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Mapping Fragments

A Spatial Analysis of Cormac McCarthy's Novels of the Desert

Settore scientifico disciplinare di afferenza: **L-LIN/11**
Tesi di Dottorato di: **Irene Nasi**
Matricola: **825740**

Coordinatore del Dottorato	Tutore del Dottorando
Prof. Alessandra Giorgi	**Prof. Pia Masiero**

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Ai miei nonni Franca, Primo, Cede e Adriano
per avermi dato radici tanto profonde
da potermi spingere lontano

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The future has an ancient heart.

Carlo Levi

INTRODUCTION

> I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy. It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning. That made the first American story (Parkman's): exploration.
>
> (Charles Olson)

> American history is thus just as much a story of the invention and expansion of space, as of its regulation and confinement.
>
> (Micheal Fuchs, Christina Holub)

The large production of materials relevant to Cormac McCarthy studies demonstrates the great interest, both national and international, revolving around this American author. Despite the fact that he had been a prolific writer since the mid-60s, publishing novels that had been acclaimed in literary circles and by academics, McCarthy gained widespread recognition only after the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992. The novel won the National Book Award, and its success paved the way for the re-printing of McCarthy's previous novels, from *The Orchard Keeper (*1965), to *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West* (1985). McCarthy's career as a novelist continued with the publication of *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain* which, together with *All the Pretty Horses,* constitute *The Border Trilogy*, followed by *No Country for Old Men*, and it reached its highest attainment with *The Road* (2006), that won him The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

McCarthy's literary production has been traditionally divided by critics into two distinct stages (Estes 89, Spurgeon 1-22). This subdivision is mostly based on the characterization of the settings: the first novels (*The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark, Child of God*,

and *Suttree*) are set in the Southeastern hills of Tennessee and in the Appalachian mountains while, from *Blood Meridian* to *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy moves to the lands of the Southwestern American desert: Texas, New Mexico, and the Mexican borderlands in particular. In *The Road* McCarthy gives very few details concerning the setting of the novel, but many critics have advanced the suggestion that, with this novel, he has turned back to the beginnings of his literary production, to the hills of the American Southeast.[1]

The difference between these two phases in McCarthy's production does not concern only the settings described in the novels, but also the stylistic choices the author makes and the literary genres the novels enter in conversation with. The language of the novels goes from the fluid prose of the first period (*Suttree* is probably the best example of this plain style), to the progressive weakening of punctuation and the use of extremely realistic dialogues which have a rhythm of their own, that does not ask for commas. *Blood Meridian* is the novel where this rhythm is easier to observe, together with an extremely rich vocabulary, at times almost baroque. The same richness can also be found in certain pages of the trilogy, especially in *The Crossing,* that becomes highly poetical when it comes to the description of the landscape. In *No Country for Old Men*, the narrative is bifurcated because of the presence of the voices of two different narrators, a total novelty for McCarthy, while in *The Road* the syntactical texture is highly paratactic.

Quite often a change in style corresponds to a change in literary genre: the novels of the Tennessee period have often been connected to the works of William Faulkner, and to the aesthetics of decay of the Southern Gothic (Greenwood 16, Spurgeon 7-10), while *Blood Meridian* is the novel that declares McCarthy's will to explore the possibilities offered by the western genre, that he continues to deploy and revision in *The Border Trilogy*. *No Country for Old Men* has been defined as a hard-boiled crime novel, a definition that Jay Ellis finds quite problematic (228), while the post-apocalyptic genre presented in *The Road* has been interpreted as the possible opening of a new stage in the author's literary production (Spurgeon 18), but readers will have to wait for his next novel to determine if this is actually the case.

In spite of the heterogeneous choices regarding style and genre, the totality of

[1] In his analysis of *The Road*, John Cant affirms that the journey of the two protagonists features the literary journey of McCarthy himself, who seems to look back to his Tennessee period (*Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* 270). Cant founds his interpretation on the presence of the descriptions of earthquakes in the novel – quite common in Tennessee –, and on the reference to the advertisement “See Rock City”, which has become a characteristic feature of Southeastern barns (see the subchapter “Things, Waste and Beachcombers” in chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of this topic).

McCarthy's production displays long descriptions of overwhelming fictional landscapes.[2] McCarthy's landscapes are so powerfully described that they become veritable narrative centers, to the detriment of plot-oriented narrative sequences. Whether the characters move in the woods of Tennessee, live on the banks of the Tennessee river, or ride in the vast immensity of the arid Southwestern desert, they all seem to be connected to the space surrounding them by a relation of submission, or at least of strong dependence. The numerous studies concerning the concept of space in McCarthy witness the importance of this theme in the critical debates related to the author, and the necessity to examine this subject and its developments to reach a more complete understanding of his novels.

Among the researches concerning narrative space in McCarthy,[3] I consider Andrew Keller Estes's *Cormac McCarthy and The Writing of American Spaces* to be the work that better focuses on the mythical implications space exercises on McCarthy's novels, while Georg Guillemin's *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* examines the presence of a biocentric pastoralism in the texts, that contrasts the anthropocentric view of the land from which pastoralism traditionally develops.[4] Jay Ellis's *No Place for Home* presents an analysis of the spaces of constraint described in McCarthy, in particular of the different kinds of dwellings inhabited by the characters, focusing on their tendency to run away from them, and from the set of responsibilities they incarnate. Finally, Megan Riley McGilchrist's *The Western Lanscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner* articulates the most significant themes related to the myth of the American West and of the frontier both from an ecocritical and a feminist perspective.

The scope and variety of these studies show a pronounced interest in the thematic force of the narrative spaces created by McCarthy, and in their relation with the mythic foundations of the American character, namely, the frontier mythology, the contrast between wilderness and civilization, the presence of pastoralism and the utopian vision, connected to the western genre, of life on the open range. These critical studies develop

2 In referring to the spaces or landscapes described in fictional texts, I will indifferently use the adjectives "narrative" or "fictional", since I have noticed that in the essays of narrative theory concerning this specific issue the two adjectives are used as synonyms.

3 The articles that have been written on this issue are more than copious, as the official bibliography edited by Dianne C. Luce (last updated in 2011) demonstrates. Some of them will constitute part of the theoretical background of my analysis of McCarthy's novels, while others have been useful to delineate the main themes at play in this field of research (see in particular Ashley Bourne, John Blair, Gail Moore Morrison and Stephen Tatum).

4 Pastoralism originally points toward an idealistic vision of the land as the idyllic place where man and nature can live in harmony. Actually, this vision is based on a conception of nature as a highly submissive element, whose wild side is not inserted in the perfect and timeless pastoral image. On the contrary, in McCarthy "the world of nature and the world of men are parts of the same world, and both are equally violent and indifferent to the other" (Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision* 83).

from the general idea of a mythologized American space, functioning as the element that justifies the presence of certain details in the characterization of the narrative spaces described in McCarthy's novels. In other words, they tend to interpret these spaces through the lens of the American land mythology. As opposed to this point of view, that interprets the particular on the basis of more general assumptions, my lens is directed to the particular: what I propose are interpretative trajectories focused on specific spatial elements that often recur in the narrative spaces of the author's second production, to unlock the general issues they inform and develop.

The novels that belong to McCarthy's second phase present a variety of landscapes, styles and genres that consistently differentiates one novel from the other, with the exception of *The Border Trilogy*, united by the presence of the same characters, whose story is followed through three different stages. *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* are two novels where mindless violence seems to be the propelling force governing the plots, but they are distant in style, and even more distant is *The Road*, which can be truly considered a world apart. The element that characterizes all the narrative spaces described in these novels, and that seems to confer a certain coherence among them, is the desert. This spatial dimension is the common denominator that allows me to examine the narrative spaces of the novels as a whole, contrasting the differences they reveal, and to map the crucial spatial elements that are the backbone of the storyworlds.

Blood Meridian and the trilogy have already been analyzed as a group, since they pertain to the western genre.[5] In *West of Everything*, one of the most complete and exhaustive studies on western novels, Jane Tompkins claims the desert to be a central element in the characterization of the genre, together with death, horses, cattle and the avoidance of women and language on the cowboy's figure part. She dedicates an entire chapter to the theme of the western landscape – that includes the great plains and the desert areas of Arizona, Texas, California and New Mexico –, arguing that the desert, this "land defined by absence" (71), is also the ultimate element to which the cowboy desires to be connected to: "[t]he qualities that nature implicitly possesses – power, endurance, rugged majesty – are the ones that men desire while they live. And so men imitate the land

[5] In chapter 3 I will present the main debates concerning the definition of genre in *Blood Meridian* and *The Border Trilogy,* highlighting the characteristics of the novels that differ from the western genre, and that demonstrate the author's will to revision it. The most specific studies on this issue have been presented by Sabine Anders in *Pain is Always New*, and by Barcley Owens in *McCarthy's Western Novels*. See also Brian Edwards' essay and Susan Kollin's analysis of *Blood Meridian* as an example of contemporary western.

in Westerns; they try to look as much like nature as possible" (72).

The characters portrayed in *Blood Meridian* and *The Border Trilogy* are often akin to the desert, or at least they wish to be so, no matter how many difficulties they have to face to survive in this habitat. As Tompkins argues in the introduction to her study, "the desert light and the desert space, the creak of saddle leather and the sun beating down, the horses' energy and force – these things promise a translation of the self into something purer and more authentic, more intense, more real" (4). In other words, the desert offers the cowboy an experience through which he can reach a higher level of human awareness, and ultimately the mythic allure typical of the hero. The relation of the cowboy with the land oscillates between domination and symbiosis, two aspects of the same bond that McCarthy develops in particular in *The Border Trilogy*, where the young cowboys go through a process of growth, loss and – in certain cases – wisdom that may be read as the author's intention to confer a psychological side to a genre generally lacking it.

In the last two novels here taken into examination, the desert emerges both as a physical and a psychological dimension. *No Country for Old Men* is set in the borderlands between Texas and Mexico – the same landscapes described in *Blood Meridian* and *The Border Trilogy* –, while the descriptions of the narrative space in *The Road* point to a cold desert constituted by ashes, burned woods and gray ice, where a chemical rain drenches the ground. As I have stated before, the novel hinges upon a post-apocalyptic aesthetics, and the unnamed waste land that constitutes its narrative space presents many similarities with that evoked in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: a comparison with Eliot's poem leads to an interpretation of this space also as a symbolic element. In *The Road*, the desert is characterized in a way that counters those described in the other novels, but it nevertheless shares with them two common features: absence, and overwhelming odds. In addition to this, the reference to Eliot's poem suggests ways in which this desert can be seen as the image of a human wasteland, and of the end of civilization. In these novels, the desert functions as a *tabula rasa* where the other elements that characterize their narrative spaces emerge with clarity, as if they were illuminated by its emptiness.

By looking at these narrative spaces as an interconnected whole, I have identified certain spatial elements that often appear in their characterization: ruins, maps, heterotopic spaces – such as prisons, cemeteries, brothels and motels – and houses. The frequency with which they recur in the novels highlights their importance as meaningful parts of the storyworlds, and makes them interpretative keys to unlock the profound

meanings hidden in these fictional spaces. Despite the variety of themes that will emerge from the analysis of these spatial elements, a common characteristic that can be observed is their state of fragmentation, or incompleteness, from which they articulate a discourse on the roots of America.

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “fragment” is defined in these terms:

> Fragment: (Latin *fragmentum*, *frangere*: to break).
> - A part broken off or otherwise detached from a whole; a broken piece; a (comparatively) small detached portion of anything.
> - A detached, isolated, or incomplete part; a (comparatively) small portion of anything; a part remaining or still preserved when the whole is lost or destroyed.

The fragment speaks about breakage, but it also represents something that is lacking, or something conceived as a whole in the past, and that has the power to tell a story about it. Through these fragmentary spatial elements, McCarthy gives voice to a highly problematic vision of the world, that seems to be characterized by discontinuities which allow the narrative spaces to communicate with the past, so much so that they become alternative means through which the history of the United States is introduced in the novels.

To unveil and illuminate this discourse, I proceed with a textual analysis founded both on the main studies on space in fiction, and on other approaches: the intrinsic polysemy of space calls for equally diverse critical perspectives. The connection between the broad field of cultural studies specifically related to spatial issues, and narrative theory has proved to be extremely fruitful, as Sheila Hones explains in relation to the interdisciplinarity of “literary geography”:[6]

> Within the interdisciplinary context of literary geography, ... an imaginative mash-up of the precision of narrative theory and the theoretical stretch of spatial studies has evident possibilities; it might not

[6] Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni's essay delineates the story of the term in the essay “Cartographies of Fictional Worlds”. Literary geography indicates the “scale of localizations that range from the realistically rendered, highly recognizable, to the completely imaginary”(217) that constitutes the fictional space described in a text. Literary geography is often accompanied (and, sometimes, erroneously substituted) by the term “literary cartography”, which can be defined as a sub-discipline of the overall topic, more concerned with the presence of maps in fictional texts.

> only enable more detailed analysis of the ways in which apparently story-internal fictional space is grounded in specific narrative techniques, but would also allow for the understanding of narrative texts as emergent spatial events. (688)

The rigor of narrative theory may offer a precise direction to the field of spatial studies, showing the importance of the structural details of a fictional text, and its mechanisms; on the other hand, the theoretical variety intrinsic to spatial studies is a source of new ideas, useful to approach the field of narrative theory and to discover its imaginative potential. For this reason, I have decided to look for interpretative directions in both fields, creating a dialogue between these two areas of interest.

As David Herman claims in "Spatialization", "[i]n some of the early research on narrative, if space was discussed at all it was used negatively to mark off setting from story ..., orientation from complicating action ..., description from narration proper" (265). Starting from the Aristotelian concept of action,[7] the studies on space in fiction[8] tended to maintain this uneven division until the publication of Mikhail Bakhtin's famous essay "Forms and Time of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1981), where he examines the centrality of space in the formation of the plot. The two dimensions are fused together in a unique nucleus of narration – the "chronotope" – and they acquire strength through their definition as an inseparable couple.

The same concept has been proposed by Gabriel Zoran in "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative", where he says that "space and time are perceived as complementary aspects of equal status, belonging to a common field of debate", and traces three "levels of structuring" (309) of the narrative space: the topographical, the chronotopic, and the textual. Each one of these levels has been divided into additional sub-categories, unfortunately too confusing to provide a satisfactory analysis of the functioning of

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7 In the *Poetics,* Aristotle lists the three classical unities constituting the structure of drama: the unity of action, of place, and of time. By defining the tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude", he also confirms the importance of the unity of action, while there are no other comments in the treatise about place, and very few about time. From this absence, it derives the poor interest directed towards description in respect to narration in the subsequent developments of narrative theory.

8 One of the first attempt to analyze the functioning of the narrative space in the novel is Joseph Frank's essay "The Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945). However, his examination of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* mistakes the temporal simultaneity represented in modernist fiction with the "spatial interweaving of images and phrases independent of any time sequence" (456). Wlliam Spanos's critique of Frank's theory has brilliantly shown the limits of his study, based on an "oversimplified account of modern literature" (92). See also Philippe Hamon and Gérard Genette. In particular, Genette argues that narration and description are two different modes of representation, but they are "blended together and always in varying proportions" (5).

narrative space in the novel. The same could be said about Ruth Ronen's "Space in Fiction", where the critic proposes a rather complex (and, I think, pointless) division of the narrative space in frame and setting, two terms that her analysis fails to explain in a clear way. Even if these first approaches[9] to the study of narrative space have proven to be incomplete, if not problematic, they have marked the beginning of the so-called "spatial turn" of the 1980s, not only in narrative studies, but also in social and cultural domains:

> One cannot help noticing an increasingly spatial or geographical vocabulary in critical texts, with various forms of mapping or cartography being used to survey literary terrains, to plot narrative trajectories, to locate and explore sites, and to project imaginary coordinates. A great many literary studies and academic conferences have been devoted to matters of space, place, and mapping, and the spatial or geographic bases of cultural productions have, in recent years, received renewed and forceful critical attention. (Tally, *Spatiality* 12)

It is not my intention to propose here a detailed report of the main stages of development of the spatial turn, since it has already been provided by eminent experts, such as Robert Tally, Bertrand Westphal, David Herman and Marie-Laure Ryan. It suffices to say that, contrarily to modernism – a cultural and philosophical movement that privileged the supremacy of the temporal dimension of human experience – postmodernism became the mouthpiece of the "disorientating and disempowering realm of space" (Skordoulis, Arvanitis 106). If modernism developed from the faith in human progress and the firm belief in the ontological – if problematic – unity of the subject, postmodernism expressed the multifaceted and fragmented society characterized by what Fredric Jameson called "multinational capitalism". The complex network of social relations, the consequent production of several spatial dimensions and the implosion of time into a perpetual present due to technological progress[10] were all seen as direct expressions of the logic of "late capitalism" (xvii), characterized by the predominance of a spatial and mental disorientation that, to Jameson, was primarily caused by what he called the postmodern "hyperspace" (*Postmodernism* 37). As Michel Foucault claims in the essay

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[9] See also Philippe Hamon and Michel Beaujours on narrative description, and Joseph Kestner's *The Spatiality of the Novel*.

[10] David Harvey speaks about a "time-space compression" (284).

"Of Other Spaces":

> We are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (22)

The necessity to understand and govern the intricate maze of spatial relations and their connection with power observable in the world of the 20th century – a theme that has been thoroughly examined by Henry Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* – brought to the development of the field of spatial studies. The spatial turn affected the field of philosophical, social and cultural studies alike, but also that of narrative theory. Gaston Bachelard's work on the role of spatial imagery, the notion of "lived space"[11], the studies on the language of spatial relations and on the "thematization of space"[12] proposed by Yuri Lotman, all gave a new dimension to this field of study, that went beyond the mere examination of the several forms of textual spatiality, to focus on narrative space as a theme and as a producer of meaning in itself.[13] In particular, narrative space began to be examined as an important element of narrative structures: "[s]pace ... becomes an 'acting place' rather than the place of action [,] [i]t influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space" (Bal 95-96).

In this thesis, I will refer in particular to the studies of Ryan, Mieke Bal, Lotman and Bachelard, who treat the issue of narrative space from different perspectives – from the concept of "cognitive mapping", that Ryan develops from Fredric Jameson's definition, to Bal's considerations on the importance of fictional objects, to the studies of Lotman on the semanticization of language and on the notion of "narrative boundary", to Bachelard's analysis of intimate spaces. I will use these critical approaches in parallel to the studies of Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, Michel de Certeau, David Harvey and Foucault (to name a

[11] This term derives from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. In his argumentation on space, he claims that space always includes a subject that perceives it (see the introduction to chapter 2 for a broader examination of this issue). The direct experience of space is important in the construction of spatial mental models that help the reader in imagining fictional spaces: "narrative does not merely reflect spatial categorization of experience but furthermore is one of the chief means by which people go about building spatial representations of a world that they could not otherwise begin to experience at all" (Herman, "Spatialization" 298).

[12] With this term, I intend the act of attributing a symbolic meaning to the spaces of the narrative world.

[13] See Algirdas J. Greimas's "Pour une sémiotique topologique", where he introduces the notion of space as a generator of meaning in fiction, but also in social practices.

few), that in each chapter will highlight the themes conveyed by the spatial elements that are at the core of my analysis. The study that follows will take into account the several layers of meaning intrinsic in the complex notion of space, from this joint critical perspective. Contrarily to the works published so far on space in McCarthy, my thesis proposes an analysis that aims at examining the functioning of these spatial elements, both as constituents of the narrative structures of the novels, and as means through which the texts develop a story told by the narrative space itself.

A final disclaimer before presenting the synopsis of the chapters that follow: I will not present an analysis of the descriptive sequences of the novels, analysis that, for that matter, are extremely interesting and useful, as the studies of Michel Beaujours, Philippe Hamon and Meir Sternberg demonstrate. On the contrary, I will examine the recurring appearance of ruins, maps, heterotopias and houses in the same descriptive sequences: I would argue that these repeated occurrences in the group of texts that I have named the "novels of the desert" are highly relevant. The analyses of these elements and of the ways in which they are inserted in the descriptive sequences of the novels will highlight other issues at play and new ways to interpret them. The echoes and cross-references of different themes, related to the narrative landscapes of the novels, will build an all-encompassing discourse on the roots and on the future development of American identity.

In the first chapter, I examine the role of ruins in *Blood Meridian* and *The Road*, emphasizing their meaning through the lenses of Georg Simmel's reflections on the relation of these elements with nature and of Walter Benjamin's notion of historical materialism. Ruins are traditionally absent in the collective imaginary of American art and culture, as Paul Zucker observes in his studies on the presence of ruins in Europe, from the Renaissance to the 19th century. This lack was justified as intrinsically depending on the ideas of newness and freshness circulating around the United States at the beginning of the 19th century. America was seen as a democratic nation born on virgin soil, quite different from Europe, whose ancient heritage was mostly represented by ruins, with all the positive and negative consequences this fact implied. Actually, as Donald J. McNutt demonstrates in *Urban Revelations,* ruins were indeed present on the American soil, and in American literature, as signs of the failure of the promises incarnated by the frontier mythology. McCarthy's decision to insert a significant number of ruins in the narrative spaces of the two novels seems to respond to the same critical approach proposed by

McNutt in his analysis, namely, showing how American ruins develop discourses on the relation of the United States with its own past, and with that of Mexico.

Starting from some premises on the hybridism of ruins, based on Simmel's essay "The Ruin", in which he defines this element as a hybrid suspended between art and nature, I propose an analysis of the ancient ruins of Mexican churches and Indian villages described in *Blood Meridian*, in order to demonstrate how they make the violent history of the American conquest of Mexico, and of the slaughter of Native American tribes, visible on the land. These ancient ruins will be compared to the modern ruins described in *The Road*, which point to the future of the nation instead. As I will show, the fictional ruins of the novel – mainly huge infrastructures and waste – present characteristics that can be included in the aesthetics of post-industrialization, which encompasses both destruction and the creation of new forms. Questions about the possibility of the opening of a new frontier in a post-atomic era conclude this first chapter.

The second chapter examines the massive presence of textual maps – that is, the fictional maps described in novels – in *The Border Trilogy*, *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men.* These maps seem to indicate the characters' necessity to locate themselves in a highly fragmentary space, and to try and impose an order on their world. Their attempt, as I will demonstrate, will prove to be disastrous. A premise on the concept of "cognitive mapping" will be helpful to define the nature of the anxiety of McCarthy's characters toward the determination of their position in space. The term was coined by Fredric Jameson to indicate the cognitive abilities involved in gaining information on the spatial environment surrounding us, and it has also been used by Ryan to analyze the characters' spatial perception.

Another necessary premise concerns the way in which maps provide information, that I present through the studies of John B. Harley and John Pickles, primarily focused on the textual quality of cartography. According to Harley, maps function as texts, and they have to be analyzed in order to be fully comprehended. A detailed examination of their structure makes clear that they do not only provide geographical data, but also cultural, economic and political information. Sometimes, they may also give fake information, or they can influence people's knowledge about international politics, the economic situation of a certain country, and so on. This is the case, for instance, of "propagandist cartography".

The maps described in the novels present two opposed ways to provide geographical

information, that also mirror a different vision of space: on the one hand, the space ordered by the imposed and abstract structures of cartography, on the other, a fluid space whose form is based on the equilibrium intrinsic in nature.[14] The analysis of the novels focuses first on what Andrew Keller Estes and Daniel Weiss call the "anthropocentric maps" pertaining to traditional cartography, and secondly on the "biocentric maps" that emerge from the natural landscapes of the novels. By following Harley's reflections on the complexity of maps, I explore the two categories, highlighting the thematic discourses they develop, and that deal with propagandist cartography, the human exploitation of nature and Native American mapmaking. In conclusion, I propose a reflection on the characters' behavior toward maps, that oscillates between the desire to modify them according to the world they see and experience, and the awareness that the knowledge offered by traditional cartography cannot satisfy their will to contrast a sense of homelessness whose depth seems to be embedded in their own souls.

The characters' disorientation becomes even stronger when they experience the illusory spaces produced by the frontier, to which I turn in the third chapter. The presence of the frontier as a common denominator in the narrative spaces described in *The Border Trilogy* and *No Country for Old Men* allows a reflection on this element both as a thematic nucleus in the novels, and as a part of their narrative compositions. In particular, I would argue that the desires created by the frontier mythology mingle with the mechanism of the quest triggered by narrative boundaries. In order to explain these two concepts, I refer to the main studies concerning the American myth of the frontier (see Richard Slotkin, Fredrick Jackson Turner, Henry Nash Smith and Roderick Nash) and to Yuri Lotman's notion of the boundary as the element from which narration emerges. Before focusing on the novels, I highlight some aspects concerning the descriptive sequences dedicated to the borderlands, to demonstrate that the frontier emerges in the texts as a highly illusory space, both for the utopias it produces, and for being an illusion itself.

In the novels, the set of illusions on which the frontier is founded emerges in the descriptions of its spatial dimension, and also in other kinds of space that it generates, and that can be included in the spatial category that Foucault calls "heterotopia". In the essay "Utopias and Heterotopias: Of Other Spaces", Foucault defines heterotopias as spaces where utopias have been made real. Therefore, the main cause for the contradictory and illusory nature of heterotopic spaces lies in the idea from which they develop, that is

[14] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define these two spatial dimensions "striated" and "smooth" (*espace strié*, *espace lisse*).

creating a space of coexistence between the ideal dimension of utopia, and the limitations of the real world. After a brief introduction to Foucault's essay, where I explain the main characteristics of heterotopias, I propose an analysis of the heterotopic spaces described in the novels, to determine the way in which they mirror the illusions produced by the myth of the frontier, and how the characters deal with them.

Chapter four is dedicated to a space that has been traditionally invested with highly symbolic meanings: the house. Specifically, I deal with the dwellings described in *The Border Trilogy* and *The Road,* whose characterization develops a binary opposition between spaces of danger, and places of comfort. This contrast seems to recall the opposition between space and place proposed by Yi-Fu Tuan,[15] and that between the two terms indicating the dwelling in the English language: the physical nature of the "house", and the abstract sense of intimacy defined by the term "home". Ellis has already proposed a study of the houses in McCarthy, highlighting the dynamics inherent in the contrast between the suffering of the characters trapped in spaces of constraint, and the call exercised by the free, open land. I would argue that what complicates this opposition is the fact that characters seem to avoid spaces of constraint – houses –, but they also seem to look for the intimacy of domesticity represented by homes.

To approach this spatial element, I refer to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, one of the most significant studies published on the use of space in literature, that will be helpful to reveal the psychological implications expressed by the house in McCarthy. Together with this perspective, more concerned with the concept of domesticity and with the idea of the house as an intimate space, I also refer to the public role of this element, viewed as the symbol of the American nation, to show the political and social implications it articulates in the novels. The negativity of houses is due to their representation of the problematic relation the characters have with the American nation and with its past, that emerges in the shape of uncanny presences, or as a lost heritage. On the other hand, the positive place of the home is characterized by images of reconciliation between the characters and the land, viewed as a feminine entity.

Memories of the past, voices coming from vast deserts, and then dark omens about a future characterized by a cold wasteland: McCarthy's spaces function as palimpsests where

[15] "The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (Tuan 6).

meaning unfolds and strengthens, to take roots in the bones of America. Space tells a story that should be listened to.

CHAPTER 1

Fragments Shored Against the Ruins: Ancient and Modern Ruins in *Blood Meridian* and *The Road*

In "Ruins: an Aesthetic Hybrid", and in the volume *Fascination of Decay*, Paul Zucker delineates the role and meaning of ruins, and how they have been represented in paintings, from the Renaissance to the 19th century. In his analysis, he examines the most meaningful stages of the development of the aesthetic appreciation related to these architectural elements, an experience that Rose Macauley defines as the "pleasure of ruins" (qtd. in Zucker, "Ruins" 119). During the Renaissance, the importance of ruins was primarily due to their relation with the ancient world: they had to be preserved as "documents of the glorious pagan past" (120). But starting from the 17th century, to reach a climax during Romanticism, ruins became increasingly important in the artistic scene, and their presence in paintings started to manifest the new awareness of a reality that was not perceived as a unique whole any longer. The fragmentation of ruins began to evoke the melancholic beauty of the passing of time, and the power of nature to take control over the work of man.

Zucker's analysis proves to be meaningful both for the examples it provides,[1] and for the absence of references to the United States. He dedicates only a few lines to the American artistic representation of ruins, stating that "it is only natural that the American romantic school showed much less interest in ruins" ("Ruins" 126) in comparison to the rich European production related to this theme. The only American examples he introduces in his essay are the paintings of Thomas Cole, Washington Allston and Albert Bierstadt. In *Fascination of Decay*, he also presents a brief analysis of Cole's *Desolation* (1836), the last painting of *The Course of the Empire* series, claiming that Cole "envisions the final

1 These examples include Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. For what concerns the use of ruins as symbols in poetry, the English group of the Graveyard Poets, which found its main voice in Thomas Gray's poems, is certainly the most significant example of this romantic production. On the topic of artificial ruins used in gardens during Romanticism, see Marcello Barbanera. Andreas Schönle inserts an overview of the main theories on ruins in the introduction to *Architecture of Oblivion* (8-17): from Edmund Burke and the concept of the sublime, to Denis Diderot and Hegel, he presents the most important stages of the development of the philosophy of ruins before Georg Simmel's and Walter Benjamin's studies.

apocalyptic stage of history ... as a bleak, ruin-studded landscape, emptied of the human life which is depicted in the preceding parts of the series" (189).

The "naturalness" of the absence of an American artistic discourse on ruins observed by Zucker is an interesting aspect of his analysis, for it reveals the European perspective on the United States as a new nation, where the physical presence of evidences of the past was neither contemplated as a distinctive part of the landscape, nor of the American cultural production. Actually, as Alexis de Tocqueville's observations demonstrate, the reality was quite different. In *Democracy in America*, he expresses his bewilderment toward the presence of a ruined cabin in the woods near New York, opposing its decaying state to the ideas of prosperity and progress transmitted by the American dream:

> These men left their first country to improve their condition; they quit their second, to ameliorate it still more, fortune awaits them everywhere, but not happiness. The desire of prosperity has become an ardent and restless passion in their minds, which grows by what it feeds on. ... Sometimes the progress of man is so rapid that the desert reappears behind him. ... In these abandoned fields, and over these ruins of a day, the primeval forest soon scatters a fresh vegetation. ... I stood for some time in silent admiration of the resources of Nature and the littleness of man; and when I was obliged to leave that enchanting solitude, I exclaimed with sadness, "Are ruins, then, already here?" (377)

De Tocqueville has been the first to announce the presence of ruined dwellings and abandoned buildings on the virgin soil of the new land, promoting the adhesion to a more critical point of view on the ideals promoted by the American nation. In *Democracy in America*, he expresses his perplexity toward the intense mobility and consequent restlessness of the immigrants, who kept going west looking for a land of milk and honey, and leaving traces of their passage behind.

Reconsidering Zucker's assumption that the absence of ruins in American art and culture was "only natural", in light of de Tocqueville's observations I would argue that one cannot talk of a real absence, but of a problematic presence. The moment of ruination of the dwellings described by de Tocqueville was simply too recent to allow the aesthetic appreciation of the sublime signs of the history of America.[2] These ruins still spoke of the

2 With the term "ruination" I intend the process of decay to which buildings and objects are exposed. Ruination can

harshness of the life on the frontier, of the tears and desperation of thousands of families on the move in the West, looking for the American dream on the prosperous soil of North America. The feeling of nostalgia related to ruins can only be present when there is a past to idealize,[3] as it happened in Europe during Romanticism; it could actually be argued that the ruins de Tocqueville speaks about, in contrast, proved the intrinsic failure of the American dream that indirectly produced them, and for this reason they had to be forgotten, not preserved.

In the fiction of Cormac McCarthy, I have observed a consistent use of ruins as distinctive elements of the narrative landscapes he describes, in particular in *Blood Meridian* and *The Road.* The two texts correspond to the beginning and the end of the group I have defined as the "novels of the desert", and they consequently present several contrasting aspects both stylistically and plot-wise, as I will explain later on in this chapter. However, I contend that the presence of ruins in the definition of the narrative spaces of the two novels frames a unique discourse on the relation of the United States with its own past, and on the anxieties concerning its future.

In *Blood Meridian* the ruins of Mexican churches and Indian villages make the violent history of the country visible on the wild lands where the Glanton gang perpetrates its ravage. After examining the hybrid structure of ruins, suspended between architecture and nature, and their relation with the allegorical space of the novel, I analyze the presence of "human gentrification" in the text, by which Donald McNutt means the vision of human subjects as ruins, or fossils, as it is the case of the Native Americans described in the novel. As a conclusion to the first part of this chapter, I turn to the figure of Judge Holden, and to his peculiar attitude toward ruins, that he paradoxically yearns to both destroy and preserve.

In the second section I deal with the post-industrial ruins that mark both the narrative landscape and the syntactical composition of *The Road.* Ruination in *The Road* is totally different from that described in *Blood Meridian*, mostly because it speaks more about the future, than about the past. Through the presentation of the main characteristics of the so-called "smokestack nostalgia",[4] and of the photographic representations related to it, I

be caused both by the passing of time, or by violent acts, such as wars or natural catastrophes.

3 In *The Invention of Liberty*, Jean Starobinski states that "for a ruin to appear beautiful, the act of destruction must be remote enough for its precise circumstance to have been forgotten. ... [W]e do not muse calmly before recent ruins, which smell of bloodshed: we clear them away as quickly as possible and rebuild" (qtd. in McNutt 180).

4 "Smokestack nostalgia" refers to the lamentation for the loss of industry, and for the heritage or transformations it spawned on particular regions or countries. The presence of nostalgia in the appreciation of ruins has been the core of many studies on the subject, for it lingers between a pointless contemplation of the past, and the positive use of this feeling to build a critical perspective on it. Andreas Huyssen highlights an important aspect of modern

propose a reading of the abandoned buildings that the two protagonists of the novel – father and son – encounter on their road, as elements whose destruction has given life to new forms and new ways of making use of them. Together with the remains of huge infrastructures, I analyze the abundant presence of objects, examples of the U.S. waste characterizing contemporary society.

Ruins of the past, ruins of the future: in contrast with the ideas of destruction that these elements evoke, in the third section I conclude with some considerations on the plausibility of the opening of a new frontier, rising from the remains of the previous one.

Blood Meridian: History Made Visible

As Dana Phillips affirms, *Blood Meridian* presents a problem of definition of genre: "the most often repeated sentence in *Blood Meridian* is 'they rode on' – so the plot moves, but it does not thicken. ... The novel does not seek to resolve 'conflicts' which trouble its characters, much less its narrator or author. It is not really a narrative, then, but a description – and some would say it is not really a novel either" (443). With this statement, Phillips describes one specific aspect of the novel that is at the core of my analysis: the overwhelming presence of the narrative space to the detriment of the progression of the action. In the novel, history emerges more through landscape than through plot, and ruins become the main vehicles of this act of disclosure.

The presence of history as a fundamental aspect of the novel, together with its kinship with violence, is made clear by the three epigraphs presiding over the threshold of the novel:

> Your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint.
> Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed
> with no calm, as if they were irresistible. Finally, you
> fear blood more and more. Blood and time. (Paul Valéry)

ruins, stating that "we are nostalgic for the ruins of modernity because they still seem to hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future"(8). In other words, modern ruins cause nostalgic feelings because they encapsulate in their structure the promises of industrialization. See also Tim Strangleman, and Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. See Jacob Riis for a broader analysis of the notion of "lamentation" connected to urban ruination.

> It is not to be thought that the life of darkness is sunk in
> misery and lost as if in sorrowing. There is no sorrowing.
> For sorrow is a thing that is swallowed up in death, and
> death and dying are the very life of darkness. (Jacob Boehme)

> Clark, who led last year's expedition to the Afar region of
> northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkley colleague Tim D. White,
> also said that a re-examination of a 300,000-year-old fossil
> skull found in the same region earlier showed evidence of
> having being scalped. (*The Yuma Daily Sun*, June 13, 1982)

Valéry's statement about the concomitant fear of blood and time is an introduction to the idea of life and death as a natural unity; the German philosopher's words reiterate the same concept. With the third epigraph, McCarthy indirectly introduces the story of the Glanton gang and its aberrant activity of scalp hunting. The *incipit* expresses the merger of violence and history through a pithy language, that reflects the mythical undertones of the novel: “See the child. He is pale and thin, he wears a thin and ragged linen shirt. ... He watches, pale and unwashed. He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence. All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man” (*Blood Meridian* 3).[5]

The historical coordinates of the novel are detailed: it begins in 1849, soon after the end of the Mexican-American war and the concession of Alta California and New Mexico to the United States by the Mexican government. The territory from the Arkansas River to the Rio Grande has been ravaged for years by Comanches, Apaches and Navajo tribes,[6] and by the gangs of scalp hunters whose aim was to earn some profit from that massacre. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator also indicates the kid's year of birth, mentioning the Leonids meteor shower of 1833: “[N]ight of your birth. Thirty-three. The Leonids they were called. God how the stars did fall. I looked for blackness, holes in the heavens. The Dipper stove” (3). The last chapter is set in 1878, and the epilogue suggests the incipient

5 All quotations in this section are taken from *Blood Meridian*, unless otherwise specified.

6 The Comanche-Mexico war (1821-1870) and the Apache wars (1849-1886) were circumscribed to a region of Northern Mexico called Comancheria, which included the state of Sonora. Villages and towns had been abandoned by the Mexican population, and in 1835 both the state of Chihuahua and Sonora offered a bounty of 100 pesos for each scalp of an Indian man, and lesser amounts for women and children, giving way to the escalation of violence described in the novel.

closing of the frontier, with the highly ambiguous description of a man "progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground" (351).[7]

Setting a novel in this historical time entails dealing with the bond that exists between the violence of the conquest of the frontier and American identity. McCarthy questions one of the most bloody moments in American history, and he does so by describing a narrative landscape that carries the signs of that violence. Along with the narration of the ravages made by the Glanton gang, the author creates a fictional space in which it can be detected a parallel story, narrated through the presence of highly meaningful spatial landmarks. I am referring in particular to the ruins of Indian villages and Mexican churches that characterize the arid Southwestern desert where the story takes place. These ruins are described in terms that create a link between history and nature, in a mosaic that reflects the strong bond that American history has with the land. Furthermore, the frequency with which these ruins appear in the novel makes of them leitmotifs in the vastness of the desert, and consequently also in the vastness of meaning of *Blood Meridian* itself.

– The Hybridism of Ruins

The first description of a ruined building in *Blood Meridian* is that of an abandoned church near San Antonio de Bexar, that the kid finds at the beginning of the novel. After stealing two bottles of liquor in a bar, he finds shelter in this place, a moment whose importance is revealed by the fact that the "abandoned church" is mentioned in the summary of the second chapter, that lists: "Across the prairie – A hermit – A Nigger's heart – A stormy night – Westward again – Cattle drovers – Their kindness – On the trail again – The deadcart – San Antonio de Bexar – A Mexican cantina – Another fight – The abandoned church – The dead in the sacristy – At the ford – Bathing in the river" (16). The mentioning of the ruin in this synoptic list suggests that it functions not only as a detail of the spatial background, but also as an important element of the plot:

> He woke in the nave of a ruinous church, blinking up at the vaulted ceiling and the tall swagged walls with their faded frescoes. The floor of the

7 See Jay Ellis' analysis of the epilogue (192-98) and Peter Josyph's dialogue with Harold Bloom on the same topic (Josyph, *Adventures in Reading* 85).

> church was deep in dried guano and the droppings of cattle and sheep. Pigeons flapped through the piers of dusty light and three buzzards hobbled about on the picked bone carcass of some animal dead in chancel. ... He walked around the side of the church and entered the sacristy. Buzzards shuffled off through the chaff and plaster like enormous yardfowl. The domed vaults overhead were clotted with a dark furred mass that shifted and breathed and chittered. (27-8)

As it emerges from this description, the ruined church has lost parts of its architectural structure, parts that have been filled up by the intrusion of nature. Nature dominates the ruin, where "pigeons [flap] through the piers of dusty light" and the vault is covered by a "dark furred mass" that seems to make the vault a wild being, alive and breathing.

Fig. 1 Vincent J. Stoker. *La chute tragique. Hétérotopie CAED III.*

The coexistence of nature and artifact is the dualism on which the hybridism of ruins is founded. In the essay "The Ruin",[8] Georg Simmel states that architecture is "the most sublime victory of the spirit over nature" (379), developing an extremely tragic vision of nature as a force that takes revenge over the work of man. Ruins symbolize the fight between the building created by man – that tries to endure time and to resist the destructive power of nature – and nature itself, which tends to reconquer the space of

8 The text is collected in Simmel's "Two Essays".

which it has been deprived. However, Simmel's considerations take an unexpected turn when he says that “where the work of art is dying, other forces, those of nature, have grown; and that out of what of art still lives in the ruins and what of nature already lives in it, there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unity” (380). In other words, what Simmel first sees as a moment of destruction becomes, in the end, a return to mother nature, a response to an aspect intrinsically present in the very act of building: decay.[9]

In *Blood Meridian*, the ruined church is a space in transition, suspended between a state of decay, and the creation of another state, more dynamic and totally governed by nature. The new function of the church – animals have built their nests in it, they live and die in it – reveals that its hybrid structure is not only founded on the contrast between artifact and nature, but that there are several oppositions at play. For instance, Karen Dale and Gibson Burrel speak about the coexistence of a state of organization and one of disorganization in the space of the ruined building; according to Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle the ruin breaks down meaning, and in so doing it permits “an intensive compensatory discursive activity” (6). The hybridism of ruins is also present in the viewer's attitude toward them, which lingers between the fear for the decay they represent, and the fascination for their contrasting nature (Dale and Burrel 113). To sum up, ruins are static and dynamic, in ruins destruction and construction coexist, they are organized and chaotic, they destroy meaning, and at the same time they build it anew.

The ruined church in *Blood Meridian* is an example of this dynamism. The natural elements that have merged into the building make it alive and pulsating, but the first part of the description contrasts with what follows. There are other more disquieting presences – the corpses of killed people, marks of bullets on the outside walls, broken statues of saints – that put into light another aspect of this ruin, that has to be added to its hybridism: the violence of history.

Simmel's essay takes into consideration only ruins produced by the passing of time, where destruction seems less traumatic, because it is accepted as a consequence of the natural flowing of the years. His analysis does not take into consideration the ruins created by wars, for instance, or by natural catastrophes. These ruins evoke, differently from those described by Simmel, a profound sense of loss and fragmentation, since they are visible scars history has left on the landscape. The majority of the ruins described in *Blood*

9 Simmel goes on saying that “ruins strike us so often as tragic – but not as sad – because destruction here is not something senselessly coming from the outside but rather the realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed” (382).

Meridian belong to this second category, proving the significance of the presence of history in the spatial dimension of the novel. Ruins become the visible signs history has left on the Southwestern desert, testimony of the blind violence of which the inhabitants of the borderlands had been the main victims. In the following section, I analyze the historical side of the ruins described in *Blood Meridian*, through the lens of Walter Benjamin's reflections on their relation with history, and on their allegorical nature.

– Historical Materialism and the Allegorical Landscape

The kid has just woken from his agitated sleep in the abandoned church, which has offered him a shelter among the animals it hosts. Outside the building, the *façade* shows other forms of ruination, this time caused by war:

> The facade of the building bore an array of saints in their niches and they had been shot up by American troops trying their rifles, the figures shorn of ears and noses and darkly mottled with leadmarks oxidized upon the stone. The huge carved stone Virgin held in her arms a headless child. (28)

The violence of the war, and that of the history of the conquest of Mexico, are manifested by the marks of the bullets on the saints and the Virgin, symbols of the religion imposed by Europe on the Southern regions of the United States. In the text, the whole area around the church is called “the mission”, a term that refers to the years of evangelization of Mexico, as well as to the violation of its territory, defined in the text as an area of “eight or ten acres of enclosed land”. The image of the Virgin is open to symbolic interpretations, but it may also be seen as another evidence of the violence that permeates the history of mankind, like the corpses of killed people left inside the church, “remains of several bodies, one a child” (28). History emerges into the setting as a blind force that does not spare women and children.

The description of the ruined church acquires a new dimension through these details. It is not only a decaying building in transition, on its way toward a re-union with nature, but also and I would argue, especially, an element through which history becomes real and visible in the narrative landscape, and in which its temporal dimension becomes physical.

This church tells the story of the conquest of Mexico, first by Spain, than by the United States; it is the representation of the origins and the end of a culture; it speaks, as all the other ruins described in the novel, of the "soft decay" (101) of history. Through the ruin, Benjamin states, "history has physically merged into the setting" (*The Origin* 178).

Benjamin deals with the theme of ruination in a text that, apparently, has nothing to do with this subject. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is a study on German tragic drama during the Baroque period, a study aimed at unveiling the cultural and historical climate of the 16th and 17th century in Germany. The main concept on which he founds his reflections is the opposition between the Classical – connected to the image of the symbol as a pure manifestation of transcendence –and the Baroque, that used allegory as the main vehicle of its values. Contrasting the general assumption that tended to consider Classical theater (and art) as superior to the Baroque, Benjamin proposes a new reading of the function and meaning of allegory.

Leaving aside the critical debates that still gravitate around the exact meaning of allegory,[10] I embrace Benjamin's explanation of the term. Opposed to the unifying force of the symbol, allegory promotes a proliferation of significations, and in so doing it manages to represent the complexity of reality. As he writes in *The Arcades Project*, "[a]llegory recognizes many enigmas, but it knows no mystery. An enigma is a fragment that, together with another, matching fragment, makes up a whole. Mystery, on the other hand, was invoked from the time immemorial in the image of the veil" (365).

The information allegory provides derives from the relation between several fragments, while the mystery hidden in the symbol is unique, and it may be brought to light by simply "unveiling" it. The knowledge one can obtain from allegory is the result of an exchange among the parts that compose the fragmentary structure of the world. Benjamin's words also introduce another fundamental difference between the symbol and the allegory, that is, the material quality of the latter as opposed to the spiritual one of the former. In other words, whenever the artistic element becomes allegorical, it is deprived of the sacred aura of the symbol, and turned into a simple object. To Benjamin, the fragment is the most important form of allegory, for it evokes the presence of history in the present time under the shape of ruins.[11] To Benjamin, the secularized uncertainty

10 On Benjamin's conception of the allegory, see Giovanni Bottiroli *Che cos'è la teoria della letteratura* 433-36

11 Benjamin's interest in Charles Baudelaire's poetry helped the philosopher to develop his conception of the fragment as the perfect form of allegory. Benjamin was fascinated by the way in which the French poet scattered fragments of objects with multiple meanings in his poems, in order to manifest the transitory nature of things, and the melancholic materiality of life in the modern city. Most of Benjamin's considerations on Baudelaire have been collected in *The Arcades Project*.

expressed by the Baroque, with its fragments and allegories, was far more suitable to represent history, than the eschatological overconfidence of the Classical.

As far as my research focus is concerned, the most relevant aspect of these reflections is the relation between the ruin as allegory, and history:

> In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. ... In the process of decay, and in it alone, the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting. (Benjamin, *The Origin* 178-9)

Two points have to be highlighted in this excerpt: first, the idea of the ruin as a manifestation of the "irresistible decay" that governs the history of mankind; second, the superiority of destruction over beauty, that demonstrates the impossibility to elevate aesthetics to the role of a unifying force governing the "fragments and shards" (Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion* 15) of society. If ruins are the physical counterparts of allegories, then their fragmentary nature has the power to offer interpretations on the historical dynamics that have produced them, as it can be observed in *Blood Meridian*. The allegorical quality of the narrative space of the novel does not only emerge from the proliferation of ruins, but also from the presence of a petrified landscape, where humans, stones and animals all have the same value, and where the elements that compose the storyworld seem to respond to the logic of an arid determinism.

In *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, Georg Guillemin offers an interesting analysis of the "anti-anthropocentrism" of *Blood Meridian*, a notion he develops starting from a specific sentence in the novel: "and in the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships" (259). Animals, stones and humans live under the same universal law – or absence of law[12] – of the desert, the violence of which is immune to moral judgments. To Guillemin, "the narrative voice insinuates the existential equality of humans, domestic animals, wild animals and inanimate nature" (78), an equality that develops on the

12 Guillemin identifies the narrative space described in the novel with the wilderness, which he considers a space without law: "the absolute lawlessness of the characters matches the absolute wilderness of the setting" (73).

horizontal axis of the allegorical space, in contrast with the vertical space of the symbolic.

The ruins described in the novel, that McCarthy positions at the core of the narrative space, epitomize Benjamin's thoughts on historical materialism. The untold history of the massacre of the Native Americans (but also that of the Mexicans, first by the hands of the *conquistadores* and then by the American troops) acquires a new power and finds its own voice, thanks to the fragments of the buildings that have been destroyed during the conquest of the territory. Even more meaningful than architectural ruins, are the human ruins buried in the ground: skeletons, ornaments and skulls cover the prairies crossed by the Glanton gang, a sea of bones that seems to be one and the same with the dirt that contains it. These bones are examples of what Donald McNutt calls “human gentrification”.

– Indian Skulls: “Human Gentrification”

The equality among all the elements described in the allegorical space of *Blood Meridian* is particularly apparent in the ruins of ancient Indian villages, the first mentioned being those scattered in the deep gorge of San Augustín, where the Glanton gang is riding in the sun: “in the dry sand of the arroyo floor old bones and broken shapes of painted pottery and graven on the rocks above them pictographs of horse and cougar and turtle and the mounted Spaniards helmeted and bucklered and contemptuous of stone and silence and time itself” (145). In this case, the ruins are constituted by skeletons and artifacts, which in turn hold images of the natural world that existed in a distant time, as well as those of the first conquerors, who are very much alive in those rocks, “contemptuous of stone”, silence and time. What the narrator seems to suggest is that, through the ruins, the past becomes present once again, carrying a dreadful, but simple message: history and violence are tightly intertwined.

There is an interesting resemblance between these ruins and the ones described by Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. The “bones and knappings of flint or quartzite ... pieces of jars and old baskets ... a part of a necklace of dried melonseed” (155) are the remains of a tribe lost in the machinery of the incessant development of the United States, akin to the ones presented by Jefferson in the accurate description of the excavations he made along the Rivanna river. The detailed list of “scull ... so tender”

(Jefferson 75), jaws, ribs and arms made with scientific detachment, and the reasoning over the faster decay of the bones of children, prove the lack of awareness – or purposeful forgetting – of the genocide of the Natives perpetrated by the United States. An almost identical description can be found in McCarthy: “women and children, the bones and skulls scattered along the bench for half a mile and the tiny limbs and toothless paper skulls of infants like the ossature of small apes at their place of murder and old remnants of weathered basketry and broken pots among the gravel” (95).

In *Urban Revelations*, Donald McNutt examines the representations of ruins in American literature, from 1790 to 1860. By analyzing ruins in novels, political speeches and essays, he comes to the conclusion that the American use of ruins was aimed at treating “concepts of instability and cultural impermanence in urban settings” (4). McNutt's mapping starts with the human gentrification of the Natives that took place at the end of the 18th century and which, in accordance to his interpretation, served “the purposes of national self-definition” (23). In other words, the presentation of Indians as human ruins had to create a visual past made of savagery from which the nation could drift apart, and to which it could oppose its civilizing mission. For this reason, the Natives and their culture were referred to as fossils, “fragmenting monuments” (McNutt 55) that belonged to the history of America.

Jefferson's essay, published in 1785, is one of the examples McNutt provides. In *Notes* Jefferson expresses the importance of collecting the relics of extinct Indian tribes in public libraries and museums, relics that, unfortunately, have already largely been lost: “[i]t is to be lamented ... very much to be lamented, that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature, the general rudiments at least of the languages they spoke” (77). Jefferson's considerations show his propensity to think about the Natives as ancient aspects of national history, dead and buried in the ground long since. Quoting Jean Starobinski, McNutt explains why Indians needed to be segregated in the past: “only as ancient remains could the tribes, and their blood, be made aesthetically palatable, sublime in their destinies” (58). In a similar way, the human ruins described in *Blood Meridian* find their value only as parts of the restored origins of America, in its attempt to justify the violence that sped the conquest of the West, and to express its glorious process of civilization.

– Judge Holden's Attitude Toward Ruins

In *Blood Meridian*, there is one character who expresses a peculiar interest toward the ruins I have presented so far. Judge Holden, that can be certainly considered as the most complex and detailed character of the novel, perfectly incarnates the main characteristics of the Wild Western hero listed by Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land*: self-reliance, solitude, anarchic freedom, savage aspect and the capacity of being one and the same with the wilderness, of which he seems to be the master. Holden, in the ex-priest Tobin's words, is "the greatest [:] [h]e can cut a trail, shoot a rifle, ride a horse, track a deer" (129). Moreover, unlike the other members of the Glanton gang, he seems completely at ease in the desert, even in the most terrible conditions. In truth, there are several passages in which the Judge appears as an actual part of the desert, as well as of every other natural element connected to this wild landscape. For instance, Tobin tells the kid that the Glanton gang found him waiting for them in the desert, alone, as if he were the spirit of that waste, and not a human being:

> There he set on a rock in the middle of the greatest desert you'd ever want to see. Just perched on this rock like a man waiting for a coach. Brown thought him a mirage. Might have shot him for one if he'd had aught to shoot him with. … about the meridian of that day we come upon the judge on his rock there in that wilderness by his single self. Aye and there was no rock, just the one. … And there he set. No horse. Just him and his legs crossed, smilin as we rode up. Like he'd been expecting us. (131)

This description highlights the mythical nature of the character, revealed by the presence of unique elements: the desert is "the greatest" a man can ever see, the judge looks like a "mirage", the rock where he sits is the only one visible in that vastness. All these details contribute to the expression of the exceptional nature of the Judge. Moreover, he is characterized by a sort of epithet – the smile – and by his kinship with fire,[13] which makes of him a version of Vulcan, the god of fire and metallurgy, also known as the emblem of the male fertilizing power. But fire comes with destruction, as his

13 The bond between Judge Holden and fire emerges several times in the novel: "the judge like a great ponderous dijin stepped through the fire and the flames delivered him up as if he were in some way native to their element" (101). See also the scene when he produces gunpowder (136-40).

attitude toward the ruins shows. His interest in ruins becomes the will to possess the knowledge they carry, a will that turns into an act of devastation. McCarthy refers to Samuel Chamberlain's account of the real Judge Holden to delineate this particular aspect of the character: “[t]o my question 'how he knew all this', this encyclopaedian Scalp Hunter replied, 'Nature, these rocks, this little broken piece of clay (holding up a little fragment of painted pottery such as are found all over the desert), the ruins scattered all over the land, tell me the story of the past” (Chamberlain 283-4).

Both in El Paso and in the canyon near San Augustín, Judge Holden carefully observes and studies the artifacts, the paintings and the rests of the buildings left by Indian tribes:

> What kind of Indians has these here been, Judge?
> The judge looked up.
> Dead ones I'd say, what about you, Judge?
> Not so dead, said the judge.
> They was passable masons, I'd say that. These niggers here-abouts now aint no kind.
> Not so dead, said the judge. (148)

The words the Judge says about the tribe whose ruins he has been studying during the camping of the Glanton gang – the Anasazi – reveal his awareness of their value as means through which the Indians killed during the war can become alive and present once again. His vision of the progress of the history of mankind through moments of advancement and decay is defined by the belief in the *genius loci* that inhabits the ruins, and that makes of them guardians of souls: “[a]ll progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage. So. Here are the dead fathers. Their spirit is entombed in the stone. It lies upon the land with the same weight and the same ubiquity” (152).

Judge Holden's interest in the several kinds of ruins he finds in the plains is that of an archeologist, or a paleontologist. But his behavior is that of a voracious Cronos when he destroys them after having sketched every single detail of their composition in his notebook:

> When he had done he took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand

> and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil and pitched it into the fire. He gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire and he shook out the wagonsheet and folded it away among his possibles together with the notebook. (146)

When Webster, a member of the gang, asks him what he wants to do with the sketches, Judge Holden tells him that his intention is “to expunge them from the memory of man” (147). Later on, during one of the monologues where he explains his philosophy to the other renegades, he also says that “whatever in creation exists without [his] knowledge exists without [his] consent” (207).

Critics have given many interpretations to these lapidary sentences, putting into focus the gnosticism of the character,[14] his deathly presence, his relationship with history seen as a never-ending dance. The contradictory relation of the Judge toward ruins, together with the mythical power he manifests, makes him a veritable allegory of the fight between civilization and savagery that built America. And indeed, Judge Holden is constantly represented as the bearer of dance and death, in the incessant circle of the myth of regeneration through violence.[15]

The point of conflation where death and dance coincide is inscribed in his smile, as well as on his rifle. The theme of the Dance of Death, as well as that of the Mexican tradition of the *Dia de los Muertos,* is evoked by the figure of the Judge, dancing naked and smiling at the end of the novel,[16] and by the inscription on his rifle – *Et in Arcadia Ego* –, which was the epigraph that traditionally accompanied the paintings and engravings illustrating this theme. In this final scene, the Judge becomes the fulcrum of the dance, almost inhuman with his small feet and huge body, like “an enormous infant”:

> And they were dancing, the board floor slamming under the jackboots and the fiddlers grinning hideously over their canted pieces. Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and

14 See Leo Daugherty's “Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy”.

15 As John Emil Sepich explains in comparing Judge Holden with the Tarot fool, “being a creature of perpetual motion, the Tarot fool dances through the cards each day, connecting the end with the beginning – endlessly” (27).

16 The comparison between the traditional iconography of Death in the *danse macabre* and Judge Holden is reinforced clearly in the passage describing the Judge in the bar: “He wore a round hat with a narrow brim and he was among every kind of man” (338). This medieval allegory was generally represented as a dance where Death was among various representatives of mankind, from emperors to laborers.

> hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he'll never die. He bows to the fiddlers and sashays backwards and throws back his head and laughs deep in his throat and he is a great favorite, the judge. (348)

The ruins described in *Blood Meridian* create a space of reflection on the bloody roots of America, and manifest the impossibility to erase the past from collective memory. From the very beginning of American history, presented through the pictures of the helmeted Spanish conquerors and of the catholic churches of Mexico, McCarthy traces the main stages of this historical development, arriving at the more recent ruins, still drenched in blood, of Indian villages. Through these fragments of artifacts, buildings and bones, the reader can paradoxically gain a more complete understanding of the meaning of the novel, just like "as a fragment, a ruin is more loaded with meaning that when it was part of a whole" (Williams 2).

The discourse on human savagery and the process of devastation of the land emerges in the last pages, and in particular in the epilogue. The kid, now addressed as "the man", reaches Texas in "the late winter of eighteen seventy-eight" (329), after years spent riding among the plains, described as ravaged lands where "enormous ricks of bones, colossal dikes composed of horned skulls and the crescent ribs like old ivory bows heaped in the aftermath of some legendary battle, great levees of them curving away over the plain into the night" (337). McCarthy is here referring to the slaughtering of the American buffaloes, that Richard Slotkin describes in very similar terms:

> The whale, the buffalo, and bear hunted to the verge of extinction for pleasure in killing and "scalped" for fame and the profit in hides by men like Buffalo Bill; the buffalo meat left to rot, till acres of prairie were covered with heaps of whitening bones, and the bones then ground for fertilizer; the Indian debased, impoverished, and killed in return for his gifts; the land and its people, its "dark" people especially, economically exploited and wasted; the warfare between man and nature, between race and race, exalted as a kind of heroic ideal; the piles of wrecked and rusted cars, heaped like Tartar pyramids of death-cracked, weather-browned, rain-rotted skulls, to signify our passage through the land. (*Regeneration*

Through Violence 565)

The devastation of the land is also represented through the image of the dancing bear in the saloon where the man meets Judge Holden for the last time. The bear can be easily seen as an element of the wilderness, but in this chapter it is described as a chained animal, killed at the end of a sad spectacle. Later on, the same human hands that have killed the bear will fence the prairies, build railroads and imprison the land "by means of holes" (351) in the ground.

The Judge explains the patterns through which mankind can win over natural wilderness: "only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth" (207). It is through the knowledge and participation to the dance of life and death, the dance of war, which destroys and regenerates the world, that men can become the masters of their own fates. According to the Judge, the great sin of the kid has been his surrender to this design, where "the history of all is not the history of each" (342), and the awareness of one's own wild nature is the only way in which he can partake the dance: "[o]nly that man who has offered himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen the horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance" (345).[17]

The death of the kid has been one of the most discussed issues of *Blood Meridian*, mostly because the narrator does not explicate it. The Judge waits for him in the privy of the saloon, naked and smiling, and "gathers" him in his arms "against his immense and terrible flesh" (347), closing the wooden door behind him. The use of the verb "to gather" clashes with the idea of the killing, so much so that some critics[18] have also interpreted the scene as a sexual act, more than a real murder. Following the logic presented by Judge Holden in his monologues, this finale could be viewed as the moment when the man sees the horror which regulates the history of mankind, as it emerges in the narrative space of the novel. It is in the "immense and terrible" flesh of the Judge, so akin to the immensity of the desert, that the man – who in this scene, more than in any other, is a kid – faces the power of this law.

In the epilogue a new dawn rises on the land, illuminating a man – a generic and

17 The reference to the "horror" expressed by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* will also be presented in *All the Pretty Horses*, during the fight between John Grady and the *cuchillero*.

18 See in particular Patrick Shaw's essay.

mythical image – who digs holes in the ground. The action is not described in pastoral terms, for the man has "an implement with two handles", he uses it and strikes fire "out of the rock which God has put there". I totally agree with Jay Ellis' interpretation of the ending, that respects the allegorical aura permeating the whole novel. To Ellis, there is no Promethean message in the epilogue, even if this theme is one of the great favorites of McCarthy's, but only the plain description of the closing of the American frontier, a closing that ends with a movement toward the future, since "they all move on again" (351).

But, going back to de Tocqueville and his reflections on the new ruins spread over the American soil, it is possible to observe that the technological and cultural development of the nation comes with its own ruins. There are bones on the prairie, signs of the decay naturally present in the progress of civilization, of which every man must take part, for "[i]t's a great thing, the dance" (341), says the Judge. The ruins described in the novel function as omens of the consequences of the self-destructive force that governs this advancement, and the American obsession with mobility. In *The Road*, these consequences – or, at least, a quite probable version of them – are identified with the end of the world as we know it.

***The Road*: Ruins of the Future**

In *The Road*, McCarthy explores a style and a literary genre that distinctly diverge from his previous works. This novel – the story of the journey of a father and his son among the ruins of a world reduced to dust after an unspecified catastrophe – has been categorized as pertaining to the post-apocalyptic genre, even though some critics have proposed other possible definitions. The novel, characterized by lexical and syntactical simplicity, lends itself to an array of interpretations, that go from its categorization as a "prototypical Western"[19] (Graulund 65), to the attention towards its Gothic overtones (Chabon). Indeed, *The Road* presents elements that may be attributed to both genres. In this novel, McCarthy reaches the highest clarity of language and plot, intensifying the mythical quality of the

19 Rune Graulund justifies her assumption by saying that *The Road* has the essentials of the western genre: "a man and his boy, trying to make it across the frontier by fighting their way out of the claws of the bad guys, armed with just one gun but a set of morals firmer than that of any hero of the Old West" (65). Actually, I consider Graulund's definition of the western genre quite over-simplified. Jane Tompkins' *West of Everything* proves that *The Road* lacks many of the elements necessary to characterize it as a western.

text: its narrative landscape is so vague “it comes to mean everything” (Graulund 60), its linguistic structure is highly fragmentary and paratactic, so much so that it seems to match the ruins characterizing its narrative landscape.

As it happens in *Blood Meridian*, also in *The Road* the compositional choices concerning language, sentence structure, paragraph formation, narrational tone and style relate importantly to what the author is doing philosophically. In *The Road*, language seems to mirror the fragmentation represented by the ruins described, that in turn become active centers of meaning in the structure of the plot. After explaining the fragmentary structure of the sentences through a comparison with Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, I will examine the aesthetics of post-industrial ruins, to which the ruins described in the novel seem to correspond. In closing, I propose an analysis of another form of ruination: waste. Through the modern ruins presented in *The Road*, McCarthy keeps on unfolding the discourse on the roots and development of American identity, this time looking at its future.

– A Fragmentary Fictional World: Comparison With *The Waste Land*

The connections between the gray desert described in *The Road* and T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* have been widely explored by John Cant in his analysis of the novel,[20] as well as by Lydia Cooper in her article “Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative”.[21] The abundant use of paratactic sentences, the mythical nature of a land inscribed in absence and loss, the plurality of meaning expressed by the fictional space of *The Road*, and the link between its fragmentation and the language through which it is evoked are the main elements it shares with *The Waste Land*. The poetic complexity of this poem, which is rightly considered one of the cornerstones of modern literature, is beyond the scope of the present study. The brief and necessarily oversimplified sketch of the motifs of absence and fragmentation, as they are expressed in the poem, will suffice for my present intention, namely, tracing a parallelism between the two narrative landscapes.

In the “desolate country”(*The Road* 17)[22] that constitutes almost the totality of the

20 See Cant's *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* (269), and his essay “Oedipus Rests: Mimesis and Allegory in *No Country for Old Men*”. Cant makes clear how Eliot influenced the whole of McCarthy's production, especially in the construction of the narrative landscapes.

21 Cooper investigates the novel through the presence of the motif of the mythical quest of the grail. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is included in this discourse, for it presents the same images to communicate an apocalyptic version of London (Cooper 220).

22 All quotations in this section are taken from *The Road*, unless otherwise specified.

narrative landscape of *The Road*, McCarthy has spread ruins that speak of the catastrophe that caused them, a catastrophe that the author has set in an unspecified future. For this reason, the modern ruins scattered all over the narrative space of *The Road* are different from those described in *Blood Meridian*, mostly because the past to which they point seems to mirror the future. Moreover, as it may be observed from the beginning, they seem to shape the language of the novel. The novel is fragmented, and this fragmentation is also visible on the page: the text is cut into short sentences, snapshots of time where reality, dreams and memories are on the same narrative level. The division of the time sequences in short paragraphs lacking precise temporal underpinnings – there is only one specified time in the novel, that probably indicates the beginning of the catastrophe: "[t]he clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions" (52) – strengthens the impression of immobility given by the monotony of the landscape, defined as a monochromatic succession of plains and mountains, burned woods and abandoned houses.[23] Even if the story develops and advances, time seems suspended in a never-ending present made of gray ruins, cold and ashes, illuminated by the anemic light of a "dull sun":

> They bore on south in the days and weeks to follow. Solitary and dogged. A raw hill country. Aluminum houses. At times they could see stretches of the interstate highway below them through the bare stands of secondgrowth timber. Cold and growing colder. Just beyond the high gap in the mountains they stood and looked out over the great gulf to the south where the country as far as they could see was burned away, the blackened shapes of rock standing out of the shoals of ash and billows of ash rising up and blowing downcountry through the waste. The track of the dull sun moving unseen beyond the murk. (14)

Francisco Rodriguez makes an interesting analysis of the fragmented language exemplified by this passage by connecting it to the articulations of trauma typical of science-fiction novels (44), while Martin Boyne focuses on the lexical simplicity of the sentences, stating that they prove how the language of storytelling and oral tradition is the only unifying force in an otherwise broken world (6). Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz mentions other theories in relation to the language used in *The Road* (6-7), demonstrating

23 This idea has also been proposed by Martin Boyne, who talks about the narrative space of the novel as "a world frozen in time" (10).

the widespread interest toward such a strong change in the style of the author.

In *T.S. Eliot and Hermeneutics*, Harriet Davidson has analyzed *The Waste Land* in terms of the coexistence between absence and density of meaning. To Davidson, through the use of an "unrelated series of fragmented narratives and lyrics" (2), Eliot gives voice to the lack of cohesion of his time, to a multilayered reality where the juxtaposition of voices and experiences mirrors the typical anxiety of modernity. The poem presents absence as "a state of the world", where absence is intended by Davidson as the lack of a "transcendental foundation, center, origin – whether subjective of objective – for our being" (3). The Eliotian wasteland resists the human attempt to enclose reality in an organized structure aimed at unveiling its meaning, since its fragmentation is both of the "coherent world" (4) and of the conscious self. The loss of stability of the subject, connected to the loss of God, "results in a world which is non-romantic, non-existential, and non-psychological" (Davidson 7).

Yet the richness of the poem derives from this state of fragmentation, that manifests the dynamism of the world, as well as the proliferation of interpretations. Davidson sees in the incessant movement of the poem its final aim, for "the movement itself, the pull forward by a mythical goal, an ending, an explanation, is not rejected. Only the expectation of reaching that goal ... is rejected" (113). The final lines of *The Waste Land* bring us back to the allegorical value of ruins, and constitute the connection between Eliot's poem and *The Road*:

I sat upon a shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hyeronimo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih (Eliot 423-433)

This stanza shows a mixture of languages and cultural traditions (a characteristic that is visible in the whole poem), as well as the preponderance of paratactic constructions I have mentioned before. The complexity of these images is open to a myriad of interpretations, but I would like to highlight two lines in particular. A cacophony of literary and musical fragments provides an answer to the question that the poet asks himself – "Shall I set my lands in order?", and the jarring fragments stem from the ruination of his world: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins". Differently put, there is no remedy to the destructive force of time, but at any rate a whole abundance of experiences is there to be relished. The heterogeneity of viewpoints – the "fragments" Eliot speaks about –, that mirrors the magmatic reality of the modern world, becomes the key force in the act of resistance against decay: fragmentation stems from ruination and provides an antidote, a way out to it.

The narrative space of *The Road* presents many features in common with the Eliotian desert, with a significant difference: the fragmentation of the self Davidson speaks about in her analysis of Eliot's poem contrasts with the stability of the relation between the father and his son, that are "each the other's world entire" (6). The meaning of *The Road* should not be circumscribed within tragic omens about the future, even if the novel certainly expresses a profound crisis of moral values. Despite the fact that no physical center is present in the "barren, silent, godless" (4) land described in the novel, *The Road* expresses the creative potential of such world, that derives in particular from the relationship between the two protagonists.

The child represents the ethical center of the novel, to which the father turns whenever he is losing control over his actions. He is compared to a God[24] not only by his father, but also by Ely (the old man they encounter on the road), and he often feels responsible for his father's behavior toward the other survivors they meet:

> You're not the one who has to worry about everything.
> The boy said something but he couldn't understand him. What? He said.
> He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said.
> I am the one. (259)

24 Cooper proposes an interesting analysis of the child as a grail: "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'" (224).

Made strong by the violence in which he has been immersed ever since birth, the child knows his mission and, most of all, he knows the importance of remembering the difference between good and evil, and always being the guardian of the good.

To this fulcrum of goodness – the child is the one who has to "carry the fire"[25] after his father's death – McCarthy opposes acts of unmentionable brutality, that prove the state of moral dereliction reached by mankind. In a sense, the opposition between construction and ruination emerges also in the contrast between the "good guys", as the father calls himself and his child, and the group of the "bad guys", who slaughter infants and feed themselves with their captives. Following the Promethean myth, the child is the carrier of the seed of knowledge, of the *logos,* even if he is traveling in a world that seems to have been deprived of any hope. To the ruination of the waste land where they are traveling, father and son oppose their "fire": order against chaos, *logos* against silence.

– Post-Industrial Ruins and the Absence of History

A form of ruination that is repeatedly described in *The Road* is that of huge infrastructures, that can be integrated in the category of "post-industrial ruins". The term indicates ruins produced after the economic boom caused by Fordism,[26] and the technological progress that started in the 1950s: skyscrapers, factories, infrastructures, but also theaters, cinemas and railway stations, spaces that mirrored the wealth coming from post-war development. The dam appearing in the first pages of the novel represents one of the remains of this wealth, which has become a decaying structure with the passing of time, and with the decline of industrial development. The same can be said about the many highways and interstate roads where the two protagonists travel, or the bridges under which they sometimes find shelter during the cold nights:

> A lake down there. Cold and gray and heavy in the scavenged bowl of the countryside.
>
> What is that, Papa?

25 The reference to the myth of Prometheus has been observed by many critics. A particularly interesting analysis of this issue has been offered by Daniel Luttrull in the essay "Prometheus Hits *The Road*: Revising the Myth".

26 George Steinmetz defines Fordism as "the regime of capitalist accumulation and social, political, and cultural regulatory practices that was hegemonic roughly between 1945 and 1973 in Western Europe and North America" (312).

It's a dam.

What's it for?

It made the lake. Before they built the dam that was just a river down there. The dam used the water that ran through it to turn big fans called turbines that would generate electricity.

To make lights.

Yes. To make lights.

Can we go there and see it?

I think it's too far.

Will the dam be there for a long time?

I think so. It's made out of concrete. It will probably be there for hundreds of years. Thousands, even.

Do you think there could be fish in the lake?

No. There's nothing in the lake. (19-20)

Most of the time, infrastructures are portrayed as useless and dangerous spaces that do not offer anything to the two protagonists but the disturbing reminder of a lost world. The industrial ruins that define a landscape where "[e]verything [is] uncoupled from its shoring" (11) point to mankind's guilty mishandling of and tempering with nature, whose visible testimony are empty shells of cement that negate any sign of life, as it is the case of this dam, where the water – the originator of life *par excellence* – is devoid of fish.

In *Untimely Ruins*, Nick Yablon speaks about an "aesthetic of impermanence" (293) in relation to modern buildings, since they are not built to endure time. The spirit that moves contemporary architecture and gives life to skyscrapers of glass and titanium is totally different from the one that still lives in the grandeur of ancient buildings, examples of an architecture aimed at resisting decay. Still, contemporary times also produce architectural elements presenting the same massive structures of ancient buildings, in opposition to the lightness of skyscrapers, and these elements are infrastructures: roads, prisons, dams and highways that will someday be recognized as "ghosts of a vast human obsession" (Scully qtd. in Yablon 293). The obsession Scully refers to is that of movement, but also that of controlling and imprisoning nature in order to exploit its power, as it is the case of the dam described in the novel. The ruined infrastructures of *The Road* are the visible evidences of the American fixation with mobility (which has scarred the land in

ineffaceable ways) and with control.

Unlike the ruins described in *Blood Meridian*, the post-industrial skeletons of *The Road* seem deprived of history: they do not speak of the past, nor do they carry any spiritual presence, as do the ruined Indian villages studied by Judge Holden. There is only one exception to this general truth, that is the reference to “[c]hattel slaves [who] had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays” (106), made in relation to the house “with white doric columns across the front” (105), where the two protagonists find the captives in the basement. The image of black slaves serving drink and food in the house strengthens the idea that the scene is set in the South of the United States, where slavery was a legal and common habit until 1864. The relation between the Indians of *Blood Meridian* and another traumatic moment in American history, when the nation tarnished its hands with the blood of exploitation and murder, reveals the author's will to insert historical awareness also into a novel that, more than all the others, speaks about the future of America.

These post-industrial ruins stand in the narrative wasteland of *The Road* as elements of the recent past, and yet they seem incapable of speaking about it. To find the reason for their apparent lack of communicativeness, it may be helpful to examine the main traits that characterize post-industrial aesthetics and the recent renewal of the interest in these architectural elements, especially through the medium of photography, that has seen the development of one trend in particular: “ruin porn”.

Fig. 2. Vincent J. Stoker. *La chute tragique, Hétérotopie IAEDFB II.*

Leary describes ruin porn in these terms:

> The exuberant connoisseurship of dereliction; the unembarrassed rejoicing at the "excitement" of it all, hastily balanced by the liberal posturing of sympathy for a "man-made Katrina"; and most importantly, the absence of people other than those he calls, cruelly, "street zombies" [he is here referring to John Temple]. The city is a shell, and so are the people who occasionally stumble into the photographer's viewfinder.

A committed supporter of "detroitism" – the photographic trend that has developed as a response to the voyeuristic gaze of ruin porn, opposing pictures where ruins are historically and socially contextualized –, Leary explains how photographs belonging to ruin porn photography do not capture the totality of the experience a modern ruin can offer, since they miss the link of this architectural element with its context, and the story that connects it to the people. For this reason they seem incomplete and extremely dependent to an "aestheticization of devastation" (Schönle, "Ruins and History" 650) that makes decay beautiful,[27] without taking into account which circumstances have caused it, and who the victims have been.

The critical debate around ruin porn manifests the importance of the theme of deindustrialization[28] in contemporary society. To Leary, this happens because modern ruins speak much more of our future than of our past. This would be the cause of the profound sense of uneasiness and fascination these photographs arouse. As Paul Mullins writes in "The Politics and Archeology of Ruin Porn": "the ruins of modernity in cities like Detroit are problematic symbols that risk illuminating the failures of modernity and replacing the pristine and aesthetic historical monument with neglected, vandalized, and unsightly ruins". In a sense, these ruins incarnate the worst fear of contemporary society – a lack of progress, a jobless future –, but they also represent the substitution of "historical monuments" with "neglected ruins" deprived of any historical value.

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27 See in particular the work of Romain Meffre and Yves Marchand, who published *The Ruins of Detroit* in 2010, and Andrew Moore's *Detroit Disassembled* (also 2010). Leary calls them "coffee-table books", as they had an incredible success on the vast public. Detroit and other problematic urban centers like Chicago and the peripheral areas of New York and Camden have known a real assault from a new kind of tourist, who takes picture from the car, without even stopping in the city.

28 With this term, I intend the reversal of the process of industrialization, that is the decline of industrial, economic and technological growth, to arrive in most cases at a complete stop in the industrial production.

Ruin porn is often uncritical, but the works of photographers such as Camilo Vergara, Dan Austin and Sean Doerr, also interested in post-industrial ruins, demonstrate the recent development of a new awareness in relation to this issue. I am referring in particular to Vergara's impressive works *The New American Ghetto* (1995) and *American Ruins* (1999). The projects of this photographer are different because, as he declares in the introduction to *American Ruins*, his photographs record urban decay “with a sense of respect, loss, and admiration for its peculiar beauty” (11), capturing the subjects in the several stages of their ruination, together with the homeless people that inhabit them. Vergara's focus is not on the aesthetics of urban decay, but on the influences it has exercised – and still does – on society, without forgetting the reasons why its appeal seems so “irresistible”, as Benjamin affirms.

McCarthy's decision to insert post-industrial ruins in the narrative space of *The Road* may be included in the variety of artistic projects that call for a critical and informed approach to these elements and to their context. Moreover, as the studies of Tim Edensor, Dale and Burrel, and Schönle have demonstrated, modern ruins should not be contemplated only as depressing omens of the future decay of our world, but also as spaces that present a structure that has the power to oppose the urban order imposed on every building, and on the human way of using it (Edensor 23). Edensor presents an extremely interesting analysis of the physical experience it is possible to encounter while living inside a modern ruin: the body is forced to move in different ways, because the function of the ruin does not correspond to the original one (95). Even the notion of time changes: “the ruin is a shadow realm of slowness in which things are revealed at a less frantic pace” (Edensor 134).

In the novel, the post-industrial ruins encountered and experienced by father and son paradoxically represent a new beginning. As the definition of the narrative space suggests, the fictional world of the novel is at the Year 0 of history: no yesterday, no tomorrow, only an extremely difficult present, where every action is reduced to the more basic needs. The system of values and the general truths taken for granted are meaningless in front of ruins deprived of their past, that point only to themselves and to their state of decay. However, this lack of references to the past is transformed into a positive absence: free from the burden of history, these ruins become spaces where new forms and new functions are discovered by the protagonists.

As it happens quite often in the novel, the two protagonists use the ruins in ways that

negate their primal function, as in the case of the truck they find near a bridge: "[t]here was a raw damp mattress on the bunk and a small refrigerator with the door standing open ... [o]ld magazines in the floor [and] drawers under the bunk" (45). It is clear that the truck has been used as a dwelling by someone else before them, and it becomes the same thing for the father and the boy. The value of the ruined truck does not depend on its primal function anymore, but on the new one it exercises in a world where anyplace with a roof could suffice as a shelter. The same thing can be said in regard to the waste the two protagonists collect on the road: they use a cart as a trolley, a tarp as their ceiling, plastic bags become their shoes. Every ruin or fragment can become something else, something useful, or it can simply offer an occasion to have fun and forget for a moment about their desperate condition:

> He fashioned sweeps from two old brooms he'd found and wired them to the cart to clear the limbs from the road in front of the wheels and he put the boy in the basket and stood on the rear rail like a dogmusher and they set off down the hills, guiding the cart on the curves with their bodies in the manner of bobsledders. It was the first that he'd seen the boy smile in a long time. (19)

Significantly enough, it is among the ruins of a town that the boy sees another child for the first time, and it is again in another town that the father is hurt by an arrow shot by a woman. Post-industrial ruins hide other refugees, that use them as their new dwellings. In this sense, the discourse the novel develops on the relation between an almost dead wilderness (fires and earthquakes are often described, as well as forests of ashes), and an almost dead civilization does not offer nature as the only way out to the seemingly hopeless situation it describes. Father and son prefer to travel among the woods, because they think they are safer, but they nevertheless need to return to the remains of civilization to look for cans of food and other items they could use. More than this, the child needs to see if other people live as they do, hiding and traveling. The ruins described in *The Road* are not empty and decontextualized as those portrayed by ruin porn photography; they are full of voices instead, and of eyes inspecting the roads in search of invaders to repel. Defense, shelter and food: post-industrial ruins provide the fundamentals for the rise of a new social nucleus.

– Things, Waste and Beachcombers

The first thing that stands out while dwelling on the descriptive sequences of *The Road* is the abundance of objects. Toys, a softdrink machine, rusted cars, carts, boxes and plastic bags fill the decaying buildings of the abandoned towns, pointing at the consumerism that produced them, and consequently at the state of degradation described in the novel. To Mieke Bal, “objects have spatial status, [and] the way in which objects are arranged in a space ... may also influence the perception of space” (95). Bal is here referring to fictional spaces, where objects often gain a symbolic value related to their position in a specific novel, and in so doing they determine the way in which narrative spaces are perceived. In *The Road*, objects are everywhere: on the road, in the abandoned supermarkets of the towns, and in the cart pushed on the road by father and son, but their meaning and their value are difficult to assess.

As Bill Brown explains in the introduction to the volume *A Sense of Things*, the industrial revolution entailed a meaningful transformation in the culture, society and economy of America, giving birth to what he called the “age of things” (5), where the obsession with possessing and accumulating objects evolved into a strong dependance of the subject to the object.[29] It is clear that Brown's position, as well as those of many other literary critics, philosophers and anthropologists who investigated the meaning of things in contemporary culture, is strongly indebted to Karl Marx's notions of commodity and fetishism. Arjun Appadurai, in his introduction to *The Social Life of Things*, explained the importance of Marx's legacy in relation to the new critical approaches toward the themes of production and consumption in contemporary times, also mentioning the contributions of Georg Simmel and Jean Baudrillard as foundational.

The role of objects in *The Road* is inevitably related to the definition of commodity and thing. A commodity is an object the value of which has been inflated by the desire circulating around it, and which has become a “fetishized thing” (Brown, *A Sense of Things* 8) thanks to this desire, and to the consequent commerce rising from people's demand. Appadurai explains the term by saying that there is no such thing as a division between

29 Brown explains the same concept in the essay “Thing Theory” where, quoting Jean Baudrillard, he states that “just as modernity was the historical scene of the subject's emergence, so postmodernity is the scene of the object's preponderance” (14).

the realm of commodities and that of things, because every thing is a commodity, depending on the social and historical context that gravitates around it:

> Let us approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives. This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sort of things. ... But how are we to define the commodity situation? I propose that *the commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature.* (13)

In *The Road*, the objects that cover the concrete of the empty streets of more empty towns, belong to what Brown called the "humiliation of homogeneity" (*A Sense of Things* 8) pertaining to mass-produced items. The well-known – and often analyzed – scene where the father finds a can of Coca Cola, and gives it to his son to drink, becomes even more meaningful thanks to the strong iconic value of this object, so common for the father, but "a treat" (23) for the child, who does not have any memory of the world as it was before the catastrophe, because he was not born yet. Later on, the two protagonists find other things belonging to contemporary ideas of leisure time: "billboards advertising motels" (8), "the ruins of a resort town", "[s]mall pleasureboats half sunken in the gray water" (24), "the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago", found by the father when he enters the house where he grew up – and he explains to the child: "[t]his is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy" (26). There is also an interesting reference to an advertisement hanging from a barn: "See Rock City" (21).

Andrew Keller Estes reads the presence of this placard as an evidence of the value of Cant's interpretation of the novel as a return to the Appalachian landscapes of McCarthy's first novels, also in thematic terms. I do agree both with Estes' and Cant's positions, but I would like to focus on the meaning of the object in itself. Rock City is a natural spot in Georgia, located near Ruby Falls. To improve tourism in the area, from the 1930s to the end of the 1960s, almost a thousand roofs and sides of barns situated in the Southeast and Midwest United States were painted with the slogan, so much so that the real attraction became not the spot in itself, but these advertisements. Introducing this reference in the

novel does not only give a clue where father and son are traveling, but it also indicates the exploitation of natural wild lands for touristic motives. The same concept emerges through the presence of oil company maps in many of the novels here taken into consideration, as it will be explained in the following chapter.

In the novel, the objects described have lost their value, becoming something else, closer to the category of "waste". Far from any social context, the lack of desire and exchange has directly brought to a lack of meaning, so that things are described as useless, empty forms that are even starting to become unrecognizable for the two protagonists. As Appadurai argues in his essay: "the politics of value is in many contexts a politics of knowledge" (6). The loss of both physical and linguistic references mingles into one, single moment of oblivion, where signifier and signified are lost in this human and natural waste land:

> The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink forever. (88-9)

The more father and son advance toward the sea, the more the road is covered in waste: "[t]he road was littered with debris and it was work to get the cart through. Finally they just sat by the side of the road and stared at what was before them. Roofs of houses, the trunks of trees. A boat. The open sky beyond where in the distance the sullen sea lagged and shifted. ... Clambering through the ruins. Slow going" (274-5). Even if this image could lead to a dystopian reading easily connectable to environmental issues (after all, *The Road* has also been acclaimed as "the most important environmental book ever written" (Monbiot)) such an interpretation would be an oversimplification. One must take into account the creative principle intrinsic in ruination, as I have explained both in relation to the "disturbing structure" of post-industrial ruins, and to the fragment as an originator of meaning. As Brown declares by presenting some photographs made by Paul Strand, a broken object may find new meanings in the absence of its previous state of totality, for it becomes free from its domestic role, and reaches a state of pure form (*A Sense of Things* 9).

Broken objects become parts of the same logic of reuse connected to ruined infrastructures. The recurrence of the theme of "gathering", already presented in the epilogue of *Blood Meridian*, suggests the idea of an action of recycling, of a new meaning given to these fragments of life abandoned on the road. In *Blood Meridian*, the image of the "gatherers of bones" at the end of the novel may represent the bond existing between the technological progress of America and the idea of decline it includes. In *The Road*, the gatherers are the two protagonists, and their action seems rather positive:

> They gathered driftwood and stacked it and covered it with the tarp and then set off down the beach. We're beachcombers, he said. What is that? It's people who walk along the beach looking for things of value that might have washed up. What kind of things? Any kind of things. Anything that you might be able to use. (220)

Differently from *Blood Meridian*, the gatherers of *The Road* look for objects to be saved, debris that may revive in new shapes. The more father and son get near to the coast, the more the road is covered with trash, as if the visible end of the dream that inspired America was even more distinct in the last part of their journey. Nevertheless they gather, and they carry the fire, two actions indispensable to survive in such an environment, but that also reveal the hope expressed by these pages. Father and son are active characters, who do not surrender to the inhuman reality of the waste land.

The Atomic Wilderness and The Opening of a New Frontier

Flags are blossoming now where little else is blossoming
and I am bent on fathoming what it means to love my country.
The history of this earth and the bones within it?
Soils and cities, promises made and mocked, plowed contours
of shame and hope?
Loyalties, symbols, murmurs extinguished and echoing?
Grids of states stretching...westward, underground waters?

Where are we moored?
What are the bindings?
What behooves us?

Adrienne Rich, “An Atlas of the Difficult World”

Rich's poem has been quoted by Slotkin at the beginning of the last chapter of *Gunfighter Nation*: “The Crisis of Public Myth”. There are many images that relate both to *Blood Meridian* and to *The Road*'s narrative landscapes, such as the idea of an arid land in the first line, the reference to the bones of the country, and the questions about the future of America. Slotkin has thought it could perfectly introduce a chapter dealing with the crisis of American mythology and the rise of a New Frontier, where old myths are given a new shape. In fact, as he states, “[c]ritical projects of demystification are, in the long run, merely part of the process through which existing myths are creatively revised and adjusted to changing circumstances” (654).

I would argue that *The Road* deals with the same crisis examined by Slotkin, and it equally unveils new shapes given to old myths. The exploitation of the wild areas in America has led not to total destruction, but to the birth of what Rebecca Raglon calls a “post-natural wilderness”, a new experience of the wild in a place “isolated not by its remoteness or distance from humans, but by its toxicity and foulness” (Raglon 64). As Diane Chisholm says in “Landscapes of the New Ecological West”, the New West is based on “a vision of the wilderness as sublime, and the prospecting of sublimity being more artful than industrial”(68), but at the same time it is also duplicitous, in the sense that it is both protected and exploited, glorified and degraded. Close to the National Parks in the mountains, a whole territory of deserts and wetlands – turned into wastelands – has been burned by a technological militancy that includes atomic bombing, but it would be wrong to say that these lands have become a meaningless reality.

Alex Hunt, who proposed an interesting study of Edward Abbey's works *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* and, in particular, *Fire on the Mountain,* states that “for Abbey, wilderness and apocalypse are linked through the landscape of the Atomic Southwest” (44). In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey describes his personal experience as a tour guide in the American desert, enriching his telling with powerful portraits of the life in the desert, and adding to these poetic fragments the reasons for his environmental commitment. *Fire on*

the Mountain is based on the life of John Prather, who faced the government's attempts to remove him from his ranch, which happened to be a designated nuclear test site. I think that the same themes can be found in the works of Cormac McCarthy,[30] who introduced the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe in *The Road*, but who has also dealt with the issue of the atomic trials performed in the desert in *Cities of the Plain* and *No Country for Old Men.* Even the epilogue of *Blood Meridian* seems to hint at the future tests that will be led on the same ground fifty years after the closing of the frontier.[31]

As the analyses of the narrative landscapes of *Blood Meridian* and *The Road* have shown, both ruined worlds lead, in the end, to a new beginning or, at least, to the idea that the progress and development of America does not stop. The repetition of the sentence "they rode on" in *Blood Meridian* is employed again in *The Road*, as if the journey of father and son followed the traces left by the Glanton gang. The ruins of the past, as well as those of the future, contribute to the same opening of a new frontier, proving the renewal of a utopia that, even if it rises already with the signs of its fallibility, it nevertheless preserves its strong allure. The post-apocalyptic landscape, in this way, is the manifestation of a new era in the conquest of the territory:

> What, after all, is the American idea of a nuclear Armageddon but that of the preservation and reinvention of the frontier? Bomb shelters, drills, and survivalist movies instructed the popular imagination not to prepare to die or for the end of the world, but to prepare for a new beginning of lawlessness, chaos, everyman for himself, self-sufficiency, a world which Daniel Boone and Kit Carson might well be at home. America has been without a past before, and seemed ready to be without one again (though the subterranean vaults for preserving congressmen and bank records promised that some vestiges of the destroyed world would return). It seems to have been for this reason that the explosive power of atomic

30 The friendship between Abbey and McCarthy is no news, as well as their common project for the reintroduction of the wolf in Southern Arizona. The friendship did not last long, for Abbey died a few years after their first encounter, but still his position in regard to environmental issues clearly influenced McCarthy's own thoughts about the future of the Southern American desert. For more details, see Richard Woodward's 1992 interview to McCarthy.

31 The first nuclear weapon was detonated in New Mexico, at the Trinity Site, on July 16, 1945. Abbey writes: "[w]hether we live or die is a matter of absolutely no concern whatsoever to the desert. ... I have seen the place called Trinity, in New Mexico, where our wise men exploded the first atomic bomb and the heat of the blast fused sand into greenish glass – already the grass has returned, and the cactus and the mesquite. On this bedrock of animal faith I take my stand, close by the old road that leads eventually out of the valley of paradox" (qtd. in Hunt 45).

> weapons was exaggerated, their radioactive aftermath downplayed: rather than the bomb as a lingering disease, it was the bomb as a phoenix fire. (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 375)

Slotkin, among others, has taken as an example of the renewal of the frontier mythology in contemporary times the science-fiction genre, which was extremely successful in the Seventies and Eighties (*Gunfighter Nation* 635). Space was considered as a new frontier to conquer, another possible experience to strengthen national identity. But what sort of space could be newer than a desolate land risen from the ashes of the precedent world? In *Space and Beyond*, a collection of essays on science fiction, Patrick Sharp argues that "American nuclear apocalypse narrative has often privileged local space, constructing a new frontier not only amongst the stars, but also in a devastated future world that has returned to the rural values of the American West" (155), revealing the powerful message hidden behind a seemingly hopeless world.

The ruins scattered on the Southwestern desert of *Blood Meridian*– still partially wild and free – appear again in *The Road*, even if they represent a different reality. Nevertheless, what the child carries on his journey after his father's death are not the ruins, nor the objects they used to keep in their cart, but fire and the "[o]ld stories of courage and justice" (41) that his father used to tell him. This is the image of a world that cannot be "put back" (287) as it was, but that can be created in a different way. The idea of destruction evoked by fire goes hand in hand with that of a new civilization, moving and struggling in the constant race toward the next frontier. In the movement of regeneration through violence, the stories told by ruins make clear that fire can destroy and regenerate, but it cannot purify the land.

And they rode on...

CHAPTER 2

Maps of a Broken World: *The Border Trilogy, No Country for Old Men*, *The Road*

In the preceding chapter I have examined the role of ruins in *Blood Meridian* and *The Road,* to show how their presence as parts of the narrative spaces of the novels enables the author to explore issues such as the development of the American character, its relation to the land, to its roots, and to a problematic future. In a similar way, in this chapter I deal with the maps McCarthy inserts in *The Border Trilogy*, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, creating a network of thematic references among the novels.

As ruins function as fictional spatial landmarks evoking critical moments in American history, or dark omens about its future progression, the "textual maps"[1] described in McCarthy's novels reveal the attempt of his characters to deal with the consequences of these moments, by imposing a structure on a world that, as I have shown in the first chapter, is described as fragmentary. Maps are the means through which the characters try to execute this imposition, since cartography has the power to exercise an ordering force on the fluidity of space. However, the obsessive necessity of the characters to locate themselves in space, and the constant difficulty they encounter in doing so prove their inability to actually impose an order on the narrative space they travel.

The act of locating one's body in space is one of the primary cognitive processes of the human mind. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's statement that "the body is our general medium for having a world" (146) highlights the embodied nature of our spatial perception, but most of all it introduces the idea of space as a product of the individual sense:

> The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify

1 In "Narrative Cartography: Toward a Visual Narratology", Marie-Laure Ryan defines as "maps of the textual world" the maps internal to the texts. Nevertheless, in her analysis of literary cartography, she refers only to drawn maps, that may be inserted at the beginning or at the end of a novel – as in the case of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or William Faulkner's *Absalom,Absalom!* – or inside the text, as it frequently happens in crime fiction. The maps presented in McCarthy's novels are not visual representations of spatial data, but fictional objects described through language. My definition of these elements as "textual maps" indicates both their internal position in the texts, and their linguistic existence.

> oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them ... I am conscious of my body *via* the world ... [and] I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body. (82)

As Merleau-Ponty makes clear, space derives from the vision of a subject that lives and experiences it, in a dynamic interconnection through which space is defined by the subject, and the subject is defined by space. To Merleau-Ponty, no space exists *a priori*: it always derives from an embodied gaze.[2]

The mental processes at play in the act of spatial perception have been referred to with the term "cognitive mapping" by psychologist Edward Tolman in 1948. Roger Downs and David Stea propose a clear definition of cognitive mapping, that highlights the several phases and activities included in the process: "cognitive mapping is an abstraction covering those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organize, store, recall, and manipulate information about the spatial environment" (6).[3] After Fredric Jameson's reflections on the sociological implications of the term, the notion of cognitive mapping has also been used in the literary domain, to examine the connections existing among different social phenomena or, more generally, among different elements related to the perception of space.

The idea of a frame that groups together the several aspects of human spatial perception can also be related to fictional worlds, considering that "we can trust the phenomenological reports of most characters in realistic fiction as accurately reflecting the types of mental experience real people have" (Gerrig 9).[4] We can safely assume that, unless stated otherwise, the mental processes activated during cognitive mapping are the same for fictional[5] and human minds, and that the reader's perception of narrative space is

2 Particularly relevant to this issue is one of the stories told in *The Crossing* to Billy Parham by a blind man he encounters on the road to Mexico. He explains to Billy his first perception of the world as a blind man – "where he moved the world moved also" (279) –, and he ends his long tale by saying: "si el mundo es ilusión la perdida del mundo es ilusión también" (283). Merleau-Ponty's considerations about the human perception of space through the body are fittingly exemplified by these two sentences.

3 This definition is quite similar to that of "mental maps", defined by Peter R. Gould as "mental pictures of geographical space". To Gould, "the political, social, cultural and economic values held by a man blend into an overall image about the space around him, an image whose components may be particular to him or held in common by many" (262). This topic has been more broadly investigated by Gould and Rodney White in *Mental Maps*, a significant example of a spatial analysis belonging to the field of "behavioral geography", where geographical settings and human actions are explored in their multiple connections.

4 Richard Gerrig's work on the reader's perception of fictional worlds develops both from reader oriented theories (see in particular Wolfgang Iser's idea that the reader, together with the text, contributes to textual meaning), and by the work done on the field of studies concerning fictional characters and their ontological status, that sees in Uri Margolin its main precursor.

5 See Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds.* With this term, Palmer indicates the consciousness of a fictional character. Under this category he inserts all the studies concerning speech, focalization and other aspects referring to the

indirectly influenced by the character's way of perceiving it.

An interesting example of literary analysis centered on the cognitive mapping of readers in the process of imagining a fictional world has been proposed by Ryan in "Cognitive Maps". In this essay, she unfolds the complex spatial structure of Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicles of a Death Foretold,* through the responses of a group of readers who have been asked to draw maps based on their readings of the novel. The examination of the sketches produced during the experiment has helped Ryan to develop interesting considerations on how readers' minds imagine fictional spaces, what is the role of memory, how the way in which characters perceive space influences the reader's cognitive mapping, and how descriptive sequences really help him or her in the imaginative process. These considerations will be helpful in the analysis of McCarthy's characters, both in their active relation with textual maps, and in the perception that we, as readers, obtain from observing their behavior in regard to the fictional space that surrounds them.

In this chapter, I propose an analysis of textual maps in McCarthy, to demonstrate that traditional cartography proves to be worthless in the characters' cognitive mapping, and that they end up trusting another kind of spatial knowledge, more consistent with the fluidity of space, and with the natural organization of the land. Significantly, the textual maps that I am referring to appear after the closing of the frontier evoked in the epilogue of *Blood Meridian* by the imposition of fences on the free lands of the West. Naming, mapping, measuring distances in spaces that used to be boundless are actions that respond to the human desire to impose an order on the dynamism of nature, a desire that permeates the totality of these novels and is connected to the urbanization of the American borderlands.

In the first part of my examination, I focus on the textual quality of cartography, and on its capacity to provide cultural information in addition to the first level of representation of geographical data: "maps have the character of being textual in that they have words associated with them, that they employ a system of symbols with their own syntax, that they function as a form of writing (inscription), and that they are discursively embedded within broader contexts of social action and power" (Pickles 193). Due to its complexity, the map has to be read as a palimpsest that develops discourses related to different topics, not strictly concerning spatial information. In other words, its

mechanisms at play in the minds of the characters. For a broad study on the functioning of fictional minds (including an analysis of speech categories), see Palmer's "The Construction of Fictional Minds", and Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds*.

structure has to be analyzed in order to unveil the blank spaces, the irregularities, the progressive stratification structuring it, to dismantle the idea that the object-map is a unifying and defining center of univocal meaning.

John Harley, the famous geographer and historian of cartography, grounds the necessity – and his consequent attempt – to "deconstruct the map"[6] on the realization that "maps are ineluctably a cultural system" (232) which has to be decoded: "[d]econstruction urges us to read between the lines of the map – 'in the margins of the text' – and through its tropes to discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image" (233). To Harley, maps give information about the social, political, cultural and economic context in which they are produced. They have also been used in a humorous way to express a satire of the political and social life of the country they represented, as in the case of Daniel K. Wallingford's *A Bostonian's Idea of the United States of America* (1930s-1940s), or in the more recent *View of the World from 9th Avenue*, drawn by Saul Steinberg (cover of the 29th March 1976 edition of *The New Yorker*), or to represent imaginary worlds.[7] The point of view from which they are drawn, the dimension of each cartographic symbol, their colors: every single element of a map always means something else.

Keeping these premises in mind, I turn to the maps described in the novels, that represent two contrasting visions of space: the "anthropocentric maps" produced by oil companies, and the "biocentric maps"[8] that seem to be inscribed in the land itself. On the one hand, oil company road maps represent the vision of traditional cartography, that sees space as a static entity, enclosed in abstract structures; on the other, biocentric maps evoke the dynamism of the world, constantly changing and inherently nomadic. By using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's definitions of "striated" and "smooth" space I will clarify this dichotomy, how it is expressed in the texts, and how it happens that "the two

6 Deconstruction indicates a series of techniques for reading texts, developed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and others. Its first aim is attacking the assumption that the structures of meaning are stable, universal and ahistorical. The heterogeneity of the term, that Derrida himself indicates as an undefinable concept, brought to several misreadings and misinterpretations, but it also permitted a vast use of this particular approach to texts, so much so that it has also been used to analyze texts that were not literary, as in the case of cartography. Deconstruction, as Jack Balkin states, "shows that texts are overflowing with multiple and often conflicting meanings", that also change in relation to the contexts in which they have been inserted. See Derrida's *Of Grammatology.* As I will explain later on in this chapter, Harley's definition of the term differs from its original meaning.

7 See *Hic sunt leones: geografia fantastica e viaggi straordinari,* edited by Omar Calabrese, Renato Giovannoli and Isabella Pezzini.

8 Daniel Weiss and Andrew Keller Estes both deal with McCarthy's use of cartography, especially in *The Road* and *Cities of the Plain*. In their analyses, that present several ideas in common, they define the two kinds of map as "anthropocentric" and "biocentric", to highlight the different points of view from which they are drawn.

spaces ... exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space." (474).

In the concluding part of the chapter, the core of the analysis shifts from fictional maps to characters. I examine their way of reading maps, how they relate to the spatial representations pertaining to traditional cartography, and to the biocentric maps that, in the novels, are often connected to storytelling.[9] Through the analysis of specific narrative sequences, I demonstrate that the attitudes of the characters toward maps reveal both their desire to master the world and the inability of anthropocentric maps to offer the spatial knowledge they ask for, in order to govern space. I would argue that McCarthy, through the positive presence of biocentric maps that oppose traditional cartography, rehabilitates the figure of the cowboy, as well as the ancient wisdom expressed by Native American tradition, by showing the merits of a life lived in direct contact with the land.

Maps as Texts: Vehicles of Power

The history of cartography is strongly intertwined with the development of civilization, so much so that ancient maps have been studied – and are still studied today – as invaluable sources of information regarding the political, economic, technological, cultural and social state of the countries that they represent. In *The Art of the Map,* Denis Reinhartz provides a detailed overview of some historical maps drawn from the 17th century to the beginnings of the 20th century, and he explains how, through the use of illustrative details and symbols, ancient cartographers conveyed information that went far beyond the mere cartographic data necessary to measure space.

By leafing through Reinhartz's volume, and paying a particular attention to ancient maps of the United States, one of the most apparent features that can be noticed is the progressive covering of blank spaces with names of towns, rivers, and mountains, as if the conquest of the West had actually happened through the act of naming the land. The

9 Robert Tally states that "narrative itself is a form of mapping [since it is] a fundamental way in which humans make sense of, or give form to the world" ("Literary Cartography" 3). Similarly, Sabine Anders quotes Robert Jarret in her analysis of the relation between mapping and storytelling in *The Crossing:* "[r]eading, narrating, mapmaking and questing – these are activities that are no longer innocent but reveal our desire to project a fixed structure on a world whose chaos resists such interpretations" (174).

imposition of names on lands that were previously considered free by native populations has been the first and most durable form of political domination.

In *The Road to Botany Bay*, an interesting book on the British conquest of Australia, Paul Carter describes how the imposition of the political power of Great Britain on the Australian lands happened more through naming, than through the construction of new settlements. Moreover, by saying that "space itself was a text that had to be written before it could be interpreted" (41), Carter makes clear that the political domination expressed by the act of naming was also a way to make the recently conquered land more knowable and accessible: naming can also be viewed as "a way of understanding the unknown, and ordering of the vastness and complexity of the space surrounding us" (Schröder 11), but this positive necessity has often been substituted by other goals, more in line with imperialistic agendas.

The relation existing between power and knowledge in the domain of cartography has been approached in particular by John Harley who, in the essay "Deconstructing the Map", proposes to read maps as elements that hide several strata of meaning, and that have to be "deconstructed" to really comprehend the social repercussions of the knowledge they transmit. Starting from Derrida's considerations on deconstruction, and Foucault's studies on the connection between power and knowledge,[10] Harley develops the view of the map as a socially constructed text, produced by a set of specific cultural rules that govern the scientific rules of cartography. By deconstructing maps, then, Harley is determined to "read between the lines" (233) of mapmaking.

Jeremy Crampton proposes a detailed analysis of Harley's theory, in which he explains that one of the limits of Harley's research was presenting Derrida, Barthes and Foucault through indirect sources. Harley's bypassing the original texts resulted in misinterpretations and in his somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation of the term "deconstruction". By examining his analytical process and his theoretical claims on this topic, it is possible to infer that when he speaks about the necessity to deconstruct maps, he actually refers to the act of stripping away the false superstructures of which they are made of, to recover and question the truth of the matter. In other words, to Harley cartography hides the truth under the illusory surface of ideology.

The most important contribution given by Harley's essay is the idea that the articulation of power in cartography takes place in different ways. There is a form of

10 See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* and the essay "Space, Knowledge and Power", collected in *The Foucault Reader*.

power imposed on cartographers, exercised by patrons who, in particular in ancient times, influenced their work; maps themselves can be viewed as vehicles of power, since they provide a spatial knowledge that facilitates the control of societies. On this topic, Harley argues that "a mapless society ... would not be politically imagined" (244), because a lack of spatial knowledge on the state's part would prevent an intervention in case of uprising. But – and this is the most important distinction – power is also internal to cartography, that is, it is an intrinsic aspect of this science. The way in which maps are compiled and drawn by the cartographer – who has the enormous power to control the access to spatial knowledge – influences the knowledge of the world they represent. As Harley says: "the power of the mapmaker was generally exercised not over individuals but over the knowledge of the world made available to people in general" (245).

From these considerations, maps emerge as "ideological weapons" (Jacob 194) that give information not only about space, but about the perspective from which they have been drawn. John Pickles' significant remark that "all maps distort, what is important is the intention behind the construction of the map, and the use to which a map is put" (199) develops a reflection on the causes at the basis of mapmaking, not on its consequences. His studies focus in particular on this aspect of cartography, i.e. the reasons behind the drawing of a map. Why does the cartographer draw a specific map? And why does he draw it in a specific way? These are the questions on which experts in critical cartography[11] such as Pickles have grounded their studies.

An example that may clarify the core of the analysis made in critical cartography is that of "propaganda maps",[12] which were quite common in the United States, especially in the 19th century, when the development of railroad lines in the uninhabited areas of the West required an increasing number of travelers to sustain the costs of construction. The first propaganda maps that influenced society on a vast scale were indeed railroad maps. The historical maps produced by railroad companies are tarnished with falsehood, as the sadly well-known case of Southeastern Montana may exemplify. In *Bad Land,* Jonathan

11 Critical cartography is a relatively new sector in the wide domain of cartographic studies, related to new mapping practices and theoretical critique. Critical cartographers are interested in the relation between geographic knowledge and power, and in the social implications of cartography. In this sense, critical cartography is a highly political field of study. Harley's studies have opened the way to other interesting approaches, among which I recommend Pickles'A *History of Spaces,* Denis Wood's *The Power of Maps*. Denis Cosgrove has also offered important contributions to the field (see, in particular, *Mappings).*

12 Persuasive cartography produces maps with the precise purpose of being convincing. The goal of persuasion is often reached through the use of deliberately falsified maps. This is probably the most important difference between propaganda maps and traditional maps: all maps are subjective products, that distort reality to a certain extent, but propaganda maps respond to the logic of advertisement, and not to that of cartography. On this issue, see Pickles 1992, 2004 and Mark Monmonier's *How to Lie with Maps*.

Raban tells the stories of the last generations of homesteaders who, at the end of the 19th century, were cheated by the government and by the railroad system, which portrayed the "bad lands" of Montana as fertile areas. Raban writes:

> There was a real mendacity in the way the scheme (dry homestead scheme) was advertised. The copywriters (who had probably never set eyes on the prairie) and the art editors created a paper-country, as illusory as the Land of Cockaigne. The misleading language and pictures of the pamphlets would eventually entitle the homesteaders to see themselves as innocent dupes of a government that was in the pocket of the corporation fatcats – and their sense of betrayal would fester through the generations. (276-7)

This is possibly one of the most serious cases of American power exercised through misleading maps. Thousands of people, with nothing left but their hopes, found themselves on a land that was the opposite to what the pamphlets on the Homestead Act[13] and railroad companies proclaimed. Those maps did not represent reality, but a dreamland.

Some of the maps McCarthy inserts in the novels here examined can be said to belong to propagandist cartography. I am referring in particular to maps produced by oil companies that, together with other maps more similar to those of Native American tradition, create an interesting dualism between traditional cartography, and what we may call "biocentric" cartography. By using Harley's approach, I analyze these fictional maps in order to discover the layers they hide, and to highlight their nature as texts made out of other texts. Naming, symbolism, and the capacity of representing a recognizable world are only some of the issues that will emerge through the examination of McCarthy's maps, that most of all respond to two opposed visions of space.

I would argue that these opposed visions could be clarified by Gilles Deleuze and Félix

13 The Homestead Act of 1862, signed by President Abraham Lincoln,was the first of a series of federal laws that gave ownership of 160 acres of federal unappropriated land, at almost no cost, to whomever had never attacked the United States, and was at the head of a family. Unfortunately, many of these lands were infertile, and thousands of families of homesteaders had to abandon their newly built houses to look for jobs in other states. The abandonment of these areas, especially the Dakotas, Montana, Arkansas and Oklahoma, became sadly famous during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Cormac McCarthy directly refers to one of these laws in *All the Pretty Horses,* where he mentions the Fisher-Miller grant in relation to John Grady's ranch (see the section "The Past as Burden and Heritage in *All the Pretty Horses*" in chapter 4).

Guattari's considerations on space,[14] viewed as an extremely influential element in the network of social relations. The division between what the two philosophers define as “smooth” and “striated” space is helpful in the analysis of McCarthy's fictional spaces, and in particular of maps, for it highlights the dialectics between a limitless spatial entity such as the desert, and a space forced into abstract structures established by mankind, as it is the case of the city. In relation to maps, the discourse on this spatial dualism may clarify the opposition between anthropocentric and biocentric maps:

> Smooth space and striated space – nomad space and sedentary space ... are not of the same nature. ... And no sooner have we done that than we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first case, one organizes even the desert. (Deleuze and Guattari 474)

A central claim of this informative analysis is that space is dynamic, and borders are porous. Their permeability implies a dialogue between the two spaces, so much so that they influence one another, transforming themselves in their opposite. Smooth space may be transformed into striated space, as it happens in cartography, and striated space can return to being smooth. The complexity of space also lies in this opposition, that demonstrates how the very idea of enclosing its fluidity into the prearranged structures of traditional cartography is doomed to failure. Moreover, the case of the American space is particularly relevant in this sense, for it is traditionally characterized by the “grid”, a structure that encloses and regularizes the vastness of what Deleuze and Guattari define as “the rhizomatic West”.[15] In the following sections, I show how the dualism between smooth and striated is articulated in the novels, and how the “transnational West” appears as “a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding simultaneously” (Campbell 4), always dynamic and always beyond any form of

14 Published in 1980, written over a seven year period, *A Thousand Plateaus* is the second volume of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical project “Capitalism and Schizophrenia”. The book, extremely heterogeneous in all its parts, provides an analysis of social phenomena in capitalist societies. The main studies on space of the two philosophers are collected in this volume.

15 In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari refer precisely to the American West as “rhizomatic”, that is, highly complex and varied, a spatial dimension that branches out in a multitude of different expressions and meanings. Neil Campbell founds his Postwestern approach on these considerations, looking at the West as a “labyrinthine [space] that refuses to be any single thing” (300). Campbell's *The Rhizomatic West* can be considered one of the most original and appealing studies pertaining to the discourse of the New Western Historians. See the introduction to chapter 3 for further details on this topic.

constraint.

The Maps in the Novels: Two Opposed Visions of Space

– Anthropocentric Maps

The presence of maps in McCarthy's novels has already been examined by Andrew Keller Estes and Daniel Weiss, who give similar interpretations of the opposition existing between what they define as "biocentric maps" – to indicate the structures intrinsically present in nature – and the "anthropocentric maps" imposed on the land by traditional cartography. The "maps and mazes" (287) on the backs of the trouts described in the epilogue of *The Road*, contrast the road map produced by oil companies that father and son consult during their travel which, as Estes makes clear in his overview of American historical road maps, is a product of persuasive cartography, aimed at improving tourism and, as a consequence, the consumption of gasoline (25; 99). This dualism is present not only in *The Road,* but in all the novels examined in this chapter, demonstrating the complexity concerning the issue of spatial knowledge.

In *All the Pretty Horses,* the first oil company road map is described at the very beginning of the journey of John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins, from their ranches in New Mexico, to the green prairies of Mexico:

> They reached the Devil's River by midmorning and watered the horses and stretched out in the shade of a stand of black-willow and looked at the map. It was an oilcompany roadmap that Rawlins had picked up at the cafe and looked at it and he looked south toward the gap in the low hills. There were roads and rivers and towns in the American side of the map as far south as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white.
> It dont show nothin down there, does it? said Rawlins.
> No.
> You reckon it aint never been mapped?
> There's maps. That just aint one of em. I got one in my saddlebag.

> Rawlins came back with the map and sat on the ground and traced their route with his fingers. He looked up.
> What? said John Grady.
> There aint shit down there. (34)

The first map represents Mexico as a boundless, white space whose wilderness makes John Grady think that "it aint never been mapped".[16] The second is equally worthless, as Rawlins vehemently argues by saying: "[t]here aint shit down there". Looking at the white space on the map is a moment of both excitement and fear for the two protagonists, who know they have to face a lawless space, far from the American side of the border to which they belong, which is represented on the map with "roads and rivers and towns". The nameless region beyond the frontier seems to offer unlimited, "smooth" extensions they can ride on horseback, but also with their imagination, so much so that they invest Mexico with many idealistic projections.

The white space on the map is a narrative motif that has often been used in literature, for it hints at the infinite power of imagination from which fiction itself derives. For example, in *Moby Dick*[17] the chapter "The Chart" describes the grim Ahab while reading a map, and tracing "additional courses over spaces that before were blank" (Melville 280). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe remembers when, as a child, he used to look at maps, in a time where "there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there'" (Conrad 70-1). Phillip and Juliana Muehrcke provide another literary example of maps and blank spaces in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where the whiteness on the map represents the starting point of new adventures for the hobbit Frodo: "Frodo began to feel restless, and the old paths seem too-well trodden. He looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps made in the Shire

16 The blank space on the map can be viewed both as a narrative element used to express the power of imagination, and as a real reference to the historical maps of the American West. It is not the case of John Grady and Rawlins' maps, since the road maps they use have probably been drawn not so many years before the beginning of their journey (that takes place in 1949). Nevertheless, the idea of a leaving a white space on a map to represent the lands that had not been conquered yet, calls to mind the maps produced during the conquest of the frontier. John Groen's *Chart of North and South America* (1753), for instance, shows a wide blank space west of the state of Virginia, similarly to David Burr's *Map of the United States of America* (1841). Both maps are collected in *American Maps and Mapmakers*. See also Warren Beck and Ynez Haase, and *Images and Icons of the New World*, edited by Karen Cook.

17 Robert Tally wrote an interesting essay on the role of the blank spaces on maps used by Herman Melville in *Moby Dick,* focusing in particular on their capacity to "tell the truth": "[t]his cartographic anxiety ... forces Melville to explore the blank spaces on the map, seeking the truth in those extraterritorial zones that he would dub 'true places', and trying to find a representational form that would allow him to realize his dream to become a master of 'the great art of telling the Truth'" ("Spaces that Before Were Blank" 183).

showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders" (Tolkien 71). In all these examples, white spaces on maps are connected to ideas of adventure and discovery.

In the case of *All the Pretty Horses*, the excitement of the discovery is accompanied by the subtle awareness that, whatever dreamland one may see in the blank space on the map, there will always be the destructive force of reality out there to erase it. John Grady and Rawlins are stuck in a suspended moment, both in time and space, because the space they used to know is now unrecognizable for them – this is the reason why they decide to leave New Mexico –, and Mexico is the unknowable. Moreover, seeing the map as a product of an oil company highlights another aspect hidden in this fictional object: it fosters an idea of mobility that is different from that of the cowboy life known to them. The road map represents a space where cars have replaced horses, and the importance of the destination has substituted the pleasure of the journey. It is a testimony of a traumatic change in the economy and society of the American West, of which John Grady and Rawlins' world is the main victim.

The development of the highway system at the beginning of the 20th century led to a high consumption of road maps. Highway associations "were among the most prolific early publishers of promotional cartography" (178), and road maps became the most distributed marketing tools of oil companies. By looking at some old road maps from the Forties and Fifties, when the novel is set, the first thing one notices is that, as it generally happens in cartography, they not only give geographical information: they are also mouthpieces of a specific lifestyle and social status (Akerman 184). The promotion of the road hero, that became one of the most powerful and enduring myths in American culture, was aimed at increasing tourism in those areas where investments for natural parks, hotels, and attractions had been made in the impetuosity of the economic development. To a certain extent, the myth of fast cars and mobility on the road is influential even today, as movies like *The Fast and the Furious* and *Gone in Sixty Seconds* demonstrate.

The reference to Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the two protagonists of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* (1957), and to Jim Stark, the main character of the renowned movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), come immediately – and predictably – to the mind: these characters can be truly considered the emblems of a generation to which McCarthy's cowboys, in some way, do not belong. John Grady and Rawlins, as well as Billy and Boyd Parham (the two protagonists of *The Crossing*) belong to a world that seems anachronistic in time, and distant in space.[18] The road maps in *All the Pretty Horses* are difficult to read for

18 Tim Cresswell analyzes the relation between mobility and modernity by saying that: "[m]obility seems self-

the two young cowboys, because they not only represent a territory that John Grady and Rawlins do not know: they are also the products of a side of the United States to which the two boys do not belong.

Road maps show highways, state roads, cars and wealth. On the contrary, John Grady and Rawlins know horses, they know the way of the desert, but the knowledge they cherish is vanishing together with their ranches and their hopes of keeping living their way, a theme already explored – for example – by Edward Abbey in the novel *The Brave Cowboy*, later adapted by Dalton Trumbo in the screenplay of the movie *Lonely Are the Brave*. The short reference at the beginning of the novel to John Grady's girlfriend, who has just left him for a guy "two years oldern ... [that] got his own car and everything" (*All the Pretty Horses* 10), reveals that the myth to which John Grady refers to – namely, that of the cowboy – is viewed as an old-fashioned motif by the girl. John Grady, then, becomes old-fashioned too, and incapable to be as fast as the road map he is looking at asks him to be.

In *The Road*, the road map used by the two protagonists paradoxically recalls the main cause for the state of waste of the landscape described in the novel, and it highlights another aspect hidden behind its propagandist nature: the human exploitation of the land. It is, once again, a map produced by an oil company, that transmits the same ideas of mobility, velocity and consumption of gasoline as the road map described in *All the Pretty Horses* does. The two settings are different, but the role of the maps is quite similar. Consider this excerpt from *The Road*:

> The tattered oilcompany roadmap had once been taped together but now it was just sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly. He sorted through the limp pages and spread out those that answered to their location.
>
> We cross a bridge here. It looks to be about eight miles or so. This is the river. Going east. We follow the road here along the eastern slope of the mountains. These are our roads, the black lines on the map. The state roads.
>
> Why are they the state roads?

evidently central to Western modernity. Indeed the word *modern* seems to evoke images of technological mobility – the car, the plane, the spaceship. It also signifies a world of movement on a global scale. Perhaps most importantly, though, it suggests a way of thinking in terms of mobility – a metaphysics of mobility that is distinct from what came before it" (qtd. in Sheller and Urry 256).

> Because they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states.
>
> But there's not any more states?
>
> No. (42-3)

The road map used by father and son is evidently ruined: the fragments of paper have to be reassembled each time they need to consult it, an image that lends the sense of an evanescent world, extremely fragile in the hands of the characters. The cartographic symbols are easily decoded by the father, who knows how to distinguish a river from a state road, but not by the child: the world represented on the map does not correspond to the world in which they live and that the boy knows, for the map had been drawn before the catastrophe. The child is a creature of the new world, he does not have references to understand what a state is, since he has never known one. The only world he knows is the ruined wasteland where trees and other forms of life have been reduced to shadows of themselves. The fragmentation of the map is both material and linguistic: the semiotic connections between the objects and the words that name them have been lost. This lack of linguistic references is particularly true for the child, but also for the father, who understands that he is slowly forgetting the names of things, since they no longer exist, as I have shown in the first chapter.

As road maps represent a vision of space as an entity to be traversed and exploited, no matter what destructive consequences this action entails, in a similar way the historical maps Billy Parham sees in *The Crossing* are things of the past, objects that reveal the human desire to control space, and to exercise a form of power over it. The two maps described in the novel belong to an anthropocentric vision of space, and they are both very old and difficult to decipher. In the first scene, Billy Parham sees “great freeform sepia maps as of old antique kingdoms, ancient worlds” (221) on the walls of an old *residencia*. The maps are ruined by water stains, freeform, and they are inaccurate and ambiguous both in form and content, for they display images that point to the fairy world of knights errant (the “ancient worlds”), not to the real one.[19] For this reason, together with their unreliability, the sepia maps are totally useless for the protagonist, since they depict a world that is not

19 Ellis proposes an analysis of Billy and Boyd Parham as squires and knights (213-4), stressing the idealism nurturing their visions of the world. In Billy's case, however, there is no romantic attitude toward the frontier, most of all after the killing of the she-wolf in the first part of the novel, a wild animal that can be viewed as the symbol of the wilderness (see the introduction to chapter 3).

present in reality, nor in Billy's expectations about the future.

The “antique kingdoms” evoke the chivalric world of the American South, a world that vanished after the Civil War, and the vague image of medieval kingdoms. In both cases, the representation of reality provided by the map is that of a dreamland of the past, not of the future. In contrast to the blank spaces on John Grady's maps, totally oriented toward forecasts of how Mexico would be, the map Billy Parham sees on the wall represents an unreal world, belonging to past dreams. The presence of a melancholic tonality in Billy's contemplation of the sepia maps demonstrates that, in *The Crossing*, McCarthy begins to illustrate the approaching end of the cowboy's world. If *All the Pretty Horses* still preserves some hope in its future progression, in *The Crossing* the same hope is irremediably denied.

The second reference to maps in this novel appears within a tale told to Billy by a gypsy. She describes it as a “stained and whimsical map printed on poor paper already severing at the folds” (406). Once again, it is an old map, this time of the town of Madera, even though the truthfulness of this detail is impossible to determine. The map lies at a second level of narration, since it belongs to a story told inside the main frame of the novel. Moreover, it is stained, ruined, and whimsical, which are all adjectives that mine the truthfulness of its representation of reality. These representations question the capability of anthropocentric maps to provide a credible image of the land, as old Quijada, a Yaqui Indian that Billy meets while he is traveling in search of his brother's bones, explains to him :

> The world has no name, he said. The names of the cerros and the sierras and the deserts exist only on maps. We name them that we do not lose our way. Yet it was because the way was lost to us already that we have made those names. The world cannot be lost. We are the ones. And it is because these names and these coordinates are our own naming that they cannot save us. That they cannot find for us the way again. Your brother is in that place which the world has chosen for him. He is where he is supposed to be. (387)

This view suggests new possible ways of living space. In Quijada's words, naming is an imposition of men over the preexisting order of a self-sufficient world, that simply cannot be named or controlled. Naming does not provide and guarantee real understanding: on

the contrary, it gives an impermanent knowledge that does not respect the natural transformations of the world.

The road maps described in these novels are not only important elements of the plots, but they also articulate discourses that demonstrate the characters' distance from the spatial knowledge they provide, and from the set of values they represent: velocity, exploitation, and the conquest of the land. McCarthy's novels express the inability of traditional cartography to impose a fixed order on space, that remains a dynamic and autonomous force. The necessity to find other forms of spatial knowledge is conveyed through the presence of biocentric maps that contrast the impositions of anthropocentric maps by representing the fluidity of space. “To explore and negotiate new identities and new discursive space” (Van Herk 132) seems to be the only solution to avoid the loss of a positive interchange with the several spatial dimensions inherent in the natural world.

– Biocentric Maps: The World in its Becoming

Biocentric maps emerge in McCarthy's texts as the most authentic and respectful depictions of the natural world, and of the network of relations existing among its components. Moreover, they seem to speak the same language of nature, for they are dynamic, fluid, and impermanent as nature itself. These maps appear in *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain* and *The Road*, and I argue that their presence in these novels suggests the increasing necessity of their protagonists to find new ways to position themselves in a world that is fading away[20] – especially in the novels of the trilogy – or, as it is the case of *The Road*, to contemplate the possibility of a new beginning, rising from the remains of a broken world. In the examination of their composition, I take into consideration two issues in particular: their dynamism, often presented through images of traveling, and their connection with storytelling, two characteristics that are strongly indebted to Native American tradition.[21] This indirect reference to Native American mapmaking is important

20 Dianne C. Luce's essential essay on the vanishing world of the trilogy – with a particular focus on *The Crossing* – presents an extremely accurate analysis of the images pointing at the slow decay of the cowboy's world. To Luce, these references are mostly related to the fictional landscape, where the themes of darkness and twilight permeate McCarthy's descriptions. The author speaks about a “falling of darkness” (168) over the narrative world described in the trilogy. In particular, the language becomes more rich in images of darkness and death after the killing of the she-wolf (see *The Crossing*, 125-7).

21 As I have shown in the first chapter, *Blood Meridian* is particularly rich in descriptions of Indian pictographs, that the characters observe in the canyons of San Augustín. At the beginning of *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady is

to understand the thematic contribution biocentric maps provide, and which discourses they develop in the novels.

In this passage from *The Crossing*, for instance, Billy and Boyd ask an old man the way to Casas Grandes, since they do not know the territory. The man begins to sketch a map in the dust:

> They sat on the ground in the dusty square while a thin old man squatted opposite and drew for them with a whittled stick a portrait of the country they said they wished to visit. He sketched in the dust streams and promontories and pueblos and mountain ranges. He commenced to draw trees and houses. Clouds. A bird. He penciled in the horsemen themselves doubled upon their mount. Billy leaned forward from time to time to question the measure of some part of their route whereupon the old man would turn and squint at the horse standing in the street and then give an answer in hours. All the while there sat watching on a bench a few feet away four men dressed in ancient and sunfaded suits. By the time the old man was done the map he'd drawn covered an area in the dirt the size of a blanket. He stood and dusted the seat of his trousers with a swipe of his flattened hand.
>
> Give him a peso, Billy said. ...
>
> When he was gone the men on the bench began to laugh. One of them rose to better see the map.
>
> Es un fantasma, he said.
>
> Fantasma?
>
> Sí, sí. Claro.
>
> Cómo?
>
> Cómo? Porque el viejo está loco es como.
>
> Loco?
>
> Completamente.
>
> Billy stood looking at the map. No es correcto? he said.

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portrayed while eating his lunch in "an outcropping of lava rock [where] ... there were ancient pictographs among the rocks, engravings of animals and moons and men and lost hieroglyphics whose meaning no man would ever know" (49). Similarly, in *The Road*, father and son see the grim show of a frieze of human heads, with "runic slogans, creeds misspelled. Old scars with old motifs stitched along their borders" (90), an image that does not refer directly to Native American cartography, but more in general to rock paintings and graffiti.

> The man threw up his hands. He said that what they beheld was but a decoration. He said that anyway it was not so much a question of a correct map but of any map at all. He said that in that country were fires and earthquakes and floods and that one needed to know the country itself and not simply the landmarks therein. .... His map was after all not really so much a map as a picture of a voyage. And what voyage was that? And when?
> Un dibujo the un viaje, he said. Un viaje pasado, un viaje antiguo. (184-5)

The old man does not follow the rules of traditional cartography, as he inserts into the map decorative images unrelated to scientific measurements of distance, latitude or longitude: birds, clouds, the serpentine streams, the houses of people are all, to him, parts of a knowledge that is necessary for the two cowboys to reach Casas Grandes. By adding the two brothers in the map, the old man evokes an idea of space as an extension that has to be experienced directly, with the slowness of a ride on horseback, feeling the atmosphere of the desert, and knowing its rhythms. When Billy and Boyd ask him how long it would take them to reach the town, "the old man would turn and squint at the horse ... and then give an answer in hours", because the strength of the horse is the variable they have to consider, and it can be measured only through the experience of riding the animal.

After the departure of the old man, two other men inform the brothers that he is mad, and his map "es un fantasma". But the unreliability of the map, as they explain afterward, is not a characteristic pertaining specifically to that map: it is intrinsic in the act of mapping the desert. Traditional maps prove to be completely useless in the boundless country the two brothers want to cross, a land that is constantly modified by natural phenomena such as floods, earthquakes and fires. For this reason, Billy and Boyd appreciate the vague map drawn by the old man, even if it probably is an imaginative projection. Through this map, the old man has told them a story about the desert they wish to see, speaking in the same impermanent language of the land (the map is sketched in the dust), and offering an invaluable picture of its real nature.

In this passage, there is an intense relation between mapping and storytelling, a relation that derives from the very beginning of the history of cartography. Medieval cartographers drew their maps on the basis of the stories that travelers and explorers told

them once they had come back from a voyage (Caquard 136, and Ryan, "Narrative Cartography" 345) so, to a certain extent, the first maps were more representations of tales than of geographical data. The concept of "story map", introduced in the domain of cartography by Robert Macfarlane, is precisely aimed at describing the "spatial expressions that embody our personal experiences of the environment and contribute to creating a deep understanding of places" (142), giving more importance to the spatial knowledge that derives from memories, sensations, and perceptions, than to the representations of space realized through abstract data. The map drawn in *The Crossing* by the old man can be defined as a "story map", since it describes the dynamic experience of the travel Billy and Boyd will make to explore the land, and not the land itself as a static space.

The narrative potential of story maps is immense, since they are tied to the world they represent, and in so doing they have the power to evoke both past and future. The map drawn in the dirt presents a highly dynamic nature, and this dynamism is primarily due to the fact that the representation of the country mingles with the powerful "narrative as travel" metaphor, that Kai Mikkonen explains in an extremely interesting essay. In the first place, Mikkonen states that the "narrative potential of travel lies in the fact that we recognize in it temporal and spatial structures that call for narration" (286). Starting from this premise, what can be the consequence of a map that represents a movement in space, and not a static image of space itself? To Mikkonen, since "events and movements impose a structure on space" (289), the map "is not only a model of a reference world, ... but may presuppose a narrative" (294) and, consequently, an order on the space it represents. I would argue that the presence of maps representing travels, that McCarthy inserts in his novels, refers to Native American mapmaking, and to the more direct contact with nature Native American culture promotes.

In *Another America*, Mark Warhus reconstructs the history of Native American cartography, counting on the little evidences collected in time. The main reason for the difficulty of this search of materials and documents is the fact that Native American maps were not drawn to endure, therefore they were usually sketched on the sand, or in the dirt, at the moment when they proved to be necessary for a hunter to communicate his position to his hunting partners, or to indicate the way to a village. Moreover, during the wars between the American government and Indian tribes– that McCarthy describes with extremely vivid images in *Blood Meridian* – thousands of artifacts had been lost, or

destroyed, leaving several uncertainties in the successive reconstruction of Native American culture. The only maps that miraculously survived the violence of wars and the passing of time were “message maps” sketched on birch bark, rocks or deer skins, that Indians usually left on the paths they mostly walked, to communicate with their mates, or with their enemies.

The most evident aspect in common between the fictional maps in the novels, and Native American maps, is their strong narrative quality, that asks for new ways of reading maps:

> To read these Native American maps it is necessary to suspend western preconceptions of what makes a map. Unlike western cartography, where the primary document is the physical map and the conventions of scale, longitude, latitude, direction, and relative location are believed to “scientifically” depict a static landscape, Native American maps are pictures of experience. They are formed in the human interaction with the land and are a record of the events that give it meaning. ... Native American maps are always secondary to the oral “picture” or experience of the landscape. Routes, landmarks, sacred sites, and historical events formed a “mental map” that wove together geography, history, and mythology. (Warhus 3-7)

The representation of space as an entity that has to be lived in order to be comprehended, implies that the attempt to impose a fixed structure on something that is constantly changing is futile, while describing its dynamism can be the right way to have a more plausible representation of the land. Native American maps, as well as the biocentric maps inserted in the novels, are “pictures of experience” of space, where the direct “interaction with the land” becomes the main source of one's knowledge of the world. To explain this concept, Warhus uses Peter Gould and Rodney White's term “mental maps”, namely, mental spatial representations deriving from an experiential knowledge of space, where the dynamic connections among different places and the feelings they raise are blended in an all-embracing image that respects the dynamism of the land.

> Western maps described land as an object; their mapping systems use

> conventions like scale and the coordinate system to “accurately” picture the land and establish the boundaries of ownership that define it. Native American oral maps are fluid pictures of a dynamic landscape, a geography in which experience shapes the past and present of the land. (Warhus 139)

In this brief paragraph, Warhus highlights a fundamental aspect of Native American maps, that is their connection with storytelling. McCarthy often connects biocentric maps to narrative moments where a character is telling a story about the country, and in this way he represents them as real chronotopes in the novels, since they encapsulate space and time, becoming powerful narrative centers. Paradoxically, in the geographical representation provided by “biocentric maps”, man becomes the ultimate maker of the land, because through his experience of it (an experience that rises together with the respect for the land) he can shape “the past and present of the land”, grasping its fluidity. The interconnection between man and nature, that is at play in this moment of knowledge, can be observed in the highly evocative epilogue of *The Road*:

> Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (287)

Consider the “patterns” on the backs of the fish, a term that indicates creative designs, with a precise order governing them: they are mysterious, but still they seem to refer to the power that nature has to renew itself under different shapes. The maps represent “a thing that could not be put back”, but they respond to laws that are “older than man”, in which the seed of life is preserved for “the world in its becoming”, a sentence that appears in all the novels here taken into examination, as if the author wanted to insert a positive nucleus in the fragmentary “story spaces” he creates.[22] Even if this image seems to evoke a

22 See Ryan's definition of the term “story space”: “the space relevant to the plot, as mapped by the actions and

development of nature as a space where the presence of man is not contemplated, there are elements that indicate a different slant: there is a "you" that could see the trouts in the streams, a "hand" that could feel their movements, and a nose that could smell their odor. Mankind is inscribed in the biocentric maps carried by the trouts on their backs, because it is a part of the history of nature, and its presence cannot be erased. Biocentric maps are constantly changing, along with the movements of the world they represent, but every element, every component of the story they tell finds its place in the chronotopic nucleus they create.

The "immappable journey": Interactions with Textual Maps

Sally Bushell has properly stated that "the literary map often has a double identity, since it exists both for the reader outside the text and for the characters within" (153). In my examination of the ways in which the characters use the maps previously analyzed, I have noticed that characters tend to read maps with a domineering attitude toward the land, bespeaking their will to control it, but what readers infer is that they are lost in the fictional landscapes of the novels. The idea that readers tend to imagine narrative worlds on the basis of the real world in which they live, and that they experience, is at the basis of this consideration, that takes into account the narratological studies of Richard Gerrig, Alan Palmer and Marie-Laure Ryan on the issues concerning the relation between character and narrative space.[23]

The immersion in a given storyworld, that to David Herman takes place only when the reader accepts the change between the "here and now" of the real world where he is reading the novel, to the fictional "here and now" proposed by the novel (deictic shift), does not only imply that the reader has to fill the gaps concerning the details of the narrated storyworld through his imaginative skills. On the contrary, this immersion leads the reader toward the development of judgments on the behavior of the characters, that

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thoughts of the characters. It consists of all the spatial frames plus all the locations mentioned by the text that are not the scene of actually occurring events" ("Space", Paragraph 8).

23 I am here referring to the "principle of minimal departure" proposed by Ryan in *Possible World, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory.* Pursuant to the principle, readers imagine fictional worlds and fill the gaps in the texts by assuming the similarity of the narrative world to the actual world they experience. This principle is activated in the mind of the reader also for what concerns the characters' feelings and thoughts. See also Gerrig: "readers are routinely called upon to use their logical faculties to bridge gaps of various sizes in texts" (27).

he perceives as ontologically similar to himself, with human feelings and mental processes comparable to his own. Gerrig uses the term “participatory responses” to indicate “noninferential responses that would also include within them the notion that these responses arise as a consequence of the reader's active participation” (66) in the text; in other words, readers participate to the text, and they express “hopes or preferences in the experience of narrative worlds” (69), as well as suspense, fear, or sadness.

In McCarthy's novels, specifically, the characters' repetitive act of looking at maps, that one can observe in particular in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, gives the reader the impression that they are uncertain and lost, even if they seem reassured by consulting them, and their behavior even seems to reflect the ideas of control evoked by traditional cartography. This inference derives from the notion that readers tend to use scripts[24] based on real life behavior in order to fill in the blanks inherent in the representation of a fictional world. In real conditions, whenever we feel lost in a place we do not know, we tend to study maps quite repeatedly, in order to solve the anxiety related to our lack of spatial knowledge. In the same way, in McCarthy's novels the characters' behavior suggests their will to control space:

> Moss sat with the heels of his boots dug into the volcanic gravel of the ridge and glassed the desert below him with a pair of twelve power german binoculars.” (*No Country for Old Men* 8)

> “When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. (*The Road* 4)

In the first paragraph, Llewelyn Moss is surveying the desert of Texas in search of antelopes; in the second, the father is looking for possible dangers on the road. These sequences are both narrative and descriptive, since through the description of the actions of the characters, the reader may also obtain some details on the characteristics of the narrative landscapes. Through the characters' gaze, reinforced by the binoculars, the reader imagines the fictional deserts as spatial extensions unified by the characters'

24 “Script and frame [are] types of knowledge representation that allow an expected sequence of events or an activity setting to be stored in the memory” (Herman, “Cognitive Narratology”).

perspectives, which seem to dominate the scene from their higher positions. Ryan provides a useful definition of the two main descriptive strategies used in literary texts, as it can be observed in this excerpt from the essay “Cognitive Maps”, and she invests these strategies with interesting implications:

> In the map strategy, space is represented panoramically from a perspective ranging from the disembodied god's-eye point of view of pure vertical projection to the oblique view of an observer situated on an elevated point. Space is divided into segments, and the text covers the segments according to a systematic algorithm: east to west and north to south; left to right; or front to back. In contrast to the more or less disembodied and static perspective of the map, the *tour* strategy represents space dynamically from a perspective internal to the territory to be surveyed, namely the perspective of a moving object. The tour thus simulates the embodied experience of a traveler. (218)

We can affirm that, in the two examples presented before, the descriptive sequences are given through the “map strategy”, that consequently produces a “disembodied and static” image of the fictional space. Ryan refers to this type of perspective as the “god's-eye point of view”, and indeed the impression the reader obtains from reading the paragraphs is that of a space in some way controlled by the character's gaze, a gaze that indirectly entails knowledge.

Ryan's considerations on these two descriptive strategies are indebted to Michel de Certeau's famous essay “Walking in the City”.[25] While describing the experience of seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, de Certeau wonders about the possibility of reading the urban space as a text – and consequently of understanding it –, a possibility that comes from the distance at which the observer, who sees space from an elevated position, is. The state of elevation “transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god” (92). On the contrary, “ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. ... [T]hey are walkers ... whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it” (93).

25 The essay is collected in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The main difference existing between the two definitions is the level of the subject's involvement in relation to space. De Certeau explains: "description oscillates between the terms of an alternative: either *seeing* (the knowledge of an order of places) or *going* (spatializing actions). Either it presents a *tableau* ... or it organizes *movements*" ("Spatial Stories" 119).[26] Once again, the map strategy corresponds to a static representation of space, disengaged "from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility" (120). The dichotomy between the tour and the map is described from different perspectives by Ryan and de Certeau. Ryan's analysis, which is strictly textual, examines the effects of the use of these descriptive strategies on the reader, while de Certeau, whose considerations go beyond the literary domain, is more interested in the subject's spatial perception. More simply, if Ryan focuses on the receiver of spatial information, de Certeau is concerned with its producer.

Which kind of fictional space do readers imagine through the descriptions previously taken from McCarthy's novels? The impression is that of a spatial entity unified and dominated by the eye of the character, who can see it from the privileged position of the detached, god's-eye point of view. But the development of the novels demonstrates quite the contrary: the characters' constant necessity to read maps reveals that they are profoundly disoriented. Their attitudes toward maps mirror the same difference between the two descriptive strategies illustrated before: there are scenes in the novels where the characters tend to master traditional maps, even altering the image they represent, and others where they are immersed in the dynamic space of biocentric maps, and they follow the movement of the travel these maps presuppose. The following excerpts, once again from *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road,* present this dichotomy :

> He pulled in at the filling station under the lights and shut off the motor and got the survey map from the glovebox and unfolded it across the seat and sat there studying it. He finally marked where he thought the trucks should be and then he traced a route cross country back to Harkle's cattlegate. He had a good set of all-terrain tires on the truck and two spares in the bed but this was some hard country. He sat looking at the line he'd drawn. Then he bent and studied the terrain and drew another one. Then he just sat there looking at the map. (*No Country for Old Men* 25)

26 Also collected in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

> At a crossroads they sat in the dusk and he spread out the pieces of the map in the road and studied them. He put his finger down. This is us, he said. Right here. They boy wouldnt look. He sat studying the twisted matrix of routes in red and black with his finger at the junction where he thought that they might be. As if he'd seen their small selves crouching there. We could go back, the boy said softly. It's not so far. It's not too late. (*The Road* 86)

In the passage from *No Country for Old Men,* Moss is tracing lines on his map, as if he could shape the land it represents. His imposing attitude – he surveys the map, he controls it and wants to make it more legible, by tracing new routes – clashes with the instability of the real desert, which is "some hard country", a fact he is aware of. In *The Road*, the father's relation to the ruined road map shows that his idea of space is that of an entity that has to be controlled. In this sense, his vision is still trapped inside the anthropocentric desire to delimit, to calculate, and to impose the cartographic grid on an extremely mutable world, where earthquakes and fires transform the landscape every day, an image that recalls the narrative landscape of *The Crossing*.

The passage from *The Road* is particularly interesting, because it shows the different positions of father and son regarding the possibility of locating themselves in space simply relying on the abstract reconstruction of the world they can see on the map. The father sees "their small selves" on the map, doing the same thing they do in reality, and he claims it with absolute certainty: "this is us ... right here". But his assertion actually demonstrates his desperate attempt to know where they are, and consequently to exercise power on a world that, on the contrary, is highly disharmonious and impossible to control. The child proves to be aware that the map does not correspond to the world where they are traveling, since "the map *is not* the territory" (Korzybski 750), but a limited and incomplete representation of it. In a subsequent scene, the position of the father emerges with even more emphasis:

> He sorted through the sections and looked again. Finally he showed the boy. They were some fifty miles west of where he'd thought. He drew stick figures on the map. This is us, he said. The boy traced the route to the sea with his finger. How long will it take us to get there? he said.

> Two weeks. Three.
>
> Is it blue?
>
> The sea? I dont know. It used to be.
>
> The boy nodded. He sat looking at the map. The man watched him. He thought he knew what that was about. He'd pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything in its place. Justified in the world. Come on, he said. We should go. (182)

The last sentences express the father's yearning for that kind of control over space represented by anthropocentric maps, where every element seems to acquire meaning through the definition of its place in the world. Meaning and, to a certain extent, protection and reassurance. But what happens in the mind of the child? The man makes conjectures on what he could imagine, even though in the novel it is often made clear that the thoughts and dreams of the child are unfathomable,[27] for they have developed in a totally different world. At one point, the father understands that there is a distance between them – "he turned and looked at the boy. Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed" (153) – a distance created by their belonging to different worlds.

In the novel, at one point the father seems to understand that the new world cannot be measured and known with the traditional methods proposed by cartography. When father and son reach the ocean, they see an abandoned boat offshore, and the father decides to swim to it in search of food and supplies that could help them survive one more day, but his attention is caught by a strange object he finds in a drawer. It is an antique brass sextant, a fundamental instrument for the measurements and calculations necessary to draw maritime maps:

> Struck by the beauty of it. The brass was dull and there were patches of green on it that took the form of another hand that once had held it but otherwise it was perfect. He wiped the verdigris from the plate at the base. Hezzaninth, London. He held it to his eye and turned the wheel. It was the

27 See these passages from the novel: "One night the boy woke from a dream and would not tell him what it was" (189); "when he looked the boy was crying. What is it? He said. Nothing. No, tell me. Nothing. It's nothing" (218); "I had some weird dreams. What about? I dont want to tell you. That's ok" (252).

> first thing he'd seen in a long time that stirred him. He held it in his hand and then he fitted it back into the blue baize lining in the case and closed the lid and snapped the latches shut and set it back in the locker and closed the door. (228)

The act of leaving the sextant on the abandoned boat may be interpreted as a new awareness in the father's mind of the futility of this object, because the new world claims new ways of knowing it, of living it, ways that cannot come from the same means that brought the old world to extinction. The sextant finds its counterpart in *The Crossing,* where the image of "a man bent at fixing himself someway in the world [,] [b]ent on trying by arc or chord the space between his being and the world that was" gives a precise thematic direction to the novel: the necessity to find one's own place in the world cannot be fulfilled simply by the spatial knowledge provided by measurements and maps. The excerpt from *The Crossing* goes on posing two legitimate questions: "[i]f there be such space. If it be knowable" (22). Can traditional cartography give the information needed by the characters in order to know their position in their fragmentary world?

The passage previously quoted is taken from the paragraph describing the moment when Billy and Boyd's father is putting traps in the ground to capture the wolves that are eating their calves. To Billy, the trap looks like an old astrolabe or sextant, and the whole scene acquires an intense, almost mythical tonality, with the image of a man who is trying to fix his position by putting in the ground a deathly trap for the wild animals, a trap that looks like a sextant. As it happens with the sextant in *The Road*, the "arc or chord" seems to force the man to measure himself with his past, in order to find a *continuum* in "the space between his being and the world that was" (*The Crossing* 22). The sextant is an antique way of measuring space, and the chord in *The Crossing* recalls the same idea: a temporal curve that has to complete and give a direction to the space that has been traveled and experienced so far. Nevertheless, the comparison of the trap with the sextant articulates another discourse, more problematic, concerning the destructive act of traditional cartography on the land, and condemns the human craving for controlling the wilderness.

In this paragraph, McCarthy inserts a temporal dimension in the concept of spatial knowledge. The man seems to be tracing an arc between his present being, and the world of the past, and it is from the dialogue between these two temporal dimensions that the awareness of one's place in the world can arise. In the epilogue of *Cities of the Plain*, Billy

Parham has a conversation with an old man, who tells him a story about the failed attempt of drawing the map of his life, which turned out to be an “immappable journey” (288). The concept is the same presented in the scene taken from *The Crossing:*

> In the middle of my life, he said, I drew a path of it upon a map and studied it a long time. I tried to see the pattern that it made upon the earth because I thought that if I could see that pattern and identify the form of it then I would know better how to continue. I would know what my path must be. I would see into the future of my life. ... It was interesting. It looked different things. There were different perspectives one could take. ... The picture seeks to seize and immobilize within its own configurations what it never owned. Our map knows nothing of time. It has no power to speak even to the hours implicit in its own existence. Not of those that have passed, not of those to come. (*Cities of the Plain* 268-274)

Traditional cartography lacks the temporal dimension that the story the old man tells to Billy has, and it tends to erase important moments of the past that are necessary to have a complete vision of the future. The knowledge that derives from experience, from the coexistence of lived time and lived space, cannot be found on maps, which provide an extremely scientific and abstract geographical knowledge. Maps cannot give what the characters so insistently ask for: a known space that they can call home.

In all the novels examined in this chapter, the characters are orphans of parental figures, homes, and even homelands. The world they experience every day is fragmentary, because it lacks the ethical center deriving from the stability offered by domesticity, and by the richness coming from the knowledge of the past, necessary to know the future. They are victims of the “transcendental homelessness” Luckács speaks about in *The Theory of the Novel,* a term he uses to indicate the ineptitude of feeling at home in any place, the longing of all souls for the place to which they once belonged, and consequently the desperate need for means to reach that place, to reach home. In *Cities of the Plain*, it seems that the ending of Billy's state of homelessness is connected to the importance given to his experience and wisdom by the family who volunteers to take him in. In the epilogue, Billy Parham is described as an old man, homeless and alone. A family, of which we know only

the name of the woman – Betty – cares for him. Betty sees a map in Billy's palm:

> She patted his hand. Gnarled, ropescarred, speckled from the sun and the years of it. The ropy veins that bound them to his heart. There was map enough for men to read. There God's plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape. To make a world. She rose to go.
>
> Betty, he said.
>
> Yes.
>
> I'm not what you think I am. I aint nothing. I dont know why you put up with me.
>
> Well, Mr. Parham, I know who you are. And I do know why. You go to sleep now. I'll see you in the morning.
>
> Yes mam. (*Cities of the Plain* 291-2)

Betty seems to be aware of the importance of the map that life itself has drawn on Billy's palm, which is formed by the paths of the relationship he had with his family, of the love for his brother and of the pain over his death. In a word, this human map represents his personal experience of the world, his involvement in space, and his direct contact with it. In spite of an anti-heroic finale, where Billy is described as an old and pitiful cowboy, a bad imitation of himself, in the end his figure is rehabilitated and ennobled, because it carries the values coming from an antique knowledge of the land.

By showing the limits of traditional cartography, McCarthy expresses the importance of taking back a different kind of spatial knowledge, that may be more vague, but which turns out to be more connected to the land. The “immappable journey” becomes mappable through this knowledge, that proves to be necessary for America, in its wandering toward – and wondering about – the future.

CHAPTER 3

Spaces of Illusion in *The Border Trilogy* and *No Country for Old Men*

McCarthy's exploration of the frontier mythology has been widely analyzed by critics. Megan Riley McGilchrist proposes a useful and extremely detailed overview of the theme, followed by the examination of the role of femininity in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner; Georg Guillemin explores the role of pastoralism and the notion of loss; Andrew Keller Estes analyzes the mythical spaces described in McCarthy, with a particular attention to the opposition between wilderness and civilization. I consider these studies in particular to be among the most significant on this issue, for the accuracy in the reconstruction of the history of the frontier, but also for the novelty of the critical approaches they propose. Many other critics provided significant readings of McCarthy's novels of the desert, as the copious number of articles and essays proves. However, the frontier in McCarthy has mainly been approached as a theme, and not as a powerful constituent of the narrative compositions of the novels.

In this chapter, I examine the frontier as an originator of spaces that reflect the network of illusions on which it is itself founded. In *The Border Trilogy* and *No Country for Old Men,* the myth of the frontier is the element that activates and propels the plots. As a premise to the close readings of the novels, I propose an analysis of the frontier both as a theme and as a narrative element, to demonstrate that the characters' movement stems from the desires generated by this myth, but also from the dynamics prompted by the boundary as a narrative device. The frontier emerges as an extremely contradictory and polysemous space, since its limited nature contains unlimited ideals. I argue that this is the main reason why it gives rise to what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopias", spaces that materialize utopias and at the same time reveal their falsehood. Spaces where illusion and reality coexist.

Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" provides the theoretical background to recognize these spaces in McCarthy, and to observe how they intersect with the theme of the frontier as it is presented in the novels. The analysis of the texts has

permitted to identify four kinds of heterotopias McCarthy makes use of: the prison of Saltillo in *All the Pretty Horses*, the cemetery of San Buenaventura in *The Crossing*, the brothels in *Cities of the Plain*, and the several motels where Moss finds shelter in *No Country for Old Men*.

Each one of these spaces deals with issues such as exclusion, the juxtaposition and blurring of different times, absence and presence, reality and illusion. Their complex nature mirrors the instability of the frontier, and in so doing these fictional heterotopias offer another perspective through which it is possible to analyze this *topos*, so essential in McCarthy's works. As a conclusion, by confronting the different kinds of heterotopia described in the novels, and the themes on which they cast light, I explain the way in which these spaces represent the more recent development of the frontier mythology and the idea of the disappearance of the West.

The Frontier and the Boundary: Themes and Narrative Structures

The frontier mythology and its role in the development of American culture has been the subject matter of innumerable researches. I will not linger on the exposition of the criticism regarding the myth of the frontier, for I could not add anything relevant to the thorough work of critics such as Roderick Nash, Henry Nash Smith, and Richard Slotkin,[1] whose trilogy on the development of the American myth of the West provides a multitude of documents, historical references and insights in the heterogeneous cultural expressions this founding myth produced. Each one of these studies has developed from one common foundational essay: Fredrick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893).[2]

1 I am referring in particular to Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Smith's *Virgin Land*, Turner's corner-stone *The Frontier in American History*, and Slotkin's trilogy: *The Fatal Environment, Regeneration Through Violence and Gunfighter Nation*. These works exemplify the whole production of studies on the topic of the American frontier.

2 In the late 1980s, with the emergence of the so called New Western History, Turner's thesis and the vision of the frontier as a process of spatial expansion came under attack. Patricia Nelson Limerick, who pioneered the movement, analyzed the frontier from a perspective that included the issues of race, gender, class and the environment, to highlight the negative aspects of the conquest and its social and political implications on a vast scale. See in particular Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* and Bruno Cartosio's "La tesi della frontiera tra mito e storia". Neil Campbell offers a useful explanation of how New Western historians see the West: "Spaces are always far more complex than the East-West frontiers defined by Turner..., and it is in studying these rhizomorphic 'leakages' or 'lines of flight' that don't tally with the official, mythic image that we might produce a different and more sophisticated 'diagram' of the West" (7).

Turner's “frontier thesis”[3] links the origins of the American character to the experience of westward progression, highlighting the inextricable relation of America to the American landscape, seen as a virgin land whose conquest was blessed by the will of God, as the theory of Manifest Destiny[4] maintains. The success of this theory both traced and mirrored the route for American expansionism, inside and outside the continent, and it invested the pioneers and the cowboys with the role of heroes against the evils embedded in the wilderness (Smith 81). The promise of free lands where every man could build his house and make his own fortune created one of the most enduring myths in American culture. Turner states that “American has been another name for opportunity, [and that] each frontier did indeed furnish ... a gate of escape from the bondage of the past [,] and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society” (37-8). This was the main promise evoked by the frontier mythology: a brand new start, a fruitful future out there for everyone.

The same promise is at the core of *The Border Trilogy*, where McCarthy describes the myth of the frontier and its slow decay[5] in three stages: the dream of pastoralism in *All the Pretty Horses*, the immersion in the wilderness in *The Crossing*, and the disenchanted return to civilization in *Cities of the Plain*. Referring to the trilogy, Guillemin speaks about an “inverted frontier life” (“'As of some site'” 93), since the three novels display a vision of the frontier according to which the wilderness is the last bulwark against the evils of civilization, contrarily to the traditional idea that saw the borderlands as wild spaces where to affirm human, civilizing progress. As Susan Lee says referring to John Grady, “in his 'return' to the frontier, Cole desires a world preserved from the effects of modernization” (190), a statement that is valid for all the characters of the trilogy.

All the Pretty Horses presents powerful descriptions of the Mexican prairies, that John Grady envisions as the real version of the mythic Eldorado (Spellman 167). Mexico

3 The “frontier thesis” states that the history of the United States is basically the history of the colonization of “the Great West” (Turner 1). Turner claims that “the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people” (22), decreasing their dependence on England. The closing of the frontier at the end of the century, then, is viewed by Turner as a critical moment for the American character, which lost the main source of its development.

4 The theory of Manifest Destiny is the belief that American people were destined to expand throughout the continent, and that the development of the country was aimed at redeeming the wild territories of the West. Expansionism (and later on, imperialism) was seen, accordingly, as an essential and divine duty of the American nation.

5 Guillemin proposes this partition in *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, highlighting the presence of the motive of the “ruined garden” in the novels, as well as that of a pastoral aesthetics based on an “anti-anthropocentric pastoralism” (74). Guillemin deals with the themes of sorrow and melancholia in the trilogy, in the essay “'As of some site were life had not succeeded': Sorrow, Allegory, and Pastoralism in Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy*”. The already quoted essay by Luce on the vanishing world of the trilogy presents another perspective on the decline of the world of the frontier.

becomes a sort of heavenly land, “a pristine garden, blooming with all the fullness of a cowboy's dream: cattle, horses, and plenty of grass” (Owens 81). These utopian images are opposed by those presented in *The Crossing*, where the narrative landscape is characterized by an overabundance of dark and melancholic images, omens of a world that is slowly vanishing. In *Cities of the Plain*, the frontier is represented as a desecrated territory, deeply violated by urbanization, and illuminated by the lights of cities, instead of those of stars. As Billy says to John Grady: “this country aint the same. Nor anything in it. The war changed everything” (*Cities of the Plain* 78).[6]

The decline of the myth of the frontier is accompanied by several symbolic representations of the subjugation of the wilderness to mankind, a theme that has already been introduced in *Blood Meridian* through the scene (highly indebted to William Faulkner's “The Bear”)[7] of the killing of the bear.[8] In the last two novels of the trilogy, the same murderous acts are represented: in *The Crossing,* the she-wolf first captured and then protected by Billy Parham dies after a long dogfighting organized by some Mexicans (a scene that recalls Jack London's *White Fang*), while in *Cities of the Plain,* Billy kills an owl by hitting it while he is driving back with his friend Troy to the ranch where he works:

> He could feel the blood of the wolf against his thigh where it had soaked through the sheeting and through his breeches and he put his hand to his leg and tasted the blood which tasted no different than his own. The fireworks died away. The moon's half hung over the black cape of the mountains ... and then all faded again into the darkness out of which it had been summoned. (*The Crossing* 125)

> A large owl lay cruciform across the driver's windshield of the truck. The laminate of the glass was belled in softly to hold him and his wings were spread wide and he lay in the concentric rings and rays of the wrecked glass like an enormous moth in a web. ... The owl was all soft and downy. Its head slumped and rolled. It was soft and warm to the touch and it felt loose inside its feathers. (*Cities of the Plain* 34)

6 This sentence echoes one of the dialogues between the two brothers Lee and Austin in Sam Shepard's *True West*: “LEE: Up here is different. This country's real different. AUSTIN: Well, it's been built up. LEE: Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don't even hardly recognize it” (15). The same concept is also expressed in *All the Pretty Horses*, when John Grady tells Rawlins that he does not know “what happens to country” (299).

7 The tale is collected in *Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories*.

8 See the section “Judge Holden's Attitude Toward Ruins” in chapter 1.

In both paragraphs, the killing of the wild animals is described as an outrageous act, almost a profanation, as the “cuciform” shape of the owl[9] and the Eucharistic act of drinking blood suggest. Billy tastes the blood of the she-wolf and recognizes it as similar to his own, as well as the owl's body, warm and soft in Troy's hands, gives to the character a disturbing feeling, that he cannot explain to Billy. After these killings, that insert in the novel a deep symbolic dimension concerning the conquest and exploitation of the wild side of the American landscape by the hands of mankind, the descriptions of the landscape become gloomier, and the characters' perception of the country consequently changes. The extinction of the wilderness symbolized by the death of wild animals coincides with the blotting out of the cowboy's romantic ideal of life on the open range.

No Country for Old Men, set in the 1980s, presents the last development of the myth of the frontier, its connection with the prosperous drug traffic between Mexicans and Americans, and the ultimate desacralization of this myth. The war in Vietnam is a powerful theme in the novel: both Moss and Bell are veterans, deeply injured by their memories of the war, and by the disillusion created by the American defeat.[10] The main consequence of the traumatic experience of the war was the crisis of American identity,[11] mainly caused by the awareness of the fallibility of American exceptionalism. Vietnam was another territory to conquer, another frontier, but its inaccessibility showed the illusory nature of the frontier mythology. In *No Country for Old Men*, the frontier is a part of the background, and the narrative space is characterized by elements that reflect the pervasive loss of values of consumerist society.

Contrarily to this vision of the frontier as a myth expunged by the brutal reality of the Vietnam war, in *The Border Trilogy* the characters' displacement between the two sides of the American-Mexican border is caused by the utopian promises created by the same myth, described at its apex. As Algirdas Greimas affirms, “[w]ithin the narrative framework, displacement is generally interpreted as the figurative manifestation of desire .. [and it] can be defined as a quest” (619). The aim of McCarthy's characters is

9 See Luce: “the dead owl is an image of the natural world crucified at the hands of man, the truck and the fence manifestations of the imposition of his mechanized world on the world of nature” (“The Vanishing World” 162).

10 McGlichrist provides a detailed examination of the role of the Vietnam war in *No Country for Old Men*.

11 Slotkin speaks about a “crisis of public myth” to describe the sense of discouragement of the American people after the defeat in Vietnam and the economic crisis caused by the war itself. The “growing concern that the United States was no longer exceptional among the nations” marked the end of the New Frontier, that predicted a future of “limitless economic and political improvement” (*Gunfighter Nation* 625).

finding ways to make their idealistic projections real: John Grady yearns for Mexico as the land where to live the pastoral life evoked by the myth of the frontier;[12] Billy Parham's attitude is more disenchanted, but he is fascinated by the borderlands, that to Mieke Bal may become a sort of narrative purgatory (45) from where characters cannot exit, as it actually happens in the novels. The borderlands deprive Billy of everything: the she-wolf he has tried to bring back to the Mexican mountains, his brother's bones, and his home. In *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady dreams of having a family with the epileptic prostitute Magdalena, and in *No Country for Old Men*, Moss yearns for the money he has found on the site of a drug deal gone wrong. In each one of these cases, desire puts the characters in motion across the space that produced their dreams in the first place.

At the beginning of *The Crossing*, Billy Parham is described first with his family, and then with the she-wolf he has captured. Their solitary journey – highly poetical – occupies most of the first part of the novel. The descriptions of their wanderings in the borderlands are helpful to understand an important notion concerning the frontier: it not only produces unreal projections in the characters' minds, but it is an illusory space itself. This excerpt shows the moment when Billy crosses the Mexican border with the she-wolf:

> She limped along behind the horse steadfast and doglike and in this fashion they crossed sometime near noon the international boundary line into Mexico, State of Sonora, undifferentiated in its terrain from the country they quit and yet wholly alien and wholly strange. He sat the horse and looked out over the red hills. To the east he could see one of the concrete obelisks that stood for a boundary marker. In that desert waste it had the look of some monument to a lost expedition. (74)

Once Billy is in Mexico, the country that spreads in front of him is not different from the one he has just left: what is different is his feeling in relation to it. The cowboy's uneasiness emerges from the words of the narrator, who states that the land was “wholly alien and wholly strange” to Billy. The character is in between two worlds different in culture, but not in landscape, so much so that he feels “not quite one of them and not quite

12 Even though it seems that John Grady's actions are caused by the desire for Alejandra, his love for her “and his love for horses and the land combine to form the foundation of his dreams” (Spellman 168). Alejandra is a personification of John Grady's pastoral ideal. Nell Sullivan even observes a strong similarity between Alejandra and Magdalena, the prostitute loved by John Grady in *Cities of the Plain.* To Sullivan, “they become disturbingly interchangeable” (247).

apart” (102) in relation to the Mexican people he encounters on the road.

The country is also described from the point of view of the she-wolf, which contrasts Billy's.[13] At the beginning of the novel Billy, his brother Boyd and their father are hunting the wild animal because she is killing their calves. In one of the passages where the narrator describes the landscape from the wolf's imaginatively reconstructed point of view, the reader has a hint of her way of perceiving space: “[s]he would not cross a road or a rail line in daylight. She would not cross under a wire fence twice in the same place. These were the new protocols. Strictures that had not existed before. Now they did.” (25) New boundaries have been traced on the land, the she-wolf has learned to cross them without being captured, and she perceives them as alien to her habitat. But these are physical boundaries, real impediments to her wanderings, physically and symbolically different to the abstract frontier between the United States and Mexico.

Billy, who first hunts her and then becomes her custodian, tries to explain to the *hacendado* who finds him traveling with her, that the animal “knew nothing of boundaries” (119) and that she left Mexico with no regards for the geographical limits imposed on the land by mankind. The frontier emerges as a cultural and political product, indirectly connected to space, in fact the she-wolf is unaware of its presence, while she has learned to avoid physical boundaries, such as fences and roads. The dualism inherent in the frontier derives mainly from the opposition between the reality of the laws that govern it, and the illusion of its physical presence. As George Perec states in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces,* the crossing of the frontier is more real on an emotional level, than on a physical one:[14]

> Crossing the frontier is quite an emotive thing to do: an imaginary limit, made material by a wooden barrier which as it happens is never really on the line it purports to represent, but a few dozen or hundreds of meters this side or that of it, is enough to change everything, even the landscape. It's the same air, the same earth, but the road is no longer quite the same. (73)

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13 Christine Chollier's essay on the use of dialogism in McCarthy provides an interesting analysis of Billy's attempt to see the world through the eyes of the she-wolf, showing that the character tries “to model his voice on hers”, proving his “dialogic relationship” (7) with the animal.

14 The same concept has been presented by Gloria Anzaldúa: “ [a] borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25). On the cultural and social dimension of the border, see also bell hooks and the concept of marginality as a space of radical openness.

The frontier does not function only as a myth, but also as a powerful narrative motif based on binary oppositions, as Yuri Lotman's studies on the composition of the narrative text show. Lotman refers not to the frontier, that indicates the geographical area around a line that divides two spaces, but to the abstract notion of the narrative boundary that, "viewed in its textual function, entails the thematic of trespassing [and] transgression" (Van Baak 72). In essays such as "On the Metalanguage of a Typological Description of Culture", "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology", "Artistic Space in Gogol's Prose", in *Universe of the Mind* and *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, he developed his theories on the boundary as the main source of narration, and on the "semanticization" of space, arguing that the spatial language used in the artistic text always entails the communication of values and meanings in addition to simple spatial information:[15]

> One of the primary mechanism of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is "ours", "my own", it is "cultured", "safe", "harmoniously organized", and so on. By contrast "their space" is "other", "hostile", "dangerous", "chaotic". ... The boundary is viewed as a filtering membrane. ... The function of any boundary or filter ... is to control, filter and adapt the external into the internal ... In this way external space becomes structured ... In the frontier areas semiotic processes are intensified because here there are constant invasions from outside. (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* 131-141)

To Lotman, the frontier opposes the inside to the outside, an internal space belonging to "us", to an external space that belongs to "them". This opposition is not only spatial: it is semanticized. Therefore "up" determines good values, such as sacredness, spirituality, and beauty; "down" indicates something vulgar, physical, and connected to ideas of death and ruination. In the same way, the boundary divides the internal space – "our" space – that is ordered, balanced and good, from the external space belonging to "them", which is often linked to an idea of danger and chaos.

Lotman develops these theories from his literary studies (Russian literature in particular), that deal with several textual typologies. One of his most relevant observations

15 From *The Structure of the Artistic Text*: "[t]he concepts 'high-low', 'right-left', 'near-far', 'open-closed', 'limited-unlimited' ... prove to be the material for constructing cultural models with completely non-spatial content and come to mean 'valuable-unvaluable', 'good-bad' [etc.]" (218).

is the fact that characters can be divided in two categories, depending on the spatial milieu that surrounds them. “Mobile” characters are defined by movement: they cross boundaries and travel on the road, “the most archaic and fundamental type of plot” (Van Baak 77), also defined by Bakhtin as the most important example of chronotope (244). “Immobile” characters do not leave their spatial milieu, they do not develop, and they generally play the role of antagonists in the text. In other words, the narrative space determines, or else is a constitutive element of the character that inhabits it.[16]

In line with these premises, in *The Border Trilogy* the boundary is the fulcrum of the plots. The characters cross boundaries many times in the novels, and in many different ways. Equally, in *No Country for Old Men* the action starts from the violation of a boundary on Moss' part, when he steals the money of the Mexican drug dealers. The characters' traveling is caused both by the inner workings operated by the narrative boundary – that is, by narrative devices that force the characters to transgress a limit –, and by the desires evoked by the myth of the frontier. The external force that exercises pressure on the boundary protecting the characters' safe places is the wild Mexico, rich in promises, illusions and dangers. In McCarthy, the frontier as a myth, and the crossing or violation of abstract boundaries from the part of the characters, are closely interrelated.

By looking at the main characteristics of the descriptions related to the borderlands, one can notice that their richness is founded on oppositions. Green prairies contrast the aridity of the desert, and natural landscapes are opposed to urban centers. In most cases where these oppositions appear, the contrast between illusion and reality plays an important role in the definition of the narrative space. In Brian Edwards' words “McCarthy's western novels ... present the interplay of reality and romance, of the historical and the imaginary” (2). Referring back to Mark Busby, Edwards maintains that the border “signifies the interplay of oppositional categories” (3), that contrast the traditional characteristics of the western and refigure the genre, much like Oakley Hall did

16 I propose a simple example to observe the mode of operation of the boundary in a narrative text, based on the analysis of Russian fairy-tales that Lotman proposes in “On the Metalanguage”: the knight leaves from his town to reach the castle where the lady has been imprisoned by the antagonist. The knight saves the lady by killing the antagonist in his own castle on the mountain. In this very simple narration, the role of boundaries is extremely important. The lady's castle is the safe place, which has been violated by the external force of the antagonist. The external space from which he comes is often described as a dark and dangerous wood, personified by the villain, which forces the boundary of the castle, since in frontier areas “semiotic processes are intensified because there are constant invasions from outside” (*Universe of the Mind* 141). To Lotman, external space always tends to enter the internal space protected by the boundary. This act – the crossing – is the main cause for the knight's travel and the development of the plot. The knight is characterized by movement, his role is connected to ideas of traveling in search of adventures, while the antagonist – the fixed character – is represented in his domain.

in *Warlock*, where he demythologizes the West by echoing its old myths.[17]

The main source of the opposition between illusion and reality on which the frontier is based can be found in its relation with the utopia it projects, because, as Louis Marin says, the nature of the boundary is not compatible to that of utopia:

> Utopia is the figure of the horizon. If in the functioning of a city, in its structure formed by streets and dwellings, and if in the functioning of a landscape, in its partition between nature and culture, forests and fields, waters and rocks, *space cannot exist without limits and frontiers,* Utopia as a city or a landscape develops and displays a virtual or potential spatial order in its text, it offers the beholder/reader an ambiguous representation, the equivocal image of significations contrary to the concept of "limit": on the one hand the synthetic unity of the same and the other, of past and future, of this world and beyond ... and on the other hand the acting tracing of differences, the indefinite fight between opposite forces. (Marin 412)

Marin opposes the unlimited space evoked by utopia – symbolically represented by the horizon, a line that can ideally expand itself *ad infinitum,* without never been reached – to the concept of limit implied in the frontier. Infinite spaces against circumscribed places: utopia contains oppositions and contradictory elements, while the frontier creates contrasts. As it seems, the two notions, united in the American frontier mythology, are incompatible on a spatial and ideological level, and from this incompatibility the oppositions and contradictions inherent in this myth arise.

17 Sabine Anders observes that McCarthy's novels present certain characteristics that can hardly be included in the western genre, and this is particularly true for *The Border Trilogy*. *Blood Meridian* is far more complex than traditional westerns, and the main characteristics of the genre are overtly modified in the trilogy. Stefano Rosso presents an interesting analysis of *Blood Meridian* as a "post-western" that re-reads the western through the new function of the duel. But it is in "Post-western esemplari" that Rosso defines the genre, analyzing Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* as examples of this literary expression. Rosso states that post-westerns are heterogeneous and complex narrations, but he individuates some elements that are generally present in these novels: the theme of the end of the frontier mythology, precise historical reconstructions that challenge the traditional dichotomy between Indians and cowboys, the presence of gender issues, the description of the characters as socially alienated subjects, and a vision of violence that distances itself from any idea of regeneration. The term "post-western" should not be confounded with "postmodern western", a label that cannot be used to define McCarthy's novels. As Barcley Owens makes clear, there is no postmodern aesthetics in McCarthy, who should be considered "a regionalist – first a Southern writer ... and since the publication of *Blood Meridian* a western writer who has adopted the Texas border and its aesthetics" (Introduction xii).

Fig. 3. Vincent J. Stoker. *Unnamed*. Copyright 2014 Vincent J. Stoker.

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An aspect that can be observed in the novels, is that the description of the borderlands is characterized by a proliferation of spaces that seem to mirror the contrast between utopia and reality created by the frontier. I argue that these spaces emerge both from the contrasts intrinsic to the frontier mythology, and from the dynamics activated by the boundary as an element of the narrative composition. In the second part of this chapter, I explain the main features of these "counter-spaces", that Foucault calls "heterotopias".

Heterotopias: Spaces of Illusion

The essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias"[18] had an enormous influence on the studies on the sociology of space of the 1990s, even though it never became part of Foucault's official body of works. The vague definition of what Foucault calls "heterotopic spaces" is both the weak point of this essay and the interesting concept on which several critics have built their theories on human relations with space. I am referring in particular to Edward Soja's notion of "thirdspace", a site "in which inextricable intertwined temporal, social, and spatial relations are being constantly reinscribed, erased, and reinscribed again" (18). Soja's theory, that is strongly indebted to Foucault's heterotopology,[19] seems even more vague than Foucault's definition of heterotopias, but still both approaches mirror the instability and heterogeneity of contemporary spatial relations. And this may be the reason why heterotopias have exercised such an enduring effect on the scientific community interested in spatial studies.

Foucault starts by the premise that the 20th century is an age concerned with space, that presents itself not as a fixed entity, but as a network of relations: he then goes on examining this network, with particular attention to sites that mirror and challenge it at the same time.[20] Utopias and heterotopias meet this requirement. If utopias are unreal spaces that "present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down" (Foucault refers here to dystopias), heterotopic spaces are utopias made real:

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places ... which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites ... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. ("Of Other Spaces" 24)

An example that may clarify Foucault's theory is that of the Puritan colonies founded by the English immigrants on the East coasts of America in the 17th century. These colonies

18 The essay was published in 1984 in the French magazine *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité,* in a version based on a lecture Foucault did in March 1967.

19 With the term "heterotopology" Foucault indicates the description of heterotopias, that is the study, analysis and interpretation of these spaces ("Of Other Spaces" 24).

20 In the essay, Foucault specifies that he does not deal with "internal space", as Gaston Bachelard did in *The Poetics of Space*, but with external space. In other words, his considerations do not refer to the psychological and emotional experience of space.

were real sites based on utopian premises, perfect versions of social communities. At the same time, however, they presented flaws in their assumed perfection.

Foucault states that it would not be possible to identify only one type of heterotopia. Every society produces a variety of them, that may also have different characteristics, as the analysis of the heterotopic spaces presented in McCarthy's novels will demonstrate. Nevertheless, he lists certain features common to all kinds of heterotopia, from the prison, to the museum. In the first place, heterotopias change function and meaning in a given community over the course of time. Their structure is fluid and dependent on the society that produces them. For instance, up until the end of the 18th century the cemetery was positioned near the church, in the heart of the town, while afterward social communities located this space on the outskirts of the city. To Foucault, this fact has been caused by a change in the consideration of death. In the past, the Christian belief in resurrection made death a simple passage in human life; on the contrary, "from the moment when people were no longer sure that they have a soul or that the body will regain life, it is perhaps necessary to give much more attention to the dead body" (25). The birth of the "cult of the dead" and the removal of the cemetery from the center of the city are the consequences of this change in the social community.

Another interesting aspect of heterotopias is that they juxtapose several and often incompatible spaces in a single place. Foucault proposes the examples of the cinema and the theater, where in the space of the screen, or in that of the stage, alien worlds coexist and communicate. The same can be said regarding time: there are certain heterotopias, such as museums, archives and cemeteries, where the combination of different spaces is mirrored by the juxtaposition of different times. For the sake of symmetry, Foucault called this characteristic "heterocronism".

By focusing on the accessibility of these spaces, the French philosopher says that each heterotopia is ruled by an access control system that isolates it and makes it penetrable at the same time. The act of entering is often accompanied by rites of purification, as in the case of churches and hammams, or it demands a permission (such as in the case of psychiatric hospitals and prisons). But the main function of heterotopias, to Foucault:

> Unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space ... as still more illusory [,] [o]r else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real

> space, as perfect, as meticulous as well-arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled. (27)

In other words, the very structure of heterotopia is illusory, and at the same time it reflects the illusions dominating the society that produces it. The perfect wholeness of heterotopic spaces, which is inherently fake, contrasts the fragmentary state of the real world.

Utopias are ideal projections of perfect spaces. The constraint to which they are exposed whenever they are integrated in a real, and therefore limited space, automatically makes them heterotopic, since their ideal nature has to come to terms with the real world. The same opposition between two incompatible elements has been described in relation to the American myth of the frontier, which tries to connect utopia and reality. The analysis of the heterotopias described in McCarthy's trilogy, and in *No Country for Old Men,* will highlight the complex relation existing between the frontier and these "other spaces" rising on its spatial extension, an extension that coexists with the abstract nature of the frontier mythology. Heterotopias reflect the mode of operation of this highly contradictory space, and challenge it at the same time, unveiling the system of illusions it is founded on.

Heterotopic Spaces in the Novels

– The Prison of Saltillo: Heterotopia of Deviation

The first heterotopia that I will examine is the prison of Saltillo described in *All the Pretty Horses*, where John Grady and Lacey Rawlins are incarcerated for stealing horses. The importance of Saltillo can be inferred by its narrative position: the very center of the novel. After their wanderings, their encounter with Jimmy Blevins and their arrival to Don Hector's *hacienda* La Purísima, John Grady and Rawlins have to face the terrible prison. Saltillo is the heart of their Mexican experience, from a thematic and narrative point of view. After Saltillo, nothing remains the same: Rawlins decides to go back to Texas, and John Grady continues his traveling, always believing in his dreams, as if untouched by the

traumatic experience lived in the Mexican prison. However, the world around him has changed, and the immensity of the desert landscapes described in the first part of the novel is substituted by the figure of the character that vanishes in the red dust, illuminated by the sunset, while a group of Indians "stood and watched him pass and watched him vanish upon that landscape" (*All the Pretty Horses* 301).[21] This image paves the way to the poetics of melancholia[22] so persistent in *The Crossing*.

One of the first descriptions of the prison presents several features that show the singularity of this space, rising as an isolated village in the middle of the town:

> The prison was no more than a small walled village and within it occurred a constant seethe of barter and exchange in everything from radios and blankets down to matches and buttons and shoenails and within this bartering ran a constant struggle for status and position. Underpinning all of it like the fiscal standard in commercial societies lay a bedrock of depravity and violence where in egalitarian absolute every man was judged by a single standard and that was his readiness to kill. (182)

Foucault defines the prison a "heterotopia of deviation", occupied by "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" ("Of Other Spaces" 25) observed in a given social community. From this excerpt, several elements that appear in the description of Saltillo can be connected to Foucault's observations. Primarily, the isolation of the prison. Saltillo is a "walled village" in the center of the town, and its dynamics takes place far from the eyes of the inhabitants. One can enter the prison with a permission, or against one's will, but this place is not freely accessible. At the same time, it is strongly bound to the social community outside its walls, because many prisoners are relatives and friends of the inhabitants of the town, and also because the prison is a product of the social community itself. Saltillo is heterotopic in presenting an access control system, and in the liminal position it occupies inside the community of the town.

Even though the prison represents the lack of freedom *par excellence*, in Saltillo commerce and power plays occur with disturbing simplicity, unveiling the illusion that stays at the basis of the idea of imprisonment. Emilio Pérez, the powerful convict whom

21 Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this section are taken from *All the Pretty Horses*.
22 See Guillemin's "'As of some site where life had not succeeded'", where he explains that melancholia is concerned with "what is absent, lost, or part of the past" (95), and that this feeling concerns the whole trilogy.

John Grady turns to in order to know Rawlins' conditions after he has been stabbed by a *cuchillero*, sees the illusion behind Saltillo: “this type of world, you see, this confinement. It gives a false impression. As if things are in control. If these men could be controlled they would not be here. You see the problem” (195). In Pérez's words, everything is illusory, also the idea of control expressed by the prison, that mirrors and challenges its own function at the same time, exercising one of the main heterotopic characteristics identified by Foucault.

Saltillo is a space in clear opposition with Don Hector's *hacienda*. The opposition between the two spaces can be easily connected to the contrast between heaven and hell, and the name of the ranch – Nuestra Señora de La Purísima Concepción – makes it quite explicit. In a way, Saltillo represents the evils that John Grady has excluded in his utopian vision of Mexico.[23] In Saltillo the law of violence is in force, as Pérez explains to John Grady: “[t]he world wants to know if you have cojones, if you are brave” (193). In contrast with the pastoral descriptions of La Purísima, Saltillo is described as an impure space, an enclave of “depravity and violence”.

John Grady has by-passed the negative aspects of Mexico to create his romantic vision. In a similar way, Saltillo excludes him and Rawlins from the group of prisoners and, more in general, from the Mexican community. Their isolation is felt first on a physical level, as the description of their cell suggests:

> They followed him down the catwalk. A sense of some brooding and malignant life slumbering in the darkened cages they passed. Here and there along the tiers of catwalks on the far side of the quadrangle a dull light shaped out the gratin of the cells where votive candles burned the night before some santo. ... They were locked into a cell in the topmost corner of the prison. (181)

The two cowboys are outcasts inside a place of confinement, as it often happens in a heterotopic space. To Foucault, the very act of entering a heterotopia makes one part of a closed community, and at the same time it excludes the subject from the outside

23 Many examples could be presented to give an idea of John Grady's romantic vision of Mexico, but the first glance of the cowboy and his friend Rawlins to the country is one of the most incisive: “[t]he grasslands lay in a deep violet haze and to the west thin flights of waterflow were moving north before the sunset in the deep red galleries under the cloudbanks like schoolfish in a burning sea and on the foreland plain they saw vaqueros driving cattle before them through a gauze of golden dust” (93).

community. The cell is at the farthest side of the prison, a position that highlights the isolation of the two boys even more. The place seems to have a life of its own: it is "malignant" and vicious, a space whose dangerousness is increased by the lack of light. In fact, the only form of light that is present in the scene has the shape of small votive candles. The candles recall the incipit of the novel, another scene set in the dark, where reflections and illusions create an interesting kaleidoscope of images: "[t]he candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door" (1).[24] In the day of his grandfather's funeral, John Grady sees the light of a candle mirrored on the window, a small light in the coldness and darkness of the prairies, illuminating his future loneliness, his losses. The two scenes are connected by this reflective motif, which invests both John Grady's ranch and its cell with images of absence and death.

The exclusion of the two characters from the group of prisoners takes place on a spatial level, but also on a cultural one. Since the first day of their incarceration, they strenuously fight for survival. When Rawlins is stabbed by a *cuchillero* and taken to the prison infirmary, John Grady decides to speak to Pérez. The young cowboy has an interesting conversation with the man, who plays the same role that Dueña Alfonsa has played before,[25] when she explained to John Grady that he did not belong to Mexico, nor to her granddaughter Alejandra. Even if John Grady knows Spanish, Pérez simply says: "You don't understand the life here. ... You dont know what is the situation here. You dont speak the language" (188). The character is not only referring to a lack of linguistic knowledge from the part of John Grady. The "language" to him is the culture of Mexico, the Mexican way of thinking, that he considers conflicting with that of the Americans. If John Grady does not understand the country that he desires, Pérez is extremely perceptive in his judgment of American people:

> Even in a place like this where we are concerned with fundamental things the mind of the anglo is closed in this rare way. At one time I thought it was only his life of privilege. But it is not that. It is his mind.
> He sat back easily. He tapped his temple. It is not that he is stupid. It is that

24 For a broader analysis of this passage, see the section "The Past as Burden and Heritage in *All the Pretty Horses*" in chapter 4.

25 Barcley Owens comments on the role of the figures of wisdom in the novels, that the protagonists promptly decide not to listen to: "young heroes always reject such older voices of wisdom, stubbornly defying chance and fate and the authority of society in favor of their own indomitable will". Self-confidence and individualism are two basic characteristics of "the Adamic hero of the West" (91).

> his picture of the world is incomplete. In this rare way. He looks only where he wishes to see. (192)

Through this affirmation Pérez indirectly refers to John Grady's blindness in regard to the many sides of Mexico that he cannot or does not want to explore. In an act of arbitrary elimination of the negative aspects of the country, John Grady shapes Mexico along his own ideals. But in Saltillo he is forced to understand what Mexico really is in order to enter the heterotopic community of the prison. He has to make a rite of passage, that in Saltillo is an act of violence and courage, to be able to see the reality behind the false myths. The conflict between John Grady and the *cuchillero* is announced as soon as he and Rawlins begin to fight with the other prisoners. In this case, the breaking in of the antagonists forces the safe place of Rawlins and John Grady, and this is the incentive that pushes them to cross the boundary that divides them from the other prisoners. By killing the *cuchillero* after a long battle, John Grady can finally enter the community of the prisoners and, to a certain extent, of Mexico. Through the killing, he crosses the boundary between dream and reality: only drenched in the blood of his enemy he finally obtains Pérez' protection and Dueña Alfonsa's money to leave Saltillo. His release, however, has a cost: John Grady and Alejandra's love affair ends in exchange for John Grady's life. Nevertheless, as he says to Rawlins once they have left the prison, he does not renounce to his dreams. He wants to return to La Purísima "for the girl and the horses" (211), that to him are parts of the same ideal, the only thing "he wishes to see".

The desire that moves John Grady's quest is not broken by the experience of Saltillo, nor by the loss of Alejandra, or the death of young Jimmy Blevins. Even though Saltillo has showed him what lies behind the golden surface of his idealistic projections,[26] the cowboy goes on wandering in search of new adventures, fully in love with the life on the open range promised by the frontier mythology. John Grady is the character more connected to heterotopic spaces, as it will emerge through the analysis of the brothel in *Cities of the Plain*. I would argue that his relation with these spaces of illusion represents his incessant tendency to dream also in the worst circumstances, a tendency that reveals his desperate heroism.

26 There is a moment of true revelation in the novel, when John Grady looks in the eyes of the *cuchillero*: "he looked deep into those dark eyes and there were deeps there to look into. A whole malign history burning cold and remote and black" (200). The eyes of the man are windows open to the darkness of the Mexican utopia.

– The Cemetery: an Example of Heterocronism

In *The Crossing*, one of the most striking scenes takes place in the cemetery of San Buenaventura, where Billy Parham goes to look for the grave of his brother Boyd and bring his bones back to America. The cemetery emerges as a highly heterotopic space, where absence is constantly turned into presence, and where several layers of time are juxtaposed in a heterogeneous unity. The first thing that Billy perceives while entering the cemetery is the desolation of the place:

> The cemetery was a large and wild enclosure set in a field with loose stones and brambles and surrounded by a low mud wall already then in ruins. He halted and looked out over this desolation. He turned and looked back at the packhorse and he looked at the gray scud of clouds and at the evening light failing in the west. ... The red sandstone dolmens that stood upright among the low tablets and crosses on that wild heath looked like the distant ruins of some classic enclave ringed about the blue mountains, the closer hills. Most of the graves were no more than cairns of rock without marker of any kind. (388-9)[27]

As in the case of the prison, the cemetery is isolated from the outside: in this case, there is "a low mud wall" that demarcates its singularity. Moreover, the cemetery rises at a mile from the town of San Buenaventura, on the hills, a place whose desolation is reinforced by the "evening light failing in the west", which confers to the scene the omnipresent sense of an ending that characterizes the whole novel. But the most important heterotopic characteristic shown by the cemetery is the co-existence of several times in its spatial unity. Graves belonging to different epochs are grouped together in the space of the graveyard, presenting a perfect example of what Foucault calls "heterocronism". The reference to ruins, both in the description of the wall and in the comparison of the tombs to the "distant ruins of some classic enclave", emphasizes the concept of an accumulation of times inside the walls of the graveyard, that makes this space an archive of Mexican memories. The state of abandonment of the graves, unnamed

27 Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this section are taken from *The Crossing.*

and in very poor conditions, reflects the destructive action of the war characterizing the history of the country.

Even though the cemetery seems a very silent space, one might actually argue that it contains “thousands upon thousands of voices clamoring to be heard” (Wright 60), a cacophony of memories that resists the passing of time and the transformations it imposes on the graves. The cemetery of San Buenaventura stands between two stages of this transformation: it is still physically visible, but the general state of ruination indicates that its disappearance is quite near. In her analysis of cemeteries as rhetorical spaces, Elizabethada Wright mentions de Certeau's terminology of *lieu* and *espace* to indicate respectively a real and an unreal space. The cemetery described in the novel is both place and space: it is real, but its ruination makes it an unreal space too, where memories have substituted the missing parts of the graves.

The dual nature of the cemetery as a real and unreal space is reinforced by another coexistence of opposite states: absence and presence. Morgan Meyer and Kate Woodthorpe examined “the practice of making the absent present” (10) that can be observed in the space of the cemetery. In their analysis, absence is a presence that reveals a certain materiality, and that has a form of agency on the subject experiencing the space of the cemetery. With the term “materiality”, the two critics refer to the presence of objects used to commemorate the defunct, and that gives to the absence of life a physicality of its own. Objects are “present parts of an absent whole” (12), that make memories visible. In addition to this, absence acts on the visitor of the cemetery, who mourns, commemorates, and is intimately transformed by the space surrounding him.

In the cemetery of San Buenaventura, there are no objects that give materiality to absence, nor names on the graves. Billy sees his brother's tomb “against the southmost wall under a board cross in which had been burned with a hot nail the words Fall el 24 de febrero 1943 sus hermanos en armas dedican este recuerdo D E P” (389). Like the other graves, it is unnamed and barren, a characteristic that recalls the example presented by Foucault in his essay: the unnamed graves, and the vicinity of the cemetery to the church demonstrate the lack of a “cult of the dead”, and the Mexican vision of death as a natural part of life. Considering death a democratic force, an inescapable moment in human life, creates a link with *Blood Meridian*. In this novel the concept emerges through the theme of the dance of death,[28] and Judge Holden's rifle, whose incision *Et in Arcadia Ego* functions, in very traditional terms, as a *memento mori.* In *The Crossing*, Billy understands this truth by

28 See the section “Judge Holden's Attitude Toward Ruins” in chapter 1.

looking at his brother's grave. Yet, the lack of names and objects on the tombs make death even more present.

The human helplessness in front of death is represented by the figure of the old woman that Billy encounters in the church near the cemetery:

> He knew her well enough, this old woman of Mexico, her sons long dead in that blood and violence which her prayers and her prostrations seemed powerless to appease. Her frail form was a constant in that land, her silent anguishings. Beyond the church walls the night harbored a millennial dread panoplied in feathers and the scales of royal fish and if it yet fed upon the children still who could say what worse wastes of war and torment and despair the old woman's constancy might not have stayed, what direr histories yet against which could be counted at last nothing more than her small figure bent and mumbling, her crone's hands clutching her beads of fruitseed. Unmoving, austere, implacable. Before just such a God. (390)

The woman is “a constant in that land”, a mythological entity that Billy knows, for it has been there since time immemorial as a counterpoint to violence, her vicious companion. The adjectives “unmoving, austere, implacable” can be easily bestowed to both elements of this Manichean couple. This passage expresses how mourning and praying cannot redeem a land so deeply injured by wars and violence, but the woman's constancy has a value of its own, that can be compared to John Grady's code of honor, or Billy's will to bring his brother back home. It gives to the human challenge against the ruthless power of fate the mythic force typical of glorious defeats.

Billy's reaction to the state of abandonment of his brother's grave is a response to the anonymity of the cemetery, and it also shows his own suffering for having lost the last member of his family. In a sense, Billy and Boyd are now both homeless: Billy has lost his family and his ranch, while Boyd's nameless grave does not make it his “home” for the afterlife. To keep his brother with him, Billy profanes his grave and exhumes Boyd's corpse: “the blade struck the box. He'd thought maybe there would be none. He dug on. By the time he had the top of the box dug clear there was little left of the day. ... The box had collapsed and he could see Boyd's bones in their burial clothes through the broken boards”

(391-2). The act of profanation reveals that Billy does not perceive the cemetery as a sacred space: to him, Boyd's corpse has been buried in an abandoned and ruinous place, where dogs are free to wander among the graves. In a sense, he sees the illusions produced by the cemetery, and invalidates them.

In line with the contradictory structure of heterotopias, the cemetery of San Buenaventura affirms and negates its role at the same time, demonstrating that it is part of the many illusory spaces produced by the frontier. It is a space that lingers between sacred and profane, where the absence of life is made physically present, where the promise of the afterlife is negated by Billy's attempt to bring Boyd's bones with him, as if he could bring his soul back to America. The cemetery introduces the reality of death in the narrative landscape of the novel, a reality that Billy cannot accept.

The character cries three times in the novel, and in each one of these scenes he has to deal with death. Billy first cries when he finds out that his parents have been killed by some Indian bandits; he then cries when he loses the bones of Boyd. Two thieves stop him just passed the pueblo of Coralito, stab his horse and kick "at the poor dessicated thing" (395), scattering Boyd's bones on the ground. Later on, Billy "gather[s] the bones in his arms and carri[es] them up into the trees and la[ys] them on the ground" (398), leaving them on the wild Mexican land. The third times Billy cries, is at the end of the novel, when he kills a stray dog on the street.

Billy's crying does not seem to be related only to the loss of his family, but to a deeper loss. His romantic vision of life has been violated by the encounter with the inevitability of death, an egalitarian force that makes no distinctions, even in the dreamland of Mexico, whose utopian nature did not contemplate death as a possible event. Like Saltillo, the cemetery of San Buenaventura is the heterotopia that opens a crack on the perfect surface of Billy's visions of the borderlands, showing him their numerous illusions. The heterocronism and the several oppositions contained in this narrative space demonstrate how sacred and profane coexist and negate themselves at the same time, creating a web of reflections and false images that inserts itself in the complex spatial framework of *The Border Trilogy*.

– The Brothel: An Extreme Type of Heterotopia

In his brief, but enlightening analysis of *Cities of the Plain*, John Cant examines the urban quality of the novel, whose textual space is extensively occupied by dialogues (see *Cormac McCarthy*). The stylistic difference with the preceding novels of the trilogy (and in particular with *The Crossing*, where the descriptive sequences are so dense they seem to be self-sufficient) underlies a new development in McCarthy's definition of the frontier mythology. The narrative landscapes have been deprived of their poetical quality, leaving space to the squalor of the urban borderlands, revealed from the very beginning by the reference in the title to the biblical cities of the plain: Sodoma and Gomorra. This detail has been read by Cant as a way to indicate that the land where the characters operate is "divorced by the female" (*Cormac McCarthy* 218), a characteristic supported by the significant presence of brothels in the spatial set up of the novel.

Cities of the Plain opens in the brothel La Venada, in the Mexican city of Juárez. Billy Parham and John Grady enter the place during a rainy night: the bar is illuminated by the cheap light of "the neon signs" (*Cities of the Plain* 1),[29] and a whore with the "powder on her face [that] had cracked like sizing"(6) approaches John Grady. The misery of the place, and the visible breaks in the system of illusions on which it is founded, are the two constant traits in the descriptions of brothels, that Foucault indicates as "extreme examples" of heterotopia. Foucault does not explain this affirmation, but I argue that the "extremism" of the brothel lies in its vicinity to the most exact definition of heterotopia. The access to brothels was regulated, they used to rise in the center of the cities, but their existence was a sort of social taboo. In the brothels, illusions of pleasure, love and control were produced and hidden at the same time, in rooms that had to evoke other worlds and other times.

It is in La Venada that John Grady sees for the first time Magdalena, a Mexican prostitute, young and beautiful, that suffers from epilepsy. He sees her "in the backbar glass", with her "long black hair [falling] across her shoulder" (6). Among the other prostitutes, who seem "alien and sad[,] [l]ike madwomen dressed for an outing" (55), Magdalena appears as a vision of perfectness and pureness, and the whiteness of her skin recalls the description of Alejandra's body[30] in the love scene between her and John Grady in the lake near La Purísima,[31] a connection made even more evident by the name of the

29 Unless otherwise specified, all quotations in this section are taken from *Cities of the Plain.*

30 Owens founds his interpretation of *All the Pretty Horses* as a western concerned with western myths on the whiteness of Alejandra's skin: "Alejandra's white ethnicity develops the novel's underlying myth of American progress, a conservative, ethnocentric myth based on Anglo-American superiority and entitlement. Her whiteness matches a white heroine to a white hero" (64-5).

31 "The water was black and warm and he turned in the lake and spread his arms in the water and the water was so dark and so silky and he watched across the still black surface to where she stood on the shore with the horse and he watched where she stepped from her pooled clothing so pale, so pale, like a chrysalis emerging, and walked

second brothel where John Grady finds Magdalena: the White Lake. This connection reveals how John Grady's attraction for the two girls goes beyond human love, and it is part of the same desire to possess the ideal of the female and consequently of the land, since the two entities are traditionally connected.

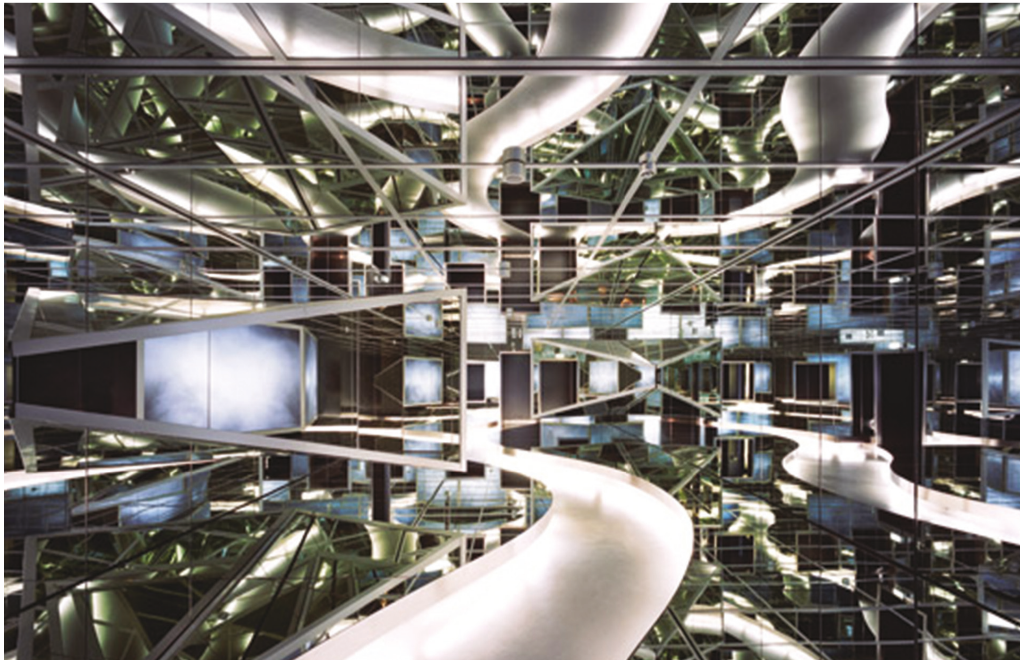

Fig. 4. Vincent J. Stoker. *La fin de l'histoire. Hétérotopie KIEAB II.* Copyright 2011 Vincent J. Stoker.

In the case of Alejandra, the link with La Purísima is explicit; for what concerns Magdalena, John Grady's desire is directed toward the ideal of domesticity that he sees in her, a desire he expresses from the beginning of the novel:[32]

> You think you'd like to of lived back in the old days? he said.
> No. I did when I was a kid. I used to think rawhidin a bunch of bony cattle in some outland country would be just as close to heaven as a man was likely to get. I wouldnt give you much for it now.
> You think they were a tougher breed back then?
> Tougher or dumber?
> The dry leaves rattled. Evening was coming on and Billy buttoned his jacket against the cold.
> I could live here, John Grady said. (77)

into the water" (*All the Pretty Horses* 141).

32 See the section "Memories of the Home, Dreams of Domesticity" in chapter 4.

In this conversation, John Grady and Billy Parham talk about the past days of the Old West, a past that has entered the dimension of the myth, as the reference to “heaven” reveals. Contrarily to the first two novels of the trilogy, in *Cities of the Plain* the characters seems to be aware of the impossible rebirth of this ideal, for the “place aint the same[,] [i]t never will be” (11), and the leaves are not falling: they are already dead and dry on the ground. John Grady, whose dreamlike attitude is particularly developed, substitutes the old dream with a new one: “I could live here”. The shift from a nomadic life to a settled one is felt by John Grady as a necessary passage. The contrast between his vision of life and reality is symbolically represented by the description that concludes the scene – “ [t]he sky to the west darkened. A cold wind blew. They could see the aura of the lights from the city come up forty miles away” (78) – where darkness falls on the lands of the West, but also on the ideals this space has fomented. The vanishing world of John Grady meets the illusory lights of the city, where Magdalena belongs.

The White Lake is surrounded by a sense of danger from its first description. A cabdriver leads John Grady to the brothel, he sees him through the gate “[a]s if the surrounding dark that formed the outskirts of the city were a danger” (65). The atmosphere of the brothel is almost theatrical, and the scene seems suspended in time, with all the characters at their places, “in studied poses”, waiting for something to happen:

> There was a bar to the right up the two stairs and he stepped up and passed along behind the stools where men were drinking and talking. The bar was mahogany and softly lit and the barmen wore little burgundy jackets and bowties. Out in the salon the whores lounged on sofas of red damask and gold brocade. They wore negligees and floorlength formal gowns and sheath dresses of white satin or purple velvet that were split up the thigh and they wore shoes of glass or gold and sat in studied poses with their red mouths pouting in the gloom. A cutglass chandelier hung overhead and on a dais to the right a string trio was playing. (66)

In this paragraph, the red damask and the purple velvet covering both sofas and prostitutes lend a lustful and sensual effect to the place, enriched by the golden of the cloths and shoes.[33] The opulence of these images is repeated *ad infinitum* by the glass and

33 Owens made an interesting analysis of McCarthy's use of colors in the descriptions of the brothel (106-7), that is similar to Fitzgerald's in *The Great Gatsby.*

the chandelier, that introduce the motif of the mirror, an element that relates in particular to Magdalena and to the proliferation of illusory spaces.

John Grady sees her for the first time through a mirror, and the same thing happens in her room, while the *criada* is combing her hair:

> The criada stood behind her in the full-length mirror, her mouth bristling with hairpins. She looked at the girl in the mirror, so pale and so slender in her shift with her hair piled atop her head. ... She studied the girl and she studied the girl in the mirror. The criada has stepped back and stood holding the brush in both hands. She and Josefina studied the girl in the mirror, the three of them in the yellow light of the table-lamp standing there within the gilded plaster scrollwork of the mirror's frame like figures in an antique flemish painting. (99-100)

Magdalena sees a girl in the mirror, "pale and slender", but she does not recognize the image as reflecting herself. The *criada* does the same, she studies two different beings: "the girl and the girl in the mirror", as if to be sure that the work she has done on the girl's hair corresponds to the image in the mirror. The illusory atmosphere of the scene is reinforced by the "gilded plaster scrollwork" of the mirror, a cheap copy of the golden frames depicted in "antique flemish paintings". This last reference demonstrates that every element in Magdalena's room is aimed at creating a world different in space and time from the reality of the brothel. Nothing could be more distant from a Mexican brothel in Juárez, than a Flemish painting. Magdalena breaks the illusion when the *criada* tells her she looks like "una princesa", by saying that she is dressed and combed "como una puta" (101) instead.

Foucault refers to the mirror as the best example of heterotopic space. The physicality of this object, that is "connected with all the space that surrounds it" ("Of Other Spaces" 24) coexists with the unreal space it reflects, a virtual space. In the mirror, illusion and reality are perfectly juxtaposed, and for this reason they are more difficult to individuate. Magdalena's femininity is real and perfect, but it hides another dimension, where it is sold. The virginal paleness of her skin, her traits, that seem those of a child, hide the degradation to which her body is exposed.

Magdalena's boudoir is "an emulation of other rooms, other worlds"(101), a

heterotopic space where dreams are broken by the contact with the miserable reality of the brothel. Magdalena is a prostitute, not a princess, and the narrator leaves the reader dubious about her love for John Grady. Eduardo, Magdalena's pimp, tells him who she really is, and that she does not love him, instilling the same uncertainty in the reader. Does she really love the young cowboy, or is she simply trying to escape a life of oppression and abuse? The same doubts arise about John Grady: is he in love with Magdalena, or is she simply the incarnation of his utopia? Eduardo's words, while he is fighting to death with John Grady, seems to unveil the truth:

> You think we have not seen your kind before? I have seen your kind before. Many and many. You think I dont know America? I know America. How old do you think I am? He stopped and crouched and feinted and moved on, circling. I am forty years old, he said. An old man, no? Deserving respect, no? Not this fighting in alleys with knives. ... Not this fighting with suitors. With farmboys. Of whom there can be no end. ... They drift down out of your leprous paradise seeking a thing now extinct among them. A thing for which perhaps they no longer even have a name. Being farmboys of course the first place they think to look is in a whorehouse. (249)

To Eduardo, John Grady's behavior is disrespectful toward his social status, because he considers fighting for a prostitute with an American a degrading waste of time. The young cowboy seems not to understand the basic rules of the Mexican community life, the power plays, and the importance of recognizing one's social position. Once again, John Grady's stubbornness confers on him both heroism and defeat. Eduardo's words make John Grady's fighting for Magdalena – or whatever ideal she incarnates – quite pathetic, because they deprive it of its greatness: hundreds of “suitors” and “farmboys” have fought the same fight, and hundreds will do the same, coming from their “leprous” land – an adjective that indicates the process of destruction and amputation of the American land – to look for a dream they cannot even imagine. Magdalena sadly becomes the Esperanza del Mundo, a bitter contradiction, since it is the name of the first brothel where she had been brought when she was only a child. Her function is that of nursing John Grady's dreams, whose frailty is due to the sickness of the land from which they have developed.

At the center of the White Lake (the same position occupied by Pérez in Saltillo), Eduardo speaks the voice of truth. The access to his office shows the heterotopic quality of the place, where Billy Parham observes a “kaleidoscope of pieced light from the overhead chandelier” (130). A door without the knob indicates the threshold Billy has to cross to reach Eduardo, after having had a special permission. While John Grady's firm belief in the possibility of reaching his dreams is not touched by the difficulties he encounters, Billy Parham is described as the disenchanted member of the couple. He is the one who speaks to Eduardo about the future of his friend, who asks him to leave him be, but he is also the one who tries to convince John Grady about the unreality of his hopes. In a sense, Billy's vision of the world matches Eduardo's, as it emerges from a second conversation they have about John Grady. Eduardo tells him that the wrong thing about Americans is that they “have in their minds a picture of how the world will be”, but that the world they dream “will never be”. At these words, Billy responds that he probably agrees, but he does not “like to say it”, since it “seems like a betrayal of some kind” (134).

In an 1966 interview to Radio France, Foucault claimed that “avec la maison close, on a ... une hétérotopie qui est assez subtile ou habile pour vouloir dissiper la realité avec la seule force des illusions” (*Die Heterotopien* 51). The power of illusions can dissolve reality, and the heterotopic space of the brothel is surely suitable to this combination of the real with the unreal. Yet, as the descriptions of the fictional brothels in *Cities of the Plain* demonstrate, reality cannot be erased through and through. There is always a detail, a voice that discloses hell behind heaven.

– Motels: Illusory Shelters

No Country for Old Men differs from McCarthy's preceding novels both from a thematic and stylistic point of view. After admitting his skepticism about the literary value of the novel, Jay Ellis explains that a second reading brought him to different conclusions about it, even if *No Country for Old Men* presents an extremely fragile and scattered composition. Ellis writes that the novel “seems to collapse, starting with a bang into what seems to be one genre that only slides down into another” (225): from the hard-boiled crime novel (a label that Ellis does not accept), *No Country for Old Men* turns into something far more

complex, that the critical writing[34] about it – quite insufficient, at least in comparison to the studies done on McCarthy's other works – has failed to unveil.

Ellis' analysis has illuminated certain interesting aspects of the spatiality of the novel, aimed at demonstrating the thesis he sustained in *No Place for Home*: McCarthy's characters tend to avoid spaces of constraint, a characteristic that is also typical of the western genre. *No Country for Old Men* is set in an almost totally urban milieu, with the exception of a few scenes set in the desert of Texas, near the Mexican border. The urban setting of the novel, together with the recurrence of the heterotopia of the motel, reinforce the idea of spatial constraint suggested by Ellis, and that McCarthy began to develop in *Cities of the Plain.*[35]

As Benjamin Child explains in his essay, the sharp division between the city and the wilderness, so neatly outlined in McCarthy's previous novels, has been substituted by a quite heterogeneous place, hard to define as totally rural, or totally urban (2). In this confusing kind of space the frontier, which has been a fundamental element in the characterization of the narrative space in McCarthy's novels of the desert, becomes a mere background, the hint of an ideal already lost in the past. And the heterotopia of the motel, which is basically the only place where the characters sleep (with the exception of Bell's untouched domesticity), reflects this loss of spatial references by creating a network of illusions, in particular around Moss.

After taking possession of the bag full of money that had to pay a lot of heroin during a drug deal between two Mexican bands, Llewelyn Moss begins his escape both from the Mexicans, and from the killer Anton Chigurh. During his wanderings among the towns of the borderlands on the highway 90, from Del Rio to Eagle Pass, Moss finds shelter in several motels, that all present the same characteristics: they are cheap, far from the city center, and of poor reputation. They are perfect examples of the American motels Foucault refers to in his essay, places that are open and closed, and that include and exclude the visitor at the same time. These motels are places "where a man goes with his car and his mistress and where illicit sex is both absolutely sheltered and absolutely hidden, kept isolated without however being allowed out in the open" ("Of Other Spaces" 27).

The motels described in the novel – the Trail Motel, the Ramada Inn, the Hotel Eagle

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34 Among the essays written on the novel, see in particular Alexander Barron's study on the connections between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *No Country for Old Men,* which offers interesting ideas on the role of sheriff Bell, Erika Spoden's investigation on the the vein of Vietnam, and Benjamin Child's work on the dualism between urbanity and rusticity. See also Sara Spurgeon.

35 Ellis reports Edwin T. Arnold's first thoughts about the last novel of the trilogy, where he observes a "growing number of confined spaces found throughout this novel: barn stalls, hotel and bordello rooms, long dark corridors and back alleys, hospitals and morgue labs, all leading to the packing crate in which John Grady, the all-american man of the west, meets his death" (qtd. in Ellis 237).

and other unnamed motels where Moss hides from his chasers – are places where everything illicit can happen, even though they seem to offer some sort of protection. The feeling of being protected, which does not last long, derives from the illusion produced by the space of the motel, whose aim is creating the surrogate of a home. Once he arrives in Del Rio, Moss asks a cab driver to bring him to "someplace cheap" (*No Country for Old Men* 83),[36] and this is how he ends up at the Trail Motel, where a woman gives him a room for a few dollars a day. The squalor of the place is the same in all the motels described in the novel: cheap chenille blankets, stained ceiling, dark colors on the walls. In the Hotel Eagle, for instance, Moss observes an "[o]ld fashioned pushbotton switchplate [and] [o]ak furniture from the turn of the century" (107), a detail that confers additional poverty to the scene.

Motels can be included among the most common features of American life, together with diners and gas stations. It is not a case that Sam Shepard, one of the authors that better described the process of decline of the American West, has used the motel as the main set for many of his plays, such as *Fool for Love* and *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, and in the book *Motel Chronicles*. The motel becomes the space where "sadness ... dissolves into a sense of menace, then uncertainty" (Kane 2), and where the dreariness that characterizes the characters' lives appears as an undeniable truth. In *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, for instance, the motel is clearly opposed to the dreamlike image of the West, as the poor young cowboy Cody tries to explain to his jailers: "CODY: I couldn't run out on ya' now. I'd be lost. It's been years. I been blindfolded and shuffled from one hotel to another for as long as I can remember. I ain't seen Great Nature for years now. The sun would probably blind me. Where would I go if I did escape" (122)?

By inserting this space in the novel, McCarthy alludes to the cultural changes that modified the American landscape, in particular after the Second World War, and that traced the beginning of the American consumerist society, a society that lost the contact with the soil where its roots developed, and that looked at this natural spatial dimension from the windows of motels and cars. The presence of fetishism and consumerism in *No Country for Old Men* has been broadly analyzed by critics,[37] and the motel is the space that better reflects these themes. Its solitude and anonymity, together with the lack of values of the objects it contains, are hidden behind the illusion of being a safe and comfortable place.

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36 All quotations in this section are taken from *No Country for Old Men*, unless otherwise specified.
37 See in particular Ellis (228-236) and Raymond Malewitz.

It is at the Trail Motel that Moss decides to hide the bag in the air duct, believing that this hideaway would be enough to protect the money from the Mexicans. At this point, Moss believes for a moment of having actually found a safe place, and he feels free enough to live his dream of richness. This is the scene where Moss looks for expensive clothes and eats in a fancy restaurant, while during the whole novel he keeps buying cheap things at Wal-Mart, or asking for cheap motels to cab drivers:

> He had to pay the driver an extra ten dollars to take him across the bridge to Ciudad Acuña. He walked the streets, looking into the shopwindows. The evening was soft and warm and in the little alameda grackles were settling in the trees and calling to one another. He went into a boot shop and looked at the exotics – crocodile and ostrich and elephant – but the quality of the boots was nothing like the Larry Mahans he wore. ... He ate in a restaurant with white tablecloth and waiters in white jackets. He ordered a glass of red wine and a porter-house steak. (85)

But once the cab takes him back to the Trail Motel, Moss does not feel safe anymore, and he decides to spend the night at the Ramada Inn. This will be the beginning of his paranoia, and of the fear of being constantly chased. Whenever he goes in another hotel, he suddenly feels that the place is not safe, and changes his shelter over and over again.

After the Ramada Inn, Moss buys some poles in a sporting goods store, and once he is back at the Trail Motel, he asks to the desk woman a map of the hotel. What he is looking for, is a way to recover the bag in the air duct from another room, with the help of the poles. The network of air ducts of the motel contributes to create the idea that Moss is actually trapped into a labyrinth, and that he will not exit from it so easily. Every hotel becomes a deathly snare for him, reflecting the situation where he is trapped in. The escape from the Trail Motel, where the Mexicans were waiting for him in his room, is the moment when the illusion of safety breaks, and Moss begins to wonder about the possibility of dying.

These moments of reflection are always accompanied by the presence of mirrors. As I have explained in the preceding section of this chapter, the mirror is the heterotopia *par excellence,* because it combines in a unique space the real object and its virtual projection. In *No Country for Old Men*, Moss often looks at himself in the mirror, as if to escape the maze

of illusions in which he is caged, to understand who he is and where he is going. During the night at the Hotel Eagle, Moss starts thinking about his life:

> He knew what was coming. He just didnt know when. He got up and went into the bathroom and pulled the chain on the light over the sink and looked at himself in the mirror. He took a washcloth from the glass towelbar and turned on the hot water and wet the cloth and wrung it out and wiped his face and the back of his neck. ... It had already occurred to him that he would probably never be safe again in his life and he wondered if that was something that you got used to. And if you did? (109)

After a few hours, Chigurh enters the room. This scene can probably be considered the climax of the novel, when Moss meets the dark center of his own illusion: Chigurh is the main impediment to Moss' plans, and his obstinacy in chasing Moss and keeping faith to his promise to kill him and his young wife Carla Jean is so intense, it almost seems inhuman. Chigurh – that has been considered by many critics a smaller and less powerful version of Judge Holden[38] – plays the role of the implacable fate to which all characters are doomed. This concept is expressed by the act of flipping a coin to decide for the life or death of a person, that Chigurh repeats twice in the novel: with a cashier, and with Carla Jean. This element becomes part of his characterization, like the smile of Judge Holden.

The hotel room seems to participate in the tension of the encounter between Moss and Chigurh: "[t]he whole room was pulsing slowly. There was an odd smell in the air. ... Everything humming" (111-2). To Ellis the characterization of Chigurh recalls the typical crime novel villain, where the details of the character are not specified, or are simply too common to be remembered. In Ellis' words, the character is "a fetish of a villain" (229), meaning that his description harks back to the "interchangeable serial novels" (230) directed to readers of serial thrillers. The only things the reader knows about Chigurh (seen through Moss' eyes) are his face traits: "[b]lue eyes. Serene. Dark hair. Something about him faintly exotic. Beyond Moss's experience" (112).

Even if the comparison could seem a bit risky, Chigurh shares these features with Alejandra: "[s]he had blue eyes and she nodded or perhaps she only lowered her head slightly to better see what sort of horse he rode, just the slightest tilt of the broad black hat set level on her head, the slightest lifting of the long black hair" (*All the Pretty Horses*

38 See Ellis 229.

109). The physical resemblance between the two characters creates a link between them: as Alejandra incarnates John Grady's desire for the rural ideal of the frontier – a dream he cannot make true – Chigurh represents the impossibility for Moss to reach his own desire of keeping the money and being safe: what he incarnates goes "beyond Moss's experience" because it presents the same idealistic projection reflected by Alejandra.

The myth of the frontier has become something different in the age of consumerism, something far less mythic than the image McCarthy creates in *The Border Trilogy*, but it nonetheless continues to produce desires: in the case of *No Country for Old Men*, richness at any cost is the element that activates Moss' decision to risk his life and the life of Carla Jean. It is significant that, as it happens in the trilogy, also in this novel the crash between illusion and reality takes place in a heterotopic *cul de sac* – the motel – that reflects the historical and cultural background of the novel, a time in which the United States had to face its recent defeat in Vietnam, the cold-war, new technologies, and the rising social alienation. The motel is one of the many products of contemporary U.S. waste, and it reflects this new sense of loss Bell recognizes at the end of the novel: "he knew what it was. It was defeat. It was being beaten. More bitter to him than death" (306).

Conclusion: What You See Is (Not) What You Get

Through the analysis of the heterotopic spaces described in the novels, I have shown the complexity of the relations of the characters with the narrative space that surrounds them. Heterotopias always cast light on the discontinuities and contradictions inherent in space, but in the specific case of McCarthy's novels, they offer an interesting perspective on the functioning of the myth of the frontier. In particular, the themes that have been examined in the several sections of this chapter chart the course of the development of this myth along the changing narrative times. In addition to the shift from a rural landscape, to an urban one, the novels describe the different approaches of the characters in relation to the heterotopias in which they are trapped.

If in the prison of Saltillo it is still possible to notice the presence of a certain heroism connected to the character of John Grady – in particular through the description of the

duel with the *cuchillero*, a traditional theme in western novels –, and in the cemetery of San Buenaventura Billy Parham accomplishes the disinterment of his brother's body to bury him in America, a profane act that, nevertheless, responds to a somehow higher sense of relational sacredness, in *Cities of the Plain* and *No Country for Old Men* the urban heterotopias of the brothel and the motel seem to have lost the mythic contrast between the real and the spiritual that characterizes the previous two. Sex and money, the issues reflected by the brothel and the motel where Moss hides the bag full of dollars, are quite vile themes in comparison to the freedom negated in Saltillo, and the theme of death represented by the cemetery.

It has already been stated that heterotopias mirror the oppositions inherent in the myth of the frontier, that is an illusion and a producer of illusions at the same time. From the illusion of freedom, denied by Saltillo, to the pastoral illusion of a perfect land – timeless and untouched by death –, denied by the cemetery, heterotopias deprive the frontier of its substance, so that it becomes a forgotten concept, an anachronistic dream. The brothel erases John Grady's romantic love dream (actually not so convincing), and the motel negates the possibility to find a shelter from a world that is completely detached from the past, unrecognizable, as Bell's reflections demonstrate.

At this point, Billy Parham becomes the key character. Both John Grady and Moss are overwhelmed by their obsessions, while Billy is able to see beyond the surface of illusions produced by the frontier, reaching the reality of things without being too cynic. I believe it is not a case that he is the protagonist of a novel such as *The Crossing*, where the moments of reflection and the stories he listens to during his journeys occupy the greatest part of the narrative. Billy's vision of the world is far more deep and mature than John Grady's or Moss', he sees the limit inside the frontier, and knows how to avoid the paths that could lead him in heterotopic traps.

Even if the end of *Cities of the Plain* could seem inglorious for Billy, he is the real answer to the ideological *impasse* described in these novels. In one of the last scenes of the book, he is described among the members of the family that hosts him: “[i]n the evening after supper sometimes the woman [the same woman that sees a map in Billy's palm][39] would invite him to play cards with them and sometimes he and the children would sit at the kitchen table and he'd tell them about horses and cattle and the old days. Sometimes he'd tell them about Mexico” (290). Billy does not try to materialize and directly live the myth of the frontier, because he is aware of the ideal nature of this concept, and of the

39 See the conclusion of chapter 2.

importance to transmit it as a legacy. It is a fundamental part of his life, of his being: this is the only space to which the frontier belongs.

The loss of this dream, or better the vulgarization of it described in *No Country for Old Men* is the real defeat, that Bell contrasts with his last words about a dream he had, where his father was riding through the mountains at night: "in the dream I knew that he was going on ahead and that he was fixing to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up" (309). Sheriff Bell and Billy Parham are old men, who prove their wisdom in respect to the history of the United States and its future progression. The question is, whether America is a country for old men, or not:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Nor is there singing school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium. (Yates, vv. 9-16)[40]

40 McCarthy used the first verse of Yates' poem "Sailing to Byzantium" as a title for his novel: "That is no country for old men. The young/In one another's arms, birds in the trees" (vv. 1-2).

CHAPTER 4

Empty Houses/Homes Desired: Intimate Spaces in *The Border Trilogy* and *The Road*

Examining the role of houses in the representation of the narrative space of a novel entails dealing with a *corpus* of studies that goes far beyond narrative theory. Philosophy, psychology and anthropology have highlighted the different aspects constituting the complex nature of a building that has been examined as a symbol, a metaphor, and an archetype, and whose importance is primarily due to its prime role in the mental processes involved in the human knowledge of space. The house is “our first universe” (Bachelard 4), through which we learn how to manage and experience the space that expands outside its walls.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1958) Gaston Bachelard celebrates space in its many manifestations, examining the way in which it functions in everyday life and how the human mind experiences intimate spaces.[1] Following the principles of phenomenology,[2] Bachelard examines space as an experienced entity, and not as an abstract dimension, focusing on the architecture of drawers, nests, cellars and attics, and on the ways in which they are represented in literature. Significantly, in his analysis he dedicates two chapters to the space of the house.

Bachelard's work paved the way for further investigations on the house, typically couched in psychological terms, analyzing the role of this particular building in the process of development of human identity. In *The Poetics*, Bachelard takes up Gustav Jung's idea of the house as the archetype of the self,[3] grounding one of his analyses on a well-

1 Bachelard uses the term “intimate space” to indicate a space that is not “open to just anybody” (78), and that develops around the concepts of intimacy and privacy. In his analysis, he focuses in particular to the “simple images of *felicitous space* ... the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (ix). In the same way, Bachelard examines the house in its most positive aspects, without taking into consideration the negative degeneration also connected to it.

2 Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline that examines the ways in which the human mind experiences the world. This ontological study of the structures of experience and consciousness was founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century.

3 Jung's reflections on the house as a representation of human identity can be found both in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, and in its autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

known metaphor used by the Swiss psychiatrist: the house stands for human consciousness, from the rational self represented by the roof, to the irrational unconscious symbolized by the cellar. Starting from this image, Bachelard analyzes the house as the first space known by the infant,[4] to which all subsequent dwellings will be compared, a space that participates in the development of the self also through the creation of memories and dreams: "[i]n this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening" (5). As it can be inferred by these considerations, the dwelling becomes the safe shelter where memory and imagination sustain and enhance human inner life.

But the house should not be viewed only as an intimate space reflecting the inner being of the subject: it also presents a public side, that expresses "something of the culture of the society in which it was built" (Smyth and Croft 12-13). Houses disclose the cultural background, the lifestyle and the social status of their inhabitants; they can provide information on the family's religious or political affiliations, on its wealth and on its tastes. In other words, the house provides an exemplification of the subject's identity, as well as of the intricate maze of social relations that constitute its larger context. This is true also in fictional worlds, where the house often becomes the spatial element that indirectly participates in the description of the characters, complementing information about their inner beings, as well as about the relationships among them.[5]

In this chapter, I examine the houses described in *The Border Trilogy* and *The Road* to determine how they affect the characters' behavior, and how they represent the social and historical contexts in which they have been built. The house functions as the symbol of the American nation, thus in the novels it communicates the economic and political changes that took place in the United States during the historical periods in which they are set: the years shortly before and after World War II in the trilogy, and an unspecified future in *The Road*. Along with the public side of the house, my analysis focuses on the more intimate and abstract space of the home, connected to feelings of protection, nurture and comfort, to determine the ways in which the notion of domesticity is represented in the texts.

As it has already emerged from the analyses proposed in the previous chapters,

4 Bachelard explains this statement by saying that the human attachment to the idea of the house is "native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting" (4), and for this reason it acquires a "primordial" (Smyth and Croft 12) evocative power.

5 An interesting example of a literary analysis of the house as the mirror of a character's inner being has been proposed by Gianfranco Rubino in his essay on Colette's novel *Chéri.* In this study, he analyzes every detail of Léa's house in order to illuminate her thoughts and her relationship with her young lover Chéri. Moreover, through this reading, it emerges that the house is also a fundamental element for the development of the plot, for it hosts the encounters and the conflicts among the characters. In *Chéri*, the house is the veritable nucleus of the novel.

McCarthy's descriptions of the narrative space are often built on the opposition between contrasting elements: ancient and modern ruins, anthropocentric and biocentric maps, real and illusory spaces. The contrast between houses and homes ingrains both in their characterization, and in the behavior of the characters toward and within them. In the trilogy, and especially in *The Road*, the houses that the protagonists abandon, or from which they are forced to leave, are often portrayed as negative and oppressive, while the idea of domesticity represented by homes develops in positive and comforting abstract spaces, that embody the protagonists' main desires.

The etymological difference between the terms “house” and “home” goes back to the ancient Greek and Latin: in Greek, *hestía* (ἑστία) indicates the heart of the house, the sacred fire that burns inside of it, and it can be translated in English with the terms “home” and “household”. The Greek goddess Hesta was the guardian of the house, but she also had an important role in the political life of the city, similarly to the Roman goddess Vesta. This mythological detail suggests the social side of the intimate space of the home, where the private and the public spheres coexist. In Latin, three terms can be used to indicate the dwelling: *limen*, that means “house”, but also “threshold”, *domus* – the term to indicate the “home” – and *patria*, a generic word that can be used both for “home” and “homeland”.

From this brief etymological analysis, it is possible to draw some relevant information: first, the space of the house is constituted by a private and a public sphere; second, the fire of the hearth is symbolically connected to the idea of domesticity and nurture expressed by the home – a link deriving from the ancient habit of burning a sacred fire at the center of the household to worship the gods and protect the family; third, the notion of homeland is closer to the intimate space of the home, than to the public space of the house. One last consideration on the term *limen* is that the liminal space of the threshold, that Bakhtin mentions as one of the best examples of the chronotope,[6] is an expression of the public role of the house, revealing its function as a space of encounter and negotiation.

The opposition between “house” and “home” recalls in a way that between “space” and “place” examined by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* one of the most important works in the field of spatial studies. To Tuan, “space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (136), namely, when it is

6 To Bakthin, the threshold is a “chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life”, very popular in 20th century literature where, as he explains, its presence is “always metaphorical and symbolic” (21). The threshold represents a breaking point in the lives of characters, a space that asks for decisions, and in which time concentrates in a unique instant where changes of any kind may occur.

experienced and enriched by memories and feelings.[7] Both terms present negative and positive characteristics: if space expresses the freedom to move in an open dimension without limits, place is generally viewed as comforting and stable, clearly limited and easy to explore. But, together with the idea of freedom, space is connected to the concept of danger, since "to be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable" (Tuan 54), while place can become an oppressive, even claustrophobic dimension (Schröder 32, Sibley 91). House and space are two concepts that evoke ideas related to the openness of the *agorà*, where the social community meets, and where negotiations and contrasts may take place. The house represents the public and institutional role of the family. On the other hand, home is connected to place because they both arouse ideas of safety and closeness, related to a more intimate and exclusive spatial dimension, that belongs to the private sphere of the family. These comparisons – house/space, and home/place – will offer a key to interpret the role of dwellings in McCarthy's novels.

The theme of the house in McCarthy has been addressed by many critics, who focused on the depiction of the dwelling as a negative space. This interpretation relates in particular to the novels belonging to McCarthy's early literary production, where the traditional idea of the house is substituted by caves, cabins, or boats floating on the river, miserable spaces that Terri Witek has defined as "imitation[s] of domesticity", where "powerful women [often act] as catalysts for destruction" (25). In her analysis, Witek states that McCarthy's male protagonists leave their houses because of these women's power, that makes the dwellings unwelcoming places, according to a vision of the world where, to Witek, no place can be called home.

The same conclusion has been drawn by Jay Ellis, who articulates a discourse on the will of McCarthy's characters to abandon their houses, a necessity that Ellis connects to their problematic relation with paternal figures.[8] In the chapter dedicated to *The Border Trilogy*, he analyzes the cowboys' passage from life on the open range, to houses, as the ultimate defeat of cowboy life, seeing "their return to some substitute home ... invariably inglorious" (223). John Grady and Billy Parham's incessant movement in the borderlands

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7 To Paul J. Pennartz, places are "profound centers of human existence" (96).

8 The need to get away from the enclosed space of the house, to follow the call of the open range, is one of the main characteristics that Jane Tompkins attributes to the Western genre: "[t]here is a tremendous tension in Westerns between the landscape and town. The genre pulls toward the landscape – that, in a sense, is its whole point. But because there's so much emphasis on getting away, town also exerts a tremendous pull; otherwise there would be no reason to flee. So there's a paradox in the presentation of town. ... Town functions as a surrogate home, though it's not home because it's a public space. ... But in fact, town always threatens to entrap the hero in the very things the genre most wishes to avoid: intimacy, mutual dependence, a network of social and emotional responsibilities" (85-86).

entails the impossibility for them to reach domesticity (Ellis 315), and at the same time it reveals their roles in the novels: they are what Lotman calls "mobile characters", whose narrative function is directly dependent on their movement in space ("Artistic Space in Gogol' Prose" 200). To Bourne, this never-ending ride, trapped between a vanishing past and an unknown future, makes these characters uprooted and lost, "because they seek destinations that exist only in memory and myth" (113).

Contrary to these interpretations, that focus only on the most negative aspects of the house and on its oppressive effects, my analysis examines the complexity of this space, its dichotomies and contradictions: the dualism between private and public spheres, its function as a mirror of the inner beings of the characters, and its role as a storyteller of the social and political changes that made the history of America. In the novels, houses coexist with homes, abstract spaces that offer examples of real domesticity where the characters can find some sort of stability. Their presence suggests the possibility that some places can actually be called home.

In the first part of the chapter, I examine houses described as negative spaces, abandoned by the protagonists, or from which they are banished. The analysis of these spaces in *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing* and *The Road* will reveal that their negativity is directly dependent on their relation with the past, that emerges in the novels as an oppressive force, and not as a source of wisdom and heritage, or as a frightening presence that recalls the Freudian concept of the "uncanny". After a brief introduction on the role of the house as the symbol of the American nation, I examine the way in which, in these novels, this building expresses the problematic relation of the characters with their country, whose incessant political, economic and social transformations have made it unrecognizable to them. The sense of coldness and loss evoked by these empty dwellings reveal that the characters' orphaned condition is not only linked to the loss of their families, but to that of their homeland.

The second part is dedicated to the more intimate notion of dwelling – the home – which has been traditionally connected to the figure of the nurturing female, as well as to the symbolic fire of civilization and culture. The home can generally be viewed as a positive space in the novels, but it can also exercise a form of oppression on the characters, especially when it becomes an ideal that limits their capacity to distinguish what is real, and what is not. This space appears under the shape of memories and dreams in *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, where the protagonists are unable to reach

domesticity, but it becomes real in *The Road*, the novel where the themes of affection and hospitality are better represented. The analysis of these spaces will demonstrate that the characters' desire for domesticity can be fulfilled only after the reconciliation of mankind with the land, and with its feminine nature.

The Space of the House: The Empty Dwelling

– The Past as Burden and Heritage in *All the Pretty Horses*

The term "house" indicates the physical building where human beings find shelter from the dangers coming from the outer world. In the specific case of American culture, the house has come to represent the United States since the very beginning of its foundation, creating a connection between the social role of the family and the political existence of the nation. In the Puritan communities of the 17th century, the family was recognized as the first societal nucleus on which the Puritan social order was grounded (Anderson 2), a divine model that the community could follow to create all the other social institutions. Consequently, the house became a metonymy of the family, highlighting its social and political role, to the detriment of its domestic and intimate side.

One of the most important political speeches in American history – Abraham Lincoln's "A House Divided" – presents a reference to the equivalence between the two terms "house" and "nation", an equivalence that has become in all respects a part of the American rhetorical language of the 19th century.[9] In the light of the symbolism connected to the American house, the analysis of this element in McCarthy's novels must take into account the possible themes concerning the institutional side of America, and not only its relation with human identity.

The houses described in McCarthy, particularly in *The Border Trilogy*, are characterized by details that make them inhospitable spaces. John Grady Cole, Billy and Boyd Parham, but also secondary characters such as Jimmy Blevins and Lacey Rawlins, all decide to

9 The famous speech was made on the 16th of June 1858 in Springfield, Illinois, on the occasion of the Republican State Convention. Lincoln takes the reference to the "house divided" from the Bible, Matthew 12:25: "[a]nd Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them: 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself cannot stand'". Lincoln referred to the difficult situation of the inner division of the United States between those who sustained slavery in the South, and its Northern opponents.

abandon their houses to lead a wandering life in the country, in a condition that lingers between the excitement offered by a state of complete freedom, and the oppressive sense of homelessness caused by the lack of roots and family bonds. Writing about *The Crossing*, John Cant makes an interesting observation on the use of the term *huérfano* in relation to Billy that, "like Job and Melville's Ishmael, [is] metaphorically part of a single narrative of the lost child seeking origins and home" (*Cormac McCarthy* 58). John Grady can be equally defined as such: a lost child without a home and a clear direction.

In *All the Pretty Horses*, two houses are particularly important for John Grady because they represent respectively his childhood memories and his future desires: the Grady ranch in San Angelo, Texas, and don Héctor Rocha's ranch, La Purísima, in the Mexican plains of Cuatro Ciénagas. The novel opens in the Grady ranch with "an equation of death and loss of domesticity" (Ellis 205), since the death of John Grady's grandfather coincides with the sale of the ranch. In a single day, the young cowboy loses his house and his roots. This sense of loss is expressed since the very beginning of the novel, when John Grady is described while entering the ranch surrounded by the darkness of the plains, while his grandfather's corpse lies in the hall:

> The candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door. He took off his hat and came slowly forward. The floorboards creaked under his boots. In his black suit he stood in the dark glass where the lilies leaned so palely from their wasted cutglass vase. Along the cold hallway behind him hung the portraits of forebears only dimly known to him all framed in glass and dimly lit above the narrow wainscotting. He looked down at the guttered candlestub. He pressed his thumbprint in the warm wax pooled on the oak veneer. Lastly he looked at the face so caved and drawn among the folds of funeral cloth, the yellowed moustache, the eyelids paper thin. That was not sleeping. That was not sleeping. (1)

The first lines of the paragraph create an unpleasant atmosphere that accompanies John Grady's crossing the threshold. His movements are trapped in a closed circle of repetitions, while the silence and emptiness of the dwelling are reinforced by the sound of his boots creaking on the boards of the floor that contributes to the creation of a general sense of

oppression. A dark glass mirrors John Grady's image, surrounded by the abyss created by the reflection of that same darkness, which carries omens of death – the withered lilies –[10] and the presence of a past that does not bring wisdom and inheritance, but seems more of a menace to the young cowboy. The hallway is cold, and the portraits of the forebears are burdens that John Grady is not able to carry in this day of loss, partly visible, partly “known to him”. The image the reader obtains from this description is that of an abandoned house, an empty shell where the past is vanishing, and the future is left out.

Later on, the narrator informs the reader that the sale of the ranch has been the choice of John Grady's mother, who considers her son too young and inexpert to run a ranch by his own, especially in the American economic scenario of the 1950s, when less and less importance was given to the cattle industry in the West. The ranch reinforces a vision of the West as a “dream of the past”, a “ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across the mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives” (5). In this short passage, that describes the Comanches with a poetical tone deeply invested with melancholy, the fates of this Indian tribe, and that of the American cowboys like the Gradys and the Coles, become one and the same: extinction, then memory, then legend. The Grady ranch seems to tell this story of past wealth and present decay, without giving to its son the knowledge he needs to face his future.

An entire paragraph is dedicated to the description of the house, in its several phases of construction, which coincide with important moments in American history. The house was built in 1872, on twenty-three hundred acres “out of the old Meusebach survey of the Fisher-Miller grant”[11], and in 1883 the first barbed-wire was set around the property. Together with these data about the location of the ranch and its extension, the reader is also indirectly informed about the violence of life in the West, through a sentence concerning the death of John Grady's grandfather: “[s]eventy-seven years later his grandfather was still the first man to die in it” (6). The old man's quiet death expresses the decline of the cowboy's way of life, according to which when real cowboys died, their

10 The symbolism of the lilies associates these flowers with ideas of purity and innocence, but also to motherhood, birth and renewal. The representation of the withered lilies in this passage negates their traditional symbolism, making them omens of death, negations of fertility and, consequently, of the prosecution of the Grady lineage.

11 This is an example of McCarthy's use of precise historical references in his novels. The Fisher-Miller land grant was a geographical area of Texas given by the Republic of Texas to 6.000 families and single men from Germany, Norway, Holland and Switzerland, to increase colonization and farming. This grant, received by Henry Francis Fisher and Burchard Miller on the 7th of June 1842, was part of a project whose aim was the promotion of German colonization in Texas. John O. Meusebach, a nobleman and bureaucrat from Prussia, became interested in the project, and later on moved to Texas to become a well-known American farmer and politician.

corpses were rarely found and brought back to their ranches. Despite the positive side of the decay of violence, this quietness marks the end of a precise lifestyle, whose dangerous aspects were parts of its mythic force. In the 1870s this decay had already begun, and in 1886 “the buffalo were gone” (7).

Another element that paradoxically contributes to these images of decline is the birth of John Grady's mother, that buries the Grady name “with that old man” (7). John Grady's surname is Cole, but the ranch does not belong to his father who, as Ellis claims, proves to be incapable of fulfilling his role, and he cannot guide his son and protect him.[12] Consequently, John Grady owns nothing, not even the ranch where he grew up, where his self developed and his experience of this limited world gave rise to his dreams.

At the beginning of the novel, John Grady has no guide nor reference points: his father is absent, the wisdom of his forebears is inaccessible to him, and his house is gone. These losses constitute the force that will propel a journey that he starts in this novel and ends in *Cities of the Plain*. The images he keeps inside of him and that represent the basis on which he will found his desires are those of the “picturebook horses” (16) he used to look at as a child in his grandfather's office, so different from the shape of the real animals, but so attractive for a child's mind. Throughout his journeys, John Grady will try to adapt the real world to the idealistic projections he has been inventing during the years spent in the ranch, unaware of the difficult situation his grandfather dealt with every day to keep it a productive enterprise. Once the ranch is gone, John Grady loses the source of his dreams, but not the set of values it represents, which are all related to the American dream: ownership and freedom that come from a sense of duty and hard labor.

When the young cowboy sees La Purísima, he finds the perfect substitute for what he has lost, a space where he can fulfill his ideals. But for Dueña Alfonsa and don Héctor Rocha, John Grady represents the foreign force attacking the private space of their fortress, that mirrors the social order of Mexico and its history, as the Grady ranch expresses the ideals that have caused both the birth and the decay of the American West:

> The house was cool and quiet and smelled of wax and flowers. A tallcase clock stood in the hallway to the left. The brass weights stirred behind the casement doors, the pendulum slowly swept. He turned to look back and

12 John Grady seems to be aware of his father's weakness, and this awareness emerges with particular clarity during their last ride in the hills along Grape Creek, when the father looks “thin and frail, lost in his clothes” (24) to John Grady.

> the hacendado smiled and extended his hand toward the diningroom doorway. ... They sat at a long table of english walnut. The walls of the room were covered with blue damask and hung with portraits of men and horses. At the end of the room was a walnut sideboard with some chafingdishes and decanters set out upon it and along the windowsill outside taking the sun were four cats. (112-3)

Don Héctor Rocha's attitude toward John Grady is one of fake hospitality. The *hacendado* extends his hand toward the cowboy, but this first contact takes place on an extremely liminal and problematic space – the threshold – to continue in an even more problematic one – the hall. This room is not the heart of the house, represented by the kitchen, but the space where social relations and negotiations unfold. John Grady penetrates only the first level of the family intimacy protected by the *hacienda*, since he is viewed as a foreign visitor, and a possible menace.

In "The Ins and Outs of the Hall", Céline Rosselin examines the roles of the hall and of the threshold in the space of the house, explaining that the host perceives the visitor's crossing the threshold as a possible menace for the family. For this reason, the act of crossing needs regulations and ritual practices to be fully exorcized. These rituals traditionally happen in the hall, or in the dining room, because these are spaces that amplify the act of crossing, creating an additional buffer between the public rooms of the house, and its private spaces:

> It is not only an entrance room to welcome visitors, but also a protective and neutralizing zone to prevent or ease transition from the public to the private space ... Located on the edge of the private and public, the inside and the outside, the exterior and the interior, the familiar and the foreign, the hall neutralizes the qualitative aspects of both domains. (55)

The selective role of the hall is important for the host to understand whether the visitor can be shown in the private areas of the house, or not: it is an in-between space where both visitor and host can acquire information about one another, through the direct act of conversation, but also through the indirect act of observing the objects displayed in the hall: photographs, books and ornaments, for instance.

In the dining room of La Purísima there are many objects that do not belong to the Mexican tradition, but that reveal instead the strong influence that Europe has exercised on the Rocha family. Don Héctor and Alejandra themselves are characterized in a way that suggests their relations with other cultures, along the Mexican one: white skin, blue eyes, a good knowledge of English, and a long time relation with France, where Alejandra is going to complete her studies like her grandaunt Alfonsa did as a girl. The table where John Grady and don Héctor sit is of "english walnut", the *hacendado* uses a "china ashtray" to smoke his "english cigarettes", and the barn is built along the "english style" (117). The furniture of the room becomes a window open on the history of the Rochas – a mixture between the progressive ideas learned in European schools, and the ancient Mexican tradition –, as the emptiness of the Grady ranch revealed the decay of John Grady's family, and the frailty of its lineage:

> The family identity, including the idea of lineage, is materialized in furniture items and decorative objects, and by its very material nature the family identity can be transmitted. The elaborated decor itself, however, cannot be transmitted for it expresses not only the material but also, and more so, the symbolic dimension imbued by the couple who created the interior. (Chevalier 91)

Europe is an important part of the Rochas' history, as it can be inferred by the "furniture items and decorative objects" that materialize the "family identity", about which John Grady comes to know many details through Alfonsa and don Héctor's tales, but also thanks to Alejandra. Alfonsa, in particular, tells him about her relationship with the revolutionary Gustavo Madero, killed during the Mexican revolution,[13] and when they meet for the last time in Zacatecas, Alejandra decides to show him the place where her grandfather died during the same revolution. Once again, the past is a presence that influences the characters' behavior and shapes their lives, a presence that is made clear from the first line of the description of the hall, where a clock and a pendulum seem to point at the passing of time, a constant flow made of heritage and memories that,

13 This historical reference points to the Mexican civil war that started in 1910 and lasted until 1920, with sporadic outbreaks of warfare along the Twenties. Francisco Madero led the first uprising against the president and dictator Porfirio Díaz, while his brother Gustavo, who had been his confident throughout the political campaign against the former dictator, was tortured and brutally murdered on the 18th of February 1913. Dueña Alfonsa's tale about her relation with the Madero family, and in particular with Gustavo, is the most direct reference to the historical background of the Rochas.

contrarily to the emptiness evoked by John Grady's ranch, have the power to give a precise direction to Alejandra's life, even if the girl perceives it as an imposition. Alfonsa invests the *hacienda* "with oldworld ties and with antiquity and tradition" (132), balancing the European influence that could bring the *hacienda* to the loss of its past.

The house reveals the dichotomy Europe/Mexico through the opposition between the English hall and the space where John Grady meets don Héctor for the second time, that is in the billiard room, which is full of tradition and details that tell the history of the Rocha family – this time, the Mexican side of it. The dark room smells of "must and old wood" (143), two very masculine odors that contrast the smell of wax and flowers described in the hall (Woodson 34). These odors invest the rooms with the presence of Alfonsa and Héctor, whose roles in the family are made clear: Alfonsa defends La Purísima and takes care of the social relations of the family with the external world, while don Héctor's main preoccupation concerns the defense of the family honor, that has been violated by John Grady's relationship with his daughter Alejandra. Héctor is linked to the billiard room, which represents the more Mexican and violent side of La Purísima. The *hacendado* explains to the cowboy that the room was once a chapel, and that the house has been built around it:

> He pulled a tasseled chain and lit an ornate tin chandelier suspended from the ceiling. Beneath it an antique table of some dark wood with lions carved into legs. The table was covered with a drop of yellow oilcloth and the chandelier has been lowered from the twentyfoot ceiling by the length of common tracechain. At the far end of the room was a very old carved and painted wooden altar above which hung a lifesize carved and painted wooden Christ. (143)

The antique table of "dark wood" with lions is a product of the Mexican baroque style – the *churrigueresco* – of which the town of Zacatecas was one of the most important examples, while the altar and the wooden Christ are two elements that reflect the strong religious background of the family, whose dogmatism emerges through the exaggerated "lifesize" statue. The very heart of La Purísima is comprised of tradition and superstition, two walls that exclude John Grady from the mysteries of the *hacienda*, and also from its domesticity. Don Héctor tells him that the room had been deconsecrated, but that he

believed in the never-ending presence of the divinity as a guardian of the house. By presenting to his visitor this room, don Héctor indirectly expresses the impossibility for him to cross the threshold between the public and the private spheres of the *hacienda,* whose domesticity is protected by God, a guardian that John Grady's ranch seems to have lost many years before. The young cowboy is cut out, once again, of the possibility to find a domestic shelter, an ideal that he will try to make real, later on, in *Cities of the Plain*.

The descriptions of John Grady's ranch and of the *hacienda* La Purísima make them two sides of the same coin. The American ranch is an abandoned space, closed out by a country whose economic and technological transformations have excluded the past and its values. Opposed to this lack of legacy, the *hacienda* is full of objects through which Mexican tradition emerges as a presence cherished and protected by the Rocha family. The coin is the idea of nation itself, questioned by the novel through the comparison between two contrasting ways of looking at the past: the American way does not give enough importance to it, and this disinterest causes the disorientation of its sons; on the other hand, Mexico seems to be stuck in an unmodifiable past, which directs and guides, but which can also oppress its people. In either case, the house is the necessary element through which the characters express their identities, but also their belonging to the social and political community of their country. Without his ranch, John Grady is unable to say who he really is, and where he is going, as it emerges from the conversation he has with Rawlins at the end of the novel, when his friend asks him "[w]here is your country?", and he answers: "I dont know ... . I dont know where it is. I dont know what happens to country" (299).

A wanderer with no direction, John Grady sees in La Purísima the ideal house he has imagined as a child while looking at the images of horses in his grandfather's office, and for this reason he is incapable of seeing behind its surface, to understand how oppressive it can be, or how violent. He does not even understand that don Héctor is using the billiard room to menace him, to make him understand that "Mexico is not Europe" (145), and no foreigner will be accepted in his house, nor as a part of his family. With a lost house behind, and an impenetrable *hacienda* in front of him, the protagonist of the first novel of the trilogy cannot find peace and stability, therefore he continues to wander, and to dream. "The house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream" (Bachelard 6), but a dreamer without a house is a grain of sand carried by the wind, in the immense

desert where the cowboy rides.

– Attacking the Citadel: Wild Intrusions in *The Crossing*

The "cult of domesticity"[14] that developed in the 19th century in America put the household at the center of the process of reformation of American society. In many manuals of domestic economy, and in particular in Catharine Beecher's well-known work *A Treatise of Domestic Economy* (1841), the house was described as the model the nation should follow to regulate the process of civilization of new territories, to accomplish this sacred duty without too much unnecessary violence or immoral competition: a good and organized house could offer examples to create a more altruistic and just society. In Beecher's writings, full of the "rhetoric of domesticity" (18) typical of the time, the house is described as "a glorious temple" (Beecher qtd. in Kaplan 18) whose primary function is the protection of the American family from "uncivilized wilderness and undomesticated foreignness" (Kaplan 20).

According to this cult, the house was a fortress protected by God, a citadel against the darkness of the wilderness and the many dangers coming from the hordes of foreigners that were invading the urban centers of the East, as well as the wild territories of the West. In this sense, as Amy Kaplan rightly observes, the cult of domesticity presents the same ideas expressed by the theory of Manifest Destiny: the foreign, that emerged as a negative element menacing the private space of the house, had to be fought against and ultimately conquered by the American nation. According to this ideology, the house became the veritable symbol of the Manichean conflict between good and evil, civilization and wilderness.

In *The Crossing,* the image of the house as a space that defends the private place of the family from the public space of the outer world emerges – and is negated – through the traumatic experience of Billy and Boyd's loss of their own dwelling, after the killing of their parents. At the beginning of the novel, Billy and Boyd encounter an armed Indian that hides in the plains around their house, who asks them for food. Billy's attitude toward

14 The term indicates the value system according to which the docile and pious woman was the angel of the house, an example of true womanhood, viewed as the source of comfort and domesticity where the ideal American family could develop and proliferate. Through magazines and manuals that addressed in particular the white women of the upper and middle class, the cult of domesticity exercised an incredible influence on American culture and society, and became one of the hardest pillars the feminist movement fought against during the 19th and 20th century.

him forebodes his future journeys in the wilderness, a spatial dimension with which he is deeply fascinated. He is curious and welcoming toward this man, and he even asks him to follow them home: “[y]ou can come to the house. Mama'll feed you”, an offer to which the man replies: “I dont want to come to the house. I want you to bring me something out” (7).[15]

This short dialogue introduces the *motif* of the opposition between the civilization represented by the Parhams' house, and the wilderness embodied by the Indian, an opposition that can also be inscribed among the traditional themes developed by the western genre. Even if the killers of Billy and Boyd's parents remain unknown, the presence of this armed Indian so close to the house, and the questions he asks Billy about his family's possessions suggest the possibility that he, together with other outlaws, is actually the one who steals their horses and kills their parents during Billy's long absence from the house. According to this interpretation, the house becomes the domestic sphere physically violated by the dangerous external forces represented by the wilderness, a violation that can also be read in political terms.

As Kaplan explains, “[o]ne of the major contradictions of imperialist expansion is that while the US strove to nationalize and domesticate foreign territories and peoples, annexation threatened to incorporate non-white foreign subjects into the republic in a way that was perceived to undermine the nation as a domestic space” (17). In other words, the motivation given by the theory of Manifest Destiny to justify the conquest of new territories, and the consequent annexation of different ethnic groups, gave rise to a negative response from the American population, caused by the fear of the foreign. In the novel, the representation of the Parhams' house as a space violated by outer and foreign forces is in line with the American anxiety of the time toward the act of forced domestication promoted by the government, which caused another critical moment for the affirmation of American identity: once the house is opened to the foreign, the private sphere of domesticity becomes public, and American identity risks to be hybridized.

Billy's orphaned condition and disorientation are in line with this interpretation. After his wanderings with the she-wolf, he encounters a man who explains him that no direction can be found unless one knows his own past, that “he must cease his wanderings and make for himself some place in the world because to wander in this way could become for him a passion and by this passion he would become estranged from men and so ultimately from

15 Billy's will to bring the Indian to his house anticipates the act of domestication toward the she-wolf, which reveals his domineering attitude toward the wilderness.

himself" (134). Billy comes back to America, but what he finds is an empty house, similar to John Grady's:

> It was past midnight when he reached the house. There were no lights. He went to the barn to put the horse up and there were no horses in the barn and there was no dog and before he'd even traversed half the length of the barn bay he knew that something was bad wrong. ... The house was empty. He walked through all the rooms. Most of the furniture was gone. His own small iron bed stood alone in the room off the kitchen, bare save for the tick. In the closet a few wire hangers. ... He ... went into his parents' room and stood in the doorway looking at the empty bedstead, the few rags of clothes in the floor. (163-4)

The emptiness and absence of light, together with the lack of furniture, are perceived by Billy as disquieting omens because, as Tuan states, "enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well" (144). The lack of the elements that Billy used to relate to his idea of "home" makes the building a meaningless space for him. He cannot recognize it anymore: no objects means no memories and no past, as if a part of his life has been erased in one single moment.

In this description, the house becomes an objective correlative of Billy's intimate landscape, deprived of its past references by the inhuman mechanisms of civilization and progress, that have entered his house as a wild and destructive force. In this sense, the house becomes the symbol of an identity violated and hurt by the betrayal of the American government toward the world to which Billy belongs, a world from which all the values that built America derive, and that has been ultimately left behind. Billy lives this betrayal as a traumatic experience, and from this moment on his vision of the world changes irremediably, since he becomes aware of the Chimeras that constitute the American dream, and that he has been unable to find during his journey. This is the main reason why *The Crossing* is the most reflective and melancholic novel of the trilogy: here the fantasies described in *All the Pretty Horses* come to an end and the mythical vision of the West reaches the climax of its decline, bringing Billy to a mature wisdom that will lead him to the disenchanted visions described in *Cities of the Plain*.

If house and identity are strongly intertwined, then John Grady and Billy's identities seem irremediably incomplete. John Grady suffers both from the loss of his roots and from the expulsion from the ideal house represented by La Purísima, while Billy's childish idealism has been broken by the intrusion of foreign forces in the intimacy of his house. The presence of history in the Grady ranch is not a source of knowledge for the young cowboy, but an unbearable burden that he has internalized, and that makes him unable to unveil the myths on which it is founded. The Grady ranch, then, represents both what John Grady has lost, and what he has never had. On the other hand, in *The Crossing* the dwelling is destroyed by the changes inherent in the social order of the United States, that comprise foreignness and the violation of the private sphere of the house. In this case, the cause for the destruction or loss of the house is not the lack of inheritance, but a future that comes as an overwhelming storm, destroying the cowboy's world.

– Unrecognizable Mementos: The Presence of the “Uncanny” in *The Road*

In his analysis of *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, John Cant observes that the characters have a difficult relation with the land, that he defines a “spiritual wasteland” (*Cormac McCarthy* 195) from which they derive a sense of the *unheimlich*. Cant uses this Freudian term – translated in English with the word “uncanny” – to indicate homelessness and disorientation, two concepts that can be rightly used to describe the mood of the characters, but that are not sufficient to justify the use of a term whose meaning is far more complex than Cant suggests. A deeper examination of the issues implied in the notion of the uncanny will prove to be useful in the analysis of the dwellings described in *The Road*, where this concept emerges through the traditional literary *motif* of the “haunted house”.

In *The Uncanny* (1919), Sigmund Freud explains the characteristics of what he claims to be “a particular area of aesthetics”, that belongs to “the realm of the frightening [and] of what evokes fear and dread” (123). Through the study of a series of literary examples, but also of some clinical cases collected during his career as a psychologist, he analyzes the meaning of the term, starting from its etymological composition, that displays its

connections to two contrasting sets of ideas.[16] In German, *heimlich* indicates something familiar and comforting, but it can also refer to what has been kept hidden. This dichotomy confers to the *un-heimlich* a contradictory meaning, that Freud explains in these terms: "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar. ... [T]he term ... applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come to the open" (124-32).

The Road offers many descriptions of narrative spaces where the uncanny emerges and develops, because it tells the story of a world where the past appears under unrecognizable shapes, especially for the child, who is deeply frightened by the spaces where fragments from the past appear in the present: houses. Many of the ruined buildings that characterize the narrative world of the novel are abandoned houses that father and son are forced to enter in search of food, blankets, or other items that could be useful to protect them during their dangerous journey. The permanence inside these dwellings is always lived by the child as a dangerous necessity, while the father's attitude toward them is more complex and contradictory. He lingers in the rooms they explore, he wants to see more, to stay more, as if he were in search of a past that he remembers and love, to live it once again. It is significant that he recognizes the first dwelling they see as his own family house, full of childhood memories:

> It's the house where I grew up.
> The boy stood looking at it. The peeling wooden clapboards were largely gone from the lower walls for firewood leaving the studs and the insulation exposed. The rotted screening from the back porch lay on the concrete terrace. ... The rooms empty. In the small room off the diningroom there was a bare iron cot, a metal foldingtable. The same castiron coalgrate in the small fireplace. ... They walked through the diningroom where the firebrick in the hearth was as yellow as the day it was laid because his mother could not bear to see it blackened. The floor buckled from the rainwater. In the livingroom the bones of a small animal dismembered and placed in a pile. ... In the nights in their thousands to dream the dream of a child's imaginings, worlds rich or fearful such as

16 The root of the German word *unheimlich* – *heim* – means "house", and it can be found in another very powerful term – *heimat* – that does not have a precise equivalent word in English, but that can be translated with several terms, such as "house", "homeland" or "native land".

> might offer themselves but never the one to be. He pushed open the closet door half expecting to find his childhood things. Raw cold daylight fell through from the roof. Gray as his heart. (25-7)

The details that contribute to the characterization of this space evoke the shape of the traditional American house: a back porch, a terrace, the dining room with the fireplace, and a living room at the center of the building. The father walks in every room, observing the yellow firebrick that his mother used to keep clean, the same objects left in the same places, in silent admiration of the traces of the past that seem still recognizable to him. Everything is the same, and yet everything is different, and from this contradiction the uncanny emerges and brutally invests him, taking the shape of the "raw cold daylight".

Once again, the process of recognition of his house pivots crucially on certain objects. His memories are awakened not by the walls of the edifice, but by the elements that he connects to his past, like the fireplace – a highly symbolic object –, that reminds him of the "cold winter nights when the electricity was out" (26) and he and his sister used to do their homework by the fireplace, while a storm blustered outside their protected and warm domestic sphere. As sweet memories of the past arise through these objects, in the same way they become the means through which the uncanny appears as something coming from the past, that repeats itself in the present, but is different in some inexplicable way: "[i]n another set of experiences we have no difficulty in recognizing that it is only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny" (Freud 144).

The father starts to feel uncomfortable in the place that was once the most comfortable to him, and the most familiar, precisely because of the "unintended repetition" of situations that are out of place in the new post-apocalyptic world the two protagonists have come to know, and that therefore acquire a different meaning. The climax of his disorientation is reached when he enters his old bedroom, where he expects to find "his childhood things" in the closet, and finds nothing instead. The shock of this discovery awakens the character from the daydream that has protected him from the awareness of having lost not only his house, but also the positive memories that have been kept untouched and safe inside of him, against all odds. After having experienced the uncanny, the father introjects the emptiness of the house, and his heart becomes "gray" like the desolate land he can see outside the window.

Among the many dwellings explored by the two protagonists, another important house is the bad guys' hideout. The architectural structure of this particular building, which is the set of one of the climaxes of the novel, is interesting because it mixes up features that recall the old colonial houses typical of the southern regions of the United States, and others that pertain to the literary *motif* of the "haunted house".[17] As it often happens in the novel, the primary reason that compels the two protagonists to enter the house is hunger:

> They'd had no food and little sleep in five days and in this condition on the outskirts of a small town they came upon a once grand house sited on a rise above the road. ... The house was tall and stately with white doric columns across the front. A port cochere at the side. A gravel drive that curved up through a field of dead grass. The windows were oddly intact. (105)

In this first image, the "grand house" appears as a traditional southern mansion, with columns and a *porte cochère* indicating the wealth of the family that once lived there. However, there are two details that create a sinister atmosphere. First, the house is "on the outskirts" of the town, a position that isolates it and highlights its singularity in respect to the other dwellings. The second element that participates to the creation of a disquieting atmosphere can be found in the windows, which are "oddly intact": they seem to have endured time, earthquakes, fires and the ravages made by the groups of refugees in search of food. Their preservation, therefore, implies the presence of other people inside the edifice.

The description of the house continues for several pages, and becomes more and more detailed as the two protagonists advance toward it.[18] The front is of "homemade brick", the paint is peeling from the outside walls, while its interiors are covered with "Fine Morris paper" (106). In the hall, they come to a "fireplace with raw brick showing where the wooden mantel and surround had been pried away and burned" (107), and some

17 The fusion of southern aesthetics and elements connected to the horror genre is one of the main characteristics of the Southern Gothic.

18 This is another example of McCarthy's use of the descriptive technique of the tour. In this passage, the reader follows the two protagonists as if he/she were actually with them, sharing their fear and disquietude toward the house. In this way, the author creates a moment of great suspense.

mattresses are arranged in front of it. The more father and son explore the rooms, the more the child is terrified, as if he felt the negative atmosphere permeating the house, which is made even more sinister by the fact that someone is living there in conditions that negate any form of domesticity. A cord at the window is tied to a bell – an alarm of some kind –, and "smell of mold and excrement" (108) pervades the hallway, creating an oppressive space that can be compared to that of a prison.

These characteristics belong to a common theme in horror fiction, strictly connected to the uncanny: the haunted house. In line with the Southern Gothic genre he explores in his first novels, in *The Road* McCarthy uses one of the most powerful *leitmotifs* of the Gothic tradition, a perfect site for uncanny manifestations. Talking about the haunted house, Anthony Vidler states that "its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpen by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits" (17). In the novel, the domesticity evoked by the house is turned into a nightmare when the two protagonists find the horror inside its walls, and they understand that "alien spirits" – the bad guys – are menacing their lives. The intrusion of evil forces in the "safe, recognizable spaces of childhood ... as well as those spaces ... about which we always had ambivalent feelings" (Vidler 18) – like cellars, attics, or locked rooms – breaks the comforting surface of domesticity, turning the once family house into a highly claustrophobic and frightening space.

When the father sees "a door or hatch" in the floor of the room, locked with "a large padlock made of stacked steel plates" (108), he decides to open it, despite the child's tears, physically bringing out "something which ought to have remained hidden" (Vidler 14). What he sees is a scene comparable to the Conradian "horror": a group of captives, men and women of all ages, left in the dark, naked, waiting to be eaten by the bad guys. This frightening moment is significantly set in the cellar, a space that to Jung symbolizes the human unconscious, with all its mysteries and dark sides, and that plays an important role in the Gothic literary tradition.

To Bachelard, the cellar "is first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces" (18), a definition that explains the reason why it has been widely used in literature to create a fictional space where dangerous and frightening forces hide, waiting for their victims. In *The Road*, the cellar houses the darkest side of human consciousness, which has only been suggested in the novel, up until this moment of revelation, when the victims of the bad guys become physically visible, and their voices

asking for help audible: “[a] bearded face appeared blinking at the foot of the stairs. Please, he called. Please” (111). The positivity expressed by the child is not sufficient to brighten this space, since “[i]n the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls” (Bachelard 19). To illuminate the cellar, the father uses a lighter, an item that can be viewed as the modern version of a candle, but another fire is burning in the cellar: the one that symbolically burns in the child, the fire of civilization, hope, the fire that illuminates a new dawn for humanity.

It is significant that the captives imprisoned in the cellar are not freed by the father, who grabs the boy and “slam[s] down” (111) the cellar door before flying out of the house. I would argue that this action should not be viewed as a cruel decision from the father's part, but as the will to leave behind the human darkness represented by the cellar and protect his child. The father is first of all responsible for his son's survival, both physical and spiritual, thus the decision to leave the captives to their destiny and spare the child the view of such inhumanity can be read as an expression of this sense of responsibility. The brutalities of which mankind has proven capable belong to the past, a past that is repeating itself in the present, determining its end.[19]

The father becomes a party to this darkness by looking at it right in the eyes, and then by closing the door, aware of its existence and of having participated to its development. His connection to the past, which condemns him to die in the wasteland from which he is trying to distance his son, and his decision to close the door and leave this past behind, save the child from an experience that would have irremediably violated his purity. In this way, the light he is carrying can brighten his way toward a difficult, but possible new beginning, where domesticity finally appears not as a memory, nor as a dream, but as a reality, and where the voice of his father continues to protect him.

A Place Called Home: Hearth and Femininity

As I have already pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the term “home”

19 I am referring in particular to the cannibalism of the bad guys, a social taboo directly linked to the self-destruction of a species. The bad guys can be viewed as remains of the past world, symbolically pointing to the process of destruction activated by mankind toward nature, and consequently toward itself.

does not necessarily indicate a fixed space or a real building made of walls, doors and windows, but it refers more to the set of values that have been traditionally connected to the idea of domesticity. Home evokes protection, warmth and nurture, feelings that connect this space to the female and, more specifically, to motherhood. Despite Bachelard's use of the term "house", in his phenomenological analysis of this particular space he actually refers both to the symbolism related to the architectural structure of the dwelling and to the feelings that the abstract space of the home triggers in the human mind, and to which we refer to whenever we feel the need to create a domestic environment:

> And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams. (5-6)

In this passage, the reference to the "land of Motionless Childhood" highlights the strong relation that domesticity has with the first moments of human life, when the infant is totally dependent on the loving care of the mother. From this relationship "memories of protection" develop and create the foundations of dreams.

The cult of domesticity – also called the cult of "True Womanhood" – used the traditional, almost primordial connection between the space of the home and the figure of the female to justify the relegation of women in the private sphere of the dwelling, which can also be "a place of limitation and even oppression, a place where the self is heavily restricted for a number of reason" (Schröder 32). The "Angel of the Hearth", a source of nurture and protection, is the powerful image that most influenced the American society of the 18th and 19th century, making of the natural relation between motherhood and nurture a social and political imperative, that forced women to play the role of caretakers and housewives if they wanted to be considered as real women.

In the novels of the trilogy, and especially in *Cities of the Plain*, the role of the female

characters has been considered of secondary importance compared to that of the male characters[20] or stereotypical, in line with the way in which women are generally represented in the novels pertaining to the western genre.[21] Women such as Luisa in *All the Pretty Horses*, or Socorro in *Cities of the Plain*, perform the traditional role of caretakers (Nell Sullivan rightly observes that “Socorro” means “help” in Spanish, 231), and their presence becomes a silent part of the background, a helping hand that male characters use for a while, and then leave behind to explore the world outside the walls of their dwellings. But there are other women that do not fit in this role, revealing a stronger connection with what constitutes the other side of the complex and contradictory nature of femininity: the wilderness.

Linda Woodson's analysis of femininity in *All the Pretty Horses* focuses on the characters of Alejandra and Dueña Alfonsa, that represent two aspects of the *hacienda*, and that can be useful to examine the dichotomy between domesticity and wild nature. Alfonsa is clearly connected to the ranch, of which she becomes the veritable guardian, while Alejandra is one and the same with the Mexican *bolsón,* characterized by fertile valleys and water, two natural elements that have been symbolically associated with the female. The sexual encounter between John Grady and Alejandra takes place in the lake, at night, a detail that reinforces this connection, together with the girl's love for wild horses, and her almost magical relation with the land surrounding La Purísima. Similarly, Magdalena's femininity is constituted more of wild elements, than of domesticity, as her biblical name suggests. In particular, she suffers from epilepsy, a disease that the other Mexican prostitutes consider a sort of magical power, and that makes her physically uncontrollable.[22] Behind her frailty, she hides a wild force that cannot be limited by her pimp Eduardo, nor by John Grady, a force that goes beyond their own understanding.

Femininity, then, is connected both to domesticity and to the wild, two opposed

20 Nell Sullivan explains this concept in “Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Will Be Gone”, an essay where she examines the role of Alejandra and Magdalena in McCarthy's trilogy, stating that they are characters only potentially important, victims of a process of obviation of women. Despite this erasure, however, to Sullivan femininity emerges in unexpected ways in the novels (233).

21 See Tompkins (47-68).

22 “Es como una mujer diabólica, the woman said. Vete, called the criada. No es diabólica. Vete. But the housewhores were gathering in the doorway and they began to push through into the room all of them in facecream and hairpapers and dressed in their varied nightwear and they gathered clamoring about the bed and one pushed forward with a statue of the Virgin and raised it above the bed and another took one of the girl's hands and commenced to tie it to the bedpost with the sash from her robe. The girl's mouth was bloody and some of the whores came forward and dipped their handkerchiefs in the blood as if to wipe it away but they hid the handkerchiefs on their persons to take away with them and the girl's mouth continued to bleed” (*Cities of the Plain* 74).

concepts that communicate precisely through the figure of the female.[23] The women described in these novels are intermediaries between the land, which has been betrayed by a process of civilization that came through the blind human exploitation of natural resources, and the male protagonists, who have been betrayed by their homeland, whose progress has excluded them from its mechanisms, as well as from its maternal care. In the following section, I analyze the way in which domesticity is presented in *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain.* Billy Parham and John Grady's desires for domesticity clash with the impossibility to reach this ideal, that appears in the novels in the shapes of memories for Billy, and of dreams for John Grady.

– Memories of Home, Dreams of Domesticity

In the *incipit* of *The Crossing* the narrator provides some information about the history of the Parhams, which develops along the slow transformation of the wild lands of the West, through a very balanced and respectful relation between man and nature. Their small family, composed of father, mother and two sons, arrives in the Hidalgo county when this land is still a free space, rich and nurturing as a welcoming mother, but also dangerous as the Grim Reaper:

> When they came south of Grant County Boyd was not much more than a baby and the newly formed county they'd named Hidalgo was itself little older than the child. In the country they'd quit lay the bones of a sister and the bones of his maternal grand mother. The new country was rich and wild. You could ride clear to Mexico and not strike a crossfence. ... In the new house they slept in the room of the kitchen and he would lie awake at night and listen to his brother's breathing in the dark and he would whisper half aloud to him as he slept his plans for them and the life they would have. (1)

In this passage, there is an interesting connection between Boyd, the Hidalgo county where the Parhams decide to build their house, and the presence of two female members

23 On the idea of the American land as a feminine entity, see Martha Banta's chapter on the "Ideas of the Land" in *Failure and Success in America*, in particular 57-79.

of the family in the veins of mother earth: Billy and Boyd's sister and their grandmother. The freshness of the country is expressed through the image of baby Boyd – who was only an infant when the family moved to this wild part of the Southwest – and from the information about the absence of fences. In this first image, the Hidalgo county corresponds to Tuan's definition of space, a dimension where freedom and danger – as the mention of the two deaths reveal – coexist. Even if the deaths of the girl and of the grandmother could be interpreted as dark omens about the future of the Parham family, I argue that at this point of the narration, when no violation has been done on the country – represented as a spatial extension devoid of fences and wires –, femininity can be viewed as a positive presence that protects the family and allows Billy to make future plans for him and his brother.

In this moment of childhood, Billy can dream because he is protected by his home, which is "one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (Bachelard 6), and by a domesticity that extends beyond the walls of their dwelling, deep down in the earth. Protected by the presence of their sister and grandmother, and by the walls of the kitchen – the room that represents the very heart of the home –, Billy and Boyd are able to dream and imagine their future, which spreads directly from the positivity evoked by the connection that their family has with its heritage and with the wilderness that surrounds it.

In this description, that offers a perfect example of domesticity, the house enhances Billy's imagination, that at this point has a precise direction. The notions of protection and nurturing presented in this paragraph will constitute the ideal that Billy will look for throughout his travels in the borderlands, and that he will finally find in *Cities of the Plain*, in another house, with another family, demonstrating that the idea of home is not necessarily linked to an actual space. As Mary Douglas observes, "'home' is the private space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day ... [, but it] is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in the mental landscape than in actual geography" (11). Thanks to his childhood memories, Billy has been able to cherish the feelings of protection coming from domesticity, with which he has built up his "mental landscape".

It is precisely in his mental landscape that, in *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady develops his own ideal of domesticity, which he tries to realize in the small cabin at Bell Springs, an

abandoned place that he wants to fix for him and Magdalena. However, contrarily to Billy, John Grady cannot relate to real memories of domesticity, but only to the idealistic projections he has been making up during his childhood. The power of John Grady's dreams is so intense, that he cannot really see what is lying in front of him, when he goes to Bell Springs with Billy Parham for the first time:

> The floor was packed clay beaten and oiled and it was strewn with debris, old clothes and foodtins and curious small cones of mud that had formed from water percolating down through the mud roof and dripping through the latillas to stand about like the work of old-world termites. In the corner stood an iron bedstead with random empty beercans screwed into the bare springs. On the back wall a 1928 Clay Robinson and Co. calendar showing a cowboy on nightherd under a rising moon. (145)

Despite the evident state of ruination and abandonment of the cabin, John Grady sees a potential in it: he foresees his family with Magdalena, their children, and a job for the girl in the ranch where he works – as he says to Billy, "Mac says she can come down and work with Socorro whenever she wants" (180). He imagines a home, not a house, and tries his best to ameliorate the degraded state of the cabin to align it with his own projection: "[t]he adobe brick walls had been white-washed and the inside of the little house was bright and monastically austere. The clay floors were swept and slaked and he'd beaten them down with a homemade maul contrived from a fencepost with a section of board nailed to the bottom" (179). The "monastically austere" cabin, furnished with the essentials, is the perfect space where to imagine a home, that to John Grady is a stable and protected place where he can live with the young prostitute.

John Grady's projections are unreal and distant from reality: his blindness prevents him from looking at things as they really are, that is at Magdalena's problematic situation, at their lack of money, but also at the many limits that the cabin presents. Billy notices them, and tells him: "I may be wrong about this, ... but it's my feeling that once they get used to lights and running water it's kindly hard to wean em back off again" (146). Billy is referring to Magdalena, and to the possibility that she will not see what John Grady sees in the ruined cabin. The cowboy's dreams and his craving for domesticity are so intense that the only thing he is able to see is the "pretty picture" (146) he has in his mind, where all

that matters is “the late sun high on the bare ridgerock of the Jarillas” (145) and the old Clay Robinson and Co. calendar with the image of “a cowboy on nightherd under a rising moon”. This sentimental version of cowboy life reminds him of the “picturebook horses” (*All the Pretty Horses* 16) he saw in his grandfather's office when he was a boy, and reveals the power of this recollection that, according to Bachelard, “marks humanity in its depths”:

> Thought and experience are not the only things that sanctions human values. The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of autovalorization. It derives direct pleasure from its own being. Therefore, the places where we have *experienced daydreaming* reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relieved as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time. (6)

In John Grady's “pretty picture”, Magdalena is reduced to the stereotype of the “Angel of the Hearth”. John Grady imagines her as the caretaker of the home, adaptable to any life condition, and happy to do that for her family. In other words, he imagines her as a woman that voluntarily accepts the difficulties of life for the sake of her children and husband, a woman that sacrifices her needs to protect the values represented by the family. Magdalena is destined to leave the oppressive brothel, where her life is mastered by Eduardo, to enter another form of oppression, this time exercised by what should be for her a positive way out: domesticity. The home John Grady is preparing for her is a golden cage, where domesticity and the image that the young cowboy has of her become ideals impossible to reach, for they belong to the perfection of his dreams.

In *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, the homes where domesticity develops belong to the realm of memories and dreams, not to reality, and this happens because the protagonists' attitude in relation to the land and to femininity is one of domination. In *The Crossing*, Billy Parham loses his home after the sacrilegious killing of the she-wolf, a symbolic animal that represents both the female and the wilderness. Billy is not the direct killer of the wolf, but an accomplice to her death, since he is the one who captures her first

with the intention to kill her, and then to bring her back to the Mexican mountains, the natural habitat to which she belongs. Throughout their journey toward Mexico, Billy tries to tame her, and to know her mysteries, but it is precisely during this act of forced domestication that the she-wolf starts to die, despite the fact that Billy is sure of being her caretaker. Billy betrays the she-wolf as mankind has betrayed the land by oppressing and exploiting it, in an act of destruction that makes the restoration of the connection between man and nature impossible.

In *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady creates his own ideal of domesticity, but he does so by forcing Magdalena in his idealistic project, in a role that does not belong to her being. Once again, the couple composed by femininity and wilderness is not respected by the male character: John Grady, exactly like Billy Parham, thinks in a paternalistic way that he is Magdalena's caretaker, and that he can offer her the life that she wants. In both cases, the protagonists' lack of understanding and respect toward their female “captives” is the main cause for the advancement of their state of homelessness.

Billy and John Grady are excluded from the American nation from an economic, political and ontological perspective: their jobs are not productive, their bodies are unfit to be part of the US Army, and their vision of life is anachronistic. If John Grady continues to live in his dreams until the end, Billy finds a form of domesticity as an old man, even if his relation with the land has not been fully resolved. Billy knows that the past will not come back again, he is aware of the transformations that made his country a different dimension, still mysterious to him. For this reason, he decides to abandon the open range to live in a family that meets his idea of domesticity, where the female is comforting and nurturing, as the traditional archetype, and “knows” him, an act of recognition that suggests how the wound that Billy has inflicted to the feminine land is healing.

A more complete reconciliation of mankind with the land and the female happens in *The Road*, where father and son show a totally different attitude toward these elements, an attitude characterized by respect and hospitality, as if they were aware of their importance in the process of restoration of the social community.

– Reconciliation

In *The Road* McCarthy introduces the theme of hospitality, examined by Philip Snyder

in an essay in which he analyzes it through Derrida's considerations on this issue.[24] Snyder focuses on the several rituals connected to hospitality described in the novel, from the sharing of food, to the offering of help to the refugees that father and son encounter on the road, but most of all he analyzes the sense of responsibility that the two protagonists have toward each other. Hospitality comes with the openness toward the other, the will to offer gifts and protection, and it can be viewed as the basis on which domesticity is founded.

In the domestic space of the home, the members of the family are hospitable with each other, they share and are responsible for the good of the small community to which they belong. In a novel where every moral order or ethical value seems to have been erased and forgotten, the two protagonists constitute a family nucleus that follows the rules of hospitality; this seminal community is suggestive of the possibility of a restored domesticity in the novel, despite the absence of the most important female figure related to it: the mother.

As Snyder claims speaking about the mother's suicide, "when one loses the sense of responsibility to the Other, one also loses one's self" (76). The mother rejects responsibility, and consequently domesticity, when she decides to stop being part of her family and of the broken world where her husband and son continue to live. Her action nullifies the symbolic connection with the space of the home, making her unfit to offer the sense of nurture and protection necessary for the creation of a domestic environment. Snyder observes that her absence becomes an incessant presence in the novel, through the metaphorical image of the sun – "[b]y day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (*The Road* 32) –, but in this image the mother/sun is "banished", and far from the exclusive relationship between father and son. Femininity is not absent from *The Road*, but silent, as if asleep in the veins of the earth which, as the epilogue suggests, are still pulsating under its surface.

A surrogate mother, the arid land paradoxically becomes a source of domesticity for the two protagonists when they discover a bunker full of food and other useful tools where they decide to stay for a few days. Differently from the cellar of the grand house – a subterranean space connected to ideas of danger and death –, the bunker offers to father

24 Snyder relies on Derrida's "Hospitality" to analyze its presence in the novel. In this essay, Derrida speaks about hospitality in terms that recall Emmanuel Lévinas' considerations regarding the importance of the responsibility toward the Other, and the sacredness of this particular bond. Derrida agrees with Lévinas, but his examinations of the issue highlights other concepts that can be considered as its constituents: justice, the gift, the Messianic – that is, "the fate in the promise of the future" (Snyder 73) , the yes/yes – an ontological affirmation that comprehends the present and the future – , the invitation, and forgiveness.

and son nurture and protection, two features that symbolically connect it to the maternal womb:

> The bunker was walled with concrete block. A poured concrete floor laid over with kitchen tile. There were a couple of iron cots with bare springs, one against either wall, the mattress pads rolled up at the foot of them in army fashion. ... Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toiletpaper, paper plates. Plastic trashbags stuffed with blankets. He held his forehead in his hand. Oh my God, he said. He looked back at the boy. It's all right, he said. Come down. (138)

The bunker is a shelter from the rain, from the bad guys, from hunger and pain. The immersion in the land that entering this space involves is a physical immersion in the basic elements of motherhood. To Freud, the state of universal homelessness to which men are exposed derives from the abandonment of the maternal womb, that remains an unconscious memory toward which human consciousness yearns for throughout its life. In this scene, going down in the ground, a nurturing ground full of food and "stuffed with blankets", suggests a return to a primordial dimension where motherhood and nature are one and the same, a return to a prenatal state of unconsciousness where everything has yet to be written.

The destruction of the world has left an arid soil on the outside but, at the same time, the bunker is a symbol of the positive force that still lives inside of it. In this moment of desperation, McCarthy inserts an image of great hope, where mankind reconciles with the land through its respectful behavior toward it, represented by the questions that the child asks to his father: "[i]s it ok for us to take it?" (139), and then "[d]o you think we should thank the people?" (145), questions that demonstrate that he does take nothing for granted.

As we have seen, the child is described as the carrier of the fire, an element whose symbolic meaning is varied and complex, but that in this context can be safely interpreted as the fire of the domestic hearth or, as Joseph Rykwert states, "*the* origin of culture" (51). Through this comparison, the child becomes not only the ethical center of the novel, but

most of all the carrier of the element that may constitute another society, an element that recalls the same values on which the Puritan communities built the American nation in the remote past. To burn, the fire of domesticity needs a hearth, that the child finds in the embrace of another female figure that, contrarily to his mother, is willing to take on the responsibility of him.

After his father's death, a man finds the boy on the beach, and asks him to join his family, constituted by his woman and their two children. After having promised to the child that he will cover his father's corpse with a blanket – a promise that the man actually honors – he leads the child to his family, and the woman is the first who welcomes him:

> The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time. (286)

In this paragraph, that precedes the well-known epilogue about the maps and mazes hidden on the backs of the trouts, the female figure is totally positive and corresponds to the most welcoming image of motherhood. The embrace described in the first line symbolizes the union of the family, where the child brings the fire of domesticity, and the woman accepts to host it, in an act of affirmation that reveals her hospitable attitude. The woman is also the carrier of some sort of spirituality that the child does not fully comprehend, so he decides to "talk to his father", that remains his source of past wisdom and tradition, and that the woman recognizes as the "breath of God". In this final image, the past finds ways to branch out in the veins of a feminine earth, protected by the fire of culture, and offering a fertile place that the child can call home.

CONCLUSION

> Narratives are also there in landscapes –
> they intersect with sites, accumulate
> as layers of history, organize sequences
> and inhere in the materials and processes
> of the landscape. In various ways,
> stories "take place".
> (Matthew Potteiger, and Jamie Purinton)

This thesis enters in conversation with the studies concerning the role of space in McCarthy. The scope and heterogeneity of this rich research field demonstrate the importance of this topic in the author's poetics and articulate the different modalities in which his novels give voice to the mythology of the American frontier, as well as to the contrast between wilderness and civilization. These perspectives have favored a general approach to McCarthy's narrative spaces, highlighting in particular their mythical quality, but they have failed to offer a specific analysis of their functioning in the novels.

The original contribution offered by the present study lies in its different slant: if previous critical approaches have explored the overall meaning of the American space in McCarthy, I have here interrogated the spatial details that characterize it through accurate close readings that have helped to unveil the richness of meaning they enshrine. The present work, thus, revolves around a detailed examination of the narrative spaces characterizing the novels that belong to Cormac McCarthy's second literary production, with the aim of showing how the presence of specific recurring spatial elements amplifies in scope and magnifies in depth the themes and ethical stakes embedded in the plots. In particular, I have focused on the descriptions of ruins, maps, heterotopias and houses, that function as pivotal *loci* in which and through which the texts pose questions on the history of the United States and explore the problematic contours of the future of American identity.

The analysis of these spatial elements has deployed different theoretical approaches, whose heterogeneity has entered in resonance with the very complex nature of fictional

space. The variety of the perspectives used to frame and examine these elements has enriched their primary ontological meaning, making the in-depth examination of their thematic and symbolic contribution to the overall interpretation of the novels particularly fruitful.

This interdisciplinary approach is consistent with that presented by Jay Ellis, Barcley Owens and, partly, by Andrew Keller Estes, but differs from those of Georg Guillemin and Megan Riley McGilchrist, whose contributions have been extremely useful to determine the precise mythic context where McCarthy's spaces have developed. The spatial analyses I here advance aim at enriching these studies with specific critical insights in the constitutive elements of these narrative spaces, to contest or support the main concepts that have been traditionally related to this specific aspect of McCarthy's poetics.

The accurate examinations of the spatial elements previously mentioned have tried to address some questions that their very presence in the novels has originated, such as: how these elements are described in the novels; how the characters relate to them; how they influence the narrative structures of the novels; which kind of themes they concur in developing. The underlying interpretative thread ponders whether it is possible to interpret them as crucial parts of a unique discourse connecting the novels here under scrutiny.

The close readings of ruins, maps, heterotopias and houses are chapter specific and varied, but it is possible to summarize the results of these examinations by considering the chapters as parts of an organic whole. Despite the variety of themes these elements convey, and the different theoretical perspectives used to explore each spatial element, I have observed that their representations are generally couched in binary terms: ruins appear as hybrids between art and nature, order and chaos, organization and disorganization; maps are anthropocentric or biocentric and, as such, they are the products of conflicting visions of space. Heterotopias develop the contrast between illusion and reality, while the negative and private space of houses is opposed to the intimate domesticity conveyed by homes.

The explorations of the relations the characters have with these kaleidoscopic spatial elements have allowed me to identify a common trajectory, namely, the characters' will to contrast the profound sense of disorientation and “homelessness” affecting their condition. I have first analyzed the figure of Judge Holden and his contradictory behavior in respect to ruins, focusing on the way in which his attitude oscillates respectively

between the desire to own them, and the will to erase them from the memory of men. Then, I have interrogated the way in which the characters read textual maps – anthropocentric and biocentric – showing how their actions affect the reader's judgment on their actual knowledge of the fictional space that surrounds them. The analysis of heterotopias in the third chapter has highlighted the power of these spaces to entrap the characters in a maze of illusions, while in the fourth chapter I have demonstrated how they are both attracted and repulsed by houses. Each topic can be considered as part of an overall discourse on the characters' unstable condition – primarily due to their lack of references to their past – and on the necessity to recover their roots and the bond with a scarred and violated American land, so as to know their place in the world.

While analyzing the thematic amplification and construction these elements develop, I have also considered how they inform the narrative structures of the novels. The case of the ruin is particularly relevant: in *Blood Meridian*, the allegorical nature of this spatial element makes of it a mouthpiece of the principles of destruction and violence that govern American history while, in *The Road,* the state of fragmentation of ruins is mirrored in the syntactical structure of the novel. In the second chapter, I have analyzed the descriptive techniques of the “map” and the “tour”, to demonstrate how they refract the two contrasting visions of space represented by anthropocentric and biocentric maps. The analysis of heterotopias has developed from the examination of the frontier as a theme, and of the boundary as a narrative device aimed at creating contrasts that, according to Yuri Lotman, constitute the basis for narration. From Lotman's considerations on the functioning of the narrative boundary, I have conducted my analysis of this element as an originator of illusions, the same illusions represented by the heterotopias produced by the frontier.

These brief hints at the issues touched by the analysis of the spatial elements at the core of this study show the multi-faceted richness they present, and the ways in which they are profitably intertwined. A question posed by a specific element – the spatial and ideological uncertainty caused by the heterotopic maze, for instance – often finds the answer in another – in this case, the spatial and cultural knowledge provided by maps –, in an intricate web of references and echoes that constitutes the primary cohesive principle of the “novels of the desert”, and that makes their narrative spaces *loci* where the history of the American nation, caught in its most problematic and painful moments, reverberates.

The title of this research – "mapping fragments" – is precisely aimed at suggesting the main discourse that has emerged from the analyses I have here presented, together with its extremely polysemous nature. McCarthy's narrative spaces are represented in their state of fragmentation, ruination, in their many decaying mythical landscapes, where the past appears as a forgotten dimension that strives to be heard. These fragments – whose very nature determines their plurality of meanings – oppose the characters' attempt to organize them in order to end the sense of disorientation and loss they suffer from, and to understand the complex process of definition of the American character.

In light of these considerations, this research has hopefully demonstrated how McCarthy's narrative spaces do not function as mere spatial backgrounds to the plots, but contribute to the development of a plurality of perspectives and interpretative trajectories that can be followed to approach the novels. The close readings of the spatial elements that characterize these narrative spaces have been useful to unlock these perspectives, and to understand their invaluable contribution to the overall understanding of the texts as elements that interrogate the relation that America has with its own history, and ask the reader to meditate on the future directions of this country.

In this sense, the present study does not aim at presenting conclusive remarks, but opens up on further explorations in McCarthy's fertile narrative landscapes. Possible directions may explore: the significant thematic role exercised by ruins, or the potentials of a detailed analysis of the characters' "cognitive mapping", or the relation between the descriptive techniques used in the novels and the reader's consequent imagination of fictional spaces, to name the most obvious ones. Other interesting research topics could be the photographic quality of McCarthy's narrative spaces, so attuned with the photographs I have inserted in the thesis, or the sonic aspects of his fictional desert, whose silence "resounds" through language in a peculiar way, and finally the urban spaces he describes, that have generally been overlooked by critics.

These trajectories may offer profitable paths to unveil other resonances among McCarthy's novels, as well as between the author's literary production and the "blank spaces" offered by American literature that, like Ahab's map, provides vast seas and deserts where "additional courses" (Melville 280) can be traced, and where the reader is free to imagine and listen to other worlds and other landscapes in which "stories 'take place'" (Potteiger and Purinton 5).

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STUDENTE: Irene Nasi

MATRICOLA: 825740

DOTTORATO: Lingue, culture e società moderne e Scienze del linguaggio

CICLO: XXVII

TITOLO DELLA TESI: *Mapping Fragments: A Spatial Analysis of Cormac McCarthy's Novels of the Desert*

RIASSUNTO: Il progetto presenta un'analisi degli spazi narrativi descritti nei romanzi della seconda produzione di Cormac McCarthy: *Blood Meridian*, *The Border Trilogy*, *No Country for Old Men* e *The Road*. Obiettivo primario è quello di dimostrare come essi sviluppino un substrato tematico parallelo a quello costituito dalle trame, riguardante il rapporto dell'America con le sue radici, e i possibili sviluppi futuri dell'identità americana. La visione dei romanzi come parti di un unico nucleo narrativo permette di identificare in tali spazi alcuni elementi ricorrenti: le rovine, le mappe, le eterotopie e le case. Attraverso attenti close-readings basati sugli studi narratologici riguardanti lo spazio narrativo, e sulle discipline che si occupano della sua complessa natura – la cartografia, l'antropologia, le prospettive filosofiche e la geografia sociale, per citarne alcune – il presente studio tenta di illuminare i vari livelli di significato di questi elementi che, come palinsesti, racchiudono molteplici traiettorie interpretative.

STUDENTE: Irene Nasi

MATRICOLA: 825740

DOTTORATO: Lingue, culture e società moderne e Scienze del linguaggio

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ABSTRACT: This study presents an analysis of the narrative spaces described in the novels belonging to Cormac McCarthy's second literary production: *Blood Meridian*, *The Border Trilogy*, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*. Its aim is showing how they evoke a thematic discourse that develops along with the narrative surface constituted by the plots, and that interrogates the roots of America, and the possible future progression of American identity. Approaching the novels as parts of a unique narrative whole allows the identification of certain recurring elements characterizing their narrative spaces: ruins, maps, heterotopias and houses. Through accurate close-readings based on the main narratological studies on space, as well as on the critical contributions related to this complex entity coming from different fields such as cartography, anthropology, philosophy and social geography, to name a few, this research aims at highlighting the layers of meaning embedded in these narrative spaces that, like palimpsests, enshrine several interpretative trajectories.