

## Sentence Fragments, Sound, and Setting in *Suttree* and *The Road*

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Cormac McCarthy is widely known not only for his distinct choices in style that set him apart from other writers, but also for the significant changes in style that he implements with each new novel. John Cant notes that “no two novels of his have the same form” (“*The Road*” 267). Separated in publication by twenty-seven years, *Suttree* and *The Road* are two such novels. However, despite their differences in style, they also share some similarities. Of all of McCarthy’s work, they offer readers the most access to the internal thoughts of the protagonists. McCarthy’s stylistic choices, particularly sentence fragments, which relay thoughts to readers in the same manner characters would think them, work to both close the gap between the reader and the protagonist while also pulling the reader’s attention toward specific details. Often, the details found within the sentence fragments highlight the abject. J. Douglas Canfield notes that Julia Kristeva’s “theory of abjection” was published at about the same time as *Suttree* (665). He refers to the abject as “filth, detritus, excrement, the slime of life that pulls us ineluctably toward what Freud calls the ‘reality principle’ of death” (Canfield 665). Both novels feature the frequent use of sentence fragments, which generally serve one of two functions: to demonstrate the protagonist’s thoughts as action is occurring (drawing the reader’s attention to particular details regarding the actions of the protagonist, including character flaws) or to describe the setting surrounding the protagonist (drawing the reader’s attention to particular details regarding the setting, especially the deteriorating parts of it).

I argue that in *Suttree*, compared to *The Road*, there is more of a stylistic difference between these two different types of fragments, creating a distance between *Suttree* and his setting, and demonstrating *Suttree*’s inability to forge a strong connection with his setting. Fragments describing the setting are routinely decorated with sound techniques, such as alliteration and consonance, and elevated diction, while those referring to *Suttree* are, in comparison, shorter and contain more common diction and fewer sound devices. However, in *The Road*, the differences in style between those fragments describing the setting and those referring to the actions of the father are not nearly as distinct as those present in *Suttree*. This lack of stylistic variation when referring to the landscape, rather than the father’s actions, demonstrates the father’s knowledge of the landscape and ability to work with it, whether that means building a den in the snow or helping to hide his child in the leaves. *Suttree*, however, does not demonstrate the same keen knowledge of the setting surrounding him. Terri Witek notes that “*Suttree* passes through early morning Knoxville easily, as if it were an interesting backdrop with which he is only half engaged” (82). However, the father in *The Road* cannot afford to pass through his surroundings remaining “only half engaged.”

Ultimately, the differences in style demonstrate that the father is more attuned to the setting surrounding him. The father has accepted the abject details of his landscape, even the fact that eventually the landscape will claim

both him and his son. His goal throughout the novel is to negotiate with the landscape in a manner that will best keep him and his son alive. Suttree, however, hasn't developed the same level of knowledge of either his surroundings or his place in the world. Unlike the father, whose son's safety depends on his knowledge of the landscape, Suttree doesn't form a similarly strong relationship. When Suttree goes to look for Harrogate, whom he tries to care for but has little success in doing so, it takes him four days to find him. Suttree's unfamiliarity with the complexities of the city is shown when McCarthy writes, "He had not known how hollow the city was" (276). Even more than halfway through the book, Suttree lacks a strong understanding of the city he lives in. When the weather grows cold and the temperature is only a few degrees above zero, Suttree cannot manage to find a way to remain warm the way the father in *The Road* knows how to find flint after he has run out of other ways to start a fire. Suttree has to hope that the old man will give him some coal, even though he doesn't have the money to pay for all of it (McCarthy 163). Because of this lesser level of understanding, which means Suttree can offer readers fewer details regarding the city, the narrator embellishes Suttree's thoughts in regard to the city or, as J. Douglas Canfield states, "Suttree's voice blends with the narrator's" in passages such as, "the river slouched past like some drear drainage from the earth's bowels" (Canfield 671; McCarthy 164). In this instance, the line is written from Suttree's point of view; he sees the river. However, the narrator gives a description of the river's movement that is more detailed than Suttree would be likely to provide. Landscape plays a significant role in all of McCarthy's novels, and, as Richard Woodward states, "McCarthy doesn't write about places he hasn't visited" (1). Realistic descriptions of landscape are important to McCarthy, and even if the protagonist doesn't recognize the significance of the details surrounding him, McCarthy finds a way to work these details in. In *Suttree*, it becomes crucial that the narrator's voice mixes with that of Suttree's in order to provide readers with vital details in regard to the abject within the city, which Suttree doesn't as keenly understand as the father in *The Road* does. In order to demonstrate this, I will first examine fragments in *Suttree*, analyzing the use of sound, and then follow with an examination of the fragments in *The Road*, comparing them to the previously discussed fragments in *Suttree*.

In *Suttree*, Cormac McCarthy's longest novel, McCarthy offers the reader a wealth of details, even more than in any of his previous novels, and many of these are communicated in sentence fragments, which, as Martha Kolln states, means these details "invariably call attention to themselves" (226). Beatrice Trotignon comments that these details frequently refer to the "abject" (89). Trotignon is one of many critics who refer to the role of the abject within *Suttree*, noting the garbage found floating in the river as well as the deteriorating city buildings and structure. Just as abject details within *Suttree* often refer to deteriorating parts of something that was once whole, such as "gray clots of nameless waste," the fragmented form these details take further remind the reader that the items described are incomplete parts, including broken down parts of the city or flaws in character, and by using sentence fragments over and over throughout the novel, McCarthy continually forces readers to confront the form of the abject (7). Trotignon comments that "the

accumulated details all suggest wholeness might be a shattered illusion,” and McCarthy’s decision to write in fragments further demonstrates to the reader that “wholeness” is something impossible to achieve, and something that the city, as well as many of the characters within it, are incapable of reaching (89). Not only will the deteriorating city never repair itself and become whole, Suttree will also prove incapable of overcoming enough of his flaws and unable to assert himself in a way that will allow him to come to truly inhabit the city. Unlike the father in *The Road*, whose constant goal is to continually move across the landscape in order to best keep himself and his son alive, Suttree doesn’t have such a clear goal, especially not one that requires he so intimately connect with his setting.

While McCarthy frequently incorporates sentence fragments, he carefully situates them among long and winding sentences, further working to catch the reader’s eye and force the acknowledgement of the abject. These sentence fragments occur both during crucial scenes of action involving Suttree as well as during more slowly paced moments in the narrative, such as descriptions of the city. While both types of fragments are similar in that they work to an extent to represent the abject, demonstrating Suttree’s passivity, powerlessness, and inability to connect with other characters as well as the city’s general state of disrepair, McCarthy more often than not incorporates sound devices into the fragments describing the city while leaving those fragments that describe Suttree relatively free of those devices. By drawing even more attention to the descriptive city fragments through sound techniques, devices that the form of the fragment itself furthers by beginning or ending at an unexpected place that accentuates the already present sound devices, McCarthy further disconnects Suttree from the city. At the same time, these devices work to contrast the state of the city itself with the pleasant quality of the sound techniques McCarthy carefully chooses. For example, when Suttree is walking in the city, McCarthy writes, “A patchwork of roofs canted under the pale blue cones of lamplight where moths aspire in giddy coils” (29). Consonance, found in the repeating *c* and *l* sounds, creates reading pleasure even though readers understand from a phrase just two sentences earlier, “jumbled shackstrewn waste,” that the city itself is not beautiful (29). McCarthy’s description of the “the pale blue cones” also draws more attention to itself than those sentences describing Suttree’s actions, such as “He folded his arms on the rail,” which appears in the same paragraph but consists of much simpler and less poetic language (29). The distinct difference in language in these two sentences helps to create a distance between Suttree and the city, reinforcing the idea that Suttree grew up in a different portion of the city and can never truly be a part of the section of the city he now tries to inhabit.

The sound devices used in the descriptive city fragments in a sense mimic the lights and size of the city, which outshine Suttree throughout the novel, never allowing him to find a place within the city in which he truly belongs. Fragments such as “Somnolent city, cold and dolorous in the rain, the lights bleeding in the streets,” contain pleasing sound techniques, including consonance and assonance, which work to make the cold and somnolent city more attractive (440). However, while Suttree’s own flaws are still exposed in the form of a fragment, they are less decorated with sound techniques, not

offering readers the same reading pleasantries. For example, when Suttree has to find somewhere “in the poorer quarters of the town” to “winter cheaply” (379), McCarthy describes Suttree as a “refugee” and includes the fragment, “Haunting the streets in a castoff peacoat” (381). Only pages later, McCarthy includes an even simpler fragment: “Wind cold in his nostrils” (385). While the fragments still contain repeating sounds, they are less decorated than the fragment describing the city mentioned above, and contain more common diction while still drawing readers’ attention to Suttree’s less than favorable situation, which exists because Suttree has not yet found a way of better supporting himself. The lack of sound devices and elevated diction, compared to that of the fragments describing the city, suggests that these fragments describing Suttree’s actions are closer to his actual thoughts and consciousness than those fragments describing setting. Through his interactions with other characters, readers understand that Suttree is a character who thinks and converses in a casual manner. He uses words such as “Hey” (317) and lines such as “We better get our ass down to the bus station is what we better do” (336). Suttree’s informal manner of conversing makes fragments with simple diction a realistic form through which to express his thoughts.

I argue that both the sound devices and the elevated level of language within the fragments describing the city do not remain true to how Suttree would describe the city, while those fragments which consist of sparer prose more often offer the reader a closer connection to Suttree by noting Suttree’s thoughts as he thinks them. Suttree’s less than keen understanding of the city, including his inability to determine how to successfully exist in the city, is demonstrated by the fights he repeatedly gets into, the injuries sustained, and ultimately his decision to leave the city altogether. This is why the narrator embellishes Suttree’s thoughts when it comes to sentence fragments describing the city. The narrator offers descriptions of the city that Suttree himself cannot, and this emphasizes the distance between Suttree and the city and provides the reader with a better understanding of the city. By examining fragments that describe Suttree, and comparing these sparer passages to the more pleasant sounding fragments describing the city, I will demonstrate that those fragments describing Suttree draw more attention to themselves than the longer sentences, and because they do not contain the same aural pleasures, force the reader to draw conclusions about Suttree’s character, including his powerlessness and passivity. Consideration of the context and style of both types of fragments leads to the conclusion that McCarthy creates a more decorated style for the city fragments, while the other set of fragments, a form McCarthy has used in previous novels in order to step into a character’s consciousness, offer readers a view of Suttree’s consciousness. In these fragments, McCarthy more strongly adheres to realism, by “recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life,” or, in this case, more faithfully records Suttree’s thoughts as he would think them (Baldick 212).

The opening section of the novel, set in italics, doesn’t enter Suttree’s consciousness, but it does offer readers the first glimpse of sentence fragments describing the city. After a rather long opening sentence, McCarthy begins the first of many fragments describing the ruined city: “*Old stone walls unplumbed by weathers, lodged in their striae fossil bones, limestone scarabs rucked in the*

*floor of this once inland sea*" (3). McCarthy incorporates many sound techniques, including consonance with the repetition of *s* and *l* sounds and assonance in *old* and *stone*. A few lines down, McCarthy incorporates alliteration when writing, "*Past these corrugated warehouse walls down little sandy streets where blownout autos sulk on pedestals of cinderblock*" (3). The form of the fragment itself forces readers to focus on each of these details in a more intense manner than they might if they were to read the same details in long sentences; as Trotignon comments, "The process of detailing in McCarthy relentlessly moves the reader to slow down his pace and focus on the words themselves" (97). It also furthers McCarthy's effort to make the decaying and broken down city more beautiful by accentuating the sound techniques. For example, after the last fragment mentioned above, the period serves as a break before McCarthy launches into his next fragment, one that will continue some of the same sounds, including the repeating *w*, but will also introduce new assonance in the long *a*'s featured at the end of the fragment: "*Through warrens of sumac and pokeweed and withered honeysuckle giving onto the scored clay banks of the railway*" (3). By breaking up his fragments, McCarthy not only offers readers more opportunities to relish the sound, but also accentuates the sound techniques within each fragment. Periods can serve as a transitional element, signaling to the reader that while some sounds may be familiar from the previous fragments, new ones will be introduced as well.

While the fragments describing the city in that first italicized section of prose are arguably the most decorated with sound techniques and elevated style, incorporating words readers are likely less than familiar with, including "cockheels," "pinchbeck," and "cataclysm," fragments incorporating sound and elevated language occur throughout the novel (3). This draws continued attention to the crumbling city, a quality that the fragmented form mimics, while the sound techniques lead the reader to find beauty in the abject. Taken alone, the details presented to the reader, such as the condoms in the river mentioned throughout the novel, fall under Kristeva's definition of the abject. However, by adding in pleasant sound techniques, McCarthy encourages the reader to have a heightened admiration for these less than likeable details. For example, when Suttree is setting off to run his lines one morning, McCarthy gives readers the following fragment: "Crossriver the cries of hogs in the slaughterhouse chutes like the cries of lepers without the gates" (415). The cries themselves are likely heart wrenching and signal the inevitable death of the hogs, yet rather than implementing sound techniques that would create a feeling of discord, McCarthy incorporates alliteration and assonance that lend a measured amount of beauty to the event by creating sound that appeals to the reader's ear. McCarthy's style forces the reader to acknowledge the abject in a way Suttree himself isn't always capable of doing. As evidenced by his decision to throw away the odorous bait Michael offers him, Suttree doesn't always recognize the significance of the abject, and how it can be useful to him within the new part of the city he has chosen to inhabit (222). Unlike the father in *The Road*, who understands how the abject, including the cast-off belongings he finds, is useful to him, Suttree hasn't developed this same understanding. Sound techniques are incorporated into the setting descriptions in *Suttree* in order to note Suttree's less than sharp understanding of the city and draw

readers' attention to the significance of the abject, which might be missed if the novel strictly followed Suttree's thoughts.

The use of sound to add reading pleasure is a technique that McCarthy has used in other novels. Jay Ellis refers to *The Orchard Keeper*, *Blood Meridian*, and *The Crossing*, commenting, "McCarthy has developed a style that depends heavily upon the *sound* of language" (157). Ellis also offers helpful insight when commenting, "we must distinguish between sound that is pleasing in and of itself—words and phrases that flow to a pleasing aesthetic effect—and sound that reinforces meaning" (158). In the case of *Suttree*, many of the words included in the fragments describing the city may have been chosen just as much for their sound as their meaning, which may be the reason why so many words that readers are unfamiliar with frequently occur. For example, in the fragment, "*Out there under the blue lamplight the trolleytracks run on to darkness, curved like cockheels in the pinchbeck dusk,*" a word such as "cockheels" could be exchanged with a word that a reader could more easily grasp the meaning of, but that would mean sacrificing certain sound techniques, such as alliteration and rhythm (3). However, while the words themselves may not be chosen to add easily discernible meaning to the text, the sound within these fragments becomes meaningful in that it mimics the lights and size of the city, illuminating the deteriorating city and, ultimately, allowing the city to outshine Suttree. The sound techniques work to differentiate Suttree's thoughts from the narrator, helping readers to see that while Suttree may not acknowledge the abject details of the city setting, these details do exist.

Suttree's inability to successfully settle into the city and connect with other characters is also illustrated through McCarthy's style, particularly the fragmented form. Since those fragments describing the actions of Suttree generally contain more common diction and fewer elements of sound compared to those describing the city, the reader becomes more focused on the actual content within the fragment, rather than simply the sound and style. As William Spencer comments, Suttree is, of all McCarthy's characters, "the protagonist that we are allowed to know most intimately, the one whose mind we are permitted to delve into most deeply" (87). The fragmented form, with its more common diction, both offers the reader a more realistic picture of Suttree's thoughts while also forcing readers to draw further conclusions in regard to Suttree's character, including his flaws. Often, these fragments leave out the subject, Suttree, and the absence ultimately pushes the reader to acknowledge Suttree's powerlessness and passivity, as well as his inability to connect with other characters. Were Suttree to be more in control of his actions, his subject would strongly begin the sentence. An instance in which the subject is left out of the sentence includes a moment in which Suttree finds himself in trouble at the bar. McCarthy writes, "Surrounded now by strangers" rather than "He was surrounded now by strangers" (*Suttree* 187). The fragment isn't entirely lacking in sound devices, and includes alliteration in the words McCarthy chooses to begin and end the fragment on, but its language is much simpler than that often found in the fragments describing the city. As a result, readers feel more directly connected to Suttree's thoughts and don't get caught up in the sound of words, but instead acknowledge that Suttree as a subject is missing, suggesting his powerlessness, as well as the impending trouble.

Other fragments demonstrate Suttree's passivity and inability to respond to events, which Daniel Traber comments on by noting, "Suttree is a passive observer and remains comfortably restrained from taking any action by his nihilistic attitude" (38). Suttree's passivity can be seen in the fragment McCarthy incorporates after Callahan's death: "Spat numbly at the tracks down there" (377). Again, in comparison to those fragments describing the city, this one is shorter, contains fewer sound devices, and uses more common language, all characteristics that allow the reader to focus less on the sound choice of the language and instead acknowledge Suttree's inability to react in any way other than spitting. Thomas D. Young remarks that Suttree's "problems are almost beyond his capacity for expression," which is true of a character who frequently chooses not to act and sometimes barely reacts (106). The more common language exposes Suttree's flaws in a way a more decorated fragment wouldn't and allows readers to more closely experience Suttree's thoughts. Suttree's absence as the subject in the fragments, and that fragmented nature which forces the reader to focus on the content of the sentence, help to emphasize that events and hardship happen to Suttree, rather than him taking an active role to prevent and react to the events.

However, Suttree isn't entirely incapable of making things happen, and McCarthy's change in style helps to reinforce this for readers. Fragments occur at such regular intervals throughout the novel that those passages in which sentences continually move smoothly along, without the interruption of fragments, catch the reader's attention. Often, these sections of text occur during those rare moments in which Suttree has become powerful and made the decision to act. Rather than reading fragments, the reader is able to move with the same fluidity that Suttree does. This includes the scene in which Ab is picked up by the cops and Suttree is filled with resolve and takes over the police car. Suttree is present as the subject in the beginning word of four sentences in a row, starting with "He brought the car to a stop and shifted into neutral and stepped out into the wet grass" (McCarthy 441). McCarthy's choice to depict this scene in full sentences, particularly ones in which Suttree becomes the focus by repeatedly beginning the sentences with "He," allows the reader to move through the prose quickly, like Suttree moves in the car, rather than being slowed down by sentence fragments that start and stop.

This is an important passage to examine when considering which fragments, and, in the case of this passage, sentences, are closest to Suttree's actual consciousness, versus when the narrator more clearly embellishes Suttree's thoughts in order to provide more eloquent descriptions of the city that do not accurately convey what Suttree sees. The two fragments in this passage—"The dead and lightly coiling back of the river moving beyond the grass. The sparsely lit silhouette of the city above"—refer to the setting and not Suttree (441). The first fragment includes consonance, a repetition of the *l* sound, while the second incorporates alliteration with the repeating *s*. As previously mentioned, those sentence fragments describing Suttree are not as decorated as those of the city. This passage, in which the sentences about Suttree are complete but the details describing the city are in fragments, demonstrate that this is a moment in which Suttree has overcome some of his flaws and gained control, but the city still contains details of the object.

The fact that these city fragments are so decorated with sound techniques and attention-getting takes the focus away from Suttree, even as he has finally become bold and decided to act. This further shows that the city will always be more significant than Suttree and will continue to outshine him, despite its deteriorating state. Even in Suttree's rare moment of strong action, the image of the river and the silhouette of the city are larger than him. While he may not realize it, Suttree's decision to drive the car into the river will prove inconsequential to the majority of the people living in the city, making very little impact on the city as a whole. However, while the city intrudes on Suttree's spotlight, McCarthy is still sure to implement a style that allows the reader to experience the moment with Suttree. After the fragments describing the city, the rest of the sentences, such as "He pulled the hoodlatch under the dash and walked to the front of the cruiser and raised the hood," are more focused on action than careful description, and therefore bring the reader closer to Suttree's consciousness and how he is thinking and acting during the scene (441). Had Suttree gained a stronger understanding of the city, and formed a closer connection to it, the fragments describing setting within this scene may also have been constructed out of diction that Suttree himself would be more likely to think in.

*Suttree* is not the only novel in which McCarthy incorporates two different styles, specifically styles that aren't necessarily restricted to long passages, but can vary from sentence to sentence. Arthur Bingham points out the stylistic differences between the violent sections of *Blood Meridian* and those "less violent narratives" in his article "Syntactic Complexity and Iconicity in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*" (20). In addition, during a close examination of style in *All the Pretty Horses*, Nancy Kreml draws the conclusion that McCarthy incorporated two distinct styles into the novel: the marked and unmarked (43). The unmarked style consists of a more common level of diction with fewer literary devices incorporated, similar to what I have previously referred to as being closer to entering the protagonist's consciousness, while the marked style consists of a higher level of diction and incorporates more literary devices, including sound techniques, similar to the fragments describing the city that I have previously discussed (43). Kreml argues that the unmarked style allows for "the uninterpreted transmission of observations," or in other words, allows the reader to create many different meanings from the text, while the marked style forces constraints on readers and allows them to draw more specific conclusions, including the conclusion that John Grady plays a role in deciding his fate, a realization that Kreml argues the reader could not come to if the marked style were not included in the text (42-43). John Cant points out that Kreml's distinct styles "can be applied to McCarthy's work more generally," and, ultimately, Kreml's definition of styles is similar to the two distinct styles I have pointed out in regard to the sentence fragments that occur in *Suttree* ("*Suttree*" 193). However, I argue that the form of the fragment itself works to impose constraints on both styles. Since complete sentences occur more often than fragments, fragments force the reader to slow down and draw conclusions regarding fragments of both styles. Given the sound techniques more frequently incorporated into those fragments describing the city, drawing the reader's attention to the sound and language more than the form of the

fragment, the reader is more likely to notice the fragmented form when it occurs during those sections describing Suttree's actions, which are, in comparison, less garnered with literary devices.

The unmarked style allows for a more realistic connection to the protagonist, in terms of following the character's thoughts in the manner he would actually think them. While Kreml argues that such plain prose opens itself up for the reader to draw many different conclusions, the sentence fragments do work to constrain the conclusions readers draw, if in a more subtle way. Kreml notes that McCarthy's unmarked "norm" is different than that of other novels: "McCarthy never uses quotation marks or indeed any punctuation to set off dialogue from narration . . . again lessening the distinction between the narrator and the characters" (44). The sentence fragments within the unmarked passages further work to lessen the distance between the narrator and characters by giving readers Suttree's thoughts as he would think them, and this is a strategy McCarthy has used in other novels. In his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, sentence fragments are also present, and, as Ellis notes, often allow for the movement "into Arthur Ownby's consciousness" (164). Unmarked prose, and more specifically fragments within that prose, are crucial to the text because they allow readers the experience of reading a character's thoughts as they occur, and allow readers to draw their own conclusions in regard to the character, without the narrator serving as a middle man who works to interpret the events.

However, while it's clear that some sentence fragments work to bring the reader closer to Suttree's consciousness, not all fragments do. Cant notes, "Suttree, being an educated, reflective and self-aware individual, allows McCarthy the freedom to take us within this protagonist's consciousness, to provide us with experiences of his emotional life" ("*Suttree*" 103). While Suttree is educated and possesses a higher vocabulary than that of many of the people he meets, it's still difficult to believe he would think about the city in the same elaborate language McCarthy uses to describe it. An example of a city description that seems to not be conveyed quite exactly as Suttree sees it reads, "Watching this obscure and prismatic city eaten by dark to a pale electric superstructure, the ways and viaducts and bridges remarked from gloom by sudden lamps their length and the headlights of traffic going through the plumb uncloven rain and the night" (398). This fragment is particularly interesting in that at the beginning it seems to be one of the plainer and shorter fragments describing Suttree's actions. Suttree again has been left out as the subject and the sentence starts with the verb that describes what he is doing. However, the narrator soon imposes to create a more complicated description of the city that incorporates consonance with the repeating *c* sound, as well as later on, the repeating *l* sound, and then a repeating *n* sound. Not only does this fragment incorporate sophisticated levels of sound usage that it seems unlikely Suttree would actually think in when regarding the city, phrases such as "plumb uncloven" also seem to be beyond the words Suttree would use to describe the city (398). In the case of this fragment, not only has the subject been left out, already diminishing Suttree's power, the sound devices go on to allow the city to further outshine Suttree. When Suttree is caught watching it, the city immediately becomes much more of a focus than Suttree himself,

demonstrating the city's continued strong presence and its large size, compared to Suttree's small and inconsequential place within it. The narrator's embellishment of Suttree's thoughts also reminds readers of the abject within the section of the city Suttree has decided to inhabit. Suttree can watch the city, but he will never fully understand it, meaning the narrator must embellish his thoughts in order to provide readers with a stronger understanding of it.

While McCarthy incorporates sentence fragments into his novels that followed *Suttree*, not all of the novels include fragments that vary so significantly in style when describing the landscape versus describing the protagonist's actions. *The Road* is one such novel and is similar to *Suttree* in that readers are offered more access to the thoughts of the father, compared to the protagonists in many of McCarthy's other novels. Ashley Kunsu even states that readers are able to access the father's character more closely than they are Suttree: "the reader has greater access to the father's thoughts than to those of any other McCarthy character, and as a result he is rounder, fuller and more sympathetic" (62). Kunsu also comments on the style in *The Road*, mentioning it is "pared down, elemental, a triumph over the dead echoes of the abyss" (58). This style, which contains several sentence fragments but rarely incorporates sound techniques and elevated diction to the degree readers can find it within *Suttree*, and creates less of a distinction between those fragments that describe the setting and those that describe the father, works to support Kunsu's assertion that the father is, of all McCarthy characters, the one readers most closely come to know.

Compared to those fragments describing setting in *Suttree*, the ones in *The Road* are more consistent with the diction in the rest of the text, allowing the reader to more easily believe that the landscape is described in the same manner the father is thinking about it. In other words, the narrator in *The Road* more often remains true to the father's thoughts than the narrator in *Suttree* does to Suttree's thoughts. The reader doesn't simply see the landscape, but instead sees it through the eyes of the father. For example, McCarthy writes, "He could see a break through the trees that he thought was a ditch or a cut and they came out through the weeds into an old roadway," followed by, "Plates of cracked macadam showing through the drifts of ash" (52). Although there are still sound devices present in the fragment, the level of diction doesn't shift much from the first sentence to the second. McCarthy has allowed the father's thoughts about the setting to be relayed to the reader in a manner he hasn't with Suttree because the father's knowledge of his setting is stronger, allowing him to more authoritatively describe the setting than Suttree could.

McCarthy's choice to not create the same level of distinction between those fragments describing the landscape and those referring to the father not only allows the reader to see the landscape in the way the father thinks about it, but also helps to demonstrate the father's ability to exist and work with the barren landscape in a way Suttree is never able to do in Knoxville. The city ultimately forces Suttree to leave, and the event is foreshadowed by the elevated diction and sound techniques referring to the city, which create a distinction from the prose that contains Suttree as a main subject. However, the father in *The Road* is continually forced to intimately connect and negotiate with the landscape. He relies on the land for water and uses high points in the

landscape as places to watch the road. For example, McCarthy writes, “When it was light enough to use binoculars, he glassed the valley below” (4). In addition, the father and son literally wear the ash of the landscape, and also sometimes mold themselves into the earth for safety, whether it be the leaves, the sand on the beach, or the den they build in the snow. McCarthy writes, “He dug a tunnel under one of the fallen trees, scooping away the snow with his arms” (82). The father continually demonstrates knowledge of the land and how to work with it, while Suttree fails to demonstrate the same sort of knowledge in regard to the city.

The father in *The Road* navigates the landscape well, ultimately directing himself and his son to the ocean, despite a tattered map and the trouble of traveling through towns that can no longer be identified or located on the map. McCarthy’s choice in style helps to demonstrate the father’s ability to navigate and work with the landscape. Not only do the fragments describing the land contain fewer sound devices and less elevated diction to separate them from the text more directly concerning the father, these fragments are often preceded by complete sentences in which the father is the subject, demonstrating his understanding of the landscape. An early example reads, “He shifted the pack higher on his shoulders and looked out over the wasted country. The road was empty. Below in the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds” (5). The fragments describing the landscape aren’t entirely bereft of sound techniques, given the repeating *d* sound in the last fragment. However, as a whole, these fragments incorporate very few devices that distinguish them from sentences in which the father is the subject. Even the father’s sentence preceding the fragments contains consonance with the repeating *sh* and *k* sounds, meaning that the sound techniques within the fragments work to establish consistency in this passage, rather than creating a distinction, as they do within many passages in *Suttree*.

This particular passage both allows the reader to stay closer to the father’s thoughts and demonstrates his closeness and understanding of the land. The first sentence contains “looked out over the wasted country” so the reader can then understand that the sentence fragments likely replicate the father’s thoughts as he is thinking them (5). Many of the fragments describing the city in *Suttree* are not preceded by a sentence that makes it clear Suttree is the one regarding it. For example, the second paragraph in a chapter toward the end of the novel begins, “A cold and brittle day. The iron gate open and the trees like bare black fossils rising from the dead leaves on the lawn,” which lets the city stand on its own and become distinguished from Suttree (431). Suttree is not named until the third paragraph. The fragments from *The Road*, on the other hand, are more often clearly the thoughts of the father. Some readers might argue that it would be a stretch to say that the father would actually use the word “serpentine” and the phrase “burden of dead reeds” in his actual thoughts, but these words are more realistic than many of those incorporated into *Suttree* and given the intelligence the father demonstrates, both in terms of his understanding of the landscape and how to protect his son, it’s not difficult to believe he might think in such a manner (5). Ultimately, while the distinction between fragments describing Suttree and those describing the city

foreshadows that Suttree is eventually going to part from the city because he can never truly become a part of it, the lesser distinction between those fragments describing the father in *The Road* and those describing the landscape can foreshadow that by the end of the novel the father and the land will literally meet and become one when the father dies.

The father's thoughts in regard to setting contain fewer sound techniques and are written in a manner closer to the way he would actually think them not only because the father is more acutely aware of the details regarding his setting, but also because he must rely on the setting in a way he can't rely on other people. The father must search for necessities such as water rather than having them readily available to them in the way Suttree often does. McCarthy spends an entire page detailing the father's investigation that begins with noticing a drainpipe and ends with "a cistern filled with water so sweet that he could smell it. . . . He lay there a long time, lifting up the water to his mouth a palmful at a time" (103). Unlike Suttree, whose city is filled with many other human beings to interact with, such as J-Bone, who gives him a ride when he is sick and essentially saves him, the father must rely on the land for his survival. As a result of this dependence, the father's understanding of the setting is stronger, meaning the narrator of *The Road* can less frequently intrude upon the father's thoughts and still be able to portray a detailed description of the setting within the novel. The differences in setting between that of Suttree and the father may in part account for this difference. The father cannot leave his setting (the terrain would be much the same), while Suttree can. In addition, the father's setting is far more ruinous than the one Suttree inhabits, meaning that it imposes more constraints on the father and forces him to connect with the landscape in order to survive in a manner that Knoxville doesn't force Suttree to work with the city. For these reasons, the father is constrained to see the setting in a manner Suttree never sees his.

The rare instances in which the narrator does seem to embellish the father's thoughts, adding in more sound devices and coming closer to the diction that is more frequent in *Suttree*, often appear at moments in which the father has come across new and unpredictable terrain, which he has not been able to explore thoroughly enough to become sure of. In these instances, he comes closest to experiencing the weak familiarity Suttree has with his newly inhabited section of Knoxville. For example, when the father and son see a city from afar, one that the father has not yet explored and come to understand, McCarthy writes, "sketched upon the pall of soot downstream the outline of a burnt city like a black paper scrim" (134). Both alliteration and consonance appear in the repeated *s* sound. "Burnt" and "black" also create a repeating *b* sound. It's difficult to believe that this fragment contains the actual thoughts of the father, particularly that the father would think in terms of the simile "like a black paper scrim" (134). Because the city is distant, and the father therefore cannot be sure what it contains and is uneasy about it, it's difficult for him to gather thoughts about this city as precisely as he can when describing settings he is already a part of, such as one of the houses he stands inside: "The waterbuckled boards sloping away into the yard" (110). In order to still capture the image of the city, the narrator intervenes to provide this information to readers in a manner the father cannot. The father's inability to precisely

describe this city in the distance is demonstrated again in the sentence that follows the fragment, a sentence that slips back into the father's thoughts, as evidenced by the more common diction: "They saw it again just at dark pushing the heavy cart up a long hill and they stopped to rest" (134). Given the level of diction in this sentence, it seems readers are now closer to the father's thoughts again and there are fewer embellishments from the narrator, who might have added another sharply described image, rather than simply referring to the burnt city as "it," a pronoun which helps to note the father's lack of knowledge regarding the city and, in turn, his insecurity.

While *The Road* is, as Kunsu notes, a "proliferation of sentence fragments," the majority of these refer to the setting and consist of the father's thoughts in regard to the land (68). The relative lack of sound techniques and elevated diction within these fragments not only demonstrates the father's knowledge of the land, but also demonstrates the barrenness and lack of hope that the landscape will ever be ash-free and rebuilt. Unlike *Suttree*, in which the city, albeit wearing down, still has lights and lively bars and a chance of growing into something more, allowing sound techniques and elevated diction to help demonstrate the city's lasting energy, the setting in *The Road* lacks the modern conveniences of electricity and running water, and there's no hope of this changing. Towns are barely even recognizable. Just as the fragments such as "Dark water in the roadside ditch. Sucking out of an iron culvert into a pool. In a yard a plastic deer" remain relatively undistinguished from the rest of the text due to the diction level and lack of sound devices, the land itself shows few variations, despite the many miles of it that the father and his son have crossed (156).

*The Road* is not McCarthy's first novel in which style works to emphasize the aspects of landscape. Ellis comments on the similarities between landscape and style in *Blood Meridian* by mentioning the desert "is paradoxically wide open to the eyes, even along switchbacks—there the vegetation does not make a newer, closer, horizon. And so the sentences tie one to another and go on and become exhausted and stop" (165). While the desert landscape and open vistas are accentuated by the long sentences McCarthy uses in *Blood Meridian*, in *The Road*, sentence fragments occur more frequently because the gray and ashen world means that sight is limited. The less open landscape results in the immediate broken details of the landscape becoming more visible, and these details are conveyed in sentence fragments that note their deterioration as well as their disconnection and uselessness in the new ashen world. For example, the plastic deer previously mentioned no longer serves a purpose, or becomes useful to the father, in this ash-covered world.

While the majority of the sentence fragments in *The Road* refer to landscape and setting, fewer point to character flaws, or traits that hinder characters' movement forward, the way fragments point to *Suttree's* passivity and powerlessness. There is a repeated instance, however, in which fragments occur outside of simply describing the landscape. These fragments occur when the father looks at his son and realizes just how thin he is. For example, when they go swimming, McCarthy writes, "He unzipped his parka and let it fall to the gravel and the boy stood up and they undressed and walked out into the water. Ghostly pale and shivering. The boy so thin it stopped his heart" (33).

The first sentence is complete, demonstrating the father's clear command over the situation and his decision to go swimming in order for them to be clean. The fragments that follow do not begin with the father as the subject the way the first sentence did, suggesting the father's lack of control when it comes to the appearance of his child. Throughout the novel, many of the sentences begin with "He," suggesting the father's control of the situation at hand, even within this barren landscape. However, repeatedly throughout the novel the prose resorts to fragments when the father regards his son. This includes, "The boy so frail and thin through his coat, shivering like a dog" (57); "The sunken cheeks streaked with black" (81); "Scrawny and filthy and naked" (124); "The small dirty face wide with fear" (166). Although readers understand that the father is regarding his son in all these instances, the father never becomes an explicit subject within these sentences because this is a situation he lacks entire control over. McCarthy's stylistic choice of the sentence fragment forces the reader to more closely acknowledge the boy's less than healthy characteristics and the father's inability to change these details. Although the father understands how to work with the barren setting, he still proves unable to salvage everything he would like to from it. As in many of McCarthy's novels, the landscape itself plays the role of a character. In this case, it is a character the father can learn to work with, but not one that he can come to overpower and influence. However, this landscape does, by necessity, force a close connection between the father and son who must wander it together, while Suttree's landscape, which is less treacherous, never forces the same strong connections, making it even more difficult for Suttree to connect with the city.

Many critics have discussed both the use of style and landscapes in Cormac McCarthy's writing, and these two elements often work together to illuminate one another. In the case of *Suttree* and *The Road*, two novels that offer readers the most access to the protagonists, sentence fragments work to draw readers' attention to both the details of the landscape as well as moments in which characters are powerless. The distinction between those fragments describing setting and those describing character actions is stronger in *Suttree* because Suttree lacks a strong understanding of the new setting he has decided to inhabit, allowing the narrator to embellish his thoughts in regard to setting in order to grant the reader the detailed descriptions of setting that McCarthy includes in all his work. However, in *The Road*, these same embellishments, including sound devices and elevated language that likely stray from the manner in which the protagonist would actually think, are fewer because the father has come to learn and understand the setting in a manner that Suttree hasn't. The father's thoughts in regard to the setting can be reproduced within the text with fewer intrusions by the narrator while still granting readers detailed descriptions of the landscape, which the father must learn to negotiate in order to best keep his son alive. Just as the landscapes McCarthy chooses to explore change from one novel to another, his styles do too. By being aware of these stylistic changes within McCarthy's novels, readers can gain a greater understanding of the relationship between the characters and the landscape they inhabit.

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