

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Weatherston, Jack (2018) How the West has Warmed: Climate Change in the Contemporary Western. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University.

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/39786/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

HOW THE WEST HAS WARMED: CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN

J. M. WEATHERSTON

PhD

2018

HOW THE WEST HAS WARMED: CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN

JACK MICHAEL WEATHERSTON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of the University of
Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the Faculty of
Arts, Design & Social Sciences

OCTOBER 2018

Abstract

This thesis will argue that the contemporary Western, in literature and film, has shown a particular capacity to reflect the influence of climate change on the specific set of landscapes, ecosystems and communities that make up the American West. The Western has, throughout its history, articulated the major anxieties afflicting American culture within the confines of its genre tropes, symbols and character archetypes. As climate change has begun to represent an existential threat to the West, the Western genre has been compelled to address its destabilising, terminal implications. The Western genre is a product of a specific mythology. As such it reflects many of the harmful ideological premises of colonial ideology and the white settler expansionist project. However, the genre has the capacity to establish spaces of resistance and critique within the mythic space of the Western. Responses to climate change are examples of this. This thesis is also informed by ecocritical approaches that emphasise the importance of the material environment, in contrast to anthropocentrism, and that acknowledge the influence of climate change on culture. I will argue that the Western, as an environmentally-located genre, is uniquely sensitive to the changing climate. Although cultural awareness of climate change has only recently begun to emerge, there has been a long history of environmental reflexivity in the Western. Studies such as the edited collection *The Landscape of the Hollywood Western* (2006), and Murray and Heumann's *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral* (2012) have delineated the ways in which "Ecowesterns" have responded to environmental destruction and loss. This thesis will add to the critical debate around the ecological Western by focusing specifically on climate change as it presents itself in contemporary Westerns. I will show the variety of ways in which the threat of climate change has made its presence known in the genre. It is apparent in the politics of the border space, the depiction of extractive industries, sound and visual design, the interaction of scale and time and even in the actual process of filmmaking itself. Genre fiction and film are potent sources of narratives that might begin to come to terms with the representational challenges of climate change.

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 74767 words

Name: Jack Weatherston

Signature:

Date: 17/10/2018

Contents

Introduction	7
Chapter one: The Western, the Border and the Changing Climate	32
Chapter two: Westerns at the Limit: <i>The Road</i> and <i>Blood Meridian</i>	51
Chapter three: Literary Westerns and Extractive Industry	73
Chapter four: The Sound of Climate Change in the Western	93
Chapter five: <i>Deadwood</i>: Time, Scale and the Anthropocene	115
Chapter six: The Intrusion of Climate in <i>The Revenant</i>	130
Chapter seven: The <i>Homesman</i> and <i>Rango</i>: Possible Futures for the Western	142
Bibliography	158

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my supervisor Dr. Victoria Bazin for all her incredible help and support. Many thanks also to Northumbria University and the American Studies department for providing the funding that made completing this thesis possible.

Jenny, Mum, Dad and Alice. Thank you all so much. Love you.

Introduction

This thesis relies on an understanding of the Western myth as an ideological construct that is subject to a complex interaction of power and reception. Despite the overt influence of white, colonialist ideology, the Western genre, as an expression of myth, is capable of producing texts that carve out small spaces of resistance against hegemonic values. Climate change, because it presents an existential threat to the Western, has the potential to further expand spaces of critique and productive resistance within the confines of the genre. Furthermore, this thesis is informed by ecocritical approaches that emphasise the importance of the material environment, in contrast to anthropocentrism, and that acknowledge the influence of climate change on culture.

With these twin theoretical buttresses in place, it will be argued that the Western genre has, throughout its existence, responded to contemporary societal crises and anxieties. It has been able to do this because it has retained a reflexive and, at times, critical relationship with its own mythology and the racist and imperialist ideology it was conceived to promote. It is therefore well placed to reflect the emerging discontinuities of climate change. The Western, as a genre, is located in a specific region, encompassing a range of existing landscapes, ecosystems and communities that are currently facing radically uncertain futures. As a result Western myths necessarily stage interactions between humans and particular, contingent, environments. Genre fiction and film provide a productive venue for representations of climate change that may otherwise be eschewed by dominant modes of realism. I hope to show how the Western, as both a genre and regionally-located mythology, reveals the influence of climate on narrative in the Anthropocene.

The Western genre, and the mythology of national identity that it represents, is a product of a discrete, physical space. The boundaries of this space have always been subject to interpretation and historical contingency. As the frontier expanded the borderline that defined the West went with it. The Mississippi river formed the symbolic division between the old, settled East and the contested but open West in the nineteenth century. Movement beyond this border was necessarily an act of physical daring and an expression of the nation's imperial destiny, the land beyond the river was full of promise but also danger and fantasy:

In 1800 the trans-Mississippi West may as well have been Mars to most Americans... Learned scholars conjured the West as a landscape roamed by mammoths, giant beavers and other animals from prehistory: a land that time forgot. Narratives spoke of fierce volcanoes, ridges five miles high, 180-mile long salt deposits and a huge mountain from which all the rivers in the continent flowed (Jones and Wills 12).

And yet by the end of the century this space of conjecture and superstition had been thoroughly

colonised and tamed. In 1898 a group of wealthy businessmen held the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, in Omaha, Nebraska. The world's fair featured an 'Indian Congress', an exhibit featuring 'living displays' of Native American cultures. The exposition also had a day dedicated to William 'Buffalo Bill' Cody, a legendary figure of the American West and creator of the world-famous Wild West show, which he founded in Nebraska in 1883. The exposition reveals how swiftly the trans-Mississippi West was appropriated, subjected to a regime of ethnic cleansing, and incorporated into the American empire. Simultaneously the imaginative space was metabolised into the pageantry and mythology of Buffalo Bill and the already calcified symbology of the cowboy, the horse and the gun.

As conquest and development moved west, and spaces that were once peripheral were absorbed into the core, the line of demarcation between the east and what lay beyond was also compelled to shift. The arbitrary process of splitting the continent made finding consensus on where to draw the line a difficult task. However, in 1879 John Wesley Powell, as head of the U.S. Geological Survey, proposed that west should be divided from east at the line of the hundredth Meridian West. This line of longitude cuts through the Dakotas, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas and is significant primarily because it represents a distinct climatological divide. East of the hundredth meridian receives in excess of twenty inches of precipitation annually; as a result the east does not require irrigation on a large scale in order for productive agriculture to occur. The opposite is true west of the line, where vast systems of drilling for groundwater and enormous civic projects like the Hoover Dam have been necessary to support large-scale food production. The historian and novelist Wallace Stegner, one of the region's foremost chroniclers, identified the centrality of climate and water distribution to a definition of the West in his 1953 biography of Powell: *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West*. Stegner argues that Powell was the first to understand the essential aridity of the West. The homesteaders and cattle ranchers that had settled and exploited the West had little understanding of the nature and hard limits of the system they inhabited. Powell lobbied hard for extensive irrigation projects to be carried out by the federal government, in the face of intense criticism from business and the states, who believed that the development of the West should be left to individuals and the private sector, free from government interference and the tyranny of regulation. Although a man of his time Powell was also a proto-conservationist, advocating for the protection of forests, watersheds and soil so that the valuable resources and potential of the West could be accessed and put to use by future generations, rather than squandered in a frenzy of short-sighted plundering. Stegner depicts this instrumentalist understanding of the fragile West, the belief that the region's primary value lay in what it could provide to its inhabitants, as indicative of an egalitarian impulse in Powell. Clearly he possessed a deep conviction that the alternative to, admittedly imperfect, democratic state interventions in the Western landscape was far worse:

The alternative was creeping deserts, flooded river valleys, dusty miles of unused and unusable land, feeble or partial or monopolistic utilization of the available, land and water. The alternative was great power and great wealth to a few and for a brief time rather than competence and independence for the communities of small freeholders on which his political economy unchangeably rested (407).

Stegner's own thinking about the future of 'hydraulic society' in the West would harden over the course of his writing career. He became increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of reforming Western people's attitudes and relationships to the land and was also doubtful of the long-term viability of large-scale irrigation. Frederick Brøgger reveals how Stegner began to radically doubt the project of irrigating and exploiting the water resources of the West. That the agricultural system of the West and the environmental degradation it entailed had become the model for the developing world Stegner viewed as a tragedy and a harbinger of further destruction. Stegner was also able to effectively link his broadly conservationist critique with a larger analysis of the character of those that settled the American West. Brøgger succinctly argues that:

Stegner's most trenchant contribution to the study of Western culture lies in an analysis that links environmental exploitation (particularly of water resources) to the migratory and transient character of Western life. As he remarks about his family's Saskatchewan farm at the Montana border: "The homestead, though it was a stead of sorts, was never a home". A place that is not a home invites environmental irresponsibility (27).

The hundredth meridian runs through the work of Powell and later Stegner. These two wary iconoclasts recognised that any definition of the West or its culture and character must acknowledge: (a) that the environment of the West is characterised by stress and resource scarcity and requires human action in order to carve out a precarious way of life, (b) that the violent and transient nature of the American colonial project and the destructive ideology of the frontier and manifest destiny has contributed to the degradation of the living environment, and (c) that the development of the West and the interaction of Western subjects and their environment is inherently unsustainable. When we define the West we are defining, in addition to a socio-political entity, an existing geographical region, with its own diverse ecology, hydrology and climate. In so doing we are also naming the future challenges facing that region and its environment, challenges that threaten settled notions of the mythological West. In this respect the West as a concept has always anticipated a changing climate. Climate and the changes wrought by human action are powerful influences on what we have come to think of as the American West. What is new now is that, as scientific and social understanding of climate change implications has grown, climate in the West has taken on an existential quality. We are confronted with the prospect of a radically hostile Western landscape. This thesis will examine how our contemporary understanding of the threat posed by climate change has interacted with the longstanding environmental reflexivity of the West and how this has been expressed in the paradigmatic mythology of the frontier, the Western.

The centrality of climate and the changing environment that the hundredth meridian represents contradicts, to an extent, the ideological foundations of the West and the Western. The archetypal landscape of the Western is the grandiose aridity of Utah's Monument Valley as visualised by Glenn Ford and it is such desert environments that exemplify the myth of the frontier as an unforgiving wilderness requiring the taming hand of white American civilisation. These founding notions of expansion, progress and the instrumental value of the environment were articulated most powerfully by two figures. In 1893, a few years prior to the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner gave a speech at another World's Exposition (this time in Chicago). The title of his thesis was 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' and in it he expounded the ideological premises of westward expansion by promoting this growth as the key facilitator of America's development. Turner argued that the taming of the American landscape by heroic farmers, a stereotype in line with a romantic and backwards looking Jeffersonian agrarianism, was the animus for the ascendancy of the nation. Turner's thesis ignores the great industrial expansion of America and effaces the Native Americans by defining them as savages in need of removal. As a result he was and still remains crucial in providing a theoretical cover for naked imperialism and ethnic cleansing. But Turner's thesis most powerfully advocated for the beneficial effect of movement Westward on the American character:

The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier (37).

Turner's description of the plucky, resourceful settlers imbued with the liberatory energy of the individual is at odds with Powell's, who distrusted the unchecked homesteaders who thoughtlessly plundered the land, and contradicts Stegner's view, that the rootless freedom of the frontier promoted exploitation and a lack of careful stewardship of the regions finite resources. They would have been similarly at odds with Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt took Turner's thesis and super-charged it with his particular hyper-masculine brio. For Roosevelt the real symbol of Western and national identity was the cowboy not the farmer. Using his own experiences as a model, he argued that rugged conquest was essential for the development of the American national character and expressed an explicit desire for *racial* conquest in order to further forge this sense of identity. Matthew Carter defines this movement from Turner to Roosevelt: 'Where Turner had essentially

elided the Native American, Roosevelt... placed the continent's aboriginal inhabitants at the forefront of his version of frontier history' (15). The frontier ideology was heavily informed by a white supremacist imperialism that saw the conquering of the West as an essential part of defining a national self-identity. Roosevelt took the violence that was implicit in Turner's thesis and made it an explicit and vital part of an emancipatory Westward migration. The Western was a product of this colonial violence whilst simultaneously helping form the ideology of manifest destiny, which held that white Americans were ordained by God to conquer the entire continent. However, as I will show, the Western has also been capable, throughout its history, of reflecting on the problematic legacy of the frontier with nuance and self-critique. When we conceive of the identity of the West, not through Turner and Roosevelt's expansionist propaganda, but instead through the prism of Wallace and Stegner's hundredth meridian we can already see this reflexivity in operation. A refiguring of Western identity that takes into account the interaction between subjects and the environment also undermines settled notions of Western identity. The hundredth meridian reveals the importance of climate and environment in any definition of the West as well as the challenges that the myth of the West will be forced to contend with in the face of climate change. The conflicts and discontinuities created by climate change are therefore visible in the novels and films that make up the contemporary Western genre.

The living environment of the American West faces a specific and contextual set of threats in our rapidly warming world. The fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) contains a regional analysis of the impacts of climate change in North America, and reveals the unique vulnerability of the West. Impacts particular to the Western and South-Western United States include: earlier peak flow of snowmelt runoff in snow-dominated streams and rivers in the western North; declines in the amount of water stored in spring snowpack in snow-dominated areas of western North America; increases in wildfire activity, including fire season length and area burned by wildfires; increases in bark beetle infestation levels in pine tree species; increases in tree mortality rates in old-growth forests; less water availability and increased drought conditions. A further report prepared for the United States government's National Climate Assessment with a particular focus on the Southwest argues that:

...as a region that has experienced – within the relatively short time span of several decades – rapid increases in human population, significant alterations in land use and land cover, limits on the supplies of water, long-term drought, and other climatic changes, the Southwest can be considered to be one of the most “climate-challenged” regions of North America (Garfin et al 1-2).

These reports are necessarily couched in the language of probabilities rather than certainties. The precise crises and disasters that climate change will bring about cannot, of course, be predicted

with absolute assurance. Similarly, although the causal relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and, for example, Californian wildfires has been proven, the complexity of the climate system always allows for doubt and nuance in the realm of causation, which can be cynically exploited by deniers and polluting industries. However, as the twenty-first century has progressed doubts about the reality and the causes of climate change have been eroded through the steady increase in the severity and extremities of the weather system in regions such as the western United States. In his 2007 work of popular science *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*, Mark Lynas uses scientific projections to describe the consequences of different degrees of global warming. In one section, detailing warming of three degrees, Lynas imagines the world of 2045 and a huge category six hurricane bearing down on Houston, Texas:

Still the storm builds. The surge is now moving up the river, the first water pouring around the buildings on the eastern edge of Houston itself. With blinding rain now pounding all of Harris County for several hours, Houston's long-tamed river, Buffalo Bayou, begins to return to the wild (137).

This vision of the dramatic consequences of climate change for regions like the West could be read as overly pessimistic, guilty of the unforgivable sin of 'catastrophism'. And yet, Lynas' warning now seems ultimately prophetic, with the deluge caused by Hurricane Harvey in August of 2017 producing flooding in Houston on just such a scale. The impacts of climate change have begun to manifest themselves beyond the realm of the speculative and the fictional. Indeed, an IPCC report from October 2018 significantly restated the dangers facing the world as it moves toward 1.5 degrees of warming. The consensus now is that any warming beyond this figure will make regions such as the American West immensely difficult to live in. And yet, even this report has been accused of understating the threat. In the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* the report was criticised for misleading policymakers about the true extent of the threat:

... the report, dire as it is, misses a key point: Self-reinforcing feedbacks and tipping points—the wildcards of the climate system—could cause the climate to destabilize even further. The report also fails to discuss the five percent risk that even existing levels of climate pollution, if continued unchecked, could lead to runaway warming—the so-called "fat tail" risk (Molina et al).

The future of the West is undoubtedly one of extreme and disorientating change. The weather patterns, ecology and modes of human existence that have been typical to the American West and its diverse environments will not persist by the end of this century. The Western cannot help but reflect this emerging knowledge. The region has entered the epoch that has come to be called the Anthropocene. Proposed by an international group of geologists the Anthropocene denotes the current geological period in which human activity is the predominant influence on the global system. This term has been controversial; critics from the left argue that it ignores the fact that the

responsibility for climate change is not evenly distributed across humanity. Jason W. Moore has coined an alternative term 'Capitalocene' that places the blame for environmental change at the door of capitalism, the global north and polluting industries. Whilst there is certainly value in this more attributive definition, for the purposes of this thesis I will continue to use Anthropocene to denote the contemporary moment and the changing climate. The Western as a genre emerges from a hegemonic culture. The development of the frontier and the lifestyles enjoyed by those who now occupy it are certainly contributors to the crisis. The ideology of westward expansion was a totalising one that saw in the movement the advancement of humankind itself. The Anthropocene as a term usefully reflects the self-reinforcing dominance of the Western myth.

The Western has been defined not just by its classical iconography (the cowboy hat, the horse, the six shooter) but also by a set of iconic landscapes. Lone Pine in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California provided the backdrop for scenes in *How the West Was Won* (1962) and *Joe Kidd* (1972), whilst the picturesque setting of Jackson Hole in Wyoming proved inspirational for the makers of *Shane* in 1953 and for contemporary filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino, whose *Django Unchained* (2012) was shot there in part. The Western's most emblematic landscape is Monument Valley, part of the Navajo Tribal Park at the border between Arizona and Utah. The familiar rock formations have provided dramatic and romantic visual impetus to classic John Wayne films *Rio Grande* (1950) and *The Searchers* (1956), amongst a host of other Westerns. But this landscape, ubiquitous now to the point of cliché, is a part of a larger environment that is becoming increasingly hostile. According to current projections (see Cullen) the region could be facing between fifty or more days per year of temperatures in excess of 100°F (37.7°C) by 2060 and, by the end of the century, could be faced with such extreme temperatures for more than half the year. Cities such as Phoenix and Las Vegas may become uninhabitable as rising temperatures place too great a strain on resources and human health. Monument Valley, already a water stressed environment prone to climate extremes, will cease to be a viable location and landscape for the production of Western films. Even further west, the increase in the frequency and severity of forest fires will introduce hostility and threat to forest ecosystems that have been long associated with Westerns. Lack of snowfall is already affecting productions looking to represent an authentic, primordial West. The Western landscape is an imaginative space, long deployed to buttress colonial and economic ideologies, however it is grounded in a physical space that is under existential threat from climate change. The West also remains a space of rampant extraction and fossil fuel exploitation. Drilling for oil continues in Texas and California, whilst fracking operations and vast new pipeline systems scar and pit the landscape. The Western lifestyle also now necessitates enormous energy consumption, to fuel large SUVs (the marketing of which relies heavily on the myth of the frontier) and to power air-conditioning in growing urban centres. Contemporary Western narratives are compelled to engage with a landscape facing its ultimate

erasure, and driven there by the very logic of growth and exploitation that underlies the mythology of Westward expansion.

Having established the threats facing the West in the coming century I will now delineate the particular features of the West as a genre. Peculiar to the Western is its dual status as genre and myth. In order to discern the influence of climate change on the Western genre it is first necessary to reach a definition of myth, and to establish how the Western (a term encompassing all of the genre's symbolic touchstones) has acquired, through constant retelling and reaffirmation, the status of mythology. And further, it is also necessary to discern to what extent mythology remains a useful model for an analysis of contemporary Westerns. From the silent era to the heyday of the Western in the nineteen fifties, it was film that established the tropes, narratives and attendant prejudices of the genre. Discussing John Ford, the critic John Saunders argues that in the classical Western: 'The focus is on history; the process through which society comes into being as the garden emerges from the wilderness' (38). The emphasis is on the self-definition of white male characters through a violent reaction towards difference. This is evident in the 'Classical' Western's patriarchal treatment of female characters as well as the – at times – gleeful depiction of genocidal campaigns against Native peoples. In her influential reading of the Western *West of Everything* Jane Tompkins asserts that the special allure of the Western for American culture is as an escape from femininity and a return to masculine values: 'Its about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents' (45). In this interpretation the classical Western performed a vital role in restating and reaffirming the myths of American masculinity that underpin the American imperial project. Standing as it did for the nation's mythic sense of self the Western was subject to change when this self-image came under threat during the nineteen sixties. Film scholars have argued that the dislocations and uncertainties engendered by the Vietnam War and domestic political crises were reflected in what are termed 'Revisionist Westerns'. Films such as *A Man Called Horse* (1970) and *Little Big Man* (1970) sought to reappraise the treatment of Native Americans during the expansion of the frontier by presenting audiences with sympathetic Indian characters and emphasising white brutality, *Little Big Man* for example dramatises the Washita River massacre. Similarly changing attitudes towards gender were expressed in Westerns featuring central female characters although, as Edward Buscombe puts it: 'women can never really be heroes in the Western: that would mean the end of the genre' (297).

It has been persuasively argued that the Western genre has indeed now ended. Contemporary or post-Westerns must play within the hollowed-out confines of a genre gutted of its mythic heft. The archetypes of the form no longer bear the symbolic weight of the American national creation myth. However, recently critics have begun to reassess the periodisation and

genre stratification that have traditionally characterised cultural histories of the Western. Matthew Carter contends that films that have been categorised as classical Westerns were in fact highly reflexive and understood and commented on the ideology of the Western. For example archetypal white male heroes have often been up for critique in classic Westerns and subject to complex representation. Films such as *The Searchers* reveal how, according to Carter: ‘the Western has often held a mirror up to the myth of such heroes, undermining their status and, as a consequence, questioning the very morality of the nation that they come to represent’ (118). This analysis complicates traditional evolutionary theories of the Western, which divided the genre into its classical, revisionist and post-Western era silos. This reappraisal of genre periodisation offers renewed impetus to the contemporary Western by allowing us to consider the genre as more than just a base industry tool for the dissemination of imperialist propaganda. The twenty-first century has seen a revival of the genre with high profile directors such as the Coen brothers and Quentin Tarantino marking out new territory for the form whilst simultaneously playing with tropes and archetypes once thought stripped of meaning. The Western as genre operates within the ideological framework of manifest destiny but is and has always been capable of critiquing, satirising and subverting this colonial agenda.

In his trilogy of critical texts on the frontier myth, Richard Slotkin established a methodology for analysing and critiquing American imperial ideology, as it is found in the mythology of the West and Westerns. Slotkin provides an important working definition of mythology in the last of his trilogy on the West, *Gunfighter Nation* (1992):

...most of the time the assumptions of value inherent in a culture’s ideology are tacitly accepted as “givens”. Their meaning is expressed in the symbolic narratives of *mythology* and is transmitted to the society through various genres of mythic expression. It is the mythic expression of ideology that will be our primary concern (5).

In this conception the generic narrative conventions of the Western amplify ideological meaning through repetition in popular cultural forms. There is in essence a production line: ideology → mythology → genre. Slotkin traces this process through the history of the Western, as the genre responds to the ideological demands placed on it as historical circumstance dictates. For example Slotkin argues that the Western reflected Cold War ideology by representing the figure of the gunfighter as prototypical ‘cold warrior’:

what justifies and directs [gunfighter] professionalism... is a “gunfighter” understanding of “how the world works.” That understanding is essentially “hard-boiled”: the world is a hostile place, human motives are rarely good, and outcomes depend not on right but on the proper deployment of might (402).

Western mythology reflects the anxieties of the contemporary moment whilst simultaneously being deployed to advance – sometimes corrosive – ideological premises. Slotkin was amongst those who located the turn towards anti-Westerns in the damaging impact of the Vietnam War on American notions of strength and exception. The failures of My Lai and Watergate resulted in a turning away from the dominant myth of a progressive frontier nation towards a collective negativity and distrust of national agency and vitality. However, Slotkin correctly asserts that despite contemporary unease with mythic narrative, and despite continuous critical attempts to de-mythologise and de-mystify culture, mythology remains a crucial component in the organisation of the nation-state and national identity. A mythological formation such as the Western mobilises narrative and genre to reiterate and reify the stories and collective notions of identity that constitute a nation. As a consequence we can never be rid of mythology as Slotkin conceives it: ‘our choice is not between myth and a world without myth, but between productive revisions of myth... and the rigid defense of existing systems... that are out of phase with social and environmental reality’ (654-655). This advocacy for an engaged form of active myth making, that acknowledges contemporary concerns without lapsing into anxiety or harmful ideological recapitulation, is useful for understanding the potential agency of contemporary environmentally oriented Western narratives.

The ability of the Western to reflect and critique the myth of the frontier as the region is threatened by climate change rests on the genre’s ability to oppose the harmful ideologies of the West. The extent to which contemporary Westerns are able to resist the reactionary impulses that have dominated the genre ultimately rests on an understanding of ideology and the degree to which subjects can productively interact with ideological power structures. In his work on contemporary British television cultural critic John Fiske gives us a helpful framework for considering ideology and its function in popular culture. Fiske applies the theories of Louis Althusser to an analysis of television news. Such programming is indicative of the way in which ideology constructs the identity of subjects and positions them within the broader social order of late capitalism. Althusser uses the terms ‘hailing’ and ‘interpellation’ to describe how media exerts ideological control over the individuals that consume it. As Fiske puts it:

Hailing is the process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee. Interpellation is the larger process whereby language constructs social relations for both parties in an act of communication and thus locates them in a broader map of social relations in general (289).

Popular culture does the work of ideology by constantly representing and reiterating to individuals their position within society and thereby constructing them as subjects of ideology. Althusser’s work was an extension and expansion of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of ‘cultural hegemony’. It was Gramsci who initially identified the way in which the ruling classes, under capitalism, construct the

culture of a society in such a way as to ensure that the values and ideas that benefit them as a class become viewed as 'common sense' by the population as a whole. In such a way a ruling ideology is constructed that prevents the restructuring of society along more egalitarian lines. Fiske effectively synthesises the earlier thought of Gramsci with Althusser's theory of ideology by suggesting that both reveal the potential of culture to become a zone of resistance for subordinate subjects. Fiske employs the imagery of the Western to define the ideological conflict that is implied by Gramsci's thought:

Cultural theorists tend to use [*hegemony*] to describe the process by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination. This consent must be constantly won and rewon, for people's material social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantages of subordination and thus poses a constant threat to the dominant class. Like Althusser's theory of ideology, hegemony does not denote a static power relationship but a constant process of struggle in which the big guns belong to the side of those with social power, but in which victory does not necessarily go to the big guns – or, at least, in which that victory is not necessarily total (291).

Fiske focuses on the potential spaces of contest within ideology identified in Gramsci and Althusser's thought. He argues that whilst popular culture largely functions to reproduce the ideology of the capitalist elite, consumers of culture are themselves involved in an active process of reading that necessarily incorporates their own class-consciousness. This can produce audience readings that seem to run counter to the ideological *raison d'être* of a text. Fiske uses the example of young female Madonna fans, who find empowerment and a liberating sense of identity in a singer who could also be accused, as Fiske puts it, of 'teaching her young female fans to see themselves as men would see them – that is, she is hailing them as feminine subjects within patriarchy and as such is an agent of patriarchal hegemony' (301).

Viewing myth through the lens of ideology and hegemony gives an insight into the complexity of Western mythology and its seemingly endless malleability. Texts in contemporary culture are subject to, in Fiske's terms, 'semiotic struggles for meaning' (229), in which readers and viewers actively engage in the project of meaning creation. The overwhelming power of ideological apparatuses does not preclude the possibility of resistance and the reorienting of myth away from the status quo. The Western, as Slotkin and later Carter have shown, is just such a zone of ideological contestation. Classical Westerns, whilst adhering to the racist tropes of the genre, nevertheless maintained the ability to criticise the Western myth. Again Matthew Carter's reappraisal of the genre is helpful in identifying these complexities. He argues that films such as *Stagecoach* (John Ford 1939) and *Shane* (George Stevens 1953) are in certain respects more questioning of the ideological premises of the genre than later 'post' Westerns like *Unforgiven*

(Clint Eastwood 1992).¹ Contemporary Westerns are part of a genre that has always been aware of its status as ideologically derived myth. From the classical period to the postmodern Western, filmmakers and genre authors have reflected the societal anxieties of the moment alongside a continuous critique of the pernicious colonial myths established by Theodore Roosevelt and Frederick Jackson Turner. Simultaneously audiences and readers have engaged in their own forms of interactive mythmaking, negotiating power asymmetries to carve out pockets of meaning that might work against the ideology of nation, race and land that the Western cannot help but return to. Whilst the genre will continue to recapitulate many of the harmful ideological structures of manifest destiny there remains space within it for critique and resistance. The Western is mythological, and should be understood as such, in this fullest sense. More than that, it is a currently productive myth that vitally reflects the crises that the environment that spawned it is facing.

Alongside this nuanced understanding of myth and its relation to ideology, this thesis will interrogate contemporary Western text using the theoretical insights of ecocriticism. The development of ecocriticism as a critical movement has been defined by diversification. Since its formation the growth in both perspectives on environment and the texts open to ecocritical reading has been rapid. However, the field has always remained grounded in the pressing realities of environmental crisis. At its core ecocriticism remains concerned with nature as an irreducible, powerful and vital entity, an entity that demands full critical engagement regardless of ideological approach. Ursula Heise argues that the academy was somewhat late in addressing environmentalism due to the prevalence of French theory in the early nineties that was highly sceptical about terms such as nature and wilderness, seeing them as discursive artefacts. The intellectual turn away from language and semiotics threw the living environment into focus. Initially the 'Deep Ecology' movement, which stressed the inherent value of nature separate from societal and individual human concerns, dominated ecocriticism. Since this period the critical focus has shifted towards 'Social Ecology', which looks at environmental issues as they pressure, change and degrade social institutions. Social ecology is heavily influenced by globalisation and its attendant environmental impacts, and as such is closely linked to the environmental justice movement. Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) uses an environmental justice analysis to reconfigure our understanding of political violence to incorporate long-term acts of toxic pollution and carbon emissions. Influential works such as Nixon's reveal the part that climate change has played in the turn towards social ecology. The interconnected complexity of climate change and its causes, the interplay between individual choices and societal structures, the difficult questions of power and pollution asymmetries between developed and

¹ See Carter, chapter 2.

² Janet Biehl's *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (1991) and Victoria Davion's "Is ecocriticism

developing world, all of these compel ecocriticism to consider the environment as it interacts with society, how it is shaped by us and how we in turn are shaped by it.

Climate change has had a similar galvanising effect on the kind of ontology that the ecocritical project suggests. Ecofeminism initially sought to reject essentialist dualism of humanity/nature and its androcentric extension man/woman. Ecofeminism sees deconstructing patriarchy and the dogmatic ideology of fixed identity as key to addressing the environmental crisis². Therefore there is a deep scepticism about any concept of a generalised human nature or species understanding. Generally speaking critics have worried about the implications of crudely Darwinian social thinking and shied away from biological determinism. ‘Darwinian Environmentalism’, which seeks to reassert the value of a scientific understanding of gender and human psychology, has countered this anti-essentialism. This valuable turn has come about in the face of a worsening climate crisis that demands us to think critically, or indeed pragmatically as Greg Garrard³ suggests, about the role of the species in responding to climate change and the real biologically contingencies that define the human animal. However, the task now is to reconcile these competing visions for ecocriticism by asking not, ‘How have we constructed the environment?’ but rather, ‘How has human identity been constructed by our environment?’ With the radical and dislocating changes predicted in climate models this question has become of vital importance.

A similar fault line is present in ecocriticism around the question of authenticity and the extent to which idealised notions of nature are constructed by discourse and, therefore, are mystificatory. In the context of the Western, this debate is most present in the definition and function of wilderness. The ideologically freighted manner in which wilderness has been deployed historically is reflected in the contemporary critical debates around the term. For some in the environmental movement, unspoilt nature has stood a bulwark against the failures and compromises of contemporary industrial society. In reaction to modernity, some environmentalists and ecocritics have constructed a monolithic wild invested with metaphysical significance. William Cronon identifies the overarching motivation of these wilderness advocates: ‘Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity’ (80). The attractive idea of escaping into wilderness in order to experience an authenticity not present elsewhere is complicated by the

² Janet Biehl’s *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (1991) and Victoria Davion’s “Is ecocriticism feminist” are essential texts for understanding the development of ecofeminist thought.

³ Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* (2012) is an essential guide to the development of contemporary environmental thought.

reality of the persistent human presence. Existence in the wild requires the apparatuses and support of contemporary society and economic relations. Tents, kayaks, parasails are all products of the 'non-authentic' world outside. And furthermore, the presence of human subjects in remaining wild spaces ensures the kind of demystification that wilderness enthusiasts are attempting to escape. And yet, these spaces possess an immense value on their own terms, as areas of ecological diversity and geological history, as well as zones of aesthetic wonder. Undoubtedly they should be protected and stewarded through the climate upheavals of the coming decades. Greg Garrard argues that the problematic status of wilderness, the tension between utilitarian exploitation and pseudo-religious mystification, can be overcome through pragmatic engagement with wilderness spaces:

Deep ecology, it might be argued, has conspired with some American ecocriticism to promote a poetics of authenticity for which wilderness is the touchstone. To critique this is not to argue for the abandonment of wilderness to the tender mercies of ranchers and developers, but to promote instead the poetics of responsibility that takes ecological science rather than pantheism as its guide. The choice between monolithic, ecocidal modernism and reverential awe is a false dichotomy that ecocriticism can circumvent with a pragmatic and political orientation. The fundamental problem of responsibility is not what we humans are, nor how we can 'be' better, more natural, primal or authentic, but what we do (*Ecocriticism* 79).

Wilderness, as place of authenticity, is a construct that obscures the real value of the living West. As the climate changes, Edenic conceptions of the Western environment risk erasing human agency and stifling action. What should be called for instead is a committed engagement with wilderness that records whatever scraps of the authentic might still persist.

In literature and film climate change has primarily manifested itself as a series of impasses and as a phenomena persistently resistant to representation. In the past decade ecocritics have sought to theorise the problems posed by scale and time in the Anthropocene, and how they manifest themselves as reactions to climate change in the culture. Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (2013) represents an ambitious attempt at incorporating the established features of environmental crisis into one concept, the hyperobject. Morton draws on the insights of object-oriented ontology (OOO), a philosophical movement that rejects the Kantian anthropocentrism of metaphysics in which objects become products of human thought. Instead, it claims that objects exist independently of human consciousness, standing in relation to one another in precisely the same manner as the mind does to the world of objects. This radical rejection of anthropocentrism allows Morton to establish his new category of hyperobject. The term, Morton states:

...refer[s] to things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar

System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are “hyper” in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not (1).

Global warming, as Morton prefers to call climate change, is therefore a hyperobject. Large-scale processes that act across timescales longer than the average human life define it. The interaction with the hyperobject of climate change fundamentally changes the relation between humans and the non-human world: ‘hyperobjects seem to force something on us, something that affects some core ideas of what it means to exist, what Earth is, what society is’ (15). Climate change is an immensely dislocating force in Morton’s conception.

The unavoidable presence of climate change is also the subject of Timothy Clark’s *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015). Clark argues that ecocriticism has been unable to address the problem of scale in the Anthropocene. The framing of environmental crises in terms of the individual or the local, which is often the framing employed in cultural responses to climate change, is no longer sufficient to incorporate the scale of human impacts on the biosphere:

As a concept transferred from geology, the Anthropocene enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time, something which alters significantly the way that many once familiar issues appear. Perhaps too big to see or even to think straight (a ‘hyperobject’, certainly) the Anthropocene challenges us to think counter-intuitive relations of scale, effect, perception, knowledge, representation and calculability (13).

The Anthropocene also drastically limits the scope of individual human agency. Clark uses the image of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* to stand for the newly apparent geological power of distributed human activity. The Leviathan is comprised of individuals and institutions all acting individually and seemingly powerless to effect the damaging influence of the Leviathan as a whole:

The cliché of humanity having become a geological force has implications beyond the fact of human violence against the Earth and other species. A geological force is also an impersonal one, one that, like plate tectonics or earthquakes, does not heed entreaties, respect individual rights or admit of being altered by human decisions. In this case, however, the geological force at issue is, paradoxically, a total effect of innumerable human decisions (16).

The task of ecocriticism is to identify texts and modes of thought that have the capacity to overcome the problems presented by scale in the Anthropocene and to advocate for an ecological cosmopolitanism that acknowledges the interconnectedness of human actions, without flattening the power dynamics of a globalised world.

As has been reflected in recent ecocritical thought anthropogenic climate change presents significant challenges for existing narrative structures. The problems of representation that climate change creates are significant: problems of scale, effects that may only reveal themselves over long periods of time, scientific terminology and jargon, the problematic nature of prediction as well as political resistance. The novelist Amitav Ghosh, in his polemic *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), argues that there has been an imaginative failure to come to terms with the scale of the climate catastrophe that we have created. The complexity and sheer outlandishness of climate change seems to defeat or in most cases entirely dissuade creative endeavours. The myriad difficulties that accompany writing about climate change have meant that a corpus of climate change fiction has begun to be delineated only recently. Adam Trexler's *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015) is at the forefront of this project. Trexler is sceptical about the ability of dominant modes of contemporary literary realism to contend with the deconstructive energy of climate change: '[Realism] cannot imagine novel technological, organizational, and political approaches to climate change. Its focus on a narrow locale and set of characters compresses distributed, global events. It struggles to understand the devastating potential of climatic disaster' (229). In *Anthropocene Fictions* Trexler instead locates this imaginative potential in genre fiction, in particular science fiction that stages new possibilities for society, politics and culture in the Anthropocene, the novels of Kim Stanley Robinson being a prominent example of the potential of this kind of climate fiction. However, other genres also profitably act to foreground the changing climate:

Chiller fiction ably evokes the dread and horror of catastrophic events, despite our quotidian desire to avoid them. Teen fiction specializes in describing the inertia and hypocrisy of domestic life, as well as the structural tensions between different generations. Suspense novels... specialize in international conflict, the motives of countries and industries (130)

Genre fiction is able to utilise structural conventions in order to foreground specific tropes of our Anthropocene reality. By working within the limits of genre authors can come to terms with some of the difficulties of representing climate change. These new narratives rely on generic conventions, and as has been shown in the case of the Western, genre emerges from a nuanced and complex mythological base. In Trexler's survey of climate fiction we view a process by which mythology is made relevant and responsive. The distributed, collective, multi-scalar nature of the Anthropocene revivifies notions of collective mythology, whilst myth criticism can also be used to understand the impact of climate change on narrative. Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra argue that fiction in the Anthropocene must look beyond older environmental narratives that took as their subject the individual and their place in nature, opting instead for a nuanced negotiation: 'narratives of climate change must offer "mediation between embodied sensuous perception and... wider

perspectives” (193). A similar critical treatment can be readily applied to other genre forms, such as the Western. Although contemporary Western novels and films often do not explicitly represent climate change I will show that they are nonetheless suffused with climate anxiety, a fear of rapid change, an obsession with a lost past and a concern with the breakdown of a supposedly unchanging natural order. The fixed tropes of the Western, in particular its embodied sense of location and landscape, means that the genre is marked by interactions between subjects and a dynamic environment and climate. The genre is now being staged in an environment that is being hollowed out by climate change. The possibility of staging Westerns in the Anthropocene West has been thrown into doubt. Contemporary Westerns, therefore, are compelled to contend with the changing climate.

Framing climate change historically is helpful for discerning the presence and importance of climate change in contemporary Western texts. The Western genre seeks to recreate both a physical environment and a historical period. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has identified a number of challenges that climate change poses for the study of history. Our ability/inability to conceive of a world without us disrupts the continuity of historical thought, which is usually conceived of as past, present and future linked by shared human experience. The humanities were concerned early on with globalisation but have taken a long time to address global warming due to these kinds of conceptual issues. Chakrabarty suggests that the urgency of climate change necessitates a move toward a universal sense of shared anxiety and hope for survival. He argues that:

...climate change poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world. It is more like a universal that arises from a shared sense of a catastrophe. It calls for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity (222).

The Western also has the capacity to promote forms of community and collective agency in the face of the climate emergency. In contrast to the stereotype of the individualistic Western hero, contemporary Westerns often dramatise ad-hoc forms of community that may be useful models for collective behaviour in hostile and changing environments.

Chakrabarty emphasises the disruptive impact of climate change on historical narratives and in so doing usefully identifies the impasses facing contemporary, climate aware cultural forms. However, critics have recently sought to emphasise continuity and ethical responsibility in the history of anthropogenic climate change. Climate change and the West are further linked through this shared, but largely unacknowledged, historical reflexivity. The warming that the West is unquestionably experiencing is occurring within the larger context of man-made or anthropogenic

climate change. It was in the late nineteenth century that Svante Arrhenius first theorised the relationship between carbon dioxide and increasing global temperatures although it was not until 1988 that a scientific and political consensus emerged sufficient to establish the IPCC. However, historians Fabien Locher and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz have begun to trace out a new genealogy of 'Environmental Reflexivity' that reveals that conscious awareness of humans' ability to change the climate and even the desire to engineer the climate has been present from the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed such theories were closely tied to the project of Imperial expansion; for example, under French occupation Algeria was subject to intensive planting techniques with the aim of changing its climate so as to be more fit for colonisation. With the rise of the global economy and the dematerialisation of capital, climate as a biopolitical force fell away in the twentieth century; now climate change has reasserted this environmental reflexivity. The key revelation here is that the crisis has not been stumbled into unknowingly, in fact ideas of climate and human impact on it have been at the core of expansionist projects such as the colonising of the American West. Our ideas of the origins of climate change have become complicated by this history:

...we need to take on board the strange and disturbing fact that the modern destruction of environments has occurred not as if nature counted for nothing but, on the contrary, has occurred in a world of longstanding climatic theories that have earmarked environmental objects as the very things that produce humankind. Modern man, oblivious of the impact of his actions and blinded by his faith in progress and polarized vision of the world? Our postmodernity also has its own mythologies (Locher & Fressoz 598).

Just as the Western has always reflected on its own status as myth and on the harmful ideology of westward expansion, there has been a long history of ecological awareness that puts anthropogenic change at its centre. Any analysis of climate change in literature and film must have as its starting point this long history of environmental reflexivity and its troubling implications. Narratives that take place in the West in its nineteenth-century heyday are depicting a region that was already experiencing anthropogenic change on vast scale. The reshaping of the continent was a self-conscious act of environmental engineering. Classical Westerns of the first half of the twentieth century acknowledge the long-term consequences of environmental exploitation. Contemporary Westerns inherit this tradition whilst also expressing the new, existential threat that is climate change.

Whilst climate change may provide opportunities for a revived notion of shared experience, it is important to also recognise its destructive potential. One potentially troubling collective response to climate change is trauma. In her book *Climate Trauma* Elizabeth Kaplan delineates the features and consequences of what is termed pretrauma. Kaplan argues that the psychological effect of pretraumatic stress disorder, which has been diagnosed in soldiers before deployment, has the potential to increase due to fears and anxiety around the potential impacts of

climate change. These fears are prevalent in a culture that bombards viewers with imagined dystopias and images of destruction. The result of this bombardment of apocalyptic imagery is, in Kaplan's analysis, ambiguous at best:

Filmmakers and novelists create fictional worlds relating both to the end of "the mass utopian dream of a social world in alliance with personal happiness" and to the destructive geological force that humans now occupy on planet Earth. Utopian discourses have given way to dystopian imaginaries on a scale rarely seen in earlier aesthetic periods. Indeed, the dystopian/utopian oscillation is fundamental to the pretrauma genre... Films reflect pretrauma operating in culture and discourse along with the twin processes of fear and hope.

Films and books that interact with the pretraumatic mindset have the potential to energise collective responses towards the safety of the planet but they can also lead to paralysing anxiety and despair. As an example of universal or collective responses to climate change, dystopian sci-fi is problematic. However, as Kaplan contends, the presence of these narratives reveals a yearning for a shared imaginary of the Anthropocene. Historical and trauma theory approaches to climate change tend towards desires for universal expressions of meaning and experience. The Western myth has the potential to operate as a shared narrative of the Anthropocene. Kaplan's theory of pretrauma operates alongside the emerging awareness of the impact of solastalgia. Solastalgia refers to the psychic or existential distress caused by environmental change. Often present in communities that live and work closely in a particular environment, solastalgia is a feature of climate change as its effects are felt globally. I would argue that such a phenomenon is present in contemporary Westerns. Genre films can express sadness and fear about the loss of Western ecosystems and landscapes. Although they may not refer to the changing climate specifically Westerns are now suffused with a solastalgic melancholy for the past and future of a region and environment.

Through the application of the eco-critical lens Western scholarship has shown the genre to be particularly capable of representing an environment under pressure from encroaching humanity. *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre* (2006) brings together a number of ecocritical readings of Western films, and attempts to create a canon of environmentally reflexive works. Editor Deborah A. Carmichael identifies the relative lack of environment focused Western criticism in her introduction: 'In studies of the Western, the importance of the landscape itself, the idyllic or treacherous environment negotiated in these films, often receives supporting-role status, yet without the land, American national mythmaking would not exist' (1). The collection seeks to ground the Western in the material reality of the American west, foregrounding a landscape that is often erased by well-established modes of Western criticism. The scholarship in the collection effectively charts the emergence of environmental

themes in Western texts. One essay by Freedonia Paschall and Robert G. Weiner analyses the stark landscapes of early silent film whilst another by Carmichael reconsiders the ending of *Stagecoach* and argues that it rejects any possibility of controlling the natural world. Other essays point to the ambiguous position of environment in the Western. Whilst the landscape is often venerated and respected it is also shown in the majority of Western texts as possessing purely instrumental value, a repository of wealth and a means to enrichment and advancement in an acquisitive and violent capitalist society. John Shelton Lawrence contributes both an essay and a filmography to *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns*, both of which sketch out the development of Western ecological films, 'The Subgenre with No Name' (19), as Lawrence puts it. Lawrence and the collection in general perform an invaluable service in identifying, defining and cataloguing this – previously neglected – subgenre. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly room to extend ecocritical analysis of Western into the contemporary moment. Lawrence remarks that 'One cannot prophesise where the ecofilms of the West will place their emphasis next' (43). Lawrence makes this statement specifically about Western's that have an explicitly environmentalist focus. However, this still seems overly cautious in the context of a warming west. Surely climate change, even at the time of the collection's publication, posed the greatest threat to the Western landscape and now is increasingly likely to inform narratives that engage with ecology and environment? There is value in pursuing the trace of climate change in contemporary Westerns even though it at times remains hidden as the ultimate threat to the genre's stability.

Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann's *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral: Western Cinema and the Environment* (2012) extends the environmental critique of the Western into a larger book length thesis. Adopting a rigorous ecocritical approach the authors examine broad conflicts that occur within the landscapes of their selected ecological Westerns:

These [films] address mining with a conflict between corporate and community miners; water rights, usually with a similar conflict but in conjunction with elements from New Deal programs; American Indian versus Anglo-American worldviews; land-rush issues that set up "sod busters" in conflict with ranchers; exploration for oil and the various bifurcations on which it rests; and several conflicts that contrast cattle ranchers with various groups, including farmers and sheep ranchers (21-22).

The authors reveal how these binaries tend to blur when examined and this blurring, in turn, exposes: 'the complexity of environmental history and environmental degradation' (22). The scope of the critique and the range of films examined in the book do indeed add a considerable amount of complexity and detail to the emerging subgenre. Murray and Heumann are particularly effective in extending Shepard Kreck's notion of 'the ecological Indian'. According to Kreck American Indians have been raised to the level of ecological paragons, possessing deep 'spiritual' connections to the environment and a desire to protect nature. This ideological mystification effaces Native

Americans in favour of a distorted image of noble savages whilst also condemning them to tragic disappearance. Murray and Heumann contrast this distortion, so evident in films like *Dances with Wolves* (1990), with the film *Smoke Signals* (1998), which was written and directed by Native Americans Sherman Alexie and Chris Eyre. Rather than disappearance or extinction the authors identify the primary characteristics of the Indian characters in *Smoke Signals* as being that of persistence and adaption. By subverting the trope of the ecological Indian *Smoke Signals* shows the potential of Western narratives to delineate new and productive modes of interaction with the environment. Still, *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral* maintains a reluctance to consider the implications of climate change on the genre. The potential that the Western has for addressing environmental and ecological themes surely necessitates interactions with the changing climate and pressures that it entails. Of course a focus on twentieth-century Westerns that predated widespread knowledge of climate change narrows the scope for climate-based readings; however, Murray and Huemann do not extend the implications of the oil rush in *There Will be Blood* (2007) to include the broader impacts of resource extraction. Myriad environmental dangers threaten the West, and yet climate change looms above all as the singular existential threat to human existence and broader biodiversity in the region. There is certainly space for readings of environmentally reflexive Western texts that focuses on the West's greatest challenge. This thesis will attempt to contribute to contemporary scholarship on the Western in this respect.

In order to develop this argument a broad range of contemporary Western texts will be analysed. These texts range across media, from novels to film and television, and cover a period from 1985 to 2015. The hugely influential novels of Cormac McCarthy form the basis for the first chapters of the thesis. McCarthy is something of a prophet of the Anthropocene. Many critics praised his novel *The Road* (2006) as heralding a new form of climate aware literature, the environmentalist George Monbiot saw in it a searing critique of anthropocentric narcissism: 'Civilisation is just a russeting on the skin of the biosphere, never immune from being rubbed against the sleeve of environmental change'. Whilst *The Road* signalled an obvious engagement with the changing climate, McCarthy's earlier Western novels also demonstrate a similar concern with interactions between subjects and an alienating and often hostile landscape. McCarthy, himself, has a long history of engagement with science through the Santa Fe Institute, a science and technology think tank located in New Mexico. With this background it is reasonable to suggest that McCarthy would have been aware of the implications of anthropogenic climate change during the writing of his earliest Western *Blood Meridian* (1985). As a result of this history and the more recent provocations of *The Road*, McCarthy's Western novels can profitably be read in the context of climate change and the Western environment. Analysis of these foundational Western novels will be complemented by readings of contemporary Westerns that display the influence of

McCarthyian genre innovations whilst also demonstrating an awareness of the contingency of the frontier space.

The second half of the thesis focuses on twenty-first-century film and television Westerns. This change of media in the thesis reflects the pre-eminence of visual representations of the West. The genre has experienced something of a cinematic renaissance in the past fifteen years. This resurgence began with the commercial and critical success of Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005, a film which showed the capacity of the Western to respond to issues of sexuality and masculine identity and to subvert genre preconceptions. This led to films such as *3:10 to Yuma*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, and *No Country for Old Men*, all made in 2007, and all nuanced takes on the genre led by established stars and directors. This indicated a level of renewed interest in telling Western stories, coinciding with the elevation of McCarthy to the height of literary national treasure. 2015 may have seen the zenith of this new Western movement. With *Bone Tomahawk* offering an entertaining horror take on genre and *Slow West* opting for a considered and offbeat comic tone. The culmination of this newfound critical relevance was Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant* triumphing at the Oscars.

The return to relevance of Western filmmaking has taken place during a period in which the landscape and environment of the American West has been experiencing rapid, existentially threatening change due to human activity. Western novels have long pointed to the creeping influence of a warming planet, and this is reflected by the centrality of McCarthy's bleak post-Westerns to the genre. Film and television have brought the changing climate of the West out into the open, dramatising the anxieties and discontinuities created when the myth of progressive expansion is shown to be radically uncertain. The renaissance in Western filmmaking that has marked the last decade has coincided with the revelation of climate change and its impact on the Western imaginative space. An analysis of film also opens up different avenues for ecocritical analysis: for example, the visual language of climate change or the ways in which environmental harms have been represented through sound. The mixing of media in my argument is also a question of canon. Not all literary or cinematic Westerns are open to a climate change-based analysis. However, a trace of climate consciousness can be followed through the texts in the thesis, from McCarthy's early post-Westerns to the climate advocacy of *The Revenant*. In order to extend the analysis of climate change in the Western it is necessary to include the full breadth of contemporary Western media. This thesis will address both literature and film as equally important sites of contact between the mythology of the Western and the new realities of the Anthropocene.

In chapter one, 'The Western, the Border and the Changing Climate', the focus will be on the particular resonance that climate change has in Westerns that are concerned with the border

space, as well as interactions and exchanges that occur continuously along the dividing line. Changing weather patterns will almost certainly drive population movements across the border, potentially in either direction. The promise of constant movement, free from state interference, is held out by the Western myth, but ultimately climate change reveals this to be an impossibility. *The Border Trilogy*, by McCarthy, is the focus of chapter one for these precise reasons. In the first of the series, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), Western characters experience profound disillusionment when they find in their search for ‘authenticity’ south of the border that the West of their imagination has already been exhausted and hollowed out. The sequel *The Crossing* (1994) also stages the disenchantment of a young Western character, however, the character is compelled to cross and recross by the traumatic experience of human-driven change and its effects on non-human others. In the third novel, *Cities of the Plain* (1998), McCarthy contrasts the relative mobility of his American cowboys with the fixedness of those living south of the border. His dark evocation of border politics gestures to the power asymmetries and contradictions of the border space that are deepened by climate change.

Chapter two, ‘Westerns at the Limit’, will address literary post-Westerns and how these representations of a hostile and hollowed out West reflect a genre gutted of its comforting symbolism through violence and the influence of a changed environment. The first section of the chapter will identify Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as a form of ‘spectral Western’. Just as the characters in the novel reuse and recycle scraps of garbage in the ruined landscape, the novel recycles and warps genre tropes in order to present a Western structured entirely around an absence. This is followed by an examination of violence in *Blood Meridian*. The novel effectively depicts both spectacular acts of violence as well as what Rob Nixon has termed the ‘slow violence’ of pollution, environmental destruction and climate change. The blood-soaked landscape of the novel is imbued with violence through human activities and desires. Ultimately, though, violence in the novel is a reaction to the absence at the core of the anti-pastoral West.

Chapter three, ‘Literary Westerns and Extractive Industry’, takes as its subject two contemporary Western novels that address the disruptive effect of extractive industry on Western subjects, beginning with a reading of Patrick DeWitt’s novel *The Sisters Brothers* (2011). The narrative shows how another feature of the mythic Western, the rugged masculinity of the frontier, is dismantled and emptied of meaning due to the changing relationship between Western male characters and the landscape they inhabit. The novel details how resource mania and toxic pollution destabilise the identities of archetypal Western characters, leading to a withdrawal from Western spaces. Secondly, Phillip Meyer’s family epic *The Son* (2013) will be read alongside DeWitt’s novel. *The Son* is firmly located in the state of Texas and is immersed in the oil politics of the South-West. It succeeds in positing two potential futures for the region: endless, toxic persistence,

or a disanthropic erasure of human activity. Through the use of multi-generational narrators the novel compels us to consider the concept of legacy and responsibility in a warming West.

Chapter four, 'The Sound of Climate Change in the Western', concerns two contemporary films that reveal the silence at the core of climate change. *No Country for Old Men* (2007), the first film discussed in this chapter, takes place in the nineteen eighties. This adaptation of McCarthy's novel presents a landscape that is completely determined, as are the characters within it. The visual framing of the film by its directors, the Coen brothers, emphasises water stress and depletion, an environment running inexorably to its end. Similarly the soundtrack employs a very effective use of silence to give the impression of a post-natural west. The second film in the chapter is Paul Thomas Anderson's California oil rush epic *There Will Be Blood* (2007). The film takes place at a moment of turning inwards, as the frontier reached the coast pioneer impulses were focused towards the land and its exploitation. Daniel Day-Lewis' megalomaniacal oil baron Daniel Plainview is an avatar for the mutative and destructive properties of oil and resource extraction. The exponential development in the film resonates with the disorientation created by the speed of climate change. *There Will Be Blood* ultimately depicts the birth of an anti-landscape, scarred with mines, drilling and pipelines.

Climate change presents many challenges of comprehension. It occurs at multiple scales, from the individual to the global, and across time spans that might be thousands of years or compressed into an afternoon. This makes the task of representing climate change and making it intelligible to the individual a difficult one. Chapter four, 'Time, Scale and the Anthropocene', shows how the HBO series *Deadwood* (2004-2006) is able to bridge this gap of understanding and representation by showing the rapid development and exploitation of a gold prospecting town. The pace of growth in *Deadwood* unmoors its characters and disrupts any sense of continuity. The town itself is almost hermetically sealed and yet connected to a worldwide system of trade and violence. This also gestures to the issues with scale that climate change implies.

The penultimate chapter, 'The Intrusion of Climate in *The Revenant*', argues that Alejandro González Iñárritu's film offers an example of what engaged, climate aware forms of Western filmmaking might look like. The production was explicitly attempting to tell a climate change story through the Western genre. In attempting this the film problematically fetishizes authenticity in a way that obscures the historical record and presents Native American characters without nuance or complex representation. However, the physical circumstances and difficulties that the production endured point to some crucial questions for the Western. How long will it be possible to make Westerns in the Western space? Can Westerns exist without the environment that

inspired the genre? *The Revenant* reveals the productive potential of a full-blooded engagement with the reality of the warming West.

The final chapter, 'Possible Futures for the Western', looks at two films that reveal diverging possibilities for the genre in the Anthropocene. *The Homesman* (2014) attempts to stage a post-Western critique of stultifying gender roles but is only partly successful. Its real value lies in the explicit linking of unusual weather and climate conditions with mental wellbeing and the viability of Western society. The film effectively reflects the difficulty of finding productive ways to dwell in a changing environment. Sustainable Western lives may not in fact be feasible in a changing landscape. The animated Western *Rango* (2011) provides an exuberant alternative to Western dead ends. The film embraces an explicitly environmentalist critique of Western development employing a post-modern reworking of mythological Western tropes to advocate for communitarian forms of Western living that may offer some solace in the warming landscape

Chapter one: The Western, the Border and the Changing Climate

Climate change complicates nationality and statehood by implying a global crisis that nevertheless applies to nations differently in terms of effects and culpability. It reconfigures our relationship with the natural world and the non-human. It also implicates the individual in a global process. Increased migration across borders will be a feature of the changing global climate, exacerbating already heated anxieties about immigration and national self-interest. These troubling effects of climate change can be seen at work in Cormac McCarthy's *The Border Trilogy*. The troubled, romantic Western youths of the trilogy are cast adrift in an American West that has shrugged off the final traces of the frontier lifestyle. In each novel the protagonists seek a remedy for their disillusionment by crossing the border into the uncertainty and romance of the Mexican landscape. For these characters, the act of crossing reveals the physical space of the West to be on the brink of exhaustion, emptied of mythic meaning and facing environmental collapse under the weight of industrialisation and the global movements they themselves are a part of. These tales of the mid-twentieth century West are suffused with anxiety and resistance to threatening change.

In the first of the trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses*, crossing the border reveals the absence of an 'authentic' Western environment. John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins flee the disenchanted American West but are confronted with its absence in the contested, exploited and changing Mexican landscape. The Western environment as store of authenticity and as a space for a romantic mode of Western living is confronted with the radical uncertainty of anthropogenic environmental change.

In *The Crossing*, Billy Parham seeks solace and a connection with landscape through an encounter with a non-human other – a wolf. Species extinction has driven the wolf from the American West and Billy embarks on a doomed attempt to return the animal to a Mexico that is revealed to be even less hospitable to the non-human. Billy finds the West to be already corrupted and denuded. Weather, climate and the non-human West are shown to be ultimately alienating forces that resist the Western myth and its heroes.

The final text of the trilogy, *Cities of the Plain*, most powerfully evokes the contemporary southern border and power relations that define it. The frictionless movement of the Americans in the narrative contrasts starkly with fixity of John Grady Cole's love interest Magdalena. The characters' crossings and John Grady Cole's tragic romance are driven by a sense of 'destiny'. The West of *Cities of the Plain* is defined by a collision between a romantic fatalism and the geopolitical and racial realities of the border space. The changing nature of the West is once again

shown to be an increasing source of conflict and violence in the novel. The novel anticipates the intractable power dynamics of migration that are increasingly heightened by the changing climate.

The genre heroes of *The Border Trilogy* face destinies as inescapable as that of the warming West itself. McCarthy's tales of disenchantment within the changing environment of the West expose the ultimate impossibility of past modes of existence in the frontier landscape of the twenty-first century. Productive futures for the West are foreclosed in McCarthy's narrative and the ultimate cause of this is the existential threat of anthropogenic climate change.

All the Pretty Horses (1992): The Disillusionment of the Border Space

All the Pretty Horses marked the elevation of Cormac McCarthy to national prominence as a writer of heavyweight literary realism, and a chronicler of the Southern border. Before its publication, the novelist had been considered a talented, if derivative, crafter of prose in the Faulknerian tradition. This transition is evident in Madison Smart Bell's review of the novel in *The New York Times*: 'Cormac McCarthy must be acknowledged as a talent equal to William Faulkner, but whatever he may owe to Faulkner's style, his substance could not be more different'. In contrast to the blood-soaked nihilism of *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses* offers a seemingly more traditional Western story, given epic scale and significance through the power of McCarthy's writing. This, coupled with its sympathetic main character, lends the novel a cinematic quality, and indeed it was duly adapted into a screenplay and film that was released, to a mixed critical reception, in the year 2000. The novel takes place in 1949 and tells the story of sixteen-year-old John Grady Cole, an heir to a ranch near San Angelo, Texas. Upon learning that the ranch is to be sold, John Grady decides to ride to Mexico in order to live out his romantic ideal of cowboy life. He sets out with his friend Lacey Rawlins and the two end up working on a ranch in Coahuila state. Grady falls in love with Alejandra, the daughter of the ranch owner, and as a result of their affair he and Rawlins are imprisoned. Upon being released by the girl's aunt, Grady finds he cannot be with Alejandra, and he eventually makes his way back to Texas, heartbroken. The romance narrative of the novel is intertwined with customary moments of McCarthyian violence and brutality. The characters journey south in order to find a pure way of Western living, but by the end of the story these notions are shown to be naïve and destructive. McCarthy follows an anti-Western model to undermine the genre's classical sense of promise and progress in the Western landscape. The environment that Grady and Rawlins find is already exhausted of the meaning it once possessed. The disillusionment of the novel is a function of the journey south and the border crossing. However, this movement across national boundaries also resonates with broader anxieties of environment, climate change and the Anthropocene.

This notion that the border between the United States and Mexico is a contested, environmentally pressured space has been confirmed by both scholarship and contemporary politics. In their survey of possible cooperative strategies for managing climate change across the border, Wilder et al., describe some of the environmental challenges of border power dynamics:

...when in 2008 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security extended its border wall at Nogales, without consulting Mexican officials, subsequent thunderstorm runoff flowing northward into Arizona became trapped and backed up, flooding numerous stores and homes in Mexico and causing significant property damage. Similar problems have occurred along the border, as when the United States unilaterally limited seepage losses in the All-American Canal, which conveys Colorado River water to San Diego, by lining the channel along the border west of Yuma, Arizona. In response, Mexico filed suit in international court to seek redress for the loss of groundwater recharge (from the canal seepage) that had for many decades served a major irrigation district and sustained critical wetlands habitat (918).

Without useful cooperation these kinds of disputes will become more fractious as climatic conditions worsen. The region is uniquely vulnerable to a range of climate pressure. Again, Wilder et al., set out the troubling prospects: ‘anticipated probable impacts include longer, more extreme droughts, higher water and energy demand, decreased inflows to rivers and streams, and increased urban-agricultural conflict over water’ (920). Climate change is not the only process placing pressure on the regional environment. Growth bought on by unrestrained globalisation has led to rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and agricultural intensification, a process that renders the socioeconomically disadvantaged who live in the region doubly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Wilder et al., 920).

These increasingly fraught environmental and political realities have been reflected in the contemporary literature of the border space. In Chicano (a self-identifying term for the Mexican-American community) and Mexican literature, the border can be seen to operate in two distinct ways. Nùria Vilanova argues that for Chicano writers the border functions as metaphorical support on which to build a sense of cross-cultural identity, one that is defined by movement across boundaries: ‘They show the experience of belonging to a culture that is neither Anglo nor Mexican, but rather a new identity’ (Vilanova 77). This conceptual figuration of the border emerges from the post-colonial perspective of critics such as Homi K. Bhabha, who views borders as interstitial spaces between cultures in which productive forms of cultural hybridity can develop: ‘It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated’ (Bhabha 2). However, Vilanova suggests that the border also functions as a physical entity, a barrier that must be negotiated, particularly in the writing of Northern Mexican authors. This manifests itself in writing that does not internalise the border space but rather responds to the

everyday difficulties and contradictions that come from living 'south of the border'. As Vilanova defines it, this kind of North Mexican storytelling: 'is *about*, yet does not *stem* from, the border' (79).

As a border text emerging from the hegemonic culture, how does *All the Pretty Horses* operate between these two literary mobilisations of border: the internalised symbolic border of the hybrid post-colonial subject and the physical reality of border existence? Jordan Savage's delineation of the ideological implications of space and place in the novel goes some of the way to answering this question. Savage suggests that McCarthy undermines the hegemonic capitalist ideology codified in the concept of borders and mapping. Grady's companion Rawlins has a map which shows the Mexican side of the border as unmapped whiteness, which Grady ridicules: 'There's maps. That just aint one of them' (35). In Savage's reading:

The terrain that is shown or effaced on Rawlins' map reminds us that, according to the codification of capitalist ideology, borders are particularly loaded areas. They are the arbitrary strips of land where the state dictates that the known ends and the unknown, the other, begins. They are essential to protecting the idea of the nation-state. For this reason, the border is an intrinsic part of the western genre. The Mexican border is typically the line beyond which there is no law and no extradition (1004).

Savage argues that as well as deconstructing national boundaries, the novel is also sceptical of national-identity. The protagonist John Grady Cole speaks Spanish and was raised by his Mexican 'abuela' and therefore he pays little regard to borders and nationhood. He is an example of hybrid national identity, an identity that allows him to move between states with ease, at least initially. This hybridity of cultural and linguistic identities interacts with Grady's whiteness to produce a subject ideally suited to thrive in the border context. He is, to an extent, comfortable in both cultures but possesses the racial identity that allows negotiation and crossing to occur with comparatively little risk. Despite the many advantages conferred on the young Americans by virtue of their whiteness, the novel shows that they are nevertheless compelled to confront the physical fact of the border. Whilst revealing the constructed nature of the US-Mexico interstitial space, John Grady and Rawlins are forced to contend with the geopolitical realities of the crossings they undertake. Their supposed statelessness does not eliminate the fact of their Americanness, the very status that allows them to move back and forth with such frictionless ease. And, in an inversion of this privileged mobility, it is their nationality that exposes them to abuse and even death when both are imprisoned in Mexico. Rather than a post-modern rendering of borders and maps as ideologically motivated absurdities, *All the Pretty Horses* instead reveals the complex act of border transgression and the problematic nature of supra-national identity. Furthermore, in acknowledging the reality of the border, both as a political entity, and a physical landscape the novel also gestures

to the changing environment of the border space. Climate change acts, as it often does, to further complicate and exacerbate problems of identity and belonging.

National identity remains a stubborn and troubling fact throughout the novel. This is revealed by the physical act of border crossing. Just before the boys attempt to cross the river into Mexico, a younger boy, calling himself Jimmy Blevins, tries to convince them that he should come too:

What the hell would we want you with us for?

He didn't answer. He was looking at the sandy water running past them and at the thin wicker shadows of the willows running out over the sandbar in the evening light. He looked out to the blue sierras of the south and he hitched up the shoulder strap of his overalls and sat with his thumb hooked in the bib and turned and looked at them.

Cause I'm an American, he said. Rawlins turned away and shook his head (46).

Rawlins' reaction shows his frustration at Blevins' simplistic notions of national fraternity. In Mexico that fellowship becomes a liability. And yet, despite their desire for him to leave, Blevins remains stuck with the pair as they travel into Mexico and his presence, his very Americanness, reveals the problematic national identity of the other two boys. In contrast to Grady and Rawlins, Blevins does not want to go south to pursue a romantic ideal, instead he is running from the law and an abusive home. Rawlins' annoyed reaction to the boy and Grady's concern for him comes because Blevins stands for both the absurdity of their quest and the hegemonic cultural identity that they drag with them into Mexico. The younger boy's separateness is also a function of his class. The poor outlaw is distanced from the sons of landowners and, as a result, he comes to represent many of the societal structures and dynamics that Grady and Rawlins are in flight from. The embarrassing reality of difference is symbolised by Blevins' shyness: 'Blevins sat with his bare legs stretched before him but they looked so white and exposed lying there on the ground that he seemed ashamed and he tried to tuck them up under him to cover his knees with the tails of the borrowed shirt he wore' (76). Blevins is without clothing after he loses his possessions in a storm. Similarly, the boys are forced to remove their clothes as they cross the river into Mexico. The process of crossing is a revelatory one in which the physical reality of the border space exposes the characters to the complex identity negotiations of cross-cultural exchange. The physical landscape of the border region forces these almost ritual acts of exposure in which their whiteness is made shockingly evident to themselves.

Whilst acknowledging the essentially constructed nature of the nation state, the border remains a physical barrier that emphasises difference and must be negotiated. This becomes clear

when the environmental space north and south of the border in the novel is compared. John Blair states that: 'Mexico and the borderlands become something more in this book; they become *tierra*, a second homeland, no stranger in reality than the place-from-which-you-come, but by the same token no less strange and no less hostile' (301). The landscape of Texas and northern Mexico are, in the uncanny sense, doubled, and this doubling reveals the process of environmental exploitation and change. Grady begins his journey in a landscape that has been irrevocably changed by industrialisation and resource exploitation. The incongruous juxtaposition of horseman and motor highway is indicative of this pacified and changed environment. Grady is filled with visions of the prehistoric past of the landscape, in which native people led: 'secular transitory and violent lives' (5). Instead he and Rawlins must content themselves with riding whilst: 'They watched the trucks along the gate both east and west' (32). The once open landscape has been divided and marked by capital; the motif of the fence is employed to indicate managed and exploited space. Approaching yet another barrier Rawlins asks: 'How the hell do they expect a man to ride a horse in this country?... They don't, said John Grady' (31). What was once the mythic space of the West has been scarred by historical processes beyond the comprehension of the novel's characters: 'To the west a mile away ran wire fence strung from pole to pole like a bad suture across the grey grasslands' (39). The fence, as a symbol of the closing frontier and the loss of freedom for those who lived in the West, is a common feature of classical and revisionist Westerns. The effort to incorporate the landscape into the process of capitalism is seen as contrary to the mythic direction of the Western, which emphasises limitless potential for movement and progress. However, in the Texas of the late forties of *All the Pretty Horses* the fencing and enclosure of the West is complete, the wounds already sutured. What remains is an exhausted landscape, both environmentally hollowed out (McCarthy references the extinction of the Buffalo (7)), and symbolically bereft of the physical environment that gave it its mythic power.

In contrast, the landscape of Mexico appears, initially, to have retained the unspoiled quality of the imagined Western past. The boys find an ecosystem comparatively untouched by the kinds of industrial processes that have tamed the Texan west: 'They rode down through the cooling blue shadowland of the north slope. Evergreen ash growing in the rocky draws. Persimmon, mountain gum... that night they heard what they'd none heard before, three long howls to the south-west and all afterwards a silence' (61). The sound of wolves, an animal driven to extinction in the US mainland by the mid-twentieth century, evokes a pre-industrial environment in which their dreams of elemental Western living might be played out. Blevins heightens this fantasy of Mexico by, again, revealing the naivety of Grady and Rawlins. The younger boy imagines how: 'this'd be just the place where Comanches'd lay for you and bushwhack you... back in the old days', to which Rawlins angrily responds: 'What in the putrefied dogshit would you know about the old days?' (59). His annoyance with Blevins' day dreaming reflects his own struggle to discern

the boundaries of myth and reality in his contemporary West. He and Grady implicitly want to believe that they have returned to 'the old days', whilst simultaneously understanding the impossibility of this within an exploited Western environment. A day later, in the midst of barren country, Rawlins asks dryly: 'Where do you reckon that paradise is at?' (61). This tension drives the characters of *All the Pretty Horses*.

The conflict between imagined ideal and found reality reaches its climax when John Grady realises that his relationship with Alejandra is ultimately impossible. Grady and Rawlins are freed from a Mexican prison (within which both have narrowly escaped death) at Alejandra's behest; on the condition she and John Grady can no longer see each other. Grady returns to the ranch to try and find Alejandra but is instead met by her aunt Duéna Alfonsa, who guaranteed their release. In an effort to explain the true nature of his situation the aunt begins to explain to him the history of the country through her own personal story: 'I will tell you how Mexico was. How it was and how it will be again. You will see that those things which disposed me in your favor were the very things which led me to decide against you in the end' (233). Alfonsa was a committed revolutionary from a wealthy family, and her story weaves through the historical events of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). She supported the democrat Francisco Madero in his fight against the forces of reaction and fell in love with his brother Gustavo. Madero succeeded in becoming leader in 1911 but was assassinated in a coup led by General Victoriano Huerta and backed by the US in 1913. Gustavo, who she had been kept from marrying by her family, was tortured to death. The eventual success of revolution, marked by the signing of 1917 constitution, came too late for an entirely disillusioned Alejandra. Her bitter involvement with the failures of the revolution leads to her belief that: 'The world is quite ruthless in selecting between the dream and the reality, even where we will not. Between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting' (241). She wishes to rescue her niece from the romantic disillusionment that she has suffered, as well as assuring, for Alejandra, a degree of agency in a rigidly patriarchal society. This agency rests in the imperfect process of perceiving truth in a world of illusions: 'by true I do not mean what is righteous but merely what is so' (242). John Grady, for the aunt, is helplessly lost in a dream, a dream of the past, of Mexico, of love. Ultimately he comes to realise this, and as a result the dream space of Mexico is no longer hospitable to him and he must return home.

McCarthy frames John Grady's journey from mythic fantasy to the disillusionment of reality as a coming to terms with the problematic nature of free will and the complexity of human agency. Alfonsa employs the recurring McCarthyian image of the coin maker⁴ to assert the necessity of attributing choice and meaning to human lives, even in the face of utter uncertainty:

⁴ See *Blood Meridian* pp. 296-297.

‘all of us bent so jealously at our work, determined that not even chaos be outside of our own making’ (243). However, *All the Pretty Horses* also reveals that ‘what is so’ is the revealed truth of environmental change brought about by modernity and industrialisation. This grounded reality of a politicised and changing frontier landscape is as much a driver of the narrative as concerns over determinism and free will.

Susan Savage Lee delineates the nature of the politicised, environmental reality that John Grady and Rawlins discover in Mexico. She establishes the political and cultural system the boys encounter as being defined by the tradition of *caciquismo*. This term refers to the dominant influence of the business, political and cultural ‘bosses’, who controlled Mexican society throughout much of its development. It is this ‘bossism’ that the boys are forced to contend with when they arrive at Don Hector’s ranch, and it is this system of entrenched violence and dominance that Alfonsa sets out for him in her personal history. Adopting a Fanonian analysis Lee states that this history emerges from colonialism: ‘When *caciquismo* emerges, this is evidence of the nationalist bourgeoisie replicating the colonialism model through the inferiorization of those less powerful because of class or race. At the root of both concepts is the universalized idea of the Other’s inferiority’ (156). The boys become complicit in the process of colonisation when they enter the Mexican landscape in search of an idealised frontier existence:

Cole’s utopia myth has been formed by the romanticization of the American Western frontier, rather than on the landscape that he actually investigates. Mexico has merely been a tool for suppressing his own disillusionment with the coldness of American modernization, so it never causes an epiphany for him. McCarthy’s novel demonstrates that neocolonialism exists because members of the dominant culture, like Cole, can only identify with their unidimensional re-creation of the Other (166)

The demystification that John Grady, in particular, experiences leaves him alienated from both industrialised America and politicised Mexico. He becomes a lost character, a liminal creature of the borderlands. The mythology of the West is one of colonisation and exploitation and we can read John Grady’s acknowledgment of this as the revisionist underpinning of the novel. The Western is shown to be a fantasy of masculine agency and self-realisation damagingly projected onto a landscape and society that rejects its founding assumptions.

Crucially, the conflict between the neo-colonial imaginary of a ‘Western’ Mexico and the compromised politically and socially fraught reality is revealed by environmental change. The conflict is, at its root, between the modernised, industrial reality of the West and the idealised, pastoral landscape of the past. Whilst the boys initially interpret the Mexican landscape as a prelapsarian Western space, it soon becomes clear that it too is marked by industrialisation and modernisation. David Holloway suggests that ranches, like La Purísima where the boys work, are

in reality industrialised operations for the breeding of horses for profit (191). Working there initially raises John Grady's spirits, as it seems to embody the romanticised, colonialist idea of Mexico he has searched for. However, the artificially pure landscape of the ranch is revealed to be incorporated within capitalism, modernity and the violence of the *caciquismo* system. John Grady and Rawlins are instead pulled back into the disciplinary system of the city and the prison by the reality of Mexican history and politics.

All the Pretty Horses operates within a set of problematic contradictions. The absurdity of borders does not lessen the real-world effects of national identity. Hybrid nationalities are still subject to the power imbalances created by neo-colonialism. The idealised myth of pristine frontier space is confronted by the industrialised and modernised Mexican landscape. John Grady and Rawlins are at once complex creatures of the borderlands struggling to negotiate the perils of statehood, and agents of neo-colonialism imposing their romanticised truth and effacing the reality of Mexican lives. They are characters caught within a web of historical circumstance and identity trouble in which the notion of them possessing any form of agency is in question. Their journey south across the border is motivated by a desire to live in a new and different way, or how they imagine people of the West used to live. The American west, enclosed and commodified, causes deep anxiety to the characters. John Grady's father tells him: 'People don't feel safe no more, he said. We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We don't know what's going to show up here come day light. We don't know what color they'll be' (26). This lament indicates racist anxiety over the threatening other but also a deep feeling of insecurity, lack of connection to the land and an empathic connection to Comanche experiences of colonisation and exploitation. The boys are seeking to escape this doomed space but instead find an environment in Mexico already exhausted and compromised. Anthropogenic imposition, whether through colonial fantasy, politics, industrial exploitation or the changing climate is inescapable. McCarthy's final image is of a landscape reeling with grief and loss:

The desert he rode was red and red the dust he raised, the small dust that powdered the legs of the horse he rode, the horse he led... he came upon a solitary bull rolling in the dust against the bloodred sunset like an animal in sacrificial torment. The blood red dust blew down out of the sun... rider and horse passed on and their long shadows passed in tandem like the shadow of a single being. Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come (306).

The space into which the Western as narrative and myth must go is fraught with uncertainty as the climate changes.

The Crossing (1994): The Exhausted South-west and the Shadow of Climate Change

The Crossing, as the second novel in *The Border Trilogy*, is defined by a stronger engagement with wildness and the border space. *New York Times* critic Robert Hass, reviewing the novel, stated that: ‘*The Crossing* tells very nearly the same story as *All the Pretty Horses* [...] But in *The Crossing*, fatality has entered the tale. If John Grady Cole [...] heads out like Huck Finn in search of open-ended adventure, Billy has elected, or been elected, to perform a nearly impossible task’. *The Crossing* mirrors the structure of its predecessor, a structure in which border crossing acts to disenchant the protagonists when the longed-for space of the West is found to be already corrupted. However, in the second novel the compulsion to cross and re-cross is driven, not by romance or nostalgia, but by the traumatic revelation of environmental change.

The novel follows the journey of Billy Parham. The Parham family live an austere existence in New Mexico at the border with Mexico itself. The opening section of the novel details Billy’s attempts to capture a pregnant wolf that has been killing livestock on their land. He captures the wolf but, struck by sympathy, determines to return her to safety in the hills of Mexico. However, the wolf is taken from him by Mexican authorities and made to fight dogs. Billy ends her suffering by shooting her and returns to the ranch. There he finds that his parents have been killed and the family horses stolen and so, in a defiant act doomed to failure, returns to Mexico with his brother Boyd to retrieve the horses. The remainder of the novel is a picaresque tale in which he and his brother come across a variety of enigmatic and obscure characters as they search for justice. Boyd falls for a Mexican girl and leaves Billy to become a folk hero in the borderlands. Billy returns to America but eventually is compelled to find his brother, who has since died. Finally, upon returning Boyd’s remains to his family home, Billy is left a shattered figure, out of place in an uncaring landscape.

This ultimately doomed odyssey is precipitated by Billy’s encounter with the wolf. The conflict between Billy and the animal is staged within an environment that has already experienced upheaval. The novel begins by describing the family’s migration from northern Grant County to the ranch in Hidalgo County, pressed up against the border. The land that they find is an exceptional wilderness: ‘The new country was rich and wild. You could ride clear to Mexico and not strike a crossfence. He carried Boyd before him in the bow of the saddle and named to him the features of the landscape and birds and animals in both spanish and english’ (309). It is also an environment in which large predators like wolves are so commonplace that young Billy is able to watch them hunt: ‘Loping and twisting. Dancing. Tunneling their noses in the snow... There were seven of them and they passed within twenty feet of where he lay’ (310). However, as Billy grows within the landscape the wolves are killed and driven away. McCarthy uncharacteristically shifts the

perspective of the narrative away from Billy to inhabit the subjectivity of the wolf. It is from within this perspective that we learn that in the once fertile environment: ‘She found little to eat. Most of the forest was cut to feed the boilers of the stampmills at the mines. The wolves in that country had been killing cattle for a long time’ (331). The loss of habitat due to extractive industry and intensive agriculture has led the lone female wolf to lose her mating partner and, in an effort to survive, predate the Parham’s livestock. Environmental activist and author Bill McKibben details the speed of the animal’s destruction on the mainland: ‘In 1899, St Lawrence county paid the last bounty in northern New York on a dead wolf. Her death marked the symbolic end of an era of spasmodic destruction [...] a space of six or seven decades that saw a nearly primeval forest cut over, burned, plowed, and polluted with great ferocity’ (7). The animals clung on longer in the southwest but by the mid-nineteen thirties they were on the edge of extinction. The wolf, as McKibben shows, stands as an indication of the overall health of American nature. Their reintroduction in places such as Yellowstone Park has reasserted the importance of wildness as well as acting to promote biodiversity in once monocultural areas. McKibben states: ‘Restoring animals means restoring the spirit of a place’ (9). McCarthy’s landscape in *The Crossing*, then, is one almost bereft of spirit.

Against this background of depletion and loss Billy sets out to capture the wolf. The animal cannily thwarts the initial efforts of Billy and his father, as she is able to detect and unearth their baited traps. Time and again Billy heads into the hills with no success whilst the wolf continues to kill livestock. His luck changes after he seeks the advice of an elderly Mexican hunter who instructs him as to the true nature of his hunt and the wolf. The conflict between boy and wolf is rendered here as an unbridgeable gap of understanding between the human and the non-human:

He said that men wish to be serious but they do not understand how to be so. Between their acts and their ceremonies lies the world and in this world the storms blow and the trees twist in the wind and all the animals that God has made go to and fro yet this world men do not see (353).

This revelation of otherness, the tantalising possibility of animal subjectivity, seems to be the spur for Billy’s decision to take the wolf to her native Mexico. Billy dreams of surmounting the distance between the wolf and his own experience of the world: ‘He wondered had the living blood with which it slaked its throat a different taste to the thick iron tincture in his own’ (359). In the attempt to bind subjectivities, Billy seemingly enters into a contract with the animal and decides to return her to a world in which she is a viable phenomenon. He identifies the space beyond the border as pre-modern and ecologically pure, in the same manner as the boys from *All the Pretty Horses*. Steven Frye positions *The Crossing* within the tradition of romantic naturalism, particularly citing the influence of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851). Frye identifies a redemptive quality in McCarthy’s narrative that has often been viewed as nihilistic. Viewed through the prism of

romantic naturalism Frye argues that, like *Moby Dick*, *The Crossing* allows the possibility of narrative as solace and reconciliation with the natural world: 'each of us takes an active role in weaving the matrix, in living and telling the individual tales that make up the one tale of the world' (Frye 55). Billy's intervention into the world of the wolf could be read as attempt to impose a narrative thread onto the warp and weft of McCarthy's unknowable world in much the same way as Ahab's quest for the meaning of the whale and, as a result, it is doomed to failure. However, the journey that Billy makes reveals concrete truths about the environmental fabric of the borderlands. The landscape of the West can be at times disenchantingly knowable.

Animals are a ubiquitous yet enigmatic presence throughout McCarthy's Westerns. *All the Pretty Horses* emphasises the bond between John Grady and horses, whilst *Blood Meridian* features numerous incidents of brutality and cruelty directed towards animals, their silence standing for our own mute response in the face of violence. The debate around the use of the wolf as metaphor and the ethics of McCarthy's engagement with animal subjectivities again moves between symbolic despair and narrative succour. Wallis R. Sandborn suggests that the wolf stands for a wilderness that must be exploited and constrained by a new Western civilisation: 'McCarthy uses a lone wolf, the pregnant she-wolf, to present his argument that man kills that which he cannot control. The wolf cannot be controlled; therefore the wolf is eradicated' (37). Billy's attempt to return the wolf is a failure from its inception because the act of capturing the animal incorporates it into an anthropocentric understanding of the world in which its true essence is obliterated. Fundamentally, as Sandborn puts it: 'the wolf and the man cannot coexist' (36). In this reading all that Billy is doing is seeking to violently control a wild and endangered animal. However, whilst it is clear that the wolf comes to represent the erasure of the primeval border landscape this purely symbolic rendering problematically denies the agency of the animal. Using a deconstructive analysis Raymond Malewitz locates this agency in the ways in which the wolf resists the anthropocentric narrative drive of the novel: 'a literary animal's agency can come into being when its behavior within a narrative temporarily exhausts, confuses, or transforms the use to which it has been put' (547). The wolf possesses a resistant power that it displays by continually confounding Billy's expectations of it. Malewitz argues that the wolf rejects its supposed wildness in favour of 'domesticity as agency' (553). By adopting some of the features of domesticated animal behavior the wolf also rejects the mythic signification that has been imposed upon it. Instead the wolf becomes something more elusive:

The wolf... does not correspond to either the boy's exaggerated ideal of wolf-ness; it is neither a man-eater nor a sympathetic partner. But as the narrator's prose suggests, if the animal's agency is indeed "reckonless," this unthinkable animal becomes available (if not to Billy then to the reader) as a mysterious absence "core[d]" into the anthropocentric

network around it (Malewitz 556).

Between these two critical poles, between the wolf as either symbolic victim or playful resistor of anthropocentric narratives, lie the journey and the crossing of the border. The act of crossing to Mexico to release the wolf is futile, the land of its birth is no more hospitable than the ranch country in which it was caught. Despite this, the boy, like the wolf, pursues the possibility of a space beyond the exhausted, agricultural landscape of his birth. Pilgrims and Mennonites moving north mark Billy's journey south and it is clear that the crossing over from north to south is of great significance. When Billy reaches the international boundary line the country he finds is: 'undifferentiated in its terrain from the country they quit and yet wholly alien and wholly strange' (382). The boy, like the protagonists of *All the Pretty Horses*, is driven by a desire to return to the prelapsarian Western space. However, unlike Cole and Rawlins there is an acknowledgment of limit and ultimate failure implicit in the act of crossing. The world that Billy seeks to inhabit is as ephemeral as the life of the wolf itself, describing the animal: 'When those eyes and the nation to which they stood witness were gone at last with their dignity back into their origins there would perhaps be other fires and other witnesses and other worlds otherwise beheld. But they would not be this one' (381). There seems no need to doubt the agency of the wolf in these lines, a vessel of an unknowable non-human world. Billy's knowingly doomed attempt to redeem himself and the animal in the mythic environment of the West is symbolic of a rejection of anthropocentrism and a simultaneous acceptance of the confounding otherness of the non-human.

The wolf's death marks the end of the first section of the novel and is the turning point in Billy's life. It is also where we see the strongest interplay in the trilogy between generalised anxieties about a changing world and specific concern for environmental and climatic changes brought about by human activity. Maria O'Connell reads the character of Billy Parham in *The Crossing* as fundamentally resistant to change: 'Billy loves ardently, but he loves wrongly, trying so hard to keep things from changing that he breaks his own heart and those around him. His desire and his blindness cause him to try to keep everything in its place' (597-598). His repeated border crossings are an attempt to escape from the reality of loss and the persistence of violence. O'Connell, like many other critics, argues that his actions are essentially futile, for example saving the wolf's life only to have it die in Mexico. This acknowledges the impossibility of Billy's attempts to construct meaning and comfort in the face of radical change. I would argue that anxiety over change in the novel is revealing of a broader concern with environmental collapse and climate induced dislocation. Due to human activity in the novel the symbolic border of the wolves' environment is being relentlessly pushed back. Billy sees in the wolf not only the enticing ephemera of non-human subjectivity but also the world shaping power of climate:

Where she ran the cries of coyotes clapped shut as if a door had closed upon them and all was fear and marvel. He took up her stiff head out of the leaves and held it or he reached to hold what cannot be held, what already ran among the mountains at once terrible and of a great beauty, like flowers that feed on flesh. What blood and bone are made of but can themselves not make on any altar nor by any wound of war. What we may well believe has power to cut and shape and hollow out the dark form of the world surely if wind can, if rain can. But which cannot be held and is no flower but is swift and a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it and the world cannot lose it (436).

There is a maddened pattern of negation in this passage as McCarthy employs stark contradiction: 'like flowers/is no flower', 'reached to hold/what cannot be held' a lost thing that cannot be lost. This familiar McCarthyian trope is heightened here and produces a deep sense of ambiguity and anxiety. What is being lost is at once unknowable and yet vitally known. McCarthy powerfully asserts the importance of the matrix of the world system as we experience it as well as a paradoxical separation and connection to the environment we impose ourselves on. Weather and climate, as both specific and generalised phenomena, haunt the contemporary imagination as we conceive of ourselves as actors in the natural world. If we read the vital spiritual essence ('What blood and bone are made of but themselves cannot make') of the wolf as a metaphor for weather and climate, what then is at stake in its death? Billy's quest is one of doomed romance, like the other children's crusades that mark the trilogy. However, rather than a quest for the mythic past of the West or for equally mythic notions of romantic love, Billy is in search of a loss he cannot define. The change he feels implicitly in his environment, the feeling of loss free from any object is the affect of climate change. The broad feeling of harmful, yet generalised and invisible change which one is simultaneously complicit in and removed from: this is what clouds Billy's mind and is the turning point of *The Crossing*.

The second section of the novel begins by stating: 'Doomed enterprises divide lives forever into the then and the now' (437). After he returns home and finds his parents dead, the rest of the novel is structured by Billy and his brother Boyd's wanderings through Mexico in a somewhat absurd quest to regain their family horses. After his brother dies, the wandering becomes entirely empty of meaning. In place of any romantic mission there is instead a compulsive crisscrossing in which the concept of the border loses all significance. The conclusion of the novel sees the repetition of events from the first section as Billy returns to retrieve his dead brother's remains, which he then buries in his home cemetery in a doubling of the wolf's burial. Diane C. Luce states that the border trilogy is: 'An elegy for the evanescent world of the South-west and a celebration of the great hearts of those who live alienated within [it] and who mourn or honor the passing of the wolves, the indian, the cowboy' (164). The recurrence of loss and grief are symptomatic of the elegiac quality of *The Crossing*. In the same manner as *All the Pretty Horses*, the novel's characters seek wildness and meaning in wildness and instead are disenchanted by the environment they find. Luce argues that what defines the trilogy is a vanishing of South-Western ecology and with it a

way of life. In *The Crossing* this loss is clear; however, there is also anxiety about what losses the future will bring. This is evident in the final image that McCarthy leaves us with in the novel. An itinerant Billy seeks shelter in an abandoned adobe house when a misshapen dog tries to share the space with him. The animal has suffered violence and ill fortune in much the same way as Billy: 'its head was askew somehow on its body and it moved grotesquely' (738). The animal seems a skewed double of the wild and beautiful wolf. Its domesticity and its need for comfort and shelter are traits that are as troubling as they were confounding in the wolf. Disgusted and saddened Billy drives the dog away despite its obvious need: 'It had once been a hunting dog, perhaps left for dead in the mountains or by some high roadside. Repository of ten thousand indignities and the harbinger of god knew what' (739). The dog has been fully incorporated into the exploitative logic that has denuded South-Western ecology. Its physical appearance reflects the process of disenchantment and degradation that both Billy and the landscape through which he has travelled have been subjected to. The animal also seems a grim augury of a deeply contingent future in which archetypal forms of Western life become increasingly unviable in the environmental space of the West.

Billy's initial decision to cross the border space appears to be without reason, the imposition of human desire onto the empty totem of the wolf. However, for Billy, like John Grady, the environment across the border seems to contain the possibility of a return to a pre-industrial, pre-modern West. Unlike John Grady, the failure of Billy's enterprise is contained in its inception. To capture the wolf is to extinguish the ineffable quality of wildness, which is the wolf in its entirety. The Mexico that Billy seeks is a wilderness that is not only unknowable but also utterly erased by extractive industry and intensive agriculture. The novel is deeply ambiguous towards the possibility of human and animal agency, because these lives play out within a natural world that is essentially unknowable. However, *The Crossing* is most defined by a crippling unease about change and how the Western landscape has been deformed by human action. It is in this anxiety that we can locate the troubling shadow of climate change.

Cities of the Plain (1998): McCarthy, Migration and Climate Change

Cities of the Plain is markedly different from its predecessors. It is a comparatively smaller book at two hundred and ninety three pages and much more tightly focused both in its plot and geographical scope. Set in 1952, the story sees John Grady and Billy Parham working together on a ranch, an occupation they find pleasant enough despite the fact that they both are traumatised by the events of their youth. They find solace and entertainment through trips over the border from El Paso to its twin Juarez. These linked cities of the plain (the collective term for Sodom and

Gomorrah in the book of Genesis) are the focus of the narrative as the men cross back and forth. John Grady, his romantic instincts even more heightened, falls for an epileptic young prostitute, Magdalena, he finds in one of the brothels. They fall in love and he plans to take her to America to build a life together. However, her diabolical pimp Eduardo refuses to let her go, so John Grady and Billy attempt a daring rescue. They are betrayed, and Magdalena is murdered. John Grady fights Eduardo and they kill each other. The novel concludes with an epilogue fifty years in the future in which a bereft and destitute Billy finds some measure of solace in the kindness of a family who allows him to stay with them. *Cities of the Plain* is slimmer and more starkly driven than two books before it. Its change in scope and its focus on the central romance plot led to a mixed critical reception for the novel. Writing in *The New York Times*, Sara Mosle suggests the reader: ‘begins to miss the simple evocation of cowboy life that is so stirring in the earlier novels’. Whilst McCarthy’s withdrawal from the range and the mountains does have the effect of shrinking *Cities of the Plain*, its close interrogation of the dynamics of love across borders and cultures ensures that the novel feels contemporary. Despite its grand evocation of romantic love, *Cities of the Plain* excels when it contends with the dynamics of power and migration in the grimy reality of Juarez and El Paso.

The problematic power imbalances that arise when north meets south are evident in McCarthy’s novel. Mexican women, like Magdalena, are a group almost devoid of power and agency throughout the trilogy but especially in *Cities of the Plain*. Critic Jennifer A. Reimer is damning in her criticism of such representations:

While much criticism applauds McCarthy’s “revisionist” western history and examines how his unique prose style self-consciously revises the Western genre, I... [will] argue that Cole’s relationships with Alejandra and Magdalena reify stereotypes about the availability and hypersexualization of Mexican women on the US-Mexico border in service of constructing a dominant, if ambivalent, white masculinity (423).

Reimer argues that McCarthy promotes the stereotype of the Mexican woman as prostitute. Magdalena is an object, first to be paid for, then conquered in the pursuit of love before finally being captured and claimed by John Grady. Reimer sees this as part of a larger process in which: ‘representing Mexican women as racial and sexual others was crucial to the stabilization and control of white femininity and, by extension, the boundaries of the nation’ (435). The criminality and sin depicted in McCarthy’s Juarez can be read as part of the same project of nation building. By externalizing the threat of moral decay and violence a sense of occidental superiority could be fostered. This has led to the border becoming synonymous with vice and threat, and a place where Mexican women are prostitutes. Reimer also effectively establishes the resonances between McCarthy’s Juarez and the contemporary violence that is being experienced there: ‘Magdalena’s brutally murdered (and certainly sexually abused) body, shoeless and abandoned, recalls the bodies

of the hundreds, possibly more, brown women who have been violently murdered and whose bodies have been dumped in the desert and other areas surrounding the city since the early nineteen nineties (437). Mexico's moves, backed by the US, to liberalise its economy have led to the creation of Maquiladoras (manufacturing operations) along the border, taking advantage of the free-trade zone and low wages for their workers. The toxic mixture of violence against women, the depredations of globalized capital and local corruption ensures that Mexican women are excluded and effaced in narratives of the border. Magdalena, in Reimer's analysis, stands as a symbol of this process: 'she is caught between an imperializing nation and the object of its imperial desire, both of which depend on the marginalization, exploitation and/or elimination, and containment of women's bodies to succeed. Magdalena is caught in a transnational web of power relations that do not accommodate her presence' (438). This reframing of *Cities of the Plain* to incorporate the marginalised experience of Mexican women is vital. It is also important to consider the Western genre from within which McCarthy is writing. The absence and erasure of the feminine is in many ways the *raison d'être* of the Western and the problematic contradictions that arise out of this have often troubled McCarthy's writing.

Its awkward focus and specificity allows *Cities of the Plain* to resonate with contemporary concerns. This includes the subjugation and exploitation of women and people of colour as well as the ethics and power relations involved in migration and borders. When we consider migration in the coming century we are forced to acknowledge the spectre of climate change. Increased immigration to Europe often has conflict as its root cause; however, climate change is exacerbating conditions across huge swaths of the Middle East and North Africa. Writing in *The Guardian* in August 2015, activist Ellie Mae O'Hagan argues:

There is only one problem with calling this phenomenon of migration a crisis, and that is that it's not temporary: it's permanent. Thanks to global climate change, mass migration could be the new normal.

There are lots of estimates as to what we can expect to see in the near future, but the best known (and controversial) figure comes from Professor Norman Myers, who argues that climate change could cause 200 million people to be displaced by 2050.

Climate-induced migration has the potential to be the defining social and political challenge of the twenty-first century with potentially huge consequences. In the context of migration from Mexico to the USA, climate change has already been proved to have an impact⁵. This migration has revealed and will continue to reveal the structural inequalities that are the result of unchecked globalisation and neoliberal economic policy since the nineteen seventies. The question of who

⁵ See *Migration and Climate Change* (Piguet, Pecoud & De Guchteneire 2011) p. 9 for evidence of climate driven emigration from Mexico to the USA.

gets to cross which borders will become even more highly contested than it already is. The inequities of the border power system, in which one country is subordinate to the interests of its hegemonic neighbour, is at play within *Cities of the Plain*. The young Americans are able to move back and forth between El Paso and Juarez with unthinking ease. The novel opens with a group of drunken cowboys making their way back home. The description of their passage from one place to the other is perfunctory: 'the cloudcover had moved off down from the Franklins and south towards the dark shapes of the mountains of Mexico standing against the starlit sky. They crossed the bridge and pushed through the turnstile each in turn' (749). The darkness of Mexico is a backdrop against which the desires of the white Americans can be played out, all the while with the safety of being able to pass through the barriers north. This is contrasted with the utter fixedness of a character like Magdalena. Trapped by processes of patriarchy, capital and environment she is entirely without the ability to cross, to pass from otherness into America. Her attempt to escape leads ultimately to her death. She believes she is being driven across the bridge to El Paso; instead, she has been betrayed and is driven to her death: 'She asked the driver if they were to cross here to the other side and he said yes. He said that she would be going to the other side now' (970). The act of crossing is instantly negated. John Grady's battle to the death with Eduardo serves only as a futile act of self-sacrifice. The ethics of border crossing are encoded into the narrative of *Cities of the Plain*. For the occidental characters, crossing is synonymous with pleasure and desire but for those moving north, the journey is fraught with danger and the real possibility of death. This is the dichotomy that climate change will increasingly reveal.

Throughout the trilogy John Grady and Billy undertake a series of doomed enterprises: John Grady and Alejandra, Billy and the wolf, Billy's attempt to save his brother, John Grady's attempt to rescue Magdalena. Erik Hage views this sense of thwarted destiny within the context of a fragile mythology:

In the trilogy there is something that is uncapturable – that cannot be contained by the histories, *corridos*, or stories we tell ourselves: Destiny. And if myths are the worlds that we create, collectively or on our own, then in McCarthy's vision destiny is the thing that was created for us long before we or our world existed. Myths don't hold up, but destiny is unwavering – and destiny is the idea that is most deeply deliberated on in *Cities of the Plain* (62).

This notion of destiny has many resonances with contemporary anxieties around climate change. Fear of a changing world without structure and shorn of familiar referents defines responses to the prognostications of climate science. Under the pressure of anthropogenic decay and change myths don't hold up. In the case of *The Border Trilogy*, it is the myth of the Western that has been fatally undermined by the destiny of an environment denuded by man and ravaged by climate change. John Grady and Billy are forced to create their own stories, around romance and loyalty, but these

are ephemeral and unable to bear the weight of circumstance and misfortune. Beneath this is sense that the destiny of the Western space is ultimately to fail and collapse. The prospect of climate refugees fleeing Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico before 2050 is a very real one.

The Border Trilogy reveals how anthropogenic environmental and climate change can destabilise the Western genre. This process is revealed throughout the trilogy through the act of crossing borders. John Grady moves south in search of a mythical Western environment but is left disenchanted and heartbroken by the realities of a rapidly industrialising Mexico. Billy Parham's crossing is driven by the revelation of non-human subjectivity but his journey is doomed to failure, and this failure creates a deep anxiety about change. Finally, the many crossings of *Cities of the Plain* reveal the deep imbalances between north and south of the border. Border areas will become zones of conflict and violence as the changing climate forces human migration. New subjectivities and narratives will emerge from this forced movement, and these will be very different from the fixed identities that have defined the Western genre.

The trilogy ends with the seventy eight-year-old Billy being taken in and looked after by a kindly family. He is still deeply affected by the losses and pain he has suffered but he is grateful for the kindness the family shows him. McCarthy leaves us with the possibility of extracting meaning from a fast-changing world: 'She patted his hand. Gnarled, ropescarred, speckled from the sun and the years of it. The ropy veins that bound them to his heart. There was map enough for men to read. There God's plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape. To make a world' (1037). The Anthropocene still holds out the possibility of narrative, of new stories that reconfigure our relationship with the natural world. As grand myths begin to be undermined and crumble it is with small stories that we might be able to build a world

Chapter two: Westerns at the Limit: *The Road* and *Blood Meridian*

In his sober account of climate change in the American South West, *The Great Aridness* (2011), William deBuys describes the vast forest fires that occurred on the Mogollon Plateau in Arizona in 2002. The Rodeo-Chediski fire destroyed 468,638 acres of forestlands and was, until another fire in 2011, the largest fire in Arizona state history. This scale and pace of destruction is vividly described by deBuys: ‘That rate of combustion works out pretty closely to the area of a football field going up in smoke every second, sixty football pitches every minute, all day and all night long. Think of a steel mill on round-the-clock shifts, except that the blast furnaces have no walls and randomly consume the countryside’ (241). As climate change causes more frequent and more severe droughts, the frequency of such devastating fires will increase. The living environment of the classical Western is increasingly under threat from climate change, a threat that is only worsening. Westerns have had to contend with the end of the frontier and the revision of Western myth. Now climate change compels us to consider not only the post-Western of generic convention but also the post-apocalyptic Western. Cormac McCarthy’s two novels *The Road* (2006) and *Blood Meridian* (1985) push the Western form to its limits linguistically, conceptually and with their graphic use of violence, and both are essential in understanding a post-apocalyptic Western environment. These novels reveal the strain that the Western genre, as an animating myth driving American expansion, is under from the changing climate.

In *The Road* McCarthy conjures up a luridly disturbing American landscape in the aftermath of climate apocalypse. However, despite its prophetic power the novel echoes many of the tropes of the Western genre. *The Road* employs archetypes and structures from the Western genre’s past to mourn a lost future. In so doing, the novel evinces the particular features of hauntological culture. Following theorist Mark Fisher, I will read the novel as a spectral Western, a product of a genre and a culture that can no longer conceive of productively different futures. Rather, *The Road* shows the Western genre at its apocalyptic extreme and emptied of symbolic meaning. This hollowing out is present in the figure of the Man, the stoic protagonist. The rugged individualism of the Man is shown as being at odds with the care ethic of his son, revealing the failure of a particular archetype of Western manhood in the face of a changed climate. *The Road* eschews explicit reference to climate change in favour of a potentially evasive rhetoric of complexity. However, the narrative is able to effectively act as a dark imaginary of the anthropocene through its deployment of an unsettlingly altered Western narrative. The core of the post-climate West is shown to be essentially disanthropic. *The Road* reveals the capacity of climate change to evacuate genre tropes of their mythic significance, creating a Western narrative that is disorientating and haunting.

Blood Meridian is another Western at the limits of the genre. The narrative is suffused with the spectacular violence that has always been associated with the Western but also expresses what Rob Nixon has termed slow violence. This term denotes temporally and spatially diffuse harms such as toxic pollution, radioactive waste and climate change that are predominantly enacted on the global south by polluting industries and the carbon economy. *Blood Meridian* is an anti-pastoral anti-Western that rejects romantic notions of the Western landscape, instead depicting its living environment as profane, defiled and relentlessly inhospitable. Violence and the inherent malevolence of the Western landscape are linked in the novel to the slow violence occurring in resource-cursed Mexico, where the damaging environmental implications of empire are inextricably linked with the genocide of native peoples. Climate change implies the end of the environment and ecology that defined the mythic West. In *Blood Meridian*, this truth emerges through the exposure of the absence at the heart of the McCarthy's West. In the narrative the character of the Judge embodies a violent reaction to this absence. The myriad forms of environmental violence present in *Blood Meridian* point to the existential threat posed by the slow violence of climate change. Here, as in *The Road*, climate change is a force that acts on the Western by radically calling into question the core assumptions of the genre. In McCarthy's Westerns the landscape no longer possesses the capacity to renew and sustain Western characters, what remains is dislocation and silence.

The Road: The Spectre of the Western

Widely acclaimed upon its release, *The Road* was quickly adopted by environmentalists who saw in it a stark warning of the dangers implied by climate science. The journalist and climate campaigner George Monbiot endorsed the novel: 'A few weeks ago I read what I believe is the most important environmental book ever written'. Monbiot was quick to read the road of the title as the doomed path towards a catastrophically warmed planet. The completely inhospitable environment of the novel is beyond even the nightmare scenarios of most climate modelling but Monbiot saw the collapse of morality and empathy in the novel as indicative of contemporary society's moral bankruptcy on the issue of climate change: '...a hardening of interests, a shutting down of concern, is taking place among the people of the rich world. If this is true, we do not need to wait for the forests to burn or food supplies to shrivel before we decide that civilisation is in trouble'. Quickly *The Road* became a portent, possessed of a prophetic power that had to be heeded by citizens and policy makers alike. However, the climate change subject matter of the novel is possibly contentious and certainly complex. This is exemplified by the conflicting ideas put forth about the nature of the disaster that has scoured and burnt the world, clogging the atmosphere with ash. Competing theories include: a meteorite strike, a super volcano eruption, a nuclear war, and as discussed, anthropogenic environmental collapse. All that McCarthy offers by way of clues is the

passage: ‘The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long sheer of light and then a series of low concussions’ (54). The vagueness of the apocalyptic event complicates environmentalist readings of the novel because crucially, the question of human agency in the disaster is left open. However, the novel emerges from a cultural and scientific milieu in which the potential for human action to irreparably damage the global environment is broadly accepted and as such climate change remains as a central concern when readers consider the landscape that McCarthy presents. Despite its complexity *The Road* is a novel suffused with the imagery, prophecies and fears of the Anthropocene. Just as in the contemporary Western, the lack of an explicit reference to the changing climate does not preclude the reading of the text through the prism of the climate crisis. *The Road* is what is left of the Western when it has been hollowed out. Bereft of the landscape that supports the genre *The Road* is a spectral Western. This reading relies upon Derrida’s concept of ‘Hauntology’, and was developed by cultural critic Mark Fisher. In *Spectres of Marx* Derrida introduced the term as a way of responding to the end of communism in Europe in the early nineteen nineties. With the dominance of the neo-liberal economic order assured Derrida identified the spectral return of Marx as a vital critique of hegemonic liberal capitalism. Fisher uses hauntology to define a musical movement in the mid-2000s that was characterised by haunting electronic music that evoked the ‘lost futures’ of modernism. This reading was extended by Fisher to describe the nostalgia that pervades contemporary culture:

The futures that have been lost were more than a matter of musical style. More broadly, and more troublingly, the disappearance of the future meant the deterioration of a whole mode of social imagination: the capacity to conceive of a world radically different from the one in which we currently live. It meant the acceptance of a situation in which culture would continue without really changing, and where politics was reduced to the administration of an already established (capitalist) system... The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production. What hauntological music mourns is less the failure of a future to transpire—the future as actuality—than the disappearance of this effective virtuality (16).

The Road is a Western in which the possibility of imagining potentially emancipatory futures is radically curtailed. As a spectral Western *The Road* does indeed mourn lost futures by using the cultural forms of the past. The film presents a hollowed out Western in which genre tropes appear altered or emptied of meaning. Climate change is the precipitator of this genre melancholy.

Genre fiction has been at the forefront of literary responses to climate change. Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra have begun to establish a canon of science fiction novels that deal explicitly with the issue. These include contemporary literary heavyweights such as Margaret Atwood and Ian McEwan and science fiction authors such as Kim Stanley Robinson. *The Road* fits comfortably with the speculative works of these authors, yet it also borrows significantly from the

Western genre as McCarthy echoes his previous works in a hollowed out Western landscape. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz has set out the continuities and divergences between McCarthy's early Western novels and *The Road*. He argues that the novel maintains much of the structure of a traditional Western: 'since, like the earlier pioneers, these two characters face an inhospitable land and all kinds of cruel enemies' (3). Ibarrola-Armendariz suggests that the move to transform the Western into its own dark echo was McCarthy's response to September 11th and the War on Terror. However, this reading seems to rely on the assertion that the narrative is initiated by a nuclear war, a political act that would link the text to War on Terror anxieties. As has been suggested, the slippery nature of the novel's unseen disaster undermines such strong claims. A climate change reading is not inherently more accurate than that of Ibarrola-Armendariz. Nevertheless the living, or dead, environment is central to the narrative, and therefore concerns about environmental degradation are a useful lens for analysing the text separate from geopolitical anxieties. A climate change reading of the *Road* also shifts the source of threat and anxiety from external forces towards our own complicity in shaping apocalyptic futures.

The Road is concerned with the environmental future of the Western landscape and I would also like to suggest that it retains many features of a Western novel. As Ibarrola-Armendariz states the novel shares with Westerns the concept of migration, from hardship to plenty, from moribund world bereft of opportunity to hope. Like classical Westerns this journey also has religious connotations; the man and the boy are pilgrims 'carrying the fire' (87). The structure of their journey is reminiscent of foundational pioneer stories. On their journey south to escape the killing winter cold they use a supermarket trolley to carry their scavenged provisions; this is strongly reminiscent of the covered waggons employed by Western pioneers to cross the Great Plains. The journey also resonates with the archetypal pioneer horror story, the Donner party, who in 1846 were trapped for winter in the Sierra Nevadas and were forced by starvation to resort to cannibalism.⁶ This grisly story is echoed in the pilgrimage of the man and the boy as they too make their way through treacherous mountain passes and are faced daily by the ethical implications of cannibalism: 'We would never eat anyone would we? ... No we wouldn't... Because we're the good guys? Yes' (136). The novel relies on these deep associations for some of its symbolic heft. Some of the narrative's power lies in the reversal of classical Western structures. Whilst archetypal Western heroes move towards progress and civilisation the man and the boy journey ever deeper into barbarism and decay.

⁶ For a gripping account of the Donner Party's ill-fated expedition see Rarick.

The poignancy of these hollowed out Western symbols is also present in the figures that the two characters encounter on the road. The road agents that they come across are truly barbarous, cutthroat cannibals whose very appearance is presented as deviant:

Like an animal inside a skull looking out the eyeholes. He wore a beard that had been cut square across the bottom with shears and he had a tattoo of a bird on his neck done by someone with an illformed notion of their appearance. He was lean, wiry, rachitic (65).

Some queer theorists have identified the othering of these characters by the man as ‘bad guys’ as problematic. Arielle Zibrak argues that the man’s relationship with the boy is an attempt to maintain heteronormativity in a world in which the loss of societal structure has made this meaningless. The demonising of the tattooed, strangely dressed queer characters that they encounter serves to preserve the heteronormative order that the mother’s death has disrupted. The road agents and roaming gangs of cannibals are necessarily feared, avoided and killed because, as Zibrak observes: ‘The preservation of this space of otherness is especially crucial in so far as the man and the boy are living in dangerous proximity to a violation of their own code’ (114). The Western as genre interacts profitably with the challenging implications of this reading. The road agents can be understood as outlaws in the classical Western sense: they are opposed to the goals of the hero, they represent savagery in opposition to wilderness, they are godless in contrast to the ‘Godspoke’ hero. Similarly the murderous army that they are forced to hide from are reminiscent of classical depictions of Native Americans, dressed irregularly and ‘strangely’, rendered alien to the eyes of our protagonists: ‘Dressed in clothing of every description... An army in tennis shoes, tramping. Carrying three-foot lengths of pipe with leather wrappings’ (96). If we read the *The Road* as a Western it seems clear that McCarthy is knowingly playing with these tropes in order to present the reversal of manifest destiny through archetypal genre figures. This reading also addresses the problematic absence of women in *The Road*, and indeed in much of McCarthy’s work. Zibrak delineates the role of the mother in the novel thus: ‘She comes in and out of narrative focus in brief flickers that illuminate her relationship to the two male protagonists in one of three ways: as someone who had sex, as someone who gave birth, and as someone who died’ (111). This absence may not be entirely a function of contemporary patriarchal unease if we consider it in terms of the Western as genre. In her influential reading of the Western *West of Everything* Jane Tompkins asserts that the special allure of the Western for American culture is as an escape from femininity and a return to masculine values: ‘It’s about men’s fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents’ (45). *The Road* fits within this schema by reproducing this flight from women, who in the novel are associated strongly with negativity and the death. However, the novel also reproduces the Western’s reflexive attitude towards its own ideological biases. McCarthy presents the existential debate between the man and woman as far more nuanced than some critics might allow. The woman reveals the man’s fanatical

zeal for continued life in a world that is dead as essentially irrational:

You cant protect us... I'd take him with me if it weren't for you.

You know I would. Its the right thing to do.

You're talking crazy.

No, I'm speaking the truth (58).

The woman rejects the man's will to survive as invested solely in the boy, a need to protect that drives the man on in the face of a world it would be better not to live in. The Western valorises movement, growth and change but the woman in McCarthy's spectral Western embodies stasis and contraction. As such the character acts to reject the ideology of the Western from within. Adeline Johns-Putra argues that the man and the boy embody two different ethics of care. The man's fiercely protective parental care – keeping the boy safe at any cost – is contrasted with the democratic care impulse of the boy, who consistently tries to help strangers despite the potential danger. Johns-Putra argues that novel provides two models of ethical behaviour for its anxious readers:

Readers who travel the sparse landscape of *The Road* cannot help but give their full attention to the relationship between the man and the boy. At the same time, as the novel's critical and popular reception reminds us, many readers reside in a wider discursive landscape of doubt and unease over humanity's inhumanity to the planet and its future. In this context, the man's vigilant exercising of parental care stands out and easily chimes with our anxieties. But so must the boy's alternative ethic of compassion, underscored by the actions of the family who save him (535).

Viewed through the prism of the Western, the man's exclusionary care ethic resembles that of the classical Western hero who seeks to protect his family and home through violence. This response to the world of *The Road* is understandable, however, it is the boy's inclusive caring that may prove most useful in the world to come. The Western archetype in *The Road* is shown to be at odds with both the fatalism of the Anthropocene, as embodied by the woman, and the strategies of democratic care that are exemplified by the boy. The man is out of step with the ethical demands of the spectral Western.

The Road stages its Western story within a landscape that evokes some of our worst fears about climate change. The unchecked wild fires that have coated the land with ash, the conditions of total famine, widespread violence and upheaval, all connect with longstanding assumptions about the worst effects of climate change. *The Road* is fertile ground for understanding cultural reactions to climate change and ecological crisis more generally, raising questions such as: What is McCarthy's relationship to climate change science? And what is the ecocritical value of the novel?

In an effort to answer the first of these questions, Derek J Thiess offers a critique of the trend towards complexity science as evident in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), The Santa Fe Institute (SFI) and *The Road*. The SFI is a scientific think tank set up to investigate the complex interactions between diverse fields from physics to economics. Complexity science has risen to prominence as a reaction against reductionist thinking in classical or Newtonian physics. In contrast complex system theory seeks to interrogate the most entwined and interdependent of systems, looking at a web of complex connections rather than reducing these webs to their component parts. Climate is a classic example of a complex system, in which many simple physical processes interacting produce wildly unpredictable weather.⁷ The Santa Fe Institute is the leading think tank in this field and McCarthy has been a part of it since its inception and is its only novelist. Thiess is sceptical about the trend towards complexity in contemporary thought. He depicts it as a pseudo-science buzzword that obscures the dangerous reality of empirical climate data. Thiess criticises McCarthy for the use of the imagery of complexity in *The Road* as well as for, somewhat paradoxically, ignoring the scientific advice given to him by fellow institute members. Science, he suggests, is subordinated in favour of McCarthy's own dubious metaphysics. This is seen as part of a more general move to infect science with the uncertainty of religious discourses. Thiess offers a timely critique of ideologically inflected complexity thought, the problems of which can be seen in the dissemination of climate science where talk of complexity obscures very real and pressing dangers. Thiess claims that *The Road* lapses into this dangerous complacency:

The danger of complexity theory as we encounter it in this novel lies in what we do not see rather than what we do. That same uncertainty of results and the spurning of science for metaphysics are as real, in many ways, in this novel as they are in complex modelling in the global warming debate (549).

The danger of a literature filled with spurious pseudo-science and a scientific discourse filled with the tropes of literature is a real one. However, one wonders how else McCarthy or the compilers of IPCC reports are to go about the important work of representing the Anthropocene. The issue of complexity is significant and deserves to be publicised. Climate change compels artists and scientists to respond to uncertainty and nuance in sharp contrast to the narratives that dominate in politics and the media. The slipperiness of McCarthy's narrative is therefore subversive and yet remains a powerful means by which the dangers of climate change are transmitted to the public. This is due in part to the decisions McCarthy made which are not empirically scientific. Thiess accuses McCarthy of inaccuracies in research, referring to 'the novel's memorable gray skies, which should be blue according to McCarthy's source' (535). However, it could be argued that the

⁷ For a useful introduction to complexity science for non-experts see Mitchell 3-14.

iconic greyness of the novel is evocative of traditional movie portrayals of apocalypse and relies on these tropes to elicit an audience reaction. McCarthy's perceived lack of rigor, in fact, viscerally connects readers with the bleak futures envisioned in climate change science. These allow McCarthy to take the complexity of climate and render it tangible. We see a familiar world, possessing familiar mythic traits, and yet it is warped: and that is what we respond to. Climate change limits the futures of the Western space whilst the imagery of the novel connects with reader's anxieties over a lost landscape. The depth of this loss drives the haunting effect of *The Road*.

Veronique Bragard has detailed another way in which *The Road* responds positively to the challenges of environmental crisis, namely the significance of garbage and waste in the novel. Garbage is a defining feature of the novel and Bragard argues that the characters' desperate and ceaseless scavenging invests trash objects with vibrant new meaning:

In their re-connection with matter in the form of nature and waste, characters affirm the equal value of elements, natural substances, and manufactured objects. The father checking cans "like a man checking for ripeness at a fruitstand" is a most relevant example (484-485).

Bragard reads this reaffirmation of the material world as positive and indeed hopeful. The wasted land of the novel implies over-consumption and environmental degradation, an ideology rejected by the father and his son. Bragard even goes as far as to chastise their old 'bad habits' when 'they strip the robber of all his possessions, thereby exposing their own sense of attachment' (487). This is a strong analysis that opens up the novel to an environmentalist perspective in which a new set of relations is formed with former waste products and, in so doing, offers a sense of hope, energy and mystery amongst the rubble. The two characters can therefore be read as reborn, ecologically conscious beings able to invest meaning into material. This formulation, of course, minimises the horror of the world in which the man and boy are attempting to scratch out an existence and also risks minimizing the struggles of those in developing nations for whom the recycling of waste holds little spiritual weight. Nevertheless *The Road* clearly 'expose[s] garbage and waste' (480) as the unseen reality of the Anthropocene. Bragard's reading also allows us to consider the ecological debris of the past that will continue to haunt our future; chief amongst these pollutants are greenhouse gases. This sense of the re-emergence of waste and consumption, the debris left by the violence of the human past, is perhaps the closest the novel comes to direct acknowledgement of climate change: 'perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made' (*The Road* 293). Again the haunting nature of *The Road* allows the narrative to connect the past of resource exploitation and pollution with the foreclosed future.

Waste also acts as a gateway to another facet of environmental thought with climate

implications: disanthropy. McCarthy dramatises a rapidly emptying world yet one that maintains the scars of human activity. Disanthropy, the attempt to represent a world without people, is a recurring theme of ecological art. Such visions can potentially be politically disabling in that they would seem to minimise the human misery of environmental crisis and are also subject to daunting formal restrictions due to the lack of human subjects. Greg Garrard contends that such narratives are at their best when they emphasise the persistence of physical and toxic human effects on the natural world. *The Road* stops short of disanthropy proper because it unfolds through the human characters' narrative. However, the implications of the novel are that soon the world will be entirely without people and that what will be left is our pollution and our waste, what Garrard terms 'the horrors of persistence' (*Worlds Without Us* 53). The coming disanthropic nature of the planet sheds some light onto the obscure final passage of McCarthy's novel. The narrative flashes back to a time where:

there were brook trout in the streams of the mountains... On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery (306-307).

Thiess reads this passage as McCarthy referencing obscurantist complexity to mystifying effect. We might alternatively interpret it as the novel's nod towards a post-American, post-human environment, filled with the utter strangeness of the non-human. As Garrard puts it: 'we have now, for the first time, glimpsed the world as it is when we are not looking, and found it at once alluring and frighteningly indifferent' (*Worlds Without Us* 42). Yet still the human trace remains, the thing that can 'Not be made right again'. This is McCarthy's strongest statement about ecology and climate. This disanthropic move unsettles humanistic readings of the novel and points towards its deep-ecological implications. Whilst the novel remains anthropocentric, this imaginative displacing of human society and the revelation of the strangeness of the non-human places the living environment at the core of the novel, an unacknowledged nexus around which the characters navigate.

Because this living environment is cataclysmic we are drawn to climate as the mechanism driving the events of the narrative, echoing contemporary preoccupations with climate and catastrophe. Graphic and sensationalist media representations of destructive weather events such as Hurricane Katrina as well as mundane but persistent forecasting create what Maria Sturken has termed 'Weather Citizens'. The default of state of the weather citizen is that of anticipation:

The weather citizen is interpellated within a set of narratives that range from the duties of consumerism to the vagaries of fate. The weather, we are told, is uncontrollable, dramatic, and exciting, yet science has given us the capacity to predict it. The government and the media have it under control. Prediction, it is

stated, will save us. Prediction, a form of knowledge that is short-lived and of limited capacity, is seen as a shield against the future. If only, we are asked to think, we could be prepared (187).

Post-apocalyptic narratives like *The Road* fit somewhat within this paradigm of anticipatory fear and desire. As readers we are shocked by the implications the novel seems to suggest for extreme climate change whilst simultaneously we may be comforted by the very act of prediction, as it reformulates the terrifying spectre of climate chaos into a digestible and comprehensible narrative form. However, *The Road* crucially stands apart from media and scientific presentations of climate and instead troubles us with its ambiguity. The uncertainty of the destruction's origin subverts the comfort of prediction by denying us empirical parameters from which to draw conclusions. Again we see how the slipperiness of McCarthy's 'complexity' acts to simplify the troubling fact of climate change against media and political obfuscations.

As has been shown, *The Road* is a spectral Western that engages complexly and troublingly with contemporary climate anxieties. At the level of the text, this fruitful dialectic between a genre that has come to embody the progressive American impulse and the apocalyptic regression of climate change narratives can be seen clearly. The contrast between genre and climate is evident in the survivalist know-how of the man. Time and again his resourcefulness ensures that he and his son are able to survive in the unremittingly harsh environment in which they find themselves. McCarthy critic Kenneth Lincoln remarks that *The Road* is 'a book to be read seriously, if at all, as a survival manual in the way Hemingway taught his readers to make camp after the war, or to tie a fishing lure, or to elude a sniper' (Lincoln 165). This depiction of the uber-capable frontiersman resonates with McCarthy's Western novels in which his protagonists have an almost preternatural knowledge of wilderness survival, which, although it is gained through a hard life lived in the landscape, is nevertheless some mark of character. Much like these characters, the man seems tailor-made for the environment he finds himself in: 'Always so deliberate, hardly surprised by the most outlandish advents. A creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end' (61). However, as has been discussed, the purpose, the survival of the child, for which the man employs his practical, Western skills, is up for question. And, as the text suggests, he may be in fact driving himself and his child towards their end. To be suited to such an environment could be seen as immoral, that to respond practically and calmly to a world which is unthinkable terrible is in some way inhumane, to both himself and the child. Paul Hoggett has articulated the trend of survivalism as a response to climate change anxiety and argues that it is powerfully present in *The Road*. He claims: 'Survivalists have lost their love of the world; instead of a secure attachment to life there is a desperate clinging' (268). Hoggett sees this ethic in the murderous gangs that populate *The Road*: 'Where the choices are seen as being either victim or predator, it is better to prey than be preyed upon. What distinguishes man from animal steadily disappears. It is a survival of the fittest' (268).

It is possible to extend this reading to the man who is driven by a need for his son to survive, which necessitates his survival, which he cannot adequately justify. As his wife puts it before her suicide: 'You have no argument because there is none' (59). Survivalism, in this reading, is politically disabling because it rejects ameliorating action on climate change and promotes callousness towards those without the necessary survival instincts for the brave new world.

However, *The Road* as spectral Western offers a different interpretation of the survivalist impulse. In the traditional Western the characters' close relationships with and knowledge of the natural world is indicative of a deep connection with the project of imperial expansion. By knowing and utilizing the land they are able to gain mastery over it and make it fit for economic activity, such as cattle ranching and cultivation. Rather than rejecting the hegemonic civilisation, the cowboy and the woodsman are bulwarks of Western expansion. *The Road* gives us a character struggling to relate to his environment in the same way. He falls back on the can-do spirit of frontier survival but finds that the chaotic and regressing West he is confronted with has rendered this meaningless. This is indicative of the way in which traditional narrative structures, such as the Western, can be subverted by climate change. The looming threat of this troubles all our old certainties. Western tropes of survival and competence in the face of a hostile environment are no longer valued in *The Road*. The novel reveals the collapsing of Western genre identities in the face of the dislocations of climate change.

Critic Nels Christensen argues that throughout the novel weather presents the primary threat and is the driving force of the narrative. The impetus for them to leave is the changing climate: 'They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here' (2). This climate driven movement is evocative of both the past and future of the Western landscape. The dust bowl migration of the nineteen thirties was brought about by severe drought whilst current increasing drought conditions in the West are predicted to cause huge displacements as water stressed areas become uninhabitable. This migratory instability is reasserted later in the novel when the man recounts:

Once in those early years he'd wakened in a barren wood and lay listening to flocks of migratory birds overhead in that bitter dark. Their half muted crankings miles above where they circled the earth as senselessly as insects trooping the rim of a bowl. He wished them godspeed till they were gone. He never heard them again (55).

This is an image that resonates with some of the contemporary fears about the impact of climate change. Namely that we are in the midst of a mass extinction that increasing climate change will exacerbate. There is a poignant sense of loss in this passage engendered by the finality of species extinction. Again we see an environment bereft of its usual signifiers, where the space of the West has been rendered so alien that the birds circle it 'senselessly' and perish. This is the effect of

weather on the symbolic landscape of the Western. The man states: ‘The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat... The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality’ (93). The structure of sign signified gives way as the world that was shrinks down to the failing memory of one man. The greying of the sodden landscape, ‘days more gray each one than what had gone before’ (3), has the effect of closing down meaning, the wind eroding and the snow covering the remains of old ways of naming the world and existing in relation to it. This may go some way to explaining the sparseness of the language McCarthy employs in comparison to his earlier contemporary Westerns, and as such this can be read as a climatic effect. *The Road* is a novel that operates at the limits of representation in which McCarthy seeks to depict total barbarism, a world nearly empty of human subjectivity and a living environment bereft of Romantic imagery. Julian Murphet suggests that the novel presents characters struggling to find ways ‘of inhabiting a dying language’ (125). For the man this means gruff survivalist imperatives, whilst the boy openly wonders and interrogates using auxiliary verbs:

What if there’s someone here, Papa?
 There’s no one here.
 We should go, Papa.
 We’ve got to find something to eat. We have no choice.
 We could find something somewhere else.
 It’s going to be all right. Come on (122).

For Murphet the man: ‘deploys all his verbal energies in an imperative mood, the have to and don’t and can’t forms of insistence, as if to counteract the wistfulness of his own nostalgia and his mounting despair’ (125), whereas the boy still clings to the eternal and the potential of new worlds different to his. Murphet locates a path outside of the restrictive linguistic space of *The Road* in the form of animal subjectivities. Time and again the novel returns to animal imagery, and thoughts of the lives of the non-human: ‘There was a lingering odor of cows in the barn and he stood there thinking about cows and he realized they were extinct. Was that true? There could be a cow somewhere being fed and cared for, Could there? Fed what? Saved for what?’ (127). Murphet locates the shadow of the sacred in these references, hiding in the cave of memory, an apparition of the good life. Contemporary neo-liberal ideology posits a timeless, spatially infinite world of global capital in which the processes of history have become irrelevant. In contrast, the prospect of climate change compels us to consider future worlds and what we have lost in them. Because *The Road* is a spectre of the Western, this destabilising affect also operates on the ideological structures of the genre. What the novel reveals about the potential futures of climate change is that they will be defined by void and absence as the symbolic structures that gird contemporary ideology and myth are hollowed out.

Blood Meridian (1985): Violence and Absence in the Warming West

‘We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales’ (Nixon 2).

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon seeks to overcome the central representational challenge posed by anthropogenic environmental harm. Whilst the media and the public they inform are drawn to the spectacle of sudden, lurid violence (tsunamis, terrorism, violent crime), it is exponentially harder for environmentalists to gain traction with their narratives of deforestation, ocean acidification, radioactive waste and a plethora of equally pressing environmental threats, including all subsuming climate change. Nixon categorizes these spatially and temporally diffuse harms as ‘slow violence’ and argues that the task of engaging with this form of violence should be the pressing concern of what he terms writer-activists in the environmental movement. Environmental writing should engage with the troubling dynamic of slow violence through narratives that reorient our gaze from the ‘if it bleeds it leads’ aesthetic of contemporary media. Nixon points to Wangari Maathi’s memoir *Unbowed* (2006) as a work that injects narrative urgency into the story of slow-violence by reformulating soil depletion as a national security issue of pressing concern:

What is productive about Maathai’s reformulation ... is her insistence that threats to national territorial integrity – that most deep-seated rationale for war – be expanded to include threats to the nation’s integrity from environmental assaults. To reframe violence in this way is to intervene in the discourse of national defense and, hence, in the psychology of war (131).

In this way, the violence of slow environmental degradation becomes politicised, urgent, frightening and impossible to ignore. This is the task of contemporary environmental narrative writing.

In this context what space might there be for the Western? This is a genre defined in many ways by the spectacle of violence, from shootouts between outlaw and sheriff in the classical Western to the massacres of Native American peoples depicted in revisionist renderings. And whilst the violence of resource exploitation has been dramatized in Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and in HBO’s *Deadwood* (2004-2006) the focus of these works is on sudden acts of violence. Indeed the Western dramatizes the space of the West as being actively forged through violence. Richard Slotkin’s influential *Gunfighter Nation* suggests that the mythology of the Western emerged from Theodore Roosevelt’s ideology of white westward expansion at the

expense of 'inferior' races, with which coexistence was deemed impossible. As a result the Western developed as a genre which supported and promoted this imperialist orthodoxy and elevated violence as the method for achieving white hegemony, a process of 'regeneration through violence' (Slotkin 12). As result of readings like Slotkin's, the use and meaning of spectacular violence in the Western is necessarily complex and problematic and is in many ways antithetical to Nixon's concept of slow violence. I will suggest that, despite this difficult preoccupation with violent action, the contemporary Western has the capacity to dramatise slow violence through its unique rendering of landscape. This dynamic of spectacular and slow violence is most powerfully present in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985). Slow violence is the background to the bloodletting action of the novel. By incorporating both forms of violence into a reading of *Blood Meridian* it is possible to discern the troubling form of the Anthropocene in McCarthy's earliest Western.

Blood Meridian is a fictional account of the Glanton gang, a historical group of scalp hunters that operated in the borderlands between 1849 and 1850 in the aftermath of the Mexican-American war. The narrative's protagonist, known only as 'the kid', falls in with the gang as they begin their murderous quest for scalps and bounties, killing Mexicans and native Indians alike to a zenith or high meridian of bloodletting. The novel's relentless portrayal of acts of violence has proved unappealing to some readers whilst its dense, biblical prose and surreal imagery have captivated many others. Harold Bloom championed the novel, bringing to it a larger critical and commercial audience, and has since described it as: 'a canonical imaginative achievement, both an American and universal tragedy of blood' (*Bloom's Modern Critical Views* 1). This, coupled with a number of unsuccessful attempts to turn a screenplay into a film (Ridley Scott and James Franco have tried and failed), has ensured that *Blood Meridian* has remained as culturally relevant as McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005) and *The Road*. And this is despite the novel's obscure prose styling and its extreme, graphic depictions of violence, both of which can be alienating to potential readers.

Indeed the intricacies and ambiguities of *Blood Meridian* have made the novel a magnet for criticism. Early debates centred on the Gnostic symbolism present in the novel, signalled by McCarthy's use of a quotation by Gnostic theologian Jacob Boehme as an epigraph. In Leo Daugherty's influential reading the terrifying character of Judge Holden, a seven-foot tall albino murderer of monstrous intelligence, is seen as a Gnostic archon, a demigod presiding over a world of human suffering. Crucially this reading posits the kid as a tragic hero seeking transcendence from this Gnostic world through a kind of moral redemption, albeit one that is frustrated by the Judge as an agent of capricious fate: 'if Fates stay Fates, then the just-doing-one's-best, divine-spark protagonist has got to lose, through no fault of his or her own' (171). Barclay Owens has

argued that this gives too much credit to the kid, who participates in nearly all of the novel's massacres. However, this conception of the novel persists and is valuable because it seeks to account for the centrality of violence to the world of the novel. McCarthy presents a pre-Christian conception of evil as the single pervasive truth of the world, and this evil expresses itself through the violent acts of evil men. Daugherty's claim that the redemptive aspects of Gnostic theology mitigate the nihilism of this vision is very much open to debate, yet it is clear that if there is meaning to be found in the novel it is in violence.

Along with these questions of theology and ethics, critics have sought to put *Blood Meridian* in a generic context. For readers looking to depict McCarthy as part of a tradition of Southern writing (Faulkner and O'Connell are strong influences), the focus has been to establish and chart the development from his earlier works to *Blood Meridian*. Georg Guillemín has produced a substantial ecocritical reading of McCarthy's early Westerns in his book *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (2004). Guillemín argues that McCarthy shifts from the 'classical pastoralism' of *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) to what he terms the 'ecopastoralism' of *The Border Trilogy*. This shift is from a land dominated by horses, men and instrumental usage towards reducing 'the man-nature hierarchy to a zero level of shared materiality' (119). *Outer Dark* (1968) and *Blood Meridian*, on the other hand, are anti-pastoral, presenting almost entirely hostile landscapes. The pastoral form is shown as being able to adapt efficiently to changes in societal understanding of, and attitudes towards, nature and the environment. The value of this reading is in connecting McCarthy with the tradition of the pastoral and inserting his fiction into the mainstream of ecocriticism. With this ecocritical background in mind it may be beneficial, given the urgency in addressing the pressing realities of environmental crisis and climate change in particular, to look beyond the pastoral, and read in McCarthy's work the dislocation, disruption and ethical imperatives of the environments he represents.

Other critics of *Blood Meridian* have sought to establish its place in the Western genre. Susan Kollin describes the novel as an anti-Western, a novel that seeks to subvert the mythic figures of the genre in an attempt at parody and critique. The novel abandons the idea of the Western hero, the innocence of the child, and the fundamental innocence of American imperialism in Mexico, all of which are mythologies that buttress the Western. Kollin, however, goes on to argue that the anti-Western can never be completely absent of the problematic ideology it seeks to critique. In *Blood Meridian*'s case this is apparent in the complete absence of female characters from the narrative, which Kollin suggests reinforces the genre's 'obsession with Anglo-American Masculinity' (569). This argument reinforces the conception of the Western genre as self-critical, divided and reflexive. Tellingly, it is the physical environment of the West in *Blood Meridian* that is most indicative of this move:

The western landscape that is supposed to be a test of character, bringing out the best in the hero and the worst in the villain, is emptied of its sacred qualities, becoming instead a fully defiled, profane space. And unlike Westerns that depict the region as a prelapsarian garden and place of retreat for the American hero, McCarthy's texts feature an anti-Edenic landscape whose ownership is violently contested (562).

Jay Ellis has tackled this anxiety about space, its contingent nature and violent contestation. In his article "What Happens to Country" in *Blood Meridian*, Ellis argues that the novel depicts the process by which the American West was turned from 'space into... place' (86). Ellis suggests that this process is represented in the enigmatic epilogue of *Blood Meridian* in which an anonymous figure lights fires in ordered holes he has dug into the earth. This is read as the preface to posts and barbed wire fencing being erected and, as such, is symbolic of the enclosure of the West. The meridian is preceded by two extinctions: the buffalo and the aboriginal peoples. 'What happens to country' is that it becomes history. The frontier space undergoes an ideological transformation from the frontier space to historical place. Meridian here seems to be defined in a geographical sense rather than more broadly as perennial zenith. This reading valuably reaffirms the weight of historical fact in *Blood Meridian* in contrast to some Gnostic readings. However, with this historical specificity established it is important to consider the significance of continuity within McCarthy's work. The meridian of violence in the novel is destined to recur. As Rob Nixon has detailed the slow violence of environmental degradation is a process of gradual return in which change emerges from the violence of the past. The reckless destruction of the Western landscape can be read as just this kind of slow violence. McCarthy sets out the grim moral implications of the rapacious plundering of the natural world that the Glanton gang partakes in by suggesting violence is a long-term consequence of environmental plunder. One way in which he does this is through the character of Judge Holden, an immortal symbol of the war of all against all. However, McCarthy also expresses an environmental consciousness in the figure of the morally beset buffalo hunter that appears towards the end of the novel. In a conversation with the kid the hunter details the final extinction of the buffalo:

We ransacked the country. Six weeks. Finally found a herd of eight animals and we killed them and come in. They're gone. Every one of them that God ever made is gone as if they'd never been at all... I wonder if there's other worlds like this, he said. Or if this is the only one (334).

The sense of compulsion, of being driven down a path of destruction articulated here echoes contemporary fears around climate change. It reveals a shared fatalism that implicates individuals and nations in countless acts of slow violence whilst well aware of the potentially ruinous consequences. The extinction of the buffalo occurred over a short period of time but the violence of this act was felt for generations as the Native Americans who relied on the animal were forced to abandon their traditional life-styles or face starvation.

Despite these elements of ecological awareness, the novel remains ambiguous when it comes to representing the living environment. What is remarkable about the landscape of *Blood Meridian* is how immediately and unremittably hostile it is. When the kid arrives in Mexico with a rag tag army of filibusters the malignity of the environment is made clear: ‘where the earth drained up into creation the top of the sun rose out of nothing like the head of a great red phallus pulsing and malevolent behind them... By midmorning another man had died’ (47). This imagery of fertility contrasts vividly with the fundamentally barren nature of the desert landscape the filibusters are crossing whilst simultaneously symbolizing the rising of violent masculinity that defines the novel. Whilst this landscape is no space of romantic Western escape, the America the kid leaves behind is as full of degradation, filth and death as the Mexico that he enters. The fight between the kid and Toadvine occurs after sixteen days of apocalyptic rain and both slog it out in the mud. In the opening passage of the novel, although the land is ‘flat and pastoral’ there are ‘blacks in the fields, lank and stooped... A shadowed agony in the garden’ (4). Here the novel diverges from *The Border Trilogy*, in which the crossing into Mexico signals a movement into a landscape of violence in comparison to the relative safety of post-War America. Kollin suggests that McCarthy is guilty of employing stereotypes about Mexicans and the exotic dangers of the Mexican space: ‘McCarthy seems to have been drawn in by the very myth his Westerns have been critiquing’ (574). The contrast with the cutthroat American West of *Blood Meridian* is in part due to the hugely different historical time periods which the novels dramatise. However, this difference also reveals McCarthy’s radical approach to landscape in *Blood Meridian*. Everywhere in the novel the physical space is hostile, strange, yet still it is suffused with the environmental manifestations of human violence. Tantalizingly, the novel’s opening sections also reveal the raw beauty of McCarthy’s Mexican landscape imagery: ‘They watched storms out there so distant they could not be heard, the silent lightning flaring sheetwise and the thin black spine of the mountain chain fluttering and sucked away again in the dark’ (49). There is a sense that the beauty to be found in this environment comes from its transience and also that the Anglo-Americans are entirely alienated from this aesthetic: ‘The survivors... slept with their alien hearts beating in the sand like pilgrims exhausted upon the face of the planet Anareta, clutched to a namelessness wheeling in the night’ (48). Anareta is an astrological term for a planet which portends doom, in this case doom for the soldiers, and more, doom for the environmental space itself.

The environmental space of *Blood Meridian* is seemingly hostile, alien and utterly strange. Despite this the novel remains grounded by the historical context in which it operates, and it is this context that reveals contemporary anxieties about the results of rapacious capitalism and the damage caused by extractive industry. The novel takes place at the beginning of the gold rush as pilgrims rushed to the newly captured and occupied territory of California. Glanton’s gang are in

part 49ers (the name given to the new fortune seeking immigrants), taking advantage of the instability of the region to profit from those seeking to remove aboriginal peoples from valuable mining land. The madness and violence of the time period the novel covers are largely driven by the acquisitive mania of gold rush economics. McCarthy makes this clear early in the novel with his description of goldseekers: ‘They saw patched Argonauts from the states driving mules through the streets to the coast. Goldseekers. Itinerant degenerates bleeding west like some heliotropic plague’ (83). Language of disease and moral decay emphasises the environmental impact of this migration. The feverish grasping of resource extraction carries an ethical weight in *Blood Meridian*, a weight that is physically present in the landscape.

In contemporary development parlance the environmental violence and social upheaval that the Mexico of *Blood Meridian* is undergoing is known as the ‘Resource Curse’. Rob Nixon observes:

in resource-cursed societies, a mineral strike, though less immediately spectacular than a missile strike, is often more devastating in the long term, bringing in its wake environmental wreckage, territorial dispossession, political repression, and massacres by state forces doing double duty as security forces for unanswerable petroleum transnationals or mineral cartels (70).

This definition strongly reflects the realities of gold rush California and Mexico, where the United States had secured territory through conflict by 1848, and where gangs such as Glanton’s scalphunters were employed to ethnically cleanse the region; McCarthy stages the reality of economic relations in a proto resource cursed nation forced to accommodate an emerging superpower. Whilst not all nations are blighted by the ‘gift’ of natural resources, those already subject to the nexus of imperial and corporate power invariably suffer once their value has been ascertained. Nixon suggests that for these nations the ideological problem is one of enchantment; oil and other natural resources create fantasies of limitless wealth without work, fantasies that ‘easily sour into volatile disillusionment, as people possessed by outsize dreams find themselves captive instead to outsize military regimes and the disenchantments of a ruined environment’ (72). Reading the Mexico of *Blood Meridian* with an awareness of its resource cursed status allows us to reframe the imagery and meaning of McCarthy’s landscapes. Chapter fourteen sees the gang leaving a village under a hail of fire, having committed numerous crimes, and setting out along a narrow ridge. A confrontation with a conducta of mules, carrying mercury for mining operations, leads to the gang killing their drivers and pushing the mules into the abyss: ‘the animals dropping silently as martyrs, turning sedately in the empty air and exploding on the rocks below in startling bursts of blood and silver... [the mercury] racing in the stone arroyos like the imbreachment of some alchemic work decocted from out of the secret dark of the earth’s heart’ (205-206). McCarthy’s imagery reverses the scene as the mercury is depicted as bubbling from a breach in the

earth, and this process acquires the pseudo-scientific, quasi-spiritual weight of alchemy in its retelling. Significantly this resource is essentially malign, ‘the secret dark’ evoking gnostic readings in which the nature of our lived world is evil at its core. However, it also reflects the violence that defines resource extraction. The elemental welling up of the mercury comes about through an act of shocking brutality, and as such it orientates the novel towards the economic processes that are the background to the gang’s savagery. Without the mining industry, and without the feverish gold seekers, the barbarism of the scalp hunters is rendered as evil within the confines of a Manichean universe. However, the economic context that McCarthy is careful to represent acts to ground the group’s actions in the reality of resource extraction and the imperial asymmetries that it exacerbates. Jonathan Imber Shaw, alongside Richard Godden and Colin Richmond, have compellingly shown that *Blood Meridian* closely and satirically resembles El Salvador and Vietnam respectively and, as such, critiques the twentieth-century foreign policy of the US military and state. I would add to this the undoubted ecological implications of empire that are powerfully present in the novel. It recasts the Glanton gang as rational economic actors who, nevertheless, wreak appalling havoc upon the landscape they occupy and the native peoples whose home it is. McCarthy’s fractured Western gothic grounds itself in the tar sands and quicksilver mines of modern environmental crisis.

What then to make of the Judge, McCarthy’s Melvillian monster? Seven foot tall hairless, white skinned, possessed of a frightening intelligence and charisma, combined with brutal sadism, the character appalls and fascinates readers and provides fertile ground for critical discussion. As mentioned before, Judge Holden can be read as a Gnostic archon, one who desires to become ‘suzerain (209)’, or one who rules over all rulers through violence, domination and war. In this role the Judge advocates for war as the ultimate game in which the truth of men’s fates is laid bare, the truth of domination of one over another: ‘war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence’ (263). The complexity of the character allows for limitless speculation about his true nature and his function within the narrative. John Spiech, through a close analysis of the tarot cards drawn by a number of characters close to the midpoint of the novel, compellingly argues that the Judge is the fool in the tarot. The fool is the most powerful card because it upsets all others and illuminates through its madness. This reading effectively reveals the Judge as a trickster character whose sermons and pronouncements, often contradictory, are not to be trusted. As a result, the conception of the Judge as portentous demi-god becomes unsettled. James Dorson further demystifies the Judge by positing him as a figure that embodies the violence of the law:

His very presence in the novel *is* the “substantial articulation” between law and violence. As both a master of ceremonies who orchestrates his environment and a reckless Lord of Misrule, he is the spitting image of anomie and law when they “coincide in a single person,” with the result that “the juridico-political system transforms itself into a killing

machine” (Dorson 111).

The order of law and exchange (scalps for money, extorting migrants at the river crossing) is embodied in the Judge and he alone parses the value of all things, the currency that is the ‘residual specie... in the markets where men barter’ (*Blood Meridian* 310). In this rendering the Judge is grounded as a figure of law and capital. He is angered by the kid’s self-reflection, his sense that the possibility of justice might exist outside of the totalizing reach of the Judge’s law. This reading is especially useful in allowing us to think about the resonances between the Judge’s character and the undercurrents of ecological collapse and climate disruption that haunt the novel.

As Dorson suggests, the Judge is a violent reactionary against the frightening prospect of the unknowable. He acts against nothing, imposing meaning and law through violence, in order to remove himself from the nothingness that was his beginning: ‘a void without terminus or origin’ (310). *Blood Meridian* situates this terminus at the heart of the living environment, which is frequently described by McCarthy as being rent with abysses and voids. A key passage sets out the troubling emptiness at the core of the non-human world. In it the narrator contemplates the destructive winds of dustspouts in the desert:

some said they’d heard of pilgrims borne aloft... in those mindless coils... Out of that whirlwind no voice spoke and the pilgrim lying may rage, but rage at what? And if the dried blackened shell of him is found amongst the sands by travelers to come yet who can discover the engine of his ruin (118)?

This passage dramatizes our violent and confused reaction to the existential weight of the landscape the Judge, the gang and we are present in. This is an environment beyond even Georg Guillemin’s anti-pastoral, one which troubles prevailing ideologies of violence and law and forces us to consider new modes of living and justice beyond Judge Holden’s dogma. The radical hostility of *Blood Meridian*’s Western environment is the void of the Real that produces, as a reaction, violence and the law that legitimizes it. In this way climate and violence are inextricably linked in the novel. Which leads to the question: What kind of law and what kind of justice can we expect in a climate-changed future? Perhaps *The Road* points to the ecological and ethical implications of that change.

Crucially, though, the Judge retains his ambiguity, his trickster nature, and this ambiguity interacts interestingly with climate science. The Judge displays all of the virtues of a Western rationalist and scientific world view, albeit taken to megalomaniacal heights. He meticulously records everything he finds in an attempt to gain mastery over it, mastery being ultimately gained through a complete knowledge or unified theory of nature. What motivates this quest is again fear: ‘Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men’s knowing.

Only nature can enslave man' (209). McCarthy plays with the rationalism and utilitarianism that define the American project, placing the ideals in the hands of a homicidal monster. More broadly this rendering of the Judge as naturalist undermines comfortable notions about the role of science in our relating to the natural world. The ceaseless acquisition of knowledge demonstrated by the Judge seems no less rapacious than the greed of the gold hunters. However, we know that the Judge's enquiries are motivated mostly by desperation, a fear of that which is non-human. The Judge's project, to know all things, is impossible because the core of nature is shown in the novel to be nothingness. This works as a metaphor for the difficulties of climate science. Scientists must always work on the edge of knowledge whilst explaining to the public the essential impossibility of completely accurately predicting and controlling the chaos of the weather system. The complexity of the weather system stands in contrast to the extreme rationalist ideology of the Judge. A humane response to the pressures of the Anthropocene would be one that recognizes this complexity and absence and resolves to ask what we can know and how the accretion of knowledge can function in a collective and sustaining manner.

Nels Christensen suggests that the characters' relationship to weather in *The Road* points to the future uncertainties of the global climate and our continuing dislocation from the patterns and rhythms of weather. Weather is constantly mentioned in the narrative and the man ritually raises his head to look at the sky, despite its unchanging nature. This gesture: 'harkens back to a lost relationship, one that has been developing and evolving between humans and the weather for as long as we have struggled to survive on this planet. It gestures, that is, to a time when it wasn't too late' (201). I would argue that the entire novel looks back to the Western as the foundational narrative and image of the American landscape. It projects this myth forward into a future where climate change hollows out its symbolic meaning to create a spectral Western. Such a Western comprehensively undermines the ideologies of endless growth and liberal progress that shore up the dangerous extractive excesses of global capital.

It would be, of course, impossible to argue unequivocally that McCarthy consciously represents climate change and anxiety in *Blood Meridian*. However, the novel is suffused with lament for environmental destruction and manifests genuine anxiety about the disruptions and discontinuities brought about by ecological and climate changes. As a Western, *Blood Meridian* is particularly suited for this climate reflexivity. The Western is primarily concerned with myth and the legacy of myth. It is myth that the Judge rejects in favor of his brutal law and logos, and it is myth that is constantly under pressure from climate change and transitory nature of the Western landscape. This contingent mythic legacy is dramatized in the novel in the Judge's speech in the Anasazi ruins:

For whoever makes a shelter of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to the common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe and so it was with these masons however primitive their works may seem to us (146).

Myth is the narrativised expression of ideology and as such it appears to be fixed and monolithic, a representation of eternal truths. However, climate change shows its foundations to be highly uncertain. Is the Western built upon durable stone or it will it subside back into mud without a trace? The genre, and with it an important part of the American ideology, is faced with the enormous symbolic challenge of climate change.

Chapter three: Literary Westerns and Extractive Industry

As the Western United States reel under the already present effects of climate change, it continues to extract carbon from the landscape. This plundering, alongside the myriad other forms of extraction that still form a significant part of the Western economy, has left its mark on contemporary Western fiction. Two novels, Patrick DeWitt's *The Sisters Brothers* (2011) and Philipp Meyer's *The Son* (2013), tell stories that are explicitly of the Western genre whilst also being concerned with the legacy of extraction and the effects of resource plunder on the West itself. In both novels, the encounter with disruptive environmental and climate change precipitates disorientating change in Western genre identities.

The Sisters Brothers is a fractured and ironic take on McCarthy's definitive anti-Westerns. The West of *The Sisters Brothers* is one in which the dangerous excesses of extractive industry have been unleashed. This leads to the very foundation of the Western genre, masculine identity, coming under threat. Notions of identity, particularly masculine identity, define the environmental narrative of *The Sisters Brothers*. Both characters initially seem to embody paradigmatic elements of Western masculinity. However, through an encounter with environmental change, the characters are themselves irrevocably changed. *The Sisters Brothers* is a narrative of the Gold Rush but it subverts classical Western Gold Rush narratives. DeWitt dramatises the corrupting effect of the Gold Rush through the gold migrant characters, Hermann Kermitt Warm and Henry Morris. In the novel, gold fever is a facet of a broader resource mania that drove much Western development and migration. The ecological looting and permanent damaging change represented in DeWitt's California echoes the contingent nature of the contemporary West as it experiences climate change. The eponymous brothers, Eli and Charlie, operate across generic conventions, never fully adopting a particular archetype of Western masculinity. However, the conclusion of the novel does see both brothers undergo a permanent withdrawal from masculine identity. Significantly, this change occurs at a revelatory moment of environmental harm. *The Sisters Brother* sits in a mediated position with regards to the Western genre. The spectacle of resource frenzy ultimately subverts Western masculinity in the narrative, precipitating a return to the home and a retreat from the West.

The Son is a multi-generational family story charting the development of the Texan oil industry. The narrative exposes the persistent threads of legacy and responsibility that irrevocably tie Western subjects to a changing landscape. Both texts show the Western genre preoccupied with a troubling future and the implications of the extractive past. The narrative of *The Son* revolves around three modes of Western generic identity embodied by three members of the McCullough family: Eli McCullough, as the extractive pioneer; Peter McCullough, his romantic son; and Jeanne-Ann, his granddaughter and a hard-nosed businesswoman. The events of the novel revolve

around the history of Texas and oil. This has the effect of tying *The Son's* Western narrative to climate catastrophe and the precarious future of the West. Peter longs for the just such an extinction of Western life as a kind of moral reckoning. However, this is also a rejection or disavowal of the persistence of the human trace in terms of carbon emissions, and a rejection of ethical responsibility. Jeanne-Anne also rejects notions of continuity and of shared human experience within a landscape. Her disanthropy emerges from the ideology of post-war Capitalism and the inherent nihilism of the carbon economy. Both characters embody a disanthropic impulse, one because of a hatred for the values of the West embodied by his father, and the other because she has been inculcated with the values of an essentially self-destructive economic model. However, Eli – despite being in many ways the prototypical white settler (specifically in terms of racial violence he is responsible for) – paradoxically embodies the potential of Western characters to respond dynamically to the climate-changed West. Eli's upbringing amongst the Comanche reveals the malleability of racial identity within the Western but also disrupts the trope of the ecological Indian. As opposed to nihilistic or disanthropic notions of the post-human West, Eli and the Comanche represent possible avenues of persistence, and an adaptive relationship with the Anthropocene West. In Meyer's novel, characters' interactions with the carbon economy can lead to a disanthropic relationship with the West. But climate change is also capable of moulding identities in productive ways.

The Sisters Brothers (2011): Extraction, Pollution and Threatened Western Masculinities

As Jane Tompkins has asserted, a foundational element of the Western's ideological formation is the concept of masculinity. Throughout its history the classical Western performed a vital role in restating and reaffirming the myths of American masculinity that underpin the American imperial project. Broadly, masculinity is implicit in the project of imperial violence, a fact that R.W. Connell suggests is evident in popular culture:

A game I played as a boy... a ritual of imperial expansion in North America, shipped across the Pacific in comic-book and Hollywood images of masculinity: a replay of frontier warfare between 'Cowboys and Indians... European/American masculinities were deeply implicated in the world-wide violence through which European/American culture became dominant (185-86).

The masculinity of the Western arises from a violent reaction towards difference, and was essential in the process of establishing hegemony over the racialised and feminised environment of the American West.

This problematic paradigm is embodied in the hyper-masculinity of the cowboy. These

masculine values include: violent action, suppressed emotion, emphasising rational thought, rejection of feminising influences, fear of sexual and racial difference. However, even classical Westerns have displayed a degree of complexity and nuance whilst representing this – potentially poisonous – masculinity. Films such as *The Searchers* (1956) reveal how, according to critic Matthew Carter, ‘the Western has often held a mirror up to the myth of such heroes, undermining their status and, as a consequence, questioning the very morality of the nation that they come to represent’ (118). The damaging symbolic role of masculinity in the Western is tempered by the often-conflicted nature of the Western male hero, and this confusion over gender and identity is profitably mined in contemporary genre novels such as Patrick DeWitt’s *The Sisters Brothers* (2011).

In his review for the *New York Times*, John Vernon correctly identifies *The Sisters Brothers* as ‘A Picaresque of the Gold Rush’. Set at the height of the California Rush (1848-1855) Patrick DeWitt’s novel follows the meandering path of the picaresque as its roguish anti-heroes, Eli and Charlie Sisters, encounter various archetypal Western characters. Faced with a corrupt and morally bankrupt society, full of danger and temptation, the brothers survive through luck and guile. The narrative is sparse and punctuated by graphic violence, however DeWitt also maintains a knowing, black-comedic tone throughout. As Vernon puts it: ‘not always serious, not always funny, sometimes derivative of old westerns, sometimes a parody of them’. The novel does not settle in to a definitively anti-Western mode, and nor does it uncritically accept the strictures of classical Western tropes. DeWitt locates his Western at the intersection between established modes of Western narrative and as a result creates a particularly elusive and contemporary novel. I will argue that by adopting a nuanced stance towards the ideology of the Western, *The Sisters Brothers* is able to comment originally and effectively on the resource mania of the Gold Rush. The jarring effects of rampant resource extraction destabilise many of the certainties of the genre, and this uncertainty is something that DeWitt’s subtle narrative is well placed to exploit.

Charlie and Eli Sisters stand as different elements of the Western masculinity. Eli, the narrator of the novel, depicts his brother as violent and at times cruel, but also possessed of immense resourcefulness and the romantic power of the outlaw: ‘Charlie had been invigorated by his latest adventure – the blood rush had banished his sickness – and he fell to preparing our lunch with an uncommon enthusiasm (91)’. Eli, as the younger brother, is almost childlike, despite his psychopathic tendencies, longing for a simpler, more innocent life, struggling with the loneliness of outlaw existence. He possesses a skewed morality in which killing is only sanctionable under certain conditions, and he resents his brother for controlling and rejecting him: ‘my feelings were deeply injured that morning, looking at my brother on his fine, tall horse, and knowing he did not love me in the way I had always loved [...] him (218). Together both encompass the values of

Western masculinity, including a violent honour code and a superficially chivalric attitude towards women. However the narrative sees both characters changed by its conclusion, in contrast with the adamant fixity of classical Western heroes. Charlie is reduced and humbled, forced, through exhaustion, to accept a life of domesticity, whilst Eli becomes the decision maker for his brother, and rejects his earlier notions of Western romance and honour. Importantly, the turning point in the narrative is the brothers' arrival in Gold Rush California, and this reveals the unsettling effect of resource mania on Western masculinity.

Glen Gedzel defines the 1848-1855 Gold Rush as 'California's founding myth':

Once the new white majority settled down to writing California history, they down played earlier residents of the state and pre-conquest events. Only with "the days of old, the days of gold, the days of '49" did California history officially begin. This narcissistic narrative took shape practically from the moment the first "Argonauts" landed in San Francisco (58)

The arrival of a quarter of a million people in such a short period of time created tremendous social and environmental upheaval, and created a Gold Rush mythology that runs in concert with the larger myth of Westward expansion. Classical Westerns such as *How the West was Won* (1962) established this Gold Rush mythology as a complex debate between the value of industrial progress and the inherent immorality of fevered wealth seeking and extraction. In the film, a rambling epic encompassing the development of the West, the characters of Lilith (Debbie Reynolds) and Cleve van Valen (Gregory Peck) journey through hostile Indian country to find that the gold mine that Lilith has inherited is worthless. The pursuit of gold is symbolically futile in this narrative, secondary to the emotional and romantic development of the characters. Peter Lehman argues that the film (a collaboration between directors including John Ford) displays an apparent critique of capitalism, the worst excesses of which were present in the Gold Rush. Lehman contends:

it is only by repressing the role of money, trading, and capitalism that Ford can represent his ideal communities and families... Ford's Westerns do not represent the evils of capitalism; instead they represent evil capitalists living at the margins of families, military units, and communities that are tied to the land in ways that do not seem to be economic (133).

In *How the West was Won*, the empty gold mine does indeed suggest scepticism about the value of naked capitalism, in favour of the benign promise of the family. Indeed Ford's story of the founding of the West centres on the continuity of the family and the importance of community. However the lure of gold remains a crucial animating factor in the film and in classical Westerns generally. Ford's epic establishes the movement West as a movement towards the family unit; however, capitalist accumulation tacitly underlies this. Lilith accepts Cleve's proposal enticed by

the promise that they will move to San Francisco, the epicentre of the Gold Rush. Cleve outlines the promise of the city:

Have you seen San Francisco? It's ugly, and it's small, and it's full of fleas, and it burns down about every five minutes. But each time they keep on rebuilding it, a little bigger and better than before. It's alive and kicking and nothing can stop it. And it makes you want to build something too, a railroad, a steam ship line, something to help the baby grow.

Here we see the explicit interaction of Gold Rush economics and the family. The language of fertility, 'help the baby grow', is attached to the development of American capitalism in the West. Cleve and Lilith's plan to start a new family is intimately tied to resource extraction, as both a means of material wealth and a psychological buttress for the character's concepts of progress, growth, and the fecundity of the American landscape. The moral complexity of the Gold Rush allows for this nuanced position between American family values and capitalistic accumulation in Gold Rush narratives.

The classical Western intermediates between conflicting views of the Gold Rush, on the one hand deploring the naked greed of the prospectors whilst on the other acknowledging the importance of resource extraction in the development of the Western environment. *The Sisters Brothers* does not entirely reject this ideological formation, as an anti-Western might, but instead seeks to further complicate the implications of gold fever. This nuance is evident when comparing the San Francisco the brothers' encounter with that of *How the West was Won*. Whilst shocked by the manic industry of the city, Eli also notices an undercurrent of malevolence: 'There was a laughter in the air, though it did not give me the impression of gaiety, but something more maniacal and evil wishing' (171). The manic air of the city is detailed to them by a local who describes a senseless suicide: 'There is a feeling here, which if it gets you, will envenom your very center. It is the madness of possibilities. That leaping man's final act was the embodiment of the collective mind of San Francisco' (175). The city is truly in the grip of 'Gold Fever'; however, where *How the West was Won* links this atavistic energy with new birth and growth, *The Sisters Brothers* couples this energy with a maddened destructiveness. The 'madness of possibilities' indicates the troubling effect of potential access to vast wealth that draws gold seekers to the city. The Gold Rush fundamentally changed the identity of the 49ers that made the trip Westward. Many men left their families and jobs with the hope of finding their fortune in California, establishing themselves as a new kind of resource-oriented individual for whom the lure of gold was all consuming. However it is clear from the historical record that the promise of gold fortunes for the average

miner, predominantly unskilled labourers, was illusory.⁸ In DeWitt's novel, the process of migration and integration into the culture of resource frenzy that San Francisco embodies warps the subjectivity of migrants in a fundamentally alienating way: 'I could leave here and return to my hometown but I would not return as the person I was when I left... no one would recognize me' (175). There is a sense that the act of gold seeking is outside of the dominant mythology of the West, which reifies the Farmer and the Cowboy, and troublingly reveals the reality of wholesale environmental exploitation. As they run counter to the accepted family, community orientation of the West, gold migrants are rejected as immoral agents of capital, despite their crucial position in the development of the West. The gold economy was also connected to the immigration of Chinese labourers in the nineteenth century. The reluctance to fully incorporate the rush into the story of the West may be indicative of a desire to erase the presence of a subaltern class at the heart of the development of the pacific West.

The gold migrant is both central to, and excluded from, the narrative of Western growth and economic development. This problematic position echoes the social reality of many migrants, who found themselves subject to the logic of extractive capitalism during the period. Historians traditionally viewed the Argonauts (as they came to be known) as floating capitalist agents, using their freedom of movement to seek out a fortune. Clearly, though, this conception, often dramatized in the excitement of the Western, is at odds with the historical reality. Daniel Cornford argues that:

...between 1848 and 1870, the Argonauts, were transformed from individual prospectors seeking (and sometimes obtaining) nuggets of gold from superficial placers into wage laborers employed by heavily capitalized hydraulic and quartz mining concerns in conditions very much akin to those experienced by eastern workers in mid-nineteenth-century American factories (80).

The proletarianisation of gold seekers removes them from the mythic architecture of the Western. The farmer and the cowboy, although, of course, intimately enmeshed in the process of production and exploitation, retain a degree of independence from capital in the Western. The impulse to resist the expansion of American capitalism is evident in Ford films like *The Searchers* (1956), as well as in later more radical efforts, such as Arthur Miller's *The Misfits* (1961). Both films establish the space of the West as one in which different considerations about the nature of the American good life are explored, outside of the contemporary logic of acquisition. *The Sisters Brothers* provides no

⁸ For a statistical analysis of the backgrounds and economic outlook of Gold Rush migrants see Clay and Jones: 'To the extent that miners in California were drawn from the ranks of operatives, service workers, laborers, and farm laborers, the effect of migrating on their wealth was effectively zero. To the extent that non miners in California were previously professionals, managers, clerks, craftsmen, and salesmen, the effect of migrating on their wealth was positive and large' (1021).

such safe space from unfettered capitalism.

DeWitt dramatizes the corrupting effect of the Gold Rush through the character of Hermann Kermit Warm. Warm's plan is introduced through a journal, discovered by the brothers, of their former associate Henry Morris. Morris details the alluring vigour and ambition that Warm expresses for his prospecting scheme: "Before I could respond to the passionate oration, Warm pulled from his pockets several loose, much abused papers.... 'I'm afraid I have no idea what all this represents', I said. 'It is the bedrock of a momentous discovery'" (189). Warm enlists Morris' help to promote a new chemical he has produced that reveals the location of gold nuggets, by making them glow in the bed of a dammed river. With this formula Warm believes that he will be able to spend the rest of his life in: 'the "silken arms of glad success"' (192). Warm functions as a model of the wildest Gold Rush hopes. He is an actual carrier of 'Gold Fever', a derangement of possibility, that he transmits to a new host in the form of Morris and, despite having been employed to spy on Warm for the brothers, Morris succumbs entirely: 'though I am loath to abandon my post I have elected to follow my heart and do just this' (195). This transmission of resource mania is a microcosm of the feverish atmosphere the brothers encounter when they arrive in San Francisco. The extractive potential of the Western landscape is exposed in the novel as morally debasing. Tellingly, Warm chooses Morris as his partner because he is: 'a good man, and because a good man is the thing I need most in my life, just now' (189). The process of gold prospecting, albeit tempered by his collusion with the criminal Sisters, radically threatens Morris' goodness. However, because of his criminal background, that same goodness is contingent upon Warm's recognition of it. Again, a character in the novel occupies a position both within and outside of the Western ideological super-structure. Gold seeking carries the weight of adventure, innovation and courage that is indicative of the good, whilst simultaneously evoking connections with greed, capital and criminality. In this divided position Morris and Warm have much in common with historical 49ers.

DeWitt renders the fate of the two gold seekers as a Greek tragedy, in which Warm's hubris is punished. As they begin to search for gold, this time with the grudging help of the brothers, the men are poisoned by Warm's chemical, even as it reveals the dreamt-of riches. The chemical initially works perfectly, but as Eli recounts, it quickly leads to disaster. Through prolonged exposure to the toxic solution the bodies and organs of the Morris and Warm, as well as Charlie's arm, are eaten away. The Gold Rush can be seen to have a literally corrosive effect on those who follow it to its limits. Again, DeWitt utilises a strong moral injunction against the seeking of wealth. The moment of utmost happiness at the prospect of accumulation is the very moment at which the narrative turns towards a cosmic, or environmental retribution. Yet DeWitt avoids a simplistic critique of Gold Rush greed with a sympathetic portrayal of Morris and Warm, whose friendship persists through their sickness. The novel also undermines the very basis of

greed, the value placed in gold as a rare metal. After the deaths of Morris and Warm, the Sisters brothers amass the fortune that they have collected only to have it stolen by Indians. This, after all their hardships, they meet with almost complete indifference: 'they decided the gold was treasure enough. "Warm's dead," I told Charlie. "I am going to sleep," he said. And do you know, this is just what he did do, too' (300). The brothers' losing their entire savings, which again leaves them unmoved, follows this. Once again the characters fall between models of Western economic beings. Whilst possessed with a vague desire to accumulate wealth, they are unable to spend it or keep it when they get it. Their relationship to the burgeoning capitalism of the nineteenth century is therefore at a remove. As Western figures they are not compelled to choose between virtuous land husbandry and morally degrading gold seeking. In this sense they adopt the true role of the outlaw.

This movement across generic conventions is evident in the anti-heroic nature of Eli and Charlie and how that relates to the use of violence in the novel. From the beginning of the novel we know that the brothers are hired killers. Several incidents underline their brutality, for example when Charlie murders a group of westward migrants, or when they kill a stable boy for witnessing a crime. This kind of violence fits comfortably within the model of Western masculinity: 'The main project of the classic Western was to dramatize the settling of the West, a story animated by the figure who embodied both civilization and savagery, engaged in a conflict set on a territorial border between the two' (Bower 50). The movement West, of the brothers, can be read as part of this process. In their case their savagery is needed in order to efficiently extract the mineral resources of the Western frontier. Their thuggish acts are reminiscent of the Pinkerton security cartel that extorted and manipulated many gold concerns during the rush. At the same time they retain the aspects of the Western anti-hero: tough, expert in the wild, skilled with guns, respected and feared. Through their actions we see characters at home with violent masculine action. However, contradictions arise in Eli's first-person narration, in which he is saddened and disturbed by both his uncontrollable violent rages and his brother's – more calculated – propensity for brutality. Indeed for these conflicted masculine figures the wilderness is less of a theatre for violence and instead provides a brief return to childhood innocence: 'with the tall snowy mountains walling us in. He was revisiting his earlier self but only briefly, and I knew he would return to his present incarnation soon enough' (108). The brothers somewhat playful approach to the monolithic masculinity of the Western has the effect of revealing the constructed nature of Western gender identity.

The Western as a genre for the most part conforms to the binary opposition in which masculinity equals activity and femininity equals passivity. Certainly classical Western men such as John Wayne can be seen to initiate action, and it is by such figures that Western narratives are driven. This is even true of McCarthy's anti-Westerns (*Blood Meridian*, *The Border Trilogy*) in

which the active desire for escape into the West spurs young characters into the horror of McCarthy's landscapes. In general the imagined passivity of the feminine is eschewed at any cost by Western heroes. The dynamic between the brothers is one of Charlie hectoring and leading his younger brother, who feels duty bound and lost in ennui: 'I stood alone, my thoughts dipping and shooting away, dipping and diving' (140). However, both are under the command of the mysterious crime lord, known only as the Commodore. In comparison to Warm, who precipitates his own narrative through his desire and vision, the brothers are passive enactors of the Commodore's wishes, despite the fact that, in the case of Warm, they are conflicted about the rightness of killing him. This is how the characters are defined in the first half of the novel, until the events that take place in the river. After the death of Morris and Warm, Eli is entirely disillusioned with his mercenary lifestyle; simultaneously his brother is exhausted and set to lose his hand. This triggers a change in their relationship:

this was the beginning of our new brotherhood, with Charlie never again to be the one so far ahead, and me following clumsily behind, which is not to say the roles were reversed, but destroyed. Afterward, and even today, we are careful in our relationship, as though fearful of upsetting each other (296).

This renewal of their relationship also means a split with the dictates of the Commodore, and with that a regaining of agency for the brothers. Their anti-heroic move is complete and they are able to move into the genre space of the Western hero. Significantly, this change takes place at a moment of environmental crisis, where the process of extractive industry destroys both the river ecosystem (a family of beavers are killed) and the prospectors. The revelation of the anthropogenic imposition onto what was once a place of separation and wildness is at once exhilarating and deeply troubling. Remembering when they first saw the gold glowing in the riverbed Eli remarks:

I have since felt it was too happy, that men are not meant to have access to this kind of satisfaction... At any rate, and perhaps this is just, it was not something we were supposed to hang on to for very long... Everything after this was death in one way or the other way (284).

This stage of Western development is linked in the novel to death and the thrilling attraction of retrograde environmental practices. It destabilises the brothers established concepts of subjectivity and masculinity and they are forced to withdraw.

The Sisters Brothers reiterates many of the key features of classical Western masculinity. This includes a reassertion of self-determination and agency, and a disdain for capitalist extraction and accumulation. However, the novel also consistently tacks against these prevailing ideologies to establish a mediated position with regards to genre and the problematic ethics of the classical

Western. This mediated position is comically revealed in the somewhat poignant relationship between the narrator Eli Sisters and his oft-wounded horse, Tub. The numerous graphic details of the horse's suffering – 'His socket had crusted with blood and pus around its rim, and without the eye to hold its form the lid sagged at its center' (218) – would seem to indicate an anti-Western subversion of the sacred bond between horse and cowboy⁹. However, Charlie possesses conflicted feelings of tenderness for his woe begotten steed, 'Many months later I became sentimental about him, and this feeling is still with me today' (242) – this gestures towards romantic Western mythology, in which the horse is essentially noble and heroic. But crucially the quirky ideological positioning of *The Sisters Brothers* is revealed by its conclusion. Having emancipated themselves, Eli and Charlie are free to become traditional hero outlaw figures. Instead they succumb to total exhaustion within the landscape of the West and retreat home to live with their mother, where they find peace and a degree of comfort: 'I listened intently and decided that my brother and I were, for the present at least, removed from all earthly dangers and horrors. And might I say what a pleasing conclusion that was for me' (325). Rather than taking up the mantle of stereotypical outlaw heroes, or replicating the hetero-normative family, as a John Ford hero would look to do, the brothers return to their atypical upbringing. This withdrawal comes from an alienation from the Western landscape, brought on by the spectacle of resource frenzy. *The Sisters Brothers* seeks to inhabit a classical Western mythological environment, but finds it troublingly altered.

The Son (2013): The Legacy of Extraction in Texas

As for JFK, it had not surprised her. The year he died, there were still living Texans who had seen their parents scalped by Indians. The land was thirsty. Something primitive still in it. On the ranch they had found points from both the Clovis and Folsom, and while Jesus was walking to Calvary the Mogollon people were bashing each other with stone axes (*The Son* 415).

Perhaps another great ice will come and grind all this into dust. Leaving no trace of our existence, as even fire does (*The Son* 515).

These statements from Jeanne Anne and Peter McCullough, two generations of a great Texan oil dynasty, reflect the key tension at play in Philipp Meyer's 2013 novel, *The Son*. Jeanne Anne emphasises the persistence of human culture and violence in Texas, from the prehistory of the Folsom people who replaced the Clovis civilisation and were in turn driven out by the Mogollons,

⁹ Classical Hollywood Westerns manufactured equine stars such as: Duke, John Wayne's horse in *Stagecoach* (1939); Silver, The Lone Ranger's Horse; and Trigger, who featured in the films of Roy Rodgers.

to the reactionary assassination of the President. The act of conquering and genocide defines the history of the region, and Jeanne Anne seems to suggest that it is a function of the living environment itself, that a hard land produces violence like oil. In contrast to this endless cycle of overthrow and renewal Peter McCullough imagines the end of a contingent landscape and human presence. He believes the existence of a region like Texas, and the civilisations it has produced, to be fundamentally unsustainable. Climate and catastrophe will precipitate the cleansing that Peter both fears and desires. *The Son* stages two conflicting possible futures for the Texan environment: a disanthropic Texas, without any trace of the human cultures that inhabited it, against what Greg Garrard, reading D.H. Lawrence, has termed ‘the horrors of persistence’ (Worlds Without Us 41); the permanent impact of human action on the natural world. Through this tension Meyer’s multi-generational family drama shows the Western’s ability to dramatize how notions of legacy and responsibility are complicated by a changing climate.

In his review, Will Blythe argues for *The Son* as an antidote to historical fiction, which emphasises reductive moralising at the expense of the past:

“The Son,” an epic of the American Southwest, represents a darkly exhilarating alternative to that sort of historical hooey. Like Cormac McCarthy’s “Blood Meridian,” it allows the past its otherness and its characters the dignity of blundering through the world as it was. These are not heroic transplants from the present, disguised in buckskin and loincloths. They are unrepentant, greedy, often homicidal lost souls, blindly groping their way through the 19th and 20th centuries, from the ordeals of the frontier to the more recent absurdities of celebrity culture.

Meyer presents a morally ambiguous form of historical fiction by offering a family that succeeded in becoming fabulously wealthy but at the expense of others. The narrative begins with the story of Eli McCullough (born in 1836). His account is then interwoven with the diary of his son Peter and the near-death recollections of his great granddaughter Jeanne Anne. Eli is kidnapped by the Comanche as a boy and raised to become a respected warrior in his band. He leaves the Comanche and eventually joins the Confederacy and, after the war, the Texas rangers, where he hunts the Native Americans he used to live amongst. Through hard work, violence and corruption he acquires the ranch land that is the basis of his family’s oil fortune. Peter is the conscience of the family, disgusted by his father’s actions and what he sees as the unearned and immoral wealth of the McCulloughs. He falls in love with a descendant of the family whose land his father has murderously taken, in the end following her to Mexico, a disgrace to his name. Finally, Jeanne Anne looks back at this history and her own, recounting her rise from a child taught bush craft by Eli, to a Texas oil baron. She is tough and uncompromising, persevering through tragedy and patriarchal roadblocks to create an empire. At the novel’s end it is revealed that she has been

accidentally killed by a Mexican descendent of her grandfather Peter. The violence that has stained the McCulloughs and the region returns cyclically.

Meyer's narrative takes cues from the anti-Western grit and blood of McCarthy's Texan novels. The influence is clear in the stark depictions of violence that occur throughout, for example this forensic description of the method for cleaning a scalp trophy: 'I scraped the inner skin to remove all the meat and fat, rinsing it in the water, rubbing it with a coarse stone and rinsing it again' (135). This level of detail is revelatory of the extent and thoroughness of the research that Meyer undertook for his novel. In a 2013 *Wall Street Journal* profile Alexandra Alter detailed the length to which Meyer had gone to learn the skills and lifestyle of nineteenth-century Texans and the Comanche. Regarding a scene in which Eli is forced to consume raw Buffalo liver, Alter writes: 'To write the passage as accurately as he could, Mr. Meyer shot two buffalo at a ranch in West Texas and drank a coffee mug full of the blood'. This kind of intense engagement with the craft of Western living, and the rugged connection between author and environment that it evokes, echoes McCarthy's impeccably detailed descriptions of horse riding and fire building. As a result, *The Son* also, at times, shares the malevolent environment of McCarthy's Westerns, in which whirlwinds and drought ravage the landscape. The Texas of McCarthy and Meyer is one in which the carnage of the American frontier is laid bare: a landscape in which a potent mixture of racial ideology, imperialist nationalism and extractive capitalism implicates and consumes all. The figures that emerged triumphant from this process of 'nation building' are the focus of *The Son*. However, whilst the debt owed to McCarthy is clear, Meyer's novel seeks to further complicate the ethical morass that is Texas' creation myth. The broad, multi-generational scope of the narrative allows the socio-political history of the region to play out through the lives of the McCulloughs. Whereas McCarthy presents doomed figures in a fading landscape Meyer's characters are able to ride the wave of expansion and development to come out on top. In contrast to the tragic failures of McCarthy's *The Border Trilogy*, *The Son* concerns itself with the ethical and environmental implications of Texas' winners. This departure from the McCarthyian Western is symbolised through pastiche. Peter's lover María tells him a story of a wise Indian who gives advice to a wealthy Spanish rancher: 'The seer said: "Go away, do not disturb me with questions of material character; this is a place of the spirit, of philosophy, of the nature of the universe itself."' (This is not really what the Indian said, I interrupt)' (420). This can be read as a subversive portrayal of the many mystic figures that populate *Blood Meridian* and *The Border Trilogy*, offering treatises to characters about the nature of fate and suffering. In *The Son* the philosophising tendencies of the Western are forced to contend with the messy reality of Texan history.

This history, which buttresses *The Son*, establishes Texas as an outlier of Western expansion. It was here that the logic of manifest destiny and the acquisitive desires of European

settlers most rapidly and violently established the Western landscape and culture, which were in turn mythologised. Throughout the nineteenth century the region saw numerous wars between the Americans and the Mexicans and between the Texans and the Indians, wars that were in turns imperialist and genocidal. At the same time the state was feverishly parcelled up and exploited, for grazing and farming land, until the discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901. Texan historian T.R. Fehrenbach locates the peculiarly vigorous settlement of Texas fundamentally in its climate:

This land shaped those who lived upon it more than they changed it. Hostile, yet with a beauty the second generation came to love, with crashing meteorological changes that punished man and beast, with winds that made them uneasy, yet volatile and free, it somehow aroused a sense of music in the Spanish-Mexican soul. In Americans, it made feelings they could not articulate. The land, the climate, the sense of endlessness yet constant change made all who came there hospitable, patriotic, violent, and brave (1299).

This statement is of course a totalising one that flattens the myriad types of Texan that would colonise and develop the state. Nevertheless it provides some insight into the self-identification of the Texan character. Landscape and climate remain fundamental as things against which Texan identity can be defined. The harshness of the living environment is shown to produce a particular kind of man in *The Son*. Peter comments on the connection between wildness and barbarity: ‘A half-grown panther abandoned in the wilderness will grow up to be a perfectly normal panther. But a half-grown child similarly abandoned will grow into an unrecognizable savage’ (227). His father Eli would seem to embody this process. Raised by the Comanche from childhood Eli rejects the norms of the bourgeois society that he is sent back to. His growth within the hostile climate of Texas fosters in him an intense individualism and a ruthless ability to resort to violence. First through ranching and then through oil he is able to appropriate the landscape of Texas for his benefit. In another revealing act of self-identification Fehrenbach describes the early Scots-Irish Texan settlers as inheritors of a Calvinist/Puritan worldview that meant they were ‘driven to material success’ (161) and disdainful of notions of class and hierarchy. These new Texans were ideally suited to carving out spaces of the frontier with few qualms about the social and political consequences of their colonising. The McCulloughs follow this archetype of suspiciously classless Texan. And yet the narrative of *The Son* reveals the centrality of class to the development of the state.

This particularly rapacious Western mythology was buttressed by the rapid changes in economy and land use that defined the region’s development. When Texas gained statehood in 1845 it was a fundamentally agrarian society, with an economy dominated by cotton, timber and cattle ranching. According to Robin W. Doughty’s analysis this economy, defined by settlement and exploitation of natural resources, emerged from an ideology of colonisation that emphasised the instrumental value of the landscape: ‘What people saw in the three natural regions of Texas

were objects having material and functional significance, rather than biological and ecological value' (426). By clearing vegetation and putting the land to use for crops and grazing, European settlers dramatically altered the climate and ecology of the region. An example of this is the denuding of prairieland by livestock, as David J. Schmidly details: 'It wasn't long before the overgrazing of Texas' vast rangelands became a problem. Also, during this time Texas' grassland landscapes were subjected to rapid encroachment of cacti and woody plants, all associated with a decrease in prairie wildfires and the severe overstocking of rangelands' (307). The pace of this change was staggering, as Doughty states: 'Cotton burgeoned from about 60,000 acres in 1850 to almost 4 million acres in 1890; and corn from about 200,000 acres to just over 3 million in the same period' (434). As a result of this history of exploitation, environmental change and the potential riches of the frontier space defined the mythology of Western expansion in Texas.

The interaction between environment and the Western subjects that sought to utilise it was further complicated by the discovery of oil in the twentieth century. The potential of access to vast mineral wealth turbo-charged the transformation of the Texan landscape, economy and society. Daniel Yergin describes the atmosphere following discovery of oil at Spindletop: 'What followed was riotous. The mad scramble for leases began immediately, with some plots traded again and again for ever more astounding prices. A woman garbage collector was thrilled to get \$35,000 for her pig pasture' (85). This change from agrarian economy to oil state acts as the timeline of *The Son*. It ensures the fortune of the McCulloughs and precipitates the violence of exploitation and conquest. Furthermore, by making oil a motivating influence on the narrative Meyer ensures that, for contemporary readers, climate change is implicated. *The Son* incorporates climate change into the mythology of the Texan west. The mythological environment and climate of Texas is depicted as producing violence and a rapacious desire for growth, however, climate change can complicate and even invert this relationship. In *The Son* it is Jeanne Anne who reveals this post-Western refutation of the established myths of Texas. She is interviewed by Edna Ferber, the real-life author of *Giant* (1952), a sprawling epic novel about a Texas oil family that was adapted into a film directed by George Stevens and starring James Dean in 1956. Annoyed by Ferber's attitude, Jeanne Anne is unimpressed by the film:

It was one long exaggeration. It made everyone look like clowns, as if they had stumbled dumbly into wealth, as if the state was nothing but backwoods tycoons without two brain cells to rub together. And yet the oilmen had liked it... the Colonel always complained about the moment his cowboys began to read novels about other cowboys; they had lost track of which was more true, the book or their own lives (372-373).

The Son rejects the romance of the mythological Western as a self-indulgent fantasy. No figure in the narrative escapes implication in the change and degradation of the Texas. The movement from

agriculture to oil production signals a ramping up of productive forces with no regard for the past. The region is accelerating towards the warming future.

Disgusted by the violence and exploitation that has defined his family, and Texas as a whole, Peter McCullough conceives of a future without the degrading human trace: 'As for myself, I have always known I will leave nothing behind me in this place, no sign I ever passed, but for the Garcias it was different, because they had hoped, and believed, that they would' (70). Their desire to make a mark on the landscape, to look to the future for security and hope, is seen by Peter as tragically naïve. A man ahead of his time, surrounded by the racism and corruption of early twentieth-century Texas, he views himself and the society he inhabits as hopelessly fallen into sin. The punishment for this sin will come through the collapsing biosphere, a process already well underway in 1917, as his diary reports:

Drought is back but cattle remain high due to war. Woke up after a night of vivid thoughts, pulled the curtains expecting the green country of my youth and of my dreams. But with the exception of the area immediately around the house, there was nothing but sparse brittle grass, thorny brush, patches of bare caliche. My father is right: it is ruined forever, and in a single generation (264).

Wracked by personal guilt Peter sees the family's oil wealth as yet more stolen capital, and he laments the transition from the romance of the pastoral past to the industrial future. Witnessing an oil find on his property he laments: 'There is nothing we will not have mastered. Except, of course, ourselves' (396). His granddaughter Jeanne Anne is ambivalent about the fate of the environment she was raised in. Her success as a business woman, rescuing the family oil operation from disaster and securing vast wealth, fosters in her a cold-blooded, hard-headed pragmatism. She is driven to exploit the mineral wealth in the family's land and is scornful of the romantic, rancher pretensions of her father and grandfather. Instead she takes her cue from Eli, who fought and killed for his own gain. Yet, like Peter, she is beset by visions of the world without her, and is sceptical about notions of legacy: 'She wondered how people would remember her. She had not made enough to spread her wealth around like Carnegie, to erase any sins that had attached to her name, she had failed, she had not reached the golden bough. The liberals would cheer her death' (82). She is defiantly scornful of her critics who hypocritically: 'eat fresh food that had travelled eight thousand miles... The whole time complaining about big oil' (83). Nevertheless she conceives of a future without legacy, in which her actions in life are irrelevant, her quest for agency finally denied. 'The Golden Bough' references the episode in the Aeneid where Aeneas must take the bough of a sacred tree to gain entrance into Hades. It was an image adopted by anthropologist James George Frazer, as the title of his highly influential comparative study of mythology and religion. Frazer emphasised the shared features of human belief, and the continuity of narrative across cultures and time. Jeanne Anne's rejection of this notion is an act of stark individualism, an attempt to remove herself from

both the history of Texas' development and the mythology of the West. She expects, and perhaps hopes, to go unremembered. Both Peter and Jeanne Anne reject the easy stories of Texas, understanding that the ideology of imperialism and manifest destiny elides the reality of violence, exploitation and greed. The changing Texan environment has the potential to erase the corrupted, decadent society that they have both had a hand in creating. This misanthropy acts as a comfort for Peter and Jeanne Anne, by imagining a landscape clear of the human trace and ultimately ethical responsibility. Climate change, in contrast, compels us to imagine an intergenerational ethics, one that emphasises responsibility and legacy. The ethical relationship between present day polluters and future generations is extremely complex. How do we define generations? Is incurring suffering or a lower standard of living now, for the sake of future generations, justifiable? Nonetheless, Stephen M. Gardiner argues that climate change must be considered as an intergenerational ethical issue, defined by 'intergenerational buckpassing' (154). Peter and Jeanne Anne's fantasies of a future without legacy can be viewed within this paradigm, as a desire to disavow the ethical weight of their impact on the Texan landscape and the future of the Western space, hoping that: 'they were all free, they would all be forgotten' (*The Son* (557)). However, both characters are ultimately denied this erasure. Peter escapes his family by moving to Mexico with his lover María, who is the granddaughter of the Garcias murdered by Eli. Jeanne Anne's death is the result of this relationship, as she is accidentally pushed and fatally wounded by Ulises Garcia, Peter's great grandson. Intergenerational conflict destroys the McCulloughs, even as they try to disavow it. *The Son* rejects the disanthropic impulse that seeks to deny legacy, so as to avoid ethical accountability. Climate change, through Peter's apocalyptic environmental visions and Jeanne Anne's nihilistic resource exploitation, is a spectre in the narrative that demands a broad consideration of ethical responsibility in the contemporary Western. As in *The Road* climate change creates a longing and anxiety around lost futures for the West.

This diffuse ethical responsibility is nowhere more evident than in the novel's depiction of Native Americans. In *The Son*, the first contact with the Comanche (who dominated Southwest Texas from the 1750s to the 1850s¹⁰) occurs when Eli's childhood ranch is raided. His mother and sister are raped, killed and scalped and he and his brother Martin are taken prisoner as slaves. The treatment of the McCulloughs matches the strategy set out by Eli at the beginning of his recollections: 'The Comanche philosophy towards outsiders was nearly papal in its thoroughness: torture and kill the men, rape and kill the women, take the children for slaves or adoption' (2). Although the violence meted out to Eli and his family is graphically depicted, it is also shown as a

¹⁰ For a comprehensive study of the Comanche empire as a bulwark against, and usurper of, Mexican and American imperial ambitions see Hämäläinen: 'In the Southwest, European imperialism not only stalled in the face of indigenous resistance; it was eclipsed by indigenous imperialism (2)'.

commonplace of frontier life. The sacramental habit and routine of the raiding party's actions is reflected in the Comanche's attitudes towards the violence: 'All the white men I'd ever seen after a fight were nervous for hours, pacing and talking so fast you couldn't understand them, but the Indians were bored and yawning like they'd just come back from an evening constitutional' (26). Eli's kidnapping and eventual adoption as an honorary Comanche reveals a society in which violence and conquest are central to existence and survival, alongside the inherited knowledge of how to live in the Western environment. Eli states: 'Any of them might have been dropped naked upon the earth and within a few days would be living comfortably. By comparison we were dumb as steers. They could not understand why they had not defeated us' (100).

In its depiction of Native Americans, *The Son* juxtaposes this harmonious accommodation with the natural world and extreme violence. This seeming discontinuity complicates the stereotypical rendering of Native American subjects that has been defined as 'The Ecological Indian'. Historian Shephard Krech II sets out the prevailing image of Native Americans that has been promoted and buttressed by Hollywood and Madison Avenue:

'the dominant image is of the Indian in nature who understands the systemic consequences of his actions, feels deep sympathy with all living forms, and takes steps to conserve so that the earth's harmonies are never imbalanced and resources never in doubt (21)

The figure of the Ecological Indian emerged from the enlightenment ideology of Michel de Montaigne and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who depicted native peoples as primitives living in a prelapsarian state of nature, an example of man before the complications of civil society, although, as Greg Garrard suggests, this was deeply ahistorical: 'Since all contemporary human societies are, in a sense, as modern as each other, this metaphor of the primitive can be seen as ideological mystification' (*Ecocriticism* 135). Native Americans came to stand for an older, purer connection with nature, unsullied by interaction with industrialised capitalism. This romantic and reductive rendering of a complex society and culture was codified and reified in the revisionist Westerns that sought to represent noble natives against rapacious settlers. The adoption of the ecological Indian in films like *Dances with Wolves* (1990) reflected how this image had become important in the counter-culture and environmental movements of the nineteen sixties and seventies, achieving what Krech terms 'ecological sainthood' (22). The reality of Native Americans' relationship with their environment was and remains far more dynamic, complex and even problematic. Our understanding of ecology has moved on from the search for harmonious balance in nature to recognition of the chaotic reality of complex living systems, and this change disrupts the model of Native proto-environmentalism: 'In an open nature in which balance and climax are questionable, [Native Americans] become, like all people, dynamic forces whose impact, subtle or not, cannot be assumed (Krech 23)'. Native societies, like the Comanche, caused radical changes in their

environment, such as the destruction of the continent's mega fauna. Buffalo were hunted often without regard for their dwindling numbers. Animistic beliefs that emphasised reincarnation led some tribes to believe that there was an inexhaustible supply of the animals. As Garrard states: 'animism is not necessarily ecological' (*Ecocriticism* 144). In the contemporary West, Native Americans' concerns do not always mesh with those of environmentalists, land use being a particular site of tension. Sarah Jaquette Ray argues:

Because Native Americans often want to do things with their land that do not fit with environmentalist ideas of nature, of their expectations of Native Americans, these groups are more often at odds than not, contrary to the myth of the ecological Indian (85).

The ecological status of Native Americans is subject to the inconsistencies and dislocations of environmental crisis and Western lifestyles, which cannot be dismissed with new-age doctrines of spiritual wholeness. As Joy Porter puts it: 'if anything unites Native writers it may in fact be alienation from the environment, from nature, from a reciprocated sense of home' (64).

Undoubtedly, native conceptions of environment are vital tools for coming to terms with the Anthropocene, in particular the lack of distinction drawn between human culture and the natural world, in contrast to the stark division that characterises modern industrial societies. Native American societies also continue to possess an unrivalled knowledge of the Western environment, a treasure trove of insight and expertise. However, it is clear that Native Americans are not fixed into the ideological mould of the ecological Indian, and instead respond dynamically to environmental change.

Eli McCullough is eventually adopted into this particular kind of environmental subjectivity. Eli learns the skills to survive amongst the Comanche: hunting, fighting, tanning, crafting and medicine. He is given the name Tiehteti-Taibo, translated as 'Pathetic Little White Man', one of a number of satirical but essentially affectionate names given to members of the band. Other examples include Hates Work, Lazy Feet and Fat Wolf. As Eli becomes Tiehteti and becomes accustomed to the cultural practices and attitudes of the Comanche he begins to comprehend the complex ethical distinctions between Euro-American conquest and the exploitation committed by the Comanche. Eli's captor and eventual mentor Toshaway establishes this difference:

Of course we are not stupid, the land did not always belong to the Comanche, many years ago it was Tonkawa land... But the whites do not think this way – they prefer to forget that everything they want already belongs to someone else. They think, *Oh I am white this must be mine*. And they really believe it, Tiehteti. I have never seen a white person who did not look surprised when you killed them (95).

Toshaway articulates the moral universe in which the Comanche operate. Like their American counterparts the Comanche have used violence to establish control over the Texan landscape; they accept reprisals and conflict as a necessary result of conflict over resources and space. Where the Comanche differ from the American colonialists is in their recognition of the historical fact of domination and exploitation. The Texans refuse to acknowledge the legacy of violence that is tied up in their land use, instead resorting to racial ideology that obscures the reality of their theft. Toshaway explains: ‘They think that if you do not see the people you are stealing from, or if you do not know them, or if they do not look like you, it is not really stealing’ (95). In Toshaway’s conception the Euro-American colonisation of the West was made possible by ideological mystification, and an ahistorical disconnection from the reality of the disputed Texan landscape.

The Son details the encroachment of Texan settlers into the Comanche’s last remaining strongholds. Disease, particularly smallpox, rips through the tribes of the southwest, and leads to the wiping out of the large and wealthy Penateka Comanche band in 1850 (199). The threat of extinction is ever present in the novel, as has been shown, with Peter repeatedly evoking the potential erasure of human activity in the West. Peter tells the story of the last Coahuiltecan: ‘The last living one on earth. His people were older than the Greeks and Romans... But finally their own winter arrived. The Spanish appeared and then the Apaches... and then the Comanches... this man was the only survivor’ (419). This concern with disappearing Native cultures interacts with the mythic notion of ‘The Vanishing Indian’. Early Western films, in particular George B. Seitz *The Vanishing American* (1925), showed Native Americans as a doomed people, the sad but inevitable victims of progress, the unending Darwinist domination of one race by another. Michael J. Riley argues that although these portrayals may be described as sympathetic, ‘[their] “sympathy” maintains and carries with it an ingrained assumption of its time, that indigenous people are embodiments of antiquated lifeways and, hence, are rendered as emblematic of the past, rather than as viable participants in the world of the present’ (67). This figuring of Native Americans also had the effect of ameliorating the moral difficulties of genocide by implying that vanishing was something inherent to indigenous people rather than something that was done to them. The fate of the Comanche in *The Son* would initially seem to mirror that of the vanishing Indian, as they are increasingly hunted and brutalised, even by Eli when he joins the Texas rangers. However, despite their dwindling numbers the persistence of an indigenous presence seems likely. Many of the Eli’s band are killed by disease, including the patriarchal figure of Toshaway, and whilst digging graves he comes across a cup and a wall, built by a previous unknown civilisation:

I decided to take the cup to Grandfather but he was dead, and then I thought I would ask Toshaway but he was dead as well, and I nearly put it down but couldn’t, I couldn’t stop turning it over in my hands, and then I knew why, because it had lain there a thousand year or more and it made Toshaway and all the others seem very young; as if they were young

and there was still hope (297).

Again the Comanche are located within a tradition of human activity in the landscape outside of European notions of progress and the American ideology of manifest destiny. Their culture recognises the ethics of land use and resource exploitation without recourse to the mystification and justifications of the settlers. The Comanche of *The Son* represent a realistic mode of living within the landscape of the West, a lifestyle that acknowledges the ethical cost of land use and the contingent nature of their existence. Through the relics and structures they leave behind, the indigenous characters of Meyer's novel also reveal the persistence of the human trace even in the absence of humanity. Greg Garrard advocates for ways of thinking about post-human worlds that acknowledge the persistence of our environmental trace¹¹. Peter McCullough may longingly wish for the wiping clean of humanity and its depredations from the landscape but the Comanche's understanding avoids this pastoral fantasy. The consequences of human actions are embedded in the landscape of Texas and the West.

¹¹ See Garrard, *Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy*

Chapter four: The Sound of Climate Change in the Western

The twenty-first century has seen Western genre films begin to come to terms with the changing nature of the Western climate and landscape. As the understanding of the terminal threats facing the region increases, filmmakers have employed visual and aural techniques in an attempt to represent the reality of an exhausted and emptied environment and ecosystem. Sound particularly has a capacity to locate and expose the diffuse and baffling influence of climate change. In *No Country for Old Men* (2007) (*NCFOM*), the Coen brothers employ sound design, in conjunction with visual imagery, to construct a sense of emptiness in the landscape of West Texas. The brothers create a determined Western landscape – the defining feature of which is silence. The diminished, exhausted West is most apparent in the film's minimalist score. The choice to remove much of the Western's customary musical backing in favour of silence is indicative of an exhausted and terminal West. Silence itself has become a metaphor for environmental crisis and, more specifically, for climate change. The retreat and diminishment of the natural world has produced a form of global muting. Silence in *NCFOM* also works in concert with the sparseness of narrative, dialogue and a visual tone that implies scarcity, drought and terminality. Finally, the narrative also symbolically gestures towards the pressures of climate change on the South Western landscape, particularly through the spectre of water shortage as signified by the depleted Rio Grande.

Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) (*TWBB*) constructs its critique of the oil industry and the madness of extractive capitalism around its main character, Daniel Plainview. Plainview is the silent core around which the disorientating sound of the carbon economy operates. The story echoes many of the tycoon epics that have characterised American cinema – from *Citizen Kane* (1941) to *Chinatown* (1974). It also echoes many of *China Town*'s environmental anxieties. In contrast to *NCFOM*, Johnny Greenwood's score is an assaulting barrage of atonal noise and discordance but the character of Plainview is defined by contrast between the sound and fury of Western development and the post-Western silence of Plainview himself. *TWBB*'s narrative concerns itself with the California oil rush. In so doing, the film seems to be an example of a specifically American oil encounter. *TWBB* is capable of dramatising the presence of oil by identifying fossil fuel extraction as ultimately a form of lack. This lack functions to inhibit Daniel Plainview's forming of filial relationships and leads to his rejection of the family – in itself a form of silence. The emergence of oil in *TWBB* is spectacular but also deafening. And, as critic Adrian Ivakhiv has suggested, it is an expression of the disavowed real of climate change. Plainview is the symbolically silent agent around which the reshaping of the Californian West occurs. *TWBB* dramatizes the creation of an anti-landscape, characterised by pollution and a landscape scared by pipelines. The California of *TWBB* is the inception of an anti-landscape and

this sense of loss projects towards the even more unsettling anti-landscapes of the future. Plainview, in the heart of his first oil well, represents the silence at the core of resource-cursed West. Daniel Plainview's encounters with oil are shown to precipitate a series of caesura: in the scoring of the film, in continuance of familial bonds and finally in the terminal halting of the anti-landscape. The sound of *TWBB*'s maddened carbon economy consistently runs up against silences that foreshadow the ultimate silence of the climate-changed West.

No Country for Old Men (2007): Silence in the post-Western Landscape

"You can't stop what's coming" (Uncle Ellis, *No Country for Old Men*)

The Coen brother's *No Country for Old Men* examines the recent past of the West, and finds an environment defined by depletion, violent competition over resources, and silence. The future of the landscape seems to be one of inexorable decline, a space in which human agency and the possibility of progressive change are radically in doubt. The grim facts of climate change produce a similar narrative of inevitable environmental degradation, and unavoidable long term consequences. Even activists like Bill McKibben, who advocate for immediate action to ameliorate the worst impacts of climate change, acknowledge that significant damage has already been 'baked in' by past and current emission levels. As McKibben puts it in his polemic *Earth*: 'It's true that we've lost that fight, insofar as our goal was to preserve the world we were born into. That's not the world we live in any longer, and there's no use pretending otherwise' (xv). This reality can have an enervating effect on climate change discourse and activism. The experience of living in an environment whose fate is entirely determined, and increasingly obvious, could be one of anger and despair, erasing the possibility of productive adaptation or resistance. *NCFOM* resonates with the dilemmas posed by a determined landscape. The overriding feature of such a landscape is silence. The Coens employ silence, the absence of a musical score or a minimal score, to suggest a post-natural West. The terminally of the Western space is also clear in the Coens' visual framing. By establishing the palette and physical structure of a stressed environment, they emphasise depletion and threat. Secondly, the spectre of drought and water conflict is present in the film. This points to the loss of an ancient Texan ecosystem as well as future dangers. The world in which the characters of the Coens' film operate is one of terminal decline, as well as doubt about the possibilities of progress and redemption. Like protagonist Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin), the terminal West of *NCFOM* is being driven towards its end.

Set in the summer of 1980, the Coens' drama takes the form of a cat and mouse chase across South-West Texas. Vietnam veteran Moss stumbles across a drug deal gone wrong whilst hunting in the desert. He tracks the last survivor of the massacre and finds his corpse and two million dollars in a briefcase. Moss then makes the fateful choice to take the money, setting the narrative in motion. The money and Moss are tracked by Mexican drug dealers as well as a demonic hitman, Anton Chiura (Javier Bardem), who ruthlessly hunts down Moss, murdering anyone who gets in his way, including another hitman Carson Wells (Woody Harrelson), sent to rein him in. Through luck and ingenuity Moss avoids his pursuers until he is eventually caught and killed in a gun fight by one of the Mexican gangs. In the aftermath of the shootout Chiura collects the money, before proceeding to kill Moss' wife Carla Jean (Kelly Macdonald) as an act of revenge for Moss' refusal to accept his fate. Throughout the film, Chiura depicts himself as an agent of fate, enacting a deterministic philosophy that justifies his homicidal tendencies. The action is followed by Sheriff Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), a stoic Texan law man approaching retirement. Bell is always just behind Moss and Chiura, and is shaken by the violence he witnesses, he claims towards the end of the film that he feels 'over matched'. The film concludes with a retired Bell reflecting on a landscape that seems both strangely new and yet suffused with a troubled history. The audience is left to wonder whether the violence of the film marks an apocalyptic descent into barbarism, or is in fact a feature of the landscape itself. Texas, as ever, possesses an inherent malevolent potentiality.

The diminished and ailing status of the environment of contemporary West Texas in *NCFOM* is most apparent in the innovative sound design and musical scoring of the film. The production was praised upon its release for the way in which it employed silence and a minimalist score to heighten the tension and excite audiences. In his review, A.O. Scott described the thrilling effect of this silence: 'The silence and the slowness awaken your senses and quiet your breathing, as by the simplest cinematic means – Look! Listen! Hush! – your attention is completely and ecstatically absorbed'. It was the supervising sound editor on the project, Skip Lievsay, who initially pushed for an experimental sound design that subverted the tradition of heavily scored Hollywood thrillers. Quoted in a piece by Dennis Lim, Lievsay claimed that: 'The idea here was to remove the safety net that lets the audience feel like they know what's going to happen. I think it makes the movie much more suspenseful. You're not guided by the score and so you lose that comfort zone'. Composer Carter Burwell complemented this aesthetic with an ambient musical score, consisting of atmospheric drones, which occur sparingly, mostly during relatively action-free driving sequences. The music, when it is present, emerges from the environment. For example, in the scene in which Chiura menaces the gas station owner with the flip of his coin, Burwell tuned the musical hum to the frequency of the refrigerator sound. The sound and music design choices were primarily intended to confound audience expectations and in so doing enhance the inherent

tension and excitement of the thriller genre. However, this asceticism also has the effect of foregrounding the physical environment, emphasising both natural and artificial aural landscapes where both the presence and absence of sound have a heightened significance.

Music theorist Paul Théberge emphasises the relational aspect of movie and television silences. For example, silence can be defined as the absence of diegetic background effects, sequences in which music or non-diegetic sounds are the only sounds perceivable. This effect has often been used to represent: ‘Any moment in which reality exceeds our expectations, when the real becomes surreal’ (Théberge 57). ‘Relational silence’ is also a feature of audience expectation, silence can be used to confound the assumptions that viewers have made about the generic conventions of a film or even from one scene to another. Théberge argues that the absence of music can be both a stylistic and structural device for filmmakers. He uses the example of Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society* (1989) in which scenes taking place within a stuffy, repressive boarding school are not scored whilst the joyous, expressiveness of the outside scenes, in which a group of students discover a love for reading poetry and literature, is emphasised through music (64-65). Silence in films can be used to support and emphasise narrative themes and structure. This structural use of silence is an influential presence in *NCFOM*, the few occurrences of music serving to heighten the anxiety and tension-inducing diegetic soundtrack. The silences that are produced are the consequence of carefully constructed soundscapes and effects that counterpoint the lack of music that would normally be associated with the Western genre. This confounding effect is at its most acute during sequences set in the Western landscape. Craig Berkey, a sound designer working alongside Skip Lievsay, detailed how the sound design of the opening section of the film, leading up to and after Moss’ discovery, attempted to use the environmental sounds in a similar way to music. He has stated that: ‘To me the winds were the score throughout this part of the film’ (Rielhe). Indeed a complex and changing wind track is used throughout these scenes, evoking a sparse, dry environment. Conspicuously missing is aural evidence of a larger ecosystem, bird, mammal, even insect noises are absent. The wind persists as an indicator of larger silences – the silence of the missing musical score, but also the silence of a hollowed out, post-natural West. The symbolic weight of silence has traditionally been used as a metaphor, within environmental thought, for ecological loss. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), a founding text of the conservation and environmental movements, depicts the silence of birds killed by pesticides in the food chain as a powerful example of the growing human impact on the natural world. Silence in this context, where there should be sound, is troubling and indicative of a natural world in crisis.

Attempts have been made to conceptualise sound in the context of global warming. Ecologist Lauren Oakes along with musician Nik Sawe have attempted to communicate the decline

of yellow-cedar trees in the Alaskan archipelago through a process called ‘data sonification’. Yellow-cedar trees are susceptible to climate change as a lack of snow exposes their roots to freezing temperatures; as a result trees in the south are dying out at a faster rate than in the north. Oakes and Sawe translated this data into a musical piece that reveals the patterns in the data. In *The Atlantic*, Michelle Nijhuis detailed the method by which the music was constructed:

[E]ach note represents a tree, and its pitch and how hard its hit corresponds with tree’s height and diameter [...] Dead trees are represented by dropped notes—gaps of silence that widen as the sonification moves from the cooler study plots in the north to the warmer plots in the south. The spreading silence in [the] “species solo” by yellow-cedar is, in effect, the sound of climate change.

Silence, the absence of life or the markers of once stable ecosystems, is a defining feature of climate change. *NCFOM* reveals how the Western reflects this when it ventures out into the irrevocably changed landscape that used to define it. Sheriff Bell is troubled by the changes he sees coming, moral degradation, societal collapse. Underlying this is the silence of the Western space. Anxiety and the failure of the progressive frontier myth are a symptom of this unsettling, terminal quiet.

The silence of *NCFOM*’s ground-breaking score works in concert with the visual sparseness of narrative, essentially a drawn-out chase sequence, and the dialogue adapted from McCarthy’s novel. The Coens’ adaptation is extremely faithful to the original text; Joel Coen flippantly described the process thus: ‘one of us types into the computer while the other holds the spine of the book open flat’ (Patterson). The dialogue, in particular, is a stripped down version of the novel, whilst Sheriff Bell’s monologue introduces the film in much the same way as in McCarthy’s narrative. Some differences do exist: a teenage runaway character from the novel is absent, as is some of the detail of Bell’s back story, most significantly the fact that he is a bereaved father whose daughter passed away before the events of the story. Nevertheless, the Coens’ film stays strikingly close to McCarthy’s stripped down, taut prose and narrative structure. McCarthy’s novel was itself a departure, stylistically, from his earlier fiction. In contrast to *Blood Meridian* and *The Border Trilogy*, which are defined by McCarthy’s elevated, intricate prose informed by the language of the King James Bible, *NCFOM* is significant for its sparse, basic descriptions and its relative lack of vivid, McCarthian imagery. Steven Frye argues that McCarthy’s earlier novels display, ‘overtly and without reserve the artifice of language’ (16), in order to compensate for the uncompromising bleakness of the worlds he creates, a bleakness ordained by a dark, Gnostic creator. However, in *NCFOM* McCarthy employs a bare bones style in order to summon up a ‘world of sense and raw beauty that is void of artifice and system, a cold world of violence and disorder that Bell must struggle somehow to understand’ (Frye 17). The West of *NCFOM* seems less comprehensible than in McCarthy’s other Westerns, not held in sway by a malevolent creator

and as a result a site of confusion and conflict. The Coens' film effectively evokes McCarthy's world, and indeed the process of adaption adds to the sparseness of *NCFOM* by further paring back the narrative and dialogue. As a consequence, the film heightens the bareness and sharpness of McCarthy's vision, leaving its audience to navigate a way through its opaque world of sheriffs and assassins.

McCarthy's novel seems particularly suited to adaptation, with its exciting cinematic pacing, its classic Western setting and its intriguing, threatening tone. These cinematic qualities are, in part, a consequence of McCarthy's long held interest in film narratives and theatrical scriptwriting. He has published two plays, *The Stonemason* (1994) and *The Sunset Limited* (2006), as well as authoring a drama *The Gardener's Son* which was produced by PBS visions in 1976, later to be turned into a book in 1996. *NCFOM* was originally conceived as a film script before being turned into a novel that was published in 2005. Rick Wallach argues that the structure of the fictional *NCFOM* is inherently cinematic, in large part due to the narrative division between Sheriff Bell's monologues and the third person narration. Wallach argues that this third person narration, with its spare, focused, descriptive prose, is: 'distinctly eidetic, or visual' (xv). By reducing the amount of Bell's monologues to a single shortened voiceover at the beginning of the film, the Coens further assert the primary, cinematic, eidetic viewpoint. This smooths out some of the complexity of the fictional text by: 'liberat[ing] Bell's narratee to accompany all the characters and share their gazes of events *as they happen*' (Wallach xxii). Bell, in the process, becomes less the compromised, defeated figure of the novel, instead conforming to a more authentic Western archetype; that of the laconic, tough, yet weary sheriff. The Coens' adaptation refines the already cinematic essence of *NCFOM* by drawing on the generic conventions of the Western. Whilst the film plays with a number of different intertexts, including the Coens' previous crime capers *Raising Arizona* (1987) and *Fargo* (1996), the presence of the Western as genre and setting remains preeminent. Jim Welsh argues that, despite the myriad influences that inform the Coens' adaptation, *NCFOM* is still a Western, albeit of the 'Post-Western' variety:

This is the "frustrated frontier" of the late twentieth century, a dystopic West where Evil has a postmodern spin, where men are still men and villains are still killers, but also a West where White Hats are mingled with a cockeyed, out-of-place killer sporting a bizarre Prince Valiant haircut. Such displacements of archetypal iconography are vintage Cormac McCarthy, to be sure, but also Cormac McCarthy reedited and popularized, recreated in a more agreeable and even cartoonish way, not exactly simplified, but changed so subtly that perhaps most viewers may not even notice (81).

This question of the degree to which the Coens' *NCFOM* represents a simplification of McCarthy's urtext is a complex one. Certainly it can be argued that the cinematic form is axiomatically concerned with surfaces and the significance of the image, Welsh quotes film critic Andrew Sarris:

‘Movies deal with surfaces; they don’t deal with essences’ (82).

The loss of the ambivalence and difficulty of Bell’s monologues would seem to be a surrender to this tyranny of surface. In concert with this, as Welsh suggests, the Coens’ post-modern, ironizing instincts reveal themselves in the adaptation through motifs such as Chigurh’s absurd haircut. The result of this could be to extend the iconoclastic McCarthyian Western into the realm of parody, thereby lessening the allegorical heft of the novel. In short, the charge is that the Coens’ adaptation renders *NCFOM* accessible but flattened, missing its essential, bumpy nuance. However, this refocusing of the text, away from the interior monologue of Sheriff Bell’s weary chorus towards the stark, bare image of the waning West, acts to assert the primacy of the physical landscape. Whilst making *NCFOM* theatrically ‘accessible’ through editing and adaptation, the Coens simultaneously unsettle the narrative by decentring its human subjects. The anchoring interpretation and commentary provided by Bell’s monologues in the novel is replaced by silence. The characters are left adrift in a changing physical environment.

This reorientation is evident in the film’s opening sequence. Sheriff Bell’s monologue, voiced in the dignified baritone of native Texan Tommy Lee Jones, begins after the title card. The first image on screen is the Texan landscape at sunrise, dark hills silhouetted against the first glow of sunlight. The second shot shows a brightening sky foregrounded by darkened telephone lines. The fixed long shots of scenery continue under Bell’s voice, becoming progressively brighter as the sun rises. The West Texas desert reveals itself as the shots progress, the pallet of brown scrubland and hazy blue-grey sky defines the landscape and recurs throughout the film. Clearly this is an environment of scarcity and hardship, in which life survives but does not thrive. The establishing shots, each lasting no more than ten seconds, are mostly still, with the only movement being created by the wind. As the sun rises it reveals a landscape without humans but in which the human trace remains: phone lines, fencing, slowly turning windmills and a barely visible oil derrick. The obvious absence of the human subject in the environment of *NCFOM* stands in contrast to the depiction of man in nature that characterises classical Westerns. The archetypal Western acknowledges the sublime wildness of the frontier space whilst ensuring that this environment functions as a setting for Western characters and stories. In the opening shot of John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956), Dorothy Jordan opens a door to reveal Monument Valley. The doorway frames John Wayne on horseback before a cut to a long shot of Wayne bracketed by two of the iconic sand stone buttes. This dual framing reveals the extent to which the environment of the classical Western was a backdrop, designed to imbue the mythology with the grandeur of a romantic landscape. *NCFOM* begins by removing the cowboy, the Indian or the outlaw, leaving a disorienting Western space devoid of reference points. All that is left is the land itself, its very emptiness evoking a sense

of loss, confusion and even anxiety, placing *NCFOM* firmly within the category of post-Western. The visual dearth, the lack of abundance, which characterises the landscapes of the Coens' Western works in concert with the absence of music to represent a Western space approaching exhaustion and prefiguring its end.

Layered on top of this ghostly rendering of the aging frontier is Sheriff Bell's jeremiad, in which he considers the changing nature of his profession. Looking back to past sheriffs, his father included, Bell depicts a less violent time in which a sheriff could go their whole career without wearing a gun. This is in contrast to the crime Bell has been a witness to, and that he can barely comprehend: 'The crime you see now, it's hard to even take its measure'. In order to combat the kind of moral depravity that Bell suggests is commonplace means that: 'A man would have to put his soul at hazard;'. Bell describes a region in terminal decline, in which changing values have produced chaos and violence, but also a distinct sense of dislocation, a lack of connection to and comfort with a changed and changing environment. This sense of moral and civilisational uncertainty that suffuses *NCFOM* connects with readings that identify it as a definitively post-9/11 film. Joan Mellan reflects on the place of veterans in the Coens' film (Moss and Carson Wells are veterans of the Vietnam war and Bell the Second World War), arguing that the moral degradation of *NCFOM* is a direct result of America's foreign adventures:

The misery began with the settlers invading the continent. The stain of imperial domination, first at home at the moment of America's creation, and later in Vietnam and Iraq, has borne an accelerating historical legacy, symbolized by the spreading pool of Wells's blood. Anton Chigurh is America's signature future (31)

Mellan cites Moss' connection with the drug trade and his greed-driven decision to take the money as indicative of a transition towards Chigurh's ultimate evil. In this analysis the violence of *NCFOM* is a function of a traumatic return of imperial violence, Moss, Wells and Chigurh playing out the pointless destruction of Vietnam and Iraq in South West Texas. Arne De Boever extends this analysis further, persuasively revealing how *NCFOM* critiques the post-9/11 consensus through the motif of retirement, which is a key feature of the narrative (Moss is a retired veteran, while Bell retires at the end of the film). The concept of retirement, of ultimate withdrawal, resists the ideology of a constant, unwinnable war on terror, embodied by ceaselessly returning political figures like Dick Cheney:

The very idea that government could ever be completely done with terror, in the sense that final control and justice would have been achieved, is – as *No Country for Old Men* makes its viewers realize – a theological assumption that risks to produce precisely the opposite of what it attempts to bring about. In *No Country for Old Men*, it is the sheriff's retirement [...] that provides a way out of this deadlock, by having the sheriff realize the essentially

unfinished, human nature of a work of justice that cannot be completed through divine intervention.

Bell's retirement, in this reading, represents a disavowal of counterproductive violence, as opposed to an admission of defeat in the face of implacable evil. This rejection of unhelpfully reductive moral categories is useful for escaping the sometimes claustrophobic and limiting McCarthyian universe.

NCFOM is shaped by and responds to the spectre of the War on Terror and the moral crisis it has engendered. By establishing a critique of empire, the film places itself within a broader context of contemporary anxieties around a changing and unpredictable global system. Bell's monologue, placed over images of the Texan West, creates an explicit link between the physical environment and the sheriff's rhetoric of uncertainty and terminally. The washed out greys and browns of the montage suggest drought, depletion and decay. Although the ecosystem of West Texas is primarily semi-arid desert and grassland the composition of the establishing shots stresses this aridity by emphasising a colour scheme associated with water shortage. The Coens and their long-time cinematographer Roger Deakins have a history of representing resource-starved landscapes on screen. Their film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000) was pioneering in its use of the digital intermediate process, in which motion picture is digitised so that its colour and other image characteristics can be manipulated. In *O Brother, Where Art Thou* this was used in order to transform the lush vegetation of summertime Louisiana into what Roger Deakins described, in a DVD extra featurette, as a: 'dust bowl era look'. This shows the capacity of contemporary filmmakers to recreate landscapes that evoke historical ecological crises; the dust bowl imagery of *O Brother, Where Art Thou* connects the American south to the broader mythology of the great depression. The shot composition of *NCFOM*'s landscapes similarly connects to a long history of Western environments under ecological stress, whilst projecting forward into an uncertain future. In conjunction with Sheriff Bell's pessimistic monologue, and the diegetic hush of wind and nothing more, the stark imagery of the film's opening sequence asserts the importance of environmental change within the broader narrative of a corrupt society heading for crisis.

This terminal Western landscape is depicted as a space in which violence and the ecosystem are intimately connected. The first shot of protagonist Llewelyn Moss' first scene is through the sights of his hunting rifle, as he hunts a group of pronghorn antelope. The scene then cuts to a wide shot in which the animals are almost lost within the vastness of the bleak scrubland. He shoots at an antelope but succeeds only in wounding it. In tracking the animal he comes across a wounded dog, which in turn leads him to the massacre in the desert. This introduction through the

rifle sights indicates Moss' veteran status as well as his comfort with violent action, emphasising, as Mellan has shown, the connection with Chiura: one a dark reflection of the other. However, it also serves to distinguish a new kind of relationship between the Western hero and the Western space. In his convincing reading of McCarthy's *NCFOM* Raymond Malewitz argues that the novel's characters resist the alienation of late capitalism through 'rugged consumerism': the misuse and repurposing of consumer objects as a means of making the post-modern West 'Wild' again. Moss' aborted hunt leads instead to the technological commodities of the West, part of wider disenchantment that defines the novel and the film:

In McCarthy's late-capitalist denouement to the dream of the mythic West, animal prey becomes human prey, animal tracks become automobile tracks become signals, cattle-smuggling becomes drug-smuggling, and horses become off-road vehicles. Fittingly, Llewelyn Moss meets the woman whom he will take as his wife not at a cattle ranch (as John Grady Cole does in *All the Pretty Horses*) but at the local Wal-Mart (728).

The strict adherence of the film script to McCarthy's text, particularly in the opening scenes, ensures that this juxtaposition between Western archetype Moss and the contemporary, consumerist West persists in the Coens' adaptation. Some signifiers of Western mythology remain: the hats, the boots, Sheriff Bell even rides a horse; however the function they serve seems to be purely performative. In the Western environment of *NCFOM* the symbolic markers of the West are either absent, altered or objects of pastiche. The mythological frontier has been entirely cannibalised, its icons and fetishes incorporated into the broader logic of post-industrial capitalism and American imperialism. The acts of resistance to this state of affairs that Malewitz identifies are necessarily small, the manipulation of consumer goods in a way that emphasises their use value, against the abstraction of the market. The West that Moss inhabits is one in which the meaning of the mythological West, in all its problematic ideological complexity, has been replaced by an overwhelming sense of alienation.

This ideological depletion, the dearth of meaning and symbols on which to anchor the Western myth, is connected to the scarcity that defines the physical environment. When Moss comes across the drug deal gone wrong he searches the cars and finds one man still alive, but mortally wounded. The dying man asks Moss for water in Spanish, Moss replies in English: 'I ain't got no water'. Moss asks him where the last man standing ('Ultimo Hombre') is, but the man only asks for water. As he leaves the man asks him to close the door, for fear of wolves: 'Cierre la puerta... Hay lobos'. Moss responds: 'There ain't no lobos', this line marking the reoccurrence of McCarthy's use of the wolf as a metaphor for the declining West. As in *The Crossing*, the absence of the animals indicates the ecological poverty of environment, as well as the change from the mythological West to the contingent, contemporary West. The lack of water evokes the drought

stricken reality of West Texas, where climate change is threatening the viability of human habitation. Al Gore backed non-profit, Climate Reality Project, has set out the consequences of past droughts in the region and the potential for future crises:

The heat and extraordinarily dry weather of 2011 was part of a larger period of drought in the state that extended from 2010 to 2015, resulting in approximately \$8.7 billion in agricultural losses. Sadly, it's unlikely that was the end of the story. As the climate continues to warm, more multi-year droughts are expected with devastating impacts to the state's agriculture sector and drinking water.

Droughts and wild fires exacerbated by climate change will continue to drive scarcity, as humans and the natural world compete for dwindling resources. The mythological West Texan way of life, as it has been perceived in classical Westerns, is becoming increasingly precarious. The symbolic absence of water at the heart of the narrative of *NCFOM* reflects this reality. The drug deal and its aftermath signifies the moral decay of the West and it occurs at the heart of a drought stricken landscape, in which resource depletion threatens all. The movement from the classical West to the late-capitalist West is marked by the disenchanting transition from romantic Western signifiers and identities to the confusing, unsettled subjects of *NCFOM* (Chigurh's baffling appearance and obscure purpose exemplify this). This change is, of course, a function of post-modernity. However, it is also a result of environmental pressures and changes. The transformation of economic activity from the agricultural (farmers, cowboys) to the shadow economy (drug traffickers, hitmen) reflects the impossibility of traditional relationships between Western subjects and the region they inhabit. Increased crime and drug trafficking could be a consequence of climate change, as collapsing economies and porous borders combine with large scale migration to destabilise whole regions. *NCFOM* depicts a Western space in which these threats contribute to a pervasive atmosphere of anxiety and decay. The plot hinges on Moss' decision to return to the scene of the crime in order to give the dying man the water he was begging for. This attack of conscience allows Chiura and the other killers tracking him to find his truck and identify him, precipitating the chase that structures the rest of the film. This symbolic 'water shortage' incorporates scarcity and environmental pressures into the film's moral morass. Moss' return to the desert is an ethical act of solidarity but it necessitates further interaction with the hostility and dearth of the Western landscape, the result of which is ultimately fatal. Moss' escape across the Rio Grande also underlines the environmental pressures that are warping the environment of West Texas. The river exists today as a symbol of a radically altered frontier. In a 2015 *The New York Times* report titled *The Parched West*, Michael Wines described the river: 'An untamed, flash-flooding home to sturgeon and eels a century ago, much of the Rio Grande today is little more than a magnificently engineered pipe – diverted, straightened, dammed, bled by canals... Its raison d'être is to sustain the booming society along its banks'. *Rio Grande* (1950), the last of John Ford's cavalry trilogy, portrays the river as a formidable obstacle that must be crossed in order to secure the frontier against Apache raiders

sheltering in Mexico. The introduction shows the Rio Grande in its full, roaring glory, as the cavalry move towards its shore. In comparison the river that Moss crosses and recrosses is becalmed and shallow, or part of the bureaucratic negotiation of the border, entirely constrained and co-opted. It remains a marker of a contested political space whilst also serving as an emblem of the strain placed on West Texas by development and the droughts associated with climate change. Through the construction of landscape imagery and the amplifying of themes of resource scarcity *NCFOM* dramatizes the crisis of the terminal West.

There Will Be Blood (2007): The Creation of the Western Oil Landscape

The West was another name for opportunity. Here were mines to be seized, fertile valleys to be pre-empted, all the natural resources open to the shrewdest and the boldest (Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Problem of the West* 213).

‘Can everything around here be got?’ (Daniel Plainview, *There Will Be Blood*).

The West, as articulated in Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, provided the space in which a vigorous, egalitarian, uniquely American form of citizenship and identity was nurtured and then propagated. The progressive, pioneer mythology of the frontier promoted the physical landscape as the engine of democracy and guarantor of liberty. Of crucial importance to this thesis was what that landscape contained: agricultural land, buffalo, timber, precious metals, coal and oil. Alongside the valorised Western individual, a rapacious form of American capitalism emerged to acquire, extract and sell the natural resources of the West, buttressed by the preeminent ideological position that the frontier, and the necessity of cultivating it, occupied. In his essay *The Problem of the American West* Turner began to consider the end of Westward expansion, and what the consequences would be when the feverish energy of frontier progress had nowhere to expend itself, a nation: ‘thrown back upon itself, and... seeking an equilibrium’ (221). This consolidation would, in Turner’s dialectic, lead to a productive compromise between Eastern traditions and the ‘authentically American’ values of the West, ultimately brought about by the technology of capitalism: ‘As time goes on, its industrial development will bring [the West] more into harmony with the East’ (221). The closure of the West resulted in the turning inwards of pioneer impulses, towards the land itself and the full exploitation of what it contained. Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* takes place at this moment of transition, following the rise of the wildly ambitious Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) as he makes his fortune amidst the California oil rush of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. By dramatizing the conflicts, contradictions and compromises of

resource extraction, Anderson's revisionist-Western reveals a landscape with a history of dramatic, drastic change. At the centre of this is oil, the extraction of which exposes the repressed reality of environmental harm. Its emergence marking the return of a destructive and mutative force. The consequence of the oil rush is the scarring and pitting of the landscape through mining and pipelines. *TWBB* depicts the birth of an American anti-landscape, anticipating the denuded and polluted contemporary West. Underlying this process of extraction is the logic of growth; the film shows the disorienting speed of Californian development. The exponential growth of the mechanisms and corporate institutions of oil portrayed in *TWBB* indicates the troubled prospects of the Western environment. All of this meaning is concentrated on the mania of one man, Daniel Plainview. He is the silent object at the heart of the extractive sound and fury.

TWBB begins in 1898 and follows the rise of silver miner Daniel Plainview. In the film's opening sequences Plainview discovers a silver lode that allows him to start an oil drilling business. In 1902 he discovers oil near Los Angeles. During this period he also adopts the orphan child of one of his workers who was killed in an accident. The boy, named H.W. (Dillon Freasier), becomes his business partner, cynically exploited by Daniel to give the impression that he is a family man. The narrative moves forward to 1911, when Daniel is approached by Paul Sunday (Paul Dano) who tells him about oil deposits under his family's farm, in return for a finder's fee. Daniel arrives in the dirt-poor town of Little Boston and makes a deal with Paul's brother Eli Sunday (also played by Dano). The ambitious Eli hopes to fund a new church for his evangelical religious movement, and asks Daniel for \$10,000 to fund the project; in return Daniel gets the farm and then proceeds to buy the other properties in the area. A rivalry develops between the two, with Daniel dismissive of the sanctimonious and false Eli. The first well eventually produces oil, but the resulting gas explosion leaves H.W. deaf. Unable to come to terms with H.W.'s disability Daniel sends him away and replaces him with Henry (Kevin J. O'Connor), who arrived in Little Boston claiming to be his half-brother. With Henry as his partner Daniel rejects the offers of Standard Oil, in favour of building his own pipeline to the Pacific. This deal with Union Oil ensures his fortune. However, Daniel begins to suspect Henry is not who he claims to be and confronts him. Henry admits he is a fraud, and was in fact the friend of Daniel's half-brother, who died of tuberculosis. Enraged, Daniel kills and buries Henry. William Bundy (Hans Howes), the last holdout whose land Daniel needs access to for his pipeline, witnesses the killing and wants him to repent and be baptised in Eli's church in exchange for rights to his land. Eli uses the baptism as an opportunity to humiliate and humble Daniel. The final part of the film takes place in 1928. Daniel, now a wealthy man, lives as an alcoholic recluse in his large mansion. The newly-married H.W. wants to leave his father's company to start his own. Overcome by feelings of resentment and rejection Daniel lashes out at him and disowns him as his son. Later, he is visited by Eli, now in dire financial straits, who asks

him for money in return to full access to the Bundy property. Daniel agrees on the condition that Eli renounces his faith and admits that he is a 'false prophet'. Eli does so and is humiliated, and Daniel informs him that the Bundy property is now worthless. Daniel becomes further enraged and finally attacks Eli, beating him to death with a bowling pin. His final words to his butler, who discovers the murder scene, are: 'I'm finished'.

The story of Daniel Plainview possesses some of the features of the American Tycoon epic, in which the protagonist comes from a relatively lowly background and amasses a great fortune through force of will, all the while beset by personal shortcomings and wounding regrets. *Citizen Kane* and *Tycoon* (1947) established this genre as a model for prestige filmmaking, a means of dissecting the grand narrative of American capitalism through compellingly flawed characters. Philip Horne locates *TWBB* within the subgenre of the 'California capitalist epic'. Martin Scorsese's biopic of Howard Hughes, *The Aviator* (2004), reveals the dark, libidinal forces that shaped the development of California, and which lurk behind the glittering façade of celebrity and wealth. Horne also notes the connections between the evil industrialist Noah Cross, played by John Huston, in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* and Plainview. Where Plainview seeks and exploits oil as a means of securing power Cross looks to corner the water supply of California in order to control the destiny of the state. John Huston's portrayal of Noah Cross is significant because Huston was an important influence for the making of *TWBB*. Paul Thomas Anderson sent Huston's neo-Western *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948), as well as *Chinatown*, to Daniel Day-Lewis as a reference for his performance as Daniel Plainview (Sperb 189). *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* anticipates the contemporary Western, with its poignant portrayal of greed and moral compromise precipitated by the wealth of resources that the West had to offer. Gold is the cause of the violence and betrayal that marks Huston's film. The lure of resource wealth forces the characters to confront the desolateness of the landscape and the crimes that they are capable of committing in it. In *TWBB*, Anderson moves the anxieties and dilemmas of Western development that define Huston's narrative to California, the place and the moment of the frontier's closure. The end of the West, and the conflicts and opportunities that this creates, are intimately connected, in the Western genre, to the capitalist competition for valuable resources. The Western genre therefore provides the background against which the radical changes of *TWBB* can be played out. Philip Horne defines the process through which Californian capitalist sagas dramatize the features of the state's development:

To construct their stories of how California so quickly came to be what it is today, they individualise and pathologise the drive to power. In Anderson's disconcerting anti-epic, mining becomes an image of the human urge to dominate the earth – the blasting and drilling of the land to gouge out silver and oil, a dirty process that also involves as his title

implies the shedding of a good deal of blood.

TWBB reveals how the discontinuities and pathologies engendered by capitalism and environmental change converge in one man, Daniel Plainview. As a self-made man, Plainview stands in opposition to the corporate oilmen that he has dealings with; he antagonises a representative from Standard Oil, whose deal he turned down: 'You look like a fool, don't you Tilford?' In this respect Plainview maintains a little of the scepticism of corporate power and larger institutions that was a feature of classical Westerns, in which the farmer and the rugged cowboy were the models of economic activity in contrast to the corrupt forces of industry and politics that emanated from the east. Plainview is a small time player in comparison to the emerging petro-monopolies, despite the considerable impact he has on the landscape, economy and social structure of California. His rise to wealth and prominence reflects the rugged individualism that was identified by Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt as instrumental in the settling of the frontier. This act of self-making is shown in the opening sequences of *TWBB*. Plainview is first revealed in the depths of a shaft he has dug in search of silver; striking his pick into the earth, he is framed by the shining rock walls of the mine and silhouetted against blackness. The sparks from Plainview's pick evoke an act of creation, a ceremony akin to the fire-setting imagery that concludes both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. In McCarthy's narratives the conjuring of light in the darkness of the Western landscape may offer at least the possibility of transcendence, a glimpse of a space beyond his claustrophobic, gnostic worlds. In *TWBB*, the fire burning in the West is even more ambiguous, signalling both the sparking of Plainview's unrelenting desire as well as the incipient power of the West's dormant resources. Composer Jonny Greenwood's score assaults the audience from the opening shot of the desert; dissonant, screeching strings hint at the twisted, discordance at the core of Plainview and the narrative. George Toles identifies the unsettling effect created by the music in its contradiction of genre norms:

The strings put us in touch with the stifling heat of an alien landscape. The desert is instantly *heard* pitting itself against human intruders it has no use for... A John Ford Western typically situates us in similarly unaccommodating desert circumstances, but the majestic buttes in Monument Valley seem to rise up in sympathy with Ford's persevering settlers and lonely outsiders... The romantic scores Ford favours draw plentifully from traditional Western songs, songs that domesticate yearning, lonesomeness and the pleasurable strenuous discipline found at military outposts. Greenwood's strident music, by contrast resists accommodation of any sort.

The interaction between musical score and landscape imagery immediately creates a confounding effect. The classical Western score suggests the possibility of human connection and even solidarity whilst the angular modernism of Greenwood's music creates a sense of threat and emphasises social anomie and disconnection from the living environment. As the scene shifts to the mine there is silence. Toles argues that this is the moment at which the music finds the object that its dissonance expresses and identifies: the isolated, tormented figure of Plainview. The extreme

use of sound in *TWBB* has the effect of emphasising the pervasive silence and difficulty of expression that characterises Plainview and the narrative as a whole. The overwhelming deployment of music and the absence that this implies further identifies Plainview as a flawed and distorted Western archetype. He exhibits many of the qualities of the self-creating Western individualist but the impulses and drives of manifest destiny are directed inwards, towards his baffling personal pathologies. The antagonistic relationship between Plainview and the environment is at the heart of this anti-Western characterisation. Plainview emerges from the darkness of the shaft into the deeper darkness of the desert at night. He is seated on the foreground against a threatening and stormy sky, his fire barely able to withstand the strengthening wind. His crouched figure against the cold indicates the oppositional posture that he will maintain against the landscape he is destined to exploit. *TWBB* reveals the distorting effect that extractive relationships with the environment have on Western generic archetypes.

As *TWBB* progresses, the object of Plainview's extractive desires becomes the vast wealth represented by oil. The California oil boom of the eighteen nineties brought prosperity to a region that had previously been thought of as relatively poor in oil reserves. Oil historian Daniel Yergin sets out the pace of the change:

‘The growth of Californian production was dramatic – from 470,000 barrels in 1893 to 24 million barrels in 1903 – and, for most of the next dozen years, California was to lead the nation in oil production. By 1910, its output would reach 73 million barrels, more than that of any foreign nation, and 22 percent of total global production’ (82).

TWBB dramatizes the near instantaneous development of an impoverished frontier region through the atavistic power of oil discovery and exploitation. Oil is possessed of a mutative potential which had a transformative effect on American society and culture. The ramifications of the upheavals produced by oil were illustrated in Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel *Oil!*, of which *TWBB* was a loose adaptation. Sinclair's muckraking satire follows Bunny Ross and his father, self-made oil tycoon J. Arnold Ross. The murky dealings and outright corruption that were a feature of the California oil boom are laid out in gory detail, as are the political and social dynamics of extractive capitalism in the raw. Peter Hitchcock contrasts the social realist approach of Sinclair with P.T. Anderson's focus on the interpersonal dynamics of Plainview: ‘Everything about the history of the industry that had galvanised Sinclair's prose and given the struggles over oil vibrant kinesis is simply blacked out in the film’ (95). Hitchcock's analysis forms part of his counter-critique of Amitav's notion of the ‘oil encounter’ (*The Great Derangement* 75). Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, Ghosh noted the absence of oil narratives in American fiction, an absence he attributes to a societal disavowal of the bloody and unpleasant reality of oil extraction and the ideological contradictions that it reveals. However, Hitchcock suggests that as American hegemony has waned

the possibility of configuring and understanding the spectre of oil in American fiction has grown more feasible. *Oil!* represents a specifically American ‘oil encounter’ in which oil is shown to enable the enclosing of the vast space of the frontier through motorised travel, whilst American hegemony is established through the export of oil during the Great War (92-93). *TWBB* studiously avoids this immersion in the historical and political context appearing to be yet another missed encounter; however, Hitchcock persuasively argues that the ‘visual economy of oil logic’ (95) in the film exposes the existence of a particularly American oil ontology:

In one scene we see Plainview staring behind us at an oil blow-out that has caught fire. He is covered in oil and this accentuates his gaze, as his face also reflects the fire. We do not imagine his awe: we are essentially constructed by it. But surely it is the oil we desire that constitutes our separable self in this algebra of the modern? Indubitably; yet oil is only present by its reflection and not in its essence, in its logic of accumulation and violence. Plainview embodies this visual conundrum: he is oil’s medium but simultaneously its lack (96).

In this reading, oil constantly resists the reality of its extraction. In *TWBB* this absence is expressed through Daniel Plainview and his inability to form filial attachments.

Daniel Worden extends the analysis of the function of family in Anderson’s film. Through readings of *Giant* (1956), television series *Dallas* (1978-91) and *TWBB*, Worden reveals the way in which ‘oil culture [became] postwar US culture’ (441). The dramatic changes brought about by the oil economy transformed into an ideological consensus, with fossil-fuel culture saturating ‘aesthetic, affective, and family relations’ (441), Worden designates this process as ‘fossil-fuel futurity’. *Giant*, and to a lesser extent *Dallas*, show how oil both constructs and mutates normative family life. This process is hidden as both paradoxically return to the family as the solution to the problems caused by oil culture. In *TWBB*, Worden argues, the connection between oil and the ideological premises of American empire are laid bare: ‘natural resources are explicitly portrayed as the material upon which a set of norms and a vision of the future are constructed’ (458). Plainview begins the film in a primitive, pre-language state of nature, and only begins to form family attachments (to the adopted H.W.) when he discovers silver and begins his ascent. By the end of the film, H.W. has rejected the paternal bonds produced by oil. In reaction to the increasing sociopathy and megalomania of his adoptive father, H.W. chooses to leave and set up his own oil operation. Plainview is left entirely alone. H.W.’s exercise of agency points to a potential emancipation from the hermetic logic of ‘fossil-fuel futurity’, a way of rejecting the oil economy’s foundational position in the American family:

H.W. illustrates the political challenge of the film and a rupture in the ideological workings of fossil-fuel futurity. If H.W. can refuse family to pursue his own oil wells in Mexico, then it is conceivable that we, the audience, can inversely form alternative practices and modes of belonging that are not underwritten by fossil fuels. The way to imagine life

without oil might be to do what H.W. does: stop listening to oil's claims on us; turn a deaf ear to the intimate connection forged between oil, the American family, and futurity (Worden 460).

The extent to which H.W.'s disavowal of Plainview is also a repudiation of oil as the location of affect and family is complicated by H.W.'s continued involvement with the industry. He leaves with his new wife Mary, the marriage viewed by Plainview as an additional betrayal, perhaps incorporating a new family unit into the nexus of capitalism and resource extraction. However, the relationship between H.W. and Mary, which grows from friendship as children, is the only example in *TWBB* of a functioning and non-exploitative interpersonal relationship. By committing to the family he has chosen and rejecting Plainview's controlling influence, H.W. certainly attempts to overcome the distorting influence that oil has had on his father.

Oil and the process of its extraction and distribution underlie much of what we know as post-War American society and culture. Its influence is pervasive but often hidden – because of the difficulty and discomfort of the 'oil encounter', the culture industry often fails in the task of exposure and critique. *TWBB* contends with this problem of representation but it is also forced to address the moment of oil's spectacularly obvious emergence. The film is punctuated by gushers, the explosion of oil released from a highly pressurised reservoir. These arterial releases were an auspicious symbol of wealth but were also highly dangerous (H.W. is a victim of the gusher at Little Boston), prone to igniting and extremely damaging to the surrounding environment. In the period in which *TWBB* takes place, comparatively primitive drilling techniques resulted in many such explosions. In Anderson's rendering, these emergences possess the weight of revelation and ceremony, the construction of the oil derrick mirroring that of the newly built church. The metonymic linking of oil and blood and the associated sanguinary Christian symbolism thematically structures the film, almost to the point of redundancy and cliché. However, it is clear that the spectacular arrival of gas and oil is indicative of the sudden emergence of repressed internal forces in a merging of the psychological and the natural. *TWBB* shares aspects of other contemporary films in which nature and natural phenomena assert themselves despite the films appearing to be primarily concerned with interpersonal and social dynamics. Adrian Ivakhiv identifies in these moments of emergence an unconscious political-ecological structure. Building on Jameson's theory of 'the political unconscious', Ivakhiv argues that contemporary culture unconsciously reflects not only the social relations and psychic realities of uneven economics and global capitalism but also: 'the ways advanced industrial capitalism both commodifies and thoroughly transforms the natural world and our relationship with it' (99). Reading Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1994) and P.T. Anderson's *Magnolia* (2000), Ivakhiv claims that the point at which natural phenomena insert themselves into the action marks a return of the repressed or, in

Lacanian terms, an expression of the excessive Real. The oddness of this phenomena and the anxiety it produces is a function of the globalised understanding of political-ecology, the understanding that contemporary economic and social relations are predicated on environmental exploitation and damage: ‘this inward gaze – at interpersonal relations in the social fabric of the US and Canada – hides, or contains, a veiled recognition of the ‘strange weather’ transpiring outside, at the point where society meets that unmappable and uncanny Other of global nature’ (101). Climate change is the ultimate indicator of a ‘global’ nature, the unsettling presence that is continually repressed and disavowed and yet persistently and threateningly emerges. In *TWBB* the connection between oil, as the preeminent fossil fuel, and climate change is unambiguous. P.T. Anderson made efforts to ensure that the production was carbon-neutral by purchasing carbon offsets from NativeEnergy, a non-profit that promotes Native American family farms and community renewable energy projects (LeManger (81)). Whatever the dubious accounting or potentially cynical PR motives behind this decision it nevertheless indicates the extent to which the oil narrative of *TWBB* was freighted with the discourse of climate change. The burning column of oil that is the film’s defining image heralds the advent of a newly configured Western landscape. Climate change and the industrial processes that produce it have irrevocably altered the environment from which Plainview emerged. *TWBB* is immersed in this sense of loss and further threat.

Plainview is the agent through which the reshaping and degrading of the Californian West is enacted. The scarring, pitting and polluting that Plainview propagates compels viewers to consider the landscape that is being created: one of hostility, scarcity and extremity. David E. Nye has developed the term ‘Anti-Landscape’ as a way of defining and analysing landscapes that have become, through human activity, unliveable. The anti-landscape is the precise inverse of J.B. Jackson’s definition of landscape: ‘A composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence’ (Nye 11). Landscapes are rarely entirely ‘natural’; rather, they are spaces that human activity modifies and exploits, improves and damages. Even cities represent some accommodation between environmental forces and social imperatives. In the anti-landscape the notion of collective existence has been superseded by man-made environmental catastrophe. Examples include long-term no-go areas like Chernobyl as well as landscapes that have the potential to recuperate, such as the post-spill Gulf of Mexico or the gradually refilling Aral Sea. Anti-landscapes are diverse in location, timescale and severity. American anti-landscapes are often the result of industrial accidents or policy. The Grace Company operated a mine outside the town of Libby, Montana, unintentionally, and later intentionally, poisoning the area with asbestos (Nye (17)). Picher, Oklahoma became a ghost town after 170 million tonnes of lead and zinc mine refuse poisoned ground water (Nye 14). Extractive industry is an important influence on the creation of anti-landscapes. *TWBB* stages the confrontation between

the needs of industrial extraction and the physical and ecological structure of the Californian frontier.

The discovery of oil in Little Boston and the manifestation of that oil in the gusher lead immediately to localised damage and pollution. The first antagonistic confrontation between Plainview and Eli Sunday occurs at such a site, a waste pool of oil and water that is running unchecked from the well. The opening shot of the scene sees Eli walking past the pool, in which the sky is reflected in the iridescent black of the oil. The shocking, azure blue, cloud-dotted sky is a portal opened up into the bleakness of Plainview and Eli's muddy, industrial reality. The arresting surreality of the pastoral sky scape in the midst of a seemingly barren industrial waste is indicative of the dialectical nature of anti-landscapes. Despite anti-landscapes being associated with human failure, fear and loss they play an essential role in constructing a material understanding of all landscapes. Werner Bigell argues that: 'The pastoral countryside[...] cannot be fully understood without the background of its rejected others, the desert or the dump' (146). What is defined as a landscape or an anti-landscape is often informed by the cultural perspective of the observer. When this form of cultural projection is contrasted with material reality the result may be the appearance of an anti-landscape. Bigell employs as an example housing in Russia and the West. In the West collectivised Soviet era dwellings are viewed as bleak and inhospitable whilst the same sentiments exist in Russia towards the peripheral suburbs that dominate housing in Europe and America (145). The mystifying influence of culture acts as a barrier between viewers of a given landscape and any possible engagement with the reality of that landscape. However, in Bigell's analysis, the anti-landscape has the potential to productively destabilise such idealised projections:

Electricity and the sun do not make the night disappear, blackouts can suddenly switch off visual control, and also in a whiteout one experiences the disappearance of the horizon, confusing the sense of gravity. Both are disturbing because they remove control, but also exhilarating because they link us to the natural world (146).

Tellingly these forms of anti-landscape (e.g. a temporary blackout, a whiteout caused by transitory weather events) are relatively short-lived and benign in comparison to some of the environments that have resulted from industrial pollution and could conceivably be created by climate change. The entirely inhospitable natures of such environments renders all dialectically fruitful contact with them impossible and, within a narrative, implausible. However, *TWBB* occurs at a moment of becoming in which the transition from landscape to anti-landscape is subjective and contested. Glimpses of pristine Western landscapes exist alongside the infernal dioramas produced by Plainview's pumps. Plainview seems, of all the characters in the film, to be most intimately connected to the material nature of the landscape through his work. He is born from the silver mine and has an intense connection with the land he is exploiting. In his final confrontation with Eli, Plainview triumphantly reveals that the land Eli is hoping to profit off of has already been drained

of oil: 'I drink the blood of the lamb from Bandy's tract' and 'I drink your milkshake' he exclaims. The use of the imagery of thirst and consumption is revelatory of the maddened excesses of Plainview's capitalist id but it also points to the physical intimacy between him and the blood of the landscape, oil. This kind of embodied contact with the material Western environment does not prevent Plainview from plotting its metamorphosis into an anti-landscape. This contradiction reflects a wider preoccupation within the contemporary Western genre, the sense that a more profound understanding of the Western environment occurs only at the point of its terminal decline. This sense of loss projects forward into the unsettling future as climate change threatens to create radically hostile anti-landscapes across the region. The heightened appreciation of the natural world that such inhospitable environments may provoke seems a meagre consolation amidst the anxiety of the changing West.

Plainview seeks to escape the world he has had a hand in creating, his solipsism bordering on sociopathy causing him to withdraw from all social contact beyond the purely transactional: 'I want to earn enough money that I can get away from people'. The secluded mansion that he barricades himself away in is located in picturesque coastal California and surrounded by verdant trees; it is a pastoral fantasy supported by wholesale environmental destruction through extraction. Plainview's fortune is ultimately secured by the construction of a pipeline from his fields to the Pacific Ocean, allowing him to make a lucrative deal with Standard Oil. The rights to the Bandy tract that were necessary for the construction of the pipe are acquired after Plainview consents to being baptised by the vindictive Eli. Through the baptism the pipe acquires a sacred significance, and its progress is stately and unhindered. The result is a scar on the landscape, a vein stretching from the oil heartlands to the transnational oil market. This vector propagates the anti-landscape of Little Boston. The environmental implications of pipelines and the potential for spills are well known. Peter Maas, in his searing critique of the late oil industry, notes the dangers and iniquities of pipeline construction. He details the damaging pollution caused by Trans-Ecuadorean Oil Pipeline System and the global dimensions of oil extraction and transportation: 'Ecuador now produces 500,000 barrels a day, with the largest portions going to California. Whether it is irony, parody or farce, one of the most environmentally conscious states in America depends on oil from a region that has suffered a catastrophe to provide it' (83). The American West has transitioned from a producer of oil to a consumer, with pipelines forming a crucial part of the energy infrastructure that sustains the hyper-consumption of the post-Western frontier space. The visibility of pipelines and the invasive manner in which they cut through the landscape means that they are often lightning rods for protest. The pollution produced by the Ecuadorean pipelines has led to anti-American protests, where locals see the system as a physical manifestation of imperialism. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which transports oil from the Bakken shale formation in North Dakota to Illinois, was the subject of intense protest led by Native tribes in the Standing Rock

reservation who were concerned that the pipeline would threaten sacred burial grounds and pollute drinking water. The protests also reflected the growing understanding of the accelerating effect of pipelines on greenhouse gas emissions. It has been estimated that the DAPL will lock in the equivalent emissions of thirty coal power plants per year.¹² The recent history of the West shows the particular predictive power of Anderson's morality tale. In his retrospective of *There Will Be Blood* critic Peter Bradshaw identified the film as representative of its anxious era and anticipative of more trouble to come:

The noughties have seen a globalised phenomenon of paranoid, theocratic jihad matched with mendacious imperial adventure. The war on terror was what we were all talking about and it filtered into the movies in different ways. But Anderson's compelling movie was a premonition of the one war more terrible still – the one that will come when the fuel runs low and the global temperatures rise. *There Will Be Blood* was more than a film: it was a prophecy.

¹² See Stockman: 'The Dakota Access pipeline would be with us decades into the future. Once built and operating the economic incentives to keep it going will be hard to overcome. Every year it will be the source of carbon emissions equivalent to nearly 30 coal plants. Even though it may be the case that those emissions would anyway occur this year or next year, or five years from now, it cannot be the case that those emissions can occur in 20, 30 or 40 years from now. Building Dakota Access would be yet another barrier to the path to climate safety'.

Chapter five: *Deadwood*: Time, Scale and the Anthropocene

Despite the encroaching influence of climate change and environmental degradation, the contemporary American West still boasts areas of near pristine natural beauty. The Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana and the Tetons of Wyoming are just two examples of living ecosystems and landscapes that bear something of a resemblance to the West at the height of settler colonialism. However, alongside these zones of natural historical continuity exists the mass of Western hyper-development. The golf courses and skyscrapers of fast growing Phoenix, Arizona are dependent on hydrological engineering and air conditioning for their continued viability (Milman), whilst California's Silicon Valley drives the global economy through relentless technological innovation. The modern, urban West exists alongside the dwindling environments of the West's past. The contradictions that define the modern West arose from a historical process of rapid and disorientating change. Historians Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher detail the pace at which the frontier was settled and quickly filled: 'The first federal census in 1790 counted fewer than one hundred thousand Americans west of the Appalachians. Fifty years later there were more than seven million, better than 40 percent of the nation's population' (159). Amidst the vast scale and accelerated pace of frontier expansion the experience of individual Western subjects became abstracted from the process as a whole. Those who settled the West and began to develop the landscape and extract natural resources experienced waves of later arriving colonists as well as the encroaching influence of state power and the pressures of capital.

The HBO television series *Deadwood*, created by David Milch, is the contemporary Western that most effectively dramatises the transition from the anarchic frontier to the pacified West, and the discontinuities that this rapid change entailed. Milch's rendering of a historical mining settlement in South Dakota is populated with characters from the historical record, all of whom are struggling to adapt to the dizzying changes wrought by social and, crucially, environmental change. Confusion and turmoil characterises the residents of *Deadwood* as they experience a radically contracted sense of time, with events also occurring at a range of scales from the individual to the ecosystem. This extension and contraction of time and space reflects a key feature of living in and making culture in the Anthropocene. Critics have begun to come to terms with the difficulties of representation inherent to the phenomena of climate change. Climate change takes place over time spans much longer than individual human lives, and yet its effects can cause once familiar landscapes to become unrecognisable over the course of a significant weather event. It also occurs at scales and levels of complexity beyond the capacity of the individual to fully discern. Timothy Morton and Timothy Clark are two ecocritics who have, in different ways, identified the necessity of reckoning with the epistemological challenges of climate change and

suggested how art can meet those challenges in a productive manner¹³. *Deadwood* has its characters contend with a Western environment that is similarly beset by the problems of scale and time. By recreating a historical and specific Western town and containing all of its action within these hermetic boundaries, the show is particularly suited for dramatizing these pressures of scale and time in a changing environmental space. *Deadwood* reveals how the contemporary Western can use the historical context of Western expansion to throw light on the intractable contradictions of the Anthropocene.

In creating *Deadwood*, David Milch had to conduct a great deal of historical research into the development of the town and the history of the Black Hills: ‘over two years researching the history, visiting archives, reading contemporary newspapers, accounts, memoirs, biographies, living in the town’ (Jacobs 33). The Black Hills is an area of South Dakota that experienced a rapid influx of fortune seekers and entrepreneurs after the hills were found to contain large quantities of gold. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 gave the land over to the Sioux; as a result the territory is seen as lawless by the characters of *Deadwood*. In 1874 Lt Col George Custer led an expeditionary force into the Black Hills with the aim of establishing a fort. This led to more exploration of the area’s geology and precipitated the gold rush, which in turn aggravated the Sioux, leading, in 1876, to the famous Battle of Little Big Horn in which Custer was to lose his life. The camp established itself as a fully-fledged settlement as gold panning shifted to deep mining and law and order became more firmly established. The US government in 1877, in contravention of the 1868 treaty, annexed the native land, and this betrayal still remains as a point of contention for indigenous rights groups¹⁴.

Seth Bullock (played by Timothy Olyphant, the character is based on the famous frontiersman and friend of Theodore Roosevelt) and his companion and business partner Sol Star (John Hawkes) arrive in *Deadwood* after the death of Custer with the gold rush in full swing. Amidst this atmosphere of lawlessness and opportunity, Bullock and Star set up a business selling supplies to hopeful prospectors. This brings them into conflict with the camp’s de facto leader, the owner of The Gem Saloon, Al Swearengen (Ian McShane), who is himself looking to swindle Brom Garrett (Timothy Omundson), a wealthy easterner seeking to purchase a gold claim. After Garrett is killed by Swearengen’s hit man his wife Alma Garrett (Molly Parker) begins an affair with Bullock and chooses to stay in the camp. Eventually Bullock is made sheriff, a role he performs with barely controlled self-righteous fury, and attempts to control and pacify the many competing factions of Deadwood. Season three sees the arrival of the businessman and prospector

¹³ For a description of Morton and Clark’s thought see pages 20-21.

¹⁴ For an accessible historical overview of Deadwood and the Black Hills region see John Edward Ames *The Real Deadwood* (2004).

George Hearst (Gerald McRaney), a truly malevolent character (and historical actor) who seeks to take control of the territory's wealth through murder, bribery and intimidation. Weaved through the narrative over the three seasons are the stories of numerous other characters, many of them based on real historical figures who inhabited the town at in the eighteen seventies. These include the famous gunslinger Wild Bill Hickok (Keith Carradine), who was killed in the town, and his friend Calamity Jane (Robin Weigert), a drunk with a heart of gold. The lives of all of *Deadwood*'s inhabitants are intertwined with one another as they are buffeted by the winds of history and capitalism shaping the town and the hills. Milch and collaborators' great achievement was in creating a fully formed Western community, possessed of a complexity of human interaction that runs counter to the solipsism of the cowboy and the range.

Critical responses to *Deadwood* have revolved around two features of the series: language and the profane, as well as violence and American empire¹⁵. The intertextual nature of Milch's production and the linguistic fireworks of his florid prose were clear points of differentiation for *Deadwood*, as was the spectacular violence. However, even within these critiques of language and violence there exists a concern for the living environment and a preoccupation with the morality of inhabiting and changing a landscape. The series was a key part of 'The Golden Age' of HBO programming during which the network ascended to a position of critical and commercial dominance, marking a significant change in the industry. Gary R. Edgerton states: 'the branding line "It's Not TV, It's HBO" marked a transitional moment in the industry, when cable and satellite channels rather than the traditional broadcast networks became the first place to look for breakout programming' (32). *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *The Wire* (2002-2008) and *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) shifted the expectations that viewers and critics had for television. Novelistic, nuanced plots involving morally complex characters defined the HBO model and became the standard for 'quality television'. The praise that HBO's landmark series have received for their 'literary' qualities is, of course, problematic. Dean J. Defino argues that the terms elitist connotations obscure the particular features of HBO's long-form story telling (117-123), and suggests that whilst series like *The Wire* gesture towards the social realism of nineteenth-century fiction they maintain tropes and structural conventions that are specific to television and HBO.

¹⁵ There are three essay collections that, together, give a good sense of the range of critical responses to *Deadwood*. *Dirty Words in Deadwood* (Melody Graulich and Nicolas S. Witschi 2013) focuses on the literary and intertextual complexity of the series, with Milch at its centre as a particular kind of literary show runner. *The Last Western* (Jennifer Grieman and Paul Stasi 2012) approaches *Deadwood* from the perspective of the American empire now and then. The collection shows how capitalism, race and gender interact with the formation of empire in the series and how it reflects the anxieties resulting from the erosion of American hegemony. *Reading Deadwood* (David Lavery 2006) incorporates a variety of critical foci to assess the value of Milch's unique creation. The role of key characters is explored, as is the central role of women in the series. The organising topics of genre, the formation of Western society and the body complete the collection.

However, *Deadwood* is almost unique in its intertextuality and in the breadth of its literary influence. Creator David Milch has a background in literary criticism; he worked with prominent New Critics Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and R.W.B. Lewis on their survey *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (1973). In a profile for *The New Yorker* Milch identified Warren as his foremost intellectual and creative influence: ‘Mr. Warren maintained certain disciplines that were in a way the best lessons he gave to me. As a model, he was crucially important. He and I stayed close pretty much all the way through’ (Singer). Milch was involved with the prominent New Critics at a point in time in which much of the strict formalism of the movement’s past was being softened, in favour of a broader cultural studies approach. However, it is apparent that Milch remains sceptical of the turn towards continental theory that was happening during his time in academia. In conversation with Nathaniel Lewis, the son of R.W.B. Lewis, Milch makes clear his scepticism of the emerging theory:

It was turning things into a kind of parlor game and trying to find new words simply for their novelty, which obscured the meaning of things—there was this secret code... That was the blessing of working with your dad and Mr. Warren and Mr. Brooks: you go back to the thing itself, and you encounter it on its own terms, and you pray to be relieved of the bondage of preexisting expectations or interpretation (15).

It is possible to discern the trace of Milch’s academic training at Yale in the preoccupations of *Deadwood*. A reverence for the text is present in the literary allusions and connections of his scripts. Whilst the narrative of *Deadwood* necessarily engages with history and culture as contexts that effect representation, Milch nevertheless maintains the right to address the past ‘on its own terms’ with the belief that his writing can access something approaching truth. Milch’s criticism of deconstruction is, of course, a partial and well-trodden one. The charges of obscurantism and jargon are familiar critiques of post-structuralism; however, there may be value in Milch’s defence of New Criticism. Milch’s commitment to the potential of language to approach and represent truth is valuable in a landscape being transformed by climate change. As will be shown, a significant part of the *Deadwood* project is the attempt to stage the reality of environmental exploitation and the effects of resource extraction on a landscape and society. Dramatising the Anthropocene requires the bravura confidence of a storyteller like David Milch, confident in the capacity of language to excavate meaning and the real. The fevered desperation of Milch’s West can be located in Robert Penn Warren’s novel *All the King’s Men* (1946): ‘For West is where we all plan to go some day. It is where you go when the land gives out and the old-field pines encroach. It is where you go when you get the letter saying: Flee, all is discovered’ (405). Contained within this passage is the promise of Deadwood, escape, hope and opportunity. However, the allure of the town and the West is also a consequence of depletion and resource extraction. Deadwood is last refuge ‘when the land gives out’. Part of Milch’s critical heritage is this clear-eyed assessment of the West as it

existed and will continue.

Milch's writing, on police shows *Hills Street Blues* (1981-1987) and *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005) as well as *Deadwood*, was fortified by his extensive literary education. His broad knowledge of the American canon is revealed in the many intertextual resonances present in *Deadwood*. Melody Graulich has detailed the extent and specifics of the debt owed by Milch and *Deadwood* to the likes of Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne:

The language of the U.S. literary tradition echoes – perhaps thunders – throughout *Deadwood*. When Wild Bill offers Alma Garret a warning after her husband's murder that she should return to the East, he asks her to imagine the sound of thunder, adding, 'I told your husband to head home to avoid a dark result. But I didn't say it in thunder. Listen to the thunder' (1.4). His comment identifies one kind of sensibility – 'a great power of blackness' – that informs *Deadwood*, as well as hints at Hickok's melancholy, qualities Melville describes as central to Hawthorne's fiction (11).

The series echoes with multiple layers of reference and allusion, down to the level of the dialogue, which has come to define Milch's epic. The theatricality of the interlocutors of *Deadwood* has led many critics to describe the language of the series as 'Shakespearean'. The characters interact with a baroque combination of period appropriate syntax and shockingly contemporary profanity. An early example of this mix of the arcane and the profane comes in episode one during prospector Whitney Ellsworth's (Jim Beaver) conversation with Swarengen: 'I may a fucked my life up flatter than hammered shit, but I stand here before you today beholden to no human cocksucker. And workin' a payin' fuckin' gold claim' (1.1). The practical purpose of contemporary profanity in *Deadwood* was multi faceted. Modern swearwords are clearly more impactful than the archaic insults of the historical West (exclamations like 'dang my melt' and 'blam-jam' may not have had the desired effect on HBO audiences). Milch himself has gestured towards the need to differentiate *Deadwood* from monolithic notions of the classical Western genre:

So one big element is the idea of the Western in culture. When people say, "That's not how they talked," what they're really saying is "That's not the movies I used to go to." You're trying to erode a sort of secondary distortion, assault a pre-existing idea about the imaginative reality of the Western. Some of that is accomplished by profanity and some by more elevated rhetoric. Which is to say, rhetoric beyond what would be expected of the common man of 1876. When you watch the television show, every part of it is a lie agreed upon (Piafsky 138-139).

The language of *Deadwood*, in Milch's reading, attempts to distinguish itself from the deadening influence of genre that proceeds it. By shocking its viewers out of their complacent assumptions about what a Western should be, *Deadwood* is able to gesture towards a more profound emotional and thematic authenticity. If Milch is correct then the series' elevated, 'Shakespearean' conversations are part of a 'lie agreed upon' in his words, one that has the effect of engendering

‘internal emotional coherence’ (Piafsky 139). The noble lie of the language of *Deadwood* is reminiscent of the elevation of Cormac McCarthy’s Western prose. In both texts the lives of proletarian Western subjects are expressed in a poetic, imagistic register in contrast to the naturalism of most Western narratives. And, in both cases the intention and effect of this writing choice is to reassert the Western as a site of historical significance and of emotional and thematic profundity. Such exaggerations echo debates around the representation of climate change in art and the media. By rigidly adhering to the cautious estimates of climate science, climate change communicators may fail to dramatise the stark reality of the threat. Perhaps, as is the case in *Deadwood*, literary exaggeration could be called upon in order to shock complacent assumptions about the climate system. The linguistic peculiarities *Deadwood* are indicative of an effort to express the constipated truths of Western frontier culture. Tim Steckline extends this notion of expressive revelation by arguing that *Deadwood*’s oft remarked upon profanity is merely a symptom of deferred or arrested emotional catharsis (46). Shock and revulsion towards profanity hampers an examination of the many emissions and purges that mark the narrative of *Deadwood* ‘in all their earthiness’ (46). The attempt to construct a social order in *Deadwood* through the purging of ‘social pollution’ is expressed symbolically in the bodily catharsis of many of the series’ characters; just think of the prevalence of vomiting and urination on the streets of the camp or Swearengen’s battle to expel his kidney stone. Ultimately though, this process is shown to be a halting and uncertain one. Final catharsis and a stable social order may not be possible in *Deadwood*.

It appears that the brutality of *Deadwood*’s discourse functions, at times inefficiently, as a means of expressing truths about the nature of the camp’s founding and future. As a result, the profanity and floridity of Milch’s scripts also reveals the compromised moral position of *Deadwood*’s residents in relation to other aspects of frontier colonialism, namely exploitation of the natural world. The strongest clue for this supposition comes from an interview of Milch by Keith Carradine that appears in the season one DVD extras. Asked by Carradine to expound on the peculiarities of the language and obscenity of *Deadwood*, Milch commented:

I think that language, both obscene and complicated, was one of the few resources of society that was available to these people... It’s very well documented that the obscenity of the West was striking, but the obscenity of mining camps was unbelievable. And there was a reason for that, which had to do with the very fundamental quality of their behavior: they were raping the land. They weren’t growing anything, they weren’t respecting the cycles of nature, they were taking... The relentless obscenity of the miner was a way of announcing the compatibility of his spirit with the world in which he found himself.

In Steckline’s analysis, profanity is designed to shock the viewer whilst obscuring the even more obscene acts of societal purging. In Milch’s statement the profane and the baroque also serve a duel

function. Language is used as a shield, held up against the harsh realities of the mining camp and the moral compromises that living on stolen land entails. Obscenity also functions as a survival mechanism, allowing *Deadwood*'s subjects to inhabit and adapt to the hostility of a despoiled landscape. The linguistic armature of *Deadwood* is, in part, formed by its citizens in reaction to a deep sense of alienation from the landscape which they inhabit. The prospectors and miners of *Deadwood* are engaged in a frenzied act of looting and therefore must protect themselves from the hostility of a society and an ecosystem that they themselves are responsible for. Swearengen uses the obscure insult 'Hoopleheads' to refer to the gullible fortune seekers of the town. The rapacious but guileless denizens of the camp are further defined by this appellation, a new type of Western subject completely at odds in their surroundings, with only the rough new language of the Black Hills to deflect from their precarity.

The presence of a changing Western landscape and natural order can also be felt in analyses of *Deadwood* that address the series' depiction of violence and American empire. Paul Stasi and Jennifer Greiman make the case that *Deadwood* reveals the way in which the role of the individual has evolved to the current moment of American imperial malaise:

Deadwood suggests that the evacuation of individual agency felt in the twenty-first century has been with us all along, and that its contemporary manifestations have their origins in the imperial capitalism of mid-nineteenth-century territorial expansion. *Deadwood* is thus a modernizing narrative, but one that refuses to posit modernity as a story of either unending progress or as the fall from some Edenic perfection. Instead, what we find is that the violence of the frontier is matched, if not superseded, by the corruption of the nation-state and the brute force of consolidated capital (3-4).

Violence – and who is permitted to use it – is at the heart of this analysis. Stasi and Greiman argue that Swearengen, a villain who we the audience come to root for by virtue of his charisma and perverse loyalty, represents the erosion of agency from the subject. In the final episode of the series Swearengen is forced to kill one of his prostitutes at the behest of the vindictive George Hearst so that Hearst will agree to leave the camp. The complexity of Swearengen's position as an individual with agency is apparent here:

...Al Swearengen... demonstrate[s] not only the inefficacy of that subject but also, and more importantly, the violence that has always accompanied the heroic subject's ability to act. Forcing us to endure the brutality of Swearengen's reign, *Deadwood* manages, by constructing an even more monstrous villain in Hearst, to make us nostalgic for an agency we know to be entirely destructive (Stasi and Greiman 9).

Deadwood shows the violence of the primordial frontier to be no more or less corrosive than that practiced by the forces of the state and capital as they begin to foreclose the potential for individual agency. Rather, Swearengen and the other characters' loss of agency gestures forward towards the

overbearing influence of state surveillance, the carceral system and the excesses of financial capital. However, whilst acknowledging that the ‘Old World’ violence of Swearengen should not be rehabilitated in opposition to the impersonal violence of a capitalist like Hearst, it is important to recognise the areas where the two diverge, Hearst for the worse. Stasi and Greiman helpfully identify the point of schism between the two in Swearengen’s complaint about the scope of Hearst’s ambition: ‘But there’s no practical need for him to run the fucking camp. That’s out of scale. It’s out of proportion, and it’s a warped unnatural impulse’ (3.1). In other words: ‘Hearst represents a will to dominate that is in excess of his actual needs’ (Stasi and Greiman 7). This question of scale marks a point at which the narrative of *Deadwood* intersects with the key problematic features of the Anthropocene.

Climate change presents a number of significant obstacles to understanding at the level of the individual. As a phenomenon it is distributed across a wide range of scales – from the global impact of melting ice caps and rising sea levels to the local experience of destructive weather events, such as a storm or a heat wave – seemingly random events are connected to a global climate system. Some regions experience far more severe consequences than others, for example island nations threatened with inundation by rising sea levels in the near future. Moral responsibility is also unevenly distributed: all individuals who produce carbon are implicated in the crisis. And yet, consumption and green house gas emissions are heavily weighted towards the global north and towards the largest fossil fuel exploiting multinational corporations. Time is another factor affecting a full comprehension of climate change. Climate science deals in prognostications about future weather patterns and temperatures. The worst impacts of climate change may not be felt until the end of the century, and yet extreme weather is already a fact of life, driving migration and destabilising regions. Climate change can seem an unlikely doomsday somewhere in the far future, or it can make itself felt in the unease of an unseasonable warm spell.

Climate change has instantiated what Timothy Morton names the ‘Age of Asymmetry’, a new state of nonhuman awareness that recognises that: ‘nonhuman beings are responsible for the next moment of human history and thinking’ (201). The definition and function of the hyperobject is structured around a series of paradoxical relations, as Ursula Heise sets out in her review of the book:

Nature understood as hyperobjects is not over yonder – yet it is unknowable. Hyperobjects confront us with the strangeness of the world, but at the same time they create greater “intimacy” with our fellow objects. Humans are “responsible” for certain hyperobjects such as global warming and nuclear radiation, but Morton challenges Marxist and environmentalist accounts of which human groups, structures, or institutions should be held responsible (461).

Morton suggests we accept that contradictory forces can exist within the form of the hyperobject, that this elementary confusion is a result of the status of the hyper object as both all pervasive and unknowable.

Timothy Clark identifies 'scale framing' as an inhibiting influence on Anthropocene fictions, borrowing Adam Trexler's term. Literary narratives tend to be unable to relate the scale of the individual or the community to the larger scale of a global climate. Clark goes on to show how a multi-scalar form of reading can be applied to texts through an analysis Raymond Carver's *Elephant* (1988). Carver's short story is traditionally read as a portrait of family dynamics and societal angst, Clark chooses instead to look beyond the family to the scale framing of the Anthropocene. In this reading the characters are implicated in the global processes of capitalism, resource consumption and carbon emissions. Whilst characters may be caught up in the injustices of contemporary western society, they are also implicated in the crisis through their consumption habits and reliance on fossil fuels: 'Events or actions that might have seemed straightforward in the past – the narrator's helping his family – emerge as following an invisible, environmental dynamic bound up with the contingency of how many other people are also actively engaged in practices that produce pollution or waste, or take up land' (103).

Morton and Clark's conceptualising of scale and time in the Anthropocene is a valuable tool for considering the contemporary Western. Westerns reveal the primordial interactions between the frontier's early inhabitants and the confounding influence of the hyperobjects of nascent American capitalism and colonialism. The nature of climate change, as hyperobject, also results in a confrontation with the dislocations of the Anthropocene in contemporary Westerns. Conceptualising scale is also valuable for an understanding of the environmental resonances of texts like *Deadwood*. Clark's methodology advocates for the imposition of different and larger scales onto seemingly hermetic or parochial narratives. This form of proactive intervention extends the possibilities for ecocritical readings of the Western and climate change. With the potential of this form of analysis established, I will go on to demonstrate the features of the Anthropocene Western as they present themselves in *Deadwood*.

The opening scene of the first episode of *Deadwood* is the only one that takes place outside of the camp itself. Sheriff Bullock spends his last night as sheriff in the Montana territories minding a horse thief who has been sentenced to hang in the morning. On the completion of the sentence Bullock, and his associate Sol Star, plan to travel to the new mining camp and set up a hardware and mining supply store. The prisoner, Clell Watson, makes clear the attraction of the unincorporated territory: 'No law at all in Deadwood? Is that true?'. To which Bullock responds:

‘Bein’ on Indian land’. Deadwood is a space outside of established eastern industrial society. Erik Altenbernd and Alex Young argue that lawlessness of Deadwood allegorises the use of violence and the state of exception in the post-9/11 era (126-150). The violence of Deadwood is both extra-legal and direct result of campaign of racial genocide orchestrated by government, and as such is a reflection of the Bush administration’s conduct in the War on Terror. Once Bullock reaches Deadwood no outside is shown to the audience. Characters come and go at times, but the camera does not stray from the confines of the camp and the surrounding Black Hills. And yet, the camp is far from hermetic; it is influenced and buffeted by the rapid developments of the frontier. Paul Stasi and Jennifer Greiman identify Deadwood and the Black Hills as a site of what Karl Marx termed ‘primitive accumulation’. In Marx’s terms this is the moment at which pre-capitalist modes of production are transformed in capitalist modes of production. In the case of the Black Hills of Deadwood Stasi and Greiman identify this as occurring: ...in *Deadwood*’s second and third seasons, as the mining baron George Hearst’s ‘murderous engine’ expropriates all the independent miners from their land, ostensibly through a neutral appeal to economic self-interest and historical necessity, but actually through violence, intimidation, deception, and murder’ (6). The America of the late nineteenth century was defined by uneven development, with a settled bourgeois society in the East and a frontier that was in process of being opened up to capitalism. In this context the discreteness of the camp in the series, its intentional narrative isolation, seems to represent an anthropocentric impulse in the face of a changing environment. The residents of Deadwood are resistant to outside forces throughout the series and they are keen always to preserve the integrity of the camp and the claims they have to the surrounding gold resources. However, they are continually assailed by what we could describe as hyperobjects. The plague that brings the camp to its knees, the annexation of the camp and the potential loss of gold claims, the arrival of George Hearst’s deputy Francis Walcott (Garrett Dillahunt) and the arrival of Hearst himself. Diseases, the government, extractive capitalism, all encroach on the sovereign discreteness of the camp. And environmental change brought about by human action also intrudes into the life of the camp through the logging and mining that scar and transform the hills. The hermetic impulse is an understandable one in the Anthropocene. However, *Deadwood* exposes the extent to which individuals in the West are compelled to reckon with the impact of the non-human. The principal quality that the residents of Deadwood must display is adaptation.

The camp is not, of course, established in virgin wilderness. The town and the mining operations in the Black Hills require the pacification and eventual destruction of the Sioux people who call the hills home. The presence of native peoples in *Deadwood* is negligible. The only instances of contact between the Sioux and the camp are when Bullock is attacked as he goes in search of Wild Bill’s murderer, and Al Swearengen talks to the decapitated head of an Indian he calls ‘Chief’. The Native American presence is erased in *Deadwood* with only these violent

glimpses emerging as totems of what has been lost. Deadwood is structured upon this absence, and all of the following layers of infrastructure, society and culture are built upon the erasure of the Sioux. But the trace of the Sioux has the effect of gesturing to the past of the landscape. There has been a process of overwriting, as the white settlers developed the territory and extracted the resources in the hills. The decapitated Indian that Swearengen commits his monologues to acts as an interlocutor between the defacto leader of the nineteenth-century camp and the continuity of inhabitation and culture that preceded the depredations of the settlers. Swearengen addresses the Chief on his balcony: 'Don't the decapitated deserve recreation, Chief? As much, if not more so, than those of us yet not dismembered. Whew. You, fuckin' Chief, are uglier than before, when you were also not a treat to the eyes. Oh! Suffer the low vantage. It's better for my standing in the camp' (2.20). Swearengen's vantage point from the balcony of the Gem saloon affords a perspective of the camp that takes in the totality of Deadwood. The Chief represents a moment of access for Swearengen to the wider framing of environmental change. The rotting head of the Chief is a shocking revelation of both a cultural past, destroyed by genocide, and of the living environment that sustained that culture. Bullock's encounter with the Sioux warrior also provokes a revelation. In her discussion of the body in *Deadwood*, Erin Hill states that:

...Bullock, traumatized by his injuries, recalls the senselessness of his violent, bodily struggle with the Indian, and the sheer luck that allowed him to land a deathblow. Through this experience, Bullock seems to recognize that his own mission was not governed by justice but by personal vengeance, and, when he finally catches McCall, decides to turn him over to the US authorities instead of killing him (176).

For Bullock, the tragedy and futility of the warrior's death precipitates a change in ethics, one that aligns more appropriately with the burgeoning civilisation in Deadwood. Again, engagement with the past of the West and its environment, as represented in the almost entirely absent figure of the Indian, allows for a reorientation of perspectives that incorporates additional frames of environmental history and other ways of living in the West.

Time in the Anthropocene is defined by acceleration. Climate change has the capacity to rapidly worsen weather effects and to develop at a pace that defies our normal understanding of geological processes. And yet, paradoxically, the worst effects of climate change can seem remote possibilities, horrors hiding somewhere in the distance yet without tangible form. *Deadwood* is similarly concerned with the pace of change and the way in which individual subjects are at the mercy of unpredictable and disruptive change. The town itself is the ultimate indicator of rapid change in the frontier. The physical structure of Deadwood changes as the series progresses. Bullock and Sol Star build their hardware shop and later Bullock constructs his own house. Cy Tolliver (Powers Booth) renovates and opens the Bella Union casino, an upscale establishment that

signals the direction that the camp is proceeding in. The opening of a school by Bullock's wife Martha (Anna Gunn), is a progressive change that signals the camp's transition toward a bourgeois society and its attendant values. Swearengen is, as usual, most attuned to the changes occurring in the camp. He pays particular attention to the arrival of the telegraph poles to the camp, identifying them as harbingers of the arrival of the outside world and capital to Deadwood. Linda Mizejewski argues that the poles specifically represent the encroaching influence of industrialist George Hearst: '...Hearst's power is far more ranging than brute violence; his is corporate power, institutional and economic, buoyed by the forces of industrial capitalism that presage the end of the frontier, first glimpsed in the telegraph lines that Swearengen recognizes as the end of his omnipotence' (192). Swearengen confronts Blazanov (Pasha D. Lychnikoff), the newly arrived telegraph operator: 'Oh, no no no. How do you do? You are the master of the fuckin' secret code and all the other fuckin' secret things, isn't that right, huh?' (2.20). Swearengen associates the new technology of the telegraph with the unwelcome intrusion of an outside world defined by uncertainty. Development brings with it change that is fundamentally inaccessible to the original inhabitants of Deadwood.

The arrival of George Hearst to the camp also heralds the final enclosure of the territory and the triumph of capitalism. Hearst is a truly monstrous figure, obsessed with the pursuit of gold and the power it brings. He uses intimidation, corruption and murder to gradually take control of the most profitable gold claims operated by the residents of Deadwood. Overnight the social fabric of Deadwood is disrupted beyond recognition as Hearst's organisation drives out the prospectors who built the camp and institutes a brutal form of monopoly capitalism in which mine workers are exploited and mistreated. The depiction of Hearst's company mines in *Deadwood* anticipates the scarring impact of contemporary mining: the extraction of value from the environment of Black Hills is rapacious and destructive. Hearst also corrupts the democratic process, installing yes men into the newly formed governmental structures. Timothy Clark employs the concept of 'unframing' to describe the practice of reading texts at larger scales. By unframing the centre of the narrative (in the case of *Deadwood* this is frontier society and its complications) we can uncover the influence of the Anthropocene frame. The workings of extractive industry in *Deadwood*, complete with corruption similar to that practiced by contemporary oil companies, are of course a product of the settled and industrialising West. However, the rush for resources in the series also gestures towards the global impact of insatiable resource consumption and how that demand creates inequality and violence in resource cursed societies. The greed of the gold-seekers also has resonances at the global scale. The prospectors of *Deadwood* evidence something approaching resource addiction, a reflection of Western consumption habits as they are now.

Hearst himself is deeply at odds with the camp, and with any notion of society in general. Hearst believes that his single-minded focus on and ability to find gold or 'the colour' is his blessing. Finding gold for Hearst is equivalent to accessing the truth of the world through his own will to power. The inability of the Deadwood citizenry to appreciate Hearst's mission leads to embittered isolation:

I hate these places, Odell, because the truth that I know, the promise that I bring, the necessities I'm prepared to accept make me outcast. Isn't that foolish? Isn't that foolishness? An old man disabused long ago of certain yearnings and hopes as to how he would be held by his fellows, and yet I weep (3.31).

Hearst's alienation from Deadwood society is contrasted with the exuberant and diverse forms of community found amongst the characters of the series. Jennilyn Merten's reading of violence in *Deadwood* argues that it is often paradoxically associated with intimacy and forms of community:

Deadwood's characters reach out tentatively toward one another in spite of or through the psychological and physical violence they inflict on one another. Yet their emotional development as characters evolves from the emphasis the series places on community and collective survival, which Milch examines using the Wild West's mythically atavistic conditions. Violence is the process by which the intimacy and proximity of community are worked out (148).

Swearingen embodies these seemingly contradictory impulses. He is at times shockingly violent towards Trixie (Paula Malcomson), a whore at the Gem saloon, but also displays a disarming tenderness to her as the series progresses. His conflict with Bullock almost results in murder, but as Deadwood is threatened by encroaching forces he and Bullock work together to resist the influence of Hearst. Daniel Worden also shows how community in *Deadwood* resists the anatomising and alienating movements of the neo-liberal state:

What makes Deadwood so complex is the fact that it does not seek to recuperate bourgeois values. Even when advocating for decency or public institutions such as prisons and schools, Deadwood's residents do so only at the intersection of individual interest and collective responsibility. Because Deadwood takes place outside of national boundaries yet in constant dialogue with them, it dramatizes neo-liberal subjectivity and its possibilities. From within aggressive individualism and the free market emerges, at least in Deadwood, an expansive and demanding sense of collectivity (241).

In this way, *Deadwood*, as a contemporary Western, shows potentially productive modes of community and affect in the face of dislocating change. The interactions that occur in the series are defined by language and intensely realised intimacy. As the effects of climate change and the Anthropocene intrude at all scales, the impulse towards collective survival evident in *Deadwood* shows the capacity of the Western myth to respond productively to the crisis.

Deadwood, almost in spite of its literary pretensions, manages to evoke a startlingly authentic Western mining settlement. In part this is due the historical inheritance of the series. Al Swearengen and Seth Bullock were historical figures who helped shape the territory. Wild Bill Hickok was killed in Deadwood and was mourned by Calamity Jane (played in the series by Robin Weigert). These figures rub shoulders with Milch's creations in a productive mixing, one that ensures that, as Jason Jacobs puts it: 'As *Deadwood* develops its stories, it uses a combination of sheer invention and interpretation of historical events to create a place that, while it has some grounding in historical reality, is never confined by it' (23). The comings and goings of the series broadly reflect the historical record, with landmark events, like the arrival of telegraph or the school, shaping many of the fictional goings on. The history of the Black Hills region also lends *Deadwood* much of its environmental subject matter. The gold-rich hills drew in speculators around whom the camp was built. This speculation is shown to have dramatic effects on the landscape of the region. Again, this is evidence of a collapsing of scale and temporal location. The commitment to historical accuracy in *Deadwood* comingles with the artifice of its language and characterisations. The past combined with the preoccupations of the present extends into the environment. The living landscape of *Deadwood*'s past contains within it the depleted form of its future.

The Black Hills remain an area of natural beauty and bio-diversity. However, the prognostications for the region look increasingly grim. A profile in Climate Nexus casts doubt on the viability of agricultural space in the region: 'Extreme heat will increase in the Great Plains region. Days where the maximum temperature exceeds 95 degrees Fahrenheit in the Northern Plains are projected to double by mid-century. Rising temperatures, persistent drought and aquifer depletion could threaten the long-term sustainability of the great plains'. The productive capacity of the land, so evident in *Deadwood*, is facing existential crisis. Milch's *Deadwood* is a town of abundance, filled with endless trinkets for sale to gullible 'hoopleheads'. Value is extracted directly from the earth and powers the burgeoning free market. The contrast with the potentially failing agricultural landscape of contemporary South Dakota is a stark one. The verdant hillsides, packed with trees, that were recreated for the series' exterior action also force us to consider the current state of Black Hills vegetation in a warming climate. A Minnesota Public Radio report quotes entomologist Kurt Allen saying: 'We are at the point in the Black Hills where whole hillsides are dying and that is not the effect we want. The scale of dead stands has grown to be too big'. The mass dieback of trees is a result of higher temperatures, drought and forest fires. *Deadwood* was itself named after the dead trees that were found in its gulch, again the past and the changing present collapse into one another. The enfolding of the historical frontier into the waning contemporary West produces a melancholy comparison. However, this act of comparison in itself is a valuable tool for relating to the Anthropocene in the West. It is tyrants like Hearst who lay

claim to the future as their sole property, rejecting the potential for dialogue between the mythology of the historical West and the uncertainty of the West to come. Jennilyn Merten details an angry exchange between the commissioner and a group of miners angry about the uncertain status of their claims. The commissioner smugly exclaims:

“You cannot fuck the future; the future fucks you!” (2.5). But if the miners have lost their chance to alter the future regarding their claims, they haven’t lost the ability to make the commissioner pay for his role in determining the future. The commissioner quickly finds the verbal architecture he is hiding behind no match for the immediacy of his physical peril (161).

In the Anthropocene capital and entrenched political power maintain a stranglehold on possible futures. Anything that deviates from the orthodoxy of markets and growth, even in the face of extinction, is rendered unthinkable by the discourse. The value of *Deadwood* lies in its capacity to link the past of the West with disruptive strategies for imagining collective survival in the future, perhaps bloodying some noses on the way out.

Chapter six: The Intrusion of Climate in *The Revenant*

Defending the use of spectacular violence in his 2015 Western *The Revenant*, director Alejandro González Iñárritu argued that the blood and viscera that marked the film were essential for achieving his stated goal of authenticity: ‘I’ve heard people say the movie is violent, [...] But there is no gratuitous violence. These guys were eating animals, wearing animals; they were threatened by accidents, diseases, tribes, wars. This is the real world. This isn’t pasteurized’ (Segal). The attempt to render the early West in all of its un-sanitised ‘realness’ resulted in a production process defined by an almost masochistic commitment to the grime, discomfort and gore of the frontiersman existence. The result of this committed engagement with the environment of the West is a film that reveals many of the challenges posed to the Western genre by the creeping intrusion of climate change. In this chapter, I will show how *The Revenant* gestures towards a productively immersed kind of Western environmental authenticity whilst also exhibiting the discontinuities and gaps in representation engendered by the changing Western space.

The nature and possibility of authenticity is complex in the context of both the Western as a genre and the West as a living environment¹⁶. The Western genre has been defined by the discourse of authenticity versus inauthenticity, history versus myth. Western writers and filmmakers are often engaged in an attempt to render the reality of the Western space, and yet the West is of course constructed through the interplay of mythology and cultural discourse. Art set in the Western space cannot claim a privileged access to the real. Similarly, ecocritical thought is sceptical of the notion of authentic wilderness that *The Revenant* leans heavily upon¹⁷. Our conceptions of a landscape or ecology without humanity ignore the persistent trace of human activity and subjectivity. And yet, despite the inherent limitations of representing the frontier, moments of interaction with the authentic do emerge in *The Revenant*. The gruelling battle with nature that characterised the production process is one site of this emergence of the living frontier. This exuberant interaction with the ecological and social realities of the Western space is also evident in the full-throated environmental advocacy of both Iñárritu and star Leonardo DiCaprio. These impulses are most evident in *A World Unseen*, the documentary that accompanied the film. However, on closer examination the complications of representing the primordial West rear their head. The process of adaptation from the historical record to a Hollywood script results in a phoney resolution that erases the complexities of the narrative’s protagonist Hugh Glass. Visual style and sound design also have to navigate the complexities of authenticity, attempting to salvage

¹⁶ For a full discussion of the complex resonances of wilderness and authenticity in the Western see pages 19-20.

¹⁷ The collection *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996), edited by William Cronon, is an early and bracing corrective of authenticity rhetoric and thinking in the environmental movement.

something of the living environment from a mediated wilderness. The unreal, or hyperreal, is evident in the computer-generated animals that populate and punctuate *The Revenant*. These ghostly impressions of animals are revelatory of the denuded reality of the Western ecosystem. Finally, I will show how the changing climate poses the ultimate challenge to what we might consider the authentic Western. Climate change intruded on the film's production, forcing changes in location and process. The difficulty of making *The Revenant* in a West experiencing the wrenching dislocations of climate change, points to a precarious and contingent future.

The early ideologues of Westward expansion identified the West as both the motive force of American progress and the location of a truly authentic American character. This is evident in Theodore Roosevelt's autobiography in which he extolls the virtues of his former cowboy existence: 'I do not believe there ever was any life more attractive to a vigorous young fellow than life on a cattle ranch in those days. It was a fine, healthy life, too; it taught a man self-reliance, hardihood, and the value of instant decision [...] I enjoyed the life to the full' (73). Roosevelt grafted the masculinity of rancher and the Rough Riders onto the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner. The phlegmatic sons of the soil that populated Turner's West were joined in Roosevelt's rendering by the heroic patriarchs who wrested the land from the natives for white civilisation. Free from the strictures of urban living and the sclerotic institutions of the old East, the character of the Western subject was forged through a rough and tumble interaction with wilderness. The authentic Westerner lived off the land, eschewed the pretensions of the East, was practical, proactive, and an inviolable individual. This figure of stoic authenticity became attractive to a culture that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, was beginning to value the real above the imitative. Miles Orvell identified this transition as a response to the technological changes that allowed for mass scale reproductions and resulted in a culture of 'rounded generalities' (xxvii). In this reading, the movement towards authenticity gave rise to the innovations of modernism. The literature of the West also displays this impulse. Narratives of the West were primarily concerned with historical authenticity and realness of the forbidding Western landscape. Nathaniel Lewis argues that, in the context of the West, authenticity is defined as being: 'above all, original and real' (5). Originality was necessary to counteract the reproductive logic of the emerging consumer market whilst the desire for realness was connected to the rise of the individual. Taking his cues from the thought of ethicist Charles Taylor, Lewis contends: 'While modern culture seems to encourage us to explore individually our own higher latitudes, so this thinking goes, it also encourages us to evaluate the hidden depths of public figures' (4). Western characters came to represent a desirable, sovereign individuality free from the contradictions and compromises of modernity. Lee Clark Mitchell identifies this persistent demand that Western authors concern themselves primarily with authenticity in the cataloguing of real locations within fictional narratives: 'cowboy westerns, which share with other popular genres (spy thrillers, detective

novels) a deep investment in assumed authenticity, requiring footnotes be strung around like barbed wire to verify unlikely locales, outrageous garb, and improbable activities all within the realm of the actual, the authentic' (96). James Fenimore Cooper, alongside later authors such as Wallace Stegner, Ivan Doig, and William Kitteridge, are writers who could be accused of fetishizing authenticity at the expense of literary experimentation or literariness itself. The demand that the Western be authentic can potentially limit the ability of Western narratives to respond to their context in novel and provocative ways.

The desire for authenticity also looms over the Western film genre. Westerns, from silent films and through the classical period, presented a history of frontier expansion that bolstered the narrative of manifest destiny and elided the reality of racial conflict and genocide. In his analysis of the early Western, Scott Simmon identifies the silent film *The Invaders* (1912) – directed by Thomas H. Ince and Francis Ford – as a point of inflection at which a rough and ready truthfulness was in evidence despite the pressures of the burgeoning settler myth. In Simmon's reading, the film's narrative of treaty-breaking surveyors and their violent interactions with indigenous people is possessed of a primitive form of authenticity that is a result of its proto-Western nature. The film tells multiple stories without centring on the trials of a particular Western hero archetype. Instead the collective nature of the production resulted in a film that represents history as driven by processes and collective action: 'No single individual is essential to the process of history, just as no one is essential to the process of filmmaking' (73). Ultimately, Hollywood would reject this form of redistributive narrative history in favour of established stars and the doctrine of heroic individualism. Simmons hints at the reasons for this in his discussion of the films of Al Jennings and Nell Shipman, two independent Western filmmakers in the mould of Ince and Ford: 'If Jennings and Shipman are the regional dead-ends in independent silent Westerns, it's also because the 'real' was never an industry goal. "The Western picture seems a constant temptation to 'realism' of a most undesirable variety," warned *Moving Picture World* in 1911; the filmmakers "give us too close a view of 'hold-ups,' hangings, lynchings, massacres..." (68). To accurately depict the racial violence of the historical frontier would be to reveal the uncomfortable truth of manifest destiny, that the great gains of the frontier were wrested by force from the indigenous inhabitants of the West. Better to lean on a quickly hardening mythology and the sturdy individuals that would come to embody it. The passing of the historical West and the instantiation of the ideologically constructed frontier have created a genre that is well aware of its status as myth whilst maintaining an almost neurotic attachment to the possibility of authenticity. Moreover, the focus on myth and ideology present in revisionist Westerns is the precise mechanism through which the Western gains access to a vital, contemporary sense of the real. Neil Campbell makes this explicit point in his work on the post-Western: 'the Western genre, rather than collapse,

actually found a “project of positive creation” through which to interrogate the very ideological frameworks that had conjured it into being in the first place’ (3).

One such ideological framework that contemporary Westerns are increasingly compelled to address is the notion of the West as a wilderness. The landscape and ecology of the American West is itself a repository of authenticity, a pristine but wild environment against which the sovereign individuals of the genre can be defined. The frontier’s wildness, its untrammelled openness, distinguishes it from both the pastoral, cultivated landscapes of the old world and the industrial development of the Eastern states. Naming the frontier as wilderness was also a feature of colonial ideology. The West was a blank space upon which the operations of manifest destiny could be pursued. Such a framing of course effaces pre-existing native cultures, reducing them to just another part of the romantic wild, a feature to be overcome in the manner of a river or a mountain range. As the frontier was settled and pacified, and whatever mystery its landscape contained was made known, wilderness came to embody lost notions of masculine identity and authentic American character. Roosevelt oversaw a huge expansion of the national park administration and created the United States Forest Service in 1905. The committed imperialist recognised the value in protecting the dwindling wild spaces of the continent.

The story of the production of *The Revenant* would certainly seem to indicate a committed engagement with the Western environment. The film is a loose retelling of the story of nineteenth-century fur trapper Hugh Glass, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Set in 1823 in the unorganised territories that would become Montana and South Dakota, the narrative follows Glass as he acts as a guide for a group of fellow trappers, led by Captain Andrew Henry (Domhnall Gleeson), on an expedition into hostile country. Whilst preparing their spoils for transport the group is attacked by an Arikara war party and forced to flee. Whilst scouting ahead to facilitate their escape Glass is attacked and critically injured by a grizzly bear protecting its cubs. John Fitzgerald, played by Tom Hardy, is left with an inexperienced party member Jim Poulter and Glass’s mixed race son, Hawk (Forest Goodluck), to look after the seemingly mortally wounded Glass. Eager to leave and claim his reward Fitzgerald attempts to smother Glass but ends up killing Hawk, who had tried to protect his father. Fitzgerald lies to Poulter and convinces him to leave Glass for dead. However, Glass miraculously recovers and proceeds to drag himself across the frozen landscape back towards Fort Kiowa and salvation. Surviving many trials and tribulations Glass makes it back to the fort where he is informed that Fitzgerald in fact murdered Hawk. Glass sets out with Captain Henry to kill Fitzgerald, who has fled from the fort. In the ensuing standoff Henry is killed, but Glass is able to trick and disable Fitzgerald. Ultimately, the Arikara kill Fitzgerald and Glass is left recovering in the frozen landscape.

The film achieved a mostly laudatory critical response, with particular praise being given to its brutal and visceral evocations of the antediluvian frontier and the human and animal suffering that existence there entailed. In *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw wrote that the film: ‘expose[s] you to the elements. You are out in a piercingly painful cold, under an endless, pitiless sky. This is not an immersion that feels like a sensual surrender; it’s closer to having your skin peeled’ (Bradshaw). Iñárritu was awarded the Oscar for best director, whilst DiCaprio received the best actor commendation. Praise was heaped on the film in part due to its professed authenticity, a desire to faithfully represent the harsh material reality of its subject matter. To do this required an almost absurd level of commitment. Iñárritu shot in natural light in extremely challenging weather conditions, pushing both the budget and the release schedule to breaking point. DiCaprio’s suffering became something of Hollywood legend, hauling one hundred pound bearskins up mountainsides and consuming a raw bison liver (DiCaprio is a vegetarian). Quoted in *The Hollywood Reporter*, unknown crewmembers described the shoot as ‘a living hell’ (Masters). Iñárritu’s commitment to shooting outdoors and away from the green screen and digital effects caused the production to overrun on time and budget. His response to the complaints was blunt: ‘If we ended up in greenscreen with coffee and everybody having a good time, everybody will be happy, but most likely the film would be a piece of shit’ (2015). This kind of muscular, uncompromising filmmaking is reminiscent of other auteur-driven productions such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), both films in which the difficulty of their creation ultimately contributed to their critical regard. However, these films differ from *The Revenant* partly because the difficulties in their making have been associated with their filming locations in the global south, the Philippines in the case of *Apocalypse Now* and Peru and Brazil for *Fitzcarraldo*. In contrast it was issues emanating from the familiar environment of the American West that dogged Iñárritu’s film.

Iñárritu has explicitly stated the rationale behind the masochistic difficulty of the filming process. He argues that such extreme techniques were essential for accessing an authentic representation of wilderness and were also an essential part of the film’s environmental advocacy. These sentiments are most clearly stated in the documentary that accompanied the film titled *A World Unseen: The Revenant*, directed by Eliot Rausch. *A World Unseen* structures the ‘making of’ story of *The Revenant* around a journey made by the actor Forest Goodluck (who plays Glass’ son Hawk) and his family to the Fort Berthold reservation in North Dakota to: ‘explore their history and the lasting realities of their ancestral home’ (*A World Unseen*). Goodluck’s family and forebears have borne witness to the environmental changes wrought by white settlers and extractive industry – in the documentary Goodluck reveals the hurt caused by a dam that inundated historic tribal lands. The experience of Native Americans animates the environmentalism of the production: Goodluck’s reconnection with the lost landscapes of his past is presented as an expression of

authenticity. The documentary deploys the trope of the ecological Indian to support and cement the critique developed in *The Revenant* itself. Alongside Goodluck's narrative, the documentary presents foreboding imagery of the contemporary West, in particular the gas flaring from plants processing fossil fuels of the Bakken shale region. Historic environmental exploitation is linked to the present and the future. DiCaprio argues that the fur trappers were the antecedents of the contemporary carbon rush economy, equally heedless of the long-term consequences of their acquisitiveness. The looming uncertainties of climate change were clearly present in the construction of *The Revenant*'s ecological conscience. This pragmatic concern for the future of the Western space coupled with straightforward calls for action that incorporate the perspectives of Native Americans is a valuable example of what a Western might aim to achieve amidst a changing climate. However, Iñárritu also claims that going out into the West, as it now exists, is a form self-actualising therapy; he states: 'You have to be a little, kind of, crazy to embark on a film like this. The physicality of it, the setting, the nature as a transformative experience [sic]. That was exactly what I wanted, personally, to go through. In my personal life' (*A World Unseen*). Here Iñárritu reflects the simplified, transactional relationship with the living world present in reductive forms of environmentalism. This is an impulse that threatens to override productive engagement with the changing West in favour of the mystifying rhetoric of self-help and authenticity.

There are other crucial areas in *The Revenant* where authenticity as a *modus operandi* becomes less apparent. For example, there are a number of discrepancies between the narrative of the film and the historical record of Glass' journey. Of course it would be wrong to overly criticise the film for the necessary changes enforced by the adaptation process, and in any case Glass' own account of his escape was written down years later and was no doubt embroidered. However, the adaptation does contain some problematic embellishments. *The Revenant* gives Glass as son, Hawk, who works alongside him as a scout and trapper. Glass is also given a tragic backstory in which American soldiers murder Hawk's mother, a nameless Pawnee Indian woman. By adding this sentimental backstory and character motivation, Glass is softened and made more sympathetic. As opposed to a driven loner on the outskirts of society, he is a family man, and ultimately, a victim. It also allows for a – perhaps too easy – conflation of Glass' personal tragedy and suffering with the destruction of Native peoples and cultures. Here, *The Revenant* falls into the trap of Westerns like *Dances With Wolves* (1990), in which a white male character acts as a saviour or proxy for noble but unfortunately doomed Native Americans. The film also deviates from the historical record in its conclusion. The real Hugh Glass did not get his revenge. In the end he let the two men who betrayed him go. Iñárritu cannot help but reach for narrative closure, which again seems at odds with the stated goal of authenticity. The moral compromises and failures of the historical frontier are elided in favour of a more compelling revenge fantasy. What then are we to make of the director's reasoning for the self-imposed difficulty and discomfort of his process?

Iñárritu claims that: ‘We are less and less used to be exposed to the real elements and try to solve it with the reality [sic] [...] It’s a transforming experience’ (*A World Unseen*). The search for forms of authentic experience in the West – through committed, material immersion – is certainly a project that has value and yet such efforts are inevitably complicated by anthropocentric discourses. However, it is possible to discern productive moments of immersion and revelation in *The Revenant*. And beyond that, the pressures of environmental disruption and climate change have the capacity to intrude into the narrative, disrupting the very identity of the ‘authentic’ West.

Leonardo DiCaprio makes the claim that the gruelling methodology of the filmmaking process resulted in a particularly involving final product, a film with the capacity to immerse the audience in a faithful representation of the frontier: ‘What Alejandro accomplishes is... his ability to put you there... this almost virtual reality where you really feel like you’re out in the elements with these characters...’ (*A World Unseen*). And indeed, the film employs a range of techniques to expand the frame and envelop the viewer’s senses. The opening shot of a river running beneath trees is accompanied by lush, aural landscape where the sound of water envelopes the scene in the absence of any score. This is first of a sequence of scenes in which Glass is in water submerged entirely (later, escaping the Arikara, and in his final showdown with Fitzgerald). These literal immersions, and the cloaking soundtrack of moving water that accompany them, have the effect of anchoring the film in a visceral sense of physicality. The sound of icy running water produces an empathic reaction in viewers, an innate understanding that moment’s discomfort. Additionally, letting natural sounds takeover from non-diegetic inputs creates a sense of a dynamic, living environment, oblivious to human trials and suffering. In an interview, re-recording mixer Jon Taylor confirmed that natural sound was privileged in the mixing process: ‘The film is about nature so music never just takes over, it always has spaces so that the nature can come through and co-exist’ (Woodhall). Here *The Revenant* has something in common with other contemporary Westerns that choose to employ minimalist or modernist sound design. The film differs in the extent to which natural sounds were incorporated from the beginning. This is again indicative of a good faith attempt to wrest something of substance from the uncooperative and always mediated wilderness. The impossibility of achieving an entirely ‘natural’ soundscape does not prevent this partial but rugged commitment to the real.

Immersion is also a property of scale in *The Revenant*. The visual style of the film is defined by the contrast between wide shots of the sublime landscape and highly detailed close-ups. A shot of mountains illuminated by shafts of winter sun is set against the persistent, tight close-up of Glass’ scabbed and filthy face, surrounded by a halo of ragged furs. The camera also picks out smaller natural details, such as shrivelled plant life in snow or the movement of ants. In much the

same way, Glass is often shown as a tiny figure trudging through an overwhelming space. This is a conscious attempt to minimise the human, and to demonstrate a natural world utterly oblivious to the morality tale that happens to be occurring within it. However, the painterly quality of these landscape compositions, their beauty and symmetry, also has the effect of implying the human trace. Indeed the concept of immersion itself can have negative valence. The James Cameron science fiction epic *Avatar* (2009), which prompted a renaissance in three-dimensional films, is perhaps the premier contemporary example of self-consciously immersive cinema. However, as post-colonial critic Gautam Basu Thakur has persuasively argued, the narrative deploys colonial ideology in a way that would not be unfamiliar to the Western: 'Though its plot appears to do just the opposite – that is, galvanize opinion against violence perpetrated against indigenous populations of the globe – the film is rife with recognizable and clandestine acts of violent othering of the Other' (89). The 'white saviour' plot of *Avatar* reflects that of revisionist Westerns such as *Dances with Wolves*. It is also possible to read the immersion of *The Revenant* in a similar manner. Glass is an explorer in an exoticized world of racial difference, one in which he inhabits the privileged position of interlocutor and peacemaker between the colonisers and the colonised. The project of immersion is a worthwhile one, and can work affectively to more fully represent the Western space. However, the indulgence of immersion as an ideologically neutral act of exploration ignores the colonial power dynamics inherent to the act.

The visual language of *The Revenant* is most effective when it clearly articulates a message of environmental plunder and gestures to the changing climate. Two instances of this in particular bear much of the weight of the film's critique. First, in a fever dream Glass is presented with a pyramid of skulls taken from the great buffalo herds that were in the process of being wiped out by Glass' contemporaries. The shot echoes photos taken from the mid-nineteenth century featuring men standing on metres tall pile of buffalo carcasses. As a symbol of the excesses of settler plundering the images could not be any starker. Glass is himself awestruck by the extent of the pillaging that the pyramid represents. A link is also made with the contemporary West as the last pockets of biodiversity are squeezed by deregulation and environmental stresses exacerbated by climate change. The skulls stand for the continuity of violence and ecocidal mania in the history of the frontier. The ominous totemistic quality of the pyramid works alongside another sign in the film, namely the persistent imagery of melting ice and dripping water. Despite the cold the landscape of *The Revenant* is experiencing persistent change. The sound of this dissolution produces a palpable anxiety, emerging at moments of crisis in the narrative, most significantly when Glass sets off to hunt down Fitzgerald, the West of *The Revenant* dissolving into new forms that may yet prove even more hostile than that endured by Glass.

Iñárritu's attempt to exhibit the reality of the frontier and of wilderness is continually confounded by the ideological underpinnings of the Western genre and the persistence of the human presence in the landscape. Nevertheless moments of insight do emerge in *The Revenant* when environmental crisis is expressed with clarity. This play between the desire for authenticity and denial of the West as it is currently constituted is most apparent in the way in which the film depicts animals through the use of computer-generated imagery (CGI). The scene in which the mother bear attacks Glass whilst defending her cubs is shockingly violent and realistic, and only made possible through the use of computer graphics. The fur and saliva of the creature are lovingly recreated, while a stunt man mimicked its movements. The heightened viciousness of this encounter functioned effective publicity for the film. Such was the frisson surrounding the scene that the distributors were compelled to deny rumours regarding its content:

Arguably, the most unnerving, gaze-averting scene is the bear attack, which could do for the woods what "Jaws" did for the ocean. The horrors of this sequence are so rattling that Fox, in response to a preposterous report by The Drudge Report, released a statement that said, essentially, No, Mr. DiCaprio was not raped by a bear in the course of the film (Segal).

The fight with the grizzly was traumatising enough to be read as an act of violation, an extreme form of assault. And yet the creature itself did not exist. The scene was again praised for its authenticity, as a brutal evocation of what such an attack would be like. Yet again the 'reality' discourse around *The Revenant* constructs a notion of the authentic built on something that cannot possibly be real. There are many more such encounters with CGI creatures, including a herd of bison being attacked by wolves. The wolves in this instance arrive after Glass' pyramid of skulls dream. The animals' balletic hunting is contrasted with the industrial slaughter committed by the colonists. Later, in his hunger, Glass mimes shooting a gun at a herd of moose crossing a river. The stick in his hand is perhaps an acknowledgement of the equally contrived animals. Of course Glass is a hunter and wild animals were common and dangerous in the West of the eighteen twenties, and it would have been highly impractical to film these sequences without the use of CGI. However, there are occasions in which the appearance of CGI animals seems gratuitous. A raven is framed looking down on Glass as he lies by the river. As it moves its wings it is clear that it is computer generated. A dislocation is immediately created between the naturally lit, pristine authenticity of the wilderness landscape and the awkwardly animated raven approximation, squatting in the centre of the screen. An attempt has been made to populate an empty landscape with long dead fauna. William Brown, in his analysis of the function of CGI in film, argues that digital technologies have allowed the development of a 'Nonanthropocentric Character' (52) in contemporary cinema. Following Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming, Brown shows how the morphing capabilities of CGI destabilise settled notions that it is the human that is the subject of film: 'The

fact that digital cinema is a cinema in which fixed identity is replaced by the constantly shifting and fluid identities of non- or posthuman characters allows us easily to grasp the ways in which digital cinema is also potentially an antihumanist cinema' (77). *The Revenant*, however, seems to employ CGI in order to reinstate a relational hierarchy that was extinguished by human action. The visual effects in the film represent an effort to recreate a pre-lapsarian Western space. Shock at the interactions with CGI animals in *The Revenant* may be read as a reaction to the zombie resurrection of the once exuberantly vital biosphere.

The digital animals that shamle through *The Revenant* seem to be indicative of a cinematic natural world that makes claims to authenticity and yet is ultimately constructed. The world of the film seems to conform to Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulation and hyperreality (*Simulacra and Simulation*). In the post-modern world, Baudrillard argues, the proliferation of communication technologies and the subsequent ubiquity of images, signs and codes have created a simulated world that has supplanted the real one. In modernity, images were designed to represent a thing that was presumed to exist in the real world. However, in our condition of postmodernity the image has no referent outside of other images. These simulacra reflect one another in an endless and inescapable hall of mirrors. In this hermetic worldview we live in a state of hyperreality, in which the play of signs and images is both more real and more inherently attractive than any claims towards truth, the real or the natural. Indeed the scepticism towards stable truth and the real that Baudrillard's thought represents challenges the very existence of a natural world beyond the simulated. This is of course problematic for any analysis that is concerned with real threats to this environment. The risk of climate change and environmental destruction would seem to intensify the enfolding of the natural into the simulated. As landscape and ecosystems are changed they become further removed and abstracted from us. The CGI beasts of *The Revenant* may be indicative of an attempt to mask the absence of those animals and the ultimate simulation that is the Western landscape. Baudrillard depicts the silence of animals as a form of dissent against the logic of reason that leads to their exploitation by humans. Animals, as beings without language, are able to fully inhabit their own territory, free from the anxieties that afflict rootless humanity. The bear, the moose, the bison and the raven in Iñárritu's rendering are perhaps indicators of the impossibility of authentic non-human representation.

Acknowledging the echoes of simulation and the hyperreal in *The Revenant* risks an enervating sense of despair, as climate change only exacerbates the disconnection between the play of signs and the diminishing world outside. The failure of authenticity that the film represents could point to the essential futility of narratives that seek to represent the challenges facing the natural world. The Western genre faces the absence of the Western landscape. However, we can accept that claims to truth that rely on an essentialised 'nature' should be subject to scepticism

whilst also accepting a non-anthropocentric world possessed of inherent value, and that we can hope to preserve it. As Greg Garrard has put it: ‘Oriented toward practical problems of responsibility, we need not accept the dichotomy between backpacking in the Adirondacks and a cyborg existence on a simulated Earth’ (130). For all of its confusion around the desire for and possibility of authenticity, *The Revenant* maintains a practically orientated position with regards to the environment of the West.

Despite the naïve claims it makes to authenticity, *The Revenant* may provide an example of a Western that acknowledges the constructed nature of the West as wilderness, whilst nevertheless passionately advocating for an ethical engagement with a real and contingent nature. Both Iñárritu and DiCaprio have spoken about the film as containing environmental themes and a concern for the rapid denuding of a once pristine wilderness. DiCaprio has helmed two documentaries about climate change and the necessity of ameliorating its worst effects¹⁸. Whilst it is easy to dismiss such efforts as the affectations of Hollywood liberals it is clear that *The Revenant* was undertaken with a commitment to representing a living world that is under immense pressure. The behind the scenes documentary, *A World Unseen*, makes an explicit connection between the acquisitive impulses of the fur trappers and the contemporary rush to exploit shale oil and tar sands in the West. However, the most significant thing that the documentary and reporting around the film revealed was the way in which the production experienced the effects of climate change first hand. For the look and narrative of the film, Iñárritu required large amounts of snow to shoot in wilderness locations. The large majority of filming was scheduled to take place in Canada, around the city of Calgary. However, there was an unprecedented lack of snow in the region. DiCaprio detailed how locals he talked to had never experienced anything like it: ‘...when we were shooting in Calgary the natives from there, they were telling us they had never experienced that weather they were going through. Never in their lives’ (*A World Unseen*). The production was forced to undertake a ‘global search for snow’ (Miller 2015), ultimately landing on the southern tip of Argentina. Similar problems beset Quentin Tarantino’s Western *The Hateful Eight* (2015), with a lack of snow at high altitude in Colorado hampering the shooting schedule. The kinds of landscapes in which the Western was developed and defined visually are becoming increasingly inhospitable to Western narratives and filmmakers. One response could be a retreat inside and onto the green screen. Animated Westerns like *Rango* (2011) show that this might even produce thoughtful and creative films. But the Western is a genre that values venturing out into the West and experiencing, first hand, the incongruities and changes rapidly proliferating in the Anthropocene. Climate change poses a myriad of representational challenges whilst disrupting notions of authenticity. Despite this, an environmentally responsible Western can, like Hugh Glass,

¹⁸ *The 11th Hour* (2007), *Before the Flood* (2016)

drag itself back from the wilderness with news about the climate. The Western has always been about the interplay of signs, symbols and tropes (the black hat, the gun, the horse); but it has also always acknowledged the truth of lives lived in a particular landscape.

The task faced by Western filmmakers is a daunting one. How can genre films continue to be set and produced in a region that is becoming increasingly hostile to the process of filmmaking? It is easy to imagine future scenarios in which production is forced away from a particular location due to excessive heat or the effects of flooding. The ecology of what we consider the Western space is also threatened. As populations of larger vertebrates have dwindled so have those of the smaller creatures. Monarch butterflies, who roost in enormous numbers across California, have had their migration routes disrupted by changing weather patterns. Other changes in vegetation are occurring. One study suggests that climate change may play a role in the movement of tree populations westward, a strange echoing of historical settler movements and the frontier¹⁹. The flora and fauna that have provided the backdrop for Western narratives for one hundred years are rapidly disappearing or changing. Westerns that seek to depict an authentic version of the frontier past will be compelled to address the absence of anything resembling the historical West in which to tell their stories. As I have shown, *The Revenant* demonstrates two possible responses to climate change in the Western. First, the film is deeply animated by the desire for authenticity and attempts to create an immersive Western through visual and sound design with some success. However, this obsession with a 'real' West ignores the extent to which the frontier and the idea of wilderness have been constructed and deployed for ideological ends. With the rapid changes that the West is experiencing authenticity may prove a dead end for Western film. However, *The Revenant* also shows the value of a full-blooded engagement with the landscapes of the West. By heading out into the changing spaces of the genre, the makers of *The Revenant* were able to experience first-hand the discontinuities and dislocations of climate change. This may indicate the value of the Western, as chronicle of loss and change, in the Anthropocene.

¹⁹ See Meyer, *American Trees Are Moving West, and No One Knows Why*.

Chapter seven: The *Homesman* and *Rango*: Possible Futures for the Western

The Anthropocene is foreclosing the potential futures of the Western. Films that take as their location the environments of the American West will become increasingly unviable as changing weather patterns force productions to go to greater lengths to film in the West. The Western will be forced to consider new types of genre narratives that address the environmental crisis and the representational challenges of a myth detached from the historical environment of the West. The animated Western *Rango* (2011) and the anti-Western *The Homesman* (2014) are two films that suggest very different possible futures for the genre. *The Homesman* self-consciously rejects its Western inheritance and instead attempts to critique the genre through the centring of female characters. However, this endeavour is interrupted by the abrupt erasure of the central female protagonist. This is indicative of a West that is hostile to productive forms of dwelling. What remains in the landscape of *The Homesman* is a peculiar form of anti-social Western subject, persisting in defiance of a closing future. *Rango* takes the opposite approach to the pressures of the Anthropocene. The animation is an exuberant embrace of the genre tropes of the Western. The post-modern intertextuality of the film belies a real faith in the redemptive power of the Western narrative. Animated Westerns could be read as a retreat from the West but by embracing an environmentalist critique the film succeeds in dramatising the effects of climate. Climate change in *Rango* is linked to the end of the Western myth and the end of the habitable West. However, the film shows how the mythology of the frontier can be used, subversively, to articulate potentially positive models of community in the new environment of the West.

The failure of dwelling in the West in *The Homesman*

‘You sons of bitches! We are headed West, God damn it! If it harelips the godddamn devil’
(George Briggs, *The Homesman*)

This statement, hollered by the grizzled George Briggs (Tommy Lee Jones) as he heads back into the darkening West, epitomises the dynamic of repulsion and attraction that defines *The Homesman*. After barely surviving a harrowing journey from the Nebraska territories to Hebron, Iowa, Briggs nevertheless returns to the frontier with a defiant rejection of the comforts of encroaching civility. Briggs succeeds in his task as a homesman for three badly traumatised women, yet ultimately he is a failure, an anachronism out of step with a fast changing world. The film also ultimately fails in its post-Western ambitions. The narrative attempts to centre female experience in a Western context by addressing the psychological impact of patriarchal settler society. However, the structure of the narrative leads to the erasure of Mary Bee Cuddy (Hilary Swank) the only character that could potentially be read as a revisionist subversion of Western

gender roles. The post-Western critique of *The Homesman* is more effective when it focuses on the interaction between genre characters and an unreceptive Western environment. The film links environmental change and mental wellbeing and in doing so suggests a West that is alienating and psychologically destabilising, and that climate is the primary cause of this. *The Homesman* ultimately illustrates the essential disconnection between Western subjects and the landscape that they exploit. As Wallace Stegner put it: 'The homestead, though it was a stead of sorts, was never a home' (273). The desire for and difficulty in achieving a sense of home, echoes a wider debate around the most productive and ecologically sustainable forms of 'dwelling' in changing environments. *The Homesman* seems to show that the notion of a responsible and fulfilling form of long-term dwelling in an environment like the West is largely a fantasy. Despite this, the anarchic, anti-social Briggs fights a rear guard action in defence of his own way of authentic persistence.

Released in 2014 and directed by as well as co-starring Lee Jones the film follows protagonist Mary Bee Cuddy, a retired teacher living by herself in the farming community of Loup in the Nebraska territories. Cuddy is a strong, independent minded character and possesses sizable amounts of land and financial security. However, she is also lonely and isolated in her property. Her proposal to her neighbour Bob Giffen (Evan Jones) is rebuffed, on the grounds that she is: 'plain, and too bossy'. The town suffers a particularly harsh winter, the hardships of which are most strongly felt by three women, at the cost of their sanity. Arabella Sours (Grace Gummer) loses three children to diphtheria, Theoline Belknap (Miranda Otto) decides to kill one of her children when a poor harvest condemns her family to starvation, and Gro Svendsen (Sonja Richter) a Danish immigrant abused by her husband suffers a breakdown after the death of her mother. The community decides that the three women must be taken to Hebron, Iowa where a church that cares for the mentally ill can treat them. Ultimately, it is Cuddy who is left with the responsibility of transporting the women across the dangerous territory. For help doing this she enlists the gruff George Briggs (after saving him from being lynched for claim jumping) and promises him three hundred dollars if they succeed in getting the women to Hebron. During the journey they are confronted by hostile Indians, but are able to bribe their way out. An unscrupulous freighter then kidnaps Arabella; however, Briggs proves his worth by tracking her down. After stopping on the trail to tend to the desecrated grave of a young girl Cuddy becomes separated from Briggs and the wagon. Lost, she spends the night riding in circles attempting to find her way back to Briggs, when she eventually finds him she is distraught. In her vulnerable state she proposes to Briggs, but again he rebuffs her. Later in the evening she propositions him and, despite his initial hesitancy, they have sex. Briggs rises in the morning to find, in a moment of shocking abruptness, that Cuddy has committed suicide by hanging. He initially abandons the women, blaming them for Cuddy's death, but when they follow him he decides to finish the task he was given. They seek shelter and food in a newly constructed hotel, but are turned away by the snooty proprietor who does not want the

women tainting his high-class establishment. In retribution Briggs sets fire to the hotel, killing all inside. Finally, they arrive in Hebron and the women are delivered to the care of the church. Briggs buys a suit with his money and attempts to fit in with the bourgeois sensibilities of the town, but he is humiliated and turned away. Before returning to the West, in a wearily futile gesture, he asks a hotel maid to marry him, a final failed proposal. Carrying a headstone he has made for Cuddy in remorse, he boards the ferry and heads into the frontier, cursing the old world and West equally.

During promotional interviews for the film Lee Jones was reluctant to categorise the film as a Western. In an interview with *The Telegraph* a typically spiky Jones railed against lazy genre attribution:

“I don’t know what makes a film a western,”... “If you look at how people use the term ‘western’,” he continues, “you can only conclude that it means a movie that has big hats and horses. And if you really want to sound like you’ve been thinking, then you’ll use a term like ‘genre’.” He stops and umms. “But all the hell it seems to mean is big hats and horses. Which is not,” he says, fixing me with a look, “all that deeply analytical” (Collin).

The makers of the film have instead chosen to focus on the issues that the narrative seeks to highlight, namely feminism and imperialism. Hilary Swank suggested that: ‘This movie is a feminist movie because it really deals with the objectification and trivialisation of women. It takes place in the middle of the eighteen hundreds and it’s dealing with issues we still deal with today’ (Doperalski). *The Homesman* attempts to construct a non-Western Western, in which revisionist impulses overwhelm potentially stultifying genre conventions. The attempt to present feminist themes and to represent complex female characters is an essential element of this project. Anthropologist Maureen T. Schwartz has established a useful heuristic for considering whether a Western can be considered feminist. In her analysis feminist Westerns must display these characteristics:

...the plot must constitute a subversion of and a challenge to a mainstream text; the actions of a female protagonist must drive the plot rather than simply provide a reason for actions of the male character or characters. The dialogue of one or more female protagonist must challenge and subvert masculine discourse, as well as convey agency; and meanings must be plural rather than singular (46).

Of course such a list of desired features cannot be exhaustive; nevertheless the act of definition is helpful for considering the potential of the Western for operating in a manner that destabilises the patriarchal gender dynamics of the Western myth. *The Homesman* certainly displays many of these attributes. The plot bears a strong resemblance to a late John Wayne film *True Grit* (1969), directed by Henry Hathaway. In *True Grit* a plucky young woman demands the help of grizzled old-timer, the pair eventually forming a bond despite initial hostility on the part of the man. However, Mattie,

in Hathaway's film, is a child and therefore her relationship with Wayne's Rooster Cogburn character does not feature the complex dynamics of Cuddy and Brigg's mutual loneliness. In representing a middle aged woman coming to terms with the closing of her opportunities for happiness *The Homesman* does in fact subvert the girlish can-do optimism of a character like Mattie in *True Grit*. *The Homesman* also meets Schwartz's second criteria for a feminist Western. Cuddy is indeed the driving force of the narrative, volunteering for the journey and enlisting Briggs to help and certainly Cuddy's dialogue cuts against the grain of classical Western masculine dialogue. This is evidenced by her proposal to Bob Giffen, an act that, although it is unsuccessful, shows the character's agency despite the difficulties imposed by a male-dominated society. 'I live – uncommonly – alone', she declares, and it is this uncommon independence that deters her suitors. In addition, the film displays the requisite multiplicity of meanings required by Schwartz's methodology. In particular, the shocking suicide of Cuddy seems to arise from an opaque set of impulses within the character. The viewer is left to wonder at her true motivations and the extent of her depression and loneliness. Similarly, Brigg's violent act of burning down the hotel seems disproportionate, and points to underlying psychological factors; one cause could be post-traumatic stress. It seems clear that, in accordance with this broad template, *The Homesman* succeeds in its stated aim of telling a feminist story in a somewhat Western setting.

However, it is precisely moments like Cuddy's suicide that seem to run counter to a feminist reading of the film. Her death comes after her second proposal of marriage, this time to Briggs, is turned down and she is left humiliated and despairing. She proceeds to seduce him, but in the morning he wakes to find her dead. The suicide functions as a surprising erasure. Where previously the narrative focused on the principled agency of Cuddy, for the final third of the film we are left with the bumbling, confused Briggs. Her final despair in the face of an absent hetero-normative relationship points to an essential passivity in her character. Ultimately, her uncommon 'bossiness' and independence make it impossible for her to function outside of the patriarchal family unit. The film concludes with Briggs hauling the helpless women to safety. Again and again he is the authentic site of competence and action in the Western mould. It is Briggs who deals with the Indians, and it is he who rescues Arabella. The untimely removal of Cuddy from *The Homesman* indicates the difficulty of maintaining subversive gender dynamics within the Western genre. Jane Tompkins argues that failure, of the kind that Mary Bee Cuddy embodies, is indicative of the eventual submission of women in Westerns to dominant masculinity: 'The message ... in the case of women in Westerns generally, is that there's nothing to them. They may seem strong and resilient, fiery and resourceful at first, but when push comes to shove, as it always does, they crumble' (39). The film's attempts to present a compelling anti-Western feminist critique remains subject to the silencing impulses that occluded women in the most classical of Westerns.

The film's interaction with the legacy of colonisation is more successful, and is largely achieved through its depiction of a denuded and collapsing environment. By presenting a misanthropic and hostile West *The Homesman* throws doubt on the civilising process of Westward expansion. The landscape of nineteenth-century Nebraska, depicted in the film, is one that is already losing its biodiversity and ecological stability. The colonisation process, mired in famine and disease, begins to look like a fundamentally flawed project, and this in turn points to a potentially troubling future. Discussing the film's imperialist critique Lee Jones proposes that: '...there's an invitation in the film to consider that some of that price to be paid for [colonisation] is still due' (Collin). Settler colonisation resulted in both genocide and ecocide in the American West. The correlation between the two can be seen most starkly in the destruction of North American bison populations. Andrew C. Isenberg persuasively argues that: '...between 1870 and 1883, Euroamerican hunters slaughtered millions of bison. Federal authorities supported the hunt because they saw the extermination of the bison as a means to force Indians to submit to the reservation system' (3). Widespread environmental destruction in the West was an instrument of colonisation as well as a consequence of it. *The Homesman* effectively renders a used up Western landscape, in which survival necessitates scavenging and violence. The man who kidnaps Arabella is indeed a Buffalo hunter. In his rapacious desire he refuses to return her to Briggs and Cuddy and is eventually killed for his trouble. More conflict occurs when the wagon is stopped by a group of Pawnee Indians. The encounter is poised on a knife-edge; either the Pawnee can be bought off or they will kill the travellers and take everything. Cuddy asks: 'What do they want' and Briggs replies: 'Whatever we got. Trouble is they don't know what that is...' The Pawnee violently reject the property rights of the settler colonists and in so doing they reveal the colonised West as a space in which access to resources is fiercely contested. *The Homesman* depicts a newly colonised landscape and people struggling under the burden of settler demands.

As well as revealing the damage wrought by westward expansion, *The Homesman*'s Nebraska territory also highlights the connection between a rapidly changing environment and mental health. The inherent inhospitality of the settlers' world produces a destabilising and alienating effect on the three women that make up the 'cargo' that must be hauled by Cuddy and Briggs. A cruel winter and a poor harvest leaves Theoline Belknap without the food to support her family, distraught she kills her own child in an act of desperation. The Belknap farm is shown as entirely barren, with dead animals lying in the dust. Such imagery references the over grazing that destabilised the prairie regions leading to the dust bowl. All of Arabella Sour's three children are taken by disease causing her to suffer a complete nervous breakdown. The doll that she carries as a comfort in the wagon reveals her childhood desires for a secure life of material wealth and bourgeois comforts as opposed to the reality of the life she was brought to in the West by her husband. The poor living conditions and lack of access to medical help afforded them by the

Western environment condemns her and her family. Finally, Dutch immigrant Gro Svendsen's mother dies during the unrelenting winter snows. The mother's body is dragged outside by Gro's husband against her wishes. She screams at her husband: 'Take her inside! Ice. Cold. Frozen!' This indicates a reflexive abhorrence of the climate and environment of the West. The psychosis that she falls into after the death of her mother is, in part, attributable to climate and the unrelenting hostility of the Western space in the film. The women's husbands are either stubbornly pig-headed, woefully naïve or actively malign (in the case of Gro's abusive partner). Patriarchal control and violence combined with environmental pressures lead to the transportation of the three women. They are removed from the community because of the troubling implications of their madness. As Briggs puts it: 'People like to talk about death and taxes but when it comes to crazy... they stay hushed up'.

Scientific research has shown that climate change will have an adverse impact on mental health globally. In an editorial L.A. Page and L.M. Howard list a number of potential features of climate change that could produce mental health effects. One example is increasing heat waves:

...there is preliminary evidence that death by suicide may increase above a certain temperature threshold (Page et al. 2007; Qi et al. 2009), suggesting that psychological mechanisms such as impulsivity and aggression could be triggered during periods of hot weather. At present, research and policy interest is focused on the vulnerability to heat-related death of people with chronic physical illness and the elderly, but such interest has not been extended to the mentally ill (178).

The travails of *The Homesman*'s settler farmers also echo specific mental health crises of the Anthropocene. Neville R. Ellis and Glenn A. Albrecht conducted qualitative surveys of farmers in the Western-Australian wheat belt in order to investigate the connection between a strong 'sense of place' and mental illness. Their findings showed that: 'recently observed patterns of climate change have exacerbated farmers' worries about the weather, undermined notions of self-identity, and contributed to cumulative and chronic forms of place-based distress, culminating in heightened perceived risk of depression and suicide' (161). In *The Homesman*, mental illness also emerges from an unsettled notion of place. The women, as settlers, are unmoored from a landscape that gives them nothing in return for their sacrifice. The film also displays the symbols of climate changed induced farming anxiety, specifically the imagery of dust and dryness. In Ellis and Albrecht's study, dry weather was particularly disruptive for farmers' sense of place and wellbeing.

...farm environments hold personal significance as places of home, family and identity... the physical condition of the land and seasonal weather conditions have [a] bearing on family farmers' mental health and wellbeing. This was most evident in farmers' reactions to chronic dryness, and wind erosion in particular. Chronic dryness and resultant wind

erosion were found to challenge notions of the 'good farmer' identity, promoting significant distress as well as avoidance behaviours (166).

The Homesman employs the fearful imagery of drought and its mentally corrosive effects. The desaturated landscape evokes famine and infertility, the colour palette remaining subdued until Briggs gets close to a comparatively verdant Iowa. Dust is also an indicator of decay and madness. Gro Svendson's mother is shown sweeping the dust from the bare dirt floor of their home. Gro points out the futility of her work: 'Mom, you've lost your mind. Soil is made of dust. You intend to dust the dust?' Insanity here is directly tied to the ineradicable dust piles that in turn indicate a deeply hostile and infertile environment. This infertility and failure to nurture is present in all of the female characters: Cuddy is a spinster, Theoline kills her baby, Arabella's children die, Gro's husband berates her, saying: 'I give you my seed but you won't accept it'. Here we see a Western reproducing anxieties around infertility and the future that are also present in science fiction films like *Children of Men* (2006) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), both of which depict societies in which low birth rates threaten the species' survival²⁰. It is important to acknowledge that these fantasies of childlessness are necessarily heteronormative and have the potential to be reactionary, as established in Lee Edelman's attack on 'reproductive futurism' in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Despite this *The Homesman* remains valuable because it exemplifies the potential of the Western for representing Anthropocene fears of a changing climate. Deploying genre tropes from the eighteen fifties, the film illustrates the precarity of contemporary, post-colonial agriculture and the mental health impact of contingent environments. At the same time as this *The Homesman* echoes speculative dystopian themes of decay and collapse in all their – at times problematic – complexity.

George Briggs's journey to Hebron and back suggests one question most pressingly. Is the West a home at all? Wallace Stegner argued that the nature of Western living was migratory and transient; therefore the West could never be said to be a home and was, as a result, never cared for like one. The persistence of damaging farming practices amidst dry land ecology seemed to prove his theory correct. The West was colonised rapidly and its resources were exploited inexpertly and at great environmental cost. *The Homesman* dramatises this febrile period of expansion, just before the telegraph and the train fully bisected the region. This was a point in history in which the possibilities of creating a home and of dwelling within the West responsibly were being reckoned with. Perhaps the prevailing mode of idealised Western dwelling is georgic, particularly as promoted by Thomas Jefferson. Virgil's *Georgics* elevates the practical act of farming, along with the technical aspects of husbandry and soil management. The aim of this was to promote the restoration of Roman social values through the salutary example of country living. This agricultural

²⁰ See Kaplan, chapter 3, for an analysis of the pre-traumatic potential of these two films.

conception of dwelling was adapted to the American context by Jefferson, who emphasised the value of yeoman farmers. *In his Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) Jefferson proclaimed:

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth (244).

Agrarianism offered an attractive alternative to rapid industrialisation, in part because the work of farming itself had the capacity to shape the individual into a better person and a more valuable citizen. The post-Western yeoman farmers of *The Homesman* do not seem quite to fit within this conceptualisation of agrarian society. Their work, rather than elevating, disables, and diminishes them. Cuddy is the only community member of Loup who is running a prosperous farm, the rest labour on in a land that is killing their crops and livestock. The men remain locked to their farms while the women leave. The insanity of the yeoman farmers on their meagre plots easily matches that of their wives being driven east. The form of dwelling seen in *The Homesman* perhaps more closely represents the bioregionalist conception of responsible homemaking. As an environmental movement emerging from the Western United States, bioregionalism was initially and most clearly articulated by Kirkpatrick Sale's influential *Dwellers in the Land* (1985). Greg Garrard describes the thesis of Sale's work thus: '[it] explains the idea of a bioregion as an eco-political unit that respects the boundaries of pre-existing indigenous societies as well as the natural boundaries and constituencies of mountain range and watershed, ecosystem and biome' (89). Of course, the Western characters of *The Homesman* do not tolerate pre-existing indigenous societies as advocated by bioregionalism; however, they do exhibit a way of living that acknowledges a regional set of environmental factors. However, the film itself is structured in a regional manner. The movement from Loup to Hebron acknowledges no political boundaries but is evident by a change in vegetation from prairie grassland to greener woodland, and from the crossing of the river. These natural boundaries as well as the specific climate and hydrology that the settlers are forced to contend with would seem to indicate a way of dwelling that demands a notion of bioregional specificity.

The constantly changing contemporary global system complicates the idea of the bioregion. One issue is that bioregions may have to incorporate two presently hostile ethnic groupings. The most pressing issue facing bioregionalism, however, is migration: 'many of the indigenous societies whose knowledge and lococentric values bioregionalists admire are already thoroughly deracinated. Forced and voluntary ethnic migration has changed the world's cultural landscape just as the deliberate and accidental movement of plant and animal species has transformed the world's biogeographical landscape' (Garrard 90). Mitchell Thomashaw

acknowledges the discontinuities created by global migration and suggests that in order to incorporate these floating subjects into a grounded mode of dwelling it is vital to develop a 'cosmopolitan bioregionalism':

In the twenty-first century we face the prospect of multiple ecological and cultural diasporas, millions of migrants attempting to salvage their ecological and cultural integrity. ... In the twenty-first century, having a homeland will represent a profound privilege. Living-in-place may become a quaint anachronism, reinhabitation a yuppie utopian vision (123).

The migrant farmers of *The Homesman* would seem to perfectly fit the mould of subjects attempting to craft a place for themselves within the environment of a non-indigenous bioregion. Briggs is a character struggling to place himself between competing visions of home and dwelling. He is not a farmer and seems at times repulsed by the West and his experiences taming it as a soldier. However, he is also not welcome in Hebron, as he lacks all the class distinctions that would allow him to exist there. When he tries to gamble in a local bar he is told: 'You're not socially acceptable here see'. The suffering of the pioneers and men like Briggs is quickly exploited by capital as it moves in to claim the spoils after the dirty work of colonisation has been done. Briggs's burning down of the hotel seems like a rebuke to the civilising influences who would have no more need for men like him. Briggs instead embodies a stubborn form of persistence, an isolated Western existence. Disconnected from any sense of belonging Briggs's path is not a sustainable one in the Anthropocene. The pressures of climate change require collective action and a notion of the universal whilst acknowledging the complicated ethics of dwelling. However, for Briggs, the dead end of Western wandering is his only option, but the retreat into isolation and alienation is also one that faces us in the Anthropocene.

Productive Western futures in *Rango*

Rango is an entirely computer animated Western of a unique kind. The narrative follows the misadventures of a chameleon, voiced by Johnny Depp, who becomes stranded in the Mojave desert when his terrarium falls out of the back of his owner's car. He comes across an armadillo (Alfred Molina) that directs him to the town of Dirt, a clichéd replica of a Western town in miniature that is wholly reliant on a limited water supply for survival. The unworldly and spindly chameleon chooses to adopt the persona of rough outlaw and proceeds to get in trouble with a Gila monster, Bad Bill (Ray Winstone). As they fight, Bad Bill is scared away by a hawk, who whilst chasing Rango is crushed by an empty water tower. The townsfolk mistakenly assume that Rango is responsible for killing the Hawk and the town's tortoise mayor (Ned Beatty) appoints him sheriff. At the prompting of desert iguana and love interest, Beans (Isla Fisher), Rango investigates

what has happened to the town's missing water reserves. In the course of his investigations, Rango discovers the murder by drowning of the town's banker Mr Merrimack. He also discovers that the mayor has been buying up land around Dirt in order to construct a new, modern city. After confronting the mayor, Rango is driven out of the town by the fearsome Rattlesnake Jake (Bill Nighy), and in the process, forced to admit to the townsfolk that he made up his identity and is not any kind of hero. He flees the town, passes out in the desert and is woken by the mythical 'Spirit of the West' (Timothy Olyphant) who proceeds to tell him to go back to the town and make things right. On his way back, Rango discovers that an emergency shut-off valve in a pipeline to Las Vegas controls Dirt's water supply. The mayor is using the valve to cause a water shortage in Dirt so that he can buy up the land of those forced to move. Rango returns to Dirt to confront Jake and the mayor but is forced to surrender when Beans' life is threatened. The mayor proceeds to turn on Jake as the last symbol of the old West, but Rango is able to escape just in time and save Jake's life. Impressed and grateful, Jake drags the screaming mayor out into the desert. Finally, the water is restored and the town is saved.

The film is defined by its oddness and originality. A. O. Scott compares *Rango* favourably to other cookie-cutter animations aimed at a younger audience: '...this rambling, anarchic tale is gratifyingly fresh and eccentric. Much of the time you don't quite know where it is going, which is high praise indeed given the slick predictability that governs most other entertainments of its kind'. Director Gore Verbinski is most well known as the man behind the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series. As with the early films in that series, *Rango* is invested with a weirdness that marks it apart from other industry creations. Part of this weirdness is due to the post-modern, intertextual references that Verbinski is fond of sprinkling through his films. *Pirates* is notable for Johnny Depp's homage to Keith Richards in his performance of Captain Jack Sparrow. *Rango* is replete with such moments of pop culture reference. The character of Rango is reminiscent of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, whom Depp had previously depicted in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998). *Rango* is a product of this layering of references. The mayor's noirish plot to control the town's water supply is a pastiche of Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), the mayor being modelled on the evil tycoon Noah Cross. The Western genre itself is also a huge source of references. Rango refers to Priscilla, the mouse, as 'little sister', which is also Rooster Cogburn's pet name for Mattie Ross in *True Grit* (1969). Other moments evoke famous spaghetti Westerns such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) and *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). *Rango* could be overwhelmed by distractingly knowing winks to this or that intertext. However, its interactions with postmodern gesture remain grounded by a sincere enthusiasm for the Western as a space in which to tell new stories.

Fredric Jameson, in *Post-Modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, shows how postmodern culture no longer requires an essentialist nature which could be subject to change:

In modernism, some residual zones of “nature” and “being,” of the old, the older, the archaic, still subsist; culture can still do something to that nature and work at transforming that “referent.” Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good (ix).

Rango could be described as playing in the postmodern anti-nature of Jameson’s critique. The film may also be a good example of Jameson’s formulation of pastiche in postmodernity.

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter (17).

In Jameson’s thought the postmodern allows very little room for postmodern art to critique or resist the ideological structures of late capitalism. After the destruction of modernism, parody has been replaced by pastiche. Unlike parody, pastiche no longer refers back to the individual stylistic identifiers of high modernism; instead, pastiche becomes a rote reflection of codes without the capacity to satirise or create spaces outside of capitalism. The hyperactive referencing of *Rango* would certainly fall within this dynamic and yet it is possible to hold out some hope for useful critique in the postmodern Western. Linda Hutcheon provides a well-known reappraisal of the potential of parody in postmodernity. Parody, in Hutcheon’s thought, always performs a double move of subverting and reinforcing hegemony but the subversion still matters, and still retains the power of critique:

It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or “highlight,” and to subvert, or “subvert,” and the mode is therefore a “knowing” and an ironic—or even “ironic”—one. Postmodernism’s distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale “nudging” commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern’s initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural’; made by us, not given to us (1-2).

The doubleness of postmodern art echoes the antagonistic dynamics of the Western genre. As products of the racist ideology of settler colonialism, westerns unavoidably reproduce reactionary narrative and thematic forms. However, the Western is also always acting reflexively by subverting the ideological structures that formed the genre. Hutcheon’s conception of parody is a helpful one

for identifying the potential for *Rango*'s playful Western pastiche to function as a critique of certain features of the Anthropocene. Despite its thorough immersion in postmodern modes of representation, *Rango* retains the capacity to resist the harmful ideological dispositions of the Western myth.

Another critique that could be levelled at *Rango* in the context of the warming West is that the film represents a retreat inside and into the virtual in contrast to energetically engaged landscape Westerns such as *The Revenant*. An example of such a retreat for the Western can be found in videogames. Sara Humphreys's analysis of the 2010 videogame *Red Dead Redemption* argues that the game offered a balm to heteronormative masculinity in the wake of the financial crisis. The game allows players to inhabit the role of former outlaw John Marsden as he struggles to survive in the frontier of 1911 at the end of the Wild West era. Humphreys argues that by role-playing as Marsden players virtually adapt to the inevitability of crisis in an entirely depoliticised way:

On the digital frontier, *RDR* resuscitates white, middle-class, heteronormative identity in the form of those who own small ranching operations and homesteads and, through these representations, teaches its players that suffering, loss, and rapid technological change are simply part of life. *RDR* naturalizes and, therefore, depoliticizes the economic downturn. This digitized frontier operates as a safety valve for the pressures brought to bear on US citizenry by the continued repercussions of the 2008 collapse (205-206).

The whimsical, postmodern animation of *Rango* could be read in similar terms. Does the rendering of a virtual frontier abrogate the responsibility to contend with the real pressures of the warming West? By crafting such an intricate and charming virtual West does *Rango* act to defuse potential resistant energies that might lead to more sustainable forms of Western living? I would suggest that although *Rango* does create an arrestingly immersive virtual West, replete with intertextual resonances, it is at times able to adopt an oppositional position to the rapacious development of the dwindling West. Rather than retreating into the comforts of the virtual, *Rango* instead utilises the flexibility of computer-generated imagery to advance a critique of contemporary environmental practices in the West.

The force of *Rango*'s critique comes from the way in which the film dramatises water shortage and the politics of water in the region. As has been discussed in this thesis, drought is one of the premier threats facing the southwest region that *Rango* takes as its location. Increasingly frequent and severe droughts will be a fact of life in the region as climate change shifts weather patterns in the already dry region. According to an article in *Mother Jones*, planners are having to take steps to mitigate coming shortages: 'According to NASA, rainfall may decline by 20 to 25 percent over California, Nevada, and Arizona by 2100. Anticipating drier times, California and

Arizona are currently in talks over a drought contingency plan...’ (Baptiste). Narratives that take the landscape of the American southwest as their subject matter will have to contend with drought as a major influence on life in the region as well as the future implications of drought for long-term settlement. *Rango* shows how to represent water crisis effectively through the prism of the western genre.

The visual palette of *Rango* is the most obvious early indication of its concern with drought and the West. The palette of the film’s early scenes is dominated by dusty, washed out greys and browns complementing the particle effects that spread dust across the frame. Cinematographer Roger Deakins, who masterminded the exhausted appearance of the Coen brothers’ *No Country for Old Men*, was called in to consult on the look of the film. Deakins is uniquely able to capture a quality of light that evokes the harshness of the desert environment. By contrasting intense light with profound shadow, he creates a visual language of drought and depletion. Significantly, Deakins was also asked to make the digital images look as though they had been filmed, something that he had previously done on other animated features: ‘This is kind of an interesting side-gig that I’ve got going. Being the guy that people bring in whenever they’re trying to make the animated film that they’re working on look like live-action’ (Hill). By digitally manipulating depth of field, focus and blurring, Deakins and the visual effects artists were able to give *Rango*’s digital vistas the filmic quality of a spaghetti Western. This would seem to indicate the debt owed by the film to the Western genre as a source of symbolism and mythological weight. *Rango* combines outlandish looking characters and surreal events with a photographic realism. The effect is to create a Western that is at once familiar and disconcertingly odd. *Rango* unsettles genre assumptions through the juxtaposition of faithful recreation and knowing parody.

This destabilising dynamic operates around the core narrative of drought and water politics. As Rango arrives in Dirt, he observes locals packing up and moving on from the town in an evocation of the Dust Bowl droughts that led to mass migration in the nineteen thirties. The fleeing residents make clear the cause of their leaving: ‘Can’t grow no crops without no water’. Water in the town functions as both a currency and sacred guarantor of continued survival. The mayor sets out the centrality of water to the community in his first meeting with Rango: ‘Water Mr. Rango. Without it there’s nothing but dust and decay. But with water there’s life’. The mayor has a carafe filled with water indicating his privileged position in the town. Control of access to resources in the West is shown in *Rango* to be a tool of social control and discipline. The relationship of the ordinary townsfolk to water is very different to that of the mayor. Before receiving their ration, the townsfolk perform a ritualistic square dance, set comically to the tune the Hank Williams song ‘Cool Water’. They come before the mayor as supplicants because water is a tool of class differentiation in Dirt. The question of who controls access to water and to what ends

water should be put is central one in the Anthropocene. Tortoise John, the mayor, is an avatar for the acquisitive forces present in regions like the West who are attempting to leverage control of water for financial and political ends. The mayor believes in Western hyper-development, which he has observed in the nearby human settlement of Las Vegas. He believes that the destiny of Dirt and the West lies in the golf courses and air-conditioned hotels of contemporary Western cities: 'I was here before the highway split this great valley. I watched the march of progress and I learned a thing or two. Perhaps it's time you started to take the long view, begin to appreciate the broad sweep of history'. This potential future for the West is unsustainable. Climate change will force an accommodation with the realities of drought and water shortage. The mayor creates a golf course in Dirt, a parody of the shockingly verdant courses that ring the desert cities of Las Vegas and Phoenix in defiance of environmental limits.

Rango also reveals some of the complicated ethics and power imbalances of water politics and diplomacy in the warming West. Rango eventually finds that the deliberate shutting off of a crucial water pipe by the mayor is the cause of Dirt's misery. This prioritising of warped development goals over a democratic ethic of care for other inhabitants of the region echoes current battles around the overuse of water. The Colorado River is a lifeline for the arid southwest carrying water down from the snowy Rocky Mountains and supplying water to seven states: California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Wyoming. However, the river is being strangled by unprecedented droughts created by climate change. This has led to a battle between states for the dwindling gallons of the Colorado. Agriculture in some states, like Arizona, could become unviable without the irrigation provided by the river. But the problem is even more acute further afield at the delta located in Mexico:

Today, the delta is a "dry river cemetery," a barren moonscape dotted with abandoned boats, says Peter McBride, who made a PBS film about the river. While American states have desperately fought over the Colorado's resources, McBride says, they've totally disregarded how the water fight affects more than 3 million people in Mexico who also depend on it. "If the river ended in San Diego," he says, "I guarantee it wouldn't run dry" (Weaver).

The pipe in *Rango* is a metaphor for the power dynamics of water use in the Anthropocene West. The needs of the citizens of Dirt are obscured by overarching discourses of development and progress that refuse to acknowledge the unsustainable practices that current modes of living in the West are predicated upon.

The environmental consciousness of *Rango* occurs alongside the film's highly reflexive relationship with Western mythology. A number of characters in the film refer specifically to myth as way of understanding the contemporary West. The mayor rejects the iconography of the mythic West as a relic of a primitive frontier past. The town of Dirt itself is an anachronism to the mayor precisely because it embodies an exuberant embrace of genre clichés and tropes: 'One day soon, all this is going to fade into myth, the frontier town, the lawman, the gunslinger. There's just no place for them anymore. We're civilized now'. This wholesale rejection of myth as a way of relating to the environment of the West occurs at the moment in the narrative when Rango is driven out of Dirt and the supremacy of the mayor's new Western order seems assured. However, the mayor's self-proclaimed defeat of myth may in fact be simply a restatement of the most damaging facets of Western ideology. The plan to erase Dirt and construct an unsustainable, consumerist metropolis in its place is redolent of the worst forms of Western mythmaking, forms that advocate for unlimited development and reckless extraction from the biosphere. The rapacious energy of the frontier will drive climate change and ultimately result in an unliveable West. This reductive and fatal figuring of Western mythology contrasts with the character of Rango himself. At the beginning of the film Rango is searching for an identity that will satisfy his theatrical and romantic desires. Luckily for him he walks into the readymade archetype of the town sheriff. Rango plays within the confines of genre, adopting different roles in order to fit in with the townsfolk: sheriff, detective, outlaw and civic leader. Eventually though, his original lack of substantive identity is discovered and he is cast out. This moment reads like the victory of one idea of the West – endless, brutal expansion – over a more productive, adaptive and sustainable one.

Rango wanders aimlessly in the desert crossing blindly over the highway and collapsing on the other side. He is carried away unconscious from the road by a swarm of beetles. Waking in the morning Rango finds himself in the presence of the 'Spirit of the West'. Taking the form of Clint Eastwood's spaghetti Western character *The Man with No Name*, the Spirit of the West (played by *Deadwood*'s Timothy Olyphant in another example of textual layering) gives a tough talking to Rango. Described as 'The eternally unattainable ideal' the Spirit of the West is a manifestation of accreted layers of genre reference combined to create the ur-Western hero. Hunting through the salt flats with a metal detector he tells Rango: 'Sometimes you gotta dig deep to find what you're looking for'. Rango is searching for meaning and a role in the wilderness of the virtual West. However, the spirit rejects his narcissistic desire for self-identification in favour of demand for productive practice: 'Doesn't matter what they call you. It's the deeds make the man'. *Rango* is the Western at its most self-referential and postmodern, and yet it is capable of offering a critique of the rapacious individualism of the genre. The spirit challenges Rango: 'You came a long way to find something that isn't out here. Don't you see? It's not about you it's about them?' *Rango* suggests that the counter to the insane logic of continued exploitation and growth and the climate

chaos that will result from it, is a restatement of the value of community and collective action in the West. The community of Dirt composed of a profusion of wonderfully realised Western animals, all drawn from the real ecology of the Mojave Desert. This recreation of lost biodiversity becomes a community, full of affective relationships, in response to environmental crisis. In this way *Rango* anticipates the value of strong connectivity in specific environments threatened by climate change. In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* Naomi Klein argues that persisting and surviving in the Anthropocene will depend on collective action in the face of tremendous climate disruption:

...a key determinant in how any community survives an extreme weather event is its connective tissue—the presence of small local businesses and common spaces where neighbors can get to know one another and make sure that elderly people aren't forgotten during crushing heat waves or storms. As the environmental writer and analyst David Roberts has observed, “the ingredients of resilience” are “overlapping social and civic circles, filled with people who, by virtue of living in close proximity and sharing common spaces, know and take care of each other. The greatest danger in times of stress or threat is isolation. Finding ways of expanding public spaces and nurturing civic involvement is not just some woolly-headed liberal project—It's a survival strategy” (459-460).

The Western is facing the end of the environment that produced it. It is also forced to contend with the increasing difficulty of staging stories in the hostile West. The spaces in which the Western can persist are becoming ever smaller. For the Western to function as a productive critique of our currently suicidal culture it must reject the solipsistic self-definition of the individual in favour of collective modes of persistence. If the genre is to have something to say about climate change and the future of the Western space it must focus on forms of connectivity that might stave off the worst of what is to come.

Bibliography

3:10 to Yuma. Directed by James Mangold. Lionsgate, 2007.

A Man Called Horse. Directed by Elliot Silverstein. National General Pictures, 1970.

A World Unseen: The Revenant (2016), Directed by E. Rausch Twentieth Century Fox, 2016

Altenbernd, Erik and Alex Young. "A terrible beauty: Deadwood, settler colonial violence, and the post-9/11 state of exception." Stasi and Greiman, pp. 127-150.

Alter, Alexandra. "Philipp Meyer: An Obsessed Novelist's Extreme Research." *WSJ.com*, 23 May 2013,
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323648304578497460628668172>.

Ames, John Edward. *The Real Deadwood: True Life Histories of Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, Outlaw Towns, and Other Characters of the Lawless West*. Chamberlain, 2005.

Apocalypse Now. Directed by Francis Coppola, United Artists, 1979.

Avatar. Directed by James Cameron, 20th Century Fox, 2009.

Baptiste, Nathalie, et al. "This Is What a West without Water Will Look Like." *Mother Jones*, 14 Mar2018, www.motherjones.com/environment/2018/03/this-is-what-a-west-without-water-will-look-like/.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by S. F. Glaser, Michigan UP, 1994

Biehl, Janet. *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. South End Press, 1991.

Bell, Madison Smartt. "Review: All the Pretty Horses." *NYTimes.com*, 17 May 1992,
<http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-horses.html>.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004.

Bigell, Werner. "Fear and Fascination: Anti-Landscapes between Material Resistance and Material Transcendence." *The Anti-Landscape*, edited by David E. Nye and Sarah

Elkind, Rodopi, 2014, pp. 129-148.

Blair, John. "Mexico and the Borderlands in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol 42, no 3, 2001, pp. 301-307, doi:10.1080/00111610109601146.

Bloom, Harold. Introduction. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Cormac McCarthy*, editor Harold Bloom. Infobase, 2009. Print.

Blythe, Will. "Lone Star 'The Son', by Philipp Meyer." *NYTimes.com*, 13 June 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/17/son-philipp-meyer-review>.

Bone Tomahawk. Directed by S. Craig Zahler. RLJ Entertainment, 2015.

Bradshaw, Peter (2015), "The Revenant review – gut-churningly brutal, beautiful storytelling." *The Guardian*, 4 Dec. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/dec/04/the-revenant-review-gut-churningly-brutal-beautiful-storytelling>.

---. "Best Films of the Noughties No1: There Will Be Blood." *TheGuardian.co.uk*, 1 January 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2010/jan/01/best-films-noughties-there-will-be-blood>.

Bragard, Veronique. "Sparing Words in the Wasted Land: Garbage, Texture, and Écriture Blanche in Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* and McCarthy's *The Road*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 20 no. 3, 2013, pp. 479-493, doi:10.1093/isle/ist06.

Brøgger, Fredrik Chr. "Wallace Stegner and the Western Environment: Hydraulics, Placelessness, and (Lack of) Identity". *European journal of American studies*, vol. 6, no.1, 2011, doi:10.4000/ejas.9302

Brokeback Mountain. Directed by Ang Lee. Focus Features, 2005.

Brooks, Cleanth, et al. *American Literature: the Makers and the Making*. St. Martins Press, 1973.

Brower, Sue. ““They’d Kill Us If They Knew’: Transgression and the Western.” *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2010, pp. 47–57. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jfilmvideo.62.4.0047.

Brown, William. *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age*. Berghahn, 2013.

Buscombe, Edward. *The BFI Companion to the Western*. A. Deutsch, 1993.

Campbell, Neil. *Post-Westerns: Cinema, Region, West*. Nebraska UP, 2015.

Carmichael, Deborah A., editor. *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre*. U. Of Utah P., 2006.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*. 1962. Mariner Books, 2002.

Carter, Matthew. *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood’s Frontier Narrative*. Edinburgh UP, 2014.

Children of Men. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón. Universal Studios, 2006.

Chinatown. Directed by Roman Polanski. Paramount Pictures, 1974.

Christensen, Nels Anchor. “Facing the Weather in James Galvin’s *The Meadow* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 21 no. 1, 2014, pp. 192-204, doi.org/10.1093/isle/isu041.

Citizen Kane. Directed by Orson Welles. RKO Pictures, 1941.

Cixous, Helene and Catherine Clement. *The New Born Woman*. I.B. Tauris, 1996.

Clark, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: the Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

Clay, Karen, and Randall Jones. “Migrating to Riches? Evidence from the California Gold Rush.” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2008, pp. 997–1027. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40056467.

Collin, Robbie. "Tommy Lee Jones Interview for The Homesman: Don't Call My New Film a Western." *The Telegraph*, 20 Nov. 2014, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/11237915/Tommy-Lee-Jones-interview-for-The-Homesman-dont-call-my-new-film-a-western.html.

Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. New York: Polity Press, 2005.

Cornford, Daniel. "'We all live more like Brutes than Humans': Labor and Capital in the Gold Rush." *A Golden State: Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California*, edited by James J. Rawls and Richard J. Orsi, California UP, 1999, pp. 78-104.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, Norton, 1996, pp. 69-90.

Cullen, Heidi. "Think It's Hot Now? Just Wait." *The New York Times*, 20 Aug. 2016, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/20/sunday-review/climate-change-hot-future.html.

Dallas. Created by David Jacobs. Lorimar Productions and Warner Bros, 1978.

Dances with Wolves. Directed by Kevin Costner, Orion Pictures, 1990.

Daugherty, Leo. "Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy". *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, edited by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, Mississippi UP, 1999.

Davion, Victoria. "Is ecofeminism feminist?" K. Warren (ed.) *Ecological Feminism*, edited by Karen Warren, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 72-94.

Deadwood. Created by David Milch, Paramount Television, HBO Entertainment, 2004.

De Boever, Arne. "The Politics of Retirement: Joel and Ethan Coen's No Country for Old Men after September 11." *Image and Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative*, vol. 10 no. 2, 2009, www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/lauteuretsonimaginaire/DeBoever.htm

Dead Poets Society. Directed by Peter Weir. Buena Vista Pictures, 1989.

Deadwood: Ultimate Collection. Produced and created by David Milch, 2004-2006.

deBuys, William. *A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American SouthWest*, Oxford UP, 2011.

DeFino, Dean J. *The HBO Effect*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. 1992. Taylor and Francis, 2012.

DeWitt, Patrick. *The Sisters Brothers*, New York: Granta, 2011.

Django Unchained. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Columbia Pictures, 2012.

Doperalski, Daniel. "Hilary Swank: 'The Homesman' Is a Feminist Western." *Variety*, 12 Nov. 2014, variety.com/2014/scene/festivals/hilary-swank-the-homesman-is-a-feminist-western-1201354618/.

Dorson, James. "Demystifying the Judge: Law and Mythical Violence in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2013, pp. 105–121. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.36.2.105.

Doughty, Robin W. "Settlement and Environmental Change in Texas, 1820-1900." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 4, 1986, pp. 423–442. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30239931.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Edgerton, Gary R., and Jeffrey P. Jones. *The Essential HBO Reader*. University Press of Kentucky, 2009.

Ellis, Jay. "'What Happens to Country' in *Blood Meridian*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2006, pp. 85–97. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4143880.

- Ellis, Neville R. and Glenn A. Albrecht. "Climate change threats to family farmers' sense of place and mental wellbeing: A case study from the Western Australian Wheatbelt." *Social Science and Medicine*, 2017, pp. 161-168., doi.10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.01.009.
- Fargo*. Directed by Joe and Ethan Coen. Gramercy Pictures, 1996. DVD.
- Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Directed by Terry Gilliam. Universal Pictures, 1998.
- Fehrenbach, T.R. *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*. Da Capo Press, 2000.
- Ferber, Edna. *Giant*. Harper Collins, 2003.
- Fisher, Mark. "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2012, pp. 16–24. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16.
- Fiske, John. "British Cultural Studies and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, edited by Robert C. Callen, North Carolina UP, 1992, pp. 284-326.
- Fitzcarraldo*. Directed by Werner Herzog, Filmverlag der Autoren, 1982.
- Frye, Steven. "Cormac McCarthy's 'World in Its Making': Romantic Naturalism in 'The Crossing'". *Studies in American Naturalism*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2007, pp. 46–65. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23431203.
- Frye, Steven. "Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" and McCarthy's No Country for Old Men: Art and Artifice in the Novel". *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*, edited by Lynnea Chapman King et al., Scarecrow Press, 2009.
- Gardiner, Stephen M. *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, OUP, 2011.
- Garfin, Gregg, et al. *Assessment of Climate Change in the Southwest United States: a Report Prepared for the National Climate Assessment*. Island Press, 2013.
- Garrard, Greg. "Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy." *SubStance*, vol. 41 no.

1, 2012, pp. 40-60. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/sub.2012.0001.

---. *Ecocriticism*, Routledge, 2012.

Gendzel, Glen. "Pioneers and Padres: Competing Mythologies in Northern and Southern California, 1850-1930." *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2001, pp. 55-79. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3650837.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Giant. Directed by George Stevens. Warner Bros, 1956.

Godden, Richard, and Colin Richmond. "Blood Meridian, Or the Evening Redness in the East: 'Itinerant Degenerates Bleeding Westwards.'" *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, vol. 2 no. 4, 2004, pp. 447-60, doi.org/10.1177/1477570004048079.

Graulich, Melody. "Deadwood's Barbaric Yawp: Sharing a Literary Heritage." Graulich and Witschi, pp. xiii-liv.

Graulich, Melody and Nicolas S. Witschi, editor. *Dirty Words in Deadwood: Literature and the Postwestern*. Nebraska. 2013.

Guillemin, Georg. *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, Texas A&M UP, 2004.

Haas, Robert. "Travels With A She-Wolf". *NYTimes.com*, 12 June 1994, <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-crossing.html>.

Hage, Erik. *Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion*. McFarland, 2010.

Hämäläinen, Pekka. *The Comanche Empire*. Yale UP, 2008.

Heise, Ursula K. "Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World: A Review." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 42 no. 2, 2015, pp. 460-461, doi: 10.1086/679088.

---. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism". *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 2, 2006, pp. 503- 516,

doi:10.1632/003081206x129684.

Hill, Erin. ““What’s Afflictin’ You?” Corporality, Body Crises and the Body Politic in Deadwood.” David Lavery, pp. 171-183.

Hill, Jim. “How Cinematographer Roger Deakins Helped Blur the Line Between Live-Action and Animated Features.” *The Huffington Post*, 7 Dec. 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-hill/roger-deakins_b_3268900.html?guccounter=1.

Hill Street Blues. Created by Steve Bocho and Michael Kozoll, MTM Television, 1981.

Hine, Robert V. and Jon T. Coleman. *The American West: a New Interpretive History*. 2000, Yale University Press, 2017.

Hitchcock, Peter. “Oil in an American Imaginary.” *New Formations*, vol. 69 no. 4, 2010, pp. 81-97, doi:10.3898/NEWF.69.04.2010.

Hoggett, Paul. “Climate Change and the Apocalyptic Imagination.” *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, vol. 16 no. 3, 2011, pp. 261-275, doi:10.1111/zygo.12222.

Holloway, David. ““A false book is no book at all’: the ideology of representation in Blood Meridian and the Border Trilogy”. *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*, edited by Rick Wallach. Manchester UP, 2000, pp. 185-197.

Horne, Phillip. “There Will Be Blood relations.” *TheGuardian.co.uk*, 29 July 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/jul/28/therewillbeblood.danieldaylewis>.

How the West was Won. Directed by John Ford, Henry Hathaway and George Marshall. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1962.

How the West was Won. Directed by John Ford, Henry Hathaway, George Marshall, Richard Thorpe. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1963.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. 1989 Routledge, 2002.

Huttner, Paul, et al. “Climate Change in Action: Visible Signs in Black Hills & Yellowstone.” *Updraft*, 7 Aug. 2012,

blogs.mprnews.org/updraft/2012/08/climate_change_in_action_visib/.

Ibarrola-Armendariz, Aitor. "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*: Rewriting the Myth of the American West". *European Journal of American Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2011, <http://ejas.revues.org/9310>.

Isenberg, Andrew C. *The Destruction of the Bison an Environmental History, 1750-1920*. Cambridge UP, 2015.

Ivakhiv, Adrian. "Stirring the Geopolitical Unconscious: Towards a Jamesonian Ecocriticism." *New Formations*, vol. 64, 2008, pp. 98-109, <https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/new-formations/64/stirring-the-geopolitical-unconscious-towards-jamesonian-ecocriticism>.

Jacobs, Jason. *BFI TV Classics: Deadwood*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2012.

Jameson, Frederick. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991.

Jaquette Ray, Sarah. *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture*. Arizona UP, 2013.

Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia with an Appendix*. Printed by H. Sprague, 1965.

Joe Kidd. Directed by John Sturges. Universal Pictures, 1972.

Jones, Karen R. and John Wills. *American West: Competing Visions*. Edinburgh UP.

Johns-Putra, Adeline. "'My Job Is to Take Care of You': Climate Change, Humanity, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 62 no. 3, 2016, pp. 519-540. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/mfs.2016.0041.

Kaplan, Elizabeth Ann. *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction*. Rutgers University Press, 2016.

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.

- Kollin, Susan. "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2001, pp. 557–588. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1208996.
- Krech, Shepard. *Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. Norton, 2001.
- Lavery, David editor. *Reading Deadwood: a Western to Swear By*. I.B. Tauris, 2006.
- Lee, Susan Savage. "The Cost of Dreams of Utopia: Neocolonialism in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*." *Confluencia: Revista Hispánica de Cultura y Literatura*, vol. 30 no. 1, 2014, pp. 152-170, doi:10.1353/cnf.2014.0007.
- Lehman, Peter. "How the West Wasn't Won: The Repression of Capitalism in John Ford's Westerns". *John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era*, edited by Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein, Indiana UP, 2001, pp. 132-153.
- LeMenager, Stephanie. "The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after Oil!" *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 59-86, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/pg/masters/modules/resourcefictions/oil09/24.1.lemenager.pdf>.
- Lewis, Nathaniel. "David Milch at Yale: An Interview." Graulich and Witschi, pp. 1-18.
- Lewis, Nathaniel. *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship*, Nebraska UP, 2003.
- Lim, Dennis. "Exploiting Sound, Exploring Silence". *NYTimes.com*, 6 Jan, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/movies/awardsseason/06lim.html>.
- Lincoln, Kenneth. *Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Little Big Man*. Directed by Arthur Penn. National General Pictures, 1970.
- Locher, Fabien, and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. "Modernity's Frail Climate: A Climate History of Environmental Reflexivity." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2012, pp. 579–598., doi:10.1086/664552.
- Luce, Diane C. "The Vanishing World of Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy". *The Cormac*

McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy, editors Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, Mississippi UP, 2001. 161-197.

Lynas, Mark. *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*. Harper Perennial, 2008.

Maas, Peter. *Crude World: The Violent Twilight of the World of Oil*. Vintage Books, 2010.

Magnolia. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. New Line Cinema, 1999.

Malewitz, Raymond. ““Anything Can Be an Instrument”: Misuse Value and Rugged Consumerism in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 50 no. 4, 2009, pp. 721-741. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cli.0.0092

Malewitz, Raymond. “Narrative Disruption as Animal Agency in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing*.” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 60 no. 3, 2014, pp. 544-561. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/mfs.2014.0038.

Masters, Kim. “How Leonardo DiCaprio’s ‘The Revenant’ Shoot Became ‘A Living Hell.’” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 July 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-leonardo-dicaprios-revenant-shoot-810290>.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*, Picador, 2010.

---. *Blood Meridian*. London: Picador, 2010.

---. *No Country for Old Men*. Picador, 2006.

---. *Outer Dark*. 1968. Picador, 2011.

---. *The Border Trilogy*. Picador, 2002.

---. *The Gardener’s Son*. The Ecco Press, 1996.

---. *The Orchard Keeper*. 1965. Picador, 2010.

---. *The Road*. Picador, 2007.

---. *The Stonemason: A Play in Five Acts*. Ecco Press, 1994.

---. *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form*. New York: Vintage, 2006.

McKibben, Bill. "Human Restoration." *The Return of the Wolf: Reflections on the Future of Wolves in the Northeast*, edited by John Elder, Middlebury College Press, 2000. 5-21.

---. *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. New Times Books, 2010.

Mellen, Joan. "Spiraling Downward: America in Days of Heaven, In the Valley of Elah, and No Country for Old Men." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2008, pp. 24–31. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2008.61.3.24.

Merten, Jennilyn. "Right or Wrong, You Side with Your Feelings." Graulich and Witschi, pp. 195-218.

Meyer, Philipp. *The Son*. Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Meyer, Robinson. "American Trees Are Moving West, and No One Knows Why." *The Atlantic*, 12 June 2017, www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/05/go-west-my-sap/526899/.

Miller, Julie. "Leonardo DiCaprio Slept in Animal Carcasses and Ate Bison Body Parts for The Revenant: Beat that, Johnny Depp." *Vanity Fair*, 20 Oct. 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/10/leonardo-dicaprio-the-revenant>.

Milman, Oliver. "'It Can't Get Much Hotter ... Can It?' How Heat Became a National US Problem." *The Guardian*, 14 Aug. 2018, www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/14/it-cant-get-much-hotter-can-it-how-heat-became-a-national-us-problem.

Mitchell L. C. (2007), "What's Authentic about Western Literature? And, More to the Point, What's Literary." *Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, Space*, edited by Susan Kollin, Nebraska UP, 2007, pp. 95-112.

Mitchell, Melanie. *Complexity: A Guided Tour*. Oxford UP, 2009.

Mizejewski, Linda. "Calamity Jane and Female Masculinity in Deadwood." Graulich and Witschi, pp. 184-207.

Molina, Mario, et al. "Climate Report Understates Threat." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 10 Oct. 2018, thebulletin.org/2018/10/climate-report-understates-threat/?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=FacebookPost&utm_campaign=Climatereport_Oct9.

Monbiot, George. "Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?" *TheGuardian.co.uk*, 30 October 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books>.

---. "George Monbiot: Civilisation Ends with a Shutdown of Human Concern. Are We There Already?" *The Guardian*, 30 Oct. 2007, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books.

Moore, Jason W., editor. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM Press, 2016.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Mosle, Sarah. "Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys." *NYTimes.com*. May 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/17/books/don-t-let-your-babies-grow-up-to-be-cowboys.html>.

Murphet, Julian. "The cave and *The Road*: Styles of forgotten dreams". *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road*, edited by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven, Continuum, 2012.

Murray, Robin L., and Joseph K. Heumann. *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral Western Cinema and the Environment*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.

Nijhuis, Michelle. "The Sound of Climate Change". *TheAtlantic.com*, 14 Sep. 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/09/this-is-the-sound-of-a-forest-changing/499802/>.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.

No Country for Old Men. Directed by Joe and Ethan Coen. Miramax Films and Paramount Vantage, 2007.

Nye, David E., and Sarah Elkind editors. *The Anti-Landscape*. Rodopi, 2014.

NYPD Blue. Created by Steve Bocho and David Milch, 20th Century Fox Television, 1993.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? Directed by Joe and Ethan Coen. Buena Vista Pictures, 2000.

O'Connell, Maria. "Home Is Where the Body's Buried: Place, Space, Homelessness in *Child of God* and *The Crossing*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 42 no. 3, 2014, pp. 588-599, doi:10.1093/isle/isu074

O'Hagan, Ellie Mae. "Mass migration is no 'crisis': it's the new normal as the climate changes." *TheGuardian.com*, 18 August 2015,
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/18/mass-migration-crisis-refugees-climate-change>.

Once Upon a Time in the West. Directed by Sergio Leone. Paramount Pictures, 1968.

Orvell, M. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*, 1989, UNC Press, 2014.

Owens, Barclay. *Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels*. Arizona UP, 2000.

Page, L. A. and L.M. Howard. "The impact of climate change on mental health (but will mental health be discussed at Copenhagen?)" *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 40, 2010, pp. 177-180., doi:10.1017/S0033291709992169.

"Painting with Pixels" (supplementary material on DVD release of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). Buena Vista Picture, 2000.

Patterson, John. "'We've killed a lot of Animals': Interview with Ethan and Joel Coen about No Country for Old Men". *TheGuardian.co.uk*, 21 December 2007,
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/dec/21/coenbrothers>.

Piafsky, Michael. "A Conversation with David Milch." *The Missouri Review*, vol. 35 no. 1, 2012, pp. 126-142. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/mis.2012.0010.

Piguet, Etienne, Antoine Pecoud, and Paul De Guchteneire. *Migration and Climate Change*. Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

Porter, Joy. *Native American Environmentalism: Land, Spirit, and the Idea of Wilderness*. Nebraska UP, 2014. Press, 2006.

Raising Arizona. Directed by Joe and Ethan Coen. 20th Century Fox, 1987.

Rango. Directed by Gore Verbinski. Paramount Pictures, 2011.

Rarick, Ethan. *Desperate Passage: The Donner Party's Dangerous Journey West*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Reimer, Jennifer A. "All the Pretty Mexican Girls: Whiteness and Racial Desire in Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses and Cities of the Plain." *Western American Literature*, vol. 48 no. 4, 2014, pp. 422-442, doi:10.1353/wal.2014.0034 .

Riehle, Jake. "'No Country for Old Men' – Exclusive Interview with Sound Designer/Re-recording Mixer Craig Berkey." *DesigningSound.org*, 15 Nov 2007, <http://designingsound.org/2007/11/15/no-country-for-old-men-exclusive-interview-with-sound-designerre-recording-mixer-craig-berkey/>.

Riley, Michael J. "Trapped in the History of Film: Racial Conflict and Allure in *The Vanishing American*". *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, edited by Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor, Kentucky UP, 2003.

Rio Grande. Directed by John Ford. Republic Pictures, 1950.

Romero-Lankao, P. et al. "2014: North America." *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge UP, 2014, pp. 1439-1498.

- Roosevelt, T., and H. C. *The Complete Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, edited by Joseph Bucklin Bishop, e-artnow, 2017.
- Sale, Kirkpatrick. *Dwellers in the Land the Bioregional Vision*. 1985. The University of Georgia Press, 2000.
- Sanborn, Wallis R. “‘I Aint Heard One in Years’: Wolves as Metaphor in ‘The Crossing.’” *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 25–37. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/42909358.
- Saunders, John. *The Western Genre: from Lordsburg to Big Whiskey*. Wallflower, 2006.
- Savage, Jordan. ““What the Hell Is a Flowery Boundary Tree?” ‘Gunslinger, All the Pretty Horses’ and the Postmodern Western.” *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2012, pp. 997–1008, www.jstor.org/stable/23352475.
- Schmidly, David J. *Texas Natural History: A Century of Change*. Texas Tech UP, 2002.
- Schwarz, Maureen T. “Searching for a Feminist Western: The Searchers, The Hired Hand, And The Missing.” *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 27, no. 1-2, 2013, pp. 45–71., doi:10.1080/08949468.2014.852382.
- Scott, A.O. “There’s a New Sheriff in Town, and He’s a Rootin’-Tootin’ Reptile.” *The New York Times*, 3 Mar. 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/movies/04rango.html.
- Scott, A.O. “He Found a Bundle of Money, and Now There’s Hell to Pay”. *NYTimes.com*, 9 Nov. 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/09/movies/09coun.html>.
- Segal, D. (2015), “About That Bear: Alejandro G. Iñárritu Discusses Making The Revenant.” *The New York Times*, 22 Dec. 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/27/movies/about-that-bear-alejandro-g-inarritu-discusses-making-the-revenant.html>.
- Sepich, John Emil. “The Dance of History in Cormac McCarthy’s ‘Blood Meridian.’” *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1991, pp. 16–31. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20078027.
- Shane*. Directed by Stevens, George, and A. B. Guthrie. Paramount Pictures, 1953.

Shaw, Jonathan Imber. "Evil Empires: Blood Meridian, War in El Salvador, and the Burdens of Omniscience." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2008, pp. 207–231. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20077915.

Shortcuts. Directed by Robert Altman. Fine Line Features, 1993.

Simmons, Scott. *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Singer, Mark. "The Misfit." *The New Yorker*, 6 July 2017, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/02/14/the-misfit-2.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. Oklahoma UP, 1998.

Slow West. Directed by John Maclean. Lionsgate UK, 2015.

Smoke Signals. Directed by Chris Eyre. Miramax, 1998.

"South Dakota." *Climate Nexus*, 22 June 2017, climatenexus.org/climate-change-us/state-impacts/south-dakota/.

Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms and Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. Texas UP, 2013.

Stagecoach. Directed by John Ford. United Artists, 1939.

Stasi, Paul, and Jennifer Greiman editors. *The Last Western: Deadwood and the End of American Empire*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

---. "Introduction: Deadwood and the forms of American empire." Paul Stasi and Jennifer Greiman, pp. 1-22.

Steckline, Tim. "The Thinking of Al Swearengen's Body Kidney Stones, Pigpens, and Burkean Catharsis in Deadwood." Graulich and Witschi, pp. 98-125.

Stegner, Wallace. *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West*. 1953. Penguin, 1992.

Stockman, Lorne. "The Dakota Access Pipeline will lock-in the emissions of 30 coal plants". *priceofoil.org*, 12 September 2016, <http://priceofoil.org/2016/09/12/the-dakota-access-pipeline-will-lock-in-the-emissions-of-30-coal-plants/>

Sturken, Marita. "Desiring the Weather: El Nino, the Media, and California Identity." *Public Culture*, vol. 13 no. 2, 2001, pp. 161-189. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/26248.

Thakur, Gautam Basu. *Postcolonial Theory and Avatar*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. Directed by Andrew Dominik. Warner Bros, 2007.

The Aviator. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Warner Bros Pictures and Miramax Films, 2004.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Directed by Sergio Leone. United Artists, 1966.

The Handmaids Tale. Directed by Volker Schlöndorff. Cinecom Pictures, 1990.

The Hateful Eight. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, The Weinstein Company, 2015.

The Homesman. Directed by Tommy Lee Jones. Saban films, 2014.

The Invaders (1912), Directed by T. H. Ince and Francis Ford, Mutual Film, 1912.

The Misfits. Directed by Arthur Miller. United Artists, 1961.

The Revenant. Dir. A. G. Iñárritu, Twentieth Century Fox, 2015.

The Searchers. Directed by John Ford. Warner Bros, 1956.

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre. Directed by John Huston. Warner Bros., 1948.

The Vanishing American. Directed by George B. Seitz. Paramount Picture, 1925.

Théberge, Paul. "Almost Silent: The interplay of Sound and Silence in Contemporary Cinema and Television." *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*. Edited by Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda. Chicago: Illinois UP, 2008.

There Will Be Blood. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. Ghoualdi Film Company, 2007.

Thiess, Derek J. "On *The Road* to Santa Fe: Complexity in Cormac McCarthy and Climate Change". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 20 no. 3 2013, pp. 532-552, doi: 10.1093/isle/ist052.

Toles, George. *Paul Thomas Anderson*. Illinois Up, 2016.

Tomashaw, Mitchell. "Towards a cosmopolitan bioregionalism." *Bioregionalism*, edited by Michael Vincent McGinnis, Routledge, 1999, pp. 121-132.

Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. Oxford UP, 1993.

Trexler, Adam and Adeline Johns-Putra. "Climate Change in Literature and Literary Criticism." *WIREs Climate Change*, vol. 2 no. 2, 2011, pp. 185-200, doi:10.1002/wcc.105

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: the Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

True Grit. Directed by Henry Hathaway. Paramount Pictures, 1969.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. 1920. Dover Publications, 2010.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. New Henry Holt and Company, 1921.

Tycoon. Directed by Richard Wallace. RKO Pictures, 1947.

Unforgiven. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Warner Bros, 1992.

Upton Sinclair. *Oil!* 1927. Penguin, 2007.

- Vernon, John. "A Picaresque of the Gold Rush". *NYTimes.com*, 22 July 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/books/review/the-sisters-brothers-by-patrick-dewitt-book-review.html>.
- Vilanova, Núria. "Another Textual Frontier: Contemporary Fiction on the Northern Mexican Border." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2002, pp. 73–98, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3339550.
- Wallach, Rick. "Dialogues and Intertextuality: No Country for Old Men as Fictional and Cinematic Text." *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*. Edited by Lynnea Chapman King et al., Scarecrow Press, 2009.
- Warren, Robert Penn. 1946, *All the Kings Men*. Penguin Books, 2007.
- Weaver, Frances. "The Unprecedented Water Crisis of the American Southwest." *The Week*, 1 Feb. 2014, theweek.com/articles/451876/unprecedented-water-crisis-american-southwest.
- Welsh, Jim. "Borderline Evil: The Dark Side of Byzantium in No Country for Old Men, Novel and Film". *No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Film*, editors Lynnea Chapman King, Rick Wallach and Jim Welsh. London: Scarecrow Press, 2009. Print.
- "What does Climate Change mean for Texas." *ClimateRealityProject.org*, 23 June 2016, <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/what-does-climate-change-mean-texas>. 2009.
- Wilder, Margaret et al. "Adapting Across Boundaries: Climate Change, Social Learning, and Resilience in the U.S.–Mexico Border Region". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 100 no. 4, 2010, pp. 917-928, doi. 10.1080/00045608.2010.500235.
- Wines, Michael. "Mighty Rio Grande Now a Trickle Under Siege." *NYTimes.com*, 12 April 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/13/us/mighty-rio-grande-now-a-trickle-under-siege.html>.
- Woodhall, Woody. "Creating the sounds for The Revenant." *ProVideo Coalition*, 2 Jan. 2016, <https://www.provideocoalition.com/creating-the-sounds-for-the-revenant/>.

Worden, Daniel. "Fossil-Fuel Futurity: Oil in 'Giant.'" *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2012, pp. 441–460., www.jstor.org/stable/23259145.

---. "Neo-Liberalism and the Western: HBOs *Deadwood* as National Allegory." *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2009, pp. 221–246., doi:10.1353/crv.0.0038.

Yergin, Daniel. *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*. Free Press, 2003.

Zibrak, Arielle. "Intolerance, A Survival Guide: Heteronormative Culture Formation In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, vol. 68 no. 3, 2012, pp. 103-128. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/486614.