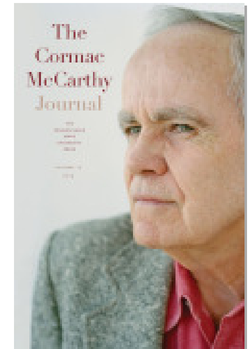
"Books Are Made out of Books": David Foster Wallace and Cormac McCarthy



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"Books Are Made out of Books"

David Foster Wallace and Cormac McCarthy

Lucas Thompson

ABSTRACT: This article reverses the central question animating the scholarship surrounding Cormac McCarthy's literary influences to reveal the complex ways in which McCarthy himself has influenced later novelists. Examining David Foster Wallace's fiction as an instructive case study, it shows how McCarthy's influence on a later generation of American writers might be explored. After tracing Wallace's myriad references and allusions to McCarthy's fiction, the article explores the many ways in which Wallace's work registers the influence of McCarthy, suggesting that during the first phase of his career, Wallace's appropriation hinged on both pastoral lyricism and moral gravity. In the second phase, Wallace's relationship to the older writer became increasingly ambivalent and confrontational, and the article traces the considerable lengths he went to in order to extricate himself from what had become an overly constrictive influence. KEYWORDS: David Foster Wallace, Cormac McCarthy, literary influence, literary style, pastoral

The ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written.

—CORMAC MCCARTHY

Textual Connections: Wallace and McCarthy

By this point, Cormac McCarthy's most powerful literary reference points have been fairly well documented. After some forty years of scholarship, we have a nuanced understanding of the techniques, thematic preoccupations, and stylistic devices he has taken from writers such as Herman Melville, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway. Moreover, scholars such as Robert Alter

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have mapped McCarthy's prose with reference to the particular rhythms and grammatical structures within the King James Bible, while other scholars—notably David Williams and Richard Gilmore—have explored the influence of Classical Greek philosophy and tragedy on McCarthy's work.[1] And, of course, the search for the specific intertextual sources that animate McCarthy's fiction continues, with recent studies examining literary indebtedness to such unexpected texts as the Middle English Arthurian romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Jean Toomer's patriotic poem *Blue Meridian*, as well as the films of John Carpenter and the novels of Samuel Beckett.[2] But what is far less often examined—and in fact frequently overlooked—is the powerful influence that McCarthy himself exerts over younger novelists. Scholars have not yet explored the myriad ways in which contemporary novelists have oriented themselves in relation to McCarthy's work, nor have they traced his diffuse influence on American fiction more broadly. But the notion that McCarthy's influence on American fiction has a wide reach seems obvious, particularly in light of his current cultural position—which has been given even greater visibility due to Ridley Scott's *The Counselor* (2014), as well as several recent film adaptations of McCarthy's novels, most notably *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *The Road* (2009), and *Child of God* (2013)—along with his numerous literary accolades, which include the National Book Award for *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and the Pulitzer Prize for *The Road* (2006). That the widely influential literary critic Harold Bloom has described McCarthy as "one of the greatest living American writers," suggesting that he is among the four most important authors of the twentieth century, is also testament to McCarthy's cultural status.[3] This article demonstrates how McCarthy's influence on a later generation of American writers might be explored, using the work of David Foster Wallace as an instructive case study. I begin by examining Wallace's highly idiosyncratic perspective on McCarthy's fiction, as articulated in a range of interview comments, archival materials, and journalistic pieces, before revealing the particular ways in which this perspective influenced his own fiction. Though the connection has not yet been properly acknowledged, my argument is that Cormac McCarthy exerted a powerful and tangible influence on Wallace's fiction, across multiple phases of Wallace's career. Comparative analysis also reveals that the nature of this influence evolved considerably. Before beginning work on *The Pale King* (2011), Wallace deployed McCarthy's stylistic innovations sparingly, and in highly strategic ways, to signal either a self-conscious moment of pastoral lyricism or an instance of moral gravity and seriousness. Such forms of homage-like appropriation, I argue, appear as highly self-conscious and dissonant linguistic intrusions within Wallace's work, and are emblematic of his emphasis on the

technical devices used throughout McCarthy's prose. In later texts, however, Wallace interrogated the limits of McCarthy's representational strategies, constructing abstruse parodies of the older writer's distinctive prose style in an attempt to distance himself from what had threatened to become an overpowering influence.

In many ways, James Sotillo's brief article on Roberto Bolaño's 2001 review of *Blood Meridian* is indicative of the way that McCarthy scholars have intuitively understood that McCarthy's fiction must exert strong influences over younger novelists, while simultaneously shying away from addressing the specific terms of such engagements. Sotillo notes that the focus of Bolaño's review, which has been recently republished in English in the collection *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles, and Speeches, 1998–2003* (2011), is on the way that landscape functions as both "*Blood Meridian*'s leading character" and as a way of gesturing toward a "particular form of [narrative] time" (Sotillo 78). Prompted by Bolaño's reflections, Sotillo suggests that "one cannot help but think about [McCarthy's] influence" (78) on the Chilean writer's fiction, particularly his encyclopedic novel *2666* (2004), which Sotillo notes bears similarities in both setting and theme to *Blood Meridian*. After making one or two hesitant claims about the nature of such similarities, Sotillo retreats into the safety of authorial unknowability, invoking Borges's mystical notion of literary influence to suggest that one can ultimately only "speculate" (79) on the formal and stylistic qualities—if indeed there are any—that Bolaño took from McCarthy. In fairness to Sotillo, such a retreat is in this case at least partially justified, since Bolaño's brief, 400-word review is the only articulation of his views on McCarthy, though surely there are other ways of registering instances of literary indebtedness within Bolaño's fiction.

But whatever complications and limitations there may be in tracing this particular influence, David Foster Wallace's perspective on McCarthy is far easier to discern. In fact, Wallace's body of work contains numerous references and allusions to McCarthy, which makes it highly curious that Wallace scholars have not yet picked up on this aspect of his work.[4] Presumably, this is because such scholars have invariably understood Wallace's fiction as part of an ongoing conversation with a fairly limited cluster of first-wave US postmodernists—figures such as John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, and Donald Barthelme—within which tradition McCarthy is a somewhat anomalous figure. As Phillip and Delys Snyder point out, the fact that McCarthy's work "does not explicitly display itself as experimental in [Jean-François] Lyotard's sense" (30) has made scholars reluctant to align him with postmodern aesthetics, while Matthew Gunn suggests that McCarthy "remains aloof from a totally postmodern sensibility," since "he chronicles the decentering of his era

without celebrating it" (115). Instead, McCarthy has been more commonly aligned with both traditional modes of realism—or even naturalism—and a belated modernism.[5] His fiction thus sits at an oblique angle to US postmodernism, and is one reason why Wallace scholars have not yet analyzed the relationship.

Yet there are substantial intertextual connections between Wallace and McCarthy. To begin with, there are the countless occasions on which Wallace alluded to McCarthy in correspondence and interviews. In a 2006 interview with Bryan Garner, for instance, Wallace spoke admiringly of *Blood Meridian*, suggesting—in a particularly memorable phrasing—that the novel is styled in "an English very remote from our own," deploying an archaic diction that is "like the King James Bible on acid" (Garner 60). In this interview, he went on to claim that such a deliberately estranged form of language allows McCarthy's prose to generate moments of extraordinary emotional resonance, since "the effects he's able to create with it simply blow your hair back" (60). In an earlier interview, Wallace effused over *All the Pretty Horses*, which he said "sent shivers up and down my spine" (Chouteau), and when asked in 2000 about his favorite contemporary writers listed Cormac McCarthy—alongside Cynthia Ozick and Don DeLillo—as "the three people who are at the top of the food chain just now" (Schechner 108). In a 1998 interview with director Gus Van Sant, Wallace was similarly enthusiastic about McCarthy, telling Van Sant that *Blood Meridian* was "literally the western to end all westerns" and pointing out some of McCarthy's linguistic eccentricities: "this guy, I can't figure out how he gets away with it, he basically writes King James English. I mean, he practically uses Old English *thou*'s and *thine*'s and it comes off absolutely beautifully and unmannered and ungratuitous" (Van Sant). Wallace also told Van Sant that *Suttree* "would make a fantastic movie," characterizing the novel as consisting of "about four hundred pages of the most dense lapidary prose you can imagine about characters who are at the functional level of idiots and are drinking rotgut." And finally, in a 2005 interview, Wallace said that he "admire[d] Cormac McCarthy's ability to use antiquated, ornate English in ways that don't seem stilted or silly" (Jacob 156), a form of admiration that reprises the sentiments within a similarly revealing 1997 letter to the literary critic Steven Moore. In this letter, Wallace exhorts Moore to track down McCarthy's work, making comparisons to Faulkner and preferencing McCarthy's earlier novels over his more recent Border Trilogy:

> I also urge on you (again) Cormac McCarthy. Not his latest stuff, either—it's dilute and I can tell publ. house are urging him to market himself.

> But earlier books—*Blood Meridian* and/or *Suttree* are totally hair-raising and intoxicating and have prose that's like nobody else (except Faulkner if Faulkner also had the entire OED memorized.)[6]

Wallace's letter covers other topics, but he closes with a final plea to track down *Blood Meridian* and *Suttree*: "Use that employee discount to get hold of McCarthy," Wallace admonishes, suggesting that the belletristic razzle-dazzle of his prose "makes A. Theroux look aphasiac."[7] Such effusive references to McCarthy's work, taken from across Wallace's career, testify to an intense admiration for the older writer, particularly his prose style, which for Wallace was so eccentrically brilliant as to be "like nobody else."

There are also several references to McCarthy's work in Wallace's nonfiction and journalism. In a 2001 review of the anthology *The Best of the Prose Poem*, for instance, Wallace playfully undermines the editor's definition of the genre by wondering aloud what other texts might be considered as prose poems:

> Are the little italicized entr'actes in Hemingway's *In Our Time* prose poems? Are Kawabata's "Palm-of-the-Hand Stories"? Is Kafka's "A Little Fable"? What about Cormac McCarthy's dreamy, anapestic prologue to *Suttree*? What about the innumerable ¶s in Faulkner that scan perfectly as iambic pentameter sonnets? (247)

The level of detail and specificity here—in the characterization of *Suttree*'s prologue as "dreamy" and "anapestic"—is another indicator of Wallace's emphasis on McCarthy's stylistic innovations, while the similarly metrical claim concerning William Faulkner's tightly constructed "¶s" confirms Wallace's strong associative link between these two figures. In "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young," he also listed McCarthy's fiction as emblematic of the way that literature had, "post-war, exploded into diffraction" (64), but more striking still is Wallace's 1999 contribution to *Salon* magazine, where he wrote brief notes on what he characterized as "direly underappreciated US novels," a list that included *Blood Meridian*. Wallace wrote concise descriptions of the other novels on this list: he described William Gass's *Omensetter's Luck* (1966), for instance, as "Gass' first novel, and his least avant-gardeish, and his best. Basically a religious book. Very sad. Contains the immortal line 'The body of Our Saviour shat but Our Saviour shat not.' Bleak but gorgeous, like light through ice" (203). The entry for *Blood Meridian*, however, is radically shorter than the surrounding novels, and simply reads "Dont even ask" (204), presumably implying that *Salon*'s rigid word limit restrictions would be too difficult to adhere to in the case of this particular novel.

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But even this brief, three-word entry confirms several of the interpretative emphases discernable throughout Wallace's letters and interviews. Revealingly, Wallace's entry includes a subtle typographical homage to McCarthy's idiosyncratic use of punctuation, in the redacted apostrophe in the word "Dont," again providing a glimpse into Wallace's admiration for the technical dimensions of McCarthy's prose. (Incidentally, the homage was too subtle for later editors: when Little, Brown & Co. collected this brief piece in the posthumous collection *Both Flesh and Not*, a typesetter erroneously restored the apostrophe, a careless mistake that will hopefully be corrected in future reprintings.)

In fact, Wallace admired McCarthy's work to such an extent that he once told Bonnie Nadell, his literary agent, that he had written a fawningly obsequious fan letter to McCarthy. Curiously, however, Stephen Burn reports that when he contacted McCarthy, via McCarthy's literary agent, he claimed to have never received such a letter (Burn 2014). Whether this missive really exists, or perhaps was written but left unsent, is not known, though Wallace did meet Cormac McCarthy in person, reflecting on his encounter with "[one] of the U.S. writers I admire" (Jacob, 156) in an interview with Didier Jacob.[8] While noting that McCarthy seemed "fine" and "pleasant," Wallace found it distracting to discover that his actual voice was nothing like his "very distinctive 'voice,' a kind of sound on the page" (156). This literary "voice," Wallace suggested, is entirely distinct from an author's "actual larynx or nasality or timbre" and is ultimately more valuable to a reader than the sound of the author's speaking voice, which he claimed can "pollute [the] experience of reading" (156). Wallace explained that he had experienced a similar reaction after meeting the novelist and essayist Annie Dillard, but his disappointment is also anticipated by an aside on the psychological makeup of fiction writers in "E Unibus Pluram," where he notes that "[o]ne reason fiction writers seem creepy in person is that by vocation they really *are* voyeurs" (*Supposedly* 23). Ultimately, Wallace's account of meeting McCarthy again testifies to the overwhelmingly aestheticized quality of his admiration. Presumably, if Wallace had been primarily interested in the subject matter or thematic content of McCarthy's work, he may have relished the opportunity to converse with him; it is clearly his emphasis on the tonal and stylistic singularity of McCarthy's novels that led to his concern that hearing McCarthy's actual voice had the potential to "pollute" the reading experience.

The specific aesthetic qualities that comprise this reading experience can be detected within Wallace's own heavily annotated copies of McCarthy's novels, archived in the University of Texas at Austin's Harry Ransom Center. Wallace's personal collection of books at the archive contains a wealth of annotations and textual markings. In fact, Molly Schwartzburg, the Center's Cline Curator of

Literature, has suggested that "[n]o author library at the Ransom Center even approaches Wallace's in the number and richness of annotations" (256), and this is certainly true of the collected McCarthy material. The archives include Wallace's copy of *Suttree*, replete with scribbled notes and irreverent doodlings over the author photograph, and his personal editions of *All the Pretty Horses* and *Blood Meridian*. All of these texts contain substantial amounts of marginalia and underlining that is crucial in gaining an understanding of Wallace's complex response to McCarthy's work. Many of these notes were written for expressly pedagogical purposes, since Wallace taught McCarthy to undergraduates at both the University of Illinois and Pomona College, but it is also possible to see Wallace rehearsing ideas for his own fiction while reading these novels: he wrote several character names in the margins, picked out favorite passages, and even jotted down plot points for his own later work. His edition of *All the Pretty Horses*, for instance, evinces meticulous attention to detail, with an enormous amount of underlining, circling, and marginalia. Wallace isolated particularly lyrical or poetic lines he admired—such as the description of "sideways rain" early on in the novel—and at one point highlighted a sentence that he noted was "classic McCarthy": "All his reverence and all his fondness and all the leanings of his life were for the ardenthearted and they would always be so and never otherwise." Similarly, Wallace wrote "*Great* sentence" and drew an arrow pointing to the following description of an abandoned cabin in *All the Pretty Horses*: "There was a strange air to the place. As of some site where life had not succeeded" (226). He was also particularly interested in the grammar and syntactical logic of McCarthy's prose—writing "All 1 long participle" next to a particularly lengthy sentence—as well as his recurring use of metaphor, underlining a number of unusual comparisons. In the marginalia to *Suttree*, Wallace noted the way that McCarthy used "[a]dverbs before dir. objects—odd," and in his copy of *All the Pretty Horses* described McCarthy's prose as a "COMMA-FREE ZONE." Moreover, Wallace was a particularly acute observer of McCarthy's veiled social commentaries, noting an oblique indictment of the "U.S. 90s" next to Dueña Alfonsa's jaded characterization of the Spanish Civil War:

> In the Spaniard's heart is a great yearning for freedom, but only his own. A great love of truth and honor in all its forms, but not its substance. And a deep conviction that nothing can be proven except that it be made to bleed. Virgins, bulls, men. Ultimately God himself. (230)

Wallace was also attentive to the structural underpinnings of McCarthy's novels: in an aside that indicates his qualified admiration for *Suttree*, he

criticized the opening of the novel for having a "set-up" that is "slow [and] does not set stage" and, in his copy of *All the Pretty Horses*, observed that the "BOOK [IS] FRAMED BY *FUNERALS*." Wallace also suggested that this latter novel's final sentence—"Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come"—would be a portentous conclusion if it were not anticipating *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, noting: "Too heavy if not final line of 1st of 3 books." Finally, Wallace's readings also carefully trace some of McCarthy's intertextual sources, noting an allusion to "Quentin—Faulkner" in *Suttree*, as well as picking up on allusions to "Nietzsche," "Witt[genstein]," "Tom Sawyer," "Hamlet," and even "DeLillo."

Yet another important document that reveals Wallace's stance toward McCarthy is a heavily marked-up copy of a student's essay on *Suttree*, "Appropriating the Postmodern: McCarthy's External Narration and Spatialized Time in *Suttree*" by Shawn Miklaucic, which suggests that Wallace had strong sympathies for overtly existential interpretations of the novel.[9] As with the annotations inside his copies of McCarthy's novels, Wallace's instructional comments affirm his acute reading of *Suttree*. In a section of the essay in which Miklaucic argues that McCarthy sketches the novel's character "in painstaking but outwardly focused detail," for instance, Wallace remarked that this reading was "too simple," since "the outward *is* the inward in this book" (15), emphasizing the continuity between interiority and the physical world that many McCarthy scholars have also perceived. Wallace's comments also reveal that he was familiar with various pieces of critical scholarship on McCarthy: at one point, he noted that "[Vereen] Bell is insipid, in my opinion," taking particular issue with Bell's argument concerning the centrality of death in *Suttree*, but he also praised Miklaucic's work as being "as good as anything in *Sacred Violence*" (7), the landmark 1995 critical collection edited by Wade Hall and Rick Wallach.[10] Wallace's personal copy of this latter collection is held in the archives, though there are only annotations on a handful of the essays, suggesting that Wallace was primarily interested in critical accounts of *Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*.

Pastoralism and Solemnity

The abundance of specific intertextual material catalogued here reveals the sheer depth of Wallace's engagements with McCarthy, providing a solid foundation from which to make broader inferences about his appropriation of McCarthy's fiction. Unlike the earlier example of Roberto Bolaño, who leaves critics with little more than a 400-word book review on which to base their "speculation[s],"

Wallace took numerous opportunities to signal his perspective on McCarthy's fiction, leaving a veritable breadcrumb trail of intertextual markers for readers to follow. In fact, the search for evidence of Wallace's literary indebtedness to McCarthy takes on a curious meta-dimension in light of his literal quotation of McCarthy in a 2004 interview. Responding to a question on the nature of literary influence, Wallace quoted a key line from McCarthy's 1992 *New York Times* interview:

> Cormac McCarthy's got this thing: "books are made out of other books." . . . I don't think there's a [writer] alive who doesn't make their books somewhat out of other books, and particularly ones they really like. The trick is to do this enough, and have enough of kind of your own stuff going on that when you're using things you're transfiguring it and making it your own. (Kipen)[11]

The appeal to McCarthy's highly pragmatic notion of literary history is enveloped in multiple layers of self-awareness, not least because—as this article will show—certain elements of Wallace's own books are clearly made from elements of McCarthy's books.

Aside from the structural mechanics of McCarthy's prose, Wallace appears to have been particularly drawn to the precisely rendered pastoral visions within McCarthy's novels, those moments that—in Lawrence Buell's influential phrasing—"celebrate the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city" (Buell 23). Indeed, it is possible to see a refracted version of McCarthy's pastoralism in "Derivative Sport in Tornado Alley," an early, quasi-autobiographical essay Wallace published in 1990.[12] Mary Karr and Mark Costello confirm that Wallace was reading a number of McCarthy novels during the period in which he lived in Boston and Syracuse, so it is unsurprising that a McCarthy-like passage would turn up in this particular essay.[13] The most obvious appropriation of McCarthy's prose rhythms and botanical specificity is found in the following, nostalgic description of the Midwestern landscape:

> The summer heat and wet-mitten humidity, the grotesquely fertile soil that sends grasses and broadleaves up through the courts' surface by main force, the midges that feed on sweat and the mosquitoes that spawn in the fields' furrows and in the conferva-choked ditches that box each field, night tennis next to impossible because the moths and crap-gnats drawn by the sodium lights form a little planet around each tall lamp and the whole lit court surface is aflutter with spastic little shadows. (24)

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The "little planet[s] around each tall lamp" mimic McCarthy's proclivity for metaphysical microcosms, and the specificity invoked by "broadleaves," "midges," and "conferva" also alludes to McCarthy's prose style. Moreover, the description of the "spastic little shadows" made by moths and crap-gnats appropriates a memorable passage from *Suttree*: "the western sky before him a deep cyanic blue shot through with the shapes of bats crossing blind and spastic like spores on a slide" (24).[14] Wallace's appropriation also functions as an important counterpoint to some of the essay's more nebulous philosophical abstractions, anchoring such speculations to the physical world. And since one of the essay's chief goals is to show how landscapes both large and small—Wallace calls attention to both the "little rural landscapes, with tufts and cracks and underground seepage-puddles" (7), of Philo's tennis courts, as well as the broader geographic setting of "[m]y part of the Midwest" (6)—shape personality and psychology, it is entirely fitting that Wallace invokes McCarthy's work.

A similar evocation of pastoral lyricism is present in the following passage from *Infinite Jest* (1996), which spirals out from the climactic particularities of Tucson, Arizona, into a McCarthy-like description:

> Heat began to shimmer, as well, off the lionhide floor of a desert. The mesquite and cactus wobbled, and Tucson AZ resumed once more the appearance of the mirage, as it had appeared when Marathe had first arrived and found his shadow so entrancing in its size and reach. The sun of A.M. had no radial knives of light. It appeared brutal and businesslike and harmful to look upon. (647)

The "radial knives of light" here seem a particularly McCarthy-esque vision of impending violence, while the incongruously archaic phrasing of the final clause, "harmful to look upon"—along with the final word *upon*, which is itself an archaism in US usage—also registers McCarthy's influence. The neologism "lionhide" is another McCarthy-like coinage, while the polysyndeton structuring the final sentence lends a sense of gravity and seriousness to the passage. In fact, Wallace was using polysyndeton in precisely this way in the nonfiction he wrote while working on *Infinite Jest*. In "Joseph Frank's Dostoevsky," for instance, Wallace stabilizes the wildly self-reflexive reflections in earlier sections of the essay by claiming that Joseph Frank's biographical portrait sets forth a model by which to attempt "morally passionate, passionately moral fiction": "Frank's books make one of them concrete and alive and terribly instructive" (274). Here, the repetition of "and" imbues the prose with a more measured and solemn tonal quality, giving the statement a level of sincerity that Wallace

does not allow himself within the remainder of the essay. As with the *Infinite Jest* extract, here Wallace reaches for this particular device when he requires a somber moment of authorial gravity. Similarly, when Wallace wanted a final summation of his thoughts on Boston, in a 1989 letter to Steven Moore, he again deployed polysyndeton, contrasting his new city with the landscapes of his Midwestern childhood: "It's lovely and crowded and ethnic and a far cry from flat black land straight to the world's curve."[15] This description recalls a strikingly similar line from *Outer Dark* (1968)—"A faintly smoking garden of the dead that tended away to the earth's curve" (242)—but it also appropriates the stentorious gravity of McCarthy's prose more generally, and stands in stark contrast to the informal, conversational tone of the rest of the letter. Yet another example of Wallace's attempt to emulate McCarthy's prose rhythms when requiring a momentarily serious tone is found in a later section of *Infinite Jest*, embedded within a lengthy description of Don Gately's sobriety regime. Here, Wallace brackets an expansive and characteristically garrulous passage with a rhetorical pause:

> when people with AA time strongly advise you to keep coming you nod robotically and keep coming, and you sweep floors and scrub out ashtrays and fill stained steel urns with hideous coffee, and you keep getting ritually down on your big knees every morning and night asking for help from a sky that still seems a burnished shield against all who would ask aid of it—how can you pray to a 'God' you believe only morons believe in, still? (350)

There is nothing in the previous part of this sentence to prepare the reader for this stylistic intrusion. Again, the unexpectedly jarring and archaic internal rhythm of this fragment—"that still seems a burnished shield against all who would ask aid of it"—lends a sense of Biblical weightiness to the passage, against the potential triviality of earlier, more predictably pop-cultural reference points. Here, as in previous examples, the use of polysyndeton in the first part of the extract ("you nod robotically and keep coming, and you sweep floors and scrub out ashtrays") pre-empts the McCarthy-like weight of the later simile, while the antiquated description of a "burnished shield" plays off the "ritual" elements of Alcoholics Anonymous recovery and the old-fashioned, scare-quoted "God."[16]

Another highly specific technical device that Wallace appropriated from McCarthy as a way of signaling solemnity concerns McCarthy's idiosyncratic use of punctuation. As we have seen, Wallace revealed his sensitivity

to this aspect of McCarthy's work in the laconic entry to *Blood Meridian* in his 1999 *Salon* piece, and while he did not share McCarthy's strong ambivalence toward the "weird little marks" that "blot the page" (Winfrey)—with the exception of the "Wardine" section in *Infinite Jest*, a stylistic outlier that uses the apostrophe-less contraction "aint" (37)—he occasionally followed McCarthy's highly unusual practice of omitting question marks after interrogatives. Early on in *Blood Meridian*, for instance, the old man asks the kid: "But where does a man come by his notions" (17). And in *Suttree*, the device occurs frequently, as when the workhouse prisoners question Gene Harrogate on his horticultural dalliances: "What happened" and "What did they say" (58), asks one prisoner, with both sentences conspicuously missing question marks, while another inmate taunts: "A cantaloupe turned queer. Do you buy them a drink" (59). These absent punctuation marks in McCarthy's work convey a flattened affect that is indicative of either a sense of nonchalance or heightened seriousness: the question marks are omitted in order to avoid implying an upward inflection that has the potential to trivialize—or even hystericize—an important interrogation. Wallace reached for this strange device when he wanted a similar effect, particularly in situations that call for a question to be delivered in a particularly somber or melancholy tone. He uses the technique in precisely this way in the description of Ken Erdedy waiting for his marijuana delivery in *Infinite Jest*, heightening Erdedy's pitiable, addicted plight: "Where was the woman who said she'd come" (17).[17] The redacted question mark is used in exactly the same way in the later story "Octet," in which Wallace concludes a grisly depiction of "[t]wo late-stage terminal drug addicts" with "Q: Which one lived," and also in "Forever Overhead," when an adult questions the narrator's willingness to jump from a high-dive board: "Do your plans up here involve the whole day or what exactly is the story. Hey kid are you okay" (15). Moreover, "E Unibus Pluram" closes with the plaintive and world-weary punctuation-less question, "Are you immensely pleased" (82), recalling both Wallace's previous analysis of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* within the same essay, and also McCarthy's deliberately sparse punctuation. Taken together, these examples reveal that, for the majority of his literary career, Wallace's intertextual relation to McCarthy invariably centered on two key strategies of appropriation: incorporating McCarthy's influence as either a self-conscious moment of pastoral lyricism, or as a way of lending an increased sense of gravity. Such insertions thus function as forms of lexical dissonance embedded within Wallace's own idiosyncratic literary style, readily discernable due to their strange discontinuity from the surrounding prose.

Intertextual Extrication

Both modes of appropriation are clearly present in the opening to Wallace's posthumous novel *The Pale King*, but in contrast to the previously sparing use of McCarthy's style, here Wallace amplifies the specific techniques he admired in the older writer's work, describing a bucolic Midwestern landscape in self-consciously rhapsodical prose:

> Past the flannel plains and blacktop graphs and skylines of canted rust, and past the tobacco-brown river overhung with weeping trees and coins of sunlight through them on the water downriver, to the place beyond the windbreak, where untilled fields simmer shrilly in the A.M. heat: shattercane, lamb's quarter, cutgrass, sawbrier, nutgrass, jimsonweed, wild mint, dandelion, foxtail, muscadine, spine-cabbage, goldenrod, creeping Charlie, butter-print, nightshade, ragweed, wild oat, vetch, butcher grass, invaginate volunteer beans, all headings gently nodding in a morning breeze like a mother's soft hand on your cheek. An arrow of starlings fired from the windbreak's thatch. . . . Very old land. Look around you. The horizon trembling, shapeless. We are all of us brothers.
>
> Some crows overhead, three or four, not a murder, on the wing, silent with intent, corn-bound for the pasture's wire beyond which one horse smells at the other's behind, the lead horse's tail obligingly lifted. Your shoes' brand incised in the dew. An alfalfa breeze. Socks' burrs. Dry scratching inside a culvert. Rusted wire and titled posts more a symbol of restraint than a restraint per se. NO HUNTING. The shush of the interstate off past the windbreak. The pasture's crows standing at angles, turning up patties to get at the worms underneath, the shapes of the worms incised in the overturned dung and baked by the sun all day until hardened, there to stay, tiny vacant lines in rows and inset curls that do not close because head never quite touches tail. Read these. (1–2)

Obvious markers of McCarthy's influence within this passage include the insistent use of asyndeton to structure clauses, botanical specificity, and rustically pastoral imagery. But it is also important to note that tracing the intertextual references that animate this highly wrought passage is a complicated task, since the passage also bears strong similarities to the opening of Stanley Elkin's *The Franchiser* (1976), and owes a complex debt to Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* (1961).[18] The primary stylistic influence here, however, is Cormac McCarthy,

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with the passage resembling the "dreamy, anapestic prologue" to *Suttree* that Wallace so revered. In fact, Wallace reproduces the metrical pattern he perceived in McCarthy's earlier novel in the final lines of this passage, as the following scansion shows:

> **uu / u u u / uu / u u u / u uu / u**
> until hardened, there to stay, tiny vacant lines in rows and inset curls that
> **u u / u u / uu / uu / / /**
> do not close because head never quite touches tail. Read these.[19]

Wallace closes the passage with an emphatic spondee (an echo of the two-word sentence that concludes *Suttree*: "Fly them." [568]), but the second-last sentence contains an astonishing five anapestic feet in quick succession, a rhythmic repetition that cannot possibly have been merely coincidental. When read in light of his earlier observation, the reproduction reveals Wallace as a particularly attentive and acute reader of McCarthy's prose, and is indicative of the highly idiosyncratic technical devices he took from the older writer. Structurally, Wallace's opening also reprises the prologue to *Suttree*, guiding the reader through an unfamiliar landscape with a free-floating narrative guide and appropriating the highly unusual second-person address—replacing McCarthy's "*Dear friend*" (1) with "you"—to give the prose a heightened sense of intimacy. Moreover, the description of "pasture's crows standing at angles, turning up patties to get at the worms beneath," borrows from another passage of the novel, wherein Suttree and Reese "crossed a pasture where grackles blue and metallic in the sun were turning up dried cowpats for the worms beneath" (415). And like *Suttree*, the opening to *The Pale King* also features a paratactic march of objects ("flannel plains," "blacktop graphs," a "tobacco-brown river," "windbreak's thatch," etc.), constructing a pastoral scene via a process of steady accumulation. Although Wallace stated in a 2005 interview to "have no illusion" that he was capable of writing the kind of "antiquated, ornate English" that McCarthy was famous for, this passage provides a clear example of the particular techniques he *could* appropriate from McCarthy's fiction, which included metrical prose rhythms, intimate second-person address, and an archaic lexicon and syntax.

In fact, during the period in which Wallace was working on *The Pale King*, the temptation to rely on such appropriations of McCarthy's techniques was so strong that in one particular draft Wallace inserted a parenthetical aside, exhorting himself to "try harder, to avoid writing a bad McCarthy rip-off." Wallace reiterated this self-admonishment in a later draft, where he noted that

"[t]he trick with this thing will be to have enough plot and vivid concreteness so [that] the whole thing doesn't just seem like all language, some McCarthy exercise." Such fears of artistic contamination are highly unusual within Wallace's work: for the most part, he conceived of other texts as endlessly manipulable and reimaginable, though it seems that McCarthy's fiction—whether because he was still alive, or because his prose style was so singular—posed a genuine artistic problem for Wallace. In part, this was because while working on *The Pale King,* Wallace was making a concerted effort to distance himself from his previous stylistic preoccupations, explaining to Jonathan Franzen in 2005 that his own "verbal habits" had become a serious creative restraint: "I am tired of myself, it seems: tired of my thoughts, associations, syntax, various verbal habits that have gone from discovery to technique to tic." Although he had appropriated elements of McCarthy's prose at earlier points in his career, it seems that during this particular juncture, Wallace intensified his appropriations of McCarthy as a means of linguistic reinvention. In this regard, it is not at all surprising that Wallace's reading of McCarthy's novels seemingly sidestepped much of their actual narrative content in order to emphasize the unusual linguistic effects McCarthy's prose was able to generate, which offered potential escape routes out of his own constraining style. Importantly, Wallace had little investment in the kinds of identities that McCarthy routinely explores, nor with Western myth-making, but was instead overwhelmingly concerned with McCarthy's technical and linguistic innovations.

However, it is also possible to see Wallace taking issue with some of these innovations throughout the Toni Ware sections of *The Pale King,* which detail Ware's backstory and later role as an IRS investigator. Several readers have detected the debt to McCarthy in these passages, with John Jeremiah Sullivan noting "a whiff of parody or pastiche to the Toni Ware sections," raising the possibility that Wallace is "making fun of bad Cormac McCarthy, the incorrigible McCarthy who, when he wants to write 'toadstools,' writes 'mushrooms with serrate and membraneous soffits where-under toads are reckoned to siesta'" (Sullivan). Stephen Burn refers glancingly to such claims by acknowledging that "sections of Toni's narrative are often read as stylistically tied to Cormac McCarthy's example" (387), before claiming that a deeper debt in such sections is to Bret Easton Ellis. And while many other readers have noted the strong similarities that such scenes bear to McCarthy's fiction, it is worth stressing just how overt—and at times even hostile—this resemblance is. In such sections, Wallace exploits the full range of McCarthy's technical repertoire, using both poly- and asyndeton, parataxis, archaisms, Biblicisms, metaphysical microcosms, and a host of other devices in an attempt to mimic

the older writer's prose. Sullivan is right to note the borderline-parodic tone that such appropriations engender but, read more broadly, the Toni Ware narrative evinces a highly complex aesthetic response to McCarthy's work, since it modulates in important ways over the course of the novel. (It is telling that an earlier draft of this section included a character named "McCorkle," a too obvious reference to McCarthy that Wallace later removed.) The first description of Ware centers on her ghastly childhood, and is given a stylistic representation that clearly justifies Wallace's fear that he would end up "writing a bad McCarthy rip-off," reproducing the singular effects of McCarthy's prose:

> One of these, Mother Tia, told fortunes, leathery and tremorous and her face like a shucked pecan fully cowled in black and two isolate teeth like a spare at the Show Me Lanes, and owned her own cards and tray on which what ash collected showed white, calling her *chulla* and charging her no tariff on terms of the Evil Eye she claimed to fear when the girl looked at her through the screen's hole with the telescope of a rolled magazine. Two ribby and yellow-eyed dogs lay throbbing in the smoke tree's shade and rose only sometimes to bay at the planes as they harried the fires. (58)

The highly recondite, antiquated language and the description of the spectral fortuneteller, along with the Spanish insertion and deployment of polysyndeton, are clearly reminiscent of McCarthy's prose. In particular, the words *shucked*, *harried*, and *cowled* are all frequently used throughout McCarthy's novels, and the broader section of the book from which the extract is taken uses a similarly antiquated lexicon—"ruddled glow" (59), "would visit upon her" (61), "distant surf's lallation" (61), "begat" (61), "strange agnate forms" (55), "arteries leading thereto" (60), and "said unto these" (65)—in its portrayal of the rural Midwest of Ware's upbringing. Moreover, Mother Tia harks back to *Suttree*'s Mother She, the "gimpen granddam" (335) whom Suttree and Ab Jones consult: just as Mother She intuits an unspeakable fate for Suttree, which causes "the skin on his scalp to pucker" (341), Mother Tia fears Toni's presence and "Evil Eye." The passage contains a final reference to *Suttree*, in the "ribby and yellow-eyed dogs" that hark back to the description of Harrogate's "dog lone dead . . . whose yellow ribs leered like teeth" (438).

But, importantly, Wallace also interrogates the boundaries of McCarthy's style via a strategy of amplification, wherein he deploys a linguistic extravagance that goes beyond even McCarthy's most florid renderings. Such an intensification, present in the above passage and in many other sections of Ware's narrative, ultimately signals an ambivalent and fretful relationship. Crucially, such scenes

also show Wallace inserting pop-cultural reference points within McCarthy's prose, to determine whether it can accommodate them: he describes a "bright plastic packet impaled on the mulberry twig," for instance, that is "seen through shifting parallax of saplings' branches" (55), as well as "shoes' brand incised in the dew" (2) and an incongruous reference to the television series *Dragnet*: "skirting the corrugate trailer where it was said the man left his family and returned sometime later with a gun and killed them all as they watched *Dragnet*" (55). Embedding pop-cultural products within otherwise bucolic descriptions works in part to undermine the aforementioned solemnity of McCarthy's prose, as in Wallace's self-consciously—and risibly—grandiloquent description of food purchased from a convenience store: "West of Pratt KS they purchased and ate Convenient Mart burritos heated in the device provided for that purpose. A great huge unfinishable Slushee" (66). Here, Wallace skewers several tendencies within McCarthy's prose: his use of stately, Biblical rhythms and an antiquated sentence structure to describe an ersatz burrito is highly comical, as are the lavish descriptors and asyndeton bestowed upon Ware's Slushee. More comical still are Wallace's overwrought descriptions of teenage lust:

> The gypsum fires and the park's lit sign were the poles of the desert night. The boys burped and howled at the moon and the howls were nothing like the real thing and their laughter was strained and words indifferent to the love they said swelled them and would visit upon her past counting. (60–61)

Wallace also offers exaggerated renderings of McCarthy's emphasis on violence and viscera, as in his description of the "battered atlas" that belongs to Toni Ware's mother, "over whose representation of her place of origin lay a spore of dried mucus spindled through with a red thread of blood" (57). The brazen nature of such appropriations stands in stark contrast to the way that Wallace used McCarthy in earlier texts. "Everything is Green," for instance, from *Girl with Curious Hair*, is set in a trailer park and features the kinds of rustically off-kilter characters that populate *Suttree*—which Wallace told Gus Vant Sant was a novel full of "derelicts and retards and twisted people"—but these two texts are radically different in terms of tone and style. Via such seemingly parodic appropriations, Wallace's strategy is analogous to Ken Erdedy's, in *Infinite Jest*, who attempts to "cure himself by excess" (22) of a marijuana addiction. In the same way, Wallace accentuated and creatively expanded upon McCarthy's distinctive prose, as a means by which he could extricate himself from what had become an overly constrictive influence.

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This process of extrication becomes clear in light of the early sections of Ware's narrative, which offer oblique reflections on the inherent falsity of literary representation. While previously Wallace had used brief McCarthy-like insertions as a way of rhetorically signaling sincerity or solemnity, his use of McCarthy in *The Pale King* instead explores the gap between literary representation and lived reality. Ware is a prodigious reader, with an omnivorous appetite for all kinds of texts:

> The girl read stories about horses, bios, science, psychiatry, and *Popular Mechanics* when obtainable. She read history in a determined way. She read *My Struggle* and could not understand all the fuss. She read Wells, Steinbeck, Keene, Laura Wilder (twice), and Lovecraft. She read halves of many torn and castoff things. She read a coverless *Red Badge* and knew by sheer feel that its author had never seen war nor knew that past some extremity one floated just above the fear and could blinklessly watch it while doing what to be done or allowed to stay alive. (60)

In a draft version of this scene that was oddly left out of the published novel, Wallace described an even more powerful repudiation of literary style, in Ware's account of reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky:

> She had library cards from five different cities. She read a coverless Dostoevski and thought the men stilted and vain and their prostitutes fools for letting themselves be shaped so plainly to suit the story's needs. She could not tell whether they took their men's handwringing seriously or whether it was part of the arrangement but knew them for fools either way.

Ware's dismissal reprises Wallace's own admission, in his review of Joseph Frank's biography of the Russian novelist, that Dostoevsky's characters frequently inhabit "soppy-seeming formalit[ies] of the 19th-century culture," an aspect that often works to "alienate" (202) modern readers. But the reference to Dostoevsky also confirms Ware's critique of literary representation. Ware's criticism of the "stilted and vain" men and foolish prostitutes that populate Dostoevsky's novels is testament to her fierce independence and self-determination. Ware is clearly determined to avoid becoming like her flimsy, semiconscious mother and refuses to let herself be shaped by the "needs" and demands—narrative or otherwise—of others.[20] Her criticism of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is similarly revealing, since Ware's personal experiences compel her to

dismiss the novel as a deceitful affectation, which does not adequately represent her own reality.[21]

A similar interrogation can also be observed in the account of Toni Ware's rape, when the narrator—via free indirect discourse—counterpoints her violation with the romantic tropes animating the novels that Ware has read: "Her second experience of the kind her books made seem sweet through indifferent speech had occurred in the abandoned car in University City MO" (59). Ware's resistance to having her own narrative shaped by "indifferent speech" and particular literary tropes is borne out across the course of the novel, since later scenes describing her life as an IRS investigator and the resumption of her backstory are presented in markedly different prose, starkly removed from the near-parodic stylistic appropriation of McCarthy. These later scenes are rendered in a far more typically Wallace prose style, as if Ware has escaped the kinds of narrative possibilities available to her within the world of McCarthy's fiction. While her early character traits are the product of an amplification of McCarthy's prose, her self-determination allows her to escape the destiny awaiting "derelicts and retards and twisted people." Stephen Burn's claim is that Toni Ware's curious ability to exert precise control over the movement of her eyes—being able to leave them open for long periods without blinking—is indicative of the way that she escapes her past, both "disdaining her connection to her mother's plans" and "prevailing against her evolutionary history" (88) but, crucially, she is also an escapee from a certain kind of literary prose. Her character arc can thus be seen as a repudiation of McCarthy's style and storytelling proclivities. Wallace clearly understood the way that literary style sets limits on particular kinds of characters and narrative events, internalizing Alain Robbe-Grillet's radical notion of literary style, which asserts that it is predominately in a novel's "form that [its] meaning resides," since a novelist's first preoccupation is with "certain rhythms of sentences, certain architectures, a vocabulary, [and] certain grammatical constructions" (44). For Robbe-Grillet, the events and character trajectories that comprise a novel "come afterward, as though secreted by the style itself" (44). This conception of literary style clearly informs the second-phase of Wallace's relationship to McCarthy, which centers on the attempt to wrest control back from the influence of the older writer, thus constituting an extended critique of the limits of McCarthy's prose. Ware's refusal to be a mere "secretion" of literary style is dramatized across the course of *The Pale King*, and reveals Wallace's second phase of engagement with McCarthy's fiction as being centered on a far more ambivalent mode of appropriation.

My sense is that analyzing the complex lines of influence between Wallace and McCarthy has important implications for conceiving of the way that other

authors have incorporated McCarthy's influence. Contemporary American novelists like Kent Haruf, Oakley Hall, and William Gay (to name just a few) have clearly been influenced by McCarthy's work, as have many other writers from beyond the US. The work of British novelists such as Niall Griffiths and Michael Crossan—the latter the infamous McCarthy impersonator who created a fake Twitter account for the author in early 2012—also bears signs of McCarthy's influence. Moreover, Roberto Bolaño's review of *Blood Meridian* contains a cryptic though intriguing reference to the "many enterprising" Latin American novelists who "thought that Cormac McCarthy would never be translated into Spanish" and thus "ransacked him shamelessly, abetted by ignorance and a rather curious understanding of intertextuality" (201).[22] Many McCarthy scholars have seemingly subscribed to a similarly curious notion of intertextuality, perhaps assuming that since McCarthy's style is so singular and distinctive, he is unlikely to have exerted a tangible influence over later writers, an assumption that reproduces Richard B. Woodward's assertion—in his 1992 *New York Times* profile of the author—that "there isn't anyone remotely like [McCarthy] in contemporary American literature." But it would be highly unusual if successive authors had *not* made use of McCarthy's innovations. Taken as a case study, the detailed comparative analysis of Wallace and McCarthy carried out in this article reveals just how deeply subsequent novelists have grappled with the older writer, showing how Wallace interrogated McCarthy's prose style not from a coolly detached remove, but from the inside-out. Wallace's heightened sensitivity to literary style allowed him to articulate a complex artistic response to McCarthy's project, and his appropriations contain instructive lessons on how subsequent writers have oriented themselves toward McCarthy's work.

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NOTES

1. See Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010); David Williams, "*Blood Meridian* and Classical Greek Thought," in *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Nicholas Monk and Rick Wallach (New York: Routledge, 2011). 6–23; Richard Gilmore, "*No Country for Old Men*: The Coens' Tragic Western," in *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers*, ed. Mark T. Conard (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2012). 55–78.

2. See Megan Riley McGilchrist, "The Ties that Bind: Intertextual Links between *All the Pretty Horses* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" (24–40); John Ferer, "From Blue to Blood: Jean Toomer's 'Blue Meridian' and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* as Intertexts" (155–67); Michael Madsen, "'A Nameless Wheeling in the Night': Shapes of Evil in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and John Carpenter's *Halloween*" (100–11); and Euan Gallivan, "Cold Dimensions, Little Worlds: Self, Death, and Motion in *Suttree* and Beckett's *Murphy* (155–67), in *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy*.

3. Bloom's list also includes Don DeLillo, Philip Roth, and Thomas Pynchon.

4. Kasia Boddy is the only previous scholar to note a connection between Wallace and McCarthy, suggesting in passing that the short story "John Billy," from *Girl with Curious Hair*, can be viewed as a "homage" (25) to *Blood Meridian*. However, such a claim is problematic, since—as Boddy herself acknowledges—Wallace "claimed not to have read *Blood Meridian* until much later" (40). According to Max, Wallace discovered McCarthy's fiction around 1987–88, while teaching at Amherst (165), making it an unlikely influence on "John Billy," which was first published in *Conjunctions* in the Fall of 1988.

5. See, for instance: Steven Frye, "Cormac McCarthy's 'world in its making': Romantic Naturalism in *The Crossing*," *Studies in American Naturalism* 2 (2007): 46–65; James Giles, "Teaching the Contemporary Naturalism of Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*," *American Literary Naturalism Newsletter* 1.1 (2006): 2–7; David Holloway, *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002).

6. David Foster Wallace, Letter to Steven Moore (16 Sept., 1990), Container 1.2–1.3. Steven Moore's David Foster Wallace Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

7. "A. Theroux" here is Alexander Theroux, whose 1982 novel *Darconville's Cat* Wallace revered.

8. In the interview, Wallace gave no hint as to when the meeting with McCarthy had taken place.

9. The essay, by Wallace's student Shawn Miklaucic, was submitted on 9 May 1997, in a class titled "English 487."

10. In this section of the essay, Miklaucic glossed and quoted from Bell's interpretation of *Suttree*, in his critical collection *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy*. Wallace's collection of annotated, personal books at the Harry Ransom Center also includes John Sepich's *Notes on Blood Meridian* (1993).

11. Wallace misremembered the quotation slightly. McCarthy's actual phrase, from the Richard B. Woodward interview, is "The ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written."

12. *Quasi*-autobiographical, since although the essay is ostensibly a memoir of growing up in Philo, Illinois, Wallace's father corrected the record in 2010, when he told Charles B. Harris that the piece was a "feigned autobiography," and that "none of us, including David, ever set foot in Philo." See Harris, "David Foster Wallace's Hometown: A Correction," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 51.3 (2010): 185.

13. Karr and Costello both mentioned Wallace's admiration for McCarthy during this period in a 2012 New Yorker Festival panel, titled "Rereading David Foster Wallace."

14. Incidentally, the words *moths* and *gnats* both occur with surprising frequency throughout *Suttree*. According to the comprehensive lexical analysis carried out by Christopher Forbis, Wesley J. Morgan, and John Sepich, *gnats* occurs three times and *moths* is used twice.

15. David Foster Wallace, Letter to Steven Moore (17 April 1989). Quoted in Max, *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story*, 120.

16. "Burnished shield" is not a phrase that McCarthy himself used, though the words *burnished* and *shield* crop up with surprising frequency throughout his work.

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17. Maude Newton goes as far as seeing such an "infuriating absence of question marks following interrogatives" as emblematic of Wallace's literary prose style and a key aspect of his literary legacy.

18. Wallace wrote a title ("'Read These' Story") and several notes for this vignette within his copy of *The Moviegoer*, and was particularly inspired by the opening scene of Percy's novel, in which Binx Bolling finds himself lying on the ground under a "chindolea bush," watching "a dung beetle scratching around under the leaves" (10–11). Just as the beetle's industry foreshadows Binx's own restless quest for meaning—"As I watched, there awoke in me an immense curiosity. I was onto something. I vowed that if I ever got out of this fix, I would pursue the search" (11)—Wallace's opening creatively expands this passage, describing a similarly significant insectile moment but replacing the dung beetle with the circular movement of worms in cow "patties." I have explored Wallace's tendency to merge multiple sources of influence within a single text in "Programming Literary Influence: David Foster Wallace's "B.I. #59," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 56.2 (2014): 113–34.

19. Here, I am using U-shaped markers for unstressed syllables, and dashes for stressed syllables.

20. For unknown reasons, these two sentences were cut by editor Michael Pietsch, though a condensed version of the larger paragraph was included in the published edition. Curiously, Pietsch decided to excise this section of the novel but leave in a similar sentence following the above—in which Ware describes reading a Stephen Crane novel, a "coverless *Red Badge* [*of Courage*]"—despite Wallace bracketing this latter sentence for possible excision, drawing a "delete" glyph with a question mark next to it.

21. Incidentally, it seems likely that the character of Toni Ware was based on a creative writing student of Wallace's described in the Gus Van Sant interview, who had a similar childhood to Ware's and was also a passionate reader: "The best under grad writing student I've had was this girl. I met her when she was 18, she had a three-year-old kid. She is from a little town, trailer park, got knocked up at fifteen and was reading *Middlemarch* on the bus trying to go to the welfare office to get her bottle of milk subsidy from the government agency. . . . [A]nything she knew she taught herself."

22. Given McCarthy's disdain for both "Latin American writers" and the literary genre of "magical realism" (Grossman), it would be intriguing to discover which particular writers Bolaño had in mind when he made this observation.

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