

**“Your Side of the Street”: Cormac McCarthy’s Collaborative**

**Authorship**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I investigate the relationship between contemporary author Cormac McCarthy and his editors: Albert Erskine at Random House and Gary Fisketjon and Dan Frank at Alfred A Knopf. In investigating these relationships I attempt to give insight into the working practices of McCarthy, and by doing so examine the changing world of publishing at Random House. I also explore the implications for established critical understandings of McCarthy's work of the significant changes which were made during the re-writing and editing of McCarthy's novels. In mapping relationships between author, editor and agent I conduct a study of the changing modes and models of author-editor and author-editor-agent relationships within Random House and its subsidiary Alfred A Knopf. Taking each of McCarthy's novels in turn as a case study I construct an examination of the relationships between this tightly knit core group and the various specialist collaborators who appear at scattered but significant moments during McCarthy's literary career. It is in this web of collaboration and interdependence in concert with established understandings of the author-role and author-function that this thesis builds its understanding of McCarthy's authorship practices.

In this thesis I draw intensively upon archival material held at both the University of Texas at San Marcos, where McCarthy's own papers are held following their sale to the Witliff South Western Writers Collection, and the papers of Albert Erskine, currently held at the University of Virginia as part of their Small Special Collections Archive. Between the two archives, this body of material contains personal and professional correspondence between McCarthy and his various collaborators, as well as McCarthy's handwritten notebooks in which he made copious notes from his various source books and, most significantly, the various typewritten drafts and redrafts of all of McCarthy's novels. These drafts include handwritten notes from both McCarthy himself as he altered the typescripts during the redrafting process and those of his editors, who annotated the various drafts McCarthy sent them in order to suggest changes or ask questions about various aspects of the drafts. Through an engagement with these valuable sources of unpublished primary material I attempt in this thesis to resituate the input of McCarthy's editor and other collaborators into an understanding of McCarthy's work.



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**Note on Editions:**

**Unless otherwise indicated, the page numbers of McCarthy's published works listed in this thesis refer to the Picador paperback edition**

## Introduction

Sonny Mehta, the Knopf editor who accepted the 1992 National Book Award for Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* on the absent writer's behalf, told during his acceptance speech a story which was neither about McCarthy nor about *All the Pretty Horses*:

*The Sound and the Fury* was issued on the 7th of October, 1929, and despite its immediate claims on the literary conscience, this book enjoyed a sale of some 3,000 copies over a 15 year period, at which point, as we know, all hell broke loose. Awards and bestsellerdom come two ways, to paraphrase Hemingway on bankruptcy. Gradually, and then suddenly, if at all.<sup>1</sup>

Mehta had been reminded of this story, he told his audience, by another notable absentee from that celebratory dinner, "Albert Erskine, who worked for Cormac as his editor from the very beginning."<sup>2</sup> For Mehta, the relevance of his story to McCarthy was twofold. Firstly, McCarthy, an author of "over the last 27 years, six novels so far," was a writer who – like Faulkner – had "waited on such recognition," enduring slow sales despite the opinion amongst reviewers and other critical readers that his "books were made to last."<sup>3</sup> The second point Mehta made was that, just as with the awards which had eventually come to Faulkner's work, McCarthy's National Book Award was "an honor, as well, for those like Mr. Erskine [...] who kept Cormac's books in print for so long."<sup>4</sup>

Mehta's story is a significant starting point for this thesis in a number of ways. The editor's outlining of the difficulties McCarthy experienced in getting the recognition and sales that his work deserved, and the efforts undertaken by Albert Erskine and others to rectify this issue, will be a recurring theme across this thesis. This is particularly true across the first four chapters, which examine McCarthy's early work and the struggles associated with getting and keeping the writer's works in print. The second reason that Mehta's story serves as an important starting point for my consideration of McCarthy's work lies in Mehta's insistence that McCarthy's award also honours the efforts of his editors. Mehta's suggestion that the work of McCarthy's editors was also being recognised by the National Book Awards that night points to the main topic under consideration in this thesis: the effect on McCarthy's novels of the collaboration between the author and his editors.

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<sup>1</sup> Sonny Mehta, "National Book Awards Acceptance Speeches," accessed 27/03/2012, [http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech\\_cmccarthy.html#.T3HDHTES3Ns](http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_cmccarthy.html#.T3HDHTES3Ns).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Taking its cue from Mehta's belief that McCarthy's National Book Award win was a moment to be shared between the author, his editors and his agents, this thesis takes as its point of departure earlier work done on notable author-editor relationships. Cormac McCarthy's interactions with Albert Erskine at Random House and later Larry Fisketjon and Dan Frank at Knopf stand in contrast to most of those relationships that have been the subject of previous studies. The kind of work done on McCarthy's novels was quite different from, for instance, the heavy editing leading to subdivision that Maxwell Perkins undertook during Thomas Wolfe's writing of his impractically lengthy first draft of *The October Fair*. Now lost as a result of the scattering of original manuscripts to various proof readers and subsumed into *Of Time and the River* and *The Web and the Rock*, *The October Fair* grew during its writing "by a process of inevitable expansion [...to almost 1,000,000 words, almost twice the length of *War and Peace*] until, in 1933, it was divided into half by Perkins."<sup>5</sup> It was this heavy editing, as Elizabeth Nowell writes in her biography of Wolfe, which caused the initial falling-out between Wolfe and Perkins. It was the publicity surrounding the degree and significance of the work Perkins had done on Wolfe's novel, as well as the over-generous dedication which Wolfe made to his editor on the first page of *Of Time and the River* that, according to Perkins, "gave shallow people the impression that Wolfe could not function as a writer without collaboration."<sup>6</sup> Over-generous though it may be, Wolfe's dedication also hinted at the degree to which the author had come to rely on his editor, not only to edit his books, but also to assuage the writer's doubts about his own talent.<sup>7</sup> McCarthy's relationships with his editors, especially Erskine, have been close, and occasionally difficult, but they have never been as volatile as that between Wolfe and Perkins. Erskine and those who followed him have been scrupulously professional and highly sympathetic readers and McCarthy has proved to be an author possessed of too stable a sense of self for such problematic exchanges to have taken place.

The archival evidence available at present most definitely does not point towards the kind of stylistically-significant relationship as existed between Gordon Lish and Raymond Carver. As William Stull explains in his introduction to *Beginners*, the "original version" of

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Nowell, *Thomas Wolfe: A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 135.

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

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Carver's collection of short stories first published under the title *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Lish "cut by more than fifty percent in two rounds of close line editing" the manuscript Carver originally sent to Knopf in 1981, more or less constructing the spare style for which Carver became famous.<sup>8</sup> With the possible exceptions of *Suttree*, where most of the material cut during the redrafting process was re-worked into McCarthy's other early Appalachian works, and a few sequences reworked during the editing of *The Orchard Keeper*, there is little evidence among McCarthy's papers to indicate that cuts of the scale and stylistic significance of those undertaken by Lish were even contemplated by any of McCarthy's editors. Certainly, no such changes were made unilaterally by McCarthy's editors. Proper consultation with the author has been central to all of McCarthy's editorial collaborations.

Finally, and most clearly, there is no evidence that McCarthy proposed, as F Scott Fitzgerald did with *Tender is the Night*, any post-publication reorganisation of the material within his novels.<sup>9</sup> Scenes were moved about during the writing and rewriting process, some moving, with dramatic consequences, from one section of a novel to another, or from one novel to another. However, these changes were always final and always done with McCarthy's, only occasionally coerced, support.

Whilst discussing what the archives in Virginia and Texas do and do not reveal it is worth at this point examining the archive as a whole, the problems with the archive as a historical record, and how I intend to use the limited record it does contain. In his examination of the archive Derrida writes that "*There is no archive without a place of consignation [...] and without a certain exteriority. No archive without an outside.*"<sup>10</sup> Derrida goes on to clarify his point, writing that of Sigmund Freud's archive: "We have yet to finish discovering and processing this immense corpus, in part unpublished, in part secret, and perhaps in part radically and irreversibly destroyed – for example by Freud himself. Who knows?"<sup>11</sup> In spite of the best efforts of the archivists at both Texas and Virginia, a similar uncertainty over content included, excluded, misfiled, lost, burned or shredded hangs over both the Erskine and

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<sup>8</sup> William Stull, "Editor's Preface" in Raymond Carver, *Beginners* (London: Vintage, 2010), vii.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, "Sober Second Thoughts: Fitzgerald's 'Final Version' of *Tender Is The Night*" in *Proof* 4 (1975): 129ff.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression", 14. Italics in original.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

the McCarthy archives.

Throughout the long correspondences between McCarthy, his editors, agents and other collaborators there are numerous and sometimes quite significant gaps. The most obvious examples are the gaps surrounding *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*. The voids around these two novels is a point I will return to later in this chapter, but there are also other, smaller, but no less significant gaps in the archival record. There is no record, for example, of McCarthy's negotiations when moving from Random House to Knopf, nor any paper record of McCarthy's efforts to get *Cities of the Plain* and the original version of *No Country For Old Men* filmed. Equally troubling is the instruction, included on the cover of one of McCarthy's early drafts of *The Road*, to "shred" the document. In this case, this very purposeful destruction of the archival record was thankfully never carried out. The presence of such a note, however, does suggest that some material may well have been intentionally destroyed by McCarthy. Again, these absences, or suggestions of other absences, will be returned to in chapters five, six and seven, but it is worth drawing particular attention to them here as they chime well with Helen Freshwater's points about the problems with the "seemingly recoverable past" that the archive offers.<sup>12</sup>

Freshwater, picking up on many of Derrida's points, argues that the historical record that is offered to the student of the archive is far from complete: "Every archive has undergone a process of selection," Freshwater points out, "during which recorded information may have been excluded and discarded as well as preserved".<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Freshwater goes further, pointing out that the archive can be incomplete or confused for unintentional as well as conscious reasons, and arguing that the archiving process results in a "duality of random inclusion and considered exclusion".<sup>14</sup> What this means, according to Freshwater, is that the archive as it is preserved in university and other holdings is far from the complete and unabridged historical record that those who work in them would like. In addition to material which has been withheld or excluded for conscious and considered reasons, there also exists material which has been accidentally included, or misfiled in addition to material which has been unintentionally excluded. There are any number of reasons for these accidental presences and

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<sup>12</sup> Helen Freshwater, "The Allure of the Archive", 732.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 739.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 740.

absences; material can be unintentionally misplaced, either by authors or archivists, left behind during a move, damaged, or irrelevant material can be accidentally included, or otherwise valuable material can be misfiled out of its original context. There would be very few ways to tell with any degree of certainty what the effects of these forces had been on any given archive. This is especially true in an archive such as McCarthy's, where is it not unreasonable to think that material from one novel could be accidentally filed under the papers of another. Additionally, as I am working with the archive of a living author, I have to consider what may have been withheld by McCarthy himself. There is a variety of reasons: personal, legal, or professional, why McCarthy could have kept some of his personal papers back from the archive. This creates yet another problem, another filter between the McCarthy archive as it exists and Freshwater's "recoverable past". Additionally, the reticence of McCarthy's living editors to offer their papers, or even opinions on McCarthy's working practices is another void, another unknowable gap which must at least be acknowledged.

What these troubles mean is that to operate within any archive is to make assumptions and to draw inferences which are based on an interpretation of a record which has been both consciously and unconsciously tampered with; by archivists, by the subject of the archive, by the simple depredations of time and McCarthy's multiple moves. To return to Derrida on Freud for a moment:

We will always wonder what [...] he may have burned. We will always wonder, sharing with compassion in this archive fever, what may have been burned of his secret passions, of his correspondences, or of his "life." Burned without him, without remains and without knowledge. With no possible response, be it spectral or not, short of or beyond a suppression, on the other edge of repression, originary or secondary, without a name, without the least symptom, without even an ash.<sup>15</sup>

The only question is how, as a researcher within archives, I deal with these absences, these depredations, these gaps. Whether anything can be done. What I have attempted to do in this thesis is to make it clear where these gaps, these absences, appear. Out of necessity I fill some of these voids with inference or supposition, but I have tried to make it clear when I have done so. This does not mean, of course, that I mean to pretend that when my analysis is based on existing archive material that I am accessing the "recoverable past", these archives have been through too many hands for that to be the case, but I do attempt to make it clear when I am departing from what remains, when the past becomes less recoverable.

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida, 63.

In conducting an investigation of the process by which McCarthy's books made it to market this thesis provides a case study of modern publishing at Random House. By drawing on both primary archival material and other published accounts of the history of the book industry in America I seek to apply theories of book history to the contemporary marketplace. To construct this examination, I draw upon the work of both book historians such as Beth Luey and John Thompson and biographical accounts from André Schiffrin and Jason Epstein. In mapping the relationships between McCarthy, his editors, his agent and his publishing houses, I explore the changing modes and models of author-editor and author-editor-agent relationships within Random House and its subsidiary Alfred A Knopf. This thesis also investigates the relationships between this core group of author, editor and agent and the various specialist collaborators: doctors, sailors, translators and others, who appear at scattered but significant moments during McCarthy's literary career. It is in this compound web of collaboration and interdependence in concert with established understandings of the author-role and author-function as well as histories of book publishing in America that I seek to build an understanding of McCarthy's authorship practices and their relationship to the literary marketplace.

One of my major lines of inquiry is the significance of the literary editor for an author's career, and the impact that an editor can have on both the physical texts that an author produces and the trajectory of an author's career and reputation. During his association with McCarthy, Erskine adopted an approach to literary editing which was both personal and individual. Thanks to Erskine and the time and attention he devoted to McCarthy the novelist and his work were largely shielded from the significant and potentially destructive changes which the publishing industry has undergone during McCarthy's long literary career.

In their examination of the role of the literary editor, Dan Simon and Tom McCarthy quote Helen Wolff, one of the founders of Pantheon, as claiming that she preferred "to publish authors, not just books [...] I don't like to take a book as a single entity. One finds an author who has an exceptional talent, and then builds him up, little by little."<sup>16</sup> Wolff's claim sums up

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<sup>16</sup> Dan Simon and Tom McCarthy, "Editorial Vision and the Role of the Independent Publisher" in *A History of the Book in America Volume V: The Enduring Book Print Culture in Postwar America*, eds David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, Michael Shudson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 213.

the approach that Erskine would take with McCarthy's work. As shown across the first four chapters of this thesis, Erskine and Random House took on and retained McCarthy as one of their authors despite unpromising sales across the first twenty years of his career. It is exactly this kind of editorial relationship that Jason Epstein, who himself worked for Random House for more than forty years, seeks to promote when he writes that had William Faulkner been treated "as simply an unpromising budget item, he would still have written his novels – the literary will is not so easily thwarted – but Random House might not have been Faulkner's publisher when his audience finally caught up with him."<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting at this point that Faulkner was another of Random House's authors whose work was edited by Albert Erskine toward the end of the writer's career. The rewards of supporting a talented but under-appreciated author are made clear by Epstein; given time, a good author will find his audience and repay his publisher's faith. Seemingly following Epstein's advice – or perhaps rather serving as the model for it – Erskine would continue to champion McCarthy both within and outside Random House despite disappointing early sales until his retirement in the early 1990s. The editor would finally receive economic validation a year before he died when *All the Pretty Horses* finally found McCarthy a large and appreciative audience as well as the National Book Award in 1992.

McCarthy sent his first manuscript to Random House in 1962. The aspiring author could not have chosen a more turbulent time to enter the publishing industry in America. In her survey of the American publishing industry, Beth Luey states that by "the late twentieth century, the book industry [...] had become fully integrated into the domestic and global communications industry."<sup>18</sup> In many ways the late 1950s and early 1960s marked the beginning of this process of integration. The Random House to which McCarthy sent his manuscript was a radically different entity from the small, privately run and privately financed operation which had been founded by Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer following their purchase of the Modern Library from Horace Liveright in 1925.<sup>19</sup> In 1960, two years before

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<sup>17</sup> Jason Epstein, *Book Business* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Beth Luey, "The Organisation of the Book Industry" in *A History of the Book in America Volume V: The Enduring Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>19</sup> There are conflicting accounts of how and why this purchase came to pass. See Bennett Cerf, *At Random* (New York: Random House, 1977), 44ff and Tom Dardis, *Firebrand* (New York: Random House, 1995), 216ff.

the manuscript of *The Orchard Keeper* arrived at the firm, Random House had finalised the purchase of Alfred A Knopf.<sup>20</sup> The significance of the fact that this move was funded by the company's first ever issue of stock in 1959 should not be underestimated. Random House would go on to add Kurt and Helen Wolff's Pantheon Books in 1961.<sup>21</sup> André Schiffrin, a long-time employee of Pantheon who would eventually leave Random House under acrimonious circumstances, explains the import of these purchases when he writes that they "added an important element to the collective backlist of the Random Empire," in addition to significantly expanding their editorial workforce and workload.<sup>22</sup> By 1962 Random House was on the path to becoming a big business.

Whether or not Random House was in 1962 quite the "Empire" Schiffrin suggests, it cannot be denied that profound changes were striking the publishing industry at the moment McCarthy chose to enter it. Even Bennett Cerf, the founder of Random House, who remains generally positive throughout an autobiography published in 1978, admits that the issue of stock in 1959:

marked a big change, since the minute you go public, outsiders own some of your stock and you've got to make periodic reports to them [...] Instead of working for yourself and doing what you damn well please, willing to risk a loss to do something you want to do, if you're any kind of honest, you feel a real responsibility to your stockholders. It was a very important decision.<sup>23</sup>

Jason Epstein, who would continue to work for Random House until his retirement in 1998, summed up the changes taking place there by writing that "by the mid-1970s, Random House had become a big business and felt like one," complete with professional contracts and shareholder oversight.<sup>24</sup> What these changes meant was that editorial freedom was curtailed; it became more problematic for publishing houses restricted by their obligations to their shareholders to publish challenging first books by promising novelists, and even more difficult, with the rise of agents aggressively pursuing their clients' interests, to hold on to those authors if and when they finally found their audience. Bennett Cerf states in his 1977 autobiography that "[w]e have a rule at Random House that our senior editors can accept any book they want

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<sup>20</sup> Cerf, *At Random*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> For less than \$1 million according to André Schiffrin. See André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books* (London: Verso, 2000), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Cerf, *At Random*, 278.

<sup>24</sup> Epstein, *Book Business*, 91.

without question, unless an enormous advance against royalties is involved, in which case we have a discussion about it.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, even by 1960 this optimistic vision of how to operate a publishing business was beginning to fade at Random House in the face of mounting shareholder pressure.

As Epstein explains, what was happening at Random House was that “by selling stock Bennett [Cerf] and Donald [Klopfer] had at long last begun to take their money out of the firm.”<sup>26</sup> There were several reasons for the founders of Random House suddenly cashing in their investments in the firm they had built up from a reprint house publishing the Modern Library series to one of the foremost publishing houses in America, but the most pressing was their age. Cerf explains in his autobiography that the “one thing that always worried [the two founders] was the value that would be put on the company if one of us died,” which could have left the survivor unable to continue running the company were they unable to buy up the other’s stock.<sup>27</sup> It was for similar reasons, according to Cerf, that “when RCA showed an interest [in buying the entirety of Random House] we certainly responded.”<sup>28</sup> This was a decision which would finally and irrevocably change Random House from small private enterprise into a large publicly-traded company.

In the context of the American publishing industry as a whole, it was the purchase of Random House by the Radio Company of America in 1965 that marked the real beginning of what Beth Luey calls the “acquisitions [of publishing houses] by nonpublishing conglomerates.”<sup>29</sup> Epstein makes clear the effect that this corporatisation had on what had traditionally been a family concern when he writes that:

Bob Bernstein, Bennett’s successor as president, did his best to sustain the old improvisational Random House style. He told bad jokes himself [as Bennett Cerf had] and insulated his colleagues from the five-year budgets and other corporate nonsense that the RCA engineers to whom Bob reported demanded.<sup>30</sup>

André Schiffrin is less complimentary about the influence of Bernstein’s own successor, the Italian former banker Alberto Vitale, who was brought in to replace Bernstein following RCA’s

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<sup>25</sup> Cerf, *At Random*, 221.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>27</sup> Cerf, *At Random*, 276.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>29</sup> Luey, “The Organisation of the Book Industry,” 29.

<sup>30</sup> Epstein, *Book Business*, 91.

sale of Random House to S.I. Newhouse in 1980. Schiffrin describes Vitale as a “business man with a thuggish disposition and a thoroughly anti-intellectual attitude – the pose of a rough-and-ready street fighter who gets things done and isn’t afraid to do what it takes to make as much money as possible.”<sup>31</sup> Schiffrin’s is perhaps an unfair description of a man who, immediately prior to his appointment at Random House, had been successfully running Bantam Books. However, what does seem to have been true of Vitale is that he understood his role at Random House to be that of a businessman first and a publisher second. The most important of Vitale’s new edicts, according to Schiffrin, was “that each book should make profit on its own and that one title should no longer be allowed to subsidise another.”<sup>32</sup> The result was that by 1990, “the rule now was that profit *per book sold* had to be as high as possible.”<sup>33</sup> Accompanying this increasing drive for profit has been an increased pressure on individual editors, who are subject to the kind of “five-year budgets” Bernstein had sought to protect them from. In many cases, Schiffrin writes, these profit reviews of editors and publishing houses come with increasing regularity, and, as at “the university of Chicago [...where] young accountants scurry about campus every quarter, asking department heads whether they have made the progress expected of them in their business plan,” so it has been for a long while in the publishing industry, where such “ritual[s] are] familiar.”<sup>34</sup> The result, Schiffrin claims, is an increasing turnover of ever more pressurised editors working at larger firms with the result that “agents [...rather than editors, as had been the case] became the fixed points in authors’ lives.”<sup>35</sup>

The changes at Random House were mirrored across the industry. In his second book on the subject, published by independent British house Verso in 2010, Schiffrin draws parallels between the fate of Random House and that of HarperCollins, which:

Taken over by Rupert Murdoch in 1987, ha[s] changed so much as to be unrecognisable. Their lists from the fifties and sixties resemble what is now only published by the best of the American university presses. The current contents justify the firm’s boasting of being part of the ‘entertainment industry,’ tying in as many books as possible to the content of films and television.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 88.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>36</sup> André Schiffrin, *Words and Money* (London: Verso, 2010), 7.

As Schiffrin is keen to point out, this corporatized approach focussed on the profitability of each individual book has failed to produce either the kind of increase in profits one might expect, or those for which their new business-minded owners might have been hoping. Schiffrin reports with some pleasure in his first book, also published by Verso, that when Newhouse became disillusioned with Random House and its disappointing profits, he sold the firm to German conglomerate Bertelsmann. During the sale Newhouse was obliged to officially report that “apart from the write-offs [of some \$80 million worth of unearned advances], the house itself had declared a profit of only 0.1% [...] far lower than anything Random House had ever recorded in the years before Newhouse took over.”<sup>37</sup> This sale, which, despite the weak sales figures Random House posted under his leadership, made Newhouse a considerable profit, demonstrates another remarkable development which the Random House story foreshadows: the way investors have found to make money from their publishing holdings. As the disappointing Random House figures show, the profits were clearly not to be had in the actual publishing of books. Schiffrin writes at length about the fate of the major French publisher Editis. Just as Random House was first sold by Cerf and Klopfer to RCA, then by RCA to S.I. Newhouse and finally by Newhouse to Bertelsmann, so Editis, which at one time “was responsibl[e] for a third of French publishing,” was first sold by its founders to “Baron Ernest-Antoine Seillière, head of the vast investment firm Wendel and president of the French employers association MEDEF.”<sup>38</sup> After a few years of disappointing profits, “Seillière announced that he was selling Editis to the Spanish publishing and television giant Planeta,” moving the company out of France.<sup>39</sup> This sale to a foreign corporation was especially galling to Schiffrin as it was something Sellière had specifically promised not to do at the conclusion of the original deal in order to avoid antitrust issues.<sup>40</sup> The sale of Editis to Planeta was hugely profitable for Sellière despite the sluggish sales made by the publishers during his ownership. Sellière was able to sell the publishing house “for over a billion” euros, having “bought Editis for 650 million euros” only a few years before.<sup>41</sup> “Seillière had demonstrated something important,” Schiffrin explains; that “one could still make money from publishing. Not, of

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<sup>37</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Schiffrin, *Words and Money*, xi.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

course, by selling good or even profitable books, but by buying and selling the firms themselves.”<sup>42</sup> Under the auspices of their new corporate owners, the publishing houses themselves had become as much of a commodity as the books they sold. Indeed, as Schiffrin states, “book publishing, with total annual sales of \$23 billion in the United States,” has become so consolidated and tightly enmeshed in the “corporate media structure,” that “individual companies are [now] worth more than the entire book market.”<sup>43</sup>

The changes in the structure of publishing have been accompanied by similar changes in the marketplace for books. The first of these changes, as highlighted by John Thompson, had been the repeal of various laws governing the minimum price of books. Thompson draws particular attention to the decline of “The Net Book Agreement” in the United Kingdom.<sup>44</sup> As Thompson explains, the NBA once determined the minimum price for which a book could be sold. André Schiffrin devotes several chapters to the impact of similar laws on the French and German book industries, where such laws are still enforced today. Schiffrin “once asked [German] Cultural Minister Michael Naumann, a former publisher, what would happen to these stores if the German equivalent [...of the NBA] were repealed. [Naumann] answered that they would lose a third of the new-book stores overnight.”<sup>45</sup> Naumann’s assertion, slightly melodramatic though it may seem, does demonstrate the importance of these laws, especially to small and independent bookstores which would both be the first to suffer significant loss of revenue and the most likely to stock first novels and other low-selling but noteworthy works. In the UK and US, however, laws governing the price of books were dismantled during the 1990s until finally, “[i]n March 1997 the Restrictive Practises Court sealed the coffin by ruling that the NBA was illegal.”<sup>46</sup> At the same time similar laws in the US were also struck down in various courts, meaning that new books could be heavily discounted by large bookselling and other retailing firms. The result, as reported by Schiffrin, has been that “stores like Wal-Mart [...offer] books like Harry Potter at a loss in order to lure customers into their store,” with predictably devastating effects to the independent new-book stores in both countries.<sup>47</sup> As

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, xii.

<sup>43</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> John B Thompson, *Merchants of Culture* (London: Polity Press, 2010), 52.

<sup>45</sup> Schiffrin, *Words and Money*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> Schiffrin, *Words and Money*, 47.

Thompson writes, “the most visible consequence [of the repeal of these laws] – one that has been much commented upon and much lamented – was the precipitous decline of the independent booksellers.”<sup>48</sup>

The other effect which has had a profound effect on the way that books are sold in the United States is that the way Americans shop is changing. According to Epstein, American preferences shifted dramatically from a proclivity toward small city-centre stores to large out-of-town shopping centres, with the result that:

The mall stores radically altered the nature of publishing [...they] demanded high volume and high turnover. The mall bookstores were now paying the same rent as the shoe store next door and were bound by the same fiscal rules. They needed recognisable products that sold on impulse. This meant books by brand-name authors with their army of loyal readers or by celebrities who pitched their books on the morning television shows and later on *Oprah*.<sup>49</sup>

There have been, therefore, two major factors impacting the selling of books: a dramatic reduction in the price of new books and a decline in market demand for anything other than bestselling novels by well-known authors. The result of the pressures exerted by these two factors mean that publishers have become increasingly dependent on what Epstein calls “name-brand authors.”<sup>50</sup> These are authors – Epstein cites Tom Clancy, Michael Crichton and Stephen King as key examples – that casual readers who might never go to a traditional book shop, but who do go frequently to the other venues now selling books alongside other retail products, will immediately recognise and whose books they will purchase. They require no additional marketing efforts to sell their books as a result of this widespread name recognition. In turn, this reliance has had a detrimental effect on new and mid-list authors. “New” authors are those who are working on publishing their first novels with a firm while “mid-list” authors are those writers whose first few novels with a house generate sales that fail to live up to a publisher’s initial expectations. Both sets of authors increasingly struggle to gain and hold a publisher’s attention as a house’s funds and efforts are increasingly tied up in acquiring and holding on to the bestselling “name-brand” authors.

The final development altering the ways in which publishers conduct their business has been the decline of the public libraries, which have had their funding dramatically reduced

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<sup>48</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Epstein, *Book Business*, 104.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

year on year. Schiffrin explains that “In both the United States and Britain [...] public library purchases were once large enough to cover most of the costs of publishing meaningful works of fiction [...] when, in recent years, library funding was drastically cut, an infrastructure supporting the publication of many challenging books was levelled.”<sup>51</sup> The slashing of funding for public libraries, Schiffrin argues, exacerbated the reliance publishing houses feel on one or two best-selling authors. Without the reliable sales from libraries functioning as a kind of indirect government subsidy, publishers lose more money on any poor-selling novels they produce and most other books would find it more difficult to break even without these guaranteed sales. This increased economic pressure makes editors less likely, in an industry increasingly motivated by the profit that *each* individual book would make, to take risks on new authors or those who produced difficult but significant books. The industry seems to have changed a great deal since Helen Wolff claimed that she enjoyed publishing “people [...] not books.”

One potential qualifier to place on Schiffrin’s gloomy predictions for the publishing world is the fact that, as reported by Lloyd Shepherd in 2011:

Ten years ago in 2001, 162m books were sold in Britain. Ten years later – a decade in which the internet bloomed, online gaming exploded, television channels proliferated, digital piracy rampaged and, latterly, recession gloomed – 229m books sold. So, a 42% increase in the number of books sold over the last 10 years.<sup>52</sup>

Shepherd’s point is a good one, and does allay fears about the total disappearance of printed novels. As Schiffrin points out, however, “[t]oday, five major conglomerates control 80 percent of American book sales. In 1999, the top twenty publishers accounted for 93 percent of sales, and the ten largest had 75 percent of sales.”<sup>53</sup> Ten years later, the picture was slowly becoming similar for online retailers, with “Amazon control[ing] 15 to 20 percent of all retail book sales,” a figure which has only increased, turning it into a company capable of dictating the price and availability of books which can be bought online.<sup>54</sup> The result is that, though book sales may be up, the variety of novels and other books available for general purchase is closely controlled by a few large corporations. This control allows these companies to impose what

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<sup>51</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 105.

<sup>52</sup> Shepherd, Lloyd, “The Death of Books Has Been Greatly Exaggerated,” *The Guardian* 30 August, 2011, Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/aug/30/death-books-exaggerated>. Accessed 02/05/2012.

<sup>53</sup> Schiffrin, *The Business of Books*, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Schiffrin, *Words and Money*, 106.

Schiffirin terms “market censorship,” their stranglehold on the market allowing them to decide what is published and what is not.<sup>55</sup>

Not all commentators are quite so damning of the current state of publishing. Beth Luey, in particular, accuses former editors like Schiffirin and Epstein of a nostalgia for “a lost golden age, a time (usually between 1920 and 1960) when publishers did not worry about the bottom line, when good books reached an eager public with no obstacles,” before claiming that “there never was such a time.”<sup>56</sup> Luey is at pains to point out that “[t]he memoirs of the publishers of this golden age are filled with lavish homes, well-stocked wine cellars, luxury travel, and expensive hobbies. Some of this luxury was accumulated at the expense of employees with low salaries and no retirement plans and of authors whose royalties did not pay their rent.”<sup>57</sup> Some of this may be true. A. Scott Berg’s biography of Max Perkins is full of instances in which Fitzgerald or Hemingway or another of Perkins’ remarkable list of authors wrote or came to him with concerns about money, demonstrating the inadequacy of the payments given to them for their works. Each time, just as Erskine would for McCarthy during his years of penury, Perkins did what he could to secure additional funds and support for his authors. On one occasion Berg describes F. Scott Fitzgerald coming in person to Perkins for financial help, and makes the remarkable claim, given Fitzgerald’s track record on the matter, that “soon editor and author had put Scott’s account in order,” with the editor arranging to have Scribner’s Sons pay Fitzgerald enough money to see him, temporarily at least, clear of his debts.<sup>58</sup> Such efforts would not have been possible without a reasonably sympathetic publishing house, or at the very least a remarkably devoted editor, prepared to fight an author’s corner within a less than generous publishing house.

It should be pointed out that authors themselves have not been idle in, or oblivious to, the changes to the publishing industry. As Schiffirin explored above, it is now agents, rather than editors, who are charged with fighting for an author’s cause and developing their careers, both within publishing houses and in the publishing industry more generally. Thompson picks up Schiffirin’s argument, and claims that “[m]uch of [an editor’s] time is [now] spent

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<sup>55</sup> Schiffirin, *The Business of Books*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Luey, “The Organisation of the Book Industry,” 52.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 42.

cultivating relationships with agents on whom they are largely and increasingly dependent for the supply of new book projects,” a quite different approach from McCarthy’s direct application to Random House.<sup>59</sup> The rise of the agent has been dramatic. Thompson cites the statistic that as recently as 2004 there were 811 agents registered in New York, but by 2008 that number had swelled to 1,081, an increase of around 25% in four years.<sup>60</sup> The role of the agent has changed quite dramatically over time as well. Thompson writes that “in the 1970s and before an agent was an optional extra for a writer; there were many authors who published with trade houses and worked directly with editors, without the mediation of an agent,” a description that matches the approach McCarthy took to his career until the early 1990s.<sup>61</sup> These days, however, says Thompson, “the agent [has become] the *necessary point of entry* into the field of trade publishing.”<sup>62</sup>

Most remarkable is how the agents Thompson interviewed for his book described their job, consistently seeing “their role as that of managing the long-term career development of their authors,” clearly co-opting the role Helen Wolff envisioned for editors.<sup>63</sup> It is also agents who have played the most central role in pushing advances from an optional extra in the 1920s to the often large and entirely compulsory sums often seen today. In this, agents are not always motivated entirely by greed, but by an understanding of the demands and workings of the new world of publishing. Thompson cites the example of Andrew Wylie, a literary agent well-known for his aggressive and effective promotion of his authors, whose numbers include Philip Roth, as being one who “believes that the only thing that will ensure that a publisher gets behind a book and publishes it energetically is the size of the advance they pay: the more they pay the more they will get behind the book, prioritise it, put resources behind it and try to make it a success.”<sup>64</sup> It is for this reason that Wylie uses various methods, normally revolving around the selling of bundles of foreign and translation rights, or rights to an author’s entire backlist, to ensure that the authors under his care receive advances on a par with those of Thompson’s “name-brand” authors who might also be published by a firm.

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<sup>59</sup> Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* Italics in original.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

By modern standards, therefore, McCarthy did everything wrong as an aspiring author entering this publishing world. Without an agent to represent him – a state of affairs which would continue until the 1990s – he sent an unsolicited manuscript to the publishing house most deeply embroiled in the new wave of professionalization and corporatization sweeping the world of publishing. It was only through the championing of McCarthy by his editors, first Larry Bensky, then Albert Erskine within Random House itself that McCarthy's initial and continuing publication was secured. In this way, McCarthy's career can be seen as a relic of an older way of publishing. Unprofitable until thirty years after his initial publication, McCarthy worked directly with his editors even though, as would be expected given the changes occurring elsewhere, the pressures of the publishing world dictated that McCarthy's relationships with these editors became ever shorter as his career progressed. It is thanks to the efforts of these editors to insulate McCarthy from both the pressures exerted upon them by the corporate structure above them and on McCarthy by his precarious finances that the author's work has been able to survive long enough to find its audience.

A. Scott Berg in his biography of Max Perkins writes that the famous editor of Wolfe, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and others "believed that book editors should remain invisible; public recognition of them, he felt, might undermine readers' faith in writers and writers' faith in themselves."<sup>65</sup> Perkins may well have been thinking of his tempestuous relationship with Thomas Wolfe when he said this to an auditorium full of Columbia undergraduates. This was after all a relationship in which Wolfe alternately depended upon and resented Perkins' efforts on his behalf. It will be made clear across this dissertation that in addition to playing an important role in shaping the actual output an author produces editors also play a crucial role in directing their authors' careers. If it is true that editors should remain out of public sight in the publication of novels, they remain a crucially important invisible ally to an author, one whose contribution should be acknowledged at the very least. A good editor, as will be shown in this thesis, can help guide a promising author through the sometimes choppy waters of the modern publishing industry.

This thesis will also enter into the debate surrounding the role of the author. Donovan, Fjellestad and Lunden in their introduction to the essay collection *Authority Matters*

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<sup>65</sup> Berg, *Max Perkins*, 2.

meticulously chart the development of the term for author. They claim that:

Today it is clear that "*Auctor*," the Latin origin for "author," is derived from the verb *augere*, which means "to increase, augment, strengthen that which is already in existence"; in addition, it means "to exalt, embellish, enrich."<sup>66</sup>

Donovan, Fjellestad and Lunden's etymological archaeology is important for several reasons. The first is that their argument assigns to an individual author no ownership over the materials with which he or she operates, which they embellish or enrich. Rather, the *auctor* adds to what already exists, adapting and elaborating it. Donovan *et al* go on to invoke Donald Pease's understanding of "the 'author' who is associated with a certain self-determinism and verbal inventiveness, collaborating with others in building an alternative social system."<sup>67</sup> The key point is that the author as Pease conceives of him is one who *collaborates with others*.

The author-as-collaborator, I argue, is a crucial component in understanding the way that Cormac McCarthy operates as an author. Drawing on Pease's understanding of the author as one who collaborates, the term "collaborator" will be used throughout this thesis to denote all those who in some way contributed to the production of McCarthy's various novels. Author-as-collaborator is an approach which does have some historical precedence, both in scholarship and authorial practice. As just one example, Brian Vickers writes that as "collaborative authorship was standard practice in Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline drama [...] it would be extremely surprising if Shakespeare had not shared this form of composition."<sup>68</sup> Given the popular understanding of Shakespeare as solitary genius, Vickers points to some surprisingly early precedents for his own work, invoking the "pioneers [...] Charles Lamb (1808), Henry Weber (1812), Charles Knight (1842-9), Samuel Hickson (1847), James Spedding (1850), [and] F.G. Fleay (1874)," who all, according to Vickers, came to a similar conception of Shakespeare's authorship as being a collaborative form of authorship in which he worked with other poets and playwrights to complete his plays.<sup>69</sup>

The aim of Vickers' project, as he himself states, is "not [to] 'disintegrat[e]'

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<sup>66</sup> Steven Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, and Rolf Lunden "Introduction: Author, Authorship, Authority and Other Matters," *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship*, ed. Steven Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, Rolf Lunden (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2008), 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

Shakespeare's solely authored text but [to] reclaim [...] the appropriate parts for their original authors," to "give each his due" as it would have been understood at the time.<sup>70</sup> As will be shown throughout this thesis, McCarthy was meticulous and determined in his searching out of various outside experts who could help him in writing his novels, providing, just as Shakespeare's collaborators did, input on scenes McCarthy was struggling with. These collaborators might not have written entire creative scenes and sequences as Shakespeare's may have, but they were certainly one of the contributing authors of some key passages and scenes in McCarthy's work. These experts ranged from medical practitioners, who aided McCarthy in the construction of scenes relating to their own areas of expertise, to those who were able to help McCarthy with both his depiction of, and his characters' interactions with, boats. These, of course, were not the only outside sources of help McCarthy received. There were also agents, editors, proof readers and translators. The roles of the agent and editor have already been sketched out above. In addition to further investigation into the roles that these recurring collaborators played, the important roles played by other collaborators in the production of McCarthy's texts will also be considered. McCarthy, throughout the drafting and redrafting of his novels also demonstrated a deep interest in locating any source books which might contain information relating to what he was writing about. These novels, philosophical texts, medical text books, historical reference documents and diaries amongst many others, were carefully and, I will argue, self-consciously sought out by McCarthy in order to locate that material which he was engaged in embellishing and enriching.

The understanding of McCarthy's authorship as a self-conscious process marked by collaboration meshes well with Foucault's answer to the question of "what is an author?"<sup>71</sup> Foucault describes writing itself as being "like a game," admittedly one which "invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits."<sup>72</sup> Foucault's understanding of writing as a "game" invokes Barthes' assertion that:

A text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Reviews by Michel Foucault*, trans Donald F Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 116.

innumerable centres of culture.<sup>73</sup>

If, as Foucault claims, writing is a “game,” then it is, according to Barthes, from the “tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture” that the rules of this game are drawn.

Foucault goes on to state that his view of the author function can be expressed through four key points:

(1) the author function is linked to the judicial and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way and in all types of civilisation; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer but, rather, by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects – positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals.<sup>74</sup>

The author therefore becomes something by which we as readers delimit a work, or a particular piece of writing. It is only by introducing, through various arbitrary socially and legally constructed markers that the “game” of embellishment, recombination and reinvention is interrupted, that various “moves” are cordoned off. Without these boundaries, Foucault argues, we would all be authors, and the individual text would be subsumed into the always-on-going and ever-expanding mass of writing. The reason for this relates back to “The Death of the Author.” In that essay Barthes writes that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”<sup>75</sup> Barthes, in arguing this point that the collected and reinvented quotations, reinventions and embellishments that the author has sewn together find their unity only in a reader effectively inducts the reader into the creative project of the text itself. It is up to readers to project their own meaning onto both the author and on his work itself. To use Cormac McCarthy’s own phraseology from his interview with Oprah Winfrey, once the writing and re-writing of a novel has ceased, the work has passed across “the street.”<sup>76</sup> There is nothing more the author can do for it.

McCarthy’s contention somewhat complicated by the actions of those like Albert Erskine, who, by seeking out awards and other accolades for McCarthy’s work added another dimension to the reception of the work. Erskine seems to have been very aware that the

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<sup>73</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 146.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 124.

<sup>75</sup> Barthes, “Death of the Author,” 148.

<sup>76</sup> Cormac McCarthy, interview by Oprah Winfrey, *Oprah’s Book Club*, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Available at <http://www.oprah.com/oprahbookclub/Oprahs-Exclusive-Interview-with-Cormac-McCarthy-Video>, Accessed 10/03/2012.

production process of a book, the binding and covering of a novel, for example, on which any awards McCarthy might have received would have been displayed, would have an impact on the way a work was understood. Gérard Genette in *Paratexts* cites Philippe Lejeune when he describes the covers and other material surrounding a text as “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text.”<sup>77</sup> Erskine seems to have been aware that these awards, although awarded after the writing process had finished, are nevertheless an important part of the text itself, as they form another centre of culture, another web of quotation, a “paratextual message,” as Genette might term it, which adds meaning to the text before it reaches its readers.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout his career McCarthy has maintained an awareness that authorship is not something that is arbitrarily or spontaneously applied, but a kind of identity which must be carefully sought and maintained. An authorial voice is composed not only of Barthes’ “tissue of quotation” drawn from existing “dead” texts of previously existing author-figures, but also from living, and often invisible secondary authorial figures, who collaborate at all stages of textual production. What this means is that the author, especially if taken to be a composite figure made up of all those responsible for the shape a text takes before it reaches the market, functions as often as a reader as they do as a writer. This contention is supported by McCarthy’s papers which provide overwhelming evidence for an author who is also a reader in the masses of handwritten annotations and carefully rewritten scenes, images and sequences. Additionally, McCarthy’s correspondence with his agents and other operators outside the central authorial collaboration between author and editor demonstrates the size and complexity of the network of collaboration which produced McCarthy’s work. In order to be considered an author, McCarthy seems to believe that he has to act like one. The authorial act is one which requires careful positioning within an established world of quotation and reinvention, and the projection of a certain persona when generating paratextual material during interviews and other activities outside of the writing process itself.

To construct my readings of McCarthy’s drafts, I take some cues from the work of the French genetic critics. Dirk van Hulle, in the introduction to his volume on genetic criticism,

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<sup>77</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts*, tran. Jane E Lewin, ed. Richard Macksey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

states that: “Genetic critics focus on the temporal dimension of writing and regarding a work of literature as a process rather than a product.”<sup>79</sup> Van Hulle goes on to argue that “what genetic criticism can yield [...] is a reevaluation of authors’ enhanced awareness of the text as a process.”<sup>80</sup> This process most clearly emerges from an examination of what Frank Bowman would term McCarthy’s “avante-texte.”<sup>81</sup> That is, an investigation of “all the material evidence of what precedes the moment when a (literary) work is finally ‘treated as a text’.”<sup>82</sup> What McCarthy’s avante-texte most clearly demonstrates is that McCarthy was very much aware of his texts as a deliberate and on-going process, one in which McCarthy both wrote and read his own work and the work of others.

For the purposes of this thesis, the important point to take away from van Hulle’s argument is the idea that the author is a self-aware actor within the production process of his novels, who has to take certain actions if he is to be considered an “author.” This point keys into Frank Bowman’s argument, that “one [...] should keep] in mind that indeed the author, as he rewrites the text, is functioning both as writer and as reader.”<sup>83</sup> To illustrate his point, Bowman relates an anecdote about “how [Victor] Hugo’s typesetters, whom he accused of having a devouring passion for commas, tried valiantly to punctuate his manuscripts.”<sup>84</sup> The result of this well-intentioned meddling was that carefully constructed metaphors were often transformed “into nicely classical appositions,” which Hugo was obliged to re-read and correct.<sup>85</sup> As I will show throughout this thesis, McCarthy’s battles with well-meaning but occasionally misguided copy-editors are a recurrent theme in the production of the writer’s texts. During McCarthy’s career various literary operators try in vain, for example, to reintroduce the apostrophes in words such as “cant,” “wont” and “isnt,” as well as occasionally attempting to restore the speech marks, all of which McCarthy purposefully excludes from his work. Bowman’s point about the author’s dual function as both reader and writer in the production of his texts is particularly useful here. There are many times during the creation of

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<sup>79</sup> Dirk van Hulle, *Textual Awareness: A Genetic Study of Late Manuscripts by Joyce, Proust, and Mann* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Frank Bowman, “Genetic Criticism,” *Poetics Today* Vol 11, No 3, (Autumn 1993): 627.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 628.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

McCarthy's novels that other voices blend with, or even overtake McCarthy's own voice.

McCarthy would also become a creative reader in Bowman's terms whenever historical records are used, or when an outside expert recommends extensive changes, when Erskine or another editor recommended a change, or even when McCarthy himself (as he did frequently, as the material surrounding each draft shows) reworked or returned to or reorganised a particular scene or image or sequence.

The depth of this re-reading and re-writing is demonstrated by the sheer length of time it took for McCarthy to produce each of his novels. In one of the very few moments when McCarthy discusses his own work and working methodologies in an interview, the author says that he is "not interested in writing short stories. Anything that doesn't take years of your life and drive you to suicide hardly seems worth doing."<sup>86</sup> Significant though this observation is, it is in an earlier interview with Richard Woodward for *The New York Times* that McCarthy states simply and surprisingly directly that "the ugly fact is that books are made of other books."<sup>87</sup> Rick Wallach calls this statement "the mother of all [...McCarthy's] few analytical observations made in print," and is certainly the most crucial McCarthy has ever made in public with regards to the argument of this thesis.<sup>88</sup> McCarthy is here clearly interested in defining himself in public as one who does take "years" over his books, rewriting, redrafting and as a result, rereading them endlessly and, most importantly, in reference to other books. This thesis will examine this very self-conscious and collaborative process, and in doing so reveal McCarthy to be a writer who is acutely aware of the role of the author as one who works with others and other texts in order to shape and reshape the work he produces.

The chapters in this thesis are arranged chronologically according to the publication of each of McCarthy's novels. The first chapter examines in detail Albert Erskine's relationship with McCarthy. This chapter also contains details of Erskine's own career and biography, in order to illustrate the importance of an editor's own background in shaping the approach they take to their work. Erskine is undoubtedly McCarthy's most important editor, and championed McCarthy at numerous points during his early career as well as forming a crucial component

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<sup>86</sup> John Jurgenson, "Interview with Cormac McCarthy," *Wall Street Journal*, November 20, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Qtd in Rick Wallach, Introduction to *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Nicholas Monk (London: Routledge, 2011). xi.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

of the collaboration responsible for producing *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, *Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*. Erskine is therefore crucial to an understanding of McCarthy's own comprehension of both authorship and the construction of his novels. It was Erskine who kept McCarthy in print, doing his best to support McCarthy financially and personally, and shaped the promising author of *The Orchard Keeper* into the self-confident and self-assured writer who produced *Blood Meridian*.

The second chapter examines more closely the publication of *The Orchard Keeper* and the beginnings of the professional relationship between McCarthy and Erskine, usefully contrasted here against the relationship between McCarthy and his first editor at Random House, Larry Bensky. Bensky's less sensitive and less successful approach to editing McCarthy's work is contrasted with Erskine's more flexible methodology, demonstrating the effect that different editors and their working methods can have on authorial voice.

A word is necessary here on the process by which the novels which form the subject of each chapter were selected. *Outer Dark* was written while McCarthy was in Europe. This period in McCarthy's personal history is still mysterious. His movements can be tracked through his correspondence with Erskine, but the record is largely incomplete, with only the progress of drafts and the frustrations surrounding securing an American visa for his new wife Anne Delisle forming the bulk of the material available in the various archives. Promising avenues of enquiry into this area do exist, including looking into the records of those who knew McCarthy in Europe, such as fellow writer Leslie Garrett, author of *The Beasts* and *In The Country Of Desire*. These records, once opened up to scholarly access, may in the future offer valuable insights into this period. In addition, *Child of God* is a void in both McCarthy's and Erskine's archives. *Child of God* was written, it would appear, around the same time that McCarthy was researching and writing a screenplay for "The Gardener's Son." A made-for-television film produced as part of PBS' *Visions* series, "The Gardener's Son," originally broadcast in 1977, deals with the murder of a wealthy mill owner by the son of a groundskeeper in 1876. Based on an actual murder, the screenplay has since been published as a book by The Ecco Press. It was during this time, it seems, that McCarthy began to write what would become *Child of God*. The novel was, unusually for McCarthy, apparently written quickly, perhaps as a result of McCarthy's research into the Gregg murder for "The Gardener's

Son.”

The major reason for including *Suttree* as the subject of the third chapter of this thesis is that *Suttree* was the novel that McCarthy took longest to write. The sheer length of time *Suttree* spent being published suggests that it was the most extensively re-read and re-written of all McCarthy's novels. Exactly when McCarthy began writing *Suttree* is a point of contention amongst McCarthy scholars, but Edwin Arnold and others have claimed that McCarthy was writing *Suttree* all through the time he was publishing his earlier novels *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*. There is some archival evidence to support this idea. As will be shown, some of the material cut from or originally intended for *Suttree* instead emerged in *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*. This reforming and reusing of already-written material reinforces the idea that McCarthy is a writer who meticulously and continually rereads and redrafts his work, demonstrating a very clear understanding of writing as a self-conscious process undertaken by a writer who also functions as a creative reader, as well as revealing the impact that an editor can have on the form of an author's novels.

*Blood Meridian* is the subject of chapter four. McCarthy's most historical novel, the drafts and other archival material on *Blood Meridian* demonstrate McCarthy's devotion to close research, and the role of his editor and other collaborators in that research. The fact that *Blood Meridian* is also the first of McCarthy's "Western" novels, written following his move to El Paso, also makes this novel especially significant, as does the fact that it was the last of McCarthy's novels that Albert Erskine was responsible for editing. What *Blood Meridian* demonstrates more than anything is the impact that a voice from outside the author-editor relationship can have on the text McCarthy produces. The writing of *Blood Meridian* was influenced by historical diaries and newspapers from the time of the novel's setting. This complicates the understanding of McCarthy's authorial voice, and reinforces the idea of the author-as-collaborator that this thesis puts forward and recalls Barthes' point that a text is a "tissue of quotation." In the letters, research material and drafts surrounding *Blood Meridian* not only are the components making up this tissue laid bare, but also the sources from which these outside voices are drawn are exposed, allowing a clear assessment of their influence on McCarthy's texts.

The fifth chapter looks at the three novels which make up the "Border Trilogy": *All*

*the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*. For several reasons this trilogy of works marks a major departure in McCarthy's work. The first significant change is the replacement of Albert Erskine with Gary Fisketjon. Erskine had retired by this point, during the turmoil at Random House mentioned by Dan Simon and Tom McCarthy in their contribution to *A History of the Book in America*.<sup>89</sup> This change of personnel altered the dynamics of the author-editor relationship in several significant ways, which will be drawn out at length in this chapter. The second major change was the arrival of Amanda "Binky" Urban, McCarthy's literary agent. In contrast to his first agent, whose association with McCarthy lasted less than six months, Urban continues to represent McCarthy's interests to this day. Urban's arrival marks the first time that an agent played such a prominent role in the researching, writing and selling of McCarthy's books. This marked a significant change from the days when Albert Erskine fulfilled all of these roles in addition to his duties as McCarthy's editor. A good number of new collaborators arrived during the writing of McCarthy's best-selling trilogy and their effect on the author-voice McCarthy projects will be mapped in this chapter.

The penultimate chapter of this thesis examines *No Country For Old Men*. Arriving as it did after a long gap in McCarthy's output, the novel provides an opportunity to examine how McCarthy's authorship practices changed over time, especially given that he was now, following the excellent sales of the "Border Trilogy," a much more established author than he had been in the past. More interesting is that *No Country For Old Men*, a text most often encountered by those unfamiliar with McCarthy's work thanks to the 2007 film directed by the Coen brothers, was originally conceived of as a screenplay by McCarthy. The varied publication lives of *No Country For Old Men* provides an excellent opportunity to examine how McCarthy's authorship operates across different media.

The final chapter of this thesis looks at *The Road*. The most recent of McCarthy's novels, *The Road* also hailed the arrival of yet another editor, Knopf's Dan Frank. The archival material generated during the writing and rewriting of *The Road* allows for an examination of how McCarthy's writing and rewriting processes have become more regimented, more

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<sup>89</sup> Dan Simon and Tom McCarthy, "Editorial Vision and the Role of the Independent Publisher," 211.

compartmentalised, and how McCarthy has become much more sure of himself and his abilities. There is still the same self-conscious writing and rewriting and consultation at play here, with McCarthy keen to invite collaborators to aid with the writing of his texts, and keen also to cite those sources which contributed to the ideas present in his works.

A conclusion pulls together the main strands of my argument, drawing out how McCarthy's self-conscious, collaborative authorship has developed and changed over time. What emerges here and across the rest of this thesis is that McCarthy's authorship is composed of several voices who all offer their own input into each of his novels. This, according to Barthes, is how authorship should be, drawn from a carefully constructed tissue of quotation. What this thesis shows is how important these voices are in shaping the work of an author, even one as self-possessed and established as Cormac McCarthy. This thesis argues that the input of McCarthy's editor and other collaborators is vital to understanding his work.

For some interviewers McCarthy comes across as a frustrating contradiction. Here is a man who is funny, engaging, and who in all his interviews does indeed come across as a "world-class talker" engaged and interested in a wide array of subjects, but who has a deserved reputation as a recluse and a loner. McCarthy is notorious for turning down public-speaking opportunities. His second wife, Anne DeLisle has often been quoted as telling the anecdote that "[s]omeone would call up and offer him \$2,000 to come speak at a university about his books. And he would tell them that everything he had to say was there on the page. So we would eat beans for another week."<sup>90</sup> Even Richard Woodward, who would be responsible for two of the earliest, and for many years only, interviews with McCarthy wrote with some frustration that "McCarthy would rather talk about rattlesnakes, molecular computers, country music, Wittgenstein -- anything -- than himself or his books. 'Of all the subjects I'm interested in, it would be extremely difficult to find one I wasn't,' he growls. 'Writing is way, way down at the bottom of the list.'"<sup>91</sup>

The claim that McCarthy makes to Woodward, along with the now-common assertion that McCarthy would rather spend time with scientists than authors is, to some extent, an act.

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<sup>90</sup> Richard B Woodward, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html>. Accessed 10/03/2012.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

William Greenwood confirms the long-standing rumour that McCarthy had planned with environmentalist author Edward Abbey to covertly reintroduce wolves to New Mexico.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, columnist Don Williams relates the many stories Leslie Garrett, the largely-forgotten author of the Maxwell Perkins award-winning novel *The Beasts*, told of the times he and McCarthy spent in Ibiza when “[t]hey roamed Ibiza together, Les, Cormac and his wife, Annie McCarthy, in their yellow Jaguar convertible. They called themselves The Three Musketeers, and they lived the high life.”<sup>93</sup> Any idea that McCarthy’s friendship with Garrett was fleeting and limited to his time in Ibiza should be put to rest by Williams’ claim that McCarthy, knowing that Garrett was dying, wrote to his friend in 1993, some thirty years after the pair’s adventures in Ibiza, saying “in so many words” that “[i]t should have been you, old friend; such honors mean nothing to me.”<sup>94</sup> Finally, in his satirical “open letter” to McCarthy, Don Graham rather explodes the myth of McCarthy as one who does not want to talk about writers and writing when he says that: “The only person of my acquaintance who has met you is Tom Stanley, the director of the Harry Ransom Centre [...] You may recall that what you talked about over dinner was *Dubliners*. That’s all you would talk about. You quoted sentences from Joyce’s great collection of short stories and queried Tom, a Joyce scholar, on what this word meant, what that word meant.”<sup>95</sup>

As his friendships with Garrett and Abbey show, the public persona McCarthy projects in interviews is precisely that, a persona, not an insight into the writer’s true character. It is possible that McCarthy simply does not enjoy giving interviews and so offers as little as possible during them, but it is the contention of this thesis that the version of himself that McCarthy shows in these interviews is part of a more generally self-conscious projection of himself as an “author,” and the interviews themselves become part of McCarthy’s textual production, a “distanced element” or “*epitext*” to his written works, as Genette might call it.<sup>96</sup> According to Barthes, the author no longer has exclusive control over the meaning of the texts that he produces. In keeping with these ideas, McCarthy does not seek interviews, avoids

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<sup>92</sup> William P Greenwood, *Reading Cormac McCarthy*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>93</sup> Don Williams. “As Leslie Garrett lay dying, Cormac McCarthy realized his greatest fame,” <http://mach2.com/williams/index.php?t=1&c=1999-05-21>. Last accessed 11/12/2011.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Tom Graham, “Open Letter to Cormac McCarthy,” *Texas Monthly*, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/2008-07-01/graham.php>. Accessed 10/02/12.

<sup>96</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 5.

discussing his work in public and turns down the public-speaking engagements that Anne DeLisle talks about. Consistent with the theories of authorship which were emerging around the time McCarthy was beginning to write, an individual text is made up of quotation and other material drawn from a multitude of sources, none of which the particular author “owns.” As one would therefore expect, McCarthy carefully and meticulously sought out the expert testimony of others, the historical records of those events and deployed these outside voices within his writing, quoting and sometimes literally re-presenting them as part of his novels. An examination of McCarthy's papers therefore gives a valuable insight into McCarthy's writing process. In this thesis I will demonstrate that this writing process is both collaborative and self-conscious. In addition, the process by which McCarthy's books make it to market both resists and is increasingly typical of the professionalised, compartmentalised world of modern New York publishing. I assemble this dual argument using one of the most notable, and most self-conscious of contemporary American writers as a critically useful case study.

## Chapter 1 - McCarthy at Random House : The Albert Erskine Years

Academic and author Richard Marius begins his lengthy examination of McCarthy's *Suttree* by stating "I wish to dispel a rumour that follows me around. I am not one of Cormac McCarthy's childhood friends; I do not even know him very well. I don't think anybody does."<sup>1</sup> It is understandable that Marius should wish to distance his essay from any claims of being amongst the few people to know McCarthy personally. However, the wording of Marius' denial is itself significant. The idea that "no-one" knows Cormac McCarthy very well chimes with the public persona that McCarthy has carefully maintained for much of his career. This chapter seeks to dispel or at least complicate this projection by exploring the history of one of the few people who could claim to know McCarthy well and who became one of his closest collaborators and allies: McCarthy's second and by far longest-serving editor, Albert Russel Erskine Jr. This chapter will examine the relationship between McCarthy and Erskine, as well as Erskine's own life and career. By mapping out this crucial collaboration in general terms in this chapter I will lay the historical groundwork for the chapters to follow, allowing for a more detailed discussion of Erskine's contributions to individual novels throughout the rest of this thesis.

In a career spanning more than forty years since the publication of *The Orchard Keeper* in 1965, McCarthy has granted around half a dozen print interviews and a single televised interview. Attempts have been made to fill the vacuum this limited engagement with his reading public has left. Madison Smartt Bell points to the efforts that have been made by critical readers to claim McCarthy as "a humanist [...] an anarchist [and] a nihilist."<sup>2</sup> If we consider other critical perspectives on McCarthy and his work it is possible to add to that list of labels. Peter Josyph describes a view of McCarthy as "another aggrieved Irish Catholic literally striking back at the God of his youth because it has vanished or because it won't."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Marius, "Suttree as Window into the Soul of Cormac McCarthy," in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, "A Writer's View of Cormac McCarthy," in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Josyph, "Blood Music: Reading *Blood Meridian*," in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy* eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas

Still others have called McCarthy a gnostic writer. Leo Daugherty, as just one example, argues that gnostic beliefs are “central to Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*.”<sup>4</sup> Other critical interpretations have attempted to affix a geographical label to McCarthy, calling him a Southern or Appalachian Writer.<sup>5</sup> These are terms that Richard Marius neatly combines by arguing that “Appalachian literature,” most particularly McCarthy’s own version of it, “is a subspecies of Southern Literature,” a tradition Marius believes “McCarthy locates himself solidly within.”<sup>6</sup> A debate also rages within McCarthy scholarship as to whether McCarthy can be considered a “Modernist,” “Postmodernist,” or even one who has “moved between the two” as Matthew Guinn claims.<sup>7</sup> Guinn argues that McCarthy’s work has evolved from the modernism of *Suttree* to the postmodernism of the Border Trilogy. However, Guinn fails to offer reasons or explanations for this change in McCarthy’s style. Less finessed labels might include that of a man obsessed with violence, as some contemporary reviewers of *Blood Meridian* claimed. Allen Boyer, writing for the Detroit Free Press, called *Blood Meridian* a novel of “relentless gore,” and complained about overwrought archaic language which he described as being “drawn from Jacobean Tragedies.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, accusations of misogyny, or at least of an inability or refusal to write convincing parts for his female characters, have been aimed at McCarthy. These accusations are typified in Patrick Shaw’s essay, in which he claims that McCarthy’s “girls and women do not emerge from the androcentric narratives with attributes enough to define them as distinct personae.”<sup>9</sup>

If it might be claimed that McCarthy’s work falls under many diverse categories, McCarthy’s own actions have served to confirm and deepen the ambiguity surrounding his

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Western Press, 2002), 171.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Daugherty, “‘Gravers False and True’ *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy,” in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy* eds. Edwin T Arnold and Dianne C Luce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 159.

<sup>5</sup> See Gary M Ciuba, *Desire, Violence, and Divinity in Southern Fiction* and Mark Royden Winchell, *Reinventing the South, Versions of a Literary Region* for two recent examples.

<sup>6</sup> Marius, “*Suttree as Window into the Soul of Cormac McCarthy*,” 12.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Guinn, “Ruder forms Survive,” in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* eds. Edwin T Arnold and Dianne C Luce (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 109

<sup>8</sup> Allan Boyer, “Relentless Gore Too Calculated,” 10/04/85. Box 28, folder “editorial material and reviews,” Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick W Shaw, “Female Presence, Male Violence and the Art of Artlessness in the Border Trilogy,” in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 258.

private life. Madison Bell claims that he once “wrote a fan letter” to McCarthy asking for an interview but that “the reply, while civil, was firmly negative [...] McCarthy hated publicity like poison, he wrote, and the only way he would do it was if somebody told him he absolutely had to.”<sup>10</sup> But McCarthy is not alone in protecting his privacy. When Bell, frustrated in his first attempt to shed light on the author's private life, telephoned Albert Erskine in 1990 he was made to wait while Erskine came to the phone. When it was finally answered Erskine shouted “*I don't know why you people can't leave a writer alone! Why don't you just read the damn books.*”<sup>11</sup>

I mean to show in this chapter that Bell was on the right track to dispelling the myth of McCarthy as the reclusive genius who works alone on his novels. McCarthy and Albert Erskine maintained a professional and personal relationship that spanned more than twenty years. During this time the two men worked closely together as literary collaborators, corresponded, exchanged visits, and remained friends even after Erskine's retirement from editing in the early 1990s. Not only was Erskine one of the close friends that McCarthy has been supposed to do without, but he was an important artistic influence. Through his careful editing and tireless efforts on McCarthy's behalf within Random House, Erskine played a crucial role in enabling McCarthy to write his novels. An examination of Erskine's papers in concert with McCarthy's own sheds an important light on a part of the author's life which has long been mysterious. This is, of course, not to claim that my research will reveal a complete picture of McCarthy's private life, and nor is it intended to. Archives, even ones supposedly containing the entirety of an individual's papers, are often incomplete, something which is almost certainly true in the case of McCarthy. Some papers may be retained by family members or the individual themselves where the subject of the archive is still alive, for any number of personal reasons. Some others may be lost or even destroyed over time. This incompleteness is hinted at by the archival voids for *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*. However, Erskine's role in McCarthy's career and artistic development is clearly demonstrated in what material is contained within the two archives. In order to understand Erskine and the origin of the editorial approach that would have such an important impact on McCarthy's work it is

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<sup>10</sup> Bell, “A Writer's View of Cormac McCarthy,” 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

necessary to first examine what facts of Erskine's own life are available.

Albert Russel Erskine Jr. worked for Random House as a senior editor for more than forty years. During that time he was known as both a line editor "meticulous about clarity and sensitive to nuance" and, interestingly for a consideration of his role in McCarthy's life, as one who developed close relationships with authors, who often "thought of him as their ally."<sup>12</sup> Erskine was born in Memphis in 1911, where his father, Albert Erskine Sr., was a skilled worker for the silversmiths Broadnax and Company. In 1932 Erskine earned his bachelor's degree from Southwestern College and began a master's degree at Vanderbilt which he would not complete until 1939. Whilst working on his thesis, Erskine secured a teaching position in the English department at Louisiana State University thanks largely to his friendship with the novelist Robert Penn Warren.<sup>13</sup> Erskine's academic career was a short one. By 1935 he was working as both business manager and, during nominal editor-in-chief Robert Penn Warren's frequent absences, editor of *The Southern Review*. By the end of 1935, Erskine was working full-time as editorial assistant at Louisiana State University Press, the publishing house responsible for producing *The Southern Review*.

Erskine stayed at LSU Press for almost five years, during which time he met and married his first wife, the writer Katharine Ann Porter. Porter was a regular contributor to *The Southern Review*, and more than twenty years Erskine's senior. Blotner reports that Erskine's first wife was of the firm belief that eventually "somebody was bound to catch on" to Erskine's publishing and editing abilities.<sup>14</sup> Porter's belief was confirmed in 1940, when Erskine was recruited to James Laughlin's New Directions Publishing as an editor. This initial foray into the world of publishing proved brief, however, and Erskine left the firm in 1941. According to Blotner, Erskine's departure from New Directions "seemed to derail his career," after which Erskine "took what work he could get."<sup>15</sup> During 1942 Erskine worked a short stint as advertising manager for *The Saturday Review of Literature*, followed by an even shorter stay as an editor at Doubleday.<sup>16</sup> During his stint at Doubleday, Erskine sustained a knee injury

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Blotner, "Albert Erskine Partially Seen," *Sewanee Review* Vol 133, no 1 (Winter 2005): 140.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

whilst out jogging which proved to be so serious that it excused him from military service on 4F medical grounds. In late 1942 Erskine's marriage to Porter ended. Blotner points to the increasing frequency and length of the absences Porter's literary career required, but also makes mention of the difficulties of the age gap between husband and wife.<sup>17</sup>

In 1943, Erskine, then newly remarried to the "willowy Radcliffe graduate student" Peggy Anthony, moved to New York to take up his second long-term job as both Editor and Director of Publishing and Design at Reynal and Hitchcock Publishing.<sup>18</sup> Erskine's move to Reynal and Hitchcock secured his first senior position at age 32, and it was here that Erskine began to show his abilities in several areas of publishing. Blotner begins to describe Erskine as a kind of publishing polymath, telling the story of how another editor at Reynal had one day seen Erskine "at a conference table with a map spread out before him [...] marking it with a view to where Reynal and Hitchcock books could be sold" and the next having seen him at the same table "drawing circles" for "a sketch for a jacket for one of his books."<sup>19</sup> Blotner's story demonstrates neatly the scope of work that Erskine undertook at the small publishing house, foreshadowing the editor's later willingness to take on additional responsibilities on McCarthy's behalf. Blotner also describes Erskine's efforts whilst working with Malcolm Lowry at Reynal and Hitchcock. As part of his difficult relationship with the author of *Under the Volcano*, Erskine was frequently required to "search the bars along Third Avenue to find his wayward author."<sup>20</sup> This determination to track down Lowry demonstrates both Erskine's devotion to his editorial duties and the personal nature of the relationships he built up with his authors.

Reynal and Hitchcock broke apart in 1947. Following the death of one of the firm's partners and a falling out between the remaining board members, Erskine and Frank Taylor – a friend and fellow editor – decided to leave the publisher before being rendered jobless by its dissolution. Together they petitioned Bennett Cerf at Random House to take them on. Hired for the authors he could bring with him, who at this point included Pulitzer-prize winning poet Karl Shapiro, Erskine's great friend Robert Penn Warren and the then-unpublished Ralph

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 148.

Ellison, Erskine's move to Random House marked the beginning of an association that lasted the rest of the editor's professional life.<sup>21</sup> Erskine's growing influence as an editor becomes clear in a 1947 letter to Warren. Erskine asks his friend, who at that time had not yet formally sign to Random House, if he was "in any way gumming up plans by holding the novelette so long."<sup>22</sup> It seems that Warren, who had by then won the Pulitzer Prize for *All The King's Men*, was waiting to hear back from Erskine before he went any further with his next project. The impression of Erskine as an important literary collaborator and creative reader of his author's work is reinforced by another exchange of letters between Warren and Erskine from 1949. By this time, both men had been taken on by Random House. Warren writes to Erskine that he had "been through every one of your million suggestions [...] and in almost every instance have followed your ideas."<sup>23</sup> Regarding one particularly contentious section Warren writes that "we'll face a final decision in proof [...] and the final decision will probably be yours."<sup>24</sup> This exchange once again serves as a refiguration of that relationship between Erskine and McCarthy, with Erskine serving as a crucial collaborator who invited his writers to be creative readers of their own work, re-reading and re-writing throughout the publication process. Erskine and Warren would work together for more than thirty years, including co-editing two anthologies, 1954's *Short Story Masterpieces* and *Six Centuries of Great Poetry*, first published in 1955.

In 1952 Erskine's second marriage ended in divorce. Blotner again claims that the divorce came about due to the absences necessitated by Erskine's wife's need to spend more and more time away from the pair's home in New York. In this case it was Peggy Anthony's desire to pursue an academic career in Art History that necessitated her absences. Anthony "finally left for Europe" in 1951, more or less marking the end of the couple's relationship.<sup>25</sup> Following his divorce Erskine stayed at Random House and developed an excellent relationship with Random House founder Bennett Cerf. Cerf would later write in his

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James A Grimshaw, "Robert Penn Warren and Albert Russel Erskine, Jr: A Sixty Year Friendship," in *Robert Penn Warren: Genius Loves Company* (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2007), 45, accessed May 29, 2012, <http://www.clemson.edu/cedp/cudp/pubs/winshell/rpwarren.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>25</sup> Blotner "Albert Erskine Partially Seen," 147.

autobiography: “I love Albert Erskine [...] I wanted him to be editor in chief but he didn’t want to be bothered with all the details involved; he already had his hands full working with a long list of authors, including some of our most famous.”<sup>26</sup> Throughout the fifties, Erskine’s status grew still further as he continued to work with the most notable authors on the Random House list including William Faulkner on *The Hamlet*, *The Mansion* and *The Reivers*, John O’Hara on *A Rage to Live*, *From the Terrace* and *Ourselves to Know* and James Michener on *Hawaii*, *Caravans* and *Iberia*. Blotner draws attention to the good relationships that Erskine developed with these authors, drawing particular attention to Michener’s claim that he “had to be ashamed of very little that I have written. For these good results I must thank Erskine for the creative role he played.”<sup>27</sup>

When Erskine married his third wife, Maria Bisi, in 1959 the couple moved out of New York to find “a home in the country where they could raise a family,” eventually settling in Westport, close to Long Island Sound.<sup>28</sup> A year later a daughter, Silvia, was born.<sup>29</sup> Erskine’s ability to establish a good working and personal relationship with his authors even – and perhaps especially – extended to those authors who otherwise deeply valued their privacy. Blotner remarks “that Erskine had developed a rapport with Faulkner surpassing that with [Saxe Commins,] his previous editor,” a remarkable claim given that Faulkner had worked with Commins for more than a decade, beginning with *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936.<sup>30</sup>

Cormac McCarthy sent the manuscript which would become *The Orchard Keeper* to Random House in May 1962. The package, addressed to the “fiction editor,” was passed from the initial reader to Larry Bensky, a general editor at the firm, with a simple hand-written note that read “Larry – This might be good.”<sup>31</sup> Bensky agreed with this anonymous first reader and passed the manuscript up once again, this time to Albert Erskine, Bensky’s immediate superior at Random House, calling *The Orchard Keeper*: “A strange and, I think, beautiful novel in the Southern tradition, which has confused me quite a bit on a quick first reading, but which I

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<sup>26</sup> Bennett Cerf, *At Random* (New York: Random House, 1977), 235.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Unknown, memorandum to Bensky, 3 May. 1962. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

think is worth publishing [...] it is neo-Faulknerian in its abstract, unidentified switching from character to character [...] some judicious editing could make this into a fine novel.”<sup>32</sup> Erskine was clearly interested in the book, because Bensky wrote back to McCarthy soon after stating the firm's interest in publishing the novel. McCarthy responded enthusiastically and a contract for Random House to publish McCarthy's first two novels was signed on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1965 with only one unusual request; that all manuscripts, drafts and proofs be returned to McCarthy upon final publication of his novels.<sup>33</sup> The length of time between McCarthy's initial contact with Random House and his eventual signing of a contract hint not only at the long and occasionally difficult roads that his novels would take from submission to publication, but also at the problematic relationship that existed between McCarthy and Bensky, a collaboration that will be explored in more detail in chapter 2.

After stating his interest in publishing McCarthy's novel in 1962, Bensky sent McCarthy a five-page list of suggested changes. These changes ranged from requests to make the identity of the speaker clearer, changes in the novel's original ending, through to objections about the “essentially unidentifiable incantations” which were intended to break up the novel's structure and point to the changing seasons.<sup>34</sup> After a long silence McCarthy replied to Bensky's suggestions with an even longer letter defending his original ideas, particularly the “incantations” which gave Bensky such problems.<sup>35</sup> Bensky's response to McCarthy lacked some of the tact that would come to characterise Erskine's correspondence with the author. Bensky sent another letter simply stating that he did not wish to get involved in “a lengthy and slow debate about the changes [he had] suggested.”<sup>36</sup> He then returned the manuscript to McCarthy, so that the writer could “complete it at [his] leisure.”<sup>37</sup> A compromise was apparently reached, and McCarthy sent his editor a slightly revised draft of the novel, entitled

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<sup>32</sup> Larry Bensky, letter to Erskine, 21 May. 1962. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>33</sup> Cormac McCarthy, contract with Random House, 4 Jan 1965. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>34</sup> Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 9 Oct. 1962. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>35</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Bensky, nd. . Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>36</sup> Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 25 Jan. 1963. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

*Toilers at the Kiln*. Bensky replied offering McCarthy a preliminary contract for the novel, complete with a \$1500 advance. The difficulties McCarthy experienced dealing with his first major literary collaborator demonstrate how delicate such a relationship can be. Bensky's insistence on his changes removed too much of the McCarthy's artistic independence, rendering the collaboration uneven. The editor seemed to be attempting to take charge of the author, telling him what needed to be changed if he wanted his work to be published rather than suggesting changes which might improve the work. Far more productive would be Erskine's more sensitive approach to a literary collaboration between equals.

The difficult relationship between McCarthy and Bensky was not to last. Bensky left Random House for England in October of 1963, still two years before the final publication of *The Orchard Keeper*. Bensky reported rather optimistically to Erskine before his departure that he was able to leave him "at last [...with] the final draft of Cormac McCarthy's novel."<sup>38</sup> Erskine, in his fifties by this point and installed as one of the most senior editors at Random House, seems to have disagreed with Bensky's impression of the state of McCarthy's novel. After taking over responsibility for *The Orchard Keeper*, Erskine wrote McCarthy a letter declaring first that he "didn't get" many of the issues raised by Bensky, before restoring an earlier version of the text as the "current" version, and going on to suggest some minor changes. Erskine's chief concern seems to have been ironing out the apostrophes used, or rather not used, in words such as "dont" and "aint," as well as other grammatical inconsistencies. Furthermore, Erskine was content to leave the text of the piece largely untouched, demonstrating a much more restrained approach to literary editing than his predecessor.<sup>39</sup> An in-depth discussion of cuts made and suggested during the pre-publication life of *The Orchard Keeper* will form part of the second chapter of this thesis.

Erskine, like Bensky before him, makes many comparisons between McCarthy's work and that of William Faulkner. Drawing attention to the fact that while Faulkner had also refused to use apostrophes for negative contractions, McCarthy had "extended [Faulkner's] beach-head of originality," to the point where clarity, seemingly Erskine's chief preoccupation,

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<sup>38</sup> Larry Bensky, letter to Erskine, 9 July. 1963. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 14 Nov. 1963. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

had suffered.<sup>40</sup> Still keen to maintain his artistic independence with his new collaborator, McCarthy initially took issue with Erskine's changes. McCarthy began this letter by pointing out that "ain't" should properly be rendered, if such a thing were possible, as "a'(i)n't," and arguing that he was being told to use apostrophes "simply because Faulkner hadn't."<sup>41</sup> Erskine responded to McCarthy's resistance rather more productively than had Bensky. The editor sent McCarthy another long letter engaging with his author's concerns and assuring him that clarity of meaning was the only reason behind his questions about the use, or rather absence, of commas. The same reasoning stood behind Erskine's questions about hyphens in words like "wool-growing" or "woolgrowing."<sup>42</sup> The effect of Erskine's more patient approach can be plainly seen, as in the published version of *The Orchard Keeper* the apostrophes in "ain't," "don't" and other contractions have all made their way back into the text. Additionally, Erskine's pursuit of clarity seems to have won through in other places. McCarthy writes in a letter sent late in the publication process that the text should "use as few [hyphens] as possible," keeping things as simple as possible for both editors and typesetters.<sup>43</sup> Erskine clearly demonstrates his keen awareness of the role of the editor as literary collaborator when he apologises in a letter to McCarthy in case he had "seemed over-insistent about apostrophes, hyphens, commas, etc" following a long silence from the author.<sup>44</sup> That McCarthy was finally won over by Erskine is confirmed by a note from the writer "about restoring [all of] the apostrophes" to the text.<sup>45</sup>

Up until this point, January 1964, McCarthy had been living at "808 St Philip Street New Orleans." With the text finally at the proofing stage McCarthy made the first of many moves, in this case to "Howland Road, Asheville, North Carolina," according to the change of address form Erskine filled in for him and passed on to Random House's administration. This

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, Dec. 1963. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>42</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, Dec. 1963 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>43</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>44</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, Dec. 1963 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>45</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

may seem like a minor act in the wider context of the relationship between Erskine and McCarthy, but keeping track of McCarthy was to be one of Erskine's major duties over the coming years, ensuring that corrected drafts, royalty cheques and other crucial documents reached his author safely. The working relationship between the two men also began to change at this point. Erskine was no longer editing McCarthy's work on a temporary basis. Erskine experienced the first of many coming delays with good grace when he wrote to McCarthy in early 1964 that he had "expected [the manuscript sheets] back about three weeks ago to tell the truth, because that is about the time we should have had them to be on schedule for a summer publication," but that he would do his best if the author could hurry their return along.<sup>46</sup> The papers failed to materialise in time and Erskine, becoming tired of McCarthy's increasingly faint responses, told him that if McCarthy could supply him with "the make and model number of your typewriter the Easter rabbit might surprise you before you get too far into the next manuscript."<sup>47</sup> McCarthy responded positively to this request for information, and Erskine delivered the promised ribbon in time for Easter 1964. This small act of kindness was acknowledged by McCarthy in a letter he wrote to Erskine using the – much clearer – new ribbon simply to say "thank you first for the typewriter ribbon, as its benefits are most apparent."<sup>48</sup> The special care Erskine took over *The Orchard Keeper* becomes clear when, in response to a query from McCarthy, Erskine writes "please dont think we spend this much time on everything we publish: We'd already be out of business."<sup>49</sup>

After June 1964 the major alterations are replaced with line editing and typographical corrections. The chief debate between author and editor was about what to call the as-yet untitled book. The title *Toilers at the Kiln* had apparently been abandoned during the redrafting process. The leading possibility at this point seems to have been *Hawks and Hounds*, which

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<sup>46</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 11 Feb. 1964. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>47</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 18 Mar. 1964. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>48</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, May, 1964 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>49</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 2 June, 1964 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

McCarthy was not completely taken with. While the debate over the title continued Erskine, as he would with several of McCarthy's later novels, began the process of selling sections of *The Orchard Keeper* to various literary magazines. That Erskine took such an active part in the bookselling process shows that he was willing and able to go above and beyond the typical activities of an editor and perform some of the duties now expected of a literary agent. Over several months Erskine attempted, without a great deal of success, to sell extracts from *The Orchard Keeper* to the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Yale Review* and, finally, the *Kenyon Review*. All editors, however, returned similar verdicts: the prose was remarkable but the pieces were not right for the magazines as they were not particularly saleable. McCarthy, meanwhile, and foreshadowing his later reticence to appear in public, was initially hesitant to provide an author biography, saying that he found it "embarrassing."<sup>50</sup> When gently pressed by Erskine, McCarthy eventually provided a long biography in which he wrote that he attended the University of Tennessee in the fall of 1952 "or enrolled at least. Most of my time was spent hustling pool and carousing by night. At the end of the year I was asked not to return."<sup>51</sup> These details were edited out by Erskine, the final biography simply saying that McCarthy had enrolled in 1952 and "was asked not to return" in 1953.<sup>52</sup>

By January of 1965 the novel was in a more or less completed state. Erskine was mindful of the importance of the post-publishing life of the book, and was therefore keen to get *The Orchard Keeper* as many reviews as possible. To this end, Erskine called upon his list of personal contacts within the literary world. In a standard letter Erskine called on this group, consisting of notable writers whose work Erskine had personally had a role in editing, to help get McCarthy's book the notices he believed it deserved. Erskine wrote to these carefully selected advance readers that *The Orchard Keeper* was "the kind of book which might be overlooked or mistreated in the routine business of book-reviewing," and asked them to provide "the kind of comment that will be useful in the difficult task of promoting a complex book by a young writer."<sup>53</sup> Erskine sent advance copies of *The Orchard Keeper* to Truman

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<sup>50</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Draft*. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>53</sup> Albert Erskine, template letter, 15 Jan 1965 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999

Capote, Ralph Ellison, James Michener, Karl Shapiro, Robert Penn Warren and Eudora Welty. Additionally, Erskine wrote a separate letter to Saul Bellow, saying that Erskine had never “solicited [him] like this before” but that he felt that *The Orchard Keeper* “deserve[d] all the support it could get.”<sup>54</sup> Erskine’s letter to Bellow would prove vital. This introduction secured a crucial ally for McCarthy who would later prove pivotal in securing the author a MacArthur grant when Bellow sat on the awarding board in 1981.<sup>55</sup>

Almost all Erskine’s selected readers responded with positive comments which Erskine carefully collected and further edited to go on the cover of *The Orchard Keeper*. He also retained longer versions to be included in promotional material sent to review magazines, encouraging them to take notice of the novel and securing McCarthy important reviews for his debut novel. Erskine was self-consciously working to position *The Orchard Keeper* as a modern classic in a similar vein to the work of these other authors whose career Erskine had helped in earlier years. Drawing on the separate web of quotation provided by these authors’ reviews, Erskine used the opinions of others given weight by the achievements in their own careers. To accomplish this positioning Erskine drew on both his experience as an editor and his extensive list of personal contacts. Much later, Erskine would even work to increase McCarthy’s profile in academic circles. Despite his angry response to Bell’s query, Erskine seems to have been happy to help those who sought to write about McCarthy’s work, as long as they did not violate the author’s privacy. Erskine responded enthusiastically when John Longley from the University of Virginia’s “Division of Humanities, School of Engineering and Applied Science” contacted the editor in 1982 asking for his help “on a long essay, which will cover the entire canon in part, but Suttree in particular.”<sup>56</sup> Longley writes that he “would be grateful for anything [Erskine] can tell me, particularly [about McCarthy’s] intellectual interests, his Weltanschauung [sic], his philosophical orientation.”<sup>57</sup> Erskine even made corrections to the early draft of the 25-page “Suttree and the Metaphysics of Death” included

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Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to Bellow, 21 Jan 1965 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>55</sup> Erik Hage, *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*, (Jefferson: McFarland Books, 2010), 41.

<sup>56</sup> John Longley, letter to Erskine 6 Oct. 1982 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

with Longley's letter and made an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to get the article published in *The Virginia Review*. Equally, when Vereen Bell got in touch with Erskine in 1983 wanting to do research on McCarthy, Erskine pointed him in the direction of *The Gardener's Son*, the screenplay for which McCarthy had written, but which was generally not counted amongst his works at the time. As well as this, Erskine was able to furnishing Bell with a “proof copy of Blood Meridian,” securing an early academic response for the novel.<sup>58</sup> Erskine even worked on refining the script for Leon Rooke's CBC report on McCarthy's work, accepting an early stage draft manuscript and marking it up with both corrections and suggestions for cuts and additions.<sup>59</sup>

In late 1964, with McCarthy's first novel completed, published, and warmly reviewed, Erskine began advising the author on ways to supplement his income. As earlier efforts by Erskine to sell parts of the novel to literary magazines had been frustrated, Erskine looked for other potential sources of funding to support his young writer's career. The first of these sources was the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Erskine wrote to the academy applying for an award on McCarthy's behalf in late 1964. Erskine's efforts were rewarded and he wrote to McCarthy in February of 1965 that he had received “around 2000 dollars” from the academy, explaining that one of the reasons he had applied for the award on McCarthy's behalf was that “they put some actual cash on the line.”<sup>60</sup> McCarthy used this money to travel to Europe, initially to Paris, before travelling onward to Ibiza, where he would spend several months before returning to America via England. While travelling to Paris, McCarthy met Anne DeLisle, an English singer who had been working on McCarthy's ship and the two began a relationship. While McCarthy was in Paris working on *Outer Dark*, Erskine remained in New York City and worked to find grants to both cement McCarthy's place as a promising young novelist and support him financially. The first award that Erskine's efforts secured was the 1965 William Faulkner Prize. Now rebranded as the PEN/William Faulkner Award, the William Faulkner Foundation First Novel Award – to give it its full name – was first handed

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<sup>58</sup> Vereen Bell, letter to Erskine, 21 Aug. 1985 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>59</sup> Leon Rooke, letter to Erskine, 19 Nov. 1985 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>60</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 19 Feb. 1965 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

out in 1960 to John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* following an endowment from Faulkner's Nobel Prize money. McCarthy was the sixth recipient of the award, which had also been awarded to Thomas Pynchon in 1963 for his novel *V*. Frustratingly, as Erskine himself pointed out, the award gave out "no cash, only honour and a plaque" at this point in its history.<sup>61</sup> Erskine would have been aware of the importance of the prestige of the award itself, another "paratext" that ensured McCarthy's future work would be widely reviewed and discussed. Equally significant were the positive reviews from the award's committee members. Erskine used these glowing reports as part of future publicity material for McCarthy's work, attracting prestige for both the author's books and for Random House itself.

Erskine's next idea was more ambitious. In March 1966 Erskine again wrote to McCarthy in Paris, this time to urge him to apply for a Rockefeller grant, telling the author that these grants were both "negotiable and usually ample," and informing McCarthy that he had arranged for the author to be invited to apply for one.<sup>62</sup> McCarthy was understandably enthusiastic about Erskine's offer of potential additional income, and he wrote a long "statement of proposed work" – one of the requirements of the grant – in response to Erskine's suggestions.<sup>63</sup> This statement outlined the plot and concerns of *Suttree*, and was included with McCarthy's application along with a sizeable part of the *Suttree* manuscript. McCarthy first submitted both of these documents to Erskine for approval, and altered them in response to the editor's suggestions before sending them on to the awarding panel. Erskine next suggested that some of the authors whom he had used as advance readers for *The Orchard Keeper* could be used as referees for the award, a suggestion McCarthy readily agreed to, on the condition that Erskine added himself to the list, a responsibility which the editor was honoured to fulfil. Erskine spent considerable time collecting the other referees' statements, as well as drafting his own citation and providing the Rockefeller panel with copies of both the first printing run of *The Orchard Keeper* and its second, corrected, printing. The combined efforts of editor, author

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<sup>61</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 16 Feb. 1966 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>62</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 3 Mar. 1966 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>63</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

and referees paid off and the Rockefeller Foundation wrote to McCarthy in June of 1966, care of Erskine at Random House, to inform McCarthy that his application to the foundation had been successful. McCarthy was awarded \$5000 over two years, as one of the recipients of a 1966 Rockefeller Foundation award, along with fellow writers Philip Roth and Eudora Welty. Erskine happily forwarded this information to McCarthy in Paris, along with a response to a letter Erskine had intercepted on its way to McCarthy from the editor of *The Wall Street Journal* who asked to know the contents of the tank the old man shoots in *The Orchard Keeper*. In this letter Erskine jokes with the *Wall Street* editor that the tank is part of a grand, fertiliser-based scheme to defraud the government, but also secures an agreement from the editor to publish an abstract of McCarthy's next novel, demonstrating his ability to establish a network of useful personal contacts to further his author's career.<sup>64</sup>

Though McCarthy's work, along with Erskine's enthusiastic lobbying on its behalf, had gathered many awards and fellowships for the young writer, all was not well between the two men in early 1967. McCarthy was still in Europe living off the last of the travelling fellowship and back in New York, Erskine was becoming increasingly impatient for delivery of the long-promised second novel. McCarthy wrote to Erskine from Paris in December 1966 assuring Erskine that he had "finished the revisions on Opus II" and had only to "let it rest for a month or so and then rewrite what needs it and put the whole thing in final shape."<sup>65</sup> Erskine responded stating his relief and saying that he looked forward to the arrival of the manuscript along with McCarthy's return to the US so that the final stages of publication could be completed. McCarthy finally sent the manuscript to Erskine in early January of 1967, saying that the document would take some time to reach New York as air transportation for such a large package had proved prohibitively expensive. It was at this time that McCarthy instructed Erskine to have his mail forwarded to "Lista de Correos Ibiza (Balears) Spain," a post office box on the island of Ibiza.<sup>66</sup> Erskine had been aware of McCarthy's relationship with Anne DeLisle for some time, and the two men referred to it in correspondence as the "English

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<sup>64</sup> Craig, letter to Erskine, 19 May. 1966 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999

Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>65</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, Dec 1966 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>66</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 8 Jan. 1967 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

campaign,” which had already caused McCarthy to spend some weeks living near Anne in Hamble, Hampshire.

McCarthy had in fact married Anne in late 1966, having divorced his first wife, Lee Holleman, mother of Cullen McCarthy, Cormac’s first child, during the writing of *The Orchard Keeper*. All was well, despite perhaps a slight delay on McCarthy’s return to America, until the couple came to apply for a visa to allow McCarthy’s new wife to accompany him back to the United States. The pair had returned to the United Kingdom in late July 1967 and initial reports from the US consulate in London indicated that a visa would take at least two months to be processed. This was information that Erskine received with concern, *Outer Dark*’s progress towards publication already having been delayed by McCarthy’s stay in Ibiza. Through Cleanth Brooks, a “good friend” Erskine had worked with and who had been cultural attaché at the American consulate in London Erskine worked to expedite the pair’s return to America. Despite his best efforts, Erskine was consistently rebuffed by the authorities, receiving several increasingly angry letters from the various members of the American embassy staff he had contacted on McCarthy’s behalf. Finally despairing of hurrying the progress of Anne’s American visa, Erskine wrote to McCarthy in September of 1967 assuring the author that, while he would keep trying to find someone who could help, as it stood Erskine believed that “as a result of my efforts what would have taken you two months will now only take eight to ten weeks.”<sup>67</sup>

Having found himself unable to hasten McCarthy’s return to the US, Erskine was by no means idle. An English publisher for *The Orchard Keeper* had already been found when McCarthy left for Europe and Erskine acted as lead negotiator on that deal, securing royalty payments for his author as well as a good deal for Random House. Following his success with the English publisher, Erskine also negotiated the German and French rights to publish *The Orchard Keeper*, although the German edition would take several years to appear and begin generating income for McCarthy. In addition to fulfilling the duties of McCarthy’s agent in negotiating these deals, Erskine also acted as the writer’s accountant, keeping track of royalty cheques and payment of advances. When McCarthy needed someone to “explain this business

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<sup>67</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 6 Sept. 1967 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

of accounts” to him, Erskine would do so, as well as keeping track of how much of McCarthy’s advance had been paid back and when the author could expect payment of the “\$500 payable on delivery of MS #2.”<sup>68</sup> Unusually for McCarthy, the author claimed not to “need the money, just wondering where I stand.”<sup>69</sup> Erskine did as he was asked, assuring McCarthy that “the advance on THE ORCHARD KEEPER has certainly been earned, largely because of advances from England, France and Germany.”<sup>70</sup> That Erskine had kept McCarthy’s finances in such good standing demonstrates not only a willingness to shield his young author from the difficulties of dealing with the publishing industry itself, but also the importance of the work Erskine did as an agent, selling McCarthy’s writings to as wide an audience as possible. Anne’s visa was finally granted in October 1967, an event that Erskine’s persistence may have accelerated after all. McCarthy wrote to his editor that “as soon as our papers came from Spain they scheduled Anne for her interview and such and she got the visa the same day. We had been told there was a three week waiting list for the interviews, so I guess they did give us a little priority after all.”<sup>71</sup>

Upon McCarthy’s return to America Erskine resumed duties more typical of a literary editor. McCarthy and Anne moved to Rockford, Tennessee, where Erskine almost immediately sent the two volumes of Ellman’s biography of James Joyce which McCarthy had requested whilst in Europe. These two volumes were only the latest in a string of books Erskine had and would continue to send McCarthy, which had been interrupted by McCarthy’s extended stay in Britain. This exchange of literature gives an interesting insight into McCarthy’s reading habits, which included Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and Robert Penn Warren’s *Flood* amongst the first novels Erskine sent to McCarthy in 1964 during the writing of *The Orchard Keeper*. Other books requested, this time during the writing of *Child of God*, include the non-fiction titles *Reason and Violence* by Cooper and Laing, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, a collection of essays by William Gass, and the Vintage edition of Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery*.

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<sup>68</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 7 Aug. 1967 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 8 Aug 1967 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>71</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 11 Oct, 1967 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

Erskine continued to send McCarthy books intermittently throughout their association, with McCarthy using Erskine as a source of cheap books thanks to the Random House trade discount. Other requested books over the next thirty years included Knopf's translation of *Grendel* in 1971, and at least one novel by Theodore Dreiser, which McCarthy wrote of appreciatively to Erskine.

After all the delays to the author's return to the United States, and concerned about the effects further delay could have on the release date for *Outer Dark*, Erskine was keen to find out when McCarthy would finally return to the country. The editor gave McCarthy both his home and office numbers with instructions to be contacted as soon as McCarthy returned to the United States. McCarthy's trip to Europe seems to have been the event which firmly cemented the friendship between the two men. Erskine had previously at least tried to make his relationship with McCarthy less formal. In his comically exasperated letter of November 30<sup>th</sup> 1964, Erskine asks the author "what you prefer to be called by people who are tired of calling you Mr McCarthy, because if you have no objection to the change, I am tired of the current arrangement."<sup>72</sup> In this same letter Erskine told McCarthy that "most of my friends call me Albert and some people who have never met me call me Al."<sup>73</sup> McCarthy replied in a letter addressed to, for the first time, "Albert" rather than "Mr Erskine," that "some of my friends call me Mac, others Chuck or Charlie. My family calls me Doc."<sup>74</sup> Erskine's determined efforts on his behalf, both with his accounts and his wife's visa, seem to have finally warmed McCarthy's relationship with his editor. Letters after McCarthy's return from Europe mention face-to-face meetings between the two before the McCarthys' move to Rockford and the tone of the correspondence itself becomes less formal.

Even after the publication of *Outer Dark* in early 1968, once again to critical praise but lukewarm sales, McCarthy's financial situation remained precarious. Random House were unwilling to provide an advance on either *Child of God* or *Suttree* without more evidence of genuine progress. Adding to McCarthy's difficulties was the fact that much of the Rockefeller

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<sup>72</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 30 Nov. 1964 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 4 Dec 1964 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

money had been spent making the couple's house at Rockford habitable. At Erskine's urging, and with the editor again acting as referee, McCarthy applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship in December 1968. Erskine again displayed his experience of awarding bodies, offering as part of his reference to "supply [the judges] with any needed copies of [McCarthy's] books or with a selection of the extraordinarily enthusiastic critical reception which both of his novels have received, if [they] want[ed] them."<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Erskine worked to secure a paperback printing of *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark* for publication in 1969 with Ballantine Books, which was then still an independent paperback house, securing a substantial advance for McCarthy as well as future royalty payments.

Correspondence from 1969 also reveals that Erskine worked as McCarthy's strongest advocate within Random House itself. McCarthy wrote to Erskine in January 1969 to complain that "Outer Dark is not on sale in: Washington, Richmond, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Asheville, Atlanta, New Orleans, Baton-Rouge, Memphis, Louisville. In fact, hardly any place in the South, so far as I can determine" and to ask if Erskine could send him half a dozen copies of each book for McCarthy himself to sell.<sup>76</sup> Erskine responded by sending McCarthy the books he asked for and promising to "see if there's anything I can do about it."<sup>77</sup> Erskine also confided to McCarthy that "nobody knows how many copies [of *Outer Dark*] we have sold because our IBM equipment became schizoid some months ago and has not yet responded even to shock therapy."<sup>78</sup> Within days of McCarthy's letter, Erskine ordered a hand count of the remaining copies of McCarthy's books.<sup>79</sup> Dick Liebermann, who carried out the count, sent a rather curt memorandum back to Erskine, informing him that "OUTER DARK: 998 copies on hand ORCHARD KEEPER: 18 copies on hand."<sup>80</sup> Also in this memorandum, Liebermann breaks down the sales of *The Orchard Keeper*: "sales '67: 660 copies, sales '68: 155 copies,

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<sup>75</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to Guggenheim panel, 7 Dec. 1968 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>76</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 9 Jan 1969 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Dick Liebermann, memo to Erskine, 1 Apr. 1969 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

sales '69: 65 copies,” arguing that “with potential sales of less than 200 copies this year, I'd be reluctant to reprint [*The Orchard Keeper*] unless you have a strong feeling to the contrary.”<sup>81</sup> Erskine did have strong feelings. The editor wrote back to Liebermann saying that “THE ORCHARD KEEPER [...] is effectively out of print at the current level and should be brought back into print,” and pointing out that “sales of 65 copies of THE ORCHARD KEEPER in the first quarter of 1969 does not indicate a potential sale of less than 200 copies per annum, but rather more [...] we have probably already lost sales through not having enough to ship.”<sup>82</sup> The printing department were initially resistant to Erskine's interference. It took a second memo in which Erskine pointed out that “The appearance of OUTER DARK by Cormac McCarthy seems to have wiped out our stock of THE ORCHARD KEEPER, which I believe we should maintain in print [...] OUTER DARK, of which we have sold 924 copies so far this year, is now down to about 500 copies,” to finally convince the printing department to put the reprint into action.<sup>83</sup> In this exchange of memoranda Erskine again demonstrates the influence that a literary editor can have on his author's career. He was able to argue, strongly and against considerable resistance, to keep McCarthy's novels in print. These actions in turn allowed McCarthy to avoid becoming entangled in the details of the publishing industry in order to focus on his writing.

During the writing and publication of *Suttree*, Erskine again worked hard using his contacts in the publishing world trying to serialise the novel in various magazines, though with little success. McCarthy had written an early draft chapter of *Suttree* called *Harrogate and the Flittermouses*. This chapter functioned as a standalone short story and would ultimately be integrated into the final novel almost in its entirety as the section in which Harrogate poisons the bats that live under his bridge with cyanide in an unsuccessful attempt to claim a department of health reward set up for dealing with the spread of rabies. Despite having a piece which did stand on its own, Erskine wrote to McCarthy in June 1971 to tell him that “we have not made it with Esquire, Harper's and Playboy, and we are beginning to run out of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Albert Erskine, memo to Liebermann, 17 Apr. 1969 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>83</sup> Albert Erskine, memo to Liebermann, nd Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

magazines. The Saturday Evening Post is being revived as a quarterly magazine, but I cannot see them reaching for these pieces.”<sup>84</sup> Erskine seems to have known all these editors well, either personally or by reputation, and worked as a literary agent would for McCarthy's work when he wrote to Gordon Lish at *Esquire* magazine. Erskine opened his letter to Lish by saying that he was “sending you herewith a short story by Cormac McCarthy [...] which I admire very much and hope you will.”<sup>85</sup> Erskine also made use of his extensive list of personal contacts, reminding the editors he knew personally of the social and professional relationships that existed between them. He did so especially when writing to *Playboy*, Erskine's “port of last resort” as he referred to it in his correspondence with McCarthy.<sup>86</sup> Here Erskine wrote of the “not too sober dinner at Luchow's” he and *Playboy* editor Robie Macauley had shared some years before.<sup>87</sup> The results of Erskine's entreaties were uniform, however. Gordon Lish politely declined saying, “look, McCarthy's prose strength is so considerable, one would want to charge him with excess [...w]ell, I do.”<sup>88</sup> A similar refusal came from Willie Morris of *Harper's Bazaar*, who wrote to Erskine that “Cormac McCarthy writes brilliantly – and we were especially taken by the scene in the beer joint,” before saying that “in the end I'm afraid we decided against this story,” but invited future McCarthy submissions from Erskine, closing his letter by saying that “I'd certainly like to publish something by him one of these days.”<sup>89</sup> Even Erskine's port of last resort refused, with Macauley writing that he was forced “to take some different attitudes about the writing at Playboy, as opposed to Kenyon. And this applies to the stories by Cormac McCarthy. He's a strong and graphic writer, but I feel that these stories aren't for us.”<sup>90</sup> Macauley's reasoning for this rejection highlights the concerns of all

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<sup>84</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 8 Jun. 1971 1969 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>85</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to Lish, 21 Oct. 1970 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>86</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 30 Dec 1970 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>87</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to Macauley, 11 May 1971 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon Lish, letter to Erskine, 20 Nov. 1970 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>89</sup> Willy Morris, letter to Erskine, 22 Feb. 1971 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>90</sup> Robie Macauley, letter to Erskine, 27 May 1971 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-

the magazine editors Erskine approached when he writes that in his opinion, “McCarthy is so relentlessly exploring the subject of degradation – the whole world reduced to feces and vomit, in a way – that nothing seems redeemable,” even though “his talent is undeniable.”<sup>91</sup>

With *Harrogate and the Flittermouses* having been rejected by the established magazines, either on the grounds of content, length, or complexity of style, Erskine turned his attention to the renegotiation of McCarthy's contract, one area where he could help fight the author's corner directly. Erskine told McCarthy to “give [him] some idea of what you need or want, so that I can plan my strategies with a figure in mind.”<sup>92</sup> McCarthy wrote back to say that “in order to get reasonably clear of debt, finish my house, and get ensconced somewhere for a year or so in the privacy that I need to finish this book, I will have to have about fifteen thousand. I hope that doesnt sound like a lot of money to you because it aint.”<sup>93</sup> Erskine managed to negotiate an advance of \$12,000, short of what McCarthy had asked for, but substantially more than the \$2,500 offered for McCarthy's first novel. Shortly after these negotiations ended McCarthy hired a literary agent. This agent, named John Gallagher, temporarily took over negotiations with Random House on the writer's behalf. McCarthy soon became frustrated with Gallagher, however, and by April of 1972 was intercepting papers bound for him, after which the agent disappears altogether from both Erskine's and McCarthy's correspondences.

McCarthy was awarded one of the 1969 Guggenheim awards for creative writing, and *Suttree* was finally published in 1979, after going through several revisions under Erskine's guidance, details of which will be dealt with in chapter three of this thesis. Even before *Suttree* was published, McCarthy sent Erskine an envelope containing a few plot sketches for what would become *Blood Meridian*, inviting the editor's thoughts. McCarthy addressed his editor as a collaborator, writing that “here are some more plots for the western [...a]rriving by separate mail are prints of an 1850 map of the Southwest which I would like to use for

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1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 8 Jun 1971 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>93</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 24 Sept. 1971 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

endpapers, or whatever they are called.”<sup>94</sup> McCarthy went on to say in the same letter that he was planning a move down to El Paso by “the end of Sept.”<sup>95</sup> Erskine, resuming his duty to keep track of the “peregrine” author, noted down McCarthy's new address as “1510 N Brown, El Paso Texas 29902?”<sup>96</sup> Erskine’s uncertainty over McCarthy’s zip code is indicative of how little information on his movements McCarthy supplied to his publishers, and how crucial Erskine’s efforts to keep abreast of the author’s changes in address were to the continuity of the pair’s correspondence. McCarthy stayed in El Paso while writing *Blood Meridian*, although there is some evidence that the author travelled to Mexico and San Francisco, or at least meticulously researched the countryside in these locations as part of his writing process.

McCarthy's research is extremely detailed, and is recorded in a series of handwritten notebooks and accompanied by illustrations of restraints for prisoners, construction of houses and the lie of the land around each of the major settlements mentioned in *Blood Meridian*. Research carried out for *Blood Meridian* ranged from finding the 1800s map of the US-Mexico borderlands mentioned above as potential endpapers, through to intimate details of life in the settlements around the border. In his research on Nacogdoches, McCarthy notes not only the date on which the town was founded, but also the date the courthouse was built. McCarthy goes on to note that the roof of said courthouse leaked in 1850 and that the main cantina in the town was owned by a man named Miguel Cortez, who opened the place up for fandango dancing once a week. The notebooks even contain a miniature map of 1800s Tucson, illustrated to mark the location of the guard tower, church, and whipping post, as well as a cross-section of the walls. Everything is carefully investigated, and McCarthy even notes his sources, naming Hobbs' *Wild Life in Early Texas*, and Ruxton's *Life in the Far West* along with Nelson Lee's *My Sixty Years on the Plains* as his major sources. Many other books are named in McCarthy's notes, ranging from diaries of the time through to sensationalist novels and anthropological text books on the Native American tribes inhabiting the area. Glanton's gang themselves do not escape being thoroughly investigated, as McCarthy used contemporary newspaper reports of the Yuma massacre to determine the origin state for every man in the

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<sup>94</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 12 Sept. 1978 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

party who survived to occupy the ferry. Even the horses had research time spent on them, as McCarthy's notebooks list "Stranglers, Sollander, Stanquary, Sealing, Scouring, Scurp [...and] Sandcreaks" in a list headed "HORSE AILMENTS."<sup>97</sup>

McCarthy's research is certainly impressive, but there is evidence that the author did not do this research entirely alone. Erskine supplied many of the specialist books McCarthy asked for, as well as finding and sending McCarthy articles and clippings he thought might be of use. The sending of articles was a gesture McCarthy reciprocated, triumphantly sending his editor details of historical accounts of meteorites used as anvils after Erskine had pulled him up on the detail of the scene in the blacksmith's shop. This researching and checking of research even extends to the individual words McCarthy uses in *Blood Meridian*. A more in-depth examination of the changes made during the drafting process will form part of chapter four, but two examples seem worth drawing particular attention to as they typify the collaboration between the two men and the attention to detail which Erskine brought to McCarthy's work. The first is the word "frizzen," which appears in final drafts of the scene where the kid confronts the barman who refuses to give him drinks after the kid has swept the floor. The frizzen is a piece of metal featured on flintlock firearms which holds the black powder priming charge in place and against which the flint of the weapon's hammer would strike, causing a spark that would ignite the powder and discharge the weapon. After a dispute with the bar owner, the kid is described as "raking the frizzen" of the barman's gun along the bar to empty the priming charge from the weapon and disarm it.<sup>98</sup> The word only appears in the final manuscript after Erskine had sent McCarthy to the OED to provide evidence to disprove the alternative word "frizzel." McCarthy wrote back to his editor saying that, "there seems to be only one entry [for "frizzel"] from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when flintlocks were in popular use and I suspect that that usage was either obsolete by then, or aberrant, or, possibly, English – although I think the word is also frizzen in England now" before concluding that "at any rate the word is frizzen."<sup>99</sup> The other word Erskine seems to have taken most issue with is

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<sup>97</sup> Cormac McCarthy, Notebook 1, nd Box 35, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>98</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 2007), 25.

<sup>99</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 21 Feb. 1984 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

“fuck,” which is, in an early version of the manuscript, scattered liberally through scenes near the beginning of the book, particularly the bar sequence mentioned above. The reason behind Erskine's objection is not, as one might expect, propriety or censorship concerns. Erskine scored through all instances of the word appearing in the early manuscripts, and added a note to check the OED. An investigation of the dictionary does indeed reveal that “fuck” only became widely used in the way McCarthy's kid uses it in the early 1900s, well after the setting of the novel.<sup>100</sup>

Another crucial duty that Erskine performed during the writing of *Blood Meridian* was the checking of McCarthy's Spanish. A great deal of the Spanish language found in the early typescripts has been cut from the final published version. For example, in the scene involving sweeping the bar, the original text included one of the patrons saying in response to the kid's antagonistic behaviour: “Puedo hablar a americano también. Cogida de la cogida de la cogida [I speak American too. Fuck fuck fuck].”<sup>101</sup> The published version of the scene says only that one of the men at the bar “said something in Spanish.”<sup>102</sup> The Spanish that remained in later drafts, however, still had to be checked. McCarthy's Spanish was rough, serviceable in the most part, but inconsistent with grammar and accenting. It is unclear whether or not Erskine himself spoke or read Spanish, or if he knew or worked with someone who did, but it appears that he assumed responsibility for correcting what mistakes McCarthy made. McCarthy wrote to Erskine explaining that “the pages (31 ff) with the red marks on the left margin are all the pages in the ms that have Spanish in them,” indicating that he trusted Erskine with the job, and also that Erskine was prepared to do it.<sup>103</sup> Even words that are correct are annotated. For example, one collection of correction notes includes the note “rebozo – yes,” indicating either that the word had been right all along, or that it had been corrected to the satisfaction of all involved.<sup>104</sup> While Erskine continued to correct his Spanish, McCarthy kept writing and proof-reading the English sections of *Blood Meridian*, leaving the Spanish

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<sup>100</sup> “fuck,” *OED Online*, accessed May 29, 2012. Available at <http://oed.com/view/Entry/270302?rskey=VKzFnJ&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

<sup>101</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Blood Meridian Later Draft,” nd. Box 35, folder “Later Draft,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos Tx.

<sup>102</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd Box 30, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

uncorrected in his copies and relying on Erskine to slot the revised versions in. This is demonstrated by another note attached to a manuscript, which told Erskine that the Spanish needed to “be checked against yours,” having been annotated by McCarthy and, seemingly, left for Erskine to deal with.<sup>105</sup> *Blood Meridian* would go on to win McCarthy a MacArthur Fellowship, and again it was Erskine who filled in the necessary paperwork to apply for the award and smoothed the novel's passage to the judges.

After the publication of *Blood Meridian* there were several developments in McCarthy's career. The first was that the author changed publishing imprints from Random House to Knopf. The reasons for this move and who or what prompted it are unclear. McCarthy's letters do not mention the move, and so is it difficult to tell if it was McCarthy's idea, Erskine's, or somebody else's. A major consideration in McCarthy's move must have been Albert Erskine's retirement from Random House, the event which would most dramatically change the makeup of the collaborations that produced McCarthy's novels. After Erskine's retirement, the two men kept up a regular personal correspondence which included an account of McCarthy's holiday in Argentina. This was a trip that had apparently been recommended to the author by the Erskines, as McCarthy also thanks Erskine's wife for her advice on where to travel within the country, particularly Buenos Aires, which McCarthy describes as a “very european city” with “good restaurants.”<sup>106</sup> Further evidence of their continuing friendship can be found in a letter from 1989 which begins “Dear Friends” and thanks Erskine “for a very nice working vacation” at his home in Westport.<sup>107</sup>

It seems that Erskine never quite retired his interest in McCarthy's work, as amongst his papers held in Virginia is a full typescript of *All the Pretty Horses* which can be dated to around 1990. This typescript exists in a form very similar to the published version of the novel, and is accompanied by a version of *The Stonemason* with some annotations and letters concerning McCarthy's “conviction that no one knows the least thing about masonry.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, Aug, 1988 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>107</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 8 March 1987 Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>108</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 9 Jul 1986 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-

McCarthy's correspondence from this time also reveals his concerns for Erskine's failing health. He begins one letter saying that he had "just wanted to write and let you know that my thoughts are with you. I know you're going through a very bad time and nothing anyone can say can make it easier. Hang in there. I know you'll come through this and life will look all the greener when you do," and ends another with "hope your mending proceeds apace. Or moreso."<sup>109</sup> Erskine would finally succumb in 1993 to the throat cancer caused by years of pipe smoking that was the underlying cause of his health problems. Before he died, Erskine had the twin satisfactions of firstly seeing *All the Pretty Horses* bring McCarthy the commercial success that had long eluded him, and secondly receiving an invitation to attend the 1992 National Book Award celebration dinner where McCarthy would formally receive the award for *All the Pretty Horses*. Erskine's failing health meant that he was unable to attend the ceremony, and it is possible that this absence, in concert with McCarthy's own loathing of such events, prompted McCarthy's own absence from the ceremony.

As early as 1962, Erskine invited the biographer Joseph Blotner to his office to be introduced to "a rising novelist named Cormac McCarthy."<sup>110</sup> Blotner writes that Erskine remained for years "one of McCarthy's strongest adherents."<sup>111</sup> This impression is confirmed by Erskine's consistent championing of McCarthy's cause, whether to prize committees, Erskine's impressive address book of advance readers, or to members of the publishing industry itself. In his brief biography of the editor, Blotner reflects that he himself thought of Erskine "after these years as much a friend as an editor," which may have been one of the reasons why, in a second meeting years after that day in Erskine's office, Blotner "ventured a question [he] later realised [McCarthy] might have found intrusive."<sup>112</sup> Erskine's wife had told Blotner that "something of a father-son relationship existed between Albert and this author" and Blotner was curious if McCarthy agreed with this assessment.<sup>113</sup> McCarthy's response clearly demonstrates the closeness that existed in what had started out as a temporary

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1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>109</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 1 Dec. 1986 Box 28, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>110</sup> Blotner, "Albert Erskine Partially Seen," 152.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>112</sup> Blotner, "Albert Erskine Partially Seen," 160.

<sup>113</sup> Blotner 153.

professional relationship. The author “thought for a moment and then said ‘Yes. I think there is something of that’.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Blotner 154.

## Chapter 2 - Toilers in the Orchard: The Long Genesis of *The Orchard*

### Keeper

The previous chapter outlined McCarthy's association with Albert Erskine in general terms. This chapter will examine the detailed working of this relationship through an investigation of the publication of *The Orchard Keeper*. Cormac McCarthy's literary career began when he posted a full typescript of *The Orchard Keeper* to the "fiction editor" of Random House in 1962.<sup>1</sup> As became typical of McCarthy's work, a long road lay between the appearance of the draft manuscript of *The Orchard Keeper* on his editor's desk and its publication as McCarthy's first novel. The length of time *The Orchard Keeper* spent being re-written after its initial submission and the extent of the changes made during the process serve to demonstrate the crucial role of literary editors in the creation of McCarthy's texts. The differing effects that Larry Bensky and Albert Erskine had on the shape that McCarthy's first novel took will form the basis of this chapter's analysis of the writer's work as a collaborative process involving several literary operators.

Accompanying the manuscript McCarthy sent to Random House in 1963 was a letter in which McCarthy writes that he "began writing [*The Orchard Keeper*] originally in 1959, at which time I was awarded a grant of money from the Ingram-Merrill Foundation for creative writing."<sup>2</sup> This grant, from a foundation established in 1956 by an endowment from the poet James Ingram Merrill, was enough for McCarthy to live on temporarily. McCarthy states that the grant was renewed in 1960, which allowed him to keep up the writing of the novel full-time in that year. However, the writing of the first draft of *The Orchard Keeper* took significantly longer than expected. McCarthy himself states in his covering letter to the manuscript that this writing, "continued over a longer period of time than the grant could possibly have been expected to support."<sup>3</sup> It would be two more years before McCarthy felt ready to send his first draft to Random House. It was this "lack of funds" that required

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<sup>1</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Random House, May 1962, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

McCarthy to take a job in a car parts warehouse and was “as much responsible for the three year’s composition which the book required as any struggle with the writing of it.”<sup>4</sup> McCarthy later provided an author biography for *The Orchard Keeper* that sheds light on his career before Random House. Having been instructed in 1952 not to return to the University of Tennessee after spending 1951 “hustling pool [...] and carousing by night,” McCarthy enlisted in the Air Force in 1953, spending two years in Texas and two more in Alaska.<sup>5</sup> It was during his time in the Air Force that McCarthy began reading seriously, “sometimes going through four or five books in a single sitting.”<sup>6</sup> After being discharged from the Air Force McCarthy returned to the University of Tennessee in 1957 on GI Bill funding. McCarthy spent the next four years at the university, “taking what courses [he] thought would please [him].” leaving in 1961 without accumulating sufficient credit to take a degree.<sup>7</sup> McCarthy then moved to Chicago, taking the job in an “auto parts warehouse” which slowed the writing of *The Orchard Keeper*.<sup>8</sup> McCarthy held this job for about a year, “the longest [he had] ever held a job,” before returning to Tennessee in early 1962 to live in a farmhouse where the “rent [was] free” to finish his novel.<sup>9</sup> McCarthy goes on in his covering letter to apologise for any typographical errors which may have made their way into the manuscript as he had only “finished the final draft today,” and as a result the pages were sent to Random House “uncorrected.”<sup>10</sup> McCarthy’s note also mentions that “[a]s the title is rather tentative” he did not include it with the manuscript he sent in 1962.

The manuscript of *The Orchard Keeper* was, as outlined in the previous chapter, passed from the anonymous initial reader to Larry Bensky and finally up to Albert Erskine before being approved for publication. An initial contract was drawn up once McCarthy had been pressed into giving the book the temporary title *Toilers at the Kiln*. The three years remaining before final publication, however, refute any idea that *The Orchard Keeper* would be rushed into print. Larry Bensky kept McCarthy’s manuscript for almost five months before

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 1964, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Random House, May 1962.

finally responding in October 1962 with the first of the many long letters which would come to populate *The Orchard Keeper's* pre-publication life. Bensky's letter, which reads as essentially a list of suggested corrections, runs to five pages of close typescript, but the purported reasoning behind almost every item on this list is a pursuit of clarity. Some of Bensky's suggestions are understandable, such as an insistence that Marion Sylder be named in the first scene of the book. McCarthy had initially delayed identifying this major character by name until the meeting with Rattner near Atlanta, risking some confusion over his identity. Also understandable is another insistence on naming. In this case Bensky insisted on greater clarity when introducing John Wesley Rattner and when relating his relationship to the murdered Rattner of the first section of the book. This three-way relationship between murder victim Rattner, victim's son John Wesley and murderer Sylder provides the tension driving the rest of the novel along; for a reader to miss this crucial relationship would deprive the novel of much of its impact.

The other major bone of contention at this stage of the novel's progress was McCarthy's original ending. The detail of the drafting and redrafting process associated with *The Orchard Keeper's* ending will be dealt with separately, but the efforts by Bensky to keep McCarthy's first novel from including what Bensky called "a typical end-of-book contrivance" are not only understandable, but should also be applauded.<sup>11</sup> Other objections raised in the letter, however, reveal Bensky to be a less than sympathetic reader of McCarthy's work. Bensky, unlike Erskine who would accept the ambiguity of the image, queries the source of Ownby's "hatred for the tank."<sup>12</sup> The editor's rather literal supposition that this hatred came from the fact that there is supposed to be "Whiskey in the tank" is a long way from Erskine's appreciation of this mystery.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, this question along with another about the definite identity and place in the text of the woodcutters who appear in the prologue suggest a less nuanced reading and understanding of McCarthy's work than Erskine would later bring, and which McCarthy at this stage desired.

McCarthy responded, but took his time in replying to Bensky. McCarthy eventually

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<sup>11</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 9 Oct, 1962, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

wrote a long letter in response to his editor's questions. Some points McCarthy concedes without much resistance, for example simply agreeing to name Rattner earlier in the novel. He also agreed to a redrafting, and then finally a cutting, of what Bensky called the novel's "essentially unidentifiable incantations."<sup>14</sup> These short sections had originally been used to break up the structure of *The Orchard Keeper* into seasonal episodes, functioning almost as chapter headings. Moreover, McCarthy's incantations had been designed to invoke the seasons in which each of the chapters take place. McCarthy says in his letter that he was "not altogether satisfied" with these sections and had come over the course of his own re-reading of his work to think that these sections "may be unduly confusing," and thus prime for cutting.<sup>15</sup> The text of these cut sections will be dealt with in more depth later in this chapter.

Other questions in Bensky's letter received a simple correction or explanation from McCarthy. Most notable amongst these is McCarthy's explanation that the woodcutters from the prologue are "the two woodcutters who have 'gone, leaving behind their wood-dust and chips' [...] on page 279, the last page of the book" and that "the young man who watches them is John Wesley."<sup>16</sup> This presumably rings true for the final novel, even if the men who have "gone leaving behind their wood-dust and chips" on page 246 of *The Orchard Keeper* have metamorphosed into "workers."<sup>17</sup> Other questions answered in McCarthy's letter include explaining that Ownby "uses a cedar to cover [the body in the pit] because it is inconspicuous - merely a discarded Christmas tree, and because a cedar is good and bushy" and that "Louisiana is simply where Sylder was during his exile. His job was smuggling liquor. The date [1933, the inclusion of which prompted Bensky's query] is the date of the repeal of prohibition."<sup>18</sup> On the subject of the tank, McCarthy replies that "it is a government installation of some type."<sup>19</sup> Further than that, McCarthy definitively states that he doesn't know what is in the tank, but that Ownby's hatred of it comes from the fact that for Ownby "[t]he tank represents [...] the encroaching of authority into what he regards as his domain and also a

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Bensky, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* (London: Picador, 2007), 246.

<sup>18</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Bensky, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

threat to the secret he guards.”<sup>20</sup> McCarthy goes on to explain that “the X which he inscribes across it with the rung shotgun shells is traditional devil-medicine.”<sup>21</sup>

McCarthy's letter to Bensky is important not only for his responses to these questions, however. In addition to addressing Bensky's concerns, McCarthy goes on to talk about one of his literary ambitions. In response to his editor's continual requests for characters' names, McCarthy writes that:

names in fiction serve no purpose other than immediate identification, and often they do that poorly or not at all, as in the case of a character reintroduced after a number of intervening scenes. Who the hell is this? Is our immediate reaction, and we recall the character only after his traits and his role in the story are again presented. And yet the writer thinks that the mere name will immediately refamiliarise us. Taint so.<sup>22</sup>

McCarthy then goes on to say that he “would like someday to write a book in which none of the characters are named.”<sup>23</sup> It seems that here are the beginnings of the minimalist style, or at least some of the more general ideas, which would later inform *The Road*, where no character names are given.

Bensky's reply to McCarthy's letter was not, as previously mentioned, particularly sympathetic to McCarthy's arguments. Bensky praises McCarthy's story, but still complains that much of it “is extremely confusing.”<sup>24</sup> Bensky goes on to argue that “unless we are going to print your letters to me as a preface, something is going to have to be done [...to] incorporate some clarity” into the story.<sup>25</sup> Bensky explicitly refuses to “get into a slow and lengthy debate” with McCarthy about potential revisions, stating that “Every point you make to me in your letter is an explanation which should be unnecessary.”<sup>26</sup> Bensky then returned the manuscript to McCarthy to be worked on before publication could proceed any further. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Bensky's letter did not go down well with McCarthy, who remained silent for several weeks following the return to his manuscript. Bensky eventually became concerned and wrote to McCarthy in February 1963 saying that although he did not necessarily place “an ominous interpretation on your silence,” he had to know if McCarthy was “planning

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 25 Jan 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

to re-do that book, work on other books, or go to work in a hydrogen bomb factory.”<sup>27</sup> Bensky seemed to realise his fault at this point, as he states in his letter that he “didn’t mean my lack of specific criticism to imply that I was no longer interested in publishing your work,” but that he thought that the two had “reached a dead end in revision through correspondence.”<sup>28</sup>

McCarthy once again responded slowly, but more positively, to this less confrontational attempt by Bensky to get in touch, replying with a progress report in May 1963. McCarthy does not directly apologise for being late in responding, stating simply that he had been “getting a little away from [*The Orchard Keeper*]” because at this point it was “four years since [he] began writing this book.”<sup>29</sup> McCarthy assures Bensky, however, that he was well on the way to having the novel ready. In spite of the fact that “at this stage of writing it comes slow beyond belief,” McCarthy promised Bensky that he would “have the thing off in the mail in the next two or three weeks.”<sup>30</sup>

McCarthy’s letter also reveals another reason behind the novel’s slow progress. McCarthy, in addition to working on *The Orchard Keeper*, had also apparently written “a hundred pages” of material on another book, as well as “another hundred which are yet to assume any shape whatever.”<sup>31</sup> This would become typical of McCarthy’s working practices, and also hints at the potential early origins of *Suttree*, the implications of which will be drawn out in chapter 3. Despite news of these distractions, Bensky responded warmly to McCarthy’s letter, saying that he would “look forward to seeing that book as soon as you’ve finished it” and expressing a “hope to hear from [McCarthy] soon.”<sup>32</sup>

For once, McCarthy’s projected timetable was not far from the truth. On June 5<sup>th</sup> 1963, Bensky sent a letter to inform McCarthy that his “manuscript arrived safely, and that [he] hope[d] to read it within the next couple of weeks.”<sup>33</sup> This version satisfied Bensky’s

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<sup>27</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 19 Feb 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Bensky, 16 May 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 21 May 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

devotion to clarity and on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963 he sent McCarthy a preliminary contract to publish the writer's first novel, complete with advance payment. In a letter accompanying the contract, Bensky writes to McCarthy that although "the resolution of our long correspondence is extremely gratifying," the editor was obliged to abandon work on McCarthy's book at this point "because [he was] leaving Random House shortly in order to go to England" for a job in another publishing house.<sup>34</sup> In his final letter to Bensky at Random House McCarthy writes to thank him "for the work you have done in seeing the whole business through" and saying that Bensky "must now be heartily sick of my little opus" and expressing a hope that he "was not responsible for driving you to seek greener fields."<sup>35</sup> Despite their differences of opinion, a degree of friendship, or at least familiarity had evidently developed between McCarthy and Bensky.

Bensky and McCarthy, then, were able to part on good terms. McCarthy's manuscript had been heavily edited and redrafted, and several major cuts had been made at Bensky's insistence, but the work was apparently ready for publication. With Bensky suddenly gone, it fell to Albert Erskine, his immediate superior at Random House, to assume responsibility for the book in what was initially planned to be a temporary arrangement. Erskine wrote to McCarthy in October 1963 to say that he would be assuming responsibility for editing, and that he would "reread the book as soon as I finish final details on books for which I am responsible on our spring list," which were his more immediate concern.<sup>36</sup> Erskine went on to assure McCarthy that he would "undoubtedly have questions for you and possibly some suggestions," but that he was confident that he would be able to "begin and complete the work in time to have the book ready for publication in the first month of our next available list – which will be August of 1964."<sup>37</sup> Erskine even told McCarthy to "forget about the problem of this book and concentrate on the next one," so confident was he that it was almost ready for

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<sup>34</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 22 Aug 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>35</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Bensky, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>36</sup>Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 29 Oct 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

publication.<sup>38</sup>

The reality was that publication of McCarthy's first novel would be delayed until 1965. Soon after assuming editorial responsibility for McCarthy's book Erskine, as Bensky had done before him, wrote a long letter to McCarthy outlining his chief concerns. Early in this letter Erskine seeks to establish himself as McCarthy's ally, stating that he "didn't get" many of the issues Bensky had raised.<sup>39</sup> As part of establishing his own editorial stamp on the book, Erskine first restored the edition of the text which had existed prior to the long silence which prompted Bensky's fears of McCarthy's finding alternate employment in a bomb factory. Next, the thorny issue of punctuation was addressed head on. The debate over apostrophes has been covered earlier, but Erskine's conduct during the discussion makes it a dispute worth returning to. Erskine initially pointed out to McCarthy the existing convention of "Faulkner's omission of the apostrophe in monosyllabic negative contractions (dont wont cant aint)," in which McCarthy had followed the Southern writer.<sup>40</sup> Erskine, having dealt with this convention before, was not only prepared to discuss it on a technical, grammatical level, but was also prepared to accept it. The only concern Erskine did raise in his letter to McCarthy was that while Faulkner "was consistent, I believe, in his manuscripts" in omitting these apostrophes, this consistency featured only "but seldom in his printed books."<sup>41</sup> This inconsistency was thanks to the interference, conscious or otherwise, of well-meaning typists and typesetters, and Erskine's concern merely alerted McCarthy to possible battles to come with similar technical collaborators.<sup>42</sup>

Erskine's other concern was the reception McCarthy's grammatical idiosyncrasies might garner in the post-publication life of *The Orchard Keeper*. Erskine argues in his letter that "following [Faulkner] (or going him one or two better) will be regarded as merely imitativeness rather than well-digested influence – which in your case would be too bad."<sup>43</sup> Erskine here demonstrates an impressively far-sighted concern for McCarthy's work,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, Dec 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

concerned for and predicting the reception that his author's work might receive, as well as foreseeing the damage which might be done to McCarthy's reputation by a hostile reception to his first novel. A debate also arose over what "omitting conventional quotation marks around passages of dialogue adds to the novel."<sup>44</sup> On this issue at least, McCarthy successfully held his ground, as quotation marks remain absent from the final text. That Erskine was already taking a special interest in McCarthy's work becomes clear when he says that "most of these things [hyphens etc] are things of a kind that I would usually (and do usually) add without consultation," but that in McCarthy's case he thought it best to enquire about every mark, a strategy which no doubt endeared him to his new author.<sup>45</sup>

The changes suggested by Erskine did not all relate to grammatical niceties, however. The most contentious issues still lay with the early section of the novel, and related to the meeting between Sylder and the elder Rattner. Erskine argued strongly that the tension McCarthy sought to create between Rattner and Sylder would only exist "if their respective scenes had a time relation to each other."<sup>46</sup> The problem was, Erskine argued, that "Rattner's progress [...toward that meeting with Sylder] could be measured in the hours of a day (or two days?)," whereas Sylder takes years to travel to Louisiana, work as a bootlegger, return to Red Branch, stay in the area for several weeks re-establishing himself as a local character, before finally travelling to Atlanta to have his chance meeting with Rattner.<sup>47</sup> The issue of time and the need to compress it on Sylder's journey or extend it on Rattner's was eventually solved by moving Sylder's flashback of the destruction of the Green Fly Inn from its original position to one much earlier in the text. This move conceals the disparity in the lengths of the two characters' journeys to Atlanta. The key difference between Erskine and Bensky as literary collaborators was that Erskine invited McCarthy at every point to "please consider and let me have your views" and said that "[i]f my suggestion[s] horrif[y] you do not hesitate to say so."<sup>48</sup> Erskine's approach to his relationship with McCarthy indicates a much greater inclination to engage with his author, and to explain and talk through what concerns he might have with the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

changes Erskine was suggesting, a marked contrast to Bensky's rather more dictatorial style.<sup>49</sup>

Erskine's gentler approach bore fruit, and McCarthy wrote back another long letter which he begins by saying "here are the sheets with what corrections I have been able to make," most of which included taking Erskine's advice on moving the Green Fly scene and restoring apostrophes.<sup>50</sup> McCarthy goes into greater detail when resisting or replying to his editor's suggestions. In one section he returns to commas saying – having been previously opposed to their use – that "[i]n several places you have added them where their absence could constitute an ambiguity and in these cases I concur" but that "[i]n other places however, they are merely conventional, setting off a simple phrase for example."<sup>51</sup> This was a convention which appeared to McCarthy "not just unnecessary but [an impediment] in a smooth passage across a printed line," and therefore a habit to be resisted.<sup>52</sup>

Further insights into the attention to detail that both men brought to bear when re-reading McCarthy's manuscript can be found in another letter, where McCarthy thanks Erskine "for trying to invent a system for commas colons etc in introducing thoughts or dialogue," systematising a convention McCarthy was attempting to establish.<sup>53</sup> This system does not survive into the final text of *The Orchard Keeper*, but was fully developed during the redrafting of the novel. In one letter McCarthy tells Erskine that "[t]here is a difference, I think" between the two marks Erskine had co-opted into his system of punctuation: "[a] colon to me represents a pause (perhaps reflective, perhaps for emphasis) and as such draws stronger immediated [sic] attention to what follows."<sup>54</sup> McCarthy's trust in his new editor becomes evident in this letter, as he writes to Erskine that with regards "Hyphens," he had "conceded to you some time ago that these could be added in places where you thought they really should be," giving his editor some direct control over the final shape of his book.<sup>55</sup>

Some areas of confusion remained, however. Most of the rest of the letter in which

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

McCarthy concedes control of hyphenation to Erskine is given over to a discussion of colours. McCarthy states a belief that “color in itself [...] is never a simple noun unless modified,” citing the examples “He painted it green. (Green as an adverb)” and “He painted it a pretty green. (Green as a noun).”<sup>56</sup> This understanding of the grammatical nature of colouration means, according to McCarthy, that compound colours need to be hyphenated because “there is no way of knowing whether the color is blue-green or green-blue” because “one word compliments but does not act as an adjective.”<sup>57</sup> However, McCarthy goes on to argue, colours described in other ways do not need hyphenation. This is McCarthy's justification for writing “bleached to a metal gray” yet having “weathered to the paper-gray of a waspnest” on the next page.<sup>58</sup> In “the first sentence gray acts as a noun and metal as its modifier,” while “[i]n the second sentence both words are simply a description of the color of a waspnest.”<sup>59</sup> What Erskine made of McCarthy's theorising goes unrecorded in the correspondence between the two men, but in the final text of *The Orchard Keeper* both “paper-gray” and “metal-gray” are hyphenated, although “violent green” survives, which suggests that a compromise was arrived at between the collaborators.<sup>60</sup>

At this point it is worth examining McCarthy's writing and, more pertinently, re-writing methods, as far as they can be inferred from the material available in the Erskine and McCarthy archives. The evidence from both McCarthy's and Erskine's papers confirm the already-established idea that McCarthy writes, or at least imagines his writing, in sections. Bensky notes early in their correspondence that “no scene in this book is longer than 15 pages,” and suggests that McCarthy must write, re-read and re-write each of these sequences separately.<sup>61</sup> What this meant during the redrafting process was that each section could be moved around, re-read, re-written, and even re-cast as flashbacks independently from the rest of the novel. This compartmentalised writing and re-writing system was to serve McCarthy well during *The Orchard Keeper's* long redrafting process.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 55, 56.

<sup>61</sup>Larry Bensky, letter to McCarthy, 9 Oct 1962, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

The clearest, and shortest, examples of these sections are the “incantations” which caused Bensky concern in his early readings of *The Orchard Keeper*. These sequences have been completely deleted from the final text of *The Orchard Keeper*, but two survive complete amongst McCarthy's papers. These page-length scenes were intended to serve as chapter introductions, setting the scene, and season, for the following chapter. The earliest, headed “III,” sets the third section of *The Orchard Keeper* in spring, the narrator remembering “*the slate skies that closed the winter's days,*” before going on to talk about the “*hail loud on the roof,*” which continued until all that remained was “*the viperhiss of the steel-bright rain, and nightfall, the distant lightning in the dusk.*”<sup>62</sup> If we can assume that, like the epilogue which also makes use of italic typeface, these sections are the recollections of John Wesley as he sits watching the woodcutters chop down the tree with wire growing through it, then they stand as useful reminders of this framing narrative. The other surviving “incantation” is less believable as the memories of a “half educated mountain boy” as Erskine refers to John Wesley.<sup>63</sup> The section, headed “IV,” first sets the scene as the summer where “*everything is green*” and the “*heat shivers the very trees shapeless.*”<sup>64</sup> The rest of the “invocation” reads as a supplication to Ownby, the “*Old man, night traveller, sage of the rock.*”<sup>65</sup> This “summer” incantation goes on to ask the old man “*what vision did you have that you sought the land's spine here where the waters divide,*” before casting Ownby as the one who enables the boys of Red Branch to “*dream of the wellsprings, green coves where in the flowering rings of water our young faces trail.*”<sup>66</sup> Finally, the incantation becomes a lament for Ownby's current situation, incarcerated in an asylum, asking “*Old man, natural, voice of the leaf, what lucid parchment can you issue us from the quaking silence of your madhouse?*”<sup>67</sup>

That McCarthy was convinced to cut these sections is perhaps a pity, as they do serve to set the scene for what follows, as well as reminding the reader of John Wesley's presence as

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<sup>62</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Early Draft*, Box 1, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx. 193.

<sup>63</sup>Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, Dec 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>64</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Early Draft*, 210

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

the novel's narrator. Their removal is understandable, though, as they represent a further digression in a first novel already possessed of woodcutters who only appear on the first and last pages of the book and cats which appear and disappear, sometimes appearing merely as background detail, at other times holding centre stage for many pages. These "cat sections" were also candidates for removal at one time or another during the redrafting of *The Orchard Keeper*. On one early manuscript they have all been highlighted by Erskine, to draw them out of the main flow of the manuscript. McCarthy wrote to Erskine in an undated letter from late in the redrafting process that the sections in which the cats are "followed" by the narrative had been moved about several times already by McCarthy himself even before the novel made it to Random House. Despite their occasionally tenuous position in McCarthy's writing, almost all these sections have survived the drafting process in one form or another.

The section in the final text of *The Orchard Keeper* which follows a cat from Mildred Rattner's smokehouse across "Tipton's field" on pages 174 and 175 of the final text of *The Orchard Keeper* was originally two sections, with the section set in the Rattner smokehouse having been used initially to break up the sequence dealing with Ownby's arrest and imprisonment. In one late manuscript Erskine has highlighted the smokehouse sequence and written next to it "Now HERE'S a gratuitous one."<sup>68</sup> McCarthy wrote back to Erskine on the matter, saying that "the cat sequence on 246-248 [...] was placed where it is because I had no other place to put it" as well as "in order to keep from having forty-two consecutive pages dealing with the old man."<sup>69</sup> Also important to McCarthy was the section's role in avoiding an "abrupt shift from rainstorm to dry weather," which occurs between the day on which Ownby falls and the day he is arrested. The cat section in the smokehouse does survive into the final text, but at the price of being joined together with its sister piece in Tipton's field and moved to its present location between Ownby's fall and his collection of trapped mink. The answer Erskine offered was to highlight the fact that, as McCarthy had already pointed out, the section dealing with Ownby's fall in the rain had been "wrenched out of its proper time sequence" by

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<sup>68</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*, Box 1, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx. 246.

<sup>69</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

italicising the section, as is done by hand on a late draft.<sup>70</sup> Secondly, to avoid having so many consecutive pages dealing with Ownby, the long section dealing with the old man's fall and arrest is split into two, with a page break added in at the proof stage, along with a return to roman text.

Some cuts seem to have been made for length and to keep the already extensive cast of characters down to a manageable level, and most are understandable, if regrettable removals. One such cut was the extraction of a long, but very funny anecdote dealing with the otherwise unmentioned "Fenners [brothers] putting up their old piece of a house," which Hobie tells during the scene in the shop where Sylder buys new socks. During the digging of the building's foundations the brothers "fell to fightin over puttin the dirt in one another's hole."<sup>71</sup> The inevitable result of this fighting is that the foundations resemble a "crookedyass hole" more than anything else.<sup>72</sup> Despite this setback the brothers "commenced t' layin their block about the same way," resulting in an extremely rickety structure.<sup>73</sup> Although apparently unconnected to the rest of the narrative, Hobie's story does illustrate the genesis of one of the "dozen jerrybuilt shacks" making up Red Branch, which McCarthy contented himself with describing in general terms in the final text.<sup>74</sup>

Other cuts are less understandable, and seem to detract from, rather than add to, the clarity of the published version, such as a cut made from the account of John Wesley's meeting with Warm Pulliam's buzzard. In the final text we are simply told that the bird had in the past "*puked on Rock and Rock like to never get over it.*"<sup>75</sup> The final text of *The Orchard Keeper* makes no mention of who or what Rock might be, but in one early manuscript the reader is told that "Rock was a North Carolina Plott Hound," who is described as "[a] huge shuffling beast with ears too short for a hound, who carried his head low as if in perpetual shame - - a posture which further exaggerated the moose-like hump of his shoulders."<sup>76</sup> This is a description which, while perhaps not adding a great deal to the scene, would have cleared up

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<sup>70</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd Box 1, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>71</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*, 246.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 134. Italics in original.

<sup>76</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*, 140.

potential confusion over whether Rock was Warn's son, dog, or friend.

That McCarthy drafted and redrafted by sections is most clearly displayed by the evolution of a description of trees in winter which appears on page 137 of the published text.

In the final draft of the novel this passage reads:

The trees were all encased in ice, limbless-looking where their black trunks rose in aureoles of lace, bright seafans shimmering in the wind and tinkling with an endless bell-like sound, a carillon in miniature, and glittering shards of ice falling in sporadic hail everywhere through the woods and marking the snow with incomprehensible runes.<sup>77</sup>

McCarthy spent a good deal of time working on this section in isolation from the rest of the text, and there are amongst his papers several sheets on which he works through different variations on this long sentence. The first is much shorter, saying only that the trees stood “like bright plated seafans tinkling with an endless bell-like sound, a carrilon of glass chimes, the glittering ice-shards falling everywhere through the woods in a slow sporadic hail.”<sup>78</sup> The second is longer and introduces the trees as “aureoles of lace,” and saying that the “splinters” of ice fell “showering down [...] everywhere throughout the woods with a faint hissing sound.”<sup>79</sup> This version has been heavily edited in pen by McCarthy, replacing the “splinters” of ice with “shards” and reintroducing the “sporadic hail” from the previous version of the introductory scene. Later, the annotations remove the “faint hissing sound” of the falling ice in favour of “marking the snow with crude runes,” a phrase which is eventually replaced with “stippling the snow with incomprehensible runes,” before “marking” is restored in place of “stippling.”<sup>80</sup>

A third form of the description present among McCarthy’s papers appears to be a writing-up of the annotations made to the previous versions, but on the same piece of paper is another descriptive section extracted from much later in the novel, which, though cut from the published version of *The Orchard Keeper*, was taken from the rainstorm sequence during which Sylder crashes his car. This short passage deals with the “rafts of leaves” which “descended the flowage of Henderson Valley road, wrinkling over the dark macadam” that

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<sup>77</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Sylder sees just before his car crashes into the overflowing river.<sup>81</sup> It is clear from these heavily re-read and re-drafted sections that the descriptive sections of *The Orchard Keeper* received as much, if not significantly more, attention as those passages of writing dealing with the plot and action of the novel.

Other sections uprooted and subject to separate redrafting include the final scene of Legwater frantically digging through the ashes in the peach pit. A draft of this sequence appears in complete isolation amongst McCarthy's papers, alongside redrafts of a section dealing with Ownby's dreams of cats, and describes Legwater as being "like some wild spodomantic sage divining in driven haste the fate of whole galaxies against their imminent ruin," a description entirely absent from the final version of the scene.<sup>82</sup> The sequence then appears again on its own sheet, settling into its final form save for delaying Gifford's arrival on the scene, having him arrive just as Legwater was "near done [...] badly winded from his climb up the mountain."<sup>83</sup> In the final text this sequence is rearranged to have Gifford arrive, still "badly winded" to find Legwater with "shoes weighted with clay [...] gaunt and fantastically powdered with ash looking at the great heaps of ashes," who then climbs out of the pit to sift the ash "like some wild spodomantic sage."<sup>84</sup>

Even though little appears to change across the different forms of this scene the initial draft has Gifford arrive just as Legwater finishes his insane digging, too late to take any meaningful action to calm his unhinged deputy. In the final form, by contrast, Gifford is able to persuade Legwater to at least temporarily stop his search for the metal skull plate he believes is hidden in the ash. That McCarthy took such care over each scene and each detail is further demonstrated in the draft of a letter Rattner was to write to his mother in one of the early drafts of the novel. Again, this detail was eventually removed, but McCarthy has extracted Rattner's potential letter wholesale from its proper place in the manuscript to work on it in isolation. McCarthy corrects the letter's language meticulously, changing "received" to "got" and "any one" to "any body," demonstrating his commitment to consistency in the language used by his

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 240.

characters, and the important role played by McCarthy's own re-reading of his work.<sup>85</sup>

The most extensive of these extracted and redrafted sections are the several endings McCarthy considered for *The Orchard Keeper*. The main concern when writing the climax of the novel was how and from whom John Wesley finds out that it was Sylder who killed his father and threw his body into the peach pit where it would ultimately be burned in a forest fire. In the final text of *The Orchard Keeper* the source of this revelation is left ambiguous. John Wesley visits both Sylder in prison and Ownby in his asylum but neither man reveals anything about John Wesley's father. The novel's final section is equally equivocal as the reader is simply told that "The boy had already gone when they came from Knoxville [...] and sifted the ashes" in the peach pit.<sup>86</sup>

The earliest draft of the closing of *The Orchard Keeper* had Sylder himself reveal that he killed a man when John Wesley goes to see him in prison. In this version it is his guilt over the murder that Sylder finally uses to persuade John Wesley that he "dont owe me nothin," to stop the young man from seeking vengeance against Sherriff Gifford.<sup>87</sup> In the published form of *The Orchard Keeper*, Sylder explains that the reason that he does not deserve vengeance is that he "didn't jest break the law, [he] made a living at it."<sup>88</sup> Sylder tells John Wesley that as a result of taking a job as a whiskey runner he was able to make "more money in three hours than a workin man makes in a week," an increase in wage which he understood "sooner or later has to be paid for" with time in jail.<sup>89</sup> In the earliest draft of this scene, however, Sylder explains that there is "a particular reason why [John Wesley] dont owe [him] nothin" and asks if, to spare him some distress, the boy will "take my word for it?"<sup>90</sup>

What Sylder says next, having been pressed by John Wesley to reveal the reason that he deserved prison time, went through several drafts. At first Sylder explains that he killed a man in "a fight and an accident."<sup>91</sup> Next, Rattner explains that the man he was fighting, whose name he presumably told John Wesley in the course of his tale, "got accidentally killed and [...]

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<sup>85</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*.

<sup>86</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 234.

<sup>87</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*.

<sup>88</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 213-4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

put in the peach pit.”<sup>92</sup> In this draft it is this revelation which causes John Wesley, as he does in the final version of the novel’s close, to leave the jail feeling ill and head back to the Sheriff’s office to attempt to buy back the hawk he had sold. In the second draft fewer details of Sylder’s tale are given. Additionally, the section in which Sylder talks about putting the man in the peach pit has been circled in pencil and the note “No he gets this part of it from old man” has been added by McCarthy. These redrafts and annotations demonstrate that McCarthy re-read and redrafted this section extensively, keeping track of where and from whom John Wesley gets his information.<sup>93</sup>

Attached to this edited version of John Wesley’s final confrontation with Rattner is a first draft of the second ending McCarthy considered for *The Orchard Keeper*. In this second ending John Wesley, having been to visit Sylder in prison and been told some part of the tale, goes to see Ownby in his mental institution seeking more information. As in the published version of this scene, John Wesley comes to bring the old man some chewing tobacco. In the final version of this scene, Ownby explains his theory that “there was a lean year and a year of plenty every seven years” and that the year that is beginning will be a lean one, “hot and dry” meaning that nothing will grow.<sup>94</sup> After explaining this theory to John Wesley, Ownby asks him to go and look for his dog, which John Wesley promises to do, and it is possible that it was while looking for Scout, who would presumably make his way back to his old home at Ownby’s shack, that John Wesley came upon the peach pit and the ashes it would contain.

In McCarthy’s draft of this scene Ownby’s explanation of the cycle of years is replaced with confusion on the old man’s part about what offence Sylder had been arrested for. When pressed by John Wesley, who asks “what else might they have got him for,” Ownby says that they might have arrested Sylder for putting “somebody in the peach pit.”<sup>95</sup> Ownby then tells John Wesley about the peach pit, beginning with the story of a man who had kept goats in it at one point. Ownby had intensely disliked these goats, and had removed them from his mountain by some method. McCarthy writes that Ownby tells John Wesley that the goats were “all dead and the rest run off. What happened to them goats? I aint got ‘em” before “cutting his

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, 226.

<sup>95</sup>McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Early Draft*.

eyes about in simulated guilelessness.”<sup>96</sup> In this version of events, including the expulsion or murder of the interloper’s goats, Ownby emerges far more strongly as the guardian of his mountain kingdom. This is a characterisation of the old man which brings his shooting at the government tank and even his protection of the body in the pit into a more cohesive context. Having told the story of the goats Ownby goes on to talk about cats, especially “one cat I kept shy of,” which he believed either belonged to the man in the pit, or was somehow a vessel for his soul, which “came round ever night for seven year.”<sup>97</sup> It was this cat that haunted the old man’s dreams and it was also this cat that Ownby found “setting on the porch” watching him sleep.<sup>98</sup> The inclusion of these additional details of Ownby’s beliefs about cats would have made the reasoning behind Ownby’s fear of cats far more explicit. These drafts of the closing of the novel not only explain how John Wesley found the peach pit and the remains it contained but also how, with the information he gained from Sylder, he found out that it was his father in the pit.

The other sequence which underwent extensive revisions was the section which would become the penultimate scene of *The Orchard Keeper*, where the local police force investigates the contents of the peach pit. Extra dialogue is again present in McCarthy’s drafts, as the two policemen discuss amongst themselves how it was that John Wesley came to know who it was in the pit. In this version it seems that the police have already questioned John Wesley, as Eller says that on the subject of the identity of the man John Wesley “never said. He said he couldn’t tell” but that he could not tell if “that meant he didn’t know for sure or whether he wasnt allowed to say, for some reason or another.”<sup>99</sup> As in the final form of the scene all that is found in the pit is the skull, and some metal parts of Rattner’s clothing, which is what drives Legwater to begin his frantic search for the metal skullplate as its discovery would confirm the body’s identity. What emerges most strongly from comparing these drafts of the ending of *The Orchard Keeper* to the published version of the novel is that McCarthy’s original ending makes the revelation to John Wesley that Sylder was responsible for his father’s death and his placement in the peach pit on the mountain far more explicit. The reasoning behind its

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*.

removal is less clear. There are not many notes on these sheets, aside from a few line-editing marks pointing out typographical errors. McCarthy could have simply agreed with Bensky's initial impression of these scenes, that they seemed a little too convenient and contrived for the ending of a carefully constructed novel and so abandoned them early in his redrafting. Equally possible is that, having been stripped of the "invocations" to him, McCarthy wanted to re-mystify and re-emphasise Ownby's close connection to the mountain land, which explains the old man's outlining of the cycles of years, albeit at the cost of lessening the sense of Ownby's role as protector of the mountain. This change would have left Sylder as the sole source of information on John Wesley's father, and getting the whole story from Sylder would have made his final confrontation with John Wesley a contrived and out-of-character confession.

In any case, with the scenes mentioned above excised, the major cuts began to be phased out in favour of careful line-editing. Some cuts were made later, such as the removal of the song lyrics "Jenny kissed me when we met jumping from the chair she sat in time you thief who love to get sweets into your list put that in ththth, Jenny kissed me when we met, jumping from the chair she sat in" from the scene introducing Jack the Runner, which are simply absent from the final version.<sup>100</sup> Erskine also highlights two particularly objectionable phrases from the scene in which Sylder dumps Rattner's body, underlining "stink in the wake of the corpse" and adding in pencil "pun (ugh!)" and adds "any other kind?" above the line "spoke loudly to the silent corpse."<sup>101</sup> Erskine's line-editing is also meticulous, and includes checking when the soil in Tennessee was laid down. This attention to detail is demonstrated when Erskine checks a metaphor McCarthy uses to describe the Red Branch locals, which prompts McCarthy to reply with "Mesozoic – gars then? OED."<sup>102</sup> Erskine also pulls McCarthy up on some of his famously-accurate details of place, asking him of one particular area whether the low-growing plants would have been "sedge or sage?" and on species of insect, as he asks of the Green Fly section "what eats wood (as wormy chestnut) grubs?"<sup>103</sup> In each case, Erskine sent McCarthy back to his notes and sources to check these minor, but important, details. This fact checking even extends to the transport capacity of Sylder's car, as one annotation reads "100 gals too

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

much for Ply[mouth]. 9 cases of = 54 gals) (Ford hold 126 = 21 cases),” demonstrating an admirable devotion to detail.<sup>104</sup>

Familiar problem areas continued to raise their heads, and McCarthy wrote to Erskine yet again late in the drafting process to explain the reasoning behind his system of hyphenation, saying that “nouns (nomicase) are separate adjectives are hyphenated.”<sup>105</sup> McCarthy goes on to cite the example of description of someone as “a fork-carving fool” against the phrase “who’s to do the fork carving (noun)” and further explaining that “a ‘needle-grinding machine’ is an “attributive adj[ective]” and as such should be hyphenated, but that “woolgrowing” is a noun and therefore should be treated differently.<sup>106</sup> In the end, as has been noted before, McCarthy simply told the editor to “use as few [hyphens] as possible,” simplifying an area of on-going confusion.

McCarthy increasingly gave control over to Erskine at this point in *The Orchard Keeper*’s genesis, confident that the text of the piece was secure. This increasing trust between the two collaborators is most clearly demonstrated in a letter McCarthy wrote to Erskine in late 1964 saying that “on page 151 you have a section marked and a note about a note. I cant [sic] find the note. I’ll go on faith and agree with whatever the alleged note says” as well as asking his editor for advice on a title.<sup>107</sup> Later in the same letter McCarthy goes on to say that “[r]ather than try to make a distinction between alright and all right, lets [sic] stick with all right” as Erskine had previously suggested.<sup>108</sup> Still later McCarthy entrusted Erskine with the assembling of the book into its final physical form, saying “I have done my best in spacing on the [manuscript] but that it’s something I know little about and can uncover no rules concerning. Your judgement may be better than mine in this matter.”<sup>109</sup> Here again, Erskine demonstrates the variety of abilities he brought to the collaboration as an experienced literary editor, switching from firming up the text of the novel to taking charge of producing the books as an object. Finally, McCarthy admitted defeat on an issue that had consistently plagued

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 1964, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

Erskine, telling him that “the apostrophes can go back in the negative contractions.”<sup>110</sup>

In addition to line-editing, Erskine was also able to help with, or rather shield McCarthy from, the technical problems associated with getting a book to market. This is exemplified in an exchange of memoranda between Erskine and Tere LoPrete, who at the time worked from Random House's illustrations department. LoPrete had been contacted by Neal Van Dyne, whose role at Random House is somewhat unclear, to say that the cover for *The Orchard Keeper* should resemble LoPrete's work for Stanley Elkin's *Boswell: A Modern Comedy*, which features the red and out-of-focus figure of a posing bodybuilder set against a hazy yellow background. Erskine somehow got wind of this plan and, stepping in to the production process to defend his novelist's interests, wrote to LoPrete in November 1964. Erskine opens his memorandum to LoPrete by saying bluntly “No! No! No! We do not want anything that even faintly resembles the jacket used for BOSWELL.”<sup>111</sup>

The use of “we” in Erskine's memo as much as any other facet of the communication demonstrates the degree to which Erskine considered *The Orchard Keeper* a collaborative effort between himself and McCarthy, an understanding of the author-editor relationship which allowed Erskine to act and make important decisions on McCarthy's behalf. Erskine goes on to suggest instead a simple, plain cover “using simple cover stock,” with only the words “THE ORCHARD KEEPER, a novel by Cormac McCarthy” for decoration, and ends the memo by urging LoPrete to get in touch.<sup>112</sup> LoPrete understood the urgency of Erskine's message, and he wrote back the next day to acknowledge the “phone conversation” with Erskine that morning, confirming that Erskine did “not want something to match Boswell,” and further that Erskine did “not want an illustration,” but rather “a very simple type cover” and promising to send Erskine a mock-up to review and approve before the book headed to publication.<sup>113</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Erskine had some experience in designing covers for his novelists' works before dealing with McCarthy and as a result of this experience he was able to get involved with all stages of the pre-publication process without directly involving

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Albert Erskine, memo to LoPrete, 24 Nov. 1964, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

McCarthy. The result of Erskine's close collaboration with McCarthy was, in this case at least, that *The Orchard Keeper* was prevented from being published with what would have been a deeply unsuitable cover, again demonstrating Erskine's concern for how the novel would be received.

The issue of what to call McCarthy's novel was still to be decided however, and was a problem which gave McCarthy serious concern. Initially titled *Toilers at the Kiln* in early official Random House paperwork the novel was completely without a title by the time Bensky provided McCarthy with his advance in 1962. In June 1964 McCarthy sent Erskine a list of possible titles including *Toilers at the Kiln* and *Watchglass and Fiddle*, which Erskine worked up on full title pages. This experiment of seeing the titles as they would appear on future book covers finally put McCarthy off them altogether. McCarthy's next title idea was *Of Hawks and Hounds*, which even appears as the novel's "current probable" on early drafts of Random House's Spring 1965 booklist. Still dissatisfied, McCarthy asked Erskine to have a list of possible titles drawn up from "dialogue found in the [manuscript]" in August 1964.<sup>114</sup> The titles generated by this process included "Ownby," "Just Turn me Loose," "The Green Fly Inn," "And I Wouldnt Care for No Man," "Where you been, old dog," "Long as I Live," "Yep, That's my name," "Traps," "I'll be damned if I do," "We got you surrounded," "He got away," "They aint no more heroes" and finally "He wadnt for sale."<sup>115</sup> None of these titles pleased McCarthy. "Ownby," it seems, sparked off some ideas, and, without further consultation, McCarthy settled on *The Orchard Keeper*, which appears for the first time on a 1965 Random House new books list.<sup>116</sup>

With this final problem solved the book headed to the printers and Erskine wired McCarthy on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1965 to say "Happy publication day," finally ending *The Orchard Keeper's* journey to market.<sup>117</sup> The story of Erskine's involvement in the novel was not quite over, however. In addition to sending *The Orchard Keeper* to his hand-picked advance readers

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<sup>114</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, Aug 1964, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Random House New Books List for 1965, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>117</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 5 May 1965, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

and awards committees, Erskine also collected and stored reviews of the novel. These reviews, both positive and negative, were copied several times. One copy was sent to McCarthy, another copy was stored in Erskine's own papers, while a third was carefully pasted into a collage by Erskine's assistant Susan Baskin. It was this collection of reviews which was sent to potential paperback and foreign publishers along with a copy of the text and other promotional material when Erskine came to sell those rights. Even before *The Orchard Keeper* reached the American marketplace, Erskine had reached an agreement with the French publishing house Editions Robert Laffont in Paris to publish the novel, securing an advance of around seven hundred dollars.

That *The Orchard Keeper* is McCarthy's novel is undeniable. The style, plot, and characters remain largely untouched during its long and occasionally torturous development. What emerges strongly from an examination of this development, however, is a sense of the important role played by an author's collaborators during a novel's production. The version of *The Orchard Keeper* which McCarthy sent to Random House in 1962 was as different from the "final version" which Larry Bensky handed to Alert Erskine in 1963 as that draft of *The Orchard Keeper* was from what was finally published in 1965. A change in any of the key collaborators during the three-year editing process behind *The Orchard Keeper* would have resulted in a different book again. The revelation of the changes made by McCarthy, Bensky and Erskine during the redrafting of *The Orchard Keeper*, rather than lessen McCarthy's claim on the novel serves to expand the notion of authorship itself to include the network of collaborators an identified author works with, demonstrating that authorship, at least in McCarthy's case, is a collaborative, rather than isolating occupation.

### Chapter 3 - Evading “dullness and garrulity”: The Copyediting of *Suttree*

“Most of my friends from those days are dead,’ McCarthy says.”<sup>1</sup> So begins the section of Richard Woodward's 1992 *New York Times* interview with McCarthy relating to *Suttree*. The relationship between McCarthy's fourth and longest novel and the Knoxville the author grew up in has been the subject of numerous articles, books and studies since *Suttree* was published in 1979.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I will argue that although it may well be true that the events and characters in *Suttree* are drawn from McCarthy's life, the sheer length of time the novel spent being written and re-written, copy-edited and otherwise produced shows the tremendous influence of editors and, significantly, copyeditors on McCarthy's work. As the efforts of these “technical” literary actors are so often invisible, I will further argue that there needs to be a greater degree of interest and investigation into the actions of these people and the artistic role they play in the creation of texts as they reach their readers. I will demonstrate in this chapter that even a novel as deeply autobiographical as *Suttree* can be a collective effort, the result of several collaborators' efforts.

Woodward describes *Suttree* as “a celebration of the crazies and ne'er-do-wells [McCarthy] knew in Knoxville's dirty bars and poolrooms,” and claims that “[m]any of the brawlers and drunkards in the book are [McCarthy's] former real-life companions.”<sup>3</sup> Later, and somewhat contrarily to his argument for *Suttree*-as-autobiography, Woodward calls Cornelius Suttree, the titular protagonist of the novel, “[a] literary conceit -- part Stephen Dedalus, part Prince Hal,” but maintains that “he is also McCarthy, the wilful outcast.”<sup>4</sup> Woodward's assumption that *Suttree* is a portrait of McCarthy as a young man does tally well with what little is known about the novelist's life. The mythologised meetings upon which *Suttree* is supposedly based could well have taken place during McCarthy's days of “hustling pool and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B Woodward, “Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html>. Accessed 10/03/2012.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Josyph's article dealt with later in this chapter is the most extensive article in recent scholarship on this subject. The forthcoming McCarthy Society casebook *You Would Not Believe What Watches: Suttree and McCarthy's Knoxville* also promises to bring some examples of this type of scholarship up to date.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

carousing by night,” which the author admits marked his first enrolment in the University of Tennessee in 1952.<sup>5</sup> Equally plausible is that McCarthy fitted in these drunken misadventures during his time in the air-force between 1953 and 1957, when he was stationed in both Knoxville and Alaska, or even around the job in an “auto parts factory” he took in Chicago during the writing of *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy transposing the characters and events to the more familiar ground of Knoxville.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the sources of these stories and characters, it is the tantalising potential of gaining a glimpse into the private life of a literary figure known for his reluctance to discuss such matters openly which has made *Suttree* a favourite with McCarthy critics and scholars. Richard Marius, whose own reluctance to be painted as “one of Cormac McCarthy’s childhood friends” was dealt with in chapter one, still salutes *Suttree* as a supreme record of Knoxville. Marius invokes the same Joycean comparison as Woodward when he calls *Suttree* “my favorite amongst his novels because in it Knoxville becomes his Dublin and he its Joyce.”<sup>7</sup> Marius indulges his own recollections of *Suttree*-era Knoxville, remembering the railway bridges which play an important part in McCarthy’s novel. Marius writes that he “grew up in a world of trains,” which criss-crossed the “First Creek” river on which *Suttree* fishes.<sup>8</sup> Marius also remembers the river itself, “stinking with raw sewage, pour[ing] sluggishly” through the outskirts of the city.<sup>9</sup> For Marius, a fellow Tennessean, *Suttree* serves as “a handbook to a necropolis of memories,” so accurately rooted in place and time does its action appear.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, Peter Josyph, in preparation for a special issue of *Appalachian Heritage* devoted to McCarthy’s work, was shown around Knoxville in 2010 by Wesley Morgan, a Knoxville resident who has for some years worked to pinpoint the locations which appear in McCarthy’s novels. Likening the journey to a walk around Dublin for Bloomsday, Josyph writes that this article is “a sampling of what it’s like to walk the great old city of

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<sup>5</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>6</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 1964, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Marius, “*Suttree* as Window into the Soul of Cormac McCarthy,” in *Sacred Violence: A Reader’s Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 6.

Knoxville with one of its most extraordinary gentlemen, and, with every step, to be reading yourself deeper into the prose miracle that is called Suttree.”<sup>11</sup> During these rambles around the city, Josyph is keen to point to the

*visit to the site of McCarthy’s childhood home along Martin Mill Pike, of which a chimney in the trees is all one can see after the fire that destroyed it two years ago [...] or to the gate in front of Orchard Road where – supporting Wesley’s claim that the so-called water tower featured in The Orchard Keeper is, in fact, a Federal Aviation Authority facility, one can see on the chain a lock with the inscription FAA, and where one can see, along Martin Mill Pike, the steep declivity in the woods where the Green Fly Inn might have stood before it suffered the catastrophe that highlights the novel.*<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Josyph mentions previous meetings with “James Long – the J-Bone of *Suttree* [...] Big Frig, and Walt Clancy,” meetings which, according to Josyph, meant that he was “even more moved when I find [them] in the novel.”<sup>13</sup> The main objective of the pair’s journey, however, is a trip to the rail bridges which provide accommodation for both Harrogate and the Ragpicker in *Suttree*. It is under one of these bridges that Morgan shows Josyph “a little concrete bunker that’s in the bulkhead of the bridge, a rectangular hole that you could climb through, and inside you’d be very well sheltered.”<sup>14</sup> Morgan claims that this hole is the basis for Harrogate’s lair under the bridge, from where he kills bats and electrocutes pigeons. The point that the two men are keen to make is “showing that [McCarthy]’s not making it up out of whole cloth,” that his characters “weren’t imagined – most of them were people who were running around, identifiable.”<sup>15</sup>

Morgan and Josyph’s argument is one they nuance somewhat by maintaining that McCarthy’s art is “based on – transformed from – the reality in front of you,” rather than a simple depiction of it.<sup>16</sup> Their rejection of established critical frameworks, especially when dealing with Harrogate’s cave, places a very heavy emphasis on McCarthy’s source material at the expense of artistic invention. Although this is problematic, the point remains that to draw his characters from his own life makes *Suttree* something of an exception amongst McCarthy’s works. While *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark* and *Child of God* are all set in and around

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Josyph, “A Walk With Wesley G Morgan Through Suttree’s Knoxville.” *Appalachian Heritage* Vol 39, No 1, (Winter 2011): 21. Italics in original.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 27.

Tennessee, a region familiar to McCarthy and meticulously rendered in his works, their characters are all, with the possible exception of Lester Ballard whose crimes may have some historical providence, creations of McCarthy's imagination and truly fictional.

There are other equally notable differences between *Suttree* and what had gone before. At almost 500 pages, *Suttree* is as long as McCarthy's first two novels combined and more than twice the length of *Child of God*, its immediate predecessor. Thomas Young also calls *Suttree* "anomalous among Cormac McCarthy's novels" due to its urban setting, a feature which still makes *Suttree* unique among McCarthy's novels, although the stage play *The Sunset Limited* does take a run-down apartment in a New York City ghetto as its setting.<sup>17</sup> Young goes on to argue that *Suttree* functions as an anti-pastoral narrative, citing as evidence Suttree's "disastrous reconnection with the natural world" during his hike in the mountains.<sup>18</sup> During this hike Suttree does indeed regress so far as to end up "crouched like an ape under the dark eaves of a slate bluff," seeing "with a madman's clarity the perishability of his flesh."<sup>19</sup> Others, however, disagree with Young's assessment of Suttree's mountain sojourn and the visions he experiences there. William Spencer sees Suttree's journey as "a spiritual adventure," in which he is "rewarded with [...] visions."<sup>20</sup> Spencer sees Suttree's "vision quest" as a logical part of McCarthy's characterisation of "his fisherman protagonist as an active spiritual seeker."<sup>21</sup> Even accepting Young's contention that *Suttree* is an anti-pastoral text leaves open for question his claim that this antipathy toward the natural world makes the text unique among McCarthy's novels, especially when one considers the harsh landscapes of *Blood Meridian*, or even the disastrous consequences of Lester Ballard's attempts to live alone in the caves of Sevier County. However, Young's central point, that *Suttree* is unusual because it is a novel of and about the city, still stands.

Amidst this critical wrangling there is one seemingly objective truth on which there is remarkable consensus: that even by McCarthy's standards *Suttree* took a very long time to

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas D Young, Jr, "The Imprisonment of Sensibility: *Suttree*" in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Edwin Arnold, and Dianne Luce. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree* (London: Picador, 2007), 278.

<sup>20</sup> William Spencer, "Seventh Direction, or Suttree's Vision Quest," in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

write. Edwin Arnold claims that “McCarthy was writing *Suttree* [...] during the time he published both *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*.”<sup>22</sup> If true, Arnold's claim puts the start date for the “writing” of *Suttree* around 1963, fully sixteen years before its publication. The pages of additional material McCarthy wrote to Bensky about in that year which were mentioned in the previous chapter certainly confirm that McCarthy was writing *something* else during the publication of his first two novels. The concrete evidence amongst McCarthy's papers does not stretch quite so far back, however. The earliest mention of any material identifiably from *Suttree* with a clear date amongst either Erskine's or McCarthy's papers appears in the letter sent by Albert Erskine to Willie Morris, then editor of *Harper's Magazine*, in July of 1969. This was the letter Erskine sent to Morris with the intention of selling *Harrogate and the Flittermouses* to *Harper's* which was mentioned in chapter one. As briefly outlined in chapter one, it is unclear if McCarthy wrote this section as a short story or if this section was simply finished earlier than the rest of the book and was extracted by either Erskine or McCarthy and titled in order to be sold to serial publications. What the appearance of this section, fully formed in Erskine's papers, does demonstrate is that McCarthy was almost certainly writing at least parts of *Suttree* more than ten years before its final publication.

Erskine's frustrations in attempting to sell sections of McCarthy's work have been dealt with elsewhere, but they are worth returning to here. The rejection from *Harper's* came as one on an increasingly lengthy list of problems for McCarthy. The author's stock was falling at Random House at this time as a result of delays in the production of *Suttree* and the underwhelming sales figures of McCarthy's first three novels. Erskine was becoming an increasingly isolated voice of support for McCarthy within the publishing house, a situation exacerbated by the acquisition of Random House by RCA in 1965 and the corporatisation which inevitably followed. In addition to selling McCarthy's work, Erskine was also fighting to keep McCarthy in print. This was evidenced by his exchange of memoranda with a sceptical printing department mentioned in chapter one, although one could perhaps sympathise with Random House's reluctance to further back an author whose first two novels had by 1969

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<sup>22</sup> Edwin Arnold, “The Mosaic of McCarthy's Fiction,” In *Sacred Violence*, ed. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Western Press, 1995), 17.

apparently sold around 2,000 copies between them in the US.<sup>23</sup> Erskine was successful in ensuring a second printing of *The Orchard Keeper*, and he was also able to keep McCarthy supplied with a reasonably steady stream of cash drawn against his advance and royalties, sending the author \$1000 in both June and July of 1969.<sup>24</sup> The supply of money from Random House was not endless, however, and Erskine sent what would be the last cheque for a long while to McCarthy in February 1971, saying that “a requisition for a c[hec]k for 1000 is going though as an advance on general acc[oun]t (as before). This will put you a little back on the red side again, roughly where you were before the final part of the advance [for *Outer Dark*] came in.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition to Erskine's efforts on his behalf, McCarthy was able to locate some additional ways to support himself during the writing of *Suttree*. Between the publication of *Outer Dark* in 1968 and *Suttree*'s eventual appearance in 1979 McCarthy found work, and income, as a screenwriter for an episode entitled *The Gardener's Son* for the PBS “visions” series of films for television. McCarthy undertook substantial historical research for the writing of *The Gardener's Son*, which was based upon the historical murder of South Carolinian mill owner James Gregg and originally aired on PBS in January 1977. ECCO press would publish the screenplay of the episode in 1996. During the researching and writing of *The Gardener's Son* McCarthy began writing *Child of God*. Published by Random House in 1973, *Child of God* seems to have been written quickly, and with little redrafting, as little material on the novel exists among archival material on the book, and there are few drafts or letters about the novel among either McCarthy or Erskine's papers.

While McCarthy continued with his other projects, Erskine tried throughout 1970 to sell *Harrogate and the Flittermouses* to other magazines, as outlined in chapter one. Despite his failure to secure magazine publication, Erskine's resourcefulness was not exhausted, and he was able to use his influence at Random House to secure McCarthy an advance of some

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<sup>23</sup> Liebermann, memo to Erskine, April 1, 1969. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, July 14, 1969. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 23 Feb, 1971. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

“\$6000” for *Suttree*.<sup>26</sup> The amount Erskine secured for McCarthy was some way short of the “fifteen thousand” McCarthy had claimed he would need “[i]n order to get reasonably clear of debt, finish my house, and get ensconced somewhere for a year or so in the privacy that I need to finish this book,” but still significantly more than those advances McCarthy's earlier work had commanded.<sup>27</sup>

With two other assignments underway, both of which promised reasonably quick, if limited, profit, it is perhaps unsurprising that it was not until 1977 that a reasonably complete draft of *Suttree* took shape. To say that there was a complete draft of the novel belies the fact that it would still be a further two years before *Suttree* saw the light of day. Having read the 1977 draft, Erskine sent a long letter back to McCarthy outlining his several serious concerns. Erskine's letter begins with a quotation from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: “It is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourses, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity.”<sup>28</sup> Erskine goes on to clarify his point, saying that the quotation given “applies precisely to such characters as J.B., Hoghead, Primrose, Blind Richard, etc, etc, who after all this time are still indistinguishable one from the other and are equally boring.”<sup>29</sup> Primrose, a character who was indeed cut before *Suttree* made it to press, seems to have been a particular target for Erskine's ire. Erskine points to the one section in which Primrose was to have appeared as one of several “gainfully expendable episodes” which in the editor's opinion “not only don't pull their weight but might even sink the boat.”<sup>30</sup> Despite Erskine's savaging of McCarthy's first complete draft of *Suttree*, the editor did retain an overall positive attitude to the book, pointing out that he had not “said one word against junkman, ragman, railroad man, the Indian, Harrogate [...] Ab Jones and his establishment; even the goatman.”<sup>31</sup> Erskine's overarching point was that the first version of *Suttree* was simply over-long, and repetitive as a

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<sup>26</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 22 March, 1972. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>27</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 24 Sept, 1971. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>28</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 27 May, 1977. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

result. The main concern behind these apparently severe cuts was, in Erskine's own words, that "this book, which has so much which is wonderful [...] seems to be marred by so much that is repetitive and extraneous."<sup>32</sup> Erskine was willing to work with McCarthy on these concerns, admitting that "you may be right and I may be wrong [...] maybe everything has to be here to achieve what you want to achieve."<sup>33</sup> Erskine even remained willing, despite his personal reservations to "turn it in [...] for copy-editing and production."<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps because Erskine took as gentle a line as possible when recommending serious cuts, McCarthy responded positively to his editor's suggestions. McCarthy's willingness to heed Erskine's advice despite the decade he had apparently already invested in the writing of *Suttree* is remarkable, and is indicative of the respect the author had for Erskine's opinions and the value he placed upon his editor's feedback. The sequence involving Primrose to which Erskine most violently objected saw Suttree, Primrose, and several other named characters also ultimately removed from the final form of *Suttree*, travelling out of the city to a barn in which a cock-fighting competition is being held. Suttree sneaks a bottle of drink past the doorman, who charges them a six dollar entry fee. Primrose's cockerel then competes successfully in several cock fights. It is during the celebrations of a particularly spectacular victory for Primrose's cockerel that a cat appears in the barn, to the obvious consternation of the assembled crowd who fear for their prized birds. McCarthy writes that it is with this cat's appearance that Suttree had "the first inkling of trouble."<sup>35</sup> Suttree's "inkling" is shown to be prophetic. The cat next appears in the ring between Primrose's legs, trying to steal the corpse of the defeated cock. Apparently to scare the creature away Primrose pours some of his drink onto the cat. Startled, the animal darts away under a lit stove which is glowing hot. The drink which had been poured onto the cat ignites, setting the cat itself on fire. The barn then catches light as the burning cat hurtles around the wooden structure, trying to escape. This in turn forces Suttree and friends to beat a hasty retreat back to Knoxville before the enraged locals discover who poured the drink on the cat.

It is unclear where this episode would have slotted into the text of *Suttree* as it stands

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree Late Draft*, Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

in the published version. The sequence only appears in isolation among McCarthy's papers. Equally unclear, as Erskine pointed out in his concerned letter, is what this sequence adds to the book apart from another drunken misadventure. In addition to its similarity to other episodes in *Suttree*, the episode takes Suttree and friends away from Knoxville itself and into the countryside, breaking up the urban setting of the rest of the early part of the novel. The similarity of the episode to Suttree's adventures in the city also give the scene a very different character to the later and more fully developed sections away from the city: Suttree's journey in the mountains and his expedition with the clam fishers, both of which deal with events quite different from those occurring in other city-bound sections. Also, McCarthy's careful use of animals in his novels is well-known, and so the scene, with its prominently-featured cat, an animal already established as important by Ownby in *The Orchard Keeper*, may have thematic links to overarching concerns of McCarthy's.

Wallace Sandborn III has explored this theme in McCarthy's work at length.<sup>36</sup> Though Sandborn's analysis is somewhat prone to sweeping statement and occasional oversimplification, his picking out of McCarthy's association between animal and symbol does hint at the importance of these creatures in the author's work. In *The Orchard Keeper* cats feature prominently as the centre of Ownby's belief in their role as vessels for the souls of departed humans. The rather mystical sections from McCarthy's first novel which follow the particular cat Ownby "kept clear of" also strengthen the bond between cats and people, especially the dead. Having a cat feature in *Suttree* as essentially a – particularly black – kind of comic relief would weaken the mystical associations McCarthy had built up in *The Orchard Keeper*. The excision of this burning cat displays McCarthy's careful and self-conscious construction of his animal images, and his desire to keep these images consistent, even across different novels. This exploration of McCarthy's rewriting process is crucial to unravelling the author's self-conscious authorship. McCarthy's rewriting and eventual excision of this scene, drawn from or based upon a real event if Marius' ideas about the autobiographical nature of *Suttree* are correct, on the grounds of problems with its symbolic loading demonstrate that even McCarthy's autobiographical fiction was subject to the same rewriting and editorial

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<sup>36</sup> See Wallace Sandborn III, *Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006).

control as his more overtly fictional works.

The other major casualty of Erskine's suggested cuts was actually one McCarthy undertook on his own initiative, a scene not mentioned in Erskine's letter. It is possible that McCarthy made this cut to secure the place of other scenes to which he was more attached, to demonstrate a willingness to streamline the novel while still leaving intact scenes he considered particularly important. The short sequence McCarthy cut deals with the autopsy of an unnamed man in an extremely graphic and detailed way, going into particular detail about the stripping of the flesh from the skull of the body. Skulls and the flesh covering them are a recurring theme in *Suttree*, one which Erskine mentioned in his long letter of 1977, wherein he laments "the author's skull-beneath-the-skin obsession."<sup>37</sup> During the autopsy we are told, for example, that "the mortician took hold of the cadaver's scalp with both hands where he had freed it from the base of the skull and pulled it up over the top of the head until it hung down across the eyes and face."<sup>38</sup> Unlike the cock-fighting sequence dealt with previously the autopsy scene has a clear place in the text, surviving until what seems to be the very last drafts of the novel, those sent to Bertha Krantz for copyediting. The sequence was to appear toward the close of *Suttree* on page 470, between the discovery of the body in Suttree's houseboat by an ambulance crew and Suttree's emergence from the side of the road with his "small cardboard suitcase."<sup>39</sup> The identity of the dead man being autopsied is never made explicit, but from the position of the scene in the text it seems reasonable to infer that the body being dissected on the table is the dead man Suttree finds in his houseboat. As with the cock-fighting sequence, the function of this section is unclear. Assuming that time has skipped ahead slightly in this sequence and the dead man is the man being autopsied is the one found in Suttree's houseboat, the corpse could be serving as a kind of double for Suttree. The unnamed man had, after all, been living in Suttree's houseboat, and presumably been living a life similar to Suttree's. McCarthy's aim with this doubling could well have been to remind the reader of the fragility of Suttree's health following his attack of typhoid fever.

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<sup>37</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 27 May, 1977. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx

<sup>38</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree Later Draft*, Box 21, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>39</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 470.

This reading is weakened, however, by the section's positioning, immediately following as it does the line "Old Suttree aint dead."<sup>40</sup> The point that Richard Marius picks up, that *Suttree* is to some extent "an expression of the fragility of this fleshly vessel that holds our lives," is worth examining in reference to this section.<sup>41</sup> Marius' point certainly has relevance to *Suttree* as it was published. *Suttree* in this reading takes an exploration of the limits of human endurance to poverty, alcohol abuse, and even exposure in the case of Suttree's mountain trek, as well as the serious illness and delirium resulting from Suttree's precarious lifestyle as its major themes. To have this additional scene, in which a human body cut up in such a meticulously described, scientific and physical way does bring the "fleshly" existence of *Suttree*'s characters out starkly, perhaps too much so for McCarthy's taste, bringing about its removal. Equally possible is that the scene was removed to deflect Erskine's criticism of McCarthy's "skull-beneath-the-skin obsession" mentioned earlier, as its removal at least relegates the motif to the level of a recurring metaphor rather than having the theme physically explored in quite such an overt manner. The sequence does, however, prefigure McCarthy's abiding interest in scalping, a theme most prominently explored in *Blood Meridian*. It is hard to tell exactly when either the autopsy sequence or the cockfighting sequence featuring Primrose were cut from the text of *Suttree* as McCarthy did not date his drafts. These sequences were both certainly present before Erskine's letter in 1977, as revealed by the editor's concerns with Primrose's presence. They are both included in a clean typescript dating from after Erskine's letter, although the cockfighting scene is clearly out of sequence. The autopsy scene definitely survived longer than the cockfighting sequence, and it is present in a draft marked up for proofreading.

A brief note on one of the characters to whom McCarthy was extremely attached. McCarthy was particularly determined to keep the "goatman" who first appears on page 195 of the published version of *Suttree* and then sporadically throughout the rest of the novel. The reason for McCarthy's attachment to the goatman could have been because the character, who recommends that Suttree should get "a goat or two" so that he "never would be lonely" and who travels with a sign on his wagon which reads "JESUS WEPT," was, very definitely, a real

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Marius, "The Mosaic of McCarthy's Fiction," 14.

person.<sup>42</sup> Included amongst McCarthy's papers held in San Marcos there is a postcard accompanied by a short "presidential handbook" written by one "Chess McCartney," who, as the handbook tells its reader, was otherwise known as "the Goat Man."<sup>43</sup> The postcard shows McCartney standing next to a junk-laden cart topped by a sign, of which only the bottom half, which reads "WEPT," can be seen. According to Darryl Patton's book *America's Goat Man* Chess (or Charles) McCartney was, during the fifties, "probably the best known itinerant since Johnny Appleseed."<sup>44</sup> McCartney, who claimed to be an "ordained preacher," spent, according to Patton, "some thirty-eight years – from 1930 to 1968 – casually walking the roads of America" accompanied by his goats and wagon.<sup>45</sup> As depicted by McCarthy, McCartney was indeed accompanied by a junk wagon topped by the JESUS WEPT sign, propelled by his string of goats. He became famous for preaching sermons wherever he was on each Sunday. These orations drew large crowds, who served to support McCartney's wanderings by buying postcards similar to the one found amongst McCarthy's papers. According to Patton's book, McCartney was in Tennessee during both 1948 and 1964. The former date coincides with when McCarthy would have been in Knoxville preparing to attend University. The latter date, the most likely date of the postcard, overlaps with when McCarthy returned to Knoxville to pursue his writing career. McCarthy's postcard, while undated, is reproduced in Patton's book as dating from around 1968. The card was certainly produced late in McCartney's wanderings, as it states on the reverse that the goat whose head can be seen poking out of the various material piled on the cart is "Old Bill," who by that point was "36 years old [...and] the only goat left that started out with Chess McCartney some 30 odd years ago. He rides now."<sup>46</sup> The coincidence of dates is striking. The time that McCarthy would supposedly have been slumming it in Knoxville is exactly the time McCartney would have been making his way up and down America, and even, if Patton's dates are accurate, been passing through Knoxville.

The question to ask here, of course, is what exactly this revelation adds to an

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<sup>42</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 207, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Chess McCartney, "Presidential Handbook," Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>44</sup> Darryl Patton, *America's Goat Man* (Gadsden: Little River Press, 2003), xi.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Anon. "postcard," Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

understanding of *Suttree*. Chess McCartney is an established piece of American folk-lore according to Patton. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that McCarthy would have heard of “The Goat Man” even if he had never met him. However, it would also be difficult to imagine the real Chess McCartney offering to sell or give away his beloved goats as he does in his exchange with Suttree. The point is that Suttree’s meeting with McCartney is a moment at which McCarthy’s fictionalising of real events can be most clearly seen. It is a matter of historical record that McCartney would have been in Knoxville at the same time as McCarthy. By inserting a historical character into his fiction McCarthy very explicitly ties his action to this time and to this place in Knoxville’s history. That the scene itself underwent the same re-writing and was edited in the same way as the rest of *Suttree* reveals the dramatic effect that editorial and other collaborative input can have on even episodes and characters drawn from McCarthy’s life and history. Even when dealing with historical characters, McCarthy still self-consciously deals in fiction.

There were other, smaller casualties of the cutting process. Immediately following the sequence involving Primrose and the fire at the cockfighting barn there was originally a scene in which Suttree goes out to buy a hotdog and encounters a man leading a bear on a chain. Suttree gives both the bear and his handler a hotdog and the two men swap hitch-hiking stories. The “bearman” insists to Suttree that he had been offered several lifts during his wanderings in spite of his enormous travelling companion. Although he admits that the bear cost them their last lift, he “kept slobberin down the back of this old boy’s neck that picked us up.”<sup>47</sup> On the same walk Suttree encounters another man, this time with a hawk on a string. This second man uses his “raptorial termagant” to hunt pigeons and other game.<sup>48</sup> The encounter with the falconer seems to have been reworked several times, but not substantially. The sequence remains underdeveloped, possibly due to its striking similarity to Warn Pulliam’s buzzard, which features in *The Orchard Keeper*.<sup>49</sup> If Edwin Arnold is correct, and McCarthy was writing *Suttree* during the development of *The Orchard Keeper* it is perfectly possible that the scene in *The Orchard Keeper* dealing with Warn’s buzzard is the developed version of this

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<sup>47</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree Late Draft*, Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> See Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* (London: Picador, 2007), 134.

sequence, transplanted from one novel to the other. If this is true, it makes *Suttree*, or at least its writing process, a “sourcebook” for other McCarthy material. McCarthy could have been working these episodes up for *Suttree* and as he could find no place for them in that novel, inserted them instead into other works. The argument for *Suttree*-as-sourcebook draws additional strength when one considers the important role played by a domesticated bear in *Blood Meridian*, showing a possible destination for the abandoned bearman sequence from the *Suttree* drafts.<sup>50</sup> These short sections have no obvious place in the narrative and no clear function other than adding to the “animal” section of the novel begun with the excursion to the barn to watch the cockfighting.

Other sections cut are merely extensions of existing scenes. A typical example is the “party on deck” on the “River Queen” which paddles past Suttree’s houseboat one night.<sup>51</sup> The songs being sung by those at the party were originally to be overheard by Suttree, the company singing “Yes I’m from Function // From Function Junction // Where the double function suction pumps are made.”<sup>52</sup> This is the first stanza of an air force song associated primarily with the 433<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, dating from the 1950s and 60s.<sup>53</sup> If this tune is, as it appears to be, an old air force song, it can reasonably be assumed that McCarthy heard this song during his service in the Air Force between 1953 and 1957. The removal of these lyrics is consistent with the earlier decision discussed in chapter two to remove the song lyrics “Jenny kissed me when we met jumping from the chair she sat in” from the scene introducing Jack the Runner in *The Orchard Keeper*.<sup>54</sup> However, what prompted the decision, whether to avoid copyright issues, or avoid too clearly identifying those on the boat as air force men, is unclear.

Other small but significant cuts made late in the process include a short section of verse after “*ruder form survive*” at the end of the italic opening of *Suttree*.<sup>55</sup> The source of the cut section, which runs “The rattle of claws and the click of teeth // Are all that the poet’s lines

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<sup>50</sup> See Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 2007), 324.

<sup>51</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree Late Draft*.

<sup>53</sup> “Function Junction,” The Jack Horntip Collection, accessed March 15, 2010.  
[http://www.horntip.com/html/books\\_&\\_MSS/1960s/1968ca\\_satans\\_angels\\_songbook/index.htm](http://www.horntip.com/html/books_&_MSS/1960s/1968ca_satans_angels_songbook/index.htm).

<sup>54</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper Late Draft*, Box 1, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>55</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 5.

bequeath // And the player's bones are crept with mold // All will be done as I have told" is unlocated. The sequence seems to be an invocation to start the narrative proper of the book, or a way to cast the italic section which precedes it as prophecy of what is to follow. The world of *Suttree* is indeed "a farther world forsaken, on purposes forgot," with its cast of "crazies and ne'er-do-wells" and its setting of "dirty bars and poolrooms." In *Suttree's* introduction we are also given previews of the "hunters and woodcutters" Suttree will meet on his trek in the mountains, as well as the ever-present threats of madness and death, here rendered as mentions of "dementia praecox" and a cryptic mention of "The thing" against which the doors of the town are barred.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, this cut section draws closer attention to the apparently dead and skeletal "interlocutor" within the "gutted sockets [of whose] skull a spider sleeps."<sup>57</sup> The cut section expends this description of the speaker to include his "bones [...] crept with mold."<sup>58</sup> By casting the dead man as a prophet, the reader is invited to consider more closely who is speaking, making it clearer that the italics represent the voice of the dead. To cast this section as prophecy or invocation also invites the reader to draw closer parallels between the introductory section and the events of the rest of the novel, as well as resembling a darker version of an invocation of the muses, as might be found at the opening of epic literature.

In his notes McCarthy also cites his source for Suttree's odd statement on page 23 that the only thing in the caves below the city is "Blind slime. As it is above, so it is below."<sup>59</sup> McCarthy's citation, included as a handwritten note on one of his manuscripts, reads "Quod est inferius // est sicut quod // est superius // (Tabula smaragdina)."<sup>60</sup> The "Tabula Smaragdina" to which McCarthy here refers appears in translation by E.J. Holmyard in a 1923 issue of *Nature*. The object from which McCarthy draws his quotation is named in Holmyard's article as the "Emerald Table," a "famous alchemical tract."<sup>61</sup> According to Holmyard, the tablet first appeared in print "at Nuremburg in 1541," in a text on chemistry.<sup>62</sup> Holmyard also provides the full quotation from which Suttree draws his pronouncement as "Quod est inferius est sicut

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>58</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree Later Draft*.

<sup>59</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree Later Draft*.

<sup>61</sup> E. J. Holmyard, "The Emerald Table," *Nature*, no 2814, vol 112 (1923): 526. Accessed May 25, 2012. <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v112/n2814/pdf/112525a0.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

quod est superius, et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius,” which Holmyard translates as “That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one thing.”<sup>63</sup> The line quoted by McCarthy is one of several sections on the tablet extolling the virtues and insights of its author, “the almost mythical ‘founder of chemistry’ Hermes Trismestigos.”<sup>64</sup>

By linking J-Bone's enquiry about gold hidden under the caves to an alchemical text McCarthy casts Harrogate's later project to dig for gold in similar terms. Harrogate's search for gold under the city becomes an attempt to turn the basest material imaginable, the human waste he actually finds in the caves beneath Knoxville, into gold. Harrogate's attempt is therefore both immediately held up as ridiculous, as Suttree's “blind slime” comment reveals McCarthy's cynicism at Harrogate's alchemical project, and contextualised in the history of human striving for greater wealth, especially the alchemical quest to turn base material into gold. The contents of this small note neatly demonstrate not only McCarthy's interest in giving credit to his intertexts, it also shows the value that can come from examining an author's papers, confirming as it does the origin of Suttree's pronouncement.

By 1978 most of the substantive cuts to the *Suttree* manuscript had been made. The copy editing was undertaken by “Bert” – Bertha – Krantz, an experienced line editor at Random House. The potentially overwhelming job of copyediting some 600 typescript pages was broken down into sections by Krantz, each of which were sent to McCarthy in turn with the copyeditor's “queries” highlighted for the author's attention.<sup>65</sup> As Krantz herself explained in her first letter to McCarthy:

it seemed to me that the best way to handle [these queries] would be to send you Xeroxes (and herewith the first batch) of pages containing them. Everything is clearly, I hope, marked in red. As soon as I have another batch I'll send them along, and so on. This way, if you could answer me fairly quickly, we could catch up on everything by the time I finish.<sup>66</sup>

Some of McCarthy's stylistic eccentricities had, by this point in his Random House career,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy 21 Mar 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>66</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 8 March 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

been anticipated and integrated into a kind of McCarthy style sheet. Krantz writes that she had “decided to quit querying you on such things as ‘on the floor’ or ‘in the floor’ - also the use of toward or towards (have left them as is).”<sup>67</sup> Krantz also avoided the issues with colours which had plagued Erskine during the writing of *The Orchard Keeper*, saying that she would leave as-is “the fact that sometimes you make one word with ‘colored’, that is ‘winecolored’ (just an example) or ‘wine colored’.”<sup>68</sup> Other queries were similarly dropped or streamlined as the process continued. By the time the next set of questions went out to McCarthy, Krantz stated that she was “not going to continue to query [McCarthy] on an apostrophe in it's where it's clearly a contraction for it is; or for let's where the contexts calls for let us, not lets.”<sup>69</sup>

One thing that becomes immediately clear during this exchange of letters is that Krantz was another of McCarthy's supporters at Random House, a true and devoted collaborator. In her first letter to McCarthy, Krantz says that having the job of copyediting *Suttree* “is not a bad deal to be paid for [...] because I'm having a fantastic time with it.”<sup>70</sup> The proofreading process was halted briefly when Krantz went on holiday. Before leaving, Krantz wrote to McCarthy saying that she didn't feel comfortable leaving the project in the hands of another copyeditor, as she was “either a glutton for punishment or a glutton for McCarthy,” before concluding “oh hell, why all the explanation. I just want to do it myself.”<sup>71</sup> The two had also become personally friendly over the course of their professional association, as Krantz sent McCarthy a postcard from her vacation in Maine extolling the wonders of the location and urging McCarthy to visit.<sup>72</sup> That Krantz was taking on responsibilities once fulfilled by Erskine was confirmed after her return from Maine. Krantz wrote to McCarthy in July 1978 to say that “within the next week I will be moving upstairs, to share Albert's office,” as the editor, now

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 23 March 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>70</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 21 March, 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>71</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 22 May, 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>72</sup> Bertha Krantz, postcard to McCarthy, postmarked 26 June 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

approaching retirement, was “only in it one day a week.”<sup>73</sup> This is not to argue that Krantz was fulfilling the same role in *Suttree*'s production as had Erskine. She does not recommend cuts at any stage of the pair's correspondence, and her work remains largely technical and grammatical. However, Krantz's work on *Suttree* had an undeniable and profound effect on the form *Suttree* would finally take.

Krantz's enthusiastic and extremely thorough approach to copy-editing meant that McCarthy was almost as prepared to listen to her ideas as he was to Erskine's suggestions, recognising her as a valuable ally. The changes Krantz suggested were minor, but related largely to punctuation, the format of the writing and a relentless pursuit of clarity, the areas which caused so many problems for Erskine during the production of *The Orchard Keeper*. It seems that McCarthy was more prepared to take advice from those at Random House at this point in his career than he had been during the time of *The Orchard Keeper*, possibly due to the positive outcome of that project. The “all-girl revue” *Suttree* encounters on page 101, for example, received its hyphen during Krantz's editing with much less resistance than Erskine encountered trying to make changes to *The Orchard Keeper*'s “paper-grey.”<sup>74</sup>

Despite McCarthy's willingness to listen to Krantz' suggestions the copyediting process was not without its frustrations. Krantz gently chided McCarthy in her letter of April 4<sup>th</sup> 1978, for example, saying that she had been “so relieved to get your letter today – thought we'd lost you” after the author had gone silent for a period of weeks.<sup>75</sup> There were also complications with the scheduling of the production process itself. Krantz wrote to McCarthy in May 1978 saying that the author “needed to get things done by May 22<sup>nd</sup> if he wanted a Jan 1979 publication time, but that Albert was happy to allow more time and go for Feb.”<sup>76</sup> In the end, *Suttree* would not appear until May 1979, suggesting that McCarthy missed both the original and extended deadlines set by Random House. Further, although there is no record of

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<sup>73</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 10 July 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>74</sup> McCarthy, *Suttree*, 101.

<sup>75</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 4 April, 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>76</sup> Bertha Krantz, letter to McCarthy, 9 May 1978. Box 19, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

what Random House wanted from the “Précis” McCarthy wrote of *Suttree* sometime in 1979 at the request of those at the publishing house, it is likely that the four pages of close type McCarthy produced were not exactly what those attempting to market the book were looking for.

Advance copies of *Suttree* were distributed to reviewers in late 1978, following the practice Erskine had adopted with McCarthy's earlier works of drumming up positive critical reviews of the novel before its general release. It is a measure of McCarthy's growing stature as a novelist that advance copies of *Suttree* were sent around to mainstream reviewers, rather than the authors known personally to Erskine as was the case with *The Orchard Keeper*. The response from reviewers was mixed. The reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* saluted McCarthy as a “rarely talented author,” who had “come up with another novel likely to leave a permanent impression on the mind” in a glowing review.<sup>77</sup> *The Baltimore Sun* and *Cleveland Press* reviewers were equally positive, the former calling *Suttree* “a tragic but funny story,” and the latter hailing McCarthy as “[a]nother Faulkner.”<sup>78</sup> Other reviewers were less kind. The reviewer for *Library Journal* lamented that “despite such individual scenes of brilliance, the character of *Suttree* is not strong enough to draw the isolated episodes together into a coherent whole.”<sup>79</sup> The *New York Times* reviewer similarly saluted McCarthy's style, saying that “Mr. McCarthy creates images and feelings with the force of a knuckle on the head,” but concluded that, ultimately, “McCarthy's picture of hell becomes bloated and strained with thick, gassy language.”<sup>80</sup> Despite these conflicting critical opinions, *Suttree* had some fierce and notable allies. The historian and novelist Shelby Foote sent a deeply negative review of *Suttree* from the Memphis-based *Press-Scimitar* to Erskine in February 1979. This review called the book “a masterpiece of filth, viciousness and ugliness,” and was accompanied by a letter in which Foote defends the book and expresses his regard for McCarthy's work as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Once

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<sup>77</sup> *Publisher's Weekly* review, 25 Dec, 1978. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>78</sup> Reviews, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>79</sup> *Library Journal* review, Jan 15, 1979. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>80</sup> NYT review, Feb 18, 1979. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>81</sup> Reviews, nd. Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

again, these reviews were carefully collected by Albert Erskine, and the positive ones used to publicise the book and convince bookstore owners to carry it. Erskine's method of marketing McCarthy's books based on their critical acclaim has recently been revived, and become more overt, with Picador's re-covering of its latest edition of McCarthy's works, replacing traditional cover illustrations with block-type style reprints of quotations from reviewers. In the case of *Suttree*, a quote from the *Washington Post* review stating that "McCarthy's novels have a stark, mythic quality that is very much their own," was chosen for the cover.<sup>82</sup>

What is striking in the drafting and re-drafting process of McCarthy's fourth novel is the lack of research material. The next chapter of this thesis deals in detail with *Blood Meridian*, a novel for which McCarthy undertook vast amounts of research, just as he had done previously when writing *The Gardener's Son*. Even *The Orchard Keeper*, another book which takes as its setting a place familiar to McCarthy involved some research for the author, if only to determine how many cases of whiskey one could reasonably fit into a car. The absence of research, shifting the focus of the redrafting and copyediting process onto streamlining the book, is a striking feature of *Suttree*'s pre-publication life, suggesting that McCarthy was indeed familiar with the characters and settings with which he was dealing. However, the lengthy drafting and re-drafting process, including some heavy cuts of both characters and set-pieces, leads a reader to suspect that though autobiographical detail may underpin the events and characters of *Suttree*, the novel remains very much, and quite self-consciously, a work of fiction. What an investigation of McCarthy's papers allows is an examination of this process; how it is that actual experience is transmuted into autobiographical fiction. In McCarthy's case at least, far from being the immediate and almost lossless transference one might expect from an author so devoted to evoking a time and place so accurately, what we find is a process involving several collaborators, each of whom has a role to play in re-reading and reshaping any record of lived experience which might inform *Suttree*'s action.

The investigation of *Suttree*'s long genesis has, in addition to allowing an interrogation of McCarthy's work as autobiographical, given insight into the way McCarthy's works make their way to market. The sheer length of time McCarthy spent writing and re-writing *Suttree* even before sending the first draft to Erskine at Random House is remarkable.

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<sup>82</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree*, (London: Picador, 2010), front cover.

Assuming that McCarthy sent only *Harrogate and the Flittermouses* to Erskine in 1969 and not a draft of the entire novel, this marks the first time that McCarthy went out of his way to abstract a part of one of his novels before the piece as a whole was at least drafted. The motivation for this could have been economic. McCarthy's extended stay in Europe had drained much of the money he had received from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the author was staying in accommodation in need of serious repair. An economic imperative could also have had a hand in McCarthy's acceptance of his side-project writing for PBS and the quick production of *Child of God*. It seems a little disingenuous, however, to claim that McCarthy wrote *The Gardener's Son* and *Child of God* purely for profit, to fund *Suttree*. The amount of time and research which seemingly went into both these projects would argue against this reading. On a more technical level, the most notable feature of *Suttree*'s pre-publication life is introduction of copyeditor Bertha Krantz. Krantz is mentioned in passing in the material surrounding *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*, but here corresponds with McCarthy at length and directly for the first time. The exchange of letters between Krantz and McCarthy reveals the extensive role the copyeditor played in the production of McCarthy's novel. HarperCollins' recent recall of thousands of copies of Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* after discovering "small but significant" typographical errors further demonstrates in a more contemporary setting the important role played by technical collaborators in the production of novels, an importance of which Erskine, McCarthy and Krantz all seem to have been acutely aware.<sup>83</sup>

In one of his very earliest letters to McCarthy, Erskine wrote that "Faulkner's omission of the apostrophe in monosyllabic, negative contractions (dont wont cant aint) [...] was consistent, I believe, in his manuscripts, but seldom in his books."<sup>84</sup> The chief reason Erskine gave for this discrepancy was that to leave out the apostrophes ran "against the natural instincts (or training, rather) of compositors and proofreaders."<sup>85</sup> This meant that these more "technical" personnel would automatically restore the apostrophes Faulkner had carefully left

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<sup>83</sup> Rowenna Davis and Alison Flood, "Jonathan Franzen's book *Freedom* Suffers UK Recall," *The Guardian* October 1, 2010. Accessed 18/3/11.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/oct/01/jonathan-franzen-freedom-uk-recall>.

<sup>84</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to McCarthy, 14 Nov 1963, Box 29, Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

out, making the process of copyediting Faulkner's works in Erskine's words, "a pain in the ass for all concerned (except WF, who seemed not to notice the errors)."<sup>86</sup> The point of Erskine's comments, I argue, is clear: every part of the production process is important to the form a book takes when it reaches its readers. Erskine, with his experiences of editing Faulkner's novels in mind, was extremely aware of this fact, especially the important role played by copyeditors and proofreaders like Bertha Krantz. An awareness of the importance of these cultural producers, traditionally viewed as having a role more mechanical than artistic, if not altogether invisible, goes some way to explaining Erskine's willingness to oversee these duties during the production of *The Orchard Keeper*. It is only when Erskine found a willing and devoted proof-reader in Krantz, not to mention establishing something of a convention for copyediting McCarthy's work, that the editor was willing to delegate some of these responsibilities to others.

McCarthy's correspondence with Krantz and his willingness to work through the changes she suggested is also an important milestone in McCarthy's development as a novelist. For the first time the author took a hand in the copyediting of his novels directly rather than through Erskine. It may seem that a lot of the changes made during the proof-reading process were comparatively minor, but the sheer number of characters and set pieces to clear up mean that some substantive changes were made during this process, chiefly the assigning of the correct names to characters whose identity may have changed several times in the course of the novel's development. The man called Warren who finds Suttree collapsed in a bathroom on page 449 of the published text, for example, was originally to have been Primrose of the cockfighting scene, before the editing changes made to streamline the text removed the character altogether. Also worth bearing in mind is that it was not until the proofreading stage that the autopsy scene mentioned previously was removed. Autobiographical or not, *Suttree* was still subject to a collaborative process during its writing, a process involving more actors than previously suspected, and a process onto which the revelation of Krantz's important and artistically significant role sheds important new light.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4 - "As Proper a use of History as Any": the Researching and

### Writing of *Blood Meridian*

In September 1979 McCarthy sent what he called "some more plots for the western" to Albert Erskine at Random House.<sup>1</sup> These "plots" would form the basis of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's most historical, most extensively researched and certainly most violent novel to date. In this chapter I will examine the researching and writing of *Blood Meridian*, investigating the role played by Erskine and other collaborators. I will pay particularly close attention to the effect that McCarthy's research and Erskine's input had on the novel. I will demonstrate in this chapter that just as McCarthy's writing and re-writing of his *Suttree*, his most autobiographical work, rendered fact and personal experience into self-conscious fiction, so did McCarthy and Erskine's collaboration on both the researching and rewriting of *Blood Meridian* render historical record into carefully constructed fiction.

At the time McCarthy sent his "plots" to Erskine *Suttree* was still undergoing final preparations for publication. Erskine, though, was happy to assume responsibility for these final stages of production, allowing McCarthy to concentrate on his new project. In addition to these "plots," McCarthy sent Erskine photocopies of maps of Mexico dating from the 1800s with instructions to use these images as "endpapers or whatever they are called."<sup>2</sup> These maps include the states of Sonora and Chihuahua as they were in 1850, including the major towns and, on the reverse, a hand-drawn sketch of the US borderlands as they existed at that time, including Oregon Territory, Utah Territory, California and New Mexico Territory. These endpapers not only demonstrate McCarthy's devotion to historical detail and research when writing *Blood Meridian*, they also demonstrate the significance of place in McCarthy's narrative. That a sense of place was important to McCarthy is reinforced by the revelation in the same letter that the author was "going to make a move out of El Paso about the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 9/12/1978. Box 28, Folder *Cormac McCarthy – Blood Meridian – Correspondence*. Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Sept.”<sup>3</sup> McCarthy left El Paso after only a short stay in order to conduct one of several research trips into the area where he would set *Blood Meridian*.

McCarthy took these trips to the country featured in *Blood Meridian* in order to scout out and mentally map the kind of terrain that his characters would inhabit. One notebook details a journey, taken off-road in one way or another, most likely on horseback, from the location of the Yuma ferry massacre to San Diego, a distance of around 200 miles. McCarthy makes notes every fifteen miles, starting at the “river 60 miles west of Yuma,” where “the Western mountains are already visible,” then continuing to “mile 75” across “a rolling gravel plain w/ocotillo” at which point San Diego is still “95 more miles” away.<sup>4</sup> “At mile 90 from Yuma” the land tops “out at 3000 feet into a rolling plateau,” where the only vegetation is “scrub juniper and palmilla.”<sup>5</sup> McCarthy goes on to note the “barren piles of great pale and rounded scabs of sandstone” and that from “[e]ighty-five miles out from San Diego,” the land is “cut through by draws, washes, gulches, ravines,” until “at forty miles from San Diego the trees look like live oaks” and the land levels out at “4000 feet” with “[b]lue ranges [visible] to the south,” which feature “alpinish slopes.”<sup>6</sup> The use to which this kind of research was put most clearly shows itself when the kid and the other survivors from the Yuma Ferry massacre arrive in San Diego “through a highland park forested with joshua trees and rimmed about with bald granite peaks” before dropping down to “pick up the wagon track and they followed where the locked iron wheels had scarred the rock [...] and the land all about them was blue and cold.”<sup>7</sup>

These same notebooks also detail the research of historical sources McCarthy undertook during the writing of *Blood Meridian*. John Sepich in *Notes on Blood Meridian* made an important early attempt to identify *Blood Meridian*'s sources. In his book Sepich identifies dozens of potential sourcebooks for *Blood Meridian*, seeking out the historical origins of McCarthy's characters and events. *Notes on Blood Meridian*, as Edwin Arnold explains in his introduction to its second edition, “convincingly illustrates [...] that] the work

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cormac McCarthy, notebook, nd. Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (London: Picador, 2007), 302.

that gave McCarthy his focus for this story is Samuel Chamberlain's memoir, *My Confession*.<sup>8</sup> Roger Butterfield, in his introduction to *Time* magazine's 1956 edition of Chamberlain's book, the first published version to be widely available in the US, maps the origin of this remarkable record:

Most of Chamberlain's narrative is devoted to his experiences as a cavalryman in the Mexican War, 1846-1848. Her carried a sketchbook throughout the war and drew pictures as gifts for his fellow soldiers and officers [...] The original manuscript contains 380 pages and approximately 175,000 words [...] Apparently the manuscript was written between the years 1855 and 1861, when Chamberlain went off again to fight in the Civil War. It remained in the possession of the family until the 1940's when it turned up in an antique shop in Connecticut.<sup>9</sup>

Chamberlain's book, which goes into detail about the author's "travels with the Glanton gang," provides McCarthy with many details, from the "fight across the mud" the kid has with Toadvine early in *Blood Meridian* to the "improbable character" of Holden himself, in whose ledger we find a darker reflection of Chamberlain's own.<sup>10</sup> The 1956 edition of *My Confession* also features maps of Sonora and Chihuahua as endpapers, confirming the idea that McCarthy wished to evoke Chamberlain's account when writing *Blood Meridian*.

In addition to Chamberlain's account, McCarthy also consulted, amongst other sources, *The Handbook of Texas* to flesh out the characterisation of his own fictional Glanton. The author notes that the historical "GLANTON was helped by Walter P. Lane to escape the army in '47. He reenlisted with Jack Hayes (See handbook of Texas Vol I p 693-4)."<sup>11</sup> A check of the *Handbook*, now freely available online, provides a detailed account of Glanton's career, both in and out of the Texas Rangers, including the details of his discharge and re-enlistment.<sup>12</sup> McCarthy also researched, from newspaper reports of the time, the name and origin state of each man present in Glanton's gang at the Yuma ferry massacre, naming his source as "NY Herald July 8 1850 and July 7 (page one)."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), xii.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Butterfield, introduction to *My Confession*, ed. Roger Butterfield (New York: Harper, 1956), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sepich, *Notes on Blood Meridian*, 68.

<sup>11</sup> Cormac McCarthy, notebook, nd. Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph A Smith, "John Joel Glanton," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed 15 Oct 2010, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/fgl2.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Cormac McCarthy, notebook, nd. Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy

McCarthy expended equal research efforts on the towns featured in *Blood Meridian* as he did on the countryside around them. Nacogdoches, where the kid witnesses the judge starting an uprising against the Reverend Green in the preacher's tent and has his fight with Toadvine in the mud, has two notebook pages devoted to it. McCarthy traces the town from its origin as an "old stone fort' [...] built in about 1778" to its emergence as fully-fledged town, a status confirmed by the building of a courthouse in 1840.<sup>14</sup> McCarthy's research involves more than just the histories of his locations. He notes that the old fort was "the house of Capt Gil Y' Barbo" and stood at the intersection of "Main and Fredonia and [was] visible at end of street looking east." McCarthy also writes that the house "faced the northeast corner of the Plaza Principal where the two branches of the Camino Real merged."<sup>15</sup> That McCarthy recorded the information that the courthouse roof leaked sufficiently that "rain would force the court to adjourn" demonstrates the thoroughness of his research. McCarthy was keen to get a sense of what it was like to live in the town and how its day to day life was run. McCarthy also lists the businesses of the town, and even its demographics, noting that in 1847 the population of Nacogdoches was "402: 211 white males & 88 white females (plus blacks (slaves))."<sup>16</sup> McCarthy expends similar efforts researching Tucson, where Glanton's men would buy whiskey and pick up the caged idiot and his keeper. McCarthy first records the 1849 incident of a litter of puppies born in Tucson "one with eight legs, one with two, one with four eyes."<sup>17</sup> Taking slight liberty with his historical source, McCarthy moves his litter of dogs to the nearby "old stone town of Jesús María," where Judge Holden buys a litter of pups only to throw them into a stream to drown them.<sup>18</sup>

The last place on which McCarthy conducted this level of research is Fort Griffin, the site of the final confrontation between the kid and Judge Holden. Fort Griffin was a major stop on the buffalo hunting trails, supplying the hunters with shot and powder and acting as a shipping ground for buffalo hides, bones and meat. In his notes on Fort Griffin, McCarthy

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Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

<sup>14</sup> Cormac McCarthy, Notes, nd. Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 192.

works out the scale of the buffalo hunting during the latter half of the 1800s. McCarthy's research on the buffalo hunting of the Southwest reveals what is perhaps the central irony explored by *Blood Meridian*. The fact is that the filibustering expeditions undertaken by men like Glanton would not accomplish their objective of making the border settlements safe from Comanche raids. The loss of the buffalo herds, depopulated by the industrial hunting depicted in the latter third of *Blood Meridian*, was what would finally drive the native populations off the plains and into the reservation. James Wilson, in his history of the plains tribes, confirms this idea writing that it was only as "their bison herds dwindled and the war of attrition against them intensified" that "most of the southern tribes – Kiowas, Comanches, Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes and others – were forced [...] to accept reservations in the western half of Indian Territory."<sup>19</sup> It is therefore significant that McCarthy notes that "Frank Conrad's store" in Fort Griffin, "had on hand as much as thirty tons of lead and five tons of powder" for sale to buffalo hunters.<sup>20</sup>

Other indicators of the scale of the trade in buffalo hides are provided by McCarthy's notebook, where he writes that in 1873 "over a million hides" were "shipped from the southern grounds," meaning that around "2 million" buffaloes had been killed.<sup>21</sup> McCarthy's kid reaches Fort Griffin in "late winter eighteen seventy-eight."<sup>22</sup> That Fort Griffin was a violent and virtually lawless town is made evident from McCarthy's note that "In 1877 in the month of April alone there were thirty men killed in and around Fort Griffin."<sup>23</sup> By three years before the kid's arrival, McCarthy's research reveals, the trade in Fort Griffin hides had fallen to "200,000 hides" a year. Two years before the kid's arrival, the buffalo were apparently gone, with the hunters returning from their expeditions having "found none."<sup>24</sup> McCarthy's notebooks reveal that around the time of the kid's visit Fort Griffin had "three stores, three saloons and two whorehouses" and that "bones were already a business" of such magnitude

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<sup>19</sup> James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 276.

<sup>20</sup> Cormac McCarthy, notes "Fort Griffin," Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 316.

<sup>23</sup> Cormac McCarthy, notes "Fort Griffin."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

that the bones were arranged in piles “12 by 12 feet by a half mile.”<sup>25</sup> Despite apparent economies of scale, bones were not enough to keep the fort in business and it was finally closed in “May, 1881,” meaning that the town outlived McCarthy's kid by only three years.<sup>26</sup>

That McCarthy's research for *Blood Meridian* was extensive is undeniable. The author's papers list around thirty more source books from which he took extensive “usable” notes.<sup>27</sup> These sources are mostly diaries or personal accounts, fictional and otherwise, of those who lived or worked around the US-Mexico borderlands during the 1800s. Some, however, are more scientific, at least in aspiration, such as Van Dyke's *The Desert*, which chronicles the effects on men, animals and equipment of long service in the desert, and Corle's *The Gila*, which is an ambitious charting of the history of the Gila River. This river flows through present-day California and Arizona, including a stretch past the town of Yuma, Arizona, where it was once crossed by the ferry Glanton and his men capture. Fort Yuma, now part of the Quechan Indian Reservation, now stands on that site, and the fort and Yuma Crossing itself are now part of the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>28</sup> The information McCarthy drew from these books, and others, includes methods of imprisonment and other punishment, details of dress, of both European and Native inhabitants of the area around Yuma and details of equipment, such as the weapons and carts most often used by expeditions similar to Glanton's. In addition to the extensive list of “horse ailments” mentioned in chapter one, McCarthy also notes that Fort Griffin sold “Creedmore Sharp” buffalo rifles, and that the most desirable wagon used at the time was the “Studebaker” type used by the US government.<sup>29</sup>

For all this research, McCarthy and Erskine were keenly aware that *Blood Meridian* remained a novel, not a historical reference document. In response to an early question regarding historical setting from Erskine, McCarthy replied that: “The first accounts of the slaughter of Glanton's gang (April 23 1850) to be published in New York were in the front

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Cormac McCarthy “notebook,” nd. Box 35, *Blood Meridian – Notes, 1982*. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

<sup>28</sup> “Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area,” National Park Service, accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.nps.gov/yucr/index.htm>

<sup>29</sup> McCarthy “notebook,” nd.

page stories of the NY Herald for July 7<sup>th</sup> and July 8<sup>th</sup> of that year.”<sup>30</sup> This fact-checking on Erskine’s part demonstrates the importance to both men of getting the historical details right. However, McCarthy also acknowledges in the same letter that “[t]he truth is that the historical material is really – to me – little more than a frame work upon which to hang a dramatic inquiry into the nature of destiny and history and the uses of reason and knowledge and the nature of evil and all these sorts of things which have plagued folks since there were folks.”<sup>31</sup> McCarthy even claims precedent for this viewpoint, writing that “I think the Bard would have agreed with me that that’s as proper a use of history as any.”<sup>32</sup>

For all that *Blood Meridian* is clearly rooted in historical record, there is evidence that significant cuts were made during the writing of *Blood Meridian* during the seven years between McCarthy sending those first “plots” to Erskine and its eventual publication. Whether McCarthy or Erskine was the driving force behind the earliest cuts from the first page of the novel is unclear. In the published version of *Blood Meridian* the reader is told that the kid’s mother “dead these fourteen years did incubate in her own bosom the creature who would carry her off.”<sup>33</sup> This passage was originally extended with further details of the kid’s life at home: “Black Irish. Enough Saxon and Spanish blood to augment a simple Celtic truculence into a taste for mindless rapacity. Can you see it in him? He kicks the door shut behind him, bearing a tottering armload of firewood like a man going to an altar.”<sup>34</sup> The decision to cut this passage has several significant implications for a reading of *Blood Meridian*, and the character of the kid especially. Not only is the kid’s “taste for mindless violence” present in the final version here replaced with a mindless “rapacity,” but his ethnic make-up is discussed in depth. By removing these individualising details, especially those depicting the kid as being of mixed-heritage Irish origin, McCarthy has universalised the character. Because readers are not told details of the ethnicity of the kid they are free to project any ethnicity they choose onto the character. Even so, the original inclusion of an unstated amount of “Spanish blood” in the kid’s

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<sup>30</sup> Cormac McCarthy, Letter to Erskine, March 1984, Box 28, Folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence.” Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Blood Meridian Later Draft,” nd. Box 35, folder “Later Draft,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

ethnic makeup would be significant given the conduct and attitudes of both the kid and the other members of Glanton's gang toward the inhabitants of Mexico, themselves of predominantly Spanish decent. For the kid to share a common ethnic origin with those he slaughters would demonstrate the arbitrary drawing of lines necessary for the gang's racially motivated violence more strongly than leaving the kid's makeup vague. The fact that there are few other racial markers applied to the kid throughout any of the drafts or the final version of *Blood Meridian* suggests that the decision to de-racialise the kid happened early in McCarthy's drafting process, but the fact that his racial makeup was initially included is significant.

Also important is McCarthy's decision to replace "mindless rapacity" with "mindless violence." Rapacity suggests the grasping, destructive greed of capitalism and would certainly add strength to a reading of *Blood Meridian* as an anti-Western novel, setting McCarthy's depiction of the "rapacious" kid against a characterisation of the cowboy as guardian of livestock and commerce. Mindless violence, on the other hand, does prepare the reader for the blood-soaked pages to come. The kid's interest in violence over capitalistic gain does explain the kid's inability to keep hold of what money he does earn from his filibustering expeditions. He is more interested in the free rein that the journey gives to his inner destructive urges than in whatever accumulation of capital these expeditions might afford.

McCarthy's early depiction of the kid as a character whose greed is both his driving force and his undoing follows through to an early scene in a bar. In the published novel, the kid is tricked into sweeping the bar and attacks the barman after being denied a drink in exchange for his labours: "How about that drink now, said the kid [...] the barman flipped his towel idly at him. Andale, he said. He made a shooing motion with the back of his hand."<sup>35</sup> The earlier drafts of this scene see the kid, lacking the money to pay for a drink, offering to sweep the bar. This done, the barman does actually give the kid a drink: "The barman took the broom and returned it to the corner it came from and looked at the boy [...] He set a glass on the bar and took a bottle of clear liquor from behind him and poured a measure and recorked the bottle and set it back."<sup>36</sup> All seems to be going well, despite some tension in the room. The kid has earned

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<sup>35</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 24.

<sup>36</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Blood Meridian Later Draft," nd. Box 35, folder "Later Draft," Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

a drink by sweeping the bar and has been given one. After finishing his drink, however, the kid is not satisfied: "Two, goddam it, the kid said."<sup>37</sup> This request the barman refuses, and he makes the same motions as in the final draft of the scene. This enrages the kid, who calls the barkeeper a "thieving cocksucker," before promising to "break your fucking face for you."<sup>38</sup> The concerns with the kid's anachronistic use of "fucking" have been explored in chapter one, but the other differences between this iteration of the scene and the one which made its way into the published version of *Blood Meridian* are just as significant. In the final version, the kid is made to sweep the bar, seemingly on the understanding that his efforts will be rewarded with a drink. When this drink is denied him he attacks the barman. In one sense the kid's anger, if not his attack on the barman, is justified in the published form of this sequence. The kid is denied what was promised him. The original version of this scene is far more damning of the kid. Having swept the floor and been given a drink in exchange, the kid is angered when denied a second drink. Here it is the kid who breaks the agreement. That the "harsher" scene was removed is curious, as McCarthy is later seemingly keen to show the kid and the men he travels with as murderous and amoral. However, to characterise the kid in these terms so early in the novel would deny the corrupting influence of Glanton and the other men. Additionally, an unprovoked attack by the kid well before his association with Glanton would erode the sense McCarthy maintained in the rest of *Blood Meridian* of the kid as somewhat apart from the others in his gang, not quite as unprincipled, not quite as violent.

That McCarthy sought to be less damning of the kid as the drafts of the novel went on is reinforced by another cut section, this time from close to the end of the novel. The kid, having worked in various jobs and moved about the country in a homeless, ever-shifting existence common amongst McCarthy's characters, arrives on the great buffalo plains heading toward Fort Griffin. Camped for the night, the kid, now some years older and referred to as "the man," is approached by a group of bonepickers one of whom, named Elrod, insists on antagonising the man.<sup>39</sup> In the published version of this scene Elrod appears armed with a rifle and, against the advice of his companions, persists in questioning the man about the necklace of Comanche ears the man wears: "Humans, [the man] said. Human ears. Aint done it said the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 319.

one with the rifle.”<sup>40</sup> Elrod is eventually dragged away by his friends, still taunting the man, who threatens him in turn. Later that night, Elrod returns to try and kill the man. The man kills Elrod in the ensuing shootout. This is an act the man justifies by saying that Elrod “wouldn't of lived anyway.”<sup>41</sup> McCarthy's early draft extends this scene on the plains considerably. Here, despite his friends' pleas for him to leave, Elrod stays a little longer at the man's fire, and is given a note by him. Elrod reads this note, with some difficulty, halting after the first line in his first attempt to read it out loud: “[Elrod] rose and took the letter and unfolded it and rose. He stood with it in two hands like a choirbook. The bearer of this note, he began in a strange falsetto voice/ He stopped. His face drained.”<sup>42</sup> The content of the note is hinted at when one of the other bone pickers, who is unable to read, takes the note from Elrod and asks why he finds it so hard to read, because “It aint but 8 words and they aint a one got more than six cyphers.”<sup>43</sup> The content of the note is revealed in a pencil addition by McCarthy himself, which reads “The bearer of this note will kill you.”<sup>44</sup> This threat explains Elrod's nervousness at reading the note out loud.

There are again several reasons for cutting this exchange. One major concern was to keep the length of the scene on the buffalo plains manageable. The scene with Elrod is largely functional, setting the man down on the great buffalo plains after his years of wandering, establishing that he is still prepared to commit violence against his fellow man, and that he is on his way to Fort Griffin. It is in that town where the final confrontation between the kid and judge will occur, not on the plains around it, and so efforts to avoid extending the scene any more than necessary are understandable to avoid breaking the flow of the narrative. Also, the difficulty for the reader in figuring out exactly what the note might have said is worth bearing in mind. Although the events surrounding the note do mean that a full revelation of its contents would be unnecessary, its import quickly becomes clear. The effect of the extended scene is, I argue, the chief reason for its removal. The published version of the man's confrontation with the bone pickers allows him, to some extent at least, to claim the moral high ground. Elrod's

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>42</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Blood Meridian First Draft,” Box 35, folder “Blood Meridian – First Draft Typescript,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos .

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

insistence on knowing something the man would rather not talk about is annoying, as is his insensitive attitude towards the traumatic adventures the man has endured. Finally, his return, explicitly to kill the man, when he had been told simply to stay away, makes the man's murder seem more like self-defence than outright homicide. By contrast, in handing Elrod a prophetic, almost gloating note the man gives the younger man a reason to return to the man's camp that night. By taking a kind of sadistic joy in the coming confrontation with Elrod, which he seems confident of winning, the man emerges from this alternate confrontation much less sympathetically as one who seeks out fights, rather than as one who simply wins those fights he is drawn into.

The reason behind all of this equivocating about the kid's character is perhaps revealed in a pencil note added to an early draft of what would become page 328 of *Blood Meridian*, the scene of the kid's final confrontation with Judge Holden in the bar with the dancing bear. The note, added again by McCarthy, reads "There must be a fatal weakness that gives the judge the edge. Something [...] that he cannot do that will seal his fate."<sup>45</sup> What this weakness may be is not made explicit by the note, perhaps because it still had to be woven into the narrative, but the implications of these early cuts in the editing process imply that, of all things, it is the kid's mercy, or at least lack of genuine sadism, which prevents him from prevailing over the judge.

This revealing insight into McCarthy's own impressions of his protagonist has clear implications for readings of *Blood Meridian*. Peter Josyph argues strongly for an historical appreciation of *Blood Meridian*'s kid, when he writes that the character contains "at least the bones" of Samuel Chamberlain.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, Josyph's argument ties in with the historical research carefully undertaken by McCarthy during the writing of *Blood Meridian*, but it does seem to sit at odds with the careful and extensive editing the character underwent during the long and occasionally torturous redrafting process under Erskine. Equally, Rick Wallach's claim that Chamberlain's *Confession* "provides the only historical record of Judge Holden" is still true, but may require a similar reassessment in view of McCarthy's careful re-editing of these

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Josyph, "Blood Music: Reading *Blood Meridian*," in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy* eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002).

historical sources.<sup>47</sup> Wallach's highlighting of McCarthy's unease with what he calls the "commodification of nature, humanity included, which characterises American history and culture," is supported by McCarthy's use of, amongst other texts, Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844).<sup>48</sup> Other critics, seeking to unpick the literary origins of the kid, might also be interested in this evidence of McCarthy's reading. Tim Parrish sees the kid as a dark retelling of Huck Finn, pointing to his early journey down a river on a flat-bed barge and also to the fact that "the kid, like Huck, will witness a variety of horrible sights, a kind of perpetual Grangerford-Shepherdson feud" on his trips to and across the border, although, unlike Twain's hero "he is not revolted by what he sees."<sup>49</sup> While Twain does not appear explicitly in McCarthy's notes, the draft material does provide additional support to Susan Kollin's view of *Blood Meridian* as anti-Western. McCarthy's use of J Frank Dobie's *Tales of Old Time Texas*, for example, reveals his debt to such founding texts of what Kollin calls the "cult of the cowboy."<sup>50</sup>

What the evidence of McCarthy's careful and self-conscious redrafting of the character and makeup of the kid allows for is for a reconciling of these two critical positions. McCarthy's version of Glanton's gang, the judge and the kid are all drawn from historical record. However, the amount of time these characters spent being redrafted and the profound changes they underwent during this process demonstrate that they are as much literary creations as they are historical depictions. The fact that these changes were instigated by McCarthy, by his research and by Erskine's comments further demonstrates that all these characters are collaborative creations, springing as much from the literary partnership between McCarthy and Erskine as they do from McCarthy's research. Judge Holden can therefore be both McCarthy's rendering of the historical – and by all accounts monstrous – Judge Holden, and the result of the literary collaboration between McCarthy and Erskine. What the draft material in combination with McCarthy's research notes reveals, therefore, is the profound

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<sup>47</sup> Rich Wallach, "Judge Holden, *Blood Meridian's* Evil Archon" in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002), 126.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Parrish, "The Killer Wears the Halo: Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor and the American Religion" in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Kollin, "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western" in *Contemporary Literature Vol 42, No 3* (2001), 557.

impact that the collaboration between author and editor can have, even on a novel so deeply indebted to its historical sources as is *Blood Meridian*.

In addition to outright cuts, the text of *Blood Meridian* was subject to a great deal of reshuffling and transposing of scenes and sequences. The most notable example of this kind of reorganising comes in Chapter 15, which finds the kid separated from the rest of Glanton's command following an Indian attack. The kid is forced to wander the wooded highlands above the desert for several days before he can re-join the other survivors under Glanton's command. On the third and final day in these mountains, the kid sees "from that high rimland the clash of armies on the plains below."<sup>51</sup> The entire passage dealing with that third day of separation, up until the kid reunites with Glanton, has been excerpted from the rest of the manuscript and a note has been added to it, presumably by Erskine, that McCarthy "Can use this but you must rewrite and have another Day in Mountains."<sup>52</sup> A few facts were changed following Erskine's suggestion, such as McCarthy's claim that the kid realises that "dark little horses" he sees were "miles below him," which in addition to being unlikely, has been underlined by the same hand that wrote of the need to re-write the section, marking it for attention.<sup>53</sup>

What this episode does reveal is, if Erskine was indeed responsible for the note, that the editor was still playing a central role part in the project. The way that the passage has been separated from the rest of manuscript to be worked on separately is also revealing of McCarthy's writing methods. This separation demonstrates that, just as he had with his earlier novels, McCarthy preferred to write and re-write *Blood Meridian* by sections. Erskine's careful watch over the time the kid spends away from Glanton's gang establishes that, in addition to fact-checking McCarthy's research, Erskine kept a check on continuity and chronology within the text. Erskine's oversight allowed McCarthy to write *Blood Meridian* in sections, the methodology with which he seems most comfortable, without having to get too concerned with possible areas of confusion such as internal chronology. Erskine was prepared to take responsibility for internal consistency of the text, monitoring events within the novel and slotting each new scene into the established narrative as McCarthy finished them. This was a

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<sup>51</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 213.

<sup>52</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Blood Meridian First Draft," Box 35, folder "Blood Meridian – First Draft Typescript," Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

process which Bertha Krantz had adopted during the copy-editing of *Suttree*. That *Blood Meridian* was also composed along these lines is demonstrated in the sections of writing and scenes which appear throughout the draft isolated or out of sequence on which McCarthy has worked in isolation. Evidently McCarthy wrote in this way with the intention of slotting these troublesome sequences back into their proper place once he was content with them. As the one holding onto the main draft at various points during the redrafting process, it would have been Erskine's responsibility to reintegrate McCarthy's sections into the main text as well as suggesting what changes needed to be made in order to keep the narrative clear and consistent.

Another area of detailed close reading that Erskine seems to have taken charge of is the monitoring of McCarthy's metaphors and descriptions. In the published edition of *Blood Meridian* the kid looks up at "a sky of china blue where very high there circled two black hawks" during his sojourn in the mountains.<sup>54</sup> This kind of detail is typical of McCarthy's lyrical descriptions of landscape, and so the image of two black hawks against an amazingly blue sky is not out of character for the novel. That this image ended up in this place in *Blood Meridian* is no accident, however. An exact copy of the "sky of china blue," complete with circling birds, appears in one draft of the scene in which the kid has to kill the injured Tate before the advancing Indians can catch him. This whole phrase of imagery has been scored through, and a note added that it had been "used xv133."<sup>55</sup> The pages of McCarthy's drafts are not consistently numbered, so tracing the image's original site in the manuscript is difficult, but it appears that Erskine was also monitoring McCarthy's style, watching for any signs of repetition or close replication. The point to take away from this object example of Erskine's editing style is that any incidences of similar imagery or other repetition making it to print in McCarthy's work are almost certainly significant, or at least intentional. Other examples of imagery have been moved around late in the drafting process, such as the description of the Glanton gang crossing a "malpais afoot, leading the horses upon a lakebed of cracked and redblack lava like a pan of dried blood."<sup>56</sup> In McCarthy's "late draft" of this scene, the description of the malpais as a "lakebed of cracked and redblack lava like a pan of dried blood" has been added into the typed manuscript by hand. This addition is accompanied by a

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<sup>54</sup> McCarthy's, *Blood Meridian*, 213.

<sup>55</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Blood Meridian First Draft."

<sup>56</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 251.

note that the piece of description had been “(salvaged from elsewhere),” although from where is not made clear.<sup>57</sup> Another description either moved about or salvaged from an abandoned section of writing is the description of the Judge as “an immense and dangerous faith healer.”<sup>58</sup> This description appears in its present location in McCarthy’s “later draft” of the novel, but the page number associated with the description is out of sequence. The pages either side of this description also follow the published edition, and are numbered in the draft as pages 333 and 334. The page describing the judge as faith healer, however, is headed as page 238, suggesting that it once occupied a much earlier position in the novel.

The most significant section of *Blood Meridian* added late in the process is the enigmatic epilogue featuring the figure moving across the plains using a mysterious “implement with two handles” to strike fire in holes he is making across the plains.<sup>59</sup> McCarthy attached an early draft of this section to a letter he sent to Erskine in February 1983, describing it as “a notion I’d been toying with on and off for a year or so.”<sup>60</sup> McCarthy goes on to write that he was “not unhappy with the way the book ends as it now stands” but that he “thought [he] would submit this to [Erskine] for [his] inspection and possibly [...] opinion.”<sup>61</sup> McCarthy tells Erskine that if he did not like the new addition to “please say so,” or if Erskine had “no opinion one way or the other say that” and if the editor thought that “it wont hurt anything say that.”<sup>62</sup> The draft of the epilogue that McCarthy sent to Erskine in 1983 was slightly different from that which appears in the published edition of *Blood Meridian*. A few additional details of the “tool” the man is using to make his holes are included in this early description, such as that it has “two blades” in addition to its two handles, bringing McCarthy’s description of this tool closer to a post-hole digger.<sup>63</sup> Otherwise, the epilogue McCarthy sent to Erskine is very similar to that published in *Blood Meridian*. That McCarthy was able to put in place such a striking additional section of the novel so late in the drafting process is testament

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<sup>57</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Blood Meridian Later Draft”

<sup>58</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 238.

<sup>59</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 337.

<sup>60</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 23/2/1983. Box 28, Folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence.” Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Cormac McCarthy, untitled draft of epilogue, nd. Box 28, Folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence.” Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

to Erskine's understanding and faith in his author. It is also significant that McCarthy seemed not only interested in seeking Erskine's opinion on the piece, but also in getting his editor's permission to include the epilogue. This note reveals the regard in which McCarthy still held his editor, despite his rising profile and experience as a writer.

The vast majority of this major redrafting seems to have taken place before 1983, after which the emphasis shifts markedly away from major revisions and towards meticulous line- and fact-checking. That McCarthy was still making line-changes at this point is evidenced by the multiple instances of the sequence describing a supposed witness to the Glanton gang's actions. In the published version of *Blood Meridian* the sequence runs as:

the expriest asked if some might not see the hand of some cynical god conducting with what austerity and mock surprise so lethal a congruence. The posting of a witness by a third and other path altogether might also be called in as evidence as appearing to beggar chance [...] that his proximity was no third thing but rather the prime, for what could be said to occur unobserved?<sup>64</sup>

This is not the first form this section took, however. Among McCarthy's drafts there are more than half a dozen different versions of this scene, of varying length and content. The earliest replace the "malign god" of the published version with a claim that the witnesses represent a "malign intelligence," which is initially replaced with "will," before the "god" of the final form makes an appearance.<sup>65</sup> That the divine was initially absent from the scene is significant enough, confirming an impression of *Blood Meridian's* "terra damnata" as a godless waste. Another edition generalises McCarthy's claims about witnesses, saying that "if the most trivial event is the issue of a thousand turns of the card, which among them can be said to occur unobserved."<sup>66</sup> This additional passage is, in turn, revised several times, before McCarthy concludes, in a pencil note, that the section may be "terminal."<sup>67</sup> Despite the trouble this passage gave McCarthy it was accorded great significance, as it undergoes yet further revisions. The god becomes "cynical" and the witnesses are depicted as "the implements which conspire to order an event" which "may orchestrate a thousand years and yet" remain "as random as rain it comes to the same thing, for what can be said to occur unobserved."<sup>68</sup> Finally, the excerpted draft comes more and more to resemble the final form of the sequence,

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<sup>64</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 153.

<sup>65</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Blood Meridian First Draft."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

until an identical one is marked as an “insert” to be placed by Erskine into the manuscript as it stood.<sup>69</sup>

It was at this stage that Erskine was able to fulfil his role as meticulous line editor once again. In addition to checking McCarthy's Spanish, Erskine also again took charge of maintaining continuity. The correction notes sent between the two men are full, for example, of running tallies of men killed in Mexico, and who and how many were left after each visit to a town, each confrontation, each desertion. One note mentions that after Tucson, the company picked up “5 recruits,” but rode out “minus C/Brown,” meaning that “14 leave Tucson including cloyce.”<sup>70</sup> Another lists “Prewett, Harlan, Glanton, Dorsey, Smith, Gunn, Wilson, Miller, Jackson” and “Lincoln” as having been “Killed At Yuma,” while listing those “Not Killed At Yuma” as “Judge, Kid, Ex-Priest, Toadvine, David Brown” and “Charlie Brown.”<sup>71</sup> The import of these notes, apart from making sure that the numbers and identities of those fleeing the massacre remained constant was to iron out an inconsistency Erskine had detected regarding “Irving” and “Webster.” These two characters were not amongst those killed at Yuma, either historically or in McCarthy's version of the event. Nor were they present amongst the few men who managed to escape, either in Chamberlain's *Confession* or McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy therefore had to move these two characters, deciding finally to have them “defect at San Diego,” removing them from the party before the massacre took place.<sup>72</sup>

Yet more research had to be undertaken even at this late stage, as other notes headed “Library” include notes on the “Calif. Indians,” the “diguenos, Yamparicos,” whose names had to be inserted where they were needed. The other major site of confusion seems to have been the chapter headings. Of these McCarthy wrote that he had sent separately “a Xerox of the chapter headings, complete” for Erskine to check against his own version, indicating that these headings underwent considerable, and separate, redrafting.<sup>73</sup> The most difficult heading seems to have been the final one, which concludes with “Sie müssen schlafen aber Ich muss

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “notes,” Box 35, folder “Blood Meridian – Notes, 1983,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 35, folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

tanzen.”<sup>74</sup> McCarthy's redrafting notes indicate that this was not always the case. In one such note he writes to Erskine that the “[h]eading to Chapter XXIII changed - ‘the judge is dancing’ replaced with ‘Sie müssen schlafen aber ich muss tanzen,’” which is accompanied by a note in pencil which reads “Goethe You must sleep and I must dance.”<sup>75</sup> McCarthy later clarified his source to Erskine, sending a note containing the citation, “Faust you must sleep but I must dance Die sonne kann nicht tanzen.”<sup>76</sup> The German language seems to have become a bit of a theme in the correspondence between editor and author, as in another letter sent to Erskine in December 1983, McCarthy quotes instead “Gottterdammerung [sic] tanzer,” linking his quotation to Wagner's opera as well as Goethe's tragedy.<sup>77</sup> The other important source revealed by McCarthy's notes is that from which McCarthy drew the title of his work. On the cover of a folder headed “WESTERN – FINAL DRAFT” McCarthy has written “OED Meridian – Byron quoted.”<sup>78</sup> The OED reveals that there is indeed a Byron quotation included amongst its definitions, drawn from *Stanzas to the Po*. This quotation, included in the OED entry for “Meridian” runs, “A stranger loves the lady of the land, // Born far beyond the mountains, but his blood // Is all meridian, as if never fann'd // By the black wind that chills the polar flood,” a revealing description of the inspiration behind McCarthy's nameless protagonist.<sup>79</sup>

By mid-1984 *Blood Meridian* was entering the production stage. Covers were being designed, back-jacket descriptions of the books were being written and “editorial factsheets” were being written up for Random House's internal records.<sup>80</sup> The contract for *Blood Meridian* also makes for interesting reading. Firstly, the “editorial factsheet” contains a long piece of description about the novel, which would eventually be rendered down into the paragraph or so

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<sup>74</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 316.

<sup>75</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “notes,” Box 38, folder “scraps,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>76</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 35, folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>77</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, Dec. 1983. Box 35, folder “Blood Meridian – Correspondence,” Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>78</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Blood Meridian Later Draft.”

<sup>79</sup> “Meridian,” *OED Online*, accessed May 29, 2012, <http://oed.com/view/Entry/116770?rskey=a1Ycid&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>

<sup>80</sup> Albert Erskine, “editorial factsheet for *Blood Meridian*,” Box 28, folder “editorial material and reviews.” Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

found on the reverse of *Blood Meridian's* book jacket. Erskine sent an early draft of this description to McCarthy to gauge his response and get any feedback the author thought was necessary. Involving himself in the later stages of production was a marked change from McCarthy's early practices, and a sign of his growing maturity as a novelist. During the publication of *The Orchard Keeper*, for example, McCarthy entrusted the packaging and typesetting of his novel completely to Erskine. It is possible that McCarthy's involvement demonstrates the increased confidence the writer felt in dealing with the publishing house at this point in his career, or that he was particularly interested in how *Blood Meridian* was packaged and sold. McCarthy wrote back to Erskine suggesting a few changes to the description of the novel Erskine's team had come up with, saying that he had "some reservations about the pejorative nature of the descriptions of Glanton et al," which he felt "seem to be stacking the deck against them in some way."<sup>81</sup> McCarthy's suggestion was that the reader ought to be left "more to their own judgements."<sup>82</sup> To that end, McCarthy suggested that Erskine change his description of Glanton's gang from "the embodiment of evil" to "[t]hese men appear to be the embodiment etc."<sup>83</sup> Taking his author's advice, Erskine changed the final description of Glanton's men: "[t]hese men seem to be an embodiment of human evil, and as they drive toward their destiny, they determine the destiny of many who happen to be in their path."<sup>84</sup>

Other information can be gleaned from the sheet, including the fact that McCarthy was still operating without an agent despite his rising stock both at Random House and within the literary community. The sheets list "NONE" in the space provided for "agent's name," but include Albert Erskine as "editor."<sup>85</sup> McCarthy's continued operation without a literary agent was surprising, even more so in the increasingly corporatised world of publishing. The fact sheet further reveals that McCarthy's "audience is increasing," as evidenced by that fact that Erskine had "recently sold three previous titles [by McCarthy] to Ecco Press" to produce

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<sup>81</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, May 8, 1983, Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Albert Erskine, "editorial factsheet for *Blood Meridian*."

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

paperback reissues.<sup>86</sup>

That Erskine was acting as McCarthy's agent at this point in his career, selling his books to foreign publishers and abstracts from these books to magazines is nothing new. The major change was that the magazine publishers were finally beginning to respond to Erskine's entreaties. Erskine sent an internal memorandum to Bert Krantz asking for a suitable piece to send to "ANTAEUS MAGAZINE."<sup>87</sup> Erskine's letter makes it clear that the magazine had asked for a part of *Blood Meridian* to use "for an upcoming issue," a marked change from Erskine's days of unsuccessful overtures to the editors of *Playboy* and the *Kenyon Review*.<sup>88</sup> The magazine even seems to have been happy to take whatever it could get. Erskine suggests to Krantz that either "the section from p78 to page 100 ending with "he aint no kin to me, might do, or perhaps chapter IX in its entirety," writing that *Antaeus* had "warm[ed] to" both.<sup>89</sup> Other sections of *Blood Meridian* were similarly sold to magazines, or at least prepared for selling. Amongst McCarthy's papers is an extracted and slightly edited form of the section involving the procession of penitents and the dead old woman at the well from pages 313-315 of *Blood Meridian*. These pages are numbered separately as EW1, 2 and 3 and include a title page bearing the title "ELDRESS AT THE WELL."<sup>90</sup> In addition, there is an extra copy of what would become Chapter X of *Blood Meridian*, packaged up for shipment to a magazine under the title "THE JUDGE by Cormac McCarthy."<sup>91</sup>

As with McCarthy's previous novels, Erskine's office collected and collated reviews of *Blood Meridian*, both positive and negative. Most reviewers responded positively. Sharon Barrett, writing for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, praised McCarthy's efforts at "Demythologising the bloody, bloody, bloody west."<sup>92</sup> Other reviewers responded to what Shuyler Ingle of the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Albert Erskine, letter to "Bert," nd. Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Eldress at the Well," Box 38, folder "scraps," Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>91</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "The Judge," Box 38, folder "scraps," Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

<sup>92</sup> Barrett, "Review of Blood Meridian," 21/4/85. Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections,

*Seattle Weekly* called McCarthy's "dark vision of the wild west," and his style of "harsh realism."<sup>93</sup> Other reviewers, however, were less positive. Allen Boyer, writing in the *The Plain Dealer* complained of McCarthy's "relentless gore" being "too calculated," as well as levelling criticism at what he saw as McCarthy's use of "archaic language" drawn from "Jacobean tragedies and bad translations of *Beowulf*."<sup>94</sup> Erskine also forwarded these reviews to McCarthy, who seemed to want both sides of the responses to his work. When Boyer's review was reprinted in the *Detroit Free Press* under the title "Nihilism, carnage, evil, and God," Erskine sent both reviews to McCarthy, noting in pencil that "somebody [...] worked on that headline."<sup>95</sup> McCarthy also sent reviews to Erskine, including those from "the English publisher (Pan-Picador)," who were apparently "quite keen – as the English expression has it" on the book.<sup>96</sup> In this same letter, McCarthy comments that he had also been sent "a notice from the French saying that Blood Meridian – in translation – has been awarded the Coindreau Prize. I'd never heard of it either but apparently it is for the translation."<sup>97</sup> McCarthy goes on to note that the Coindreau Prize is an award named "after M. Coindreau," who, fittingly enough, was a "translator of Faulkner and others."<sup>98</sup> This intelligence apparently brought McCarthy particular satisfaction, because "[t]he translator – Francis Hirsh – worked on this project for over two years and came out to El Paso twice," meeting McCarthy to iron out any difficulties he was having.<sup>99</sup> McCarthy's involvement with Hirsh's translation again demonstrates that McCarthy was taking a more active role in the after-life of his work, and also that he was prepared to meet people to discuss his novels, even if only for publishing, rather than publicity, purposes.

Despite some dissenting critical voices, *Blood Meridian* gained some very vocal

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University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>93</sup> Ingle, "Dark Vision of the Wild West," April, 1985. Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>94</sup> Boyer, "Relentless Gore Too Calculated," 10/04/85. Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 28, folder "editorial material and reviews." Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

supporters. Kenneth Hope, then director of the MacArthur Fellows program, wrote to McCarthy simply to say “it has been some time since I read BLOOD MERIDIAN. I have been meaning to write since then, to say simply that I have never read a better American book. Thank you for writing it.”<sup>100</sup> The MacArthur Foundation had awarded McCarthy a fellowship in 1981 based upon both McCarthy's early work and the early sections of *Blood Meridian*. Erskine was able to provide to the awarding committee. The MacArthur foundation would again appear during the final stages of preparing *Blood Meridian* for market. McCarthy discovered as the book was going to print that the foundation insisted that “the full name of the foundation should be used in the acknowledgement at the front of the book.”<sup>101</sup> McCarthy relayed this intelligence in a letter to both Erskine and Bertha Krantz, to which someone, apparently Erskine, has added in pencil, “[b]right yellow of course.”<sup>102</sup>

In addition to dealing with awards foundations, Erskine also helped raise McCarthy's academic profile in the months following the publication of *Blood Meridian*. Vereen Bell, who would go on to write *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* (1988), one of the earliest sustained academic studies of McCarthy's work, wrote to Erskine in 1983, asking for any information Erskine could provide on the writer as part of research for a forthcoming book. Erskine initially set Bell on the trail of *The Gardener's Son*, the PBS film McCarthy had written a screenplay for in 1976. Bell, encouraged by Erskine's responses, got back in touch with Erskine a few years later in 1985 while doing research for a “Harper's magazine [...] essay on McCarthy for their ‘revisions’ series.”<sup>103</sup> In this letter, Bell not only thanks Erskine for his help locating *The Gardener's Son*, he also thanks the editor “for having the proof copy of Blood Meridian sent” to him, on account of which he was “going to have to add a chapter to the book.”<sup>104</sup> That Erskine shielded McCarthy from some of the interest his books were now generating is understandable, given the writer's clear desires for privacy, but that Erskine

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<sup>100</sup> Kenneth Hope, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 28, Folder *Cormac McCarthy – Blood Meridian – Correspondence*. Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>101</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, nd. Box 28, Folder *Cormac McCarthy – Blood Meridian – Correspondence*. Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Vereen Bell, letter to Erskine, 21/09/1985. Folder *Cormac McCarthy – Blood Meridian – Correspondence*. Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

would go to such lengths to promote McCarthy's work to an academic audience shows the importance Erskine placed on getting McCarthy's work to as wide an audience as possible.

That the relationship between author and editor had changed between the writing of *The Orchard Keeper* and *Blood Meridian's* is clearly in evidence. That McCarthy had gained experience and confidence as a writer is one factor in this change. During the writing of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy was more prepared to deal with aspects of publishing his books with which he had previously avoided becoming entangled. The writer was also more prepared to conduct his own research and undertake his own rewriting. As McCarthy was already at Random House and working closely with his editor, he was able to use Erskine a proof reader, checking for errors in continuity and repetition. Thanks to his established relationship with his editor and publishing house McCarthy was able to send Erskine the novel section by section, beginning in 1978 with his plot sketches and continuing through the extensive research process for the novel, its writing and redrafting process and finally into line-editing. What becomes clear is that Erskine remained a powerful and important collaborator on McCarthy's work. From checking the author's research, and indeed sending him some of the books necessary to carry out this research, through to checking his Spanish, Erskine's editorial oversight was a crucial component of the collaboration which produced *Blood Meridian*. Even more important was the role Erskine played in shaping *Blood Meridian's* reception, an area of McCarthy's work in which he had always been keenly interested. Erskine smoothed the passage of the novel to the MacArthur fellowship committee, increasing its chances of being given an award. Erskine also collected and re-used the reviews he copied and sent McCarthy, repackaging the novel for its paperback release. Finally, in his efforts to help Vereen Bell and others, Erskine helped McCarthy into the canon of American authors, assisting as far as he was able in the writing of academic texts on McCarthy's work, and helping interested researchers in their research. The fact is that had Erskine not undertaken these various duties at all stages of the writing and publishing of *Blood Meridian* it is likely that the novel would not occupy the same position in American letters that it enjoys today. Not only was the text of *Blood Meridian* shaped by the collaboration between McCarthy and Erskine in spite of its deep and acknowledged debt to historical record, the book's reception and the public understanding of both it and McCarthy's work as a whole was shaped through that same crucial relationship.

## Chapter 5 - Skittish Screenplays: The Border Trilogy

In 1992 Richard Woodward secured a remarkable exclusive for the *New York Times* when he was granted McCarthy's first, and for many years only, print interview. Woodward's interview with McCarthy was secured only "after long negotiations with his agent in New York, Amanda Urban of International Creative Management, who promised [McCarthy that] he wouldn't have to do another for many years."<sup>1</sup> In the previous chapter I examined the profound effect that historical research and the intertexts that such investigations bring with them can have on an author's voice. In this chapter I will examine the impact of new living collaborators on McCarthy's writing. Amanda Urban, McCarthy's agent and new editor Gary Fisketjon will be the primary focus of this investigation. I will also investigate the role played by other collaborators from outside the relationship between the author and his publishing house in this chapter. The most significant of these is Dr Barry King, who made important contributions to McCarthy's Border Trilogy. In conducting this investigation I will shed some light onto the changing world of Random House and its subsidiaries and onto the developing authorial practises of McCarthy and his literary collaborators. I have shown in previous chapters the impact that collaborators within McCarthy's publishing house have had on the author's work. In this chapter I will explore the effect on McCarthy's work that those collaborators from outside that relationship have had.

The period McCarthy spent writing the Border Trilogy was characterised by the introduction of several new collaborators. McCarthy's new editor, Gary Fisketjon, who was allocated to McCarthy following Albert Erskine's retirement, was the new collaborator who would work most closely with McCarthy. These new contributors to McCarthy's work also included medical advisers, Spanish translators and, for the first time since dismissing John Gallagher within six months of hiring him in 1971, literary agent Amanda Urban. Urban came into her role as McCarthy's agent with an impressive résumé, working as International Creative Management Co-Director and having been General Manager of both the *New York*

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B Woodward, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html>. Accessed 10/03/2012.

Woodward's interview marks the first time that McCarthy spoke publicly about his work and the first time that an agent had a visible impact on the public presentation and perception of McCarthy. It is also in this interview that Woodward reveals that the novels that comprise McCarthy's "Border Trilogy" were originally written in an order, and indeed medium, other than that in which they were finally published. Woodward's interview was conducted at a significant point in McCarthy's career. The author had just published *All the Pretty Horses*, his first true bestseller, had hired an agent and, following Albert Erskine's retirement in 1990, been allocated a new editor at a reorganised imprint of Random House.

During his interview with McCarthy Woodward states that the then newly published *All the Pretty Horses*, "is, in fact, the first volume of a trilogy; the third part has existed for more than 10 years as a screenplay."<sup>3</sup> Woodward goes on to claim that McCarthy "and [filmmaker] Richard Pearce have come close to making the film -- Sean Penn was interested -- but producers always became skittish about the plot, which has as its central relationship John Grady Cole's love for a teen-age Mexican prostitute."<sup>4</sup> That *Cities of the Plain* existed as a screenplay before *All the Pretty Horses* was published has been known to McCarthy scholarship for several years. Richard Marius, in an article from 1999 offers a brief outline of the original screenplay, pointing out that "the sub-plot involving the horse trader Wolfenbarger is absent, as is the masterful set piece of the horse auction."<sup>5</sup> Marius also briefly charts the development of some of those elements present in the screenplay which do survive into the published novel in one form or another. The clearest example Marius offers is that "the puppy John Grady buys from the yard man" in the original screenplay "evolves into that taken by John Grady and Billy from the den underneath the huge rock."<sup>6</sup> On a more general level, Marius argues that in McCarthy's original script "Billy is something of a comic misanthrope

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<sup>2</sup> "Amanda Urban." Curtis Brown. Accessed May 30<sup>th</sup> 2012.  
<http://www.curtisbrown.co.uk/amanda-urban-icm>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Marius, "The Last of the Trilogy: First Thoughts on *Cities of the Plain*" in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy* eds. Edwin T Arnold and Dianne C Luce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 226.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

[...] who blames Magdalena, not Eduardo, for his friend's death."<sup>7</sup> These initial remarks aside, Marius does not offer much further analysis of other differences between the two texts or any potential implications, moving on to an analysis of the published text of *Cities of the Plain*.

Early criticism of *All the Pretty Horses* and the Border Trilogy more generally see these novels as emblematic of McCarthy's nostalgia for what James Lilley calls "the Old West's chivalric code."<sup>8</sup> Lilley argues that John Grady Cole is a character who "does not want to *extricate* himself from the codes of the past" as one might expect of a young man trying to make his way in the 1940s Southwestern United States.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Lilley characterises John Grady's trip out of this modernising American context and into the Mexico ranch lands as "an elegy to the Old West, an attempt to move backward in time to a place where the codes of the Old West are still valorised."<sup>10</sup> This is a project Lilley identifies closely with McCarthy's own priorities. An alternative, though not precisely contradictory, position is adopted by Charles Bailey. Bailey argues for John Grady as McCarthy's update or invocation of older traditions of "the heroic character."<sup>11</sup> More specifically, Bailey sees John Grady as "the knight from the courtly love romances of the Middle Ages."<sup>12</sup> Bailey's reading extends to Alejandra, who he casts as "the lady Alejandra [...] the epitome of the courtly lady who inspires [John Grady's] heroism."<sup>13</sup> Bailey's positioning of the Border Trilogy's characters allows him to go on to argue that "the action of [The Border Trilogy] is knightly," especially the third part of the Trilogy.<sup>14</sup> "If anything," Bailey writes, by the time we reach *Cities of the Plain* John Grady Cole "is the more fully developed knight [...] his martial prowess with horses become unsurpassed and unsurpassable, a mystical association with the horses' souls."<sup>15</sup> Bailey's reading does sit well with some important scenes in the Border Trilogy. John Grady's disastrous confrontation with Eduardo the pimp, for example, reminds a reader of classic

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>8</sup> James D Lilley, "'The hands of yet other puppets': figuring freedom and reading repetition in *All the Pretty Horses*," in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 273.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 274. Emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Bailey, "The last stage of the hero's evolution: Cormac McCarthy's *Cities of the Plain*," in *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy* ed. Rick Wallach (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 293.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 294.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Homeric heroes such as the martially unsurpassable but doomed Achilles, or the knightly heroes of Arthurian legend, whose martial might was also tied up with their relationship to horses.

More recent critical voices have turned against Bailey's and similar readings in favour of seeing McCarthy's depiction of John Grady and his actions in Mexico as being "a critique of the myth of the frontier," and of the very traditions some critics argue that McCarthy's work invokes or valorises.<sup>16</sup> Rather than see John Grady's trip to Mexico as an attempt to recapture a romanticised past, Megan McGilchrist sees the Border Trilogy as a critique of westward expansion, American imperialism and the Anglo "land grab" in North America more generally.<sup>17</sup> Far from reading McCarthy's protagonist as Lilley's tragic hero or Bailey's knight errant these interpretations cast John Grady as an epitome of Anglo-American entitlement at best and a "spoiled child" at worst.<sup>18</sup> For McGilchrist, John Grady's retreat to Mexico is not an elegy, but a journey undertaken with very definite "eyes for the spread" of land, and more importantly the horses which live on it.<sup>19</sup> It is these lands, and the economic rewards they offer, which the young cowboy would inherit, or "grab" for Anglo America by marrying Alejandra.<sup>20</sup> McGilchrist more broadly argues that McCarthy's depiction of John Grady is part of a larger project the author began in *Blood Meridian* in which his "characters look towards a past they feel is innocent, only to find it irretrievably corrupt, based upon a myth whose referents are flawed, hollow."<sup>21</sup> In its unflinching depiction of the brutal realities of frontier conquest, *Blood Meridian* undermines the very romantic image of the past John Grady tries to recapture by travelling south. To read *Blood Meridian* in concert with the Border Trilogy reveals this "hollowing out" and undermining to be McCarthy's underlying project for the novels.

McGilchrist's argument, though original in its details, does have acknowledged antecedents in the established critical understandings of John Grady and the Border Trilogy more generally. McGilchrist quotes David Holloway's claim that in his careful invoking and

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<sup>16</sup> Megan Riley McGilchrist, *The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner* (London: Routledge, 2010), 154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 159. Italics in original.

parodic engagement with the tropes and idioms of the western genre, a genre which has always been self-aware and self-reflexive, McCarthy's project is a "pastiche of pastiche."<sup>22</sup>

According to Holloway, the chief concern underlying McCarthy's pastiche of these tropes and idioms is his characters' "inability to access authentic experience," either in Mexico or America.<sup>23</sup> This inaccessibility is caused by these characters subconsciously filtering reality through their flawed invocation of the romanticised past. This lack of authenticity is the cause of what Holloway calls "the full hollowing out of John Grady into a mere hologram of the character he so much longs to be."<sup>24</sup> The implication of Holloway's argument is clear: if the source material is hollow and inauthentic, then so should be any character who unproblematically takes these myths as the material from which they construct their sense of self.

Diane Luce adds weight to a conception of John Grady as naïve or childlike at best and grasping and rapacious at worst. Luce first locates the title of *All the Pretty Horses* in "Hush-a-bye," a traditional African-American lullaby:

Hushaby,  
Don't you cry,  
Go to sleepy, little baby,  
When you wake,  
You shall have,  
All the pretty horses -  
Blacks and bays,  
Dapples and grays,  
Coach a six-a little horses.<sup>25</sup>

By drawing his title from a child's lullaby, a song designed to placate an infant, Luce argues that McCarthy loads John Grady's desire for Alejandra with "the motifs of dreaming, wishing, and the child's natural sense of entitlement."<sup>26</sup> John Grady's childish sense of entitlement is tied up, according to Luce, with horses and land:

the horses of the title come to represent any fantasy, dream, wish, or object of desire to which one might aspire or feel entitled by a promise made to him by parents, by life itself: a beautiful woman, a ranch to run, a world arranged to match one's ideas of

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<sup>22</sup> David Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy* (London: Greenwood Press 2002), 77-78. qtd. in McGilchrist, *The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner*, 164.

<sup>23</sup> Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dianne C Luce, "'When You Wake': John Grady Cole's Heroism in *All the Pretty Horses*," in *Sacred Violence: A Reader's Companion to Cormac McCarthy*, eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2002), 156.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

right and justice.<sup>27</sup>

It is John Grady's sense of being owed these things, and his attempts to gain them, divorced as they are from the reality of a situation in which the land he desires is already owned and farmed before the young cowboys arrive, which ultimately results in the pair's ejection from Don Hector's ranch and their imprisonment. John Grady and Rawlins have no real claim on the land, other than John Grady's simple sense of entitlement. It is because of his abilities with horses, which both McGilchrist and Luce link to martial prowess, and whose brutal role in American expansionism was fully exposed in *Blood Meridian*, that John Grady believes he is due the land he can win through these abilities. It is precisely this attitude that McCarthy undermines, hollows out, casts as a dream, and reveals as a child's fantasy through his Border Trilogy.

As previously mentioned, the writing of the Border Trilogy was marked by the introduction of several new collaborators in McCarthy's writing process. Albert Erskine had been semi-retired from Random House during the writing of *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy had been one of a few authors the veteran editor still regularly worked with by the mid-1980s. It is unclear exactly when Erskine retired because his correspondence with McCarthy continues until the editor's death in 1993. Joseph Blotner, who worked extensively with Erskine as he compiled his biography of William Faulkner, points to the editor's failing health forcing him into retirement in 1991 or 1992. Blotner's time-line is supported by the changing nature of the correspondence between McCarthy and Erskine after 1991. After this date the letters between Erskine and McCarthy shift noticeably from being professional correspondence between editor and author to personal letters between old friends. Even discounting the much earlier screenplay version of *Cities of the Plain*, McCarthy was clearly working on the Border Trilogy project for some time before the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992. It is likely, therefore, that Erskine had some input in the writing process, an idea supported by the inclusion of a complete manuscript of the novel amongst Erskine's own papers. The full-time responsibility for *All the Pretty Horses*, however, fell to experienced Knopf editor Gary Fisketjon. Now vice-president and "editor at large" at Knopf, Fisketjon's impressive back-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 157

catalogue of authors includes Bret Easton Ellis, Haruki Murakami and Raymond Carver.<sup>28</sup>

The move from Random House to Knopf would not have been particularly traumatic for McCarthy. Indeed, by the early 1990s Knopf was a wholly owned and integrated part of Random House, and so it is debatable whether the author would have noticed the change, Erskine's retirement aside. What this change of publishing imprint does reveal, though, is how McCarthy's books were being marketed and understood by Random House itself. Knopf is an imprint associated with "loss leaders." These are low-selling books which add prestige to a company's name and other products, despite their underwhelming sales. It is clear from this change of imprint that *All the Pretty Horses*, despite high hopes for its artistic merit, was not expected to sell well.

Another significant new collaborator, whose specific role is worth discussing at this point, was Richard Estrada, who took responsibility for checking McCarthy's Spanish. Estrada sent McCarthy a letter early in the writing of *All the Pretty Horses* saying first that McCarthy's "Spanish is pretty good," and that he "didn't see much need for revising" much of it.<sup>29</sup> Estrada does, however, convert McCarthy's technically correct Spanish into a style less strictly correct but more conversationally accurate. The most significant part of this conversion involved Estrada telling McCarthy that "[w]hile "el" and "yo" are pretty fundamental in the language, those words can be superfluous at times, especially in conversation."<sup>30</sup> This was advice McCarthy took to heart during the re-writing of his Spanish conversations, where most of these "superfluous" articles and pronouns have been removed, neatly demonstrating the impact of Estrada's suggestions. Estrada goes on to say that he "very much enjoyed meeting you; would be willing to assist you in the future; and look forward to reading your book."<sup>31</sup> The meeting Estrada mentions shows that not only did McCarthy value his literary collaborators; he took the time to meet them and ensure that they would remain willing contributors for future projects.

It is unclear from the available archives who Estrada is or how McCarthy came to

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<sup>28</sup> Amie Barrodale, "Gary Fisketjon Edits Your Heroes," *The Vice Interview*. Available at <http://www.vice.com/read/gary-fisk-v14n12>. Accessed 31/10/2012.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Estrada, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 46, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

know him, other than as a personal acquaintance. No formal letter of introduction is present among McCarthy's papers, nor does anyone seem to have suggested Estrada as a potential collaborator. Estrada's involvement with the writing of the Border Trilogy is particularly significant as it marks the first, although by no means last, time that McCarthy would call on collaborators from outside the author-(copy)editor relationship to make substantial contributions to the writing process. If nothing else, Estrada's introduction reveals a new, and more clearly defined, division of labour among McCarthy's collaborators. During the writing of *Blood Meridian* it appears that Albert Erskine assumed responsibility for checking McCarthy's Spanish, combining the duties of translator and editor. Here, however, Fisketjon and McCarthy seem to have welcomed Estrada's input as outside collaborator, a new contributor brought in to fulfil a single, clearly defined, and significant role in McCarthy's writing process.

Another important new source of outside collaboration during the Border Trilogy, especially *The Crossing*, was the "El Paso Orthopaedic Surgery Group & Center for Sports Medicine."<sup>32</sup> Attached to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), this facility still exists, devoted to "[p]roviding the Southwest with Fellowship Trained Physicians with subspecialties [...including] Foot and Ankle, Spine [...] Oncology, Sports Medicine [and] Pain Management."<sup>33</sup> During the writing of *The Crossing* McCarthy and his editor hit a problem. The plot of *The Crossing* required that one of his characters be shot during a chase sequence and then be treated by a country doctor, all these events taking place in late 1930s Mexico. McCarthy had been able to conduct some research into the medicine of the 1930s on his own. The texts named as important sources by McCarthy in his notebooks during this process are given as "Medicine in America: a short history, Medical America in the Nineteenth Century [...and] A narrative of medicine in America," most of which he was able to borrow from the UTEP library in El Paso.<sup>34</sup> As with his Spanish, McCarthy needed to ensure that the research he had done for this important scene in *The Crossing* matched up with the "real life" medicine

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<sup>32</sup> Barry King, letter to McCarthy, 29 Nov 1993, Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>33</sup> "Welcome," El Paso Orthopaedic and Surgery Group, accessed May 30, 2012, <http://www.eposg.com>.

<sup>34</sup> AmandaUrban, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

of the time. To ensure historical accuracy McCarthy corresponded with two surgeons based at this institute during the writing of *The Crossing*, Drs Oren Ellis and Barry King.

Doctor King in particular was an enthusiastic collaborator. King initially wrote to McCarthy in November 1993 to say it was a “privilege and a thrill to read [...] from You Working Progress [sic].”<sup>35</sup> The section of *The Crossing* McCarthy had sent for Dr King to read was the first draft of the scene in which Boyd is treated for his gunshot wound by the Mexican doctor Billy wakes up late at night. In this first draft of McCarthy’s scene the doctor arrives, takes Boyd’s pulse and temperature before examining the wound and the “poultice” the local healers placed on it.<sup>36</sup> He then washes the wound out with alcohol, an action which causes Boyd some pain, then quickly sews up the wound with tweezers, needle and thread.<sup>37</sup> Before closing the wound, the doctor inserts a tube into Boyd’s ankle.<sup>38</sup> Later in Boyd’s treatment, the doctor fills a jar with “water and added a teaspoon of salt and a little sugar. Then he took from his bag a glass syringe and filled it with the solution and fitted the other end of the rubber hose to it and slowly pumped the solution into Boyd’s ankle.”<sup>39</sup> This detailed action is completely absent from the published form of the scene.

In his letter to McCarthy King says of the original draft of Boyd’s treatment that although “from a literary standpoint, there is no doubt that the scene well depicts the adversity Boyd faces [...] from a purely medical view, it doesn’t tie together.”<sup>40</sup> King identifies his main areas of concern with the scene in a long letter of some ten typed pages. The first problem King addresses is initial diagnosis of Boyd as a patient suffering from “hypovolemic shock,” that is, shock resulting from the loss of blood, which King states would be the most pressing concern in such a situation.<sup>41</sup> King claims that as an experienced doctor the country physician Billy summons would be able to “immediately pick up on some of the clinical manifestations” of the condition by sight and a general examination alone.<sup>42</sup> The main concern for King, however, seems to have been the lengthy section dealing with the injection of the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing Draft*, Box 57, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Barry King, letter to McCarthy, 29 Nov 1993.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 2.

salt/sugar/water solution into the tube inserted into Boyd's ankle. King spends a great deal of time detailing the issues arising from McCarthy's description of the doctor's actions. According to King, "in shock, 2 or 3000 cc. of isotonic solution delivered intravenously would be more appropriate" than the small syringe full of improvised solution administered by the doctor in McCarthy's draft.<sup>43</sup> King goes on to say that "a non-isotonic fluid in a large volume would destroy blood vessels and possibly cause circulatory collapse," a potentially fatal consequence of even slight errors in the measurement of salt and sugar.<sup>44</sup> It is this risk, King says, coupled with the difficulty of measuring out "sugar and salt to achieve the right proportions" in a high stress situation with limited tools and equipment which meant that he advised dropping the action altogether.<sup>45</sup>

Equally troubling for King is the "cut-down" the doctor establishes in the original scene by feeding the tube into a vein in Boyd's ankle.<sup>46</sup> King says that the procedure is "an absolute \_\_\_\_\_ [sic] even under ideal circumstances" and that "threading that cannula up a collapsed vein is [...] far more tricky than might seem to an observer."<sup>47</sup> Lastly, King corrects McCarthy's knowledge of historical medicine. The original draft of the scene makes no mention of the doctor disinfecting either tools or wound, aside from the rather traumatic washing out of Boyd's wound with pure alcohol. Displaying an impressive grasp of the history of medicine, King writes that physicians working in the late 1930's and early 40's "would be well aware of sterile techniques which were introduced into medicine in the fourth quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to germ theory."<sup>48</sup> This knowledge, King argues, would "be reflected in how he washes his hands, how he lays out his instruments," and, most importantly, "how he cleans the wound," which would have been washed with "soap and water" then "irrigate[d with] an antiseptic solution."<sup>49</sup> King's prescribed course of action avoids altogether the "brutal" introduction of alcohol into the wound McCarthy had originally depicted.<sup>50</sup> The influence of this final point is clearly shown in the published version of the scene in which the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

doctor takes “from his bag a folded towel which he laid on a chair and opened carefully with just his fingertips [...] inside was a second towel cured in the autoclave [a machine used to sterilise medical equipment using steam] and done up in a bundle fastened with tape,” inside of which were the doctor's tools.<sup>51</sup>

That King thought of himself as a literary collaborator is clear from the concluding page of this first letter. In summing up his letter he says that:

My wife says that I am trying to get too literary, which is of course, your field; when I mentioned the character of the physician can be determined through his eyes and his experience through his hands and movements. It is hard to explain, but I know exactly how the physician would act as he would walk into that room.<sup>52</sup>

It may well have been this attitude, coupled with the doctor's clear enthusiasm to help which prompted McCarthy to contact King again asking for more help with the treatment of Boyd's gunshot. King once more responded enthusiastically, replying with another long letter which sketched exactly how he would imagine the scene playing out. King states that even before heading to the scene he would first “ask the summoner what the problem is.”<sup>53</sup> This initial enquiry is absent from McCarthy's original draft, but forms an important part of the published version. We are told in the final version that when Billy first reaches the doctor's house and rouses the inhabitants, the “mozo [...] waited to hear the supplicant's tale” before going to get the doctor.<sup>54</sup> Picking up on the reverential tone of describing Billy as a “supplicant,” the doctor appears priest-like “in his robe” and hears the story again, asking for details such as when the incident occurred and if Boyd “is very hot,” a key symptom which might indicate shock.<sup>55</sup> King goes on to say that on arrival at the scene of the accident the doctor would “identify the woman of the house, who as a rural practitioner I would probably already know.”<sup>56</sup> In the first draft of the scene, we are simply told that on the doctor's arrival in the room where Billy is lying “the woman was standing behind them holding a glass jar.”<sup>57</sup> In the published version, the doctor finds the woman of the house and sends her to bring some water, and a short time

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<sup>51</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (London: Picador, 2002), 620-1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Barry King, letter to McCarthy, 14 Jan 1994. Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>54</sup> McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 612.

<sup>55</sup> McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 613.

<sup>56</sup> King, letter to McCarthy, 14 Jan 1994.

<sup>57</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing Draft*, Box 57, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

later she reappears “carrying a pail of steaming water” which the doctor uses to wash his hands.<sup>58</sup> King even suggests the positioning of the small chair the doctor has Billy bring in the published version of the sequence. The examination of Billy that King suggests in his letter is faithfully reproduced in McCarthy's novel. From the checking of “the symmetry of his pupils and their response to light,” through to the examination of Boyd's tongue, and the placing of the doctor's “hand on [Boyd's] chest and ask[ing] him to take a deep breath [...which] would tell [the doctor] if he was moving air symmetrically or if he was severely splinting on the wounded side [...] indicative of a ruptured lung,”<sup>59</sup> all of King's suggestions appear almost verbatim in the final version of McCarthy's scene which matches up very closely to King's suggestions.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, King goes into a great deal more detail in his letter than could possibly have appeared in McCarthy's scene, something the doctor seems to have realised. King closes his second letter by saying that he “wanted [McCarthy] to know these things for the small percentage of readers who are medically sophisticated and would immediately recognise the subtle accuracy of what you're writing. I'd get a kick out of having them wonder how in the hell did you know these things.”<sup>61</sup> King clearly wrote such a long description of what he would do in the situation McCarthy presented him with on the understanding that the author would make extensive use of the material. That some of the medical procedures and insights appear virtually identically in both King's letter and McCarthy's book indicate the dramatic effect that expert collaborative input of this kind can have on the final shape of a novel without compromising the overall voice or integrity of the piece.

The third important new collaborator who appears in the writing of the Border Trilogy was the literary agent Amanda Urban. Referred to by McCarthy in all correspondence by the nickname “Binky,” Urban is a literary agent and vice-president of International Creative Management, a “well-established, multimedia [agency] with numerous divisions, of which book publishing is only one” according to John Thompson.<sup>62</sup> Urban's catalogue of authors is

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<sup>58</sup> McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 620.

<sup>59</sup> King, letter to McCarthy, 14 Jan 1994.

<sup>60</sup> McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 616.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> John B Thompson, “The Rise of the Literary Agent,” in *LOGOS: The Journal of the World Book Community*, Vol 21, no 3 (2010): 104.

just as impressive as Fisketjon's, and indeed features substantial overlap, including Haruki Murakami and Toni Morrison. Urban's influence as a powerful and effective literary agent was recognised in 2010 when she was awarded the Maxwell E. Perkins award. According to its own mission statement, the Maxwell Perkins award was set up in 1982 to "honor the work of an editor, publisher, or agent who over the course of his or her career has discovered, nurtured and championed writers of fiction in the United States."<sup>63</sup> Previous winners have included, amongst other notable literary actors, McCarthy's editor Gary Fisketjon. Urban was the first agent to win the award, which had previously been the exclusive domain of editors. Urban's award is revealing of the increasing influence of the literary agent over the negotiating process of book-selling, but also a recognition of agents as important literary collaborators who increasingly shape and develop an author's work and career.

Urban's influence on the publishing industry has been well-documented for several years. In 2002 *The Independent* ran a feature by Boyd Tonkin about the agent's involvement with the then-newly published author Donna Tartt whose first novel, *The Secret History*, Urban was involved with selling. Tonkin claims that, once engaged by the young writer "Urban worked her magic: she unleashed a bidding war for the 850-page manuscript of *The Secret History*, won by Knopf for \$450,000 (£308,000), with as much again for subsidiary rights," a huge advance for the work of a debut novelist.<sup>64</sup> Tonkin also implies that it was due to Urban's influence, or the raw economic imperative of such a large advance, that resulted in an "initial 75,000 print run (enormous by first-novel standards)" for *The Secret History*.<sup>65</sup> This huge print run, along with "a national and international round of teasing interviews and public appearances" organised by Urban propelled Tartt's first novel to widespread commercial success.<sup>66</sup>

Urban's supposed role in the Tartt deal and subsequent marketing fits well with John Thompson's ideas of the changing role of the literary agent in the book selling industry. Thompson writes that the agent role has developed from a limited remit "to arrange deals

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<sup>63</sup> "About the Maxwell E Perkins Award," The Center for Fiction, accessed May 30, 2012, <http://www.centerforfiction.org/awards/perkins>.

<sup>64</sup> Boyd Tonkin, "Whatever happened to Donna Tartt," *The Independent*, accessed May 30, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-secret-history-whatever-happened-to-donna-tartt-749938.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

between the buyers and sellers of literary properties” to fulfilling an “indispensable” part of the process, as crucial “it seems, as the very publishers who initially resented their appearance on the scene.”<sup>67</sup> As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Thompson points to Andrew Wylie, founder and namesake of The Wylie Agency as the first of the modern agents who, instead of simply brokering deals between author and publisher were “unapologetic about pursuing [their] clients' interests aggressively, especially when it came to advances.”<sup>68</sup> Wylie’s strategy seeks not just to procure larger advances for his authors, but also to ensure that their work is marketed effectively and energetically. A larger advance would no doubt have been welcomed by McCarthy, as would a more robust selling strategy, if we think back to the author’s complaints mentioned in chapter two regarding the difficulties found in procuring a copy of *The Orchard Keeper* “any place in the South.”<sup>69</sup>

What does seem to apply most clearly to the relationship between McCarthy and his new agent, however, is Thompson’s second important argument; that editors, overworked as a result of the integrated, corporate nature of the modern publishing industry effectively farm out some of the work they would previously have undertaken to agents. Thompson claims that the first and most prominent duty agents perform on behalf of the big publishing houses is the labour-intensive “initial selection process,” or as Thompson later calls it “wad[ing] through the slush piles [...] trying to find the occasional gem among the mind-numbing quantities of unsolicited dross.”<sup>70</sup> Just as important is work of the agent as another kind of filter. Thompson quotes an unnamed editor who explains that with the additional strains on their time resulting from the consolidation of the industry the new generation of corporate editors “don’t want someone calling them up at night [...] they don’t want to hear the ins and outs of someone’s divorce.”<sup>71</sup> That is to say, the new editor does not want to be involved with his author “in a day-to-day way,” and as a result, the agent becomes “generally speaking, the first point of contact with the author.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Thompson, “The Rise of the Literary Agent,” 94.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Erskine, 9 Jan 1969, Box 29 Papers of Albert Erskine, 1930-1999 Accession #13497, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, “The Rise of the Literary Agent,” 103.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Thompson's point does seem to ring somewhat true for McCarthy in the post-Erskine era. The earliest piece of correspondence between McCarthy and his new agent present amongst the author's papers is a fax from Urban dated April 14, 1993 in which she asks McCarthy about some "dicey transition points" in a section of *The Crossing* she had been able to sell to one magazine or another.<sup>73</sup> The part of *The Crossing* Urban managed to sell seems to have been the first section of the novel, as Urban goes on in her letter to say that "the basic thrust of the excerpt is Billy's hunt for and capture of the wolf - - and his decision to head down into Mexico with her."<sup>74</sup> Initially notable is that Urban succeeded in getting McCarthy's work accepted to a magazine, something Albert Erskine had struggled with for years. It could be that Urban was simply a better salesperson than Erskine, which would perhaps be understandable given her professional background, or that she simply had more time to devote to the selling, unhampered by editorial duties. Also worth considering is the changing profile of McCarthy himself. When Erskine was attempting to get abstracts from *The Orchard Keeper*, *Suttree* and other early work into the literary magazines McCarthy was still the relatively unknown writer of novels which, while critically lauded, were hardly bestsellers. By the time Urban came to sell this section from *The Crossing* in 1993, however, McCarthy was not only the recipient of the 1992 National Book Award, he was also a best-selling author, *All the Pretty Horses* having sold more than 200,000 copies in its first six months.

I do not mean to argue that Urban's collaboration with McCarthy was a purely professional, or rather, purely economic one. It seems that Urban also co-ordinated with McCarthy on his medical research, playing a crucial role in the writing of McCarthy's texts. In her letters to McCarthy Urban mentions, first in passing, that McCarthy should not forget to return the medical texts, "Medicine in America: a short history, Medical America in the Nineteenth Century [and] A narrative of medicine in America" to the "UTEP library."<sup>75</sup> It seems that the matter slipped McCarthy's mind, however. Urban wrote to the author again, saying that "if you could drop these books by the UTEP library I would appreciate it. Maria is

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<sup>73</sup> Amanda Urban, letter to McCarthy, 14 Apr 1993. Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Amanda Urban, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

afraid they're going to send out a hit squad for her. She's enrolled in some graduate courses.”<sup>76</sup> Who Maria, revealed later to be Maria King is, and how she came to know McCarthy and Urban is unclear. It seems that Urban had set up this useful avenue of research collaboration for McCarthy and was invested in maintaining it, something McCarthy's delay in returning the books endangered.

This exchange of letters provides an insight into the workings of this new collaboration. That the collaboration between author and agent had an impact on the artistic content is clear. The most obvious example is the changes to the “dicey transition moments” that Urban suggested McCarthy make to the section of *The Crossing* she had sold to the magazine. Equally important is the effect that Urban's enabling of McCarthy's research had on the final form of *The Crossing*. In the past, this kind of research collaboration would have been handled by Erskine. Erskine's role in McCarthy's research was demonstrated most clearly in the last chapter dealing with *Blood Meridian*. During the writing of *Blood Meridian* Erskine located and sent McCarthy a great deal of historical material and helped McCarthy organise and fact-check his sources. In the case of *The Crossing* it was the books McCarthy borrowed from the UTEP library which informed McCarthy's novel. These books, which Urban helped the author procure, were a crucial influence in McCarthy's depiction of the scene involving Boyd's gunshot wound which caused McCarthy and Dr. Barry King the difficulties explored above.

Urban was a new collaborator in many ways. Aside from John Gallagher, whose involvement with McCarthy's work had lasted only a few months, the author had never had a full-time agent before Urban's appointment. Urban therefore filled a collaborative role in the production of McCarthy's work which had not, in any formal way at least, existed before. The contrast between Erskine's working of personal contacts in an ad-hoc manner and the professional role played by Urban, a senior agent at a powerful firm representing not only authors, but also creative workers in other industries makes for an interesting comparison. It is notable then that just as the Border Trilogy were the first of McCarthy's books to be represented by a professional agent they were also the first to be published through Alfred A

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<sup>76</sup> Amanda Urban, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 55, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

Knopf. It is difficult to tell precisely what prompted the decision to change the imprint through which McCarthy's novels were published. It could be that Urban was simply more alert to what Eric de Bellaigue calls the "Vertical [...and] concentrated" publishing industry.<sup>77</sup>

De Bellaigue explains that publishing is "concentrated" in that publishing houses now contain "hardback houses [...and] their own paperback arms," as well as mainstream and more specialised imprints.<sup>78</sup> For instance, De Bellaigue lists "Chatto; Bodley Head; Jonathan Cape; Century; Hutchinson; Harvill; Corgi; Bantam; William Heinemann; Secker and Warburg [and] Doubleday" as the imprints contained within Random House, although even that list is incomplete.<sup>79</sup> To move publication of *All the Pretty Horses* from the mainstream arm of Random House to the more "specialist" imprint Knopf, which de Bellaigue associates more with publishing "artistically significant" books than large sales, speaks well of Urban's knowledge both of McCarthy's work, and of the publishing set-up at Random House.<sup>80</sup> The effect that this act of collaboration had on the way the work would be received is hard to quantify, but it is likely that the novel would have been marketed more energetically at Knopf than at the mainstream imprints of Random House. This seemingly insignificant act thus demonstrates Urban's ability to get her client's novels published through the imprint where they would be most highly valued.

Of course, the most notable new collaborator to enter the team contributing to McCarthy's work was his new editor. When Gary Fisketjon took over responsibility for the editing of McCarthy's work he seems to have wanted to be a little more professional and formalised in his approach than had Erskine. To this effect, Fisketjon drew up a long list headed "Cormac McCarthy style sheet," the majority of which was taken up with a list words and descriptions which either were or were not hyphenated in previous McCarthy novels.<sup>81</sup> Fisketjon put this formalised approach to use when he wrote to McCarthy in early 1998 "In haste, before the Fed Ex door shuts," enclosing part of the manuscript of *Cities of the Plain*,

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<sup>77</sup> Eric De Bellaigue, "Trust me. I'm an agent," in *LOGOS*, Vol 19 no 3 (2008): 111.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Gary Fisketjon, "Cormac McCarthy Style Sheet," Box 71, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

“the first 200 pages with [his] feeble notations.”<sup>82</sup> These notations themselves were systematised: “A little dot by a word and in the margin means I’ve checked the styling; a little [tick symbol] that I had to applaud; the ‘ss’ short for style sheet, also included.”<sup>83</sup> McCarthy also contributed to this style sheet, writing to Fisketjon regarding “enumeration [...t]he problem is in one place using numbers and in another spelling the numbers out [...m]y notion is just to spell them all. You cant believe the trouble this saves.”<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps because of Fisketjon’s regimented style of editing, most time during the re-drafting process of the Border Trilogy was spent fact-checking, and ironing out repetitive words and phrases rather than chasing inconsistencies in hyphenation and spelling. For example, the editor’s note to what would become page 29 of *All the Pretty Horses* reads “too much ‘looking?’ Okay?”<sup>85</sup> McCarthy apparently valued his editors services as a proof-reader at least, and the section, which originally ran “She looked off up the street where he was looking, but there wasnt much to look at. She looked back and he looked at her” was indeed changed.<sup>86</sup> For the published version of the scene the fourth “look” in the sequence was replaced with “turned” to give the less repetitious “She turned back.”<sup>87</sup> Other changes Fisketjon suggested were more about maintaining the tone of the novel. Fisketjon took particular issue with the phrase “I hear ye, cousin,” which would have appeared on page 61 of *All the Pretty Horses* during the exchange between John Grady and Rawlins regarding how they couldn’t tell “what’s in a country like that until you’re down in it.”<sup>88</sup> Fisketjon underlined “I hear ye” and made the note “‘I hear you’ used before (once) and ‘ye’ is far too hokey and out of voice.”<sup>89</sup> Again, McCarthy accepted this point, and in the published form of the conversation, “ye” has been replaced by “you.”<sup>90</sup> Across these drafts, however, there is a growing sense of McCarthy’s

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<sup>82</sup> Gary Fisketjon, letter to McCarthy, 22 Jan 1998, Box 71, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Cormac McCarthy, letter to Fisketjon, nd. Box 71, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>85</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “All the Pretty Horses Draft,” Box 51, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “All the Pretty Horses Draft.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 61.

confidence in his own opinion. In several places in the *All the Pretty Horses* manuscript, Fisketjon complains of the “over-use” of the “as if” sentence structure.<sup>91</sup> These qualms were ignored by McCarthy, and almost all of the highlighted sections remain in the published version of the novel.

Part of the reason for McCarthy's increasing resistance to Fisketjon's influence was that McCarthy was an increasingly strict self-editor. This newfound self-discipline can be seen in his interactions with Estrada, after whose input McCarthy had to abstract all the Spanish terms and phrases used in the novel and correct both spelling and accenting, a process he had already undertaken once in order to send the phrases to Estrada in the first instance. In other places, McCarthy has been more ruthless in cutting lines and sections from his work without waiting for editorial input. Lines cut from page 17 of *All the Pretty Horses*, for instance, include additional description of John Grady's mother and her past, details absent from the published version:

I dont think there's much you can do. You can go see Franklin if you want.  
We she really in a movie once?  
Yeah. She was in a movie.  
She must have been young  
She was. She was eighteen.  
Will you talk to her?<sup>92</sup>

When McCarthy either made or accepted cuts in the past, for example the lines dealing with the hawk in *Suttree*, they were often redrafted and re-purposed in other works, the hawk re-emerging as Warn Pulliam's captive buzzard in *The Orchard Keeper*. There is little evidence, however, that sections cut from the Border Trilogy works re-emerged elsewhere in McCarthy's oeuvre, at least so far. This practice of discarding rather than redrafting suggests that McCarthy was prepared to let some material go altogether, a marked change from his previous writing methods.

Perhaps this new-found willingness to cut, rather than re-write came from McCarthy's experiences trying to sell his original screenplay of *Cities of the Plain*. After finishing *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy decided that his next project would be to write a screenplay, and the first draft of *Cities of the Plain* was the result. Written, as Marius claims, and as archival evidence indicates, in the late 1980s immediately following the completion of *Blood Meridian*, *Cities of*

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<sup>91</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “All the Pretty Horses Draft.”

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

*the Plain* the western film seems a logical follow-up to or result of McCarthy's researching of the genre for his writing of *Blood Meridian*. The screenplay itself is complete and prepared for sending out to studios. Included with the text of the potential film is an intriguing "synopsis." Far more controlled than the ten-page summation of *Suttree* McCarthy sent Random House in 1978, the synopsis of *Cities of the Plain* is a professional film pitch. The piece begins with the tantalising claim that "the events in Cities of the Plain took place in El Paso Texas and Juarez Mexico in 1952 and were related to the author by Jack Sanderson, a rancher of El Paso and Carlsbad New Mexico."<sup>93</sup> Inconveniently for any potential fact-checkers, the pitch goes on to state that Sanderson "died five years ago."<sup>94</sup>

McCarthy's setting up of historical provenance for his story in this way recalls the mystery surrounding the supposed historical basis for Lester Ballard's crimes described in *Child of God*. More clearly, this shutting off of the fictionalised past from the present harks back to the comment McCarthy made to Richard Woodward that "Most of my friends from those days are dead" when discussing the autobiographical aspects of *Suttree*.<sup>95</sup> The effect in both cases is the same; closing the door on any who might wish to find witnesses to verify the correlations between McCarthy's fiction and the author's own biography. The tantalising opening passage aside, the synopsis was clearly written with selling the script in mind, and describes *Cities of the Plain* as being "a story of doomed lovers and betrayal and the meaning and limits of friendship set in two cultures radically different and inextricably joined."<sup>96</sup> More significant to critical readers of McCarthy, however, is the conclusion, which states that "In the end it is John Grady's romanticism and stubborn pride as emissary of the clearly defined values of the old west – values already well under siege – that bring him to a confrontation which can neither be avoided or survived."<sup>97</sup> The mournful tone of the claim that the "clearly defined values of the old west" are under siege is troubling to, for example, McGilchrist's reading of McCarthy's text as pastiche, as it does indeed seem to suggest that McCarthy resents the

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<sup>93</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Synopsis – Cities of the Plain." Box 69, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>94</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "Synopsis – Cities of the Plain." Box 69, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>95</sup> Woodward, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction."

<sup>96</sup> McCarthy, "Synopsis – Cities of the Plain."

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

passing of these old values. The more general point of the synopsis, that it is John Grady's "romanticism and stubborn pride" which ultimately results in his demise, on the other hand, suggests a more ambivalent relationship with the old western values than the description of the story as one of "doomed lovers and betrayal" would initially indicate.

The general points that Marius makes about Billy's character in the screenplay proper are fair. Billy here seems bitterer, more cynical, and even older, although his laconic comment that the cowboys work "daybreak to backbreak for a god given dollar" survives into the published version of the text.<sup>98</sup> Marius does miss a few telling details, however. Magdalena is in some versions of the script known as "Elvira," which can either mean "alert, trustworthy," or "the white."<sup>99</sup> The name Elvira also invokes the 1967 Swedish film *Elvira Madigan* which, with its runaway tightrope walker and soldier, also tells the story of a fatally unrealistic love affair. "Elvira" is also given far more lines in this initial draft than Magdalena gets in the final draft of *Cities of the Plain*. For example, we are told that it was her uncle who sold her to Eduardo the pimp in payment of a debt.<sup>100</sup> This detail is especially telling, as it reinforces McGilchrist's point that women in *Cities of the Plain* are most often treated as objects to be fought over, traded and otherwise exchanged by the men in the narrative.

Another notable difference between McCarthy's early screenplay and the published version of *Cities of the Plain* is a change to the event which breaks John Grady's foot. In the published version of the event, John Grady breaks his foot falling from a horse he is trying to break. The horse that hurts John Grady's foot in *Cities of the Plain* the novel has been abandoned as a difficult horse by the other ranch hands, who refer to the creature as "the owlheaded son of a bitch," which had already "thrown" the young cowboy four times before it "fell backwards on him," landing badly enough to "[l]ike to of broke his foot."<sup>101</sup> In the original screenplay, however, John Grady is said by the other characters to have damaged his foot riding in a rodeo, although the event itself happens off-stage.<sup>102</sup> The removal of all reference to the rodeo in the published version of *Cities of the Plain* is particularly striking, as

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<sup>98</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain*, 752.

<sup>99</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain Draft*, Box 69, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain*, 757.

<sup>102</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain Draft*.

it removes this link with the self-conscious performance of cowboy skill, the commercialisation or commodification of John Grady's gift with horses. Instead, the final version of the foot injury is linked inextricably with the most important of the old western skills, the ability to ride and break horses. Of course, John Grady's refusal to participate in the potentially lucrative rodeo also keys in well with the "romantic stubbornness" McCarthy talks about in his synopsis. The poor young cowboy refuses absolutely to turn his gifts to raising funds, to participate in the modern world of capitalistic values which are incompatible with his western romanticism.

There are some additional threads to draw out here. To have the final part of the trilogy, which includes John Grady's death and at least some of Billy's dissolute wanderings after his friend's demise, renders the rest of the trilogy as more tragic than romantic. McCarthy knew that his characters were doomed, because he had already written their deaths. As a result, the first two books of the trilogy are recast from linear narrative and character building to a process by which McCarthy carefully constructed these fatally flawed characters from their deaths backward, laying the groundwork for this tragic conclusion from the very beginning. Another question arising from the differences between original screenplay and published novel is why McCarthy chose to more or less silence Magdalena. In addition to strengthening the arguments to do with women as simple objects of exchange value as espoused by McGilchrist as others, this silencing also adds strength to Holloway's argument about the emptying out of characters as the Border Trilogy progresses. By silencing Magdalena and, more importantly, removing the back-story involving her uncle and his debt, McCarthy removes her individuality and renders her simply the maiden imprisoned by the ogreish Eduardo, the object of John Grady's quest. Holloway's emptying-out argument also gains strength from the removal of John Grady's competition in the rodeo. In the original screenplay, the injury sustained while consciously putting on a show of being a cowboy prevents John Grady from fulfilling his duties as an actual cowboy, as it leaves him unable to ride a horse. The simulacrum of horsemanship quite literally renders inaccessible the authentic experience. The removal of the rodeo, an overt and self-conscious performance of horsemanship, and moreover its replacement with an unselfconscious performance in John Grady's attempts to break the horse in front of a crowd of assembled ranch-hands removes a certain level of self-awareness from

John Grady's character. John Grady refuses to participate in the rodeo as to do so would require him to acknowledge that his entire persona as a cowboy out of his time is an act. To truly become Holloway's "hologram" of the person he wishes to be, John Grady cannot but believe that this persona is his authentic self, to do otherwise would endanger his entire identity.

For all the information that McCarthy's archive includes on the drafting and re-drafting of the screenplay of *Cities of the Plain*, any details of the "selling" of the screenplay are strangely absent. As mentioned above, the film script appears professionally typed and complete with the short synopsis ready to be sent out to film-making studios. Where McCarthy's script was sent is a mystery. There are no letters to or from film agencies or directors. Woodward's interview is the only source I have been able to find which makes reference to how close *Cities of the Plain* came to being produced. To have both director and a lead actor attached, or at least interested, suggests that the project was considered by a major studio, but there is little evidence of this consideration, or any debate or discussion surrounding any studio's "skittishness" with the central romance. It could be that McCarthy engaged Amanda Urban or some other intermediary for the purpose of selling the screenplay. A break from the literary world in which McCarthy had secured an established, if not particularly lucrative, niche to the unknown realm of film production would have been a compelling reason to engage new professional representation. This idea rings especially true if we consider Erskine's diminishing involvement and clout in either world and remember International Creative Management's role in representing not just literary but also other creative talents. If the supposition that Urban took control of the attempts to sell McCarthy's script is true, then it would make sense that the papers relating to any negotiations with studios would be with the agency or even the film studio themselves, not with McCarthy's personal literary papers. This is, of course, all conjecture. It is equally possible that the project never really got off the ground, a few verbal agreements aside, and so there is little paperwork to display.

A few other changes were made during the redrafting process of the novel version of *Cities of the Plain*. In what must have been some unedited material left over from the screenplay, Billy was originally supposed to have been conscripted into the Second World War. He was to have been pensioned off following an encounter with a landmine in training, which

left him unsuitable for active wartime service but still able to fulfil his duties as a cowboy.<sup>103</sup> The details of the injuries Billy suffered from the landmine remain obscure, perhaps pending further research. In the published story, of course, Billy is declared 4-F due to a “heart murmur” discovered when he attempts to sign up toward the end of *The Crossing*.<sup>104</sup> The war only appears in a few brief asides in these early drafts of *Cities of the Plain*, and was dropped early in the redrafting process, apparently just to avoid having further complications to the narrative, removing the need to have Billy's service record or land-mine injury developed.

It appears that some of the ideas from McCarthy's original synopsis have survived the redrafting process. In one of these early drafts of *Cities of the Plain* the novel McCarthy highlighted the exchange between John Grady and the blind piano player, in which the maestro reveals to John Grady the story of his own deceased wife. Added in pen to this sequence is an asterisked quote McCarthy may have intended as an insert: “\*‘Your belief that another world exists (for you) is what will kill you’.”<sup>105</sup> The asterisk leads to a further note, which reads “\*what gets her killed is her belief, hence at the moment of her commitment to J.G. She is also committed to their deaths.”<sup>106</sup> McCarthy points out explicitly in this note that it is this unrealistic and romantic belief that dooms the two characters. They are doomed from the moment they commit to John Grady's hopelessly romantic approach to rescuing Magdalena from Eduardo's brothel. McCarthy wrote this note to his editor to clarify what might otherwise have been debatable, and this evidence certainly adds weight to arguments like McGilchrist's which see John Grady's romanticism as problematised by McCarthy, rather than celebrated as Lilley might argue.

Even late in the drafting process there is evidence of further collaborations at work, of McCarthy pulling in other outside knowledge, other intertexts, accessing further webs of quotation. It is perhaps no surprise that epilepsy was not chosen for Magdalena by accident. McCarthy, as he did during the researching and writing of *Blood Meridian*, made careful notes of the sources he employed when researching Magdalena's condition. The most important of these seem to have been “Thorndike's History of Magic and Experimental Science,” an

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<sup>103</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain Draft*.

<sup>104</sup> McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 652.

<sup>105</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain Draft*.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*.

enormous eight-volume work charting the rise of scientific enquiry against the old world of magic and superstition, and Leo Kanner's "The Folklore and Cultural History of Epilepsy," which McCarthy drew from a 1930 issue of "Medical Life."<sup>107</sup> Kanner's article provides a snapshot of attitudes toward epileptics and their treatment at the time of *Cities of the Plain*'s setting. McCarthy also made general notes about the symptoms and other conditions surrounding epilepsy lifted from these texts, which he listed as, "The 'aura' at onset is like a cold breeze [...] Insusceptible to pain after falling [...] An initial cry," and "Stridor," a kind of wheezing breathing common before attacks.<sup>108</sup> Even possible causes of attacks were listed, again lifted from these medical texts, which claim that epileptic attacks can be "brought about by fright, by whirling wheels."<sup>109</sup> Other contemporary taboos were drawn from these source materials, especially Kanner, who outlined additional interdictions, especially against "[b]lood," described as "the main specific against (goat's, menstrual...)."<sup>110</sup> Another medical detail which would ultimately be removed from the final text of *Cities of the Plain* was the nature of the illness which killed ranch-owner Mac's wife before the start of the novel. Early forms of the text include the detail that Mac and his wife "fought that cancer [...] for the better part of a year. I dont guess any of us will ever be right."<sup>111</sup> Why this was removed is again unclear. Perhaps researching one medical condition for *Cities of the Plain* in Magdalena's epilepsy was enough for McCarthy, or perhaps it was removed simply to avoid further complications to the narrative and keep it focussed more tightly on John Grady's doomed pursuit of Magdalena.

The final collaborator to emerge from this study of archival papers surrounding the Border Trilogy is McCarthy's new proof reader. In contrast to earlier actors who filled this position, this new collaborator plays a very minor role. The only evidence of this new proof reader is the note "1<sup>st</sup> CORRECTIONS GOES TO JEN" on one of McCarthy's later drafts.<sup>112</sup> In comparison to Bertha Krantz, "Jen" has little input and did not correspond with McCarthy as far as can be discerned from the available material. However, the addition of a new proof-

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Notes*, Box 71, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>111</sup> McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain Draft*.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

reader to the network of collaboration surrounding McCarthy's work should at least be noted, as it alters the dynamic surrounding its production.

The process by which McCarthy's Border Trilogy came into being and the people involved in its production are significantly different from those by which the author's earlier works came to be published. Each collaborator's role was far more clearly defined than during the writing and redrafting processes of previous novels. Gary Fisketjon, McCarthy's new editor, worked exclusively on the text of the novels, limiting his role to fact- and word-checking, yet he still played a significant collaborative role in overseeing and maintaining tone and clarity as well as the elimination of repetition. Meanwhile, Amanda Urban dealt more directly with McCarthy's day-to-day life and issues. It was Urban who worked first to sell the book itself, and manoeuvred the trilogy into what seems to have been the best place for it to be published within the Random House infrastructure. It seems no coincidence that *All the Pretty Horses* was the first to have a powerful agent employed full-time during its writing, redrafting and selling and was also the first to achieve best seller status and win mainstream literary awards. Urban was particularly active and successful in selling parts of the novels to various magazines, demonstrating her value in enabling McCarthy to concentrate on writing, rather than the increasingly complex world of the book selling industry. Urban also took responsibility for organising and enabling the research McCarthy undertook as part of the writing and redrafting process. Urban's assumption of this set of time-consuming duties reveals the increasingly compartmentalised and professionalised network of collaboration around McCarthy's work. The reduced role played by Fisketjon is perhaps the most striking difference between McCarthy's early work and these later novels. I do not mean to suggest that Fisketjon was a less devoted and effective editor than Erskine. Fisketjon was McCarthy's most crucial collaborator during the writing and drafting of the Border Trilogy. Fisketjon's services as proof-reader and fact-checker alone demonstrate his value as a collaborator, and the significant role he had in shaping the published form of all three novels comprising the Border Trilogy should not be underestimated. Fisketjon's more specific role is simply a product of what de Balague calls the "concentrated" world of the modern corporate publishing house. This new corporate world of publishing, and the resulting strains on Fisketjon's time, is the reason that it was McCarthy rather than his editor who called in outside help from Dr King and Richard

Estrada. McCarthy was increasingly expected, and at this point in his career comfortable, to do his own research. That Urban played an important role in setting up these valuable contacts reveals that just as the role of the literary editor contracts, so the role of the agent expands to fill the resulting void.

The changes within the collaborations which produced McCarthy's novels, tending as they do toward these clearly defined, compartmentalised and professionalised roles, are symptomatic of more general changes within the publishing industry as a whole. Indeed, it is this solidifying structure of labour which is the supposition underlying the work of Thompson, de Bellaigue and others who point toward the issues surrounding modern publishing. What an examination of McCarthy's more recent work allows, especially as an individual case study and in comparison with his earlier work, is a way to examine the assumptions being made by theorists of the market such as Thompson and de Bellaigue. Just as significantly for this examination of McCarthy's writing practices, the sheer number of actors involved in the production of McCarthy's work clearly demonstrates the clear and wide-ranging importance of the composition of the network of collaboration surrounding literary works on the form, and indeed medium, which those works take.

## Chapter 6 - Composite Auteurship:

### The Varied Production Lives of *No Country For Old Men*

If *All The Pretty Horses*, with its National Book Award and best-seller status, was the novel which made McCarthy's literary career, then *No Country For Old Men*, and moreover its adaptation into an Oscar-winning film by Joel and Ethan Coen, was the story which made McCarthy a household name. That *No Country For Old Men* was so successfully adapted by the Coens is less surprising if the genesis of the novel, which saw the story written first as a screenplay before being turned into a novel by McCarthy, is taken into consideration. In this chapter I will argue that one of the reasons *No Country For Old Men* succeeded in winning plaudits as both a book and as a film was because of a successful model of collaborative authorship. The previous chapter laid the foundations for an idea of how McCarthy's authorship might extend over different media as well as over different novels. The previous chapter's analysis, however, was limited by the lack of success McCarthy found in getting his screenplay produced. The success of the Coen brothers' adaptation of *No Country For Old Men* – hereafter referred to as *No Country* – will allow this chapter to develop those ideas, shedding light on to a new form of collaborative authorship.

It seemed to some reviewers at the time of *No Country*'s publication that the widespread acceptance which greeted the publication of McCarthy's ninth novel was no accident, but rather marked a change in both McCarthy's literary production and the attitude of the author behind it. Richard Woodward in his second print interview with McCarthy, this time conducted for *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2005, claims that “[s]ome of McCarthy's fans may be surprised by the flat-out speed of the plot; his novels commonly unwind at a far more wayward and leisurely pace.”<sup>1</sup> Woodward's comments evoke the often-cited argument that *No Country For Old Men* is a comparatively simple “thriller” novel written with the film industry and more casual readers in mind. That *No Country* is a “simple” story is a contention largely rejected by scholars of both McCarthy's book and the Coens' film. Jay Ellis, for instance, casts Chigurh

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<sup>1</sup>Richard B Woodward, “Cormac Country,” *Vanity Fair*, August 1, 2005, available at [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-11819586\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-11819586_ITM). Accessed 31/10/2012.

especially as a psychologically and philosophically complex construction.<sup>2</sup> That McCarthy wrote *No Country* to be filmed is a supposition borne out by both archival evidence and the extremely successful Coen brothers' adaptation of the novel. *No Country* won four Oscars at the 2007 Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay. *No Country* was not the first of McCarthy's novels to be adapted into film, however, nor, as was explored in the previous chapter, was it the first novel McCarthy had initially written as a screenplay. Billy Bob Thornton directed an adaptation of *All the Pretty Horses*, whose characters appeared first in an embryonic form in an early screenplay version of *Cities of the Plain*, starring Matt Damon and Penelope Cruz.<sup>3</sup> Thornton's film, in contrast to the Coen brothers' award-laden adaptation, was released to overwhelmingly negative reviews in 2000, partly as a result of studio interference with Thornton's initial three-hours-plus cut of the film. *No Country*, therefore, became not the first film adaptation of a McCarthy novel, but the first successful one, suggesting its greater suitability for the medium. The success of the film adaptation of *No Country* paved the way for John Hillcoat's less successful adaptation of *The Road* which followed in 2009.<sup>4</sup> It is my contention that it was due to a successful collaborative relationship between the various authors of the book and film, a relationship McCarthy was more willing to enter into now than at any other stage of his career, that *No Country* succeeded where *All the Pretty Horses* had not.

Following as it did a five year gap in McCarthy's output, there was widespread interest in *No Country* from both mainstream reviewers and McCarthy scholars when the novel first appeared in 2005. John Cant wrote in his introduction to the special issue of the *Cormac McCarthy Journal* devoted to *No Country* that he had "detected a valedictory note in the concluding 'Dedication'" of *Cities of the Plain*.<sup>5</sup> Cant writes that it was the final line of this postscript, "The story's told / Turn the page," which led to a belief that McCarthy, 65 at the time, may have been considering retirement after the publication of *Cities of the Plain*, leaving

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<sup>2</sup>Jay Ellis, "Do you see?: Levels of Ellipsis in *No Country For Old Men*," in *Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Sara L Spurgeon. (London: Continuum, 2011), 94.

<sup>3</sup>*All the Pretty Horses*, directed by Billy Bob Thornton (2000; Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2005), DVD.

<sup>4</sup>*The Road*, directed by John Hillcoat (2009; New York, NY: Dimension Films, 2010), DVD.

<sup>5</sup>John Cant, "Editor's Notes," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Special Issue: No Country For Old Men* Vol 5 (2005): 2.

the final volume of the Border Trilogy as his last published work.<sup>6</sup> With the publication of *No Country*, however, Cant concludes that this interpretation of McCarthy's dedication was "proved superficial [...] if there are no more stories why 'turn the page'?"<sup>7</sup> It was the story of the Border Trilogy, not McCarthy's writing career which had come to an end. *No Country*, following McCarthy's best-selling Border Trilogy, was widely and positively reviewed. *No Country* earned praise from fellow Western writer Annie Proulx in her review for *The Guardian*, where she claimed that McCarthy's "writing transforms a standard western good-guy-bad-guy plot into serious literature."<sup>8</sup> These reviews were accompanied for the first time in McCarthy's career by a small but significant round of interviews by the author, cementing his place in the upper echelons of American writing. The literary press seemed as keen to welcome McCarthy back as were his more devoted followers.

In his *Vanity Fair* interview Woodward makes the point that *No Country for Old Men* "has the structure of genre fiction and film; the late Don Siegel or the young Quentin Tarantino might have directed."<sup>9</sup> Woodward here offers another form of intertextual collaboration. What Woodward's quote points to is how and why McCarthy invokes and engages with the existing expectations of genre in a similar way to that in which John Sepich set out to discover McCarthy's engagement with *Blood Meridian's* rendering of historical record. Woodward's point is that in writing what, initially at least, appears to be a genre piece of borderland thriller writing McCarthy is drawing on a new web of quotation, accessing a new set of voices. That *No Country* uses and engages with the clichés, expectations and language of thriller genre fiction is a reasonable point, although a deeper examination of the reasons for this engagement than Woodward offers in his interview is required.

*No Country's* appearance as a piece of simple genre writing, sitting at odds with what had gone before in McCarthy's oeuvre, seems to have left the contributors to the special issue of the *Cormac McCarthy Journal* unsure quite what to make of the book. Linda Woodson

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Annie Proulx, "Gunning for Trouble," *The Guardian* 29 October, 2005, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/oct/29/featuresreviews.guardianreview16>, accessed 4 June, 2012.

<sup>9</sup>Woodward, "Cormac Country."

points to “a materiality not seen in the earlier Border Trilogy.”<sup>10</sup> Woodson argues that this materiality is demonstrated both in the concerns of the characters in the narrative, and in the increased incidence of brand-names being deployed as McCarthy describes the characters’ clothing and objects they encounter, a marked contrast to his earlier work.<sup>11</sup> Woodson sees *No Country* as dramatising a moral battleground “where the competing discourses of moral responsibility in the language of Sheriff Bell and the determinism in the language of Chigurh [here representing material or capital concerns] contradict.”<sup>12</sup> In this struggle, Woodson argues, McCarthy argues for a world of moral responsibility, despite Bell’s fragility in the face of Chigurh’s overwhelming violence. As part of this argument Woodson states that McCarthy places the blame for Chigurh’s violence “clearly with those who demand the drugs,” not with those who supply them, or who commit violence in the name of this supply.<sup>13</sup> Woodson’s argument does draw some additional strength from archival evidence. In an early draft of the scene in which Sheriff Bell goes to talk to Ellis, McCarthy has added the note “DETERMINISM” in pencil to a section of Ellis’ speech and underlined it several times, demonstrating that Bell faces the same confrontation between his own morality and the unstoppable forces of determinism at home in his conversation with Ellis as he does out in the world in his more physical confrontations with Chigurh.

Rather than see the novel as a critique of late capitalism, Steven Frye sees the novel as dramatising the conflict between a quite different pair of “worlds: the external world [...] of artless violence, disorder and bloodshed, where passion vents itself in pain; and the interior world of Bell’s consciousness which is a realm infused with the same, but one that seeks and finds a stability and permanence in human love, spiritual transcendence and a mild and mitigated acceptance.”<sup>14</sup> Frye argues that the “artless” world of Chigurh’s violence represents McCarthy’s “early aesthetic,” as most obviously explored in *Blood Meridian*.<sup>15</sup> Frye uses this

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<sup>10</sup>Linda Woodson, “...you are the battleground”: Materiality, Moral Responsibility and Determinism in *No Country for Old Men*,” *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Special Issue: No Country For Old Men* Vol 5 (2005): 4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 4.

<sup>14</sup>Steven Frye, ““Sailing to Byzantium” and McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*: Art and Artifice in in New Novel,” in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Special Issue: No Country For Old Men* Vol 5 (2005): 20.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 17.

conflict between violence and acceptance to support his overall argument; that *No Country* represents a turning point in McCarthy's work, away from the "artless" world of violence, which Frye offers as an explanation for the "the notable stylistic departure" evidenced in *No Country*'s "lean, sparse, at times terse" prose style.<sup>16</sup> Frye's seems an odd argument. On the one hand it makes a convincing case that McCarthy's work is evolving over time, and that McCarthy's work itself offers an insight into this process of evolution and gradual rejection of old stylistic visions to make way for new ones. On the other, however, it seems contrary to argue that McCarthy would reject the artless world of Chigurh by writing in such a spare and "artless" style compared to his earlier output.

Amongst these early critical responses to *No Country* only Robert Jarrett engages at length with the text on the level of genre, arguing persuasively that *No Country* "mimics the popular thriller while deconstructing the narrative and metaphysical assumptions" of the genre.<sup>17</sup> Jarrett casts *No Country* as a kind of anti-thriller. McCarthy, Jarrett argues, engages with these narrative assumptions in order to highlight and deconstruct them. In this reading *No Country* becomes a far more sophisticated text, and later film, than it at first might appear. This is an argument supported by later work on the novel, including Ellis' essay. Jarrett's engagement with genre was taken up by some of the contemporary reviewers of the text. Walter Kim wrote in his review for the *New York Times* that McCarthy acts as "a master-level gamer who changes screens and situations every few pages. The choreographed conflicts [...] resolve themselves with a mechanistic certitude that satisfies the brain's brute love of pattern and bypasses its lofty emotional centers."<sup>18</sup> Kim in this review sees *No Country* as an example of genre writing *par excellence*, McCarthy playing expertly with the genre's expectations, although he ignores or rejects any ideas of deconstructionism in favour of seeing *No Country* as a kind of well-written but ultimately cheap visceral thrill.

Some reviewers did attempt to draw *No Country* into the subversive project of the rest of McCarthy's output. Annie Proulx posed "the question of why McCarthy set this story in

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 14.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Jarrett, "Genre, Voice and Ethos: McCarthy's Perverse "Thriller"," in *No Country for Old Men*," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Special Issue: No Country For Old Men Vol 5* (2005): 36.

<sup>18</sup>Walter Kim, "'No Country For Old Men': Texas Noir," *The New York Times*, 24 July, 2005, 1.

1980” in her review of the novel for *The Guardian*.<sup>19</sup> Proulx argues that 1980 is significant as the year that “the shootings of John Lennon, Dr Herman Tarnower, ex-congressman Allard Lowenstein, physician-author Michael Halberstam and many others [...] all made headlines.”<sup>20</sup> The reason McCarthy chose this violent year, Proulx argues, is because “McCarthy’s oeuvre can be seen as the on-going study of a burning American rage, and how common that rage has become.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, *No Country* can be seen as updating some of the concerns of *Blood Meridian*, which revealed the anger and violence at the heart of America’s expansionism, to the more modern context of the borderland drug trade.

*No Country* was the most commercially successful of McCarthy’s novels. It spent five weeks on the New York Times bestsellers list, peaking at number eight on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Woodward reported in his interview, “[t]he book’s streamlined screenplay qualities [...] did not hurt it in the eyes of Hollywood. Rights were snapped up with a pre-emptive bid by producer Scott Rudin [who also produced *No Country*’s main rival for the 2007 Best Picture, *There Will Be Blood*] in what McCarthy’s literary agent, Amanda Urban, calls ‘a substantial deal.’”<sup>23</sup> It was this contract which would ultimately result in the Oscar-winning adaptation of the novel directed by the Coen brothers. The ease of adapting the book into a screenplay was noted by the directors of the film, who invited McCarthy to attend the 2007 Academy Awards ceremony as their guest. By the end of the evening, McCarthy says, the brothers “had a table full of awards [...] sitting there like beer cans. One of the first awards that they got was for Best Screenplay, and Ethan came back and he said to me, ‘Well, I didn’t do anything, but I’m keeping it’.”<sup>24</sup> Ethan Coen may well have been flattering the author, and a number of significant changes were made during the adaptation process, however the most obvious reason for this apparently easy and successful transfer from one medium to the other may well be that McCarthy, as he had done previously when writing *Cities of the Plain*, first wrote *No Country* as a screenplay.

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<sup>19</sup> Annie Proulx, “Gunning for Trouble,” 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> “The New York Times Bestsellers List September 4, 2005,” available at <http://www.hawes.com/2005/2005-09-04.pdf>, accessed 15/05/2012.

<sup>23</sup> Woodward, “Cormac Country.”

<sup>24</sup> John Jurgenson, “Hollywood’s favourite Cowboy,” in the *Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704576204574529703577274572.html> Accessed 24/7/11.

In his *Wall Street Journal* interview McCarthy states that after writing this first version of *No Country for Old Men* he “showed it to a few people and they didn’t seem to be interested. In fact, they said, ‘That will never work.’ Years later I got it out and turned it into a novel. Didn’t take long.”<sup>25</sup> Archival evidence supports McCarthy’s version of the genesis of *No Country for Old Men*. Amongst the papers in the McCarthy archive in Texas there exist complete drafts of a script for a film version of the novel, which date, so far as can be determined, from years before the novel’s publication. The draft screenplays differ in significant ways from both the published form of the novel and the Coens’ film version. In the earliest version the story follows Sheriff Bell much more closely, and depicts a much more antagonistic relationship between Bell and the DEA agent who is treated as a minor annoyance in McCarthy’s novel and is absent altogether from the Coens’ film. In McCarthy’s early screenplay drafts the agent acts as an additional antagonist to Bell, interested in recovering for himself the drug money stolen from the shoot-out. At his first meeting with Bell, the agent tries to bribe Bell by offering him a share of the drug money before threatening him if he does not cooperate, saying, “It comes down to this. You got a chance to have a nice piece of change to kind of supplement your retirement with no strings attached. Or you got a chance to retire a little earlier than what you’d planned on.”<sup>26</sup> This draft of *No Country* is incomplete in the archive, although some parts of the planned ending of this draft reappear in later versions of the screenplay. Chigurh appears only in the second, more complete draft of McCarthy’s script, in an embryonic form as the stun gun armed “Milo Jones,” who wears the air tank for the gun on his back.<sup>27</sup> This version of the story more closely resembles a conventional action film plot. Bell and this version of Moss end up working together to bring down “Ralston,” the drug dealer who employs Milo Jones to recover both his money and the drugs lost at the shoot-out. Ralston in this draft functions as an early combined version of two unnamed men in the published version of *No Country*; the first who hires Wells to kill Chigurh and the second to

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*, Box 80. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>27</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Later Draft*. Box 81. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

whom Chigurh returns the money at the end of the novel. The narrative of the draft screenplay culminates in a gunfight in the desert between Bell, Moss, Jones and Ralston. During this confrontation, in a scene reminiscent of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, Milo's oxygen tank is shot and explodes, killing him, before Ralston is also killed by Sheriff Bell. Bell then invests his share of the captured drug money in a charitable foundation to build a medical clinic in his county before deciding not to stand for re-election as a sheriff. Though complete, these screenplays never seem to have got very near to being filmed. Whereas *Cities of the Plain*, McCarthy's first screenplay, had been professionally packaged for sending out to studios, there is no evidence that *No Country* the screenplay was ever seriously considered by any studio, director or actor, despite the increasing prestige McCarthy's name carried.

There was evidently a good deal of development and refinement to be done before the rough screenplay of *No Country* became the finished book. One part which did seem to be completed early in the process, however, was the initial section in which Moss finds the scene of the shoot-out between drug dealers and drug buyers and takes the money, setting the rest of the narrative in motion. This sequence: Moss shooting at gazelle, missing, and then following a blood trail to the shoot-out scene, finding the dying man who asks for water, then taking the suitcase of money from a dead man under a tree is complete in even the earliest draft of McCarthy's screenplays. The supposition that the opening of the story was completed first is supported by further archival evidence. The earliest dated correspondence relating to *No Country* the novel in the archive in Texas is a letter to McCarthy from his agent Amanda Urban informing him that "Virginia Quarterly Review's proposed excerpt of NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN [...] is the Moss section of the first chapter, and they've suggested the title "Agua" for the excerpt. If you would prefer a different title, they are amendable [sic] to suggestions."<sup>28</sup> Just as significant as the piece's acceptance into the magazine was Urban's assertion in the letter that "[t]he piece will run about 17 pages in the issue, and [the magazine] are offering \$5,000."<sup>29</sup> This exchange demonstrates both the increasing marketability of McCarthy and his work, and Urban's considerable abilities as a salesperson for her client's work. "Agua" is still

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<sup>28</sup>Amanda Urban, letter to McCarthy, March 4, 2005," Box 80. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

available to subscribers on the *Virginia Quarterly* website, which also reveals that the extract was first published in the summer of 2005.<sup>30</sup>

The date of the *Virginia Quarterly* piece means that Urban was able to time the appearance of the abstract “a month before the book is published.”<sup>31</sup> The piece therefore served much the same function as a trailer for a film might, drumming up further anticipation for McCarthy’s already eagerly-awaited return, as well as generating valuable funds for the writer. Urban’s influence can be seen elsewhere in the production life of *No Country*. The rights settlement mentioned previously was indeed “substantial,” as indicated by the cheque for almost \$250,000 among McCarthy’s papers, although the details of the deal are absent. It is worth noting that Tommy Lee Jones, who stars as Sheriff Bell in the Coen brothers film of *No Country* and would later serve as both director and star, alongside Samuel L. Jackson, in the HBO television adaptation of *The Sunset Limited*, is also represented by Urban’s International Creative Management talent agency. This remarkable overlap of collaborators neatly demonstrates the useful contacts which can be made available thanks to an influential and well-connected agent.

The role of returning editor Gary Fisketjon had also changed somewhat during the writing and rewriting of *No Country*, especially when compared to the role he played during the writing of the Border Trilogy, where he acted as both fact-checker and guardian of tone and style. In the *Wall Street Journal* interview Woodward writes that Fisketjon “sees his role at this stage as one of ‘looking for small inconsistencies’,” although the editor goes on to say that “[i]f it is as Cormac wants it, that’s how it stays.”<sup>32</sup> The rather self-deprecating picture of the limited role the editor performs in the production of McCarthy’s novels painted by Fisketjon is, of course, not entirely accurate. There were several significant changes made during the redrafting process of *No Country*, often at Fisketjon’s suggestion or insistence, revealing that the production of McCarthy’s novels remained very much a collaborative effort between author and editor.

The first of these changes encountered in a reading of McCarthy’s drafts is that Bell’s

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<sup>30</sup>Cormac McCarthy, “Aqua,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Summer 2005, available at <http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2005/summer/mccarthy-agua/>. Accessed 31/10/2012.

<sup>31</sup>Amanda Urban, letter to McCarthy, March 4, 2005.

<sup>32</sup>Woodward, “Cormac Country.”

theatre of operations during the war was initially written as taking place in the Pacific. In an early draft Bell tells Ellis during a visit which takes place much earlier in the draft narrative than it does in the published version of the story that he “was one of the oldest in our class at boot camp. Six months later I was on the Kwajalein Atoll killin people with a Browning Automatic Rifle.”<sup>33</sup> The move from the war in the Pacific to the war in Europe is significant for many reasons. Firstly, it makes Bell’s service more accessible to non-American audiences, especially the UK and Europe, where the European theatre of the Second World War resonates more strongly than the war in the Pacific. Secondly, and more importantly, it ties Bell’s military service to the struggle against the artless violence of Nazi Germany, which, like that committed by Anton Chigurh, was as often inflicted upon civilians as on military personnel. Thirdly, moving Bell’s military service from the Pacific to the European theatre also gets the sheriff clear of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, America’s own brush with artless violence inflicted upon civilians. Finally, the move frees Bell’s military service from association with American imperialism.

The Kwajalein Atoll, now part of the Marshall Islands, was seized from Japanese occupation during the Second World War by American forces moving through the Pacific. The Kwajalein Atoll itself is still in use by the US military today, and is home to the “Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site,” whose mission, according to its website is “to provide a Major Range Test Facility Base (MRTFB) activity on Kwajalein Atoll and Wake Island.”<sup>34</sup> The US military maintains a substantial presence in the region despite the Marshall Islands having declared semi-independence in 2003 with the signing of the “Compact of Free Association” with the US.<sup>35</sup> To tie Bell’s wartime service to a place which is still, in one form or another, under US occupation would complicate the image of the character, changing the nature of Bell’s service from the heroic defence of Europe against encroaching fascism, to something some could see as approaching a US land grab in the Pacific. The European theatre, of course, is also the scene of John Grady’s father’s wartime experiences. The Ninth Infantry

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<sup>33</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*.

<sup>34</sup> “Welcome,” *Ronald Reagan Missile Defense Test Site*, available at <http://www.smdc.army.mil/rts.html>. Accessed 15/05/2012.

<sup>35</sup> “Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2003,” available at <http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Compact/Compact%20Public%20Law%20108-188.pdf>. Accessed 15/05/2012.

Division from whom the character received the Zippo lighter which appears in *All the Pretty Horses* were also deployed in Europe during the conflict, especially in Sicily and France.

Fisketjon's influence can clearly be seen from these changes. Most of the drafts of these sections have been marked in some way by the editor for consideration by McCarthy, and the editor's advice was more often heeded than it was ignored. Many of Fisketjon's editorial notes did consist of fact and time checking, as they had during the editing of the *Border Trilogy*. The frequent bus trips taken around Texas seem to have been a particular source of confusion, one which Fisketjon appears to have been especially keen to sort out. When Moss arrives in Sanderson and sends Carla Jean onward to Odessa, for example, he tells Carla Jean in the draft that "There's a bus leaves out of here at seven in the mornin. I want you to go to Odessa."<sup>36</sup> Carla Jean, as in the final version of the trip, is later shown arriving in Odessa "at quarter to nine."<sup>37</sup> Next to this section, Fisketjon has written the note, "Bus leaves at 7 but doesn't arrive till 8:45, which is a long time for 65 miles..."<sup>38</sup> Other bus trips are also checked by Fisketjon, who seems to be equipped with an impressive knowledge of Texas, its bus routes and its geography. The editor complains that during one trip Moss "must've waited a long time for the bus in Langtry, since he would've got there around 6pm and it's only an hour or so away (55-60 miles). Okay?"<sup>39</sup> Both these inconsistencies are ironed out in the published version of the text, in both cases by McCarthy simply being less specific about the time his characters set off on their journeys, a simple way to satisfy his editor's understandable insistence on chronological accuracy. Another good example of this kind of fact checking appears in Fisketjon's querying of Bell's response time to the shooting at Eagle Pass. In McCarthy's first draft we are told that Bell "pulled up in front of the sheriff's office in Eagle Pass at 7:15 in the morning" following a phone call from the local Sheriff's office.<sup>40</sup> In his note to this section Fisketjon wrote that "We know when the shooting started – shortly before 5:00 – and he wouldn't likely be called till 5.30 or so" and queries if Bell "Could [...] make this trip in under two hours."<sup>41</sup> Fisketjon's query is reasonable. Assuming that Bell was starting his trip

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<sup>36</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

from somewhere near Sanderson, he would have to cover around 175 miles to get to Eagle Pass, an impressive distance to cover in less than two hours. McCarthy accepted Fisketjon's point, and Bell's time of arrival in Eagle Pass is changed to "nine-fifteen in the morning" in the final version of *No Country*, allowing the sheriff a far more reasonable four hours to receive the call and make his way to the scene.<sup>42</sup>

Clarity was the stated driving force behind all of Fisketjon's corrections. The times and distances of the bus and car journeys McCarthy's characters take are important for narrative clarity in a subtle way, as they give structure and shape to the story, allowing a reader to keep track of Chigurh's pursuit of Moss across Texas without being confused by any chronological inaccuracies McCarthy might have missed while shaping the overall narrative. A more detailed example of this drive for clarity appears during the hiring of Wells by the nameless man in the mysterious office block. The man's recounting of those killed by Chigurh originally ran "He killed two other men at R-23 the day before and those two did happen to be ours. Along with the three at that colossal goatfuck two days before that. All right?"<sup>43</sup> To this rather complicated summing up of Chigurh's body count Fisketjon added the note:

Elliptical to a fault since the reader has no way of connecting these two events to anything previous in the book. I assume R-23 is where Chigurh got the Ramcharger, but I don't know it. If so, however, "the day before" would imply this is Monday, since Chigurh killed those two on Sunday. And the goatfuck is in fact what Moss stumbled across at the beginning, "two days before that" suggests that happened Friday. Maybe none of this matters, but these are the thoughts that came to me.<sup>44</sup>

To this, McCarthy has simply added "GOOD," a judgement of Fisketjon's impressive grasp of the narrative and its shape it is very hard to argue against.<sup>45</sup> The final version of the nameless man's run down of Chigurh's murders is altered to "He killed two other men a couple of days before and those two did happen to be ours. Along with a couple more at that colossal goatfuck a few days before that. All right?"<sup>46</sup> This version is how the statement appears in the final version of *No Country*, McCarthy having removed all references to "R-23," a road which appears by name nowhere else in the story, and ironing out the order and number of days

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<sup>42</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men* (London: Picador, 2005), 134.

<sup>43</sup>Cormac McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 141.

mentioned.<sup>47</sup> Some of Fisketjon's notes were ignored by McCarthy, however. The most obvious example of the writer not acting on Fisketjon's advice is Moss' claim to Carla Jean that he had found his pistol "at the gettin place."<sup>48</sup> This line appears in an early draft of *No Country*, accompanied by the note from Fisketjon that "this line used in All The Pretty Horses, p47, Blevins: 'At the gittin place'. Best not to echo that."<sup>49</sup> That McCarthy chose to ignore this note is just as significant as those alterations he chose to accept, as it confirms that the mirroring of language between the two books was intentional, forming links across McCarthy's oeuvre. This particular piece of editorial input also harks back to McCarthy's time with Erskine, when the editor took McCarthy to task over the repetition of the "china blue sky" image. Fisketjon, it seems, was prepared to carry this oversight of metaphor on across multiple books, not just chapters.

Another major feature of *No Country* to undergo significant change was the name of McCarthy's antagonist. Referred to as Milo Jones (likely a place-holder, he is not referred to by name) in McCarthy's screenplay, this key character went by several different identities over the course of the various drafts. McCarthy collected these together on one of his draft pages, to try and settle the issue. These names, integrated into the scene in which Chigurh strangles the deputy with his handcuffs are listed as "Chignon, Chigerat, Chigorate, Chigoron, Chingo, Chigrey, Chingore, Chigore [...and] Chigureon [and also, further down the page], Chigger."<sup>50</sup> Most of these names are as obscure in their origin as the one McCarthy eventually arrived on. Chignon and Chigger are perhaps the exception to this rule, the former referring to both the hairstyle and to a medical condition affecting new-born infants, the latter to an infamous kind of biting insect found in the Southern United States. What does seem to be important is the Chig- root of the name, suggesting the sound of the name is as important as the meaning, adding support to the reading of Chigurh's name as phonetically similar to "ant on sugar" as suggested by Moss' mishearing of the name in the scene in the Mexican hospital. This avoids the meaning of the name, which does appear obscure, but does suggest the single-minded or frenzied actions of a group of ants on finding a store of sugar, something which relates closely

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, 21.

<sup>49</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*.

<sup>50</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men Draft*.

to the way Chigurh himself relentlessly pursues his enemies. Another possible origin of this unusual name is the now-archaic word “Chirurgon,” which appears in the Oxford English Dictionary as an old name for a surgeon, reinforcing the medical connotation of “Chignon” and evoking the clinical way Chigurh kills with his stun gun.<sup>51</sup>

The collaborators at Knopf and International Creative Management were not the only support systems McCarthy had in place by this point, however. The newest group of collaborators to play a role in the writing of *No Country* was the academic network at the Santa Fe Institute based in New Mexico. The precise nature of McCarthy’s involvement with this institute has been the subject of much conjecture among McCarthy scholars. The institute is described on its own website as “a private, not-for-profit, independent research and education center founded in 1984, for multidisciplinary collaborations in the physical, biological, computational, and social sciences” and is home to a wide variety of researchers working in many different scientific fields.<sup>52</sup> It was to this institute that the \$254,500 from the sale of McCarthy’s old Olivetti typewriter was donated and it receives a generous dedication at the beginning of *No Country* in which the author expresses “his appreciation to the Santa Fe Institute for his long association and his four-year residence.”<sup>53</sup> In a recent interview on National Public Radio’s Science Friday program, in which he was accompanied by both filmmaker Werner Herzog and Lawrence Krauss, a physicist associated with the Santa Fe Institute, McCarthy says that he was first introduced to the work of the Institute by his brother Dennis, who holds a PhD in biology, and took McCarthy along to several lectures.<sup>54</sup> According to McCarthy, it was through this association and his attendance at several Guggenheim Fellowship dinners that he met Murray Gell-Mann, a Nobel prize-winning physicist and one of the founder members of the Institute. It was through this friendship, McCarthy says, that he became involved full-time with the institute, eventually being installed as its “writer-in-residence.”

The precise role McCarthy does play at the institute is not made completely explicit in

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<sup>51</sup> “Chirurgon,” *OED Online*, accessed 28/09/2012. Available at

<http://oed.com/view/Entry/31908?rskey=Y5fuwZ&result=7&isAdvanced=false#>.

<sup>52</sup> “Intro,” *Santa Fe Institute Website*, available at <http://www.santafe.edu/about/>, accessed 24/7/11.

<sup>53</sup> McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Katharine Wells, “Connecting Science and Art,” National Public Radio. Available at <http://www.sciencefriday.com/segment/04/08/2011/connecting-science-and-art.html>

the Science Friday interview, but it seems that he has a role in proof reading the scientists' work. The work of the researchers at the Institute is something which apparently fascinates McCarthy, who enjoys staying abreast of the latest research. *The Guardian* reported in February 2012 that McCarthy had "emerged as the unlikely copy editor" of Krauss' book *Quantum Man* "a biography of the physicist Richard Feynman."<sup>55</sup> It was this book which the physicist promoted on the Science Friday radio program he shared with McCarthy and Herzog. McCarthy's presence on this program suggests that the author appeared not only to promote his own work, but to raise the profile of Krauss's book as well. *The Guardian* article also reports on McCarthy's literary opinions, as it claims that the author "started out by making Krauss promise that 'he could excise all exclamation points and semicolons, both of which he said have no place in literature.'"<sup>56</sup> Krauss's was not an isolated case of McCarthy working as a scientific proof-reader. The same article relates a similar story dealing with Harvard physicist Lisa Randall's experience of having McCarthy look over "her first book, *Warped Passages: Unravelling the Mysteries of the Universe's Hidden Dimensions*" in 2005, shortly after the publication of *No Country*.<sup>57</sup> Randall states that McCarthy "gave [her book] a good copy-edit [...h]e really smoothed the prose."<sup>58</sup> Special attention was, as with Krauss's book, given to "superfluous punctuation," as Randall recalls that "'Cormac isolated all the semicolons in the margin; I then removed them [...]. Apparently exclamation points are only for exclamations! Those were removed too.'"<sup>59</sup>

The most notable collaborator at the Institute during the writing of *No Country*, however, was Della Ulibarri, whose name also appears on the material connected to the production of the Border Trilogy. Ulibarri still works at the Santa Fe Institute, her role described as an "Academic Affairs Assistant/ Faculty and Sponsored Research Assistant," on the Institute's website.<sup>60</sup> According to annotations on various draft forms of *No Country*, Ulibarri was responsible for the "1<sup>st</sup> Proofreading" of the drafts of McCarthy's work, and there

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<sup>55</sup> Alison Flood, "Cormac McCarthy's Parallel Career Revealed – as a Scientific Copy-Editor!," *The Guardian* 21 February, 2012, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/feb/21/cormac-mccarthy-scientific-copy-editor>. Accessed 21/05/2012

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> "Della Vigil," <http://tuvalu.santafe.edu/~della/>. Accessed 21/05/2012.

is an invoice among McCarthy's papers for the "9.5 hours" Ulibarri spent "*No Country for Old Men* text editing."<sup>61</sup> It appears from archival evidence that Ulibarri was responsible for typing up the various drafts of McCarthy's novel, correcting obvious misspellings and typographical errors, and digitising the typewritten drafts McCarthy generated on his famous Olivetti. While it may seem that this was a minor role, the issues associated with the partnership between McCarthy and Bertha Krantz, his old proof-reader and copy-editor at Random House mentioned in chapter three, point to the intricate and complex nature of copy-editing McCarthy's unconventionally punctuated work.

Cut at this stage was a section of *No Country* McCarthy extracted from the main body of the draft and titled "Prison." This short section is an alternative ending to the story in which Chigurh is captured by another Sheriff's department and imprisoned awaiting trial. This section would eventually be reworked into the section toward the close of the novel in which Bell discusses God and Mammon with a county prosecutor conducting the county's case against a Mexican drug runner. The original draft begins with a similar discussion between Bell and a lawyer who is in this draft charged with defending Chigurh. Bell and the lawyer talk about the prison chaplain visiting Chigurh, who apparently "ignored him [...] like he was a piece of furniture."<sup>62</sup> The chaplain, according to Bell, was scared of Chigurh, or as the sheriff puts it, meeting with Chigurh "was not a pleasant experience" for the priest.<sup>63</sup> The two then move on to compare defending Chigurh to defending Hitler, a point to which the lawyer replies that "I think a lawyer would have a hell of a job on his hands defending Adolph Hitler. But if he was being tried in an American court somebody has to defend him. And they've got to do the best job they can," asserting Chigurh's right to due process, moral compunctions aside.<sup>64</sup> However, before the trial can begin Chigurh is found "dead from causes unknown" in his cell.<sup>65</sup> Chigurh's death infuriates Bell, who asks a deputy "what am I supposed to tell people," complaining that Chigurh's crime was "a capital murder and a state execution" was the only

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<sup>61</sup>Invoice, Box 80. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>62</sup> McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men* Draft.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

acceptable end to the situation.<sup>66</sup> Bell does seem resigned to an unsatisfying result to his pursuit of Chigurh, though, saying at the end of his speech that he “knew that son of a bitch would pull something like this before it was over.”<sup>67</sup> The whole section is covered with notes in both McCarthy’s hand and in others, presumably Fisketjon’s and possibly Ulibarri’s. The reasons for cutting this section are unclear, and the sections about God and Mammon are marked with notes saying “re-written” and “Use this.”<sup>68</sup> There is no detail of how Chigurh had been captured, or when, although presumably this would have been after his murder of Carla Jean.

McCarthy’s original ending still cheats the authorities of their final triumph in a way which makes the allusion to Nazi war criminals even more pertinent when one thinks of Göring’s suicide at Nuremberg. However, the original ending does allow the authorities to capture Chigurh. Unlike in the final published version of the text, Chigurh is not allowed to walk away into the sunset at the conclusion, inverting, as several critics have pointed out, the expectations of the Western genre. In this ending, Chigurh is captured, taken out of circulation by the authorities and only escaping the will of the system by “up and dying” as Bell puts it in the draft ending.<sup>69</sup> The draft ending does not subvert the expectations of the Western genre quite so explicitly. Chigurh is not allowed to walk away from the conflict with Bell upright, claiming the rightful ending of the hero of the Western. In this ending, Chigurh has to die. Moreover, what Chigurh resists here is not the controlling influence of the state apparatus, but the right of the state to kill its subjects. McCarthy’s rejection of this ending undermines some orthodoxy within critical understanding of McCarthy, especially those attempts to cast McCarthy as a conservative writer. Had McCarthy allowed Chigurh to be captured but escape execution, it would appear that the outrage caused by Chigurh’s resistance to authority comes not from his inability to be controlled by the authorities – which would remain unchallenged – but from his resistance to being executed by the authorities, a far less radical position.

McCarthy’s involvement with other researchers at the Santa Fe Institute was, perhaps surprisingly given the array of specialised knowledge available at the Institute, accompanied

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

by the return of Dr Barry King, the specialist medical advisor who had worked with McCarthy during the writing of the Border Trilogy. The section of *No Country* Dr King returned to help McCarthy with had already caused problems for the writer and his editor. In the earliest drafts of Chigurh's gunfight with the Mexicans in Eagle Pass the character had "squatted" quite a lot during the short sequence despite having been shot in the leg by Moss, mostly to recover arms and ammunition from dead adversaries.<sup>70</sup> Fisketjon had picked up on this problem, writing in the margin that the action was "bound to hurt him with a bad leg," and asking if perhaps "Kneeling" would be "better."<sup>71</sup> Fisketjon's was probably not an ideal solution, given the pain this would probably still cause a man with a serious leg injury. These actions are removed altogether in the final version of the text, replaced with Chigurh watching the last of the gunmen die without bending down.

Despite the removal of these details, Fisketjon's comments seem to have alerted McCarthy to other possible problems in his depiction of Chigurh's injury and its treatment. Dr King wrote to McCarthy at the author's request to advise him on the treatment of Chigurh's gunshot wound. In a long letter the doctor outlined his concerns with several aspects of the sequence dealing with Chigurh's trip to the pharmacy and subsequent treatment of his leg wound. The section McCarthy asked for King's help with runs from page 161-166 in the published version of *No Country*. Dr King seems to have learnt from his previous dealings with McCarthy and goes through the sequence methodically. It was at King's suggestion that McCarthy changed the dressing on Chigurh's leg from a "sash cord as a tourniquet" to a larger dressing made of "a bunched up towel, placed over the entry and exit wounds," with a sash cord to hold the whole arrangement in place.<sup>72</sup> This suggestion appears almost verbatim in the published text as a towel "soaked through with blood" is depicted tied around Chigurh's leg as he pulls up to the veterinary supply store.<sup>73</sup> The next suggestion King makes is that "[a]fter sitting for a while in a truck with a gunshot wound to the leg, the act of getting it moving again to get out of the truck would likely be a very painful effort."<sup>74</sup> As a result, Dr King

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Barry King, letter to McCarthy, nd. Box 80, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>73</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 161.

<sup>74</sup>King, letter to McCarthy, nd.

recommended that Chigurh should “lock his fingers around his thigh and swing it around so that he would be sitting squarely at the open truck door.”<sup>75</sup> This detail appears later in McCarthy’s scene, when Chigurh arrives at the pharmacy and “eased himself down, lifting his injured leg out with both hands under his knee.”<sup>76</sup>

It appears that Dr King has had extensive experience of leg injuries. The doctor explains the way his medical practice used to “teach our patients” with mobility difficulties resulting from leg injuries to get into and out of vehicles using the “over-the-door grab handle” to lower themselves out of cars and trucks.<sup>77</sup> This detail is reproduced by McCarthy in the way Chigurh is described as having “eased himself down” out of his truck, carefully testing his injured limb as he went.<sup>78</sup> This is a detail completely absent from McCarthy’s first draft. McCarthy was very willing to listen to King’s expert advice, clearly valuing him as a collaborator, especially when dealing with the drugs Chigurh would have taken from the pharmacy. McCarthy originally intended Chigurh to take a complex cocktail of “tetracycline or sulfa” drugs, information clearly lifted from some medical textbook or other.<sup>79</sup> King advised replacing these with the simpler and more recognisable “penicillin,” which the doctor recommended on the basis of doubts that an injured man, even one as determined and knowledgeable as Chigurh would “have the mental acuity or mental foresight” to find those specific drugs “amongst thousands of medicines stacked on shelf after shelf” in the drug store.<sup>80</sup> King’s advice here is very reminiscent of that which he gave to McCarthy during the writing of *The Crossing*, replacing “technically correct” medicine lifted from source texts with more practical solutions familiar to practising physicians. It becomes clear, as with the treatment of Boyd’s wounds in *Cities of the Plain* that McCarthy’s and King’s voices blend here. McCarthy uses the actions and addressing the points that King raises, integrating them into his story, making the scene very clearly a composite effort between the two men.

Most significant, however, is Dr King’s input into the precise nature of Chigurh’s injury, again demonstrating that he was prepared to make artistic contributions to McCarthy’s

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 162.

<sup>77</sup>King, letter to McCarthy, nd.

<sup>78</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 162.

<sup>79</sup>King, letter to McCarthy, nd.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

work as well as giving general medical advice. Early in his letter King recommends that “it would probably be better for the scene if his left thigh sustained the wound” as it would still leave Chigurh able to “drive an automatic transmission,” working the pedals with his good leg.<sup>81</sup> It is unclear if this advice is followed in McCarthy’s novel, as the leg which sustains the injury is ambiguous. On the other hand, Dr King’s advice is clearly followed in the Coen brothers’ film adaptation, where Chigurh is shown treating his left leg.<sup>82</sup> Whichever leg the wound was inflicted upon, Dr King was keen to iron out the details of the injury. The first suggestion King made was to have Chigurh “shot with a low velocity bullet to the mid-lateral thigh,” rather than the “shotgun wound” McCarthy had originally planned.<sup>83</sup> The reason for this, King claimed, was that “shotgun wounds are too messy unless delivered from close range [...which] would cause a major, most likely incapacitating injury.”<sup>84</sup> McCarthy seems to have ignored this advice, however, and in the published version of the scene Moss shoots at Chigurh with “the shotgun” he had bought from the outdoor shop while staying in the motel, although at a great enough range to avoid King’s “most likely incapacitating injury.”<sup>85</sup>

One insight from his medical collaborator that McCarthy does seem to have been willing to accept is the nature of the wound the shot inflicted on Chigurh. McCarthy had apparently originally intended for Chigurh’s wound to be far more severe. In his letter King advises the writer to “stay away from bone chips” in Chigurh’s wound because, as the doctor puts it, “[h]aving “a little fracture” of the femur is like being a little bit pregnant.”<sup>86</sup> The problem, King says, with getting bone damage involved is that “fracturing the femur” would likely result in damage to “major vascular or necessary nerve structures,” which would be “life and limb threatening” and likely incapacitating, justifying his suggested changes to McCarthy.<sup>87</sup> The force of his collaborator’s argument won over McCarthy, and all mentions of bone damage have been removed from the description of Chigurh’s injury, which is limited to being a deep, but non-life-threatening flesh wound, “leaking a pale blood dilute with serum”

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen (2007; Burbank, CA: Miramax Pictures, 2008), DVD.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 114.

<sup>86</sup> King, letter to McCarthy, nd.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

but mercifully free of bone fragments.<sup>88</sup> The treatment of Chigurh's injury and the effect that it has on the character is described in accordance with Dr King's insights, especially the fact that Chigurh would have been "very thirsty from dehydration and blood loss."<sup>89</sup> Dr King's suggestion appears in McCarthy's sequence when Chigurh pauses in his treatment of his leg wound, and goes to the sink in his motel room, fills "the plastic tumbler on the sink with water and drank it [...] he filled and drank twice more," clearly demonstrating the effects of the loss of fluid resulting from his injury.<sup>90</sup> Dr King even includes pages photocopied from a medical text book showing the muscular and vascular structure of the leg, along with a suggested location for the bullet wound, a suggestion which matches up very well with both McCarthy's description of the wound and the Coen brothers' depiction of it. Just as significant as the insights offered by this collaboration is the evidence of how close the collaborative relationship seems to have become. Dr King concludes his letter by saying that he would "love to walk [McCarthy] around our office some Saturday" if he would like more information and to see for himself the kind of material Chigurh would be taking from the pharmacy.<sup>91</sup>

Just as with Boyd's injury in *The Crossing*, his collaboration with Dr King allowed McCarthy to deal confidently and accurately with an area of the text about which he had little specialist knowledge. That McCarthy sought out Dr King in the first place to deal with Boyd's injury shows McCarthy's interest in calling upon specialist collaborators, drawing them into his creative process. That McCarthy returned to his expert collaborator when writing *No Country* shows his respect for medical and scientific accuracy, something which sits well with the character of a man who enjoys the company of scientists at the Santa Fe Institute. It also demonstrates the value McCarthy sets by his expert collaborators, returning to the same sympathetic individuals time and again. Authorship for McCarthy may be collaborative, composed of the input of several different people with different backgrounds and viewpoints, but it seems that the author is keen to keep his gestalt identity consistent, to keep the sources of the tissue of quotation he weaves together the same for each creative project.

Another level of authorship, and indeed auteurship, in the form in which many people

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<sup>88</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 164.

<sup>89</sup>King, letter to McCarthy, nd.

<sup>90</sup>McCarthy, *No Country For Old Men*, 164.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

will have experienced *No Country* is the input to the story from Joel and Ethan Coen during their adaptation of the novel into award-winning film. Despite Ethan Coen's protestations to the contrary, there is considerable divergence between McCarthy's novel and the Coen brothers' film. Most of the changes the Coens made involve increasing the pace of the narrative still further. Bell's monologues have been compressed into a single opening voice over, some days are removed from Chigurh's pursuit of Moss and the pair's convalescences in the Mexican hospital and Motel room respectively after the Eagle Pass shoot out undergo considerable acceleration. Another detail removed or rather truncated in the film adaptation are Moss's dealings with the female hitch-hiker. In McCarthy's novel Moss is accompanied by this girl for several days, taking her to several diners as he makes his way toward the motel where the Mexicans will finally catch up with him.<sup>92</sup> In the film version of *No Country* Moss meets this girl at the motel, and it is later that day the Mexicans arrive and kill him.<sup>93</sup> The most obvious example of time compression comes at the conclusion of Moss's part of the story. In McCarthy's novel, Bell is called by another Sheriff's office to come and identify Moss's body, *No Country's* protagonist having been killed many hours before Bell's arrival.<sup>94</sup> By contrast, the Coen brothers have Carla Jean reveal Moss' location to Sheriff Bell, who arrives in time to hear the shooting which kills Moss, and in time to see the Mexican gunmen responsible driving away from the scene.<sup>95</sup>

Some details from the Coens' film are additions to McCarthy's original narrative: the Mariachi band who sing to Moss when he wakes up in Mexico were added by the filmmakers, as is the elderly owner of the Desert Palm motel who quibbles with Moss over the rent of the various rooms he rents in her motel in an attempt to rescue his money through the use of an air vent.<sup>96</sup> These characters supply some comic relief to the film, needed more in a two-hour film than the longer form of a novel, as well as being a recognisable incarnation of the Coen brothers' signature black humour. The introduction of these more comic elements by the Coens is a move recognisable from theories of auteur-ship as the film-makers putting their own recognisable stamp of authorship on the text of the film. The life of the film may appear to be

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<sup>92</sup> McCarthy, *No Country*, 219ff.

<sup>93</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen.

<sup>94</sup> McCarthy, *No Country*, 236ff.

<sup>95</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, directed by Joel and Ethan Coen.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

distinct and unrelated from the life of the text of the novel *No Country*, produced as it was by other authors and in another medium. However, unusually in the author's career, McCarthy has been involved with promoting the film, appearing with the Coen brothers in a "conversation" about the film in *Time Magazine* dating from October 2007, about a month before the film's release.<sup>97</sup> The writer is also known to have been on set during the making of the film, demonstrating still further his investment in the film version of his novel.<sup>98</sup> This investment and close involvement with the film-making process and promotion of the film shows McCarthy's approval of the Coens' adaptation, the author's voice endorsing the auteurs'.

Given McCarthy's close, at least for one known to shun the limelight, involvement with the promotion of the Coens' film, it is perhaps surprising that *The Road*, McCarthy's next, and so far last, novel would appear only a year after the publication of *No Country For Old Men*. This is especially true given the long gap between the publication of that novel and *Cities of the Plain*. However, the reason behind such rapid publication gives insight not only into McCarthy's working practices, but also the constitution of the collaborative relationship which exists between the author and his editor. There have, of course, been other silences in McCarthy's lengthy literary career; six years between the publication of *Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*, for example, and almost seven between that novel and *All the Pretty Horses*, the first of the Border Trilogy. These gaps stand in contrast to other periods of comparatively rapid output. There are, for instance, only eight years between the publication of McCarthy's first novel, *The Orchard Keeper* in 1965 and the appearance of *Child of God*, his third, in 1973. The 1990s were equally productive for McCarthy, as *Cities of the Plain* appeared within six years of the publication of *All the Pretty Horses*.

Such an uneven spread of work may seem inexplicable for a writer who has always seemed to be actively writing. However, the writing practices revealed by archival and other evidence do offer an explanation for this uneven spread of his novels. McCarthy's authorial methods are hinted at by Woodward's claim that *No Country* was "one of four or five McCarthy novels that exist in various drafts, [and] was simply the first that he was ready to

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<sup>97</sup>Eric Ogden, "A Conversation Between Author Cormac McCarthy and the Coen Brothers About the New Movie No Country For Old Men," *Time*, 18 October, 2007, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1673269,00.html>.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

part with.”<sup>99</sup> The selection process, Woodward writes, was not complex or undertaken with any notions of marketability or publishing timetables taken into account. Woodward re-enforces his point with an anecdote from McCarthy’s editor, “‘He asked me, ‘Which one do you want first?’ says Gary Fisketjon [...] I said, ‘Whichever you want us to publish first.’ It would be foolish to express a preference’.”<sup>100</sup> More significant than charting McCarthy’s rise in influence over his own work are the insights knowledge of McCarthy’s writing practices lend to an understanding of McCarthy’s work and authorship as a whole. David Cremean argues that the repetition of Blevins’ line about the “gittin place” which caused Fisketjon such concern is a way to tether *No Country* “to the rest of McCarthy’s writing.”<sup>101</sup> Cremean uses this repetition as evidence that McCarthy subscribes to what he calls a “one book idea.”<sup>102</sup> Cremean argues that McCarthy’s work forms one coherent vision dealing with one consistent set of concerns, echoing Annie Proulx’s point about McCarthy’s exploration of American rage from her *Guardian* review. Woodward’s claim that McCarthy works on “four or five” books at the same time adds strength to this claim, as McCarthy clearly conceives of several novels at once, rather than considering each as an individual project. The precise group of collaborators involved in each book also forges important and meaningful links across not only individual books, but also groups of books.

The first such group would be made up of McCarthy’s “Appalachian” period; *The Orchard Keeper*, published in 1965, *Outer Dark*, published 1968, *Child of God*, which appeared in 1973, and *Suttree*, the final “instalment,” finally emerging in 1979. After *Suttree* was published, it would be more than six years before *Blood Meridian* would appear. The links between these novels are clear. They are all set in and around the Knoxville where McCarthy spent much of his youth. Most significantly, this period marked the height of Erskine’s influence over McCarthy’s creative process, making the Random House network of collaborators the most significant collaborators in these projects. It is therefore less surprising that draft material from *Suttree* seems to appear in *The Orchard Keeper* and other novels from

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<sup>99</sup> Woodward, “Cormac Country.”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> David Cremean, “For Whom the Bell Tolls: Conservatism and Change in Cormac McCarthy’s Sheriff” in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal Special Issue: No Country For Old Men* Vol 5 (2005): 26.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

this early period. In these early novels, published by Random House and edited by Albert Erskine, we find a consistent network of collaborators producing material closely compatible with other work produced by the same group. *Blood Meridian* is logically the first of the second period of McCarthy's work. This new set of novels also includes the Border Trilogy, and is linked with McCarthy's physical and novelistic move to the Southwest borderlands of Texas and New Mexico. The decision to move his novels' setting from the mountains and cities of Appalachia to the Southwestern deserts meant that McCarthy undertook a good deal of research for his new novels. The researching process and the role played by various collaborators have been outlined elsewhere, but heralded an influx of new collaborators comprising the various authors of McCarthy's source texts, translators, and a series of medical experts including Dr King. The research McCarthy undertook for *Blood Meridian* also equipped him for the writing of the Border Trilogy, which continues the story of the myths of the Southwest.

The next long break in McCarthy's output was between *Cities of the Plain* and *No Country For Old Men*. As with the break between *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses* this break can partially be explained by McCarthy's attempts to sell *No Country* as a screenplay. What is remarkable, however, is that McCarthy's next novel, the much-lauded *The Road* was published the following year. If, as McCarthy claims, *No Country* was adapted from a screenplay in a process which "didn't take long," it is reasonable to assume that *No Country* was written up using the material remaining from McCarthy's Southwestern research. Only *The Road* required new research and new collaborators, a process which will be investigated in the next chapter of this thesis. What an examination of McCarthy's papers allows is an exploration of the way the novelist went about researching and writing his books, effectively re-dating the writing of *No Country* by several years, linking it far more closely to the Southwestern literature of McCarthy's 1990s output, and reaffirming the importance of the writer's collaborators in the work he produces.

The example of the Coen brothers' influence over their films is a useful way of thinking about McCarthy's authorship during the various incarnations of *No Country For Old Men*. The concept of authorship has been a long standing area of debate within film studies. The debate is complex but in summing up the objective of such a discussion, David Gerstner

writes that “[i]dentifying the singular and great author of the text” is part of “[t]he long-standing tradition of the sole artist as creative force,” which “can be traced from the arts’ relationship to the sacral through our own contemporary period of late capitalism.”<sup>103</sup> That is to say, the author may be under pressure in the modern world, but his independent influence over his work indisputably survives. V.F. Perkins, in a phrase which echoes the findings around McCarthy’s work, asserts that the “fact [is] that the movie production is a collaborative enterprise.”<sup>104</sup> Perkins is atypically cynical about the influence of the author, however, claiming that: “The director may be little more than an advisor or a catalyst [...h]is other most vital role is that of co-ordination.”<sup>105</sup> Colin McCabe, on the other hand, claims that in his experience: “The most general concern of the cast and crew, not to mention the producer, is that the director knows what film he is making, that there be an author on set.”<sup>106</sup> What exactly McCabe means by “an author on set” is never made completely explicit.

Janet Staiger is more forthcoming. For her, an author or authorial figure is “A performative statement [...] a directorial (or other) choice,” which only functions “because it is a citation of authoring by an individual having the authority to make authoring statements.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, the auteur-author is one who manages the collaboration of others by making decisions recognisable both as their own and as those of an author. As a result film studies scholars would still identify *No Country For Old Men* as a “Coen brothers film” despite the fact that the film was made in collaboration with the huge range of other people who were involved in the production of the film itself including actors, set designers, make-up artists and costumers, the film’s own medical advisory team and many others. I argue that an examination of the researching, consulting and editing processes which go into the production of one of McCarthy’s texts invite a similar kind of understanding of the role of the modern author who finds the production of his texts similarly compartmentalised between several cultural producers of varying specialisms and areas of expertise. In McCarthy case, we still identify *No*

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<sup>103</sup>David A Gerstner “The Practices of Authorship” in *Authorship and Film* eds David a Gerstner and Janet Staiger London, Routledge, 2003. 4

<sup>104</sup>V.F. Perkins “Direction and Authorship” in *Auteurs and Authorship A Film Reader* ed Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 70.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid, 72.

<sup>106</sup>Colin McCabe, “The Revenge of the Author” in *Film and Authorship* ed Virginia Wright Wexman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 30

<sup>107</sup>Janet Staiger, “Authorship Approaches” in *Auteurs and Authorship A Film Reader* ed Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 51.

*County* as McCarthy's book despite the fact that the story was written in collaboration with Gary Fisketjon, Della Ulibarri, Amanda Urban and Barry King. Like a film director, McCarthy was obliged to bring together these influences through the use of recognisable authorial moves and statements. McCarthy made authorial choices based on the input of agents, editors, medical professionals, historical research, and personal experience. An examination of McCarthy's life, writing process and collaborators thus becomes crucial to an understanding not only of how his novels came to be, but the very constitution of his works of fiction.

## Chapter 7 - Boats and Brothers: The Road

I have argued across this thesis that authorship should be understood as a collaborative enterprise, which draws on both personal collaborations with people and intertextual links with pre-existing documents and texts. In this model of authorship the central author figure collects together the voices of these collaborators and combines them in a way which is both recognisably their own and recognisable as an authorial action, resulting in a composite authorial voice. In McCarthy's case these collaborations have meant that the author has engaged in a sewing together of several different sources of specialist knowledge to inform his depiction of material relating to both medical and historical matters, as well as drawing on the life stories and recollections of his friends and personal acquaintances. In addition to this, McCarthy has taken on board the more practical suggestions and alterations of his editors and negotiated with typesetters and proof-readers.

In this final chapter I will argue that the process by which *The Road* was written, re-written and published was a similarly collaborative undertaking. In addition to drawing out intertextual sources, whose influence can be more clearly seen through an investigation of McCarthy's drafts and papers, in this chapter I will examine the collaborative network which produced *The Road*. During the writing of *The Road*, McCarthy drew on medical knowledge from established medical collaborators, nautical knowledge gleaned from his editor's network of contacts, and scientific theories of the end of human society garnered from colleagues at the Santa Fe Institute. *The Road* emerges from this examination as a collaborative effort between McCarthy, his editor, his agent and a series of other contributors, including proof-readers and copy-editors. The roles that each of these collaborators played will be explored, pointing out the usefulness, even the necessity of conceiving of McCarthy's authorial voice as one emanating from a collaborative network with a single authority at its centre rather than from that central authority alone.

Published in 2006 only a year after *No Country For Old Men* appeared, *The Road* was McCarthy's tenth novel to be published, and the fifth to be issued through Random House's Knopf imprint. *The Road* is unique amongst McCarthy's fiction in that it deals with a future,

rather than past setting. The stylistic departures which mark *The Road*'s spare, minimalistic style will be returned to later in this chapter, as will the significance of McCarthy casting a father, rather than a son as his protagonist. Furthermore, the draft material on *The Road* introduces Dan Frank, McCarthy's new editor at Knopf, adding a new collaborator to the production of McCarthy's work. *The Road* has also been McCarthy's most commercially successful work to date. Although McCarthy's early work received critical plaudits and book awards, *The Road* was included in Oprah Winfrey's book club and earned McCarthy further recognition and revenue when it was turned by John Hillcoat into a feature film. McCarthy's personal involvement with Hillcoat's film will also be drawn out later in this chapter. The author worked as an editor of a kind on the film, further expanding the role he had previously played in the network of collaboration around his novels.

The significance of the selection of *The Road* to Oprah's book club should not be underestimated. Craig Garthwaite, amongst others, has looked at the effect that an endorsement by Oprah can have on a novel's sales. Conducting an extensive analysis which compared book sales in the months before and after a selection by Oprah, Garthwaite found that in "the first week following the selection announcement [...] sales increased by approximately 4,700 percent" for a book club book.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, "This effect was long-lasting. Over the entire 12 weeks following the announcement, there was an average weekly increase of approximately 3,400 percent" compared to before the books was selected.<sup>2</sup> The effect on sales of *The Road* is hard to quantify without access to Garthwaite's original numbers, but based on Garthwaite's conclusions it is safe to assume that Oprah's endorsement of *The Road* caused a marked sales bump for the book. The increased sales and visibility of *The Road* are reasons enough to acknowledge Winfrey's role in the public reception of *The Road*. However, the additional fact that McCarthy was obliged to grant a televised interview with the talk-show host is just as significant. In this rather awkward interview McCarthy was asked why he avoids publicity, to which he replied that "I don't think it's good for your head. If you spend a lot of time thinking about how to write a book you probably shouldn't be talking

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<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Garthwaite, "Demand Spillovers, Combative Marketing and Celebrity Endorsements," 14. Available at [http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/garthwaite/htm/Celebrity\\_Product\\_Endorsements\\_Garthwaite.PDF](http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/garthwaite/htm/Celebrity_Product_Endorsements_Garthwaite.PDF), Accessed 31/10/2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

about it. You should be doing it.”<sup>3</sup> Winfrey also gently pressed McCarthy on his writing and the genesis of *The Road* in particular. In response McCarthy told the story of a trip he and his son John took to El Paso a few years before *The Road* was published:

[W]e checked into the old hotel there and one night John was asleep. It was night, and it was probably about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and I went over and I just stood and I looked out the window at this town, it was just nothing moving but the trains going through and that very lonesome sound and I just had this image of what this town might look like in fifty or a hundred years. I just had this image of these fires up on the hill and everything being laid waste and I thought a lot about my little boy and so I wrote these pages and that was the end of it and then about four years later I was in Ireland and I woke up one morning and I realised that it wasn't two pages in a notebook, it was a book and it was about that man and that little boy.<sup>4</sup>

McCarthy's story of the origin of *The Road* does seem like a fiction designed to appeal to Winfrey's viewers, but there is a kernel of truth to it. McCarthy's earlier works often featured dedications, often to his agent or to the Santa Fe institute, but *The Road* is dedicated to McCarthy's son John. The emphasis placed in the novel on the interactions between father and son as the father attempts to both ensure the survival of his son and to complete his moral education in a world full of cannibals and other dangers also suggests that *The Road* is indeed a novel of and about fatherhood, a topic which McCarthy had not dealt with in previous works.

Donovan Gwinner picks up on the theme of the man's attempts to ethically educate his son in one of the earliest full-length essay collections on *The Road*. Gwinner characterises *The Road's* “family ethical code” as one which “stresses honesty, fairness, constancy [...and] most crucial to their ethics [...] a staunch rejection of cannibalism.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to dealing with the ethics of McCarthy's characters, Gwinner goes on to deal with the origin of these ethics, the *kind* of goodness encountered in *The Road*. Gwinner argues that the father approaches life on the road from a purely pragmatic viewpoint, because “from the father's perspective, that which is good depends only on the *actual* survival of his son.”<sup>6</sup> Gwinner argues that it is this pragmatic goodness which shapes the pair's survivalism, their *actual* survival depending upon “reading’ the signs that still signify the wasteland [...] an intensified version of interpreting the

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<sup>3</sup> Oprah Winfrey, “Interview with Cormac McCarthy,” Full interview available at <http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Oprahs-Exclusive-Interview-with-Cormac-McCarthy-Video>. Accessed 10/03/2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Donovan Gwinner, “‘Everything uncoupled from its shoring’: Quandaries of Epistemology and Ethics in *The Road*,” in in *Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Sara L Spurgeon (London: Continuum, 2011), 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 138.

text of the world evident in his other works [...as the demonstrated ability to] 'cut for sign'.<sup>7</sup> It is this approach, Gwinner argues, which allows the father, upon the pair's miraculous discovery of a hatch leading to a fallout shelter full of food, to make "this case: the guys with the goods were good guys: good guys share with good guys; wonder to relate, good guys discover the 'tiny paradise' into which the founding good guys could not descend: QED: - rejoice and enjoy."<sup>8</sup> Gwinner's case does draw some additional strength from McCarthy himself. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* conducted in 2009 McCarthy states that "[t]here's not a lot of good guys in *Blood Meridian*, whereas good guys is what *The Road* is about. That's the subject at hand."<sup>9</sup>

What Gwinner does not deal with, at least at the same length, is McCarthy's depiction of the contrasting kind of goodness exhibited by the boy, which McCarthy himself explains in the same interview as being directly inspired by his own son:

I don't think goodness is something that you learn. If you're left adrift in the world to learn goodness from it, you would be in trouble. But people tell me from time to time that my son John is just a wonderful kid. I tell people that he is so morally superior to me that I feel foolish correcting him about things.<sup>10</sup>

McCarthy's description of his son John McCarthy as being inherently ethically and morally superior to his father is something instantly familiar from McCarthy's depiction of the relationship between father and son in *The Road*. The goodness of the child is an inherent, in-born goodness, not all learned from his father and their experiences on the road or any other outside sources. By contrast, the father's goodness is pragmatic, learned, compromised; completely different from his son's. McCarthy's depiction of the father's learned goodness is exemplified by Gwinner's list of "several passages [that] reflect medical training."<sup>11</sup> Gwinner's list includes moments in which McCarthy's protagonist "uses such specialised anatomical terms as 'colliculus and temporal gyrus' [...] he performs minor surgery on himself [...] and he recalls that antibiotics 'have a short shelf life'."<sup>12</sup> The father has had to learn these words, these

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>9</sup> John Jurgenson., "Hollywood's favourite Cowboy," in the *Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704576204574529703577274572.html>, accessed 24/7/11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Gwinner, "Everything Uncoupled From its Shoring," 140.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

skills. It is only as a result of these lessons that the father is able to do good; to ensure his own and his son's survival.

For Lydia Cooper, what the differing kinds of goodness depicted in *The Road* invite is a comparison with another kind of goodness, that exhibited by the questing knight of Arthurian legend. This comparison reveals another source of intertextual influence, another layer to McCarthy's web of quotation. As Cooper first revealed in her examination of the draft materials on *The Road*, McCarthy's tenth novel was originally begun under the title *The Grail*. Lydia Cooper has written extensively about many of the Arthurian allusions in McCarthy's novel. In her examination, which takes as its primary focus the role of the boy and his goodness, Cooper asserts that "the boy is the symbolic grail of the early draft's title [...] narrative patterns suggest that he is a Perceval figure as well."<sup>13</sup> The parallels Cooper examines are convincing. Both Perceval and McCarthy's boy exhibit the same kind of unlearned, natural goodness. The similarities between the "ruined kingdom" of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* and the world of *The Road*, described in one early draft as "The green world that once had been compounded to a fine grey sillage dilute with ash which the secular winds carried forth" are just as compelling.<sup>14</sup> Further, as Cooper points out: "While the boy is described in terms evocative of the grail, as a 'house' for divine light, the father underscores the connection, describing the boy as a grail and a house simultaneously. He calls the boy a '[g]olden chalice, good to house a god'."<sup>15</sup> For Cooper the boy's role is that of a character who both quests toward and carries within them the hope for a regenerated world. This hope is symbolised in his father's lessons on morality and goodness embodied as the "fire" the pair carry.<sup>16</sup> Cooper explains this imagined fire as pointing "to the Celtic symbolism [...] of the 'transplanted hearth fires' of Celtic culture, in which grown children would carry fire from their parents' hearth with them when they founded their own homes."<sup>17</sup> In Cooper's reading McCarthy is shown to be drawing on the Celtic origins of a myth of the transmission of culture. This evocation of older mythology befits a writer interested in Arthurian mythology,

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<sup>13</sup> Lydia Cooper, "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative," in *Studies in the Novel* Vol 48, No 2 (Summer 2011): 223.

<sup>14</sup> Cormac McCarthy, "The Grail," Box 87, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>15</sup> Cooper, "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative," 224.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the boy's initial meeting with the veteran: McCarthy, *The Road*, 306ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

which is itself based in part upon older Celtic stories. This repetition or reinvention of Celtic to Arthurian myth is itself a kind of cultural transmission.

Where I believe Cooper's argument could be developed, however, is in her examination of the father's role. Cooper asserts that "[i]f the boy is both grail and grail-bearer, vessel and antidote to the world's toxicity, then the father must play the role of the elder Fisher King, wounded and infected by that which is destroying the land."<sup>18</sup> Cooper's point does fit certain elements of the father's character; he is closely linked with water, just as the Arthurian Fisher King is most often encountered fishing from a small boat on a lake, and the father remembers happier days uprooting a stump near a lake with his uncle. Most obviously, he is gravely afflicted with condition which is slowly killing him, paralleling the condition of the wounded king of the grail legend.<sup>19</sup>

Gwinner's impression of hinted-at medical training is crucial to understanding the nature of the father's goodness, and is reinforced by archival sources. On one draft page, ultimately cut from *The Road*, the man reflects that: "He knew that there were doctors and other men of skill who would not come forward in that world. Doctors who would pass the dying in a ditch and move on."<sup>20</sup> How the man knows this is never made explicit, but the theme is returned to later in this same draft, in another cut sequence in which the man remembers: "Thousands jammed together at the hospital doors. People sitting on the walkways smoking like failed sectarian suicides. The doors giving way and carrying on their jambs into the hallways where the dying fought the snarled and moiled."<sup>21</sup> These passages, taken in concert with the skills the man demonstrates during the narrative of *The Road*, strongly hint at the fact that before the unseen event which triggers the collapse of society, the man worked if not as a doctor then certainly as someone with medical training. The influence of medical collaborators is strongly felt in McCarthy's depiction of the man's skills. Thanks to the intervention of advisers like Dr King, McCarthy is here able with just a few references to hint at the store of specialist knowledge the father might possess. The question is why, apart from the narrative convenience of having a protagonist able to provide his own healthcare,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007), 12.

<sup>20</sup> McCarthy, "The Grail."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

McCarthy chose to gift his character with these abilities. The specialist healing abilities displayed by *The Road's* protagonist were reserved in *The Crossing* and *No Country For Old Men* for either medical practitioners or sinisterly unstoppable antagonists. What McCarthy's characterisation of *The Road's* central character as one skilled in medical matters invites is a comparison with Sir Gawain, another character featured in both Celtic and Arthurian literature.

In her analysis of Grail mythology Jessie L. Weston points out "the curious and persistent attribution of healing skill to so apparently unsuitable a personage as Sir Gawain."<sup>22</sup> Weston goes on to cite several instances of this attribution, including "a passage in the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, where Gawain, finding a wounded knight by the roadside, proceeds to treat him," in which we are told that "[o]f wounds and healing lore // Did Sir Gawain know more // Than any man alive," as a result of which knowledge, Gawain is able to offer the knight "A herb to cure all pain."<sup>23</sup> According to Weston, all versions of Gawain, whether found in "the poem entitled *Lancelot et le cerf au pied blanc*," "The Dutch *Lancelot*," or "the Welsh *Triads*" are possessed of this deep knowledge of healing, indicating that Gawain's role as healer is key to the make-up of the character.<sup>24</sup>

The similarities between the legendary Gawain and McCarthy's nameless protagonist are further reinforced by Weston's earlier book, a close examination of the Gawain myth in its entirety, in which she remarks that "the most striking characteristics of Gawain, and one which may undoubtedly be referred to in the original conception of his character, [...] that of the waxing and waning of his strength as the day advances or declines."<sup>25</sup> Weston takes as one of her earliest sources for this unusual characteristic a passage from Malory's *Death of King Arthur*:

*but Sir Gawayne fro it passed 9 of the clock waxed ever stronger and stronger // for thenne hit cam to the hour of noone and thryes his myghte was encreased // And thenne whan it drewe toward evensong Syre Gawayne's strengthe febled and waxt passing faint unnethe he myght dure ony lenger.*<sup>26</sup>

Weston argues that this waning of Gawain's strength as the sun sets is clear evidence "that this Celtic hero was at one time a solar divinity," his very essence linked to the sun, a point which

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<sup>22</sup> Jessie L. Weston, *Ritual to Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 106.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Jessie L. Weston, *The Legend of Sir Gawain* (London: David Nutt, 1897), 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Italics in original.

links back to Cooper's point about the Celtic origin of the "fire" carried by McCarthy's characters.<sup>27</sup> Not only does Weston's point key in well with some details of McCarthy's depiction of the father in *The Road*, it also illustrates the importance of intertextuality within McCarthy's medieval source texts. Just as McCarthy was eager to incorporate existing historical records and established mythology into his authorial voice, so the authors of the grail legends were keen to seek out their own source texts and incorporate their voices into their own.

A Sun God is even mentioned in one of McCarthy's *Grail* drafts, as the father tells an early version of Ely – the old man struck by lightning whom the pair met during their travels – that he thinks the boy "believes in a God of the sun. On days when there is that faint shadow at noon of trees across the road then I think he believes in God."<sup>28</sup> By contrast, all references to the sun breaking through the ash clouds covering the world of *The Road* have been removed from the published novel, McCarthy describing instead a diffuse "gray light" with seemingly no visible source.<sup>29</sup> More important, however, is the recurring sense in the published novel that, as McCarthy's protagonist explains it, "the world grew darker daily."<sup>30</sup> As the light fades from the world, so too does the father's strength as his unknown condition worsens, until finally he is unable to "dure any longer" and dies, having delivered his son to the coast, the literal end of the road.

The father in *The Road* is depicted as a healer who, despite impressive competencies, weakens as the sunlight and the memories of the old world before the apocalypse fade. The world before the collapse of society is invariably linked in the father's dreams with light and sunlight, especially in John Hillcoat's film adaptation of the novel in which the man's dreams of his happier past are rendered in bright, almost super-saturated colours, a marked contrast to the grey palette of the rest of the film.<sup>31</sup> As the light goes down and the world darkens, the healer loses his strength. There is, as McCarthy wrote in the first draft of *The Grail* "no one to fix the simplest things," let alone the larger ones.<sup>32</sup> The father's noble struggles ending in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> McCarthy, "The Grail."

<sup>29</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>31</sup> *The Road*, directed by John Hillcoat (Bristol, UK: Icon Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

<sup>32</sup> McCarthy, "The Grail."

failure relate back to Gawain's quest for the Grail. It is Gawain who is the first of Arthur's knights to reach the castle of the Fisher King and ask the first of the questions about the artefacts held there needed to begin the healing of the land. Having asked "where the blood comes from so copiously springing from the lance's point" Gawain awakes the next day to find "a land [...] rich in wood and water and meadow-land."<sup>33</sup> However, both Gawain's and McCarthy's protagonist's quests remain unfulfilled. As Gawain leaves the partially restored kingdom the people shout to him that although he had "brought us great comfort [...] you should be distressed too, and should hate yourself for having failed to hear what the grail was for."<sup>34</sup> Just as Gawain's strength failed him in his quest, as he fell asleep before he could ask any more questions of the Fisher King, so McCarthy's protagonist dies before he can see his son safely delivered into a moral adulthood. The seeds, the beginnings of the quest have been successfully sown, however. The implication, given McCarthy's source text, is that the son will complete his father's vision to carry the fire into the new world, just as Perceval the knight returns to the Fisher King's castle, repairs the sword that was broken and asks the questions needed to restore the "ruined" land.

What the use of specialist knowledge in *The Road* does is to provide a coming together of intertextual allusion and interpersonal collaboration. McCarthy once again draws upon collaborators from the world of medical knowledge in order to deploy successfully that world's terms and characterise its abilities in order to integrate intertextual links into his work. What McCarthy has been able to do in this section of *The Road* is to hint at both mythological allusion and an extensive network of scientific knowledge through the accurate use of medical terms. It is the man's hinted-at abilities as a doctor, hints written in a language provided by McCarthy's medical collaborators, which provides the first clue to a reading of him as a questing Gawain. McCarthy binds together the intertext of myth with modern specialist medical collaborators, a binding more clearly revealed through the consultation of archival sources.

The characterisation of the environment in *The Road* is one of the most striking features of the novel, the burned and dimming world a sharp contrast to the environments of

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<sup>33</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1982), 132.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

McCarthy's early work and another coming together of intertextual allusion enabled by interpersonal collaboration. That *The Road* can be seen as a text with an important environmental message is a point which has been raised by Susan Kollin. Kollin sees McCarthy's novel as a re-writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*, arguing that "McCarthy's book is a novel of disaster, a horrifying account of environmental decline in the context of larger social failings."<sup>35</sup> Kollin writes that: "McCarthy offers an instance of what might be called 'environmental blowback', where human practises on the land – in this case, agricultural policies and economic pressures – end up creating [...worse problems]."<sup>36</sup> Kollin sees McCarthy's novel as being darker than Steinbeck's intertextual fore-runner, as she points out that *The Road* is "a road novel without an automobile," the embodiment of agency and mobility.<sup>37</sup> Aside from the trucks utilised by roving gangs of road-rats, the car has been replaced with "the cart [...] a reminder of the irrational exuberance that characterised the economy of contemporary America, with its overextended, debt-ridden citizenry."<sup>38</sup> The parallels that Kollin draws between *The Road* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are compelling and convincing. What this chapter examines is the relationship between *why* McCarthy made these compelling allusions, and *how* these intertextual links were established through the use of interpersonal collaboration.

Megan Riley McGilchrist picks up a similar thread of environmental argument. McGilchrist, despite taking the Border Trilogy as her main subject of inquiry, writes that "*The Road*, [...] takes the argument even further, suggesting that the myth of the frontier and the desire for endless expansion at whatever cost will lead us all to an apocalyptic fate as the environment finally turns on us, as indeed it is beginning to do already."<sup>39</sup> McGilchrist goes on to argue that "significantly in *The Road* there are images which recall the history of American settlement. From the ship registered in Tenerife, Columbus' point of departure for the New World, to the burning man who recalls the self-immolation of Vietnam War protesters, we see

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Kollin, "'Barren, silent, godless': Ecodisaster and the Post-abundant Landscape in *The Road*," in *Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Sara L Spurgeon (London: Continuum, 2011), 159.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Megan Riley McGilchrist, *The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner* (London: Routledge, 2010), 136.

images from the palimpsest of American history throughout this dystopian picturesque.”<sup>40</sup>

McGilchrist is unquestionably on to something here. What does seem to be certain is that the scientific community at the Santa Fe Institute had a direct collaborative influence on the composition of the authorial voice McCarthy deployed in *The Road*. Equally significant was the input of McCarthy’s biologist brother Dennis, who now works as a lawyer for the Tennessee Valley Authority, following in the footsteps of McCarthy’s father, Charles McCarthy Sr.<sup>41</sup> McCarthy claimed in his interview with the *Wall Street Journal* that during the writing of *The Road* he spent a lot of time “Just talking to people about what things might look like under various catastrophic situations.”<sup>42</sup> McCarthy goes on to say that “I have these conversations on the phone with my brother Dennis, and quite often we get around to some sort of hideous end-of-the-world scenario and we always wind up just laughing [...w]e talked about if there was a small percentage of the human population left, what would they do? They’d probably divide up into little tribes and when everything’s gone, the only thing left to eat is each other. We know that’s true historically.”<sup>43</sup>

The influence of Dennis McCarthy’s suggestion that the remaining humans would “divide up into tribes” can clearly be seen in the published form of *The Road*. The man and the boy encounter roving bands of cannibal road-rats, one of whom the father is forced to shoot in order to protect his child. The tribalism of the remaining humans emerges even more strongly in the drafts of *The Road*. This is especially true in the early drafts of the scene with Ely mentioned previously, in which the old man says that “I was in a commune once but I was too old. Too old to work and too old to eat.”<sup>44</sup> Ely’s story fits well with the man’s earlier statement from the same draft that “if you were a doctor or an engineer or had some other skill and it were found out you would be enslaved by one of the communes [a word McCarthy later replaced with “cooperatives”] for their own purposes.”<sup>45</sup> This depiction of the harsh realities of tribal life goes some way to explaining why the doctors of the man’s recollection mentioned

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>41</sup> “Dennis McCarthy,” *Knoxville Writers Guild*, available at <http://www.knoxvillewritersguild.org/mccarthy.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Cormac McCarthy, “Interview with Cormac McCarthy,” By John Jurgenson. *Wall Street Journal*, November 20, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> McCarthy, *The Road Draft*.

<sup>45</sup> McCarthy, *The Grail*.

above would “pass the dying” without helping them.<sup>46</sup> These references to communes and cooperatives show, along with the gangs of road-rats and other veterans of the wasteland that the man and the boy encounter on their journey, that Dennis’ arguments for the brutal tribalism of those humans who survive the apocalypse had a lasting and demonstrable impact on the final shape of *The Road*.

The ship mentioned in Kollin’s article is important when examining the collaborations which shaped the intertextual and historical allusions present in *The Road*. In June 2006 Dan Frank wrote to McCarthy with a list of “typos that fellow from the McCarthy society sent in.”<sup>47</sup> Who the “fellow” Frank refers to is not clear, but the typos collected are typical of the kind of late-stage line-editing Albert Erskine would have been responsible for during McCarthy’s tenure at Random House. These “typos” chiefly revolve around punctuation, including long-time bugbear apostrophes in “mustnt,” and some spacing issues between “forthagain” and “ashenair.”<sup>48</sup> Dan Frank’s involvement in McCarthy’s work as a key collaborator is revealing about the integrated corporate structure at Random House. Frank, at the time McCarthy published *The Road*, was editorial director at Pantheon Books. According to an interview with Frank from 2000, the editor joined Pantheon books from Viking Press in the early 1990s, and worked with Art Speigleman, author of the critically-acclaimed *Maus*, to bring in the graphic novelists Pantheon became noted for.<sup>49</sup> Pantheon had been bought by Random House in 1961. Pantheon had retained a kind of semi-independence for a few years, but by the 2000s had been wholly integrated in Random House’s corporate structure.<sup>50</sup> It is testament to quite how integrated these previously diverse parts of Random House had become that a book published under the auspices of Knopf could be edited by someone working in a senior position for Pantheon.

More significant than Frank’s list of typos is what the editor refers to as “the meticulous, perhaps overmeticulous report from my nautical expert/friend,” a printed email

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dan Frank, letter to McCarthy, 21 June 2006, Box 87, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin Reid, interview with Dan Frank for *Publisher’s Weekly*, sept 4, 2000. Available at [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-28267984\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-28267984_ITM)

<sup>50</sup> André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books* (London: Verso, 2000), 33ff.

attached to the letter he sent McCarthy.<sup>51</sup> The email deals in impressive detail with all aspects of the scene in *The Road* in which the father and son find the grounded sailboat, board it and take amongst other items the flare gun and gas burners which play an important part in their later survival. Frank's "nautical expert/friend," according to his letter, is Jane Daniels Lear, who, in addition to being a keen amateur sailor, has written several cookery books published by HarperCollins.<sup>52</sup> This new collaboration shows that Frank, like Erskine and Fisketjon before him, was able to use his own contacts within the world of publishing to find his author a valuable literary collaborator. Most of the advice, according to Lear in her email to Frank, comes from her friend "Joe McCann, who has more experience on big boats than I do."<sup>53</sup> It appears that McCarthy had sent a draft of the scene, which I have been unable to locate amongst his papers, to his editor, who had passed the section on to Lear who was only too happy to offer her assistance in collaboration with her own nautical expert. Lear first shows a good understanding of the scene as it stood, saying that: "The first few pages of the excerpt indicate that it is low tide when the man and the boy come upon the sailboat (the firmer sand below the tidewrack, the bones of the seabirds, the ribs of fish, and the mats of weeds along the beach). Yet the boat is already awash."<sup>54</sup> These details remain in the published version of the sequence, as the "firmer sand below the tidewrack" appears in *The Road* as it was published, suggesting that McCarthy was happy with this aspect of the scene, his initial impression reinforced following Lear's comments on the implications of setting the scene at low tide.<sup>55</sup> The first detail that Lear corrects McCarthy on is one of terminology. She writes in her email that: "In sea parlance we generally speak of the *decks*, not the *hull* being awash – meaning green or blue water, not white water (spray) is splashing around on deck."<sup>56</sup> This is a detail taken on by McCarthy, as in the final version of the scene he writes about "the guardrail just awash," and depicts the father splashing through a "stagnant bilge" as he moves about the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "Jane Daniels Lear," *HarperCollins Website*, available at [http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/27987/Jane\\_Daniels\\_Lear/index.asp](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/27987/Jane_Daniels_Lear/index.asp).

<sup>53</sup> Jane Lear, email to Frank, 21 June 2006. Box 87, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 237.

<sup>56</sup> Lear, email to Frank, 21 June 2006.

ship.<sup>57</sup> The significance of this seemingly minor detail is that by ensuring that the correct terminology is deployed at this point McCarthy keeps his characterisation of his protagonist, whose consciousness the narrative inhabits during this section, consistent. The central character of *The Road* is a man who knows about boats, a facet of his character displayed earlier in the narrative when he remembers the boat trip he took with his grandfather, which he remembers as “the day to shape the days upon.”<sup>58</sup> McCarthy’s protagonist is a character who is linked early and consistently with boats and sailing. For mistakes to be made in his description of the boat he finds would undermine this impression, weakening his association with his grandfather’s boat, and as a result his link to water, his intertextual link to Gawain and his grail-quest.

Still describing the outside of the boat, Lear complains that:

The boat is also described as being made of steel, which would be a material used in a boat this size, but then the man swims around to the mahogany transom (the flat area on the stern). It would be highly unusual to have a wooden transom on a steel boat, as the whole point is to weld it together in one piece to make it watertight. That said, a mahogany transom could be installed as a veneer over the steel transom, but it's a little odd.<sup>59</sup>

This detail has been absorbed by McCarthy, and in the final version of the scene there is no mention of any mahogany veneer, the whole of the ship is made of steel. As a result, when swimming around the ship the man “pulled himself along to the transom. The steel was grey and saltsoured but he could make out the worn gilt lettering.”<sup>60</sup> Lear and her nautical friend have clearly had input into the description of the boat, changing the depiction of both the building materials shown in its construction and the depiction of the water on the flooded decks. Lear’s suggestions have largely been accepted by McCarthy, and his own authorial voice has been changed by Lear’s as he adopted her suggested changes as a valued collaborator.

Other details of the man’s scavenging expedition to the boat were altered at Lear’s suggestion. The exploration of the galley in particular attracted Lear’s attention, as she said first that “The description of the cabin and floating debris is very realistic,” before adding that: “With regard to the canned goods you might be interested to note that before an ocean voyage,

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<sup>57</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 239.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Lear, email to Frank, 21 June 2006.

<sup>60</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 239.

the cook will generally remove the labels from all the cans and label the contents of the cans themselves with a waterproof pen.”<sup>61</sup> Lear’s insight was clearly of interest to McCarthy, as he has marked it in pen on the printout of the email. During the exploration of the ship McCarthy’s man comes across “cans in the galley floor [...] stripped of their labels and the contents written on them in spanish.”<sup>62</sup> A final detail, which Lear seems to have been very insistent on, was the location of the gas bottle the man recovers from the ship. Originally, the man was to find this bottle in the galley, located under the stove as it would be in a camping stove, or those found in caravans. In her email Lear writes that: “Unless the designer, builder, or owner were suicidal, the gas for the stove would never be under the stove, or anywhere in the cabin for that matter.”<sup>63</sup> The reason for this, Lear says, is that: “Propane or LPG (Liquified Petroleum Gas) is heavier than air and settles in the bilge waiting for a stray spark to set off an explosion.”<sup>64</sup> Lear explains that this means that any leak would be potentially catastrophic if it were to occur in the sealed environment of the galley, or anywhere below decks. As a result, Lear recommended that: “The tank is generally kept in a separate closed locker on deck that is vented overboard,” which would allow any escaping gas to vent into the atmosphere rather than linger in bilge below decks.<sup>65</sup> McCarthy took this point to heart. The father still takes the burners from the stove in the published form of *The Road*, but he finds the “steel bottles of gas” in “a locker behind the wheel pedestal” above decks.<sup>66</sup> The number of substantial changes this sequence underwent during its drafting and redrafting show the importance that McCarthy set by his collaborators. The scene as presented in the published edition of *The Road* is McCarthy’s scene, but one which he was only able to construct after careful and extensive collaboration with others.

The amount of time McCarthy spent on getting the details of the man’s scavenging trip to the boat demonstrates how important the scene was to McCarthy. Not only is the scene important within the plot of *The Road*, because it is from the boat that the flare gun the man will use later in self-defence as well as other important supplies are taken, the care taken over

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<sup>61</sup> Lear, email to Frank, 21 June 2006.

<sup>62</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 245.

<sup>63</sup> Lear, email to Frank, 21 June 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 242.

the characterisation of the boat itself demonstrates the importance McCarthy set by the boat itself as a symbol. McGilchrist picks up on the significance of the boat's point of origin. As a reminder of Columbus' voyage, a successful characterisation of the boat as one which was capable of, and perhaps engaged in, making a transatlantic crossing was essential for the historical allusion to function as McCarthy intended. Furthermore, the crashed and destroyed boat's name translates as the "Bird of Hope." This is a name whose biblical significance Erik Wielenberg spends time unpacking, and which becomes all the more significant when considering the care McCarthy took to ensure that historical fidelity was maintained in its characterisation.<sup>67</sup>

The draft to which McCarthy made the changes suggested by Lear was the first to be given the title *The Road*, and also the last to be marked "Shred." This was an instruction which was never carried out, although its presence on the cover of McCarthy's draft suggests that other drafts may have been destroyed. On this draft there is a note which leads to another source of intertextual influence on the final shape of *The Road*. Early in the draft is a note in the margin in McCarthy's hand referring to "Kierkegaard: Abraham and Isaac," a clear reference to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>68</sup> In brief, *Fear and Trembling* is Kierkegaard's attempt to understand Abraham and his motivation as he travelled to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. The central conflict with which Kierkegaard struggles when reading the story of the binding of Isaac is between the moral injunction against murder and Abraham's faith in the God who commands him to kill. The similarities between Kierkegaard's understanding of Abraham and McCarthy's characterisation of the father of *The Road* are striking. Kierkegaard writes that it was only "[b]y faith Abraham went out from the land of his fathers and became a sojourner in the land of promise."<sup>69</sup> In order to undertake this wandering, Kierkegaard tells us that Abraham had to leave "one thing behind, took one thing with him: he left his earthly understanding behind and took faith with him – otherwise he would not have wandered forth but thought this unreasonable."<sup>70</sup> The parallels are clear. McCarthy's nameless man travels

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<sup>67</sup> Erik Wielenberg, "God, Morality, and Meaning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, Vol 8, No 1 2010, 1. Available at <http://journals.tdl.org/cormacmccarthy/article/viewFile/2234/1926>.

<sup>68</sup> McCarthy, *The Grail*.

<sup>69</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Everyman's Library, 1994), 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

through the ruined “land of his fathers” toward the uncertain promise of the sea. He undertakes this journey despite the unreasonable hardships he encounters and in spite of the fact that he knows, rationally, that there is little hope for the pair out in the ruined world, and that he himself is dying. The mother, who commits suicide rather than carry on, makes the rational choice. To carry on wandering in hope in this ruined world, from a rational standpoint at least, is “unreasonable,” faith alone keep the father and son going.

As a way of coming to an understanding of Abraham and his undertaking of the journey to Moriah, Kierkegaard offers the example of a “knight of faith,” a man whose complete faith allows him to be possessed of many paradoxical qualities.<sup>71</sup> It is, for example, in his resignation to the fate that God has chosen for him that Kierkegaard's knight draws his strength, his ability to act beyond the moral. Kierkegaard's knight bears more than a passing resemblance to McCarthy's protagonist. Kierkegaard writes that “the knight remembers everything, but precisely this remembrance is pain, and yet by the infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence.”<sup>72</sup> This painful remembrance mixed with resignation can be seen in the memories of the vanished world the man carries with him, which both cause him pain and at the same time inform his conduct and the messages he passes on to his son. The resignation Kierkegaard mentions in his description of the knight of faith can clearly be seen in the man's reflection that “if he were God he would have made the world just so and no different.”<sup>73</sup>

The key difference, Kierkegaard argues, between the knight of faith and the tragic hero, who the knight, and indeed McCarthy's protagonist, closely resembles, is that in all his actions “The tragic hero remains within the ethical.”<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard's expectation that the knight of faith will act beyond what is normally considered ethical in order to fulfil his sacred mission goes some way to explaining the different kinds of goodness the father and the boy exhibit during *The Road*. Gwinner's arguments make it clear that the father is using at least some of Abraham's conceptions of the ethical. Kierkegaard states that “[I]n Abraham's life there is no higher expression for the ethical than this, that a father shall love his son.”<sup>75</sup> This is a point which mirrors Gwinner's assertion that it is only that which ensures the pair's, and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 234.

<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 49.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 50.

especially the child's, actual survival which can be considered ethical in McCarthy's novel. It is here that the influence of Kierkegaard's thinking on McCarthy's writing becomes most clear. If for McCarthy's protagonist there is no higher moral compulsion than ensuring the survival of his son, then all other actions he takes during their journey, however shocking or unpleasant they might be, are justified. It is his faith that his son will go on to rebuild the world which allows him to kill the road-rat and to take the clothes of the robber in order to neutralise him as a threat.

If McCarthy's protagonist is indeed a knight of faith, as the note on McCarthy's draft suggests, then it is necessary for the father to demonstrate a willingness to go beyond this highest ethical calling, to think the unthinkable and consider killing his son. The father considers this act, which mirrors the purpose of Abraham's pilgrimage to Moriah, on several occasions in the course of *The Road*. The most notable of these incidents appears in the scene when the father and son flee the house owned by the cannibal family in the basement of which they find a group of people held captive as food. Escaping the house itself, the pair hides in the garden of the house, and the father considers trying to break cover, leaving his son in order to lead the cannibals away. Before going he gives the boy the gun he has carried throughout the novel and tells his son that "if they find you you are going to have to do it. Do you understand? [...] You know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point it up. Do it quick and hard. Do you understand"?<sup>76</sup> The boy does not understand, and will clearly not go through with the suicide the father wants him to commit rather than face capture, torture and cannibalism. As a result the father is forced to hide with the child, holding the revolver and questioning his faith in what is right; "Can you do it? When the time comes? [...] Now is the time. Curse God and die. [...] Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock?"<sup>77</sup> The man's thoughts here show that he is prepared to go beyond the moral to protect his son, but only when events that go beyond the pair's family code of ethics threaten to overtake them; when they are directly threatened with cannibalism, or slavery, or worse. The boy's mother outlines these extreme circumstances before her suicide when she tells the man that "sooner or later they will catch us and they will

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<sup>76</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 119.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

kill us. They will rape me. They will rape him.”<sup>78</sup>

The understanding of McCarthy's protagonist as one influenced by Kierkegaard's philosophy not only offers to resolve some of the difficult questions surrounding the criticism of McCarthy, it also reveals the source text for the morals displayed by *The Road's* father and son. What this investigation of McCarthy's notes reveals is the use to which McCarthy puts his intertextual sources. McCarthy imports Kierkegaard's understanding of morals and moral absolutes into his writing, lifting directly the details of the makeup of the character of a knight of faith, showing the direct effect that Kierkegaard's writing had on the development of *The Road*. The material surrounding *The Road* is also revealing of how McCarthy arrived at this philosophical point as the story of Abraham and Isaac would have resonated deeply with McCarthy, himself a father late in life.

During the re-writing process several other, smaller cuts were made to *The Road*, mostly from the first draft of *The Grail*, which appears to have gone from McCarthy, through Della Ulibarri's office at the Santa Fe Institute for typing up and a first proof reading, then on to Dan Frank for type- and fact-checking. The longest of these cut sections deals with one of the few animals mentioned in *The Road*. In this section, the father remembers that “the last horse he saw was hied out of the woods by a horde of ragged hunters armed with knives and cornered against a fence where its throat was cut.”<sup>79</sup> The hunters then butcher, cook and eat the horse, while the man “and the boy sat at the top of the hill sheltered by a rock and watched them.”<sup>80</sup> The man passes no comment on the event apart from telling the boy that “they wont leave anything.”<sup>81</sup> The father later says to the boy as they leave the scene that the roasting meat “sure did smell good, didnt it?”<sup>82</sup> In reply the boy only “nod[s]” without speaking.<sup>83</sup> The father and son of *The Road* demonstrate a much different relationship with horses from that explored by McCarthy through John Grady in the Border Trilogy. In the draft featuring the scene of horse butchery, the man promises the boy that “there'll be other horses. But there

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>79</sup> McCarthy, *The Grail*.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

werent.”<sup>84</sup> This event goes directly against a claim made by one of the Border Trilogy’s ranch hand characters, who claims that it was foolish to talk about the extinction of horses because “god would not permit such a thing.”<sup>85</sup> To have the last horse killed on-stage would have been a very explicit rejection of the old myths and values from the world of McCarthy’s earlier works, overtly exposing their romantic beliefs in the special properties of horses to the reality of *The Road*’s myth-less waste. The removal of this scene is therefore particularly significant. Although a reader assumes that there are no more horses, the fact of the matter is never shown, meaning that some myths can potentially retain their place in the world of *The Road*. The wasteland is not devoid of belief, but belief is certainly harder to maintain. The whole section dealing with the horse has been copyedited, presumably by both McCarthy and Dan Frank, but then crossed out, suggesting that the piece was abandoned altogether quite early in the redrafting process. Taken in concert with the previous removal of all mention of communes and cooperatives these changes suggest that McCarthy wanted to make his wasteland as bleak and lifeless as possible, something which the presence of wandering animals and other groups of people, gangs of aggressive cannibals aside, would have undermined. With the removal of this section, McCarthy makes it clear that the animals are gone. The dangerous tribes of other people are all that remain.

The other significant change that the text underwent had to do with the fate of the man’s wedding ring. In McCarthy’s novel, the man empties the contents of his wallet “Some money, credit cards. His driver’s licence. A picture of his wife” onto the road and leaves them, after throwing his wallet into the woods.<sup>86</sup> In the parallel scene in John Hillcoat’s film, in addition to shedding his wallet and its contents, the man places his wedding ring on the wall of a high road bridge and almost flicks it off the edge, before deciding to leave it there. The reason that this detail is significant is that original ending of the novel had the son return to his father’s body, just as he does in the published version. In this early version, the son “took the ring from his father’s finger. So loose it fell away. He fitted it over his own thumb and then he put his father’s hand away and covered it and rose.”<sup>87</sup> In the published version of this scene, the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 52

<sup>87</sup> McCarthy, *The Road Draft*.

son “didn't uncover” the father at all and only promises to talk to him every day before leaving to join the veteran and the new group of survivors which miraculously appears at the end of *The Road*.<sup>88</sup> When and why this change was made is unclear, although as it appears in McCarthy's papers under the title *The Road* rather than *The Grail*, it is reasonable to assume that the change was made late in the redrafting process. The import is clear, however; in the published version the boy takes nothing physical from his father apart from the gun, his tool for survival. After his death the father's only influence over his child are the lessons he taught him during their journey together, which are not tied to any one physical memento.

One of the most striking features of the process by which *The Road* came to be, at least when compared to McCarthy's previous novels, is the relatively minor role taken by Dan Frank. During the early years of Erskine's involvement with McCarthy's work the editor played a crucial role in shaping and reshaping McCarthy's work into its final form, convincing him, amongst other things, to change the sequence of cat scenes in *The Orchard Keeper*, and drop or amalgamate characters and scenes in *Suttree*. By contrast, Frank's duties here seem to have been those of a particularly thorough proof reader. The notes Frank makes on McCarthy's drafts are similar to those provided by the “fellow from the McCarthy society” mentioned in Frank's letter. His role as a collaborator should not, however, be underestimated. His eye for detail was clearly appreciated by McCarthy, and almost all the typos and questions about punctuation, spelling and continuity Frank raises on the various drafts of *The Road* and *The Grail* are dealt with in one way or another by McCarthy. In addition to these crucial editorial duties, Frank was able to act as a go-between to supply McCarthy with access to Lear and the expert insight she was able to provide. This new collaboration was a crucial component of McCarthy's authorial voice when the author came to write the section of *The Road* dealing with the scavenging of the *Bird of Hope*.

Other established collaborators are still present. Della Ulibarri, the copy-editor at the Santa Fe Institute, appears again in communication regarding *The Road*, with one photocopied draft marked with a note as being “For Della.”<sup>89</sup> This draft is accompanied by a covering note which reads “Della // I'll stop in after lunch to see when you might get to this (It's very little)

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<sup>88</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 306.

<sup>89</sup> Cormac McCarthy, note to Ulibarri Box 89, Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

Cormac.”<sup>90</sup> The familiarity of McCarthy's note suggests not only that he valued Ulibarri's assistance, but that the author was also heavily involved personally in seeing the different drafts of *The Road* go through the various stages of production. This is a marked change again from McCarthy's Random House days, when such concerns were left largely for Erskine to deal with.

McCarthy's involvement with the Coen Brothers' adaptation of *No Country For Old Men* is still the subject of much conjecture. McCarthy claimed in an interview with John Jurgenson for the *Wall Street Journal* that he played no part in the adaptation of his novel, saying that when a novelist gives up a work to be adapted, “you sell it and you go home and go to bed. You don't embroil yourself in somebody else's project.”<sup>91</sup> McCarthy even jokes about the idea of involving himself in such a project. When asked “is there something compelling about the collaborative process compared to the solitary job of writing,” McCarthy responded, “Yes, it would compel you to avoid it at all costs.”<sup>92</sup> By contrast, McCarthy involved himself extensively with the editing of John Hillcoat's film of *The Road*. A hint at McCarthy's greater involvement can be found in his interview for the *Wall Street Journal*. In this interview McCarthy says that: “One school of thought says that directors shouldn't be allowed to edit their own films. But the truth is they should be. And they should be really brutal. Really brutal.”<sup>93</sup> The significance of McCarthy's statement and his involvement with Hillcoat's film, however, is made more explicit in a series of interviews the director gave to the website *io9* in 2009. In the second of these interviews, Hillcoat explains that he had to cut some of the scenes featuring cannibalism from the final cut of *The Road* because he “realized [that having additional scenes] didn't work, it was total overkill. It just made it redundant and didn't have any impact.”<sup>94</sup> Hillcoat goes on in his interview to reveal the opposition he had in trying to cut down his film, saying that he “had to fight to cut them,” although he “was supported.”<sup>95</sup> Supported, it seems, by “Cormac himself, he really understands how film works as a medium,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> John Jurgenson, “Hollywood's Favourite Cowboy,” interview for the *WSJ*, Nov 20, 2009. Available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704576204574529703577274572.html>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Meredith Woener, interview with John Hillcoat, Dec 2 2009. Available at

<http://io9.com/5416768/why-the-roads-baby-scene-was-cut-and-why-its-first-trailer-sucked>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

how different it is. He didn't miss anything from the book other than four lines of dialogue... Just those four lines. Nothing else. He didn't miss any of it [...] He said, 'Oh, that's irrelevant.'"<sup>96</sup> What those four lines were is made explicit in an earlier interview, where Hillcoat explains that "those four lines of dialogue, which we did shoot and put back in, is when the boy says, "What would you do if I died?" And the father says, "I'd want to die too, so you could be with me - so I could be with you."<sup>97</sup> For Hillcoat McCarthy's insistence on including these lines was "very telling as to what the real story is."<sup>98</sup>

This would not be last time that McCarthy would be prepared to involve himself in the after-life of his works. The *New York Times Magazine* reported in a long profile of Samuel L Jackson that: "When Jackson was making a filmed version of the play 'The Sunset Limited,' with Tommy Lee Jones, the play's author, Cormac McCarthy, complained about his line readings."<sup>99</sup> In this case, however, it seems that some of McCarthy's instructions were ignored, as Jackson replied that: "It sounds better my way. I'm not trying to make this [expletive][sic] worse!"<sup>100</sup> These examples of McCarthy involving himself in the after-life of his novels and plays and indeed in an area and medium that was unfamiliar to the novelist reinforce the idea that McCarthy was a writer now prepared to act as an editor, to play more diverse roles within the collaborations around his work.

McCarthy's handling of more areas of publication than he was prepared to do at the beginning of his career may hint at a more mature, developed and confident engagement with the production process of his novels. This growing confidence should, in all likelihood, be expected of a man whose hard-won literary reputation was made. By the time he came to write *The Road* McCarthy had not only secured best-seller status with the Border Trilogy, he had also made the leap into popular consciousness and financial security with the optioning of *No Country For Old Men*. Despite this increased reputation and confidence, McCarthy was still dependent upon a network of collaborators and intertextual sources to produce his work. From

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Meredith Woener, interview with John Hillcoat, Nov 18 2009. Available at <http://io9.com/5407850/what-cormac-mccarthy-insisted-on-keeping-in-the-road-movie>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Pat Jordan, "How Samuel L Jackson Became His Own Genre," April 26 2012. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/magazine/how-samuel-l-jackson-became-his-own-genre.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/magazine/how-samuel-l-jackson-became-his-own-genre.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss)

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

complex intertextual ideas he had absorbed himself and which informed his writing, such as those of Kierkegaard and the story of the Grail, through to collaborators nautical, editorial and medical, whose expertise he drew upon, McCarthy, despite being indisputably the strongest voice behind the work and in control of its final shape and content, was still engaged in absorbing and stitching together the insights of those around him.

McCarthy was dependent on Lear's email for his depiction of the boat and its scavenging, which was drawn almost word for word from her advice. Equally, McCarthy, by his own admission, depended on his brother and other researchers at the Santa Fe Institute for his characterisation of the cataclysm which set the events of his novel into motion and the grey and dying world it leaves in its wake. *The Road's* depiction of those pockets of humanity left behind is also indebted to these collaborators. The changes these surviving groups underwent from the communes of *The Grail* to the roving cannibals of *The Road* stand as testament to the impact that these scientific collaborators had on the final shape of McCarthy's text. Finally, the influence of expert medical testimony can still be felt here. The father, as depicted in both the published and draft forms of *The Road* as one with hinted at but never confirmed medical training would have been impossible to draw quite so successfully without the input of Dr King and others. The point is that *The Road* is McCarthy's book. However, like those books which came before and influenced it, *The Road* was also a collaborative effort between author, agent, editor, and outside experts, all of whose contributions directly impact and constitute McCarthy's own authorial voice.

## Conclusion

The speech Sonny Mehta gave at the 1992 National Book Awards with which I began this thesis may have seemed, to some observers at least, to have been disrespectful to McCarthy. Even in his absence McCarthy was, after all, the author whose work was being honoured by the National Book Foundation that night. Yet, in the acceptance speech that he gave on McCarthy's behalf Mehta spoke at greater length about Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and the input of Albert Erskine, "a major figure in American letters," than he did about McCarthy. The only mention of McCarthy in Mehta's speech was a simple statement that the author was "working away" on one of his "books [...] made to last."<sup>1</sup> I have shown across this thesis, however, that not only did Erskine and his fellow collaborators play a crucial role in shaping and developing McCarthy's work, but McCarthy himself set tremendous value by the additional voices which went into the production of his novels, the Barthesian tissue of quotation from which he stitched his works. The length of these relationships, and the way they developed from professional collaborations into close personal friendships suggests that McCarthy may well have approved of Mehta's dedication of his National Book Award to his most crucial collaborators and his most unstinting supporters.

The purchase of McCarthy's papers in 2008 by the Wiltliff Collection's South Western Writers archive presented a golden opportunity to penetrate the aura of mystery which hangs around McCarthy's authorial practises as well as his personal life. Studied in context with the already-extant papers of Albert Erskine held at the University of Virginia's Small Special Collections Library, McCarthy's newly available papers offered a chance to examine a modern professional writer at work, to investigate how McCarthy's novels are written and how they make it to market.

Part of the fascination of this initial enquiry into the Wiltliff papers comes from the character of McCarthy himself. Famously publicity-shy, to the point of being called reclusive in the past even by those journalists who have been able to secure interviews, McCarthy's

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<sup>1</sup> Sonny Mehta, "National Book Awards Acceptance Speeches," accessed 27/03/2012, [http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech\\_cmccarthy.html#.T3IHDIHES3Ns](http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_cmccarthy.html#.T3IHDIHES3Ns).

works have nevertheless been critically lauded and over the years have made their way onto both cinema screens and university reading lists. Yet, despite a public profile which has only increased, especially over the last few years, little is known about the personal and professional contexts which produced McCarthy's novels.

The starting point for my analysis of McCarthy's work was one of establishing context. As I discussed in my introduction, scholarly work has been done on other notable author-editor relationships, though mostly in circumstances where the input of an editor has been particularly dramatic or controversial. The work Maxwell Perkins undertook, for example, in cutting Thomas Wolfe's gargantuan first draft of *The October Fair* from an initial 1,000,000 words to something which could reasonably be published has been the subject of considerable critical scrutiny. Equally, Gordon Lish's "manufacturing" of Raymond Carver's spare style through his editorial interventions into *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* have attracted similar attention from both academic and popular commentators, especially following the publication of the "restored" edition of his work under the title *Beginners* in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

It was possible that, when I accessed the files in Virginia and Texas, I would find something similar to these author-editor battlegrounds. The Erskine archive had been open for some years when I undertook my first research trip to Virginia, but precious little has been written about the McCarthy material held there. The McCarthy papers themselves were an almost complete unknown. The archives had been open to the public for less than a year when I travelled there for the first time in 2011, not long enough for extensive scholarship to have emerged from their contents. What I found was a relationship which was far more collaborative than that which had existed between Lish and Carver. Erskine, in contrast to the well-intentioned but more draconian Larry Bensky, was too sympathetic a reader and collaborator to insist on the kind of swingeing changes that Lish made to Carver's work. The editor's devotion was most clearly demonstrated in his drawing up of style guides for copy-editors and his fierce defence of McCarthy's stylistic idiosyncrasies during the publication process of his earlier works. This strong start to McCarthy's career, and especially the style

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<sup>2</sup> Gaby Wood, "Raymond Carver: The Kindest Cut," *The Guardian* September 27, 2009. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/sep/27/raymond-carver-editor-influence>. Accessed 15/06/2012.

guides and other ways of working Erskine established during his time editing McCarthy ensured that the editors who came after Erskine followed in his methods, engaging with McCarthy's style rather than setting themselves in opposition to it. Equally, McCarthy himself proved to be too controlled an author to submit to his editors the packing crates full of sprawling manuscripts that Thomas Wolfe sent to Maxwell Perkins. Indeed, even early in his career, McCarthy emerges as a writer who is also a creative reader, meticulously writing and rewriting sections of his novels, working sections unsuited for one novel into others, and keeping a careful watch on tone and repeated metaphors and images. In the journeys of McCarthy's novels from draft to marketplace we find neither the acrimonious battles of Wolfe and Perkins, nor the unilateral stylistic cuts of Gordon Lish. What we find instead is a collaborative working process.

The second context in which this examination of McCarthy's writing methods had to position itself was that of the state of the publishing industry itself. André Schiffrin and Jason Epstein, whose work provides an important component of the first introductory chapter of this thesis, both provide invaluable eyewitness accounts of a publishing industry which finds itself increasingly corporatized, professionalised and profit-driven. On an aesthetic level David Holloway has described McCarthy's writing as being a kind of "late modernism":

a kind of writing that cannot help but embody the intellectual climate of its time, a kind of writing, indeed, that finds genuine value in much of what simultaneity disables in its putative authority in the world at large, but a writing whose "utopian" vocation, in common with the earlier modernisms it echoes, is also to project in aesthetic form a world that lies beyond the apocalyptic commodification of all things (including its own language).<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore appropriate that McCarthy worked for the majority of his career with Albert Erskine, one of the last surviving editors from the days of high modernism, indeed one who worked extensively on the novels of William Faulkner, whose ghost was invoked by Mehta's address at the National Book Award dinner. Of all of McCarthy's potential collaborators at Random House, Erskine was one of the best equipped to shield his young novelist from Holloway's "apocalyptic commodification of all things" as the drive for profit swept through the publishing industry. The publishing sector which McCarthy entered in 1962 was an

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<sup>3</sup> David Holloway, "Modernism, Nature, and Utopia: Another look at "Optical Democracy" in Cormac McCarthy's Western Quartet" in *The Southern Quarterly* University of Mississippi Press Spring 2000, 189.

industry undergoing dramatic change from a landscape dominated by numerous small, privately-owned companies to one in which a few large multi-media corporations control vast swathes of formerly independent houses. In light of such changes to the publishing context in America, Albert Erskine's contributions to McCarthy's early career become all the more significant. Shepherding a difficult first novel through the copyediting process would have been the expected duties of an editor of Erskine's calibre and experience, but his efforts to first secure good critical notices for *The Orchard Keeper* and then to keep the novel in print despite increasing pressure from Random House over poor sales demonstrate a concern for his novelist's career similar to that espoused by Helen Wolfe in her claim to publish "people, not books."

If, as Holloway argues, McCarthy's work can be seen as a final development or last bastion of modernism, then Erskine's work both with McCarthy and on his behalf can be seen as a remnant of an earlier age of publishing. The negative implications that might extend from describing both Erskine and McCarthy as being the last of a dying breed can be somewhat softened, however, by the actions of McCarthy's later editors. Gary Fisketjon and Dan Frank also proved themselves to be valuable collaborators, patient and diligent copyeditors and exceptional champions of McCarthy's work, even if the vagaries of the increasingly uncertain publishing industry meant that these later relationships were much shorter-lived than the twenty years McCarthy spent working with Erskine.

The final context in which this analysis has had to situate itself is the growing body of scholarship on McCarthy and his work. As I outlined above and in greater detail in my introduction, McCarthy is famously publicity averse. In his landmark interview with McCarthy from 1992 Richard Woodward describes the author as a "gregarious recluse," a man with "lots of friends who know that he likes to be left alone."<sup>4</sup> Woodward's description went some way to dispelling the myth of McCarthy as reclusive genius, situating for the first time in the critical conversation around the writer the idea that McCarthy is a man with a lot of friends, even collaborators. Woodward's hint, however, went only some way to uncovering the truth. Across this thesis I have shown that McCarthy is a novelist extremely interested in collaboration, in

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<sup>4</sup> Richard B Woodward, "Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html>. Accessed 10/03/2012

working with others who can contribute to his novels and, most of all, as a man who cultivates lasting and close personal friendships with his valued professional collaborators. That McCarthy also emerges as a man interested in meticulous accuracy in his intertextual sources is a distinct but related point. Clearly there is a difference between working with a living collaborator possessed of some specialist knowledge and an intertextual link to a pre-existing text. The driving impulse behind these two differing forms of collaboration remains the same, however. McCarthy has demonstrated an awareness throughout his career that there are certain actions, or “moves” as both Barthes and Janet Staiger have it, that identify him as an author. These moves, as Staiger points out, are recognisable “because [they are] a citation of authoring by an individual having the authority to make authoring statements.”<sup>5</sup> That is to say, an action by an author is only “authorial” if it can be identified as such. Clearly for McCarthy such actions involve quotation or consultation from authoritative sources.

The examination of McCarthy’s writing process I have conducted has revealed several new insights into McCarthy’s work and working practises. An examination of the drafts of two of what critics have long been calling McCarthy’s “Appalachian works” – *The Orchard Keeper* and *Suttree* – has revealed important new intertextual links between the two novels. By tracing out the development of these two crucial works – the first because it marked McCarthy’s entry into the world of publishing and the genesis of his crucial collaboration with Erskine, the second because of what it reveals about McCarthy’s writing strategies – I have shown that material originally drafted for one of McCarthy’s novels could be published, in one form or another, in a completely different novel. The clearest example of this kind of authorial recycling is the scene from *The Orchard Keeper* involving Warn Pulliam’s buzzard being reworked from an embryonic form found in the drafts of *Suttree*. This finding gives significant insight into the McCarthy’s writing practices, suggesting that McCarthy does indeed, as some have suggested, write several novels at once and that during this writing process material can move between the various drafts as it is written and rewritten. This is a finding which forges new intertextual links between McCarthy’s works, linking these early novels more closely together.

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<sup>5</sup>Janet Staiger, “Authorship Approaches” in *Auteurs and Authorship A Film Reader* ed Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 51.

The differing approaches adopted by Larry Bensky and Albert Erskine are also revealing of the differing strategies that editors can adopt with their authors and the process by which novels are taken up, approved and edited. *The Orchard Keeper* was first looked at by an anonymous reader at Random House. The manuscript sparked some interest and was passed up to Larry Bensky, who also approved, but sought confirmation from Albert Erskine. This process seems fraught enough, but what comes out most strongly from the different editorial lives of *The Orchard Keeper* is the impact that different editorial strategies can have on an author and his work. In a speech given at a convention in 1979 the author George R.R. Martin, writer of the lengthy “Song of Ice and Fire” series of fantasy novels currently being adapted by HBO into a big-budget drama series under the title *Game of Thrones*, posed his audience the rhetorical question “What is a good editor like?” According to Martin:

A good editor offers you decent advances, and goes to bat with his publisher to make sure your book gets promoted, and returns your phone calls, and answers your letters. A good editor does work with his writers on their books. But only if the books need work. A good editor tries to figure out what the writer was trying to do, and helps him or her do it better, rather than trying to change the book into something else entirely. A good editor doesn't insist, or make changes without permission.<sup>6</sup>

Larry Bensky certainly “went to bat” for McCarthy’s work. He ensured that it was taken up by Random House and championed it to Albert Erskine, although there is little evidence that Erskine needed much persuading. Where Bensky seems to fall short of Martin’s ideal of an editor, however, is in his insistence upon his changes. The letter he wrote to McCarthy outlining every one of his concerns and leaving his author to work upon them, rather than engaging in a debate or collaboration over them was what prompted a long silence from McCarthy, and it was these changes that Erskine reversed once he took over responsibility for *The Orchard Keeper*. Erskine, and indeed Gary Fisketjon and Dan Frank for that matter, seem by contrast to have almost worked to Martin’s outline. They engaged with McCarthy as equals, as collaborators, enabling him to write his books in the way that he wanted, rarely insisting and certainly never making changes without McCarthy’s consent.

The drafts of *Suttree* also reveal, for the first time at such length, the crucial role played by modern copyeditors in reshaping and finally printing the works of their authors.

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<sup>6</sup> George RR Martin, “Editors: The Writer’s Natural Enemy,” keynote address given at Coastcon II, Biloxi, Mississippi, March 10, 1979. Available at <http://www.georgerrmartin.com/sp-goh79.html>. Accessed 20/6/2012.

McCarthy's close collaboration with Bertha Krantz during the publication of *Suttree* demonstrates a surprising degree of awareness on McCarthy's part of the importance of these under-studied literary operators. McCarthy's is an awareness most likely gleaned from Erskine's concerns with his early style and the preservation of the author's unconventional punctuation. McCarthy's willingness to engage with what turned out to be a lengthy copy-editing process demonstrates both a devotion to his artistic vision and an early sign of a growing willingness to involve himself in more aspects of the production of his texts.

Equally revealing is the examination of the material on *Blood Meridian*. As the most closely studied of McCarthy's works *Blood Meridian's* origins have long been puzzled over by McCarthy scholars. John Sepich's *Notes on Blood Meridian* is the most important and notable of the early attempts to unravel McCarthy's web of quotation. What the material held in McCarthy's archives shows, however, is that not only was McCarthy's research for *Blood Meridian* wider-ranging and more complex than had previously been considered, but McCarthy was as dependent on those living collaborators who surrounded him and his work as he was on the strong basis of intertextual research he and his editor were able to construct. The role that Erskine played in gathering these facts and checking both McCarthy's language and his historical accuracy demonstrates the crucial importance of the literary editor even in a book as carefully constructed as *Blood Meridian*. The difficulties surrounding the origin and historical use of the word "fuck" neatly demonstrate the attention to detail that both men brought to their work. At this point, far from being a paternal relationship in which the senior editor played the role of adopted father, what existed between Erskine and McCarthy was a close professional collaboration of central importance to the construction and reconstruction of McCarthy's works. The exchange relating to the inclusion or otherwise of *Blood Meridian's* epilogue shows the great store that McCarthy sets by his collaborators, and the dramatic impact that Erskine had on the form of the author's novels.

The examination of McCarthy's later works yields its own insights. The material on the Border Trilogy in particular is revealing of just how much weight McCarthy gives to the opinions and contributions of his collaborators and the extent of the roles they played during the writing and redrafting of his novels. Dr Barry King, as just one example, is as much the source of the depiction of the treatment of Boyd's gunshot wound in *The Crossing* as

McCarthy. That McCarthy contacted King at all suggests a deep and considered interest in getting the details of his scene correct, as well as an intense desire to get his authorial “moves” right. That he returned time and again to the same collaborator even across multiple projects, as he did when he came to depict Chigurh’s leg wound in *No Country For Old Men*, demonstrates a remarkable faithfulness to those who help him, and a deep appreciation and respect both for their input and for their expertise. Equally significant is the confirmation of the idea, again first mooted by Woodward in his interview, that the novels of Border Trilogy were written out of order, beginning with *Cities of the Plain*. There are clear implications for a reading of the Border Trilogy in reordering the novels in this way, just as there are implications for McCarthy’s claim on the original film script that the events of the *Cities of the Plain* had been related to him by an old rancher.

The entrance of Amada Urban into the correspondence on the Border Trilogy also reveals the increasing input that agents have had on their author’s careers. Again mirroring more general trends in the publishing industry as a whole, the increasing involvement of Amanda Urban in McCarthy’s career after the retirement of Albert Erskine stands as a microcosm of a world where, as André Schiffrin points out “agents [...rather than editors, as had been the case] became the fixed points in authors’ lives.”<sup>7</sup> The sheer variety of activities Urban undertook on McCarthy’s behalf, from securing contracts and advances, through securing research materials for her author, to establishing new personal collaborations demonstrates that even for McCarthy, long without one, the agent has arrived on the literary scene, filling in the gaps left by the corporatized and overburdened editorial collaborator.

The material on *No Country For Old Men* is revealing of the changes which McCarthy was prepared to put his novels through. The published version of *No Country For Old Men* is sufficiently different from McCarthy’s initial screenplay as to be a different work altogether. McCarthy emerges here as a mature novelist, capable of and willing to edit and redraft his own work. Furthermore, McCarthy’s engagement with the filming of his novel, discussed at length in the Coen Brothers’ interviews with McCarthy, demonstrate not only a greater willingness on McCarthy’s part to face his public, but also a greater interest in involving himself with the afterlife of his novels. This discovery paves the way for McCarthy’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 82.

later, and much more intensive, involvement in John Hillcoat's adaptation of *The Road*. During the filming of Hillcoat's film, as discussed in chapter seven, McCarthy felt able to give advice on the editing of the film, and was able to successfully argue for the reintroduction of what he felt were lines crucial to the integrity of his story. This involvement would, in turn, foreshadow McCarthy's involvement with the various productions of *The Sunset Limited*. The comments that Samuel L Jackson makes about McCarthy's directorial input to the performance he gave to the HBO version of the play are prefigured in the archives by McCarthy's notes on a playbill for the original stage version of the play, which are covered in pencil instructions to both actors to "stop yucking it up," and to play more of the lines "straight," rather than going for laughs.<sup>8</sup> What emerges from this material is that McCarthy, by this point in his career, was confident enough in his own voice and work to embark on editing and directing of his own.

McCarthy as editor is a theme which reappears in the material on *The Road*. As the multiple news reports around the time McCarthy was working on his tenth novel were keen to reveal, McCarthy was working with scientists at the Santa Fe Institute to which he was attached as a "writer in residence" to sharpen up the prose of their papers and books. Not only does this change in role signify a dramatic shift in McCarthy's career, going from the young novelist in need of careful and extensive editing to an experienced novelist working on and editing the writings of others, it also demonstrates the fact that McCarthy's involvement with his collaborators was becoming increasingly reciprocal. One of the enduring impressions of McCarthy which appears time and again in articles and interviews about the author is a characterisation of McCarthy as a man possessed of what John Jurgenson called an "omnivorous curiosity."<sup>9</sup> The draft material surrounding *The Road* certainly confirms Jurgenson's impressions of McCarthy. That McCarthy's scientist brother had some impact into McCarthy's depiction of *The Road*'s desolate wasteland is reasonably well-known, but the confirmation that McCarthy was dealing with and working amongst scientists dealing with precisely these kinds of events adds new credence to the idea that McCarthy collaborated with

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<sup>8</sup> "Playbill" Box 94 Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos, Tx.

<sup>9</sup> John Jurgenson, "Hollywood's favourite Cowboy," in the *Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704576204574529703577274572.html> Accessed 24/7/11.

outside scientific sources in constructing his wasteland.

Equally significant are the great lengths that McCarthy went to in order to precisely construct the image of the boat from which the man and his son scavenge supplies in one of *The Road's* set-piece scenes. As explored in the chapter on *The Road*, the length of time McCarthy spent getting the detail of his scene right suggests its importance, both for his characterisation of the man and for his thematic linking of his protagonist to the mythological figure of Sir Gawain. This intertextual link to mythology is further strengthened through an examination of McCarthy's papers, with discarded and reworked scenes confirming the hinted-at impression that *The Road's* protagonist was, like his mythic predecessor, a healer. These removed scenes not only firm up links to outside intertexts such as the grail myth and the motif of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac – revealed in turn by a pencil note from McCarthy directly naming his source text – intertextual links within McCarthy's own writing have been unearthed from the material on *The Road*. The cut scene involving the death of the last horse is a clear nod to McCarthy's previous work and the statement by a ranch hand in *All the Pretty Horses* that god would "never allow" horses to go extinct. The effects on the reading of McCarthy's earlier text by eventually-deleted asides such as this one have also been explored, as they key into debates surrounding the precise location of McCarthy's sympathies when dealing with John Grady and his deep but imperialistically-intoned fascination with Don Hector's horses.

This thesis has taken in a case study of the developing world of New York publishing, especially that of Random House and its subsidiaries. In this thesis I have examined the changing yet constantly vital role of high-level literary editors. I have looked at the involvement of literary agents and the role they have increasingly supplanted from literary editors as the key contact in developing their authors' careers and managing their affairs, a slow development tracked perfectly in miniature by McCarthy's career. Finally, I have examined McCarthy's authorship practices. What emerges from this examination is that McCarthy's authorship is a self-conscious process involving dozens of different collaborators and hundreds of intertexts across his career. These collaborators have ranged from medical doctors through scientists to fellow authors. Each of these collaborators added substantively to McCarthy's texts, contributing to the "web of quotation" from which McCarthy worked and

reworked his novels. That is not say that I mean to, as Vickers puts it in the section of his work quoted in the introduction to this thesis, “disintegrat[e]” McCarthy’s claim to be the author of his text, rather my intention has been, again as Vickers puts it, to “give each [collaborator] his due.”<sup>10</sup>

The implications of this thesis for the understanding of McCarthy and his work are, I argue, clear. This project goes some way to exploding the myth of McCarthy as solitary, even anti-social, author. McCarthy may have previously, for example in his statement that “books are made of other books”, acknowledged his debts to his intertextual sources, but what emerges across this project is the sheer depth and scale of McCarthy’s reading and research. In addition, this project reveals for the first time at such length that McCarthy owes just as much to his living collaborators as he does to his traditional intertextual sources. That McCarthy is quite aware of his debt to these collaborators – editors, agents, doctors, sailing enthusiasts, copy-editors, proof readers, and others – is just as revealing of his authorship practices as his more public acknowledgement of his debts to other writers.

The public persona that McCarthy presents in his interviews and other public appearances has long been thought to be an act. What this look behind the curtain of McCarthy’s performance of authorship allows for is a more thorough exploration of the sources of this routine, an untangling of what McCarthy’s authorship is made of. In revealing the differing roles played by McCarthy’s assorted collaborators, and the debts of thanks and loyalty McCarthy demonstrates toward these people, this thesis deepens the understanding of just how and why McCarthy projects this persona, and how this self-conscious performance fits into McCarthy’s understanding of what it means to be an author, and how such an identity can be constructed and maintained.

What the examination of McCarthy’s papers in this thesis, and resulting complicating and unpacking of McCarthy’s authorship, reveals is that to talk about McCarthy’s authorship, McCarthy’s novels, is also to talk about Erskine’s editorship, Bertha Krantz’s proof-reading, Barry King’s research. That McCarthy was keen to not only seek these collaborators out, but that he returned to his collaborators time and again and the multitude of uses to which he puts their expert testimony, their proof reading queries, their editorial comments and queries,

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<sup>10</sup>Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137.

reveals that for McCarthy the very act of authorship is a collaborative enterprise, a stark contrast to existing narratives around McCarthy, the man with *“lots of friends who know that he likes to be left alone,”* but who isolates himself when he begins to write.

There are also implications within this thesis for the study of the American literary marketplace, and for American print culture studies more generally. My examination of the McCarthy and Erskine papers reveal the extensive, and often overlooked roles played by McCarthy's collaborators and allies at his publishing house. This revealing of the roles played by McCarthy's editors, proof-readers, copy-editors, agents, advisors and many others who have contributed to the form McCarthy's books have taken over the years is one contribution that this thesis can make to this critical conversation. The lengthy and involved exchanges surrounding Bertha Krantz's proof-reading and copy-editing, as just one example, neatly demonstrates that even the most apparently technical of McCarthy's collaborators still had a significant, and self-consciously artistic, role to play in the development and publishing of his texts. The fact that Albert Erskine took it upon himself to assume responsibility for these roles in the days before he found a reliable and devoted ally in Krantz is also revealing of the respect that those within the publishing industry have for these so-often invisible individuals.

In addition to opening up the role of these collaborators for debate, if not for the first time then for the first time at such length, this thesis also engages with the history of book publishing in America. It is clear that Albert Erskine was a remarkable, and remarkably devoted, editor and ally to McCarthy. However, the relationships between other authors and other editors explored in the introduction of this thesis indicate that Erskine was not alone in his willingness to go the extra mile for his author. Equally, the way in which McCarthy was able to work as a professional author for more than twenty years without professional representation seems now to be a relic of a previous era. And perhaps it is. What the changing nature of McCarthy's relationships with his later editors, devoted and sympathetic readers and collaborators all, reveals is that it would appear that some of Schiffrin's warnings about the state of American publishing are not without basis in fact. McCarthy's relationships with these editors became ever shorter, ever more professional and increasingly compartmentalised. As a result, McCarthy was increasingly reliant, though not exclusively so, on his agent rather than his editor to set up the new collaborations he needed to write his novels. McCarthy's career, in

his move from one publishing house to a smaller imprint, in the change from one twenty-year editorial relationship to three later collaborations, each lasting no more than five years, and even in the way his career spans the time between the late 1960s at the beginning of the consolidation of the publishing industry through to the early 2000s and the height of corporatized publishing is shown across this thesis to be a significant and revealing test-bed for the theories of Schiffrin, Thompson and others.

What emerges most strongly from this attempt to discover how McCarthy writes his novels is that McCarthy writes his novels over years, and with an awareness and appreciation for the world in which he writes and a self-aware reflexivity of what it means to be an author. Accordingly, he collaborates with those who know about the subjects his writings cover. The picture of McCarthy which comes through most strongly is one of an author who moves from an inexperienced novelist, sheltered from the encroaching world of corporatized and profit-driven publication by his devoted and thoroughly pre-corporate editor through to an experienced author confident in both his own work and in his abilities both to write and rewrite his novels. McCarthy also increasingly plays a part in more and more stages of the publication of his works and always, always seeks to work in concert with a select group of dedicated collaborators and to integrate their multifarious voices into his own authorial one. A “gregarious recluse” indeed.

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