

Looking Over the Country Again: Rusticity and the Urban/Rural Spatiality of *The Orchard Keeper* and *No Country for Old Men*

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From the outset of his career, readers have noticed the spatial and geographic qualities of Cormac McCarthy's work. Donald Noble's 1985 mention of McCarthy in *The History of Southern Literature* takes up the role of natural spaces in his novels through *Suttree*, explaining that the writer "has the capacity to describe nature with such a fresh and sharp eye that nature itself becomes a character in the fiction, not merely a setting or a two-dimensional backdrop" (580). In nearly all of his work, whether it is an indifferent natural world, a vast historical one, an imposing modern one, or an apocalyptically damned one, the landscapes and settings signify powerfully and are worthy of thorough examination.

One strategy that might help bring these textual characteristics into relief is to compare two McCarthy novels with distinct spatial sensibilities. Much has been made of the writer's shift from the Appalachian settings of the early books to his more recent concern with the border states of the American Southwest. For this reason, I intend to contrast McCarthy's first and perhaps most thoroughly Appalachian novel, 1965's *The Orchard Keeper*, with one of his most recent, 2005's *No Country for Old Men*, through the lens of urban/rural exchanges and spatial representations. More specifically, this paper explores the ways in which the fluid postmodern geographies of *No Country for Old Men* revise the more distinctly divided visions of urban and rural space that pervade *The Orchard Keeper*.

The suggestions of Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed in their 1997 essay "Recognizing Rusticity" set one frame for this approach. Here Ching and Creed limn out some characteristics of the representation and reception of rustic identities, arguing that, in spite of academia's heightened interest in marginalized voices, rustic figures remain on the periphery. This examination of the relationship between rural spaces and identity seeks to correct a blind spot in critical attention but it also acknowledges the characteristics of the urban and the rural, making it an ideal aid to theorizing the bracketed spaces of *The Orchard Keeper*, spaces both discrete in their construction and hybridized through the reciprocal dynamics of an urban/rural contact zone. In this way, it is clear that the novel can be understood as describing the emergence of a world where "asserting a positive rural identity courts devaluation in the larger society [because] rusticity remains at the bottom of the cultural heap" (Ching and Creed 30). The novel's most rusticated character, Uncle Ather, thus becomes its most identifiable container of the rural/traditional and the crucible of one of its central conflicts: the clash between the past and the present, between the maintenance of a traditional mountain lifestyle/community and the struggle to create a more profoundly standardized urban one amidst a milieu of active cultural exchange.

One way to situate the novel is to recognize it as narrative undergirded by the tensions of early twentieth-century urban-rural exchanges and the processes of modernization, especially as it links up to a variety of aesthetic modernism that is distinctly—and self-consciously—rustic. This is a move that also uncovers telling relationships between the center and the margin: as Jolene Hubbs suggests, varieties of “rural modernism critique the conflation of the urban and the modern, in part by revealing how the country is used as a foil against which urban modernity is defined” (461). Again, these impulses, and the novel’s divided spatial identities, adhere to principles typical of a certain antidevelopment strain of modernism—the same current that gave rise to the tracts of the Nashville Agrarians, the more conservative tendencies of high modernists like Eliot and Faulkner, and the humanist musings of Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*.

In its representations of space, then, *The Orchard Keeper* more closely follows a model that relies on the production of a separate, uniquely urban sensibility set in opposition to clearly drawn rurality, and examines what happens when these two impulses interact with one another. In some broader sense, *The Orchard Keeper* is a portrait of a world in flux: set in the moment when the T.V.A. programs of the New Deal were enacting foundational changes in rural mountain life, the novel traces the imposition of a modern world upon the conventions of traditional Appalachia, as well as the more subtle influence of Appalachian culture back upon the city itself. In other words, the book’s conflict stems from what Robert Brinkmeyer succinctly identifies as the tension between the “circle of society and the straight line of time” (15). We also discover that, in their own way, these rural spaces forge their own distinct versions of modernity.

The urban/rural dynamics of *No Country for Old Men*, on the other hand, are more obviously dialectical. Where the oppositional relationship between the Red Branch community and Knoxville is fundamental to *The Orchard Keeper*, the West Texas of the later book is, according to the spatial theories of scholars like Frederic Jameson, David Harvey, and Edward Soja, a site that confounds binary conceptualization of place, and hesitates to accept spaces as coded either exclusively urban or rural. Terrell County and the West Texas of *No Country for Old Men* are, despite the nominal traditionalism of rural systems, postmodern—we might even say “post-rural”—spaces that bear the influence of late capitalism and a confluence of distinct cultural forms: urban and rural, “American” and “Mexican,” postwar and drug-war.

If, as Harvey theorizes, “Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is” (*Condition of Postmodernity* 44), it is clear that this instability is what so thoroughly dismays Sheriff Bell, the text’s closest approximation to the rustic. And yet, in the text, this rustic figure performs a vastly different function than Uncle Ather did in *The Orchard Keeper*. My purpose here is to investigate the meanings of these differences. By bringing the two discrete representations of space and spatial identity posed by the novels into conversation with one another, we can better understand a further dimension of McCarthy’s geographical shift through exploring how each text treats subjects like

consumerism, technologies, authenticity and landscape, and the significance of the rustic.

It is the characters of *The Orchard Keeper* who, in Ching and Creed's words, most "concretely live the distinction between the country and the city" (4-5). There is a boundary dividing Knoxville from Red Branch—a community located on "the west wall of the mountain" (*Orchard Keeper* 11)—and the characters who venture to cross it do so purposefully. These are two differently ordered landscapes: the city, in the account of John Wesley's trip with the dead chickenhawk, is described as being filled with "towering columns of brick adorned with fantastic motley" and "bare outlandish buildings" gilded in "glass and tile" (81); the physical environment surrounding Red Branch, on the other hand, is a space marked by "cynical fecundity," a rich amalgam of plant and animal life, and, in contrast to Knoxville's lean towards industrial progress, a "primordial quality" (11). The distance between Red Branch and Knoxville is manifest in other ways as well. Its watering hole the Green Fly Inn, for example, stays open on Sundays, attracting urban "crowds" drawn by its position "beyond the dominion of laws either civic or spiritual" (16). The relationship is thus antipathetic: while Knoxville is emerging as a beacon of constructed order and institutional standards, Red Branch signifies a transgression of those standards, a separate sense of tradition, history, and natural order. And, keeping with a familiar tenet of the urban-rural dynamic, it also functions as an urban dweller's escape destination.

The difference in a postmodern society, according to Soja, is a "negation of nodality, a submergence of the power of central places, perhaps even a Derridean deconstruction of all differences between the 'central' and the 'marginal'" (234). Where *The Orchard Keeper*'s Red Branch and its outliers are represented as the edges of an increasingly centralized region, a more pervasive ethos and set of problems infiltrates the entire landscape represented in *No Country for Old Men*. From the high rises of downtown Houston to the schoolhouses of West Texas, Sheriff Bell notices the same invasive troubles: "Rape, arson, murder. Drugs. Suicide" (196). In this way, the borderlands of *No Country for Old Men* are provocatively decentered spaces that conform to Foucault's preference for "flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems" (viii). Indeed, the fluidity of capital and violence highlighted in the text tellingly parallels Deleuze and Guattari's description of the effects of "decoded flows": "The more decoded flows enter into a central axiomatic, the more they tend to escape to the periphery, to present problems that the axiomatic is incapable of resolving or controlling" (468), a startling summation of Bell's conflict. Textual representations of the city and the country, and even Mexico and the United States, are thus more flexible, permeable constructs, a stark contrast to the binary systems of *The Orchard Keeper*.

Rustic versus Postmodern Consumerism

This contrast is evident in the different attitudes towards consumerism displayed in the two texts. While John Welsey Rattner and his mother live in a "hand-squared" cabin house on a plot of land that "did not exist in the county courthouse records" and rely on their garden for food (63), Moss and his wife

inhabit a prefabricated trailer made of “[c]heap plastic pipe and plywood” on a space evocatively branded the Desert Aire (19-20). The Rattner home is the product of individual labor and exists tenuously beyond the reach of tax codes but, whether at a motel or the trailer park, Moss must always pay for a space to spend the night—a brash, but familiar, postmodern commodification of the “shelter” function. Similarly, the particular brand of consumption associated with Moss’s living quarters reveals something of his financial station. As readers familiar with the varieties of postmodern consumption, we can recognize the “strange significations of life-style and social status etched into a landscape of unrelieved consumerism” (*Urban Experience* 43). In short, we understand that the family fortunes could use an infusion of cash.

Especially when compared to *The Orchard Keeper*, then, the details in *No Country for Old Men* signal a postmodern world where, in Harvey’s terms, “money and commodities are themselves the primary bearers of cultural codes.” Harvey further explains, “[s]ince money and commodities are entirely bound up with the circulation of capital, it follows that cultural forms are firmly rooted in the daily circulation process of capital” (*Urban Experience* 299). Although the transaction takes place outside the bounds of approved, legal society, when Moss disrupts the process by intervening between commodity (“Mexican black tar”) and payment (2.4 million dollars), the logic of an aggressive capitalist exchange demands the restoration of the circuit regardless of the cost (97). Anton Chigurh obviously embodies this system’s ruthlessness but so does the entire assemblage of murderous characters that follow the money’s trail. Thus, the violence and power of this errant consumerism is also exposed as fundamentally linked to the esteemed institutions of the broader society: Chigurh’s musings about who might be tracking the lost money include “some agent of the Maticumbe Petroleum Group” (171), collapsing boundaries between a legitimate business transaction and an exploitive, illegal one. Tracing out the agents of the broken drug deal, the narrative focus leads to an office on the “seventeenth floor with a view over the skyline of Houston” (139). In addition to a possible overlap between these two projects, there is also the suggestion that both forms of business—the oil trade and illegal drug trafficking—are differently directed expressions of the same violent impulse.

We also encounter similarly exploitive practices in communities with no kind of corporate connection. For example, the three “young boys” whom Moss meets halfway across the bridge to Mexico form a loose coalition that bears a striking similarity to the postmodern capitalistic collective Harvey describes in *The Urban Experience*:

The collective entrepreneur is fashioned out of an uneasy and unstable coalition of individuals, factions, and classes, each of which internalizes a tension between seeking advantage by breaking from or even undermining the coalition and remaining solidary and so seeking to secure gains already made. The fragments are, in any case, always caught between postures of conflict and accommodation. (161-62)

The boys' various reactions and demands—expressions of their contradicting codes of ethics—in the face of Moss's obvious disability reveal their position as somewhere between "conflict and accommodation": "Let's go Brian. He's drunk." "Let's see the money." "Let's go, Brian." "Let me have the money" (116-117). The tension between these voices exposes the coalition as a fundamentally "uneasy and unstable" one, but one ultimately bound by the prospect of a commercial exchange.

Although we briefly encounter the Green Fly Inn, the courthouse where the bodies of hawks are sold for a bounty, the Knoxville market, and quick glances at a few odd stores and bars, the central site of consumer traffic in *The Orchard Keeper* is Mr. Eller's store. In contrast to the highly specialized, aggressively commercial retail spaces pictured in 1980 Texas, Eller's store is as much a place for communion as it is for commerce. Old men shuffle around the store, roaches troll dirty glass cases that house "handkerchiefs, socks, cigars" and sometimes invade the "meat case" (115). However, aside from selling gas and a pair of socks to Sydler, we rarely see Eller's store used for commercial transaction—its most visible use is as a meeting place. It thus works as a fixture of the landscape, and one that operates according to a separate set of criteria than *No Country for Old Men*'s retail sites.

Similarly, the Red Branch community of *The Orchard Keeper* presents a world of economic exchanges that are often at odds with the standardized practices suggested by official Knoxville: Eller keeps a credit ledger that is only as good as his customers' word while the clerk at the Knoxville hardware store makes John Wesley "sign a pledge" promising to fulfill the terms of a discount price deal (4), and Sydler makes his living from an untaxed black market, repaying John Wesley for his help with a puppy. Indeed, John Wesley, perhaps having absorbed some of Uncle Ather's deep regard for nature's supreme autonomy, comes to see blasphemy in the trading of the hawk for cash and returns to the courthouse to "trade back" the money he received for the bird's corpse (232). But this gesture, an action that reaches back beyond the modern moment represented by the courthouse, is another expression of a rustic economy on the cusp of obsolescence—the hawk, he learns, has been consumed by an incinerator; it cannot be reclaimed. And in contrast to the uncannily mobile commodities and cash of *No Country for Old Men*, capital does not flow so easily in this proto-modern world. John Wesley recognizes such failure as a further manifestation of swelling institutional power, a force that has disrupted the traditional order of things in his rural, Red Branch world. The anonymous, foreboding pronoun "they" marks the system: "They burn em? . . . And thow people in jail and beat up on em. . . . And old men in the crazy house" (233). John Wesley defiantly returns the dollar, to the dismay of the courthouse secretary, asserting the supremacy of the natural world and its economy by declaring, "I made a mistake, it wadn't for sale" (233).

In contrast to these economies, the characters in *No Country for Old Men* make aggressive use of the wide variety of retail spaces their landscape provides, wandering from store to store throughout the novel. More than any other McCarthy text, this narrative is deeply interested in branded commodities and spaces—Norma Jean works at and Moss visits a Wal-Mart (89), and he buys a pair of Wrangler jeans at a store that carries "Tony Lama, Justin,

Nocona” products but not, to Moss’s disappointment, “Larry Mahans” (190). Also, in contrast with *The Orchard Keeper*’s simply described “shotgun” (59), the firearms in *No Country for Old Men* are most often identified by their brand names: “Uzi” (122), “H&K” (12), a “nine millimeter Glock” (61), a “Winchester pump gun” (87), a “Tec-9” (209). One way to account for the difference in the economies of these two texts is Jameson’s belief that there has been a “decisive shift and displacement from the conceptuality of production to that of distribution and consumption” (266). The published McCarthy text with a setting closest to our contemporary moment, the novel reflects a world everywhere coded by consumerism and commercial exchange.

Appropriately then, the figures in *No Country for Old Men* are skilled consumers, and consequently comfortable hotwiring commodities to match their needs. Throughout the text, we encounter these kinds of modified objects with hybrid applications: a “trash compactor” is used to store a dead baby (39), Chigurh carries a pistol with a silencer “made out of brass mapp-gas burners fitted into a hairspray can . . . stuffed with fiberglass roofing insulation” (99), “half quart masonjars” house live hand grenades (217), Moss uses a set of tent poles to stash the drug money, and—most prominently—the technological violence inherent to a pneumatic slaughterhouse “stungun” is harnessed so that it becomes an object capable of enacting horrifically efficient brutality on humans (6). In an environment where, as Certeau posits, consumer goods have become an invisible feature of the postmodern network, hijacking these products to execute transgressive activities is a bold violation—it runs contrary to the behavior of the “pure receiver” (31), and serves as an attempt to, using the theorist’s metaphor, assert a sense of individuality by writing upon the TV set.¹ “Anything can be an instrument” (57), Chigurh evocatively explains of his coin toss’s meaning. Although we get hints of this phenomenon in *The Orchard Keeper*—Kenneth Rattner, for example, tried to assault Sydler with a tire jack—it exerts a greater presence in the more thoroughly commercialized, postmodern world of *No Country for Old Men*.

Technologies

While some of what makes Sydler feel like such an outlaw character in *The Orchard Keeper* is his transgressive use of the car’s technology to run bootleg liquor, the characters realistically have fewer opportunities to adapt and interact with consumer products. Still, automobiles signify forcefully throughout the text, with Sydler and several of the other characters using them to tease the edges of emergent modernity. A car, for instance, is a ripe signal of economic and social rank, as when Rattner seeks to validate himself to the storekeeper in the book’s opening scene by lying, “Why I got me a new Ford. Brand-new thirty-four, V-eight motor. Scare you jest to set in it . . .” (9). The possession of an automobile is not only a comment on one’s economic standing here but, in Rattner’s description, it also has a kind of martial appeal as an object that inspires fear as well as admiration.

Sydler’s cars, however, compellingly fulfill Bakhtin’s requirements for a textual chronotope. Bakhtin described the chronotope as a “unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial

categories represented,” and Sydler’s cars clearly trace the contours of the time—post-Prohibition America—and place—the Appalachian mountain regions surrounding Knoxville, Tennessee—represented in the novel. As such, the cars, their routes, and malfunctions act as an “optic” that reveals the “forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (462). Although *The Orchard Keeper* is largely a narrative about the separations between rural and urban cultures, Sydler’s car and his frequent trips from Red Mountain into Knoxville make him a more slippery figure. The technology of the car allows Sydler to shuttle between two distinct cultures, and he effectively becomes a vessel of exchange between the aged practices of mountain culture and the burgeoning modernity of the metropolis.

Not only does Sydler smuggle unbonded whiskey into the city, he also brings rural farmboys—“five, six, as many as eight of them, all bound for the show” (16). In so doing, Sydler transports the whiskey of the mountains to the city, and he also assures that country boys “with no more farm than some wizened tomato plants and a brace of ravenous hogs” are exposed to the amenities of Knoxville, leaving them to roam the streets “like a flock of curious birds” (16)—an act of peculiar cross-pollination. Sydler’s movements thus trouble a strict binary representation of urban/rural and center/periphery, proving that even in a culture that understands itself as deeply divided there are significant—and sometimes subtle—points of contact and exchange. These roads, we can assume, have made possible the wider presence of “*brown country faces*” and “*backlanders trafficking in the wares of the earth*” that John Wesley witnesses on the far side of Market Square (82), an example of the ways in which the margins can engage and modulate the forces at the center. Correspondingly, as Jay Ellis posits, the “countryside [of Red Branch] . . . is vertiginous” (52); both the land and its inhabitants seem to sway towards and then away from Knoxville.

The car’s cultural significance is also apparent in its relation to Uncle Ather. Early in the text, when Sydler and his friend June use the car to seduce a pair of young women, Ather sees the car’s movements and hears “the slam of the car door” from the porch of his mountain home (20). His space, however, is entirely peripheral to the car’s mobility. Unlike Sydler, who relies on the movement and potential for wide-reaching interaction that the car provides, Uncle Ather’s sensibilities are more static, more tied to his parcel of land—he moves on foot, with measured calculation. Thus, as the car barrels down the mountain pass, it “howl[s] brokenly” like an industrial incarnation of the panthers who stalk the region, disturbing the hollow with its “wail of rubber” (91-92). When Uncle Ather does have to move, he does so by dragging a sled across a mountain pass, avoiding any routes that would place him in contact with urban traffic. The irony is clear, then, when Uncle Ather is finally taken in by the law in an automobile that he uncomfortably “fumble[s]” into (203). For Ather, the car is an intrusion, and its preternatural mobility makes it a sign of how deeply the movement of modern culture can penetrate the sanctity of his rural mountain world.

In the economy of Marion Sydler, the car means the possibility of progress, transgression, and money. And yet even for Sydler, who brashly celebrates his first auto’s speed and control, technology eventually fails: he is

apprehended by the law because a leaky gas pump has filled his car with diluted fuel, a random misfire of technological progress and one that lands him in jail. *The Orchard Keeper*, then, suggests an uneasy alliance between people and technology by acknowledging the connection between the failures of humans and their machines, reflecting a suspicion of the machine that reverberates throughout certain corners of modernism.

In a loose parallel, then, it is significant that the only force that can finally impede Chiruh is a vehicle that fails to observe the logic and rules of the road—a “ten year old Buick that had run a stopsign” (260). This is, we recognize, a more fundamental human mistake with effects exacerbated by the involvement of the machine. Where technical failure was at the source of Sydlar’s defeat, this incident occurs because someone has randomly ignored the ordering principles of postmodern road travel—a delicious irony given Chigurh’s pose as arbiter of human fatefulness in the text. This scene reveals a chaos that traffic lights cannot organize and Chigurh cannot anticipate.

On the balance though, when tested against the earlier novel, cars have some fundamentally different meanings in *No Country for Old Men*. Compared to 1930s Knoxville, they are ubiquitous, and used as a means of personal identification; in the wake of Chigurh’s early killings and the broken drug deal, for example, Bell and Wendell reconstruct the scene of the crime by fastening automobiles to their human owners. “I know that truck. . . . The boy’s name is Moss” (71), Bell explains and Wendell nods in agreement. *The Orchard Keeper*’s nascent cultural codes, which acknowledged the meanings associated with the car one is able to drive, have fully blossomed in *No Country for Old Men*. Although Sydlar’s Plymouth and his Ford are identified by brand name proper nouns, in *No Country for Old Men* we encounter a whole series of specific makes and models—a “Dodge Ramcharger” (58), a “Bronco” (60), a “’77 Ford” (68), a “Barracuda” (236), a “1978 Ford pickup with four-wheel drive and a 460 engine” (210), another sign of the saturating influence of postmodern consumerism.

Although this may be a function of the difference in landscape, the “all-terrain tires” and four-wheel drive encountered in the novel provide automobiles with a kind of ultimate mobility (25). The terrain—both on the roads and off—is littered with cars and trucks. And yet the fast car is no longer the apex of technology that it was in *The Orchard Keeper*. Where the fastest/newest car grants autonomy and freedom in the earlier text, there is no such guarantee in *No Country for Old Men*. Provocatively, Sydlar is constantly speeding and only susceptible to capture when he finally slows down. Moss studiously avoids speed; driving back to Sanderson with the satchel of money, “he kept to the speed limit every mile of the way” (19), and he forcefully warns his hitchhiking companion against speeding in the novel’s final third. “You go over the speed limit and I’ll set your ass out by the side of the road” (211), he tells the girl. Moss understands that, in his world, you cannot outrun either the law or the drug runners; the best one can hope to do is to fly under the radar somehow. In the postmodern moment, physical mobility can never hope to compete with the celerity of communication technology. No matter how fast Moss travels, the radio and telephone signals always travel faster.

Technology similarly plays a crucial role in helping characters to locate themselves—and one another—within the landscape of *No Country for Old Men*. It is by use of a beeping transponder, a device tied to a broader, global web of communication by electro-magnetic signal, that the money is finally tracked. Tellingly, the transponder's bleep does not respond differently to distinctions of urban and rural; it is the perfect guide for a postmodern landscape marked more by placelessness than made navigable by natural landmarks. These are intersections between time, space, and landscape marked by profound confusion, especially for the text's rustic Bell. In contrast to Chigurh, who displays a strange ability to anticipate the movements of the money-filled satchel, Bell is consistently uncoordinated with his desired destinations in both place and time. This resonates loudly against *The Orchard Keeper*'s characters' acute locatedness and sense of direction. When Ather, for example, takes to the mountains escaping the Sheriff and his men, he follows a set of tracks "down out of the darkening fields where night fell on the high backs" (189), guiding himself and relying on the local people he encounters for directions to the Harrykin. Although Ather's steps are noticeably out of rhythm with the modern landscape, his is not a problem of topographical mastery.

Rural Authenticity and Natural Presence

The question of authenticity plagues the characters of *No Country for Old Men*. Moss's performance of the "big time desperado" is tragically frustrated (224), and the possibility that he is not the real war hero his decorations would suggest haunts Bell. When commenting on his Aunt Carolyn's letters to Harold, the sheriff observes, "*You could tell they were just country people*" (283). The authenticity implied in the classification "just country people" is a category that, ruefully, Bell himself can no longer access. Indeed, Bell is bewildered to encounter a world so thoroughly colored by forces that seem foreign to his experience and the traditions of his community—"These old people I talk to, if you could of told em that there would be people on the streets of our Texas towns with green hair and bones in their noses speaking a language they couldn't even understand, well, they just flat out wouldn't of believed you" (295). (Whether his Texas community was ever actually so uniformly peopled is a compelling question as well, but not one that Bell seems to worry much about.)

In *The Orchard Keeper*, Sydler's understanding of authenticity seems to revolve around one's ability to sustain the solidarity of his/her community. And thus the character most lacking is local constable Jefferson Gifford, as Sydler's interior monologue reveals: "*he's a traitor . . . and maybe a man steals from greed or murders in anger but he sells his own neighbors out for money and it's few lie that deep in the pit, that far beyond the pale*" (215). Gifford's betrayal is his willingness to trade the threatened values of his own community—values identified by David Paul Ragan as "religion, community relationships, agrarian connections to the earth" (15)—for financial comfort and a measure of authority. So while Uncle Ather, with his arcane philosophies and deep connections to the land, is the figure most fully invested in

Appalachian folkways, there is an additional layer of communitarian authenticity present throughout the text as well.

Authenticity is a far more complicated notion in the postmodern spaces of *No Country for Old Men*. For Bell, there is an impulse that equates anachronism with a truer sense of being in the world. The more authentic sheriffs of another age (and even his earlier career), Bell explains, could handle disruptions with a fistfight and never left a crime unsolved. This is an impossible standard, particularly at a time when Bell's jurisdiction includes a swath of country that overlaps a major drug route, and yet it weighs heavily on the sheriff's conscience, forcing him to question his own personal sense of authenticity. This is one possible explanation for Bell's constant hearkening back to the practices and philosophies of those who came before—the communities that loom largest for Bell, in comparison with those of *The Orchard Keeper*, are inaccessible, imagined ones. He feels the incessant pull of a connection back to his grandfather, his uncle and the other figures that populate his vision of the past. And yet, much like John Wesley Rattner, Bell's closest patriarchal relationship, the link between father and son, is fraught with misdirection and absence, resulting in a lineage burdened by uncertainty.

Although *No Country for Old Men* is full of technology, Sheriff Bell holds deep-rooted suspicions about its place in his profession: "*I don't know that law enforcement benefits all that much from new technology*" (62). And although he prefers old .44-40 Colts, Winchester 97s, and an outmoded cruiser with an obsolete 454 engine, even he can't avoid the qualities of simulacra that characterize his postmodern culture. Recounting the time his cruiser was shot up in a car chase, Bell describes the car: "It was shot just full of holes. Looked like the Bonnie and Clyde car" (39-40). Although he never makes this clear, it's unlikely that Bell would have ever seen the actual "Bonnie and Clyde car" and thus the stark visual rendering of the object he conjures has likely been provided him by Arthur Penn's 1967 film *Bonnie and Clyde* and its famous final scene, where both the criminals' bodies and their vehicle are riddled with bullets. Placing this image amongst his ruminations on a "real" event, Bell locates himself within a liminal, postmodern space, constructing a version of personal history that straddles authenticity and simulacrum. It is, in Jameson's words, a "new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (25). If, as Jameson argues, film is "the dominant art form of the twentieth century" (68), then it follows that Bell's understanding of his own experiences and his representations of those experiences would be processed and refracted through a repository of media images.

Under Ching and Creed's rubric, we might describe the characters of *No Country for Old Men* as engaging in a dialectical exchange whereby "the inhabitants of areas where town and country seem nearly indistinguishable may nevertheless elaborate a difference through extensive cultural discourse" (2-3). This cultural discourse often requires characters to assert their individuality according to a specific set of codes. As Joyce Carol Oates pointed out about the connection between authenticity and a certain kind of post-western consumerism in the *No Country for Old Men*, "Men are judged by their

pro prowess with firearms but also by the boots they choose to wear: ‘Nocona’ for Moss; ‘expensive Lucchese crocodile’ for a self-described hit man named Wells in the hire of a wealthy Houston businessman/drug smuggler; ostrich-skin boots for the psychopath Anton Chigurh” (44). In some sense, then, Bell isn’t the only figure in the novel to make a connection between the mythic tropes of the West and personal authenticity, but the text’s other characters prefer their mythology commodified and branded. Although the lines that once separated urbanity and rurality are unarguably blurred, these men still adhere to the codes of a delicately stylized West in order to “elaborate a difference” and to construct their versions of masculinity, a problem that never troubles the characters of *The Orchard Keeper* in quite the same way.

Jameson defined postmodernism as “what you get when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good” (ix). It may not hold that *No Country for Old Men* ever allows nature to disappear entirely, but the presence of nature there is drastically different from *The Orchard Keeper*. The intense focus on the minutiae of natural life everywhere present in the earlier novel is traded for flatter, more clinical descriptions. If the natural world was something to be lived amidst—and occasionally struggled against—in *The Orchard Keeper*, it is more often gazed at in *No Country for Old Men*, as both Moss and Bell are pictured studying the landscape with careful scrutiny, often assisted by tools like the rifle scope or binoculars. The physical landscape itself responds differently to these two different sets of characters and temporal worlds, and never has the same kind of sovereignty that it had in *The Orchard Keeper*.

For example, in the West Texas of 1980, the bloody aftermath of a broken international drug deal interrupts Moss’s afternoon of isolated antelope hunting near the Texas-Mexico border. According to the natural vision developed in *The Orchard Keeper*, an exploitive and violent capitalist venture has compromised this desert landscape. But, paradoxically, it also provides Moss with what he understands to be the opportunity of a lifetime. “You live to be a hundred . . . and there won’t be another day like this,” he confesses (20). Bell’s tale of a drug-running DC-4 aircraft discovered in the middle of the desert makes a similar commentary. Even the most isolated wilderness bears the traces of a malevolent drug trade and, while the absurdity of a stranded aircraft on a desert plane is not lost on Bell, it is nevertheless a postmodern reality and a violation of natural logic. Much as the obtrusive metal tank invaded Athert’s pastoral orchard, this same proliferation of manufactured objects through and amongst the landscape is further confirmation that what was latent in the tensions of *The Orchard Keeper* has become endemic in *No Country for Old Men*.

This concern with controlled substances also provides an interesting point of contrast between the two texts. In *The Orchard Keeper*, Sydlar’s involvement in the bootlegging business makes him an outlaw folk hero and the text’s clearest villain is a law enforcement agent; in *No Country for Old Men*, the drug trade ingloriously stains most everything it touches. Even Moss, whose inadvertent connection to the business ostensibly offers a chance at outlaw glamour and economic opportunity, meets an ignominious end because of it. Says Bell, “If you were Satan and you were settin around tryin to think up something that would just bring the human race to its knees what you would

probably come up with is narcotics" (218). And judging by the body count that follows the drugs and drug money, it's hard to argue. How might we account for this difference? For one, the stakes in the drug deal are much higher: there is simply greater capital value attached to the product, value enmeshed in a larger global network that stretches at least into Mexico and probably farther. Trading in drugs and cash is an exchange in the highly developed systems of late capitalism. Appropriately, then, the text's use of electronic technologies like the transponder, the ATM machine, and the mobile phone to eliminate the distances of space and time mirrors Manuel Castells' theory about "space of flows" in global capital exchange (140).²

In the aftermath of the broken drug deal, someone must account for every variable. Sydler, on the other hand, loses 60 gallons of liquor in a car wreck and doesn't seem to answer to anyone. The parameters of his economy are localized in a tighter, more lateral exchange—east to west, from Red Mountain to Knoxville. Although he admits that his occupation pays better than most in his community, Sydler and his inventory never attract the concentration of money and violence associated with the drug deal of *No Country for Old Men*. Where the traffic of unbonded liquor in the years after prohibition was a form of protest against the centralized federal tax system in *The Orchard Keeper*, the drugs of the later text carry a more dangerous way stigma. They represent a sophisticated abuse of human appetites and wield an influence that sways the streets, the schoolhouses, and the spheres of law enforcement.

Reconstructing Rusticity

Interestingly enough then, in a reversal from *The Orchard Keeper*, the central law enforcement agent is *No Country for Old Men*'s most sympathetic character. He is, in comparison to Uncle Ather, also the closest thing to an American rustic that the text provides. Yet they stand in diametrically opposite relations to the law. Where the figures in *The Orchard Keeper* sought to stave off the organization and modernity linked to the New Deal in favor of an organic laissez-faire system, Sheriff Bell feels the prescient need to reimpose an order that has been lost somewhere. And a kind of paternalistic regard for humanity and the human body draws both characters together. Ather, for one, keeps a 7-year vigil over the crypt of Kenneth Rattner, and Sheriff Bell uses his authority to chide the driver transporting the eight dead bodies in the back of a flatbed truck: "That's a damned outrage" (169).

Cultural forces, however, force these rustics to come to terms with their relative "idiocy," to use Marx's language, in terms of wider "socialization and spatialization . . . [and] the degree of adherence/separation in the collective social order" (Soja 234-35). Both Bell and Ather have fallen out of sync with the "collective social order," and yet this marginal status offers each character an odd mixture of ungainly wisdom and sympathetic folly. It may be impossible to say whether this is a method of critiquing the texts' dominant culture or a comment on its superseded figures but it does, regardless, provide an opportunity to juxtapose the worldviews of the texts' rustics with the prevailing ethos of their respective time(s).

And tellingly, in the midst of shifting landscapes, both Uncle Ather and Bell entertain similar conceptions of an ideal lifestyle. Uncle Ather longs to move deep into the mountains: "I would find me a Clearwater branch and build me a log house with a fireplace. And my bees would make black mountain honey. And I wouldn't care for no man" (55). As readers, we come to understand how unfeasible this is in a culture that, with the developments of expansive New Deal programs and highway construction in full swing, is increasingly making the kind of self-reliance he desires—a "cranky independence" Orville Prescott called it in his 1965 review ("Still Another Disciple")³—impossible. Bell, on the other hand, entertains the equally impossible wish of riding "*horseback goin through the mountains of a night*" in older times (309), far from the changes and unsettledness of a postmodern landscape.

Perhaps as a reflection of their fundamental conservatism, intrusions from the past discomfit both Bell and Ather. The conflated influence of personal and public history is a constant, real pressure that cannot be evaded; indeed, the passage of time only seems to intensify its hold on the characters. However, where Bell's ruminations appear to be taking place in real time and combine the past and present in a more thoroughly reflective stance, Ather's textual interactions with the past suggest a less refined understanding of the integration of past and present. The flashbacks signaled in *The Orchard Keeper*—although they don't belong exclusively to Ather—are not filtered through his consciousness but through the voice of the narrator, and first-person interiority ascribed to Ather appears only fleetingly throughout the text. In some sense, then, he is also somehow incarcerated by the narrator's voice itself: he becomes a living emblem of the residual. This narratological difference allows Bell the appearance of more control and yet, ironically, of the two, he appears to be more thoroughly unsettled by the past. Still, in thus framing *Ownby*, McCarthy's novel participates in a movement towards what Mancini labels "anthrological modernism," the same kind of ethos that, in roughly the same period, spawned the archival projects of Harry Smith and Alan Lomax, the urban folk revival, and the establishment of *Fox Fire Magazine*, all of which seek to compile and preserve the practices a disappearing cultures. So while in its meticulous efforts to capture the distinctive speech and practices of its Appalachian subjects the novel animates the conflicts of early 20th century modernity, it remains a product of late modernism.

In a stroke that complicates Bell's worldview, for example, he is able to recognize the land's history of bloodshed. Thinking back on Ellis and the handicap he gained attempting to compel order through law enforcement, he sees, in Patricia Limerick's terms, the "legacy of conquest" that has been enacted upon the terrain—" [*I*]t just seemed to me that this country has got a strange kind of history and a damned bloody one too" (284). And yet, in spite of the fact that violence is as old as the landscape ("*That county had not had a time of peace much of any length at all that I knew of. I've read a little of the history of it since and I ain't sure it ever had one*"), it is the seemingly new direction that criminality has taken that so befuddles Bell (307). This includes the text's unsolved crimes but also the flat refusal of Bell's concern by the Mexican man awaiting execution for one of Chigurh's killings. All this runs

counter to Bell's carefully processed experience and logic. In the end he retires, feeling the distance between his own values and those brought to a head in the Moss-Chigurh case. Where authorities forcibly remove Uncle Ather from a society that he has actively defied and that has rendered his lifestyle obsolete, Bell withdraws—each because his particular ordering of the world resonates dissonantly against the dominant culture. And so although Ather and Bell have stood on opposite ends of the law, wrenching changes outmode the two and they both become, in their inefficacy, emblems of the residual.

One way to understand *The Orchard Keeper's* italicized prologue is to recognize it as a representation of the collision between two histories—the ancient history of a natural world (the elm tree) and a modern, more industrialized one (the wrought-iron fence). It becomes a site of hybridization, and an image that models the rupture, the escape, that neither Ownby nor Sydler is capable of in their new enclosed worlds. Even though human imposition is a short story in the much longer physical record of the world, in the wake of industrial modernity one can no longer cleanly divide the two. This is, in fact, a nice capsule of the narrative encountered in the text itself: we witness the casualties but also the incontrovertible transformation of the organic spaces and people of Red Branch by the overwhelming forces of the urban-modern. But, strangely enough, the elm tree is responsible for the hole in the wrought-iron fence that the budding rustic John Wesley uses to leave the cemetery and move on “past the torn iron palings and out to the western road” (246)—a further manifestation of rusticity working its own changes upon the modalities of modernity.

There is, as Vereen Bell writes of the scene, a “shock of temporal displacement” accompanying the realization that the elm tree that opens the novel is the same one encountered in its final pages (31). Bell feels this same kind of temporal displacement when, in *No Country for Old Men's* final chapter, he describes the ancient “stone water trough” standing in the yard: the trough is a stable feature of the landscape, a benevolent expression of someone's efforts in a peaceless time. Bell speaks admiringly of the artisan's work—“only thing I can think is that there was some sort of promise in his heart” (308)—and we can assume that this has something to do with the man's persistence in creating something more durable than himself. This is a task that Bell himself, by his own painful admission, has failed to execute. And where the aggressively fertile tree created an escape route for John Wesley, the static stone trough is an anchor for Bell, as it draws his attentions back to imagined spaces of a past plagued by guilt and regret. John Wesley, who has been paternally guided by Uncle Ather, looks towards the West—a region marked by mythological promises of freedom, and frontier unencumbered by modernity; Bell, planted in the southwest of a postmodern moment that has voided the region's mythological meanings, gazes wistfully at a stone, wishing for something similarly stable in an environment marked by constant motion. *No Country for Old Men*, then, offers a provocative revision of a familiar narrative by presenting a postmodern landscape that not only troubles the spatialization of an urban/rural binary but also the mythic grammar of ideas like rusticity and frontier, concepts vital to the modernist philosophies at the heart of *The Orchard Keeper*.

Notes

¹ According to Certeau, the child who “scrawls and daubs” in the margins of a textbook has “made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author of it.” But “[t]he television viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set”—an observation disputed by several of the characters in *No Country for Old Men*.

² In *The Informational City*, Castells pays specific attention to the connectivity of ATM machines. See page 140.

³ Prescott’s assessment of the novel is typical of the tendency to bundle *The Orchard Keeper* with the conservative ecology of Faulkner’s modernist texts.

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