If you have a copy of your powers of diss., may I have it?

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**Appropriating the Postmodern:
McCarthy's External Narration and Spatialized Time in *Suttree***

Suttree is a novel about insides and outsides. It is also obviously, about a lot of other things as well but I intend in the following pages to isolate some ways in which McCarthy uses the dichotomous relationship between interiority and exteriority as a central thematic device. I would also like to explore this relationship with an eye toward answering a broader question: is *Suttree* an example of a modern or postmodern literary work? This question may seem, in and of itself, somewhat academic and esoteric. However, I believe that an attempt to answer it will involve the examination of a number of issues that will prove central in better understanding McCarthy's magnificent and complex novel.

Umm, redundant?

Fredric Jameson has been a central figure in helping to define the modern/postmodern distinction, and I shall begin with a look at some of his differential descriptions of the two concepts. One of his most direct and lucid examples of a quintessentially modernist work is Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, which he calls a "canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation" (*Postmodernism* 11). A brief recounting of his reading of this painting as the epitome of modernist expression will serve as a convenient starting point for an explanation of his conception of

Kind of a wrong way to use this word

Awk

Look out Hegel

Nice prose!

Avoid using a gerund/pres. participle before a preposition — trust me

postmodernism's reaction against the modern.

Jameson writes that Munch's painting is

> an embodiment not merely of the expression of that kind of affect [of the alienation, etc., mentioned above] but, even more, as a virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself, which seems to have dominated much of what we call high modernism but to have vanished away--for both practical and theoretical reasons--in the world of the postmodern. (11)

This expressiveness that is central to modernism, Jameson goes on, presupposes both "some separation within the subject...of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that 'emotion' is then projected out and externalized." This externalization of an interior feeling rests upon "a whole metaphysics of the inside and the outside" (11) that Jameson argues get lost in the postmodern. Thus, within the painting, we see a solitary figure attempting to render ~~an~~ inner pain in external terms. The implicit contradiction in the form of that expression, however, "elaborately disconnects its own aesthetic" (14); the medium of the painting is visual, yet the form of the figure's expression is primarily auditory. However, this "absent" scream returns visually in the swirls that surround the figure, visibly enclosing and isolating him. Thus the painting, a decidedly *external* medium of expression, paradoxically creates the palpable impression of *inner* turmoil:

> [The] loops inscribe themselves on the painted surface in the form of those great concentric circles in which sonorous vibration becomes ultimately visible, as on the surface of a sheet of water, in an infinite regress which fans out from the sufferer to become the very geography of a universe in which pain itself now speaks and vibrates through the material sunset and landscape. The visible world now becomes the wall of the monad on which this 'scream running through nature' (Munch's

~~term words~~) is recorded and transcribed. (14)

Jameson asserts that postmodernism challenges and perhaps even abolishes the "metaphysics of inside and outside" that modernism posits. In place of images like Munch's *The Scream*, we get instead Warhol's reproductions of Marilyn Monroe, the very mechanical nature of which replaces the individualism and affect central to modernism with a decentered impersonality prevalent in the postmodern. Whereas ~~in~~ with modernism Jameson would posit a certain alienated paranoia or individualistic hysteria/neurosis as the signature mental breakdown, for postmodernism he suggests instead schizophrenia: "This shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter's fragmentation" (14).

I present Jameson's visual iconography rather than his discussions of literature because they lend themselves more readily to a consideration of the internal/external distinction that I perceive ~~>~~ at the heart of *Suttree*. Jameson argues at length that various signs of interiority in modernism are abolished in the postmodern, that considerations of depth are replaced by a dominance of surface, and that the "critical distance" that the modernist depth models allow has largely been collapsed and eliminated in the postmodern.[1] This partial,

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1 "[A]t least four other depth models have generally been repudiated in contemporary theory: (1) the dialectical one of essence and appearance...;(2) the Freudian model of latent and manifest, or of repression...;(3) the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity whose heroic or tragic thematics are closely related to that other great opposition between alienation and disalienation...; and (4) most recently, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified, which was itself rapidly unraveled and deconstructed during its brief heyday in the 1960s and 1970s" (12).

descriptive definition of postmodernism's shift from modernism allows a useful theoretical point of entry into an discussion of McCarthy's novel.

External Narrative in *Suttree*

The introductory section of *Suttree* provides an excellent example of the incredibly lush and textured descriptive prose that characterizes the novel throughout. Readers are explicitly addressed and thrown into a lengthy and poetic description of the setting that will dominate the mood and tone of the work as a whole. This description begins in very temporal terms:

> Dear friend now in the dusty clockless hours of the town when the streets lie black and steaming in the wake of watertrucks and now when the drunk and the homeless have washed up in the lee of walls in alleys or abandoned lots and cats go forth highshouldered and lean in the grim perimeters about, now in these sootblacked brick or cobbled corridors where lightwire shadows make a gothic harp of cellar doors no soul shall walk save you. (3)

William Prather has examined *Suttree* at length in terms of existential philosophy, detailing the great extent to which Cornelius Suttree may be seen as an existential hero. Vereen Bell, in his earlier booklength study, *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy*, also refers to Suttree in existential terms (79,90) and states that, in the novel, "existence not only precedes but precludes essence." Reading the opening passage in these terms, we can see a specific example of the rendering of physical, experiential detail as a standing in for inner experience. We, the readers, the "[d]ear friend[s]" of the narrator, get inextricably placed in the immediate "now" of McAnally Flats, assaulted by a

barrage of specific and intricately rendered details throughout the entirety of the novel that refuse to allow us to forget the exterior denseness of reality. Significantly, though, this elaborate novel, addressed specifically to "us," places us on a different plane than the characters it portrays. Through the various details of existence that the first paragraph begins to catalogue, the final line fixes the singular reader in terms of the "essence" that the existence we experience either precedes or perhaps precludes: "in the hours . . . in the wake . . . in these sootblacked brick or cobbled corridors . . . *no soul shall walk save you*" (italics mine). The use of the word "soul" here in reference to the reader highlights, I think, a key separation of the reader from the characters and emphasizes the extent to which the characters we encounter will be seen not in terms of "souls" but rather intricately and painstakingly defined in terms of their outward appearance and actions. [Other than Suttree himself, we are almost utterly without insight into the interior thoughts of the characters], and even with Suttree, whose mind we occasionally and briefly enter, the tone and descriptive quality of our inward glimpses are often barely distinguishable in their descriptiveness from the general third person narration.

In fact, a great number of the passages that cross into Suttree's interior deal with dreams and/or hallucinations, and it is difficult to say how much of these descriptions we can attribute to Suttree, as opposed to how much we must consider a detached but first person extension of the narrator's vision into the internal but visually concrete images of Suttree's mind. In

one paragraph, we begin with what we assume is an continuation of the intense third person description: "In the lobbies of the slattern hotels the porters and bellmen are napping in the chairs and lounges, dark faces jerking in their sleep down the worn wine plush" (27-8). But as we move on, the constant references to sleeping figures ("napping" bellmen and porters, "drunken homecome sailors sprawled in painless crucifixion," and the "whores [who] are sleeping now" [27]) suddenly shift into a first person narration from Suttree's point of view: "Dim tavern, an alleymouth where ashcans gape and where in a dream I was stopped by a man I took to be my father, dark figure against the shadowed brick" (27-8). We follow for a few sentences as the "I" describes the dream in which the figure of the father shifts suddenly in the last sentence of the paragraph to that of Suttree's son: "It was not my father but my son who accosted me with such rancorless intent" (28).

When a new paragraph begins, it would seem by the shifting to the present tense that the narrator has taken over again: "On Gay Street the traffic lights are stilled." But when midway through the paragraph we read of Suttree approaching another figure ("He marches darkly toward his darkly marching shape in the glass door of the depot."), the sentence momentarily shifts us back to the dream, reminding us of the figure of the father/son. The deceptiveness and near seamlessness of the integration of Suttree's interior visions and thoughts with the exterior narration of this passage represent specificly the extent to which our access to Suttree's interior is problematic throughout the

novel.

Near the end of the introductory section, after a long and intricately detailed description of the setting we are about to enter, McCarthy returns to a "we" that seems figuratively to link us readers and the narrator together as two travelers about to embark on a expedition into the realm of the dead reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*:

> We are come to a world within a world. In these alien reaches, these maugre sinks and interstitial wastes that the righteous see from carriage and car another life dreams . . . . The city beset by a thing unknown and will it come from forest or sea? The murengers have walled the pale, the gates are shut, but lo the thing's inside and can you guess his shape? Where he's kept or what's the counter of his face? Is he a weaver, a bloody shuttle shot through a timewarp, a carder of souls from the world's nap? Or a hunter with hounds or do bone horses draw his deadcart through the streets and does he call his trade to each? Dear friend he is not to be dwelt upon for it is by just suchwise that he's invited in. (4-5)

Vereen Bell rightfully points out the obvious reference to death in this passage and configures it as the central problem for Suttree in the novel: how to "come to terms with what is; having invited the 'thing' in by dwelling upon it, he must either give in to it and die in stages or live and, in living, affirm life" (70).

But Bell also ignores the "we" as such. The narrator of the story is not Suttree himself, except in very isolated incidences. In fact, the passage seems specifically to differentiate on one hand ourselves and the narrator, who addresses us as "friend," and on the other, Suttree, who is in fact absent from the introductory section altogether. I would argue that this separation is intentional and important in understanding the novel, for it sets

us and the narrator distinctly apart from Suttree and the other characters from the start, emphasizing the extent to which we, like those who pass in "carriage and car," are only visitors in this realm. Like Dante's narrator and his guide Virgil, we will pass through McAnally Flats and witness, but not be subject to, the often hellish experiences and interactions of its inhabitants.

The final paragraph in the opening section echoes in several ways *Hamlet* and Shakespeare more generally, pulling us slightly away from the almost overwhelming details of the preceding and following paragraphs to give us a hint of how to proceed. "The rest indeed is silence," almost directly quotes Hamlet's final words as he dies in Act V, and the reference to beetles reminds us of the fear of the ghost expressed by Horatio in Act I, scene IV of the same play:

> What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
> Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
> That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
> And there assume some other horrible form
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
> And draw you into madness? Think of it. (69-74)

These lines are resonant given the passage above. Hamlet *does* "think of it," and is to some extent drawn into madness. Horatio fears the ghost, which can be seen as symbolic of death itself, because it can take so many forms to trick us, which coincides with the many descriptions of death McCarthy records. Interesting as well is the idea expressed by Horatio that if Hamlet takes caution and thinks before he acts, he will be better for it; this is in direct contradiction to the sentiments of the narrator and of *Suttree* more generally, in which thinking about death is the

very act by which death is "invited in" (5). This theme is re-emphasized in the passage's final sentence, which intimates that a simpler, less contemplative existence may be easier or at least more efficient: "Ruder forms survive" (5).

These examples from the opening section illustrate the ways in which the novel's emphasis on exterior action and detail rather than interior thought is, as William Prather argues, a function of the novel's existential framework. Prather lists five ~~of Camus's~~ "instigative arguments" that Camus presents as central to bringing about a recognition of ~~the~~ life's existential absurdity:

> the passage of time, the horror of death, the hostility of nature, the inhumanness of other human beings, and a sense of weariness with the mechanical aspects of daily life. ("Absurd" 104)

While I think Prather and others can make an plausible case for the existence of all of these elements in the novel, I wish to examine two early episodes with these arguments in mind.

The first episode involves Suttree's visit to his aunt's house and the old photo album ~~that~~ he looks through. One would think that, if *anywhere* in the novel we were to find out more about Suttree's past life and family, ~~an extended look at old family pictures would provide such an opportunity~~. But McCarthy emphasizes surfaces and exteriors here more than ever, forcing us to remain removed on the surface and barely aware of the interior memories and life that we assume *must* be present within Suttree's head. He is ~~un~~able to recognize photographs of either his mother nor himself (128). His revulsion at a glimpse of his earlier self, if revulsion it is, gets conveyed solely through a purely physical

reaction: "Suttree's spine convulsed in a long cold shunting of vertebrae" (129). This physical reaction is contrasted with his Aunt Martha's, who gazes as the album "through her delicately wired eyeglasses with that constrained serenity of the aged remembering and nothing more" (128). Although their reactions are different, Suttree's a jarred emotion and Aunt Martha's a detached contemplation, they both are conveyed to us through language which remains externalized. We *assume* we understand a little what causes Suttree's reaction, but upon reflection we realize we simply cannot (and will not) know. Similarly, Aunt Martha's "serenity" comes to us through her calm gaze, but we cannot be sure what that outward calmness hides.

The descriptiveness of this episode intensifies at this point, as if in an attempt to reassert the cold details of description to hold in the interior feelings of the two characters. Almost all of our senses are engaged in this re-intensification of description. Suttree takes a bite of a piece of cake. The "old musty album with its foxed and crumbling paper seem[s] to breathe a reek of the vault" (129). The "dead faces" look up, "wan and lifeless," and are described as "masks of incertitude before the cold glass eye of the camera" (129). The use of the word "masks" seems particularly apt both for the episode and as a description of entire novel: we become so enmeshed in the details of Suttree's life that we tend to *create* an interior, emotional life for him, generating it out of our own empathetic response, but passages like this one remind us that we know next to nothing about Suttree's past or present inner life.

Just as the faces in the album are masks to the eye of the camera, so too are Suttree and the other characters largely textual masks within the narration we read. Even at points where we *seem* to begin to enter Suttree's thoughts to hear the questions he is asking, the external always intrudes to re-appropriate the text, forcing us back to the outward, physical world:

> What deity in the realms of dementia, what rabid god decocted out of the smoking lobes of hydrophobia could have devised a keeping place for souls so poor as is this flesh. This mawky wormbent tabernacle.
>
> What say boy?
>
> Suttree turned. Clayton was standing at the door scratching his stomach and grinning.
>
> Hey, Suttree said. (130)

The desire in this passage to attribute the opening statement/question to Suttree is strong, but I would argue that we have no compelling evidence ~~that~~ that proves this ~~is not the narrator rather than~~ rather than Suttree. In fact, the way in which this passage recalls the introductory section, especially in its association of "wormbent" flesh as a poor house for the soul,[2] would support a reading of this section as an intrusion of the narrator rather than as Suttree's inner thoughts. If nothing else, the ambiguity this passage presents, especially the ambiguity of the first sentence as either statement or question, re-emphasizes our lack of interior access.

The second example involves Suttree's son's death and funeral. Throughout this section, we are again tempted as readers

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2 "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that's the end." (Hamlet, IV iii, 20-26)

Avoid double conjuncts in dep. clause — trust me!

to believe we will gain some kind of knowledge or access to Suttree's interior life and history. At least, it would seem, we will come to know why Suttree abandoned his wife and child, and perhaps this will shed some light on why he has taken up his current life in McAnally Flats. But again, as with the photo album, we are given only a brief, tantalizing glimpses of emotion and thought that are quickly turned outward.

When Suttree learns of his son's death from J-bone, the immediate reaction is not of its effect on him but instead one of minute physical detail:

> Who's dead, Jim?
> He didn't look up. Your little boy, he said.
> Suttree set his cup down and looked out the window. There was a small pool of spilled cream on the marble countertop at his elbow and flies were crouched about it lapping like cats. He got up and went out. (148)

Light

This description does not represent the neutral, Hemingwayesque attention to detail one might expect at such a crucial moment. Perhaps if the description stopped at the spilled cream, it would. But the addition of flies "lapping like cats" at the cream adds a certain grotesqueness to the image, again purely external, which can be read to counterpoint whatever kind of dread, loss, sadness or other emotion Suttree is feeling but which we are not privileged to know explicitly.

-ood

After two pages of emotionless description of Suttree's journey to the town where his wife lives, we get one of the few direct renderings of an emotional state in the novel. However, even this specific attribution of emotion is couched in very physical terms: "Remorse lodged in his gorge like a great salt

cinder" (150). This description is followed by a moment of doubt about returning, unnamed but again clear through context:

> What will she say?
> What will her mother say?
> Her father.
> Suttree got up and swung down toward the door but the bus had already started.

We then enter for an entire paragraph Suttree's mind as he tries to remember his child's face ~~but~~ He cannot. Instead he remembers only a carnival, a "fleeting image of elf's eyes wonderstruck at the wide world," and a "tiny hand in his" (150). We see the images Suttree sees in his memory, but they give us little understanding of Suttree's past, how he feels, or why he left. - Well, it's pretty clear how he left

As Suttree approaches his wife's house, she asks him to leave. The exchange, cryptic and brief, sheds little light on the surreal physical altercation that follows as first the mother and then the wife savagely attack Suttree: order?

> Please go away, she said.
> When is the funeral?
> Three oclock. Please Buddy.
> I wont . . .
> Don't say anything please I cant bear it. (150)

say how sorry he is, absurdly

What is it that she does not want him to say? What does he begin to say he won't do? The context for these statements and any hope of understanding them are shattered when the mother, "axemark for a mouth and eyes crazed with hatred," attacks Suttree, "clawing, kicking, gurgling with rage" (151). When the father finally comes out of the house with a gun, Suttree flees:

> [He] vaulted through the hedge. He crossed a lawn and went through another hedge and down a small lane past some chickens in a foulsmelling pen, the birds flaring and squawking, Suttree crossing through another yard and coming out alongside a house where a man in a lawnchair

> looked up from the nothing he was contemplating and smiled curiously. Suttree nodded to him and went on down the drive into the road. He looked back but no one was coming. (151)

This description of Suttree's escape is remarkable for how it extracts him from the threat of death through a piling on of one description after another in a long sentence that always seems about to end but somehow keeps finding something else to describe. One would think it sufficient that he vaults the fence, runs down an alley, looks over his shoulder and finds he is safe. Instead, we see not just the chickens in a pen, but a "foulsmelling pen," and we hear them "flaring and squawking." Without a break in the sentence, Suttree then passes a man in contemplation of "nothing" and they exchange a civil smile and nod. Descriptive detail serves as a normalizing power in this passage, throwing what seem to be meaningless details (why do we need to know about how the chickens sound and smell?) one on top of another as a way of regaining the even, surface-level textual detachment that violently emotional episodes threaten to break.

At the cemetery, after the funeral ceremony is complete and the other mourners have gone, Suttree stands above the grave of his child:

> There among the flowers and the perfume of the departed ladies and the faint iron smell of the earth to stand looking down into a full size six foot grave with this small box resting in the bottom of it. Pale manchild were there last agonies? Were you in terror, did you know? Could you feel the claw that claimed you? *And who is this fool kneeling over your bones, choked with bitterness?* And what could a child know of the darkness of God's plan? Or how the flesh is so frail it is hardly more than a dream. (154; italics mine)

Again, I want to argue that, although on its surface it is easy to

argue for this passage as an interior representation of Suttree's thoughts, such a reading ignores the distinct differentiation between the narrator and Suttree himself. The series of questions asked over the open grave again recall *Hamlet*, specifically Act V, scene I, in which Hamlet addresses the skull of Yorick with a barrage of questions in a similar fashion as above. Further, the third person reference to "this bitter fool kneeling over your bones" would be strange to come from Suttree himself. Suttree is described as "choked with bitterness," and this echoes the isolated descriptions *by the narrator* of Suttree's state: "The dread in his heart was a thing he'd not felt since he feared his father in the aftermath of some child's transgression" (152); "A state of dread, like some uncanny foretaste of a bitter memory" (153); "He turned and laid his head against the tree, choked with a sorrow he had never known" (153). Suttree's emotions, described in visceral terms, become an extension of the narrator's catalogue of descriptive details to be rendered.

These two episodes represent the novel as a whole, showing an attention to physical states rendered in unrelentingly external detail. This detail, however, is not necessarily a sign of a rejection of life or inner emotion in the text, but rather an elaborately crafted portrayal, commensurate with Prather's existential reading, designed to explore Suttree and the other characters in painstaking but outwardly focused detail. Richard Marius aptly captures this quality of McCarthy's prose:

> No writer who describes sensual experience in the vivid and magnificent metaphors that McCarthy uses can be anything other than a fervid, almost frantic lover of

> life, and the dissection and corruption of bodies that occur so often in his work are reminiscent of some seventeenth-century surgeon-philosopher searching for the soul that is responsible for all our glory and not finding it. (15)

Forced to read emotion and inner life almost entirely through action and description, it is difficult not to read *Suttree* in existential terms.

Where does the funeral episode leave us in terms of Camus's five "arguments"? While I think a case for the prevalence of "the horror of death" is obvious, I would like briefly to problematize that strictly existentialist reading that Prather imposes. I will save a discussion of the first element, a recognition of "the passage of time," for later. But the novel as a whole and this sequence of events in particular seems difficult to read unequivocally as existentialist. The "hostility of nature" is not clear throughout *Suttree*, for while the heat and cold of the seasons certainly assault Suttree and the others, the Tennessee River's yield of fish, turtles, mussels and other forms of life also provide the means of survival for so many people who inhabit its banks. The "inhumanness of other human beings" might be read into the violent attack on Suttree by his in-laws. However, we also witness the beneficence of the sheriff who, in trying to help both the father and Suttree, gives his own money to Suttree to allow him to leave town and avoid further violence. This act of kindness, which prefigures the final scene in which Suttree is given water and a ride while he escapes Knoxville, represents a benevolent rather than malevolent humanity. And even as Suttree's words to the sheriff sound filled with despair, the sheriff

responds with a very optimistic form of existentialism, one which Suttree seems to move toward as the novel progresses. Suttree states, "No one cares. It's not important," but the sheriff responds

> That's where you're wrong my friend. Everything's important. A man lives his life, he has to make it important. Whether he's a small town county sheriff or the president. Or a busted out bum. You might even understand that some day. I dont say you will. You might. (157)

That Suttree does not simply learn this lesson ~~himself~~ through experience but also through interaction with other human beings points to less "inhumanness" in the world than Camus's vision implies.

Finally, I would argue that the "sense of weariness with the mechanical aspects of daily life" is one of the most disputable of the elements when applied to *Suttree*. Suttree's single-minded ~~purpose in~~ burying his child himself without the help of machine or man exemplifies his existence throughout the novel. The very labor involved in shoveling the earth allows Suttree an outward, physical outlet for the dread, sorrow, and remorse he feels. And the great detail with which we see Suttree earn a living day after day, whether tending his fishing lines or enduring with Reese the exertions involved in harvesting mussels upriver, shows a sometimes wearying but also sustaining and ultimately uplifting pursuit. The fish Suttree catches not only sustain him, but also allow him contact with others, both as he sells them or, often, as he trades or gives them away to the Indian, the goatherd, or others.

My ~~stress~~ emphasis on the externality of the narration in *Suttree* might seem to imply, given Jameson's opposition of depth vs. surface as representative of the modern vs. the postmodern, that this is a postmodern novel. I would return, however, to the image of Munch's *The Scream* as a way of arguing differently. As Munch renders the relation between inside and outside in a medium ~~which~~ that would seem to prohibit ~~the~~ direct access to the former, ~~and~~ McCarthy's novel attempts, in textual terms, to do much the same thing. We *infer* a pained interior life in Munch's painting because of the outward crystallization of the figure's cry. The almost palpable and audible rendering of the scream itself occurs through its solely visual representation. The narrator in McCarthy's novel similarly renders Suttree's progession in external terms, but these terms paradoxically affirm, rather than deny, a depth of consciousness ~~and feeling throughout~~ in the novel. To this extent, I believe that *Suttree* employs what has been called a postmodern mode to achieve is instead a modernist effect.

Spatializations of Time

Another element in Jameson's (and others'[3]) definition of the postmodern involves a shift from a temporal dominant to a spatial one. While both modes obviously find their place in modernist and postmodernist artistic forms, Jameson argues that "even if everything is spatial, this postmodern reality here is somehow *more* spatial than everything else" (*Postmodernism* 365). He goes

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[3] See also Henri LeFebvre's work, *The Production of Space*, and Linda Hutcheon's two studies of the postmodern, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, and *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

on to explain the postmodern concern with space as a reaction against a modernist concern for time:

> The predilection for space, among postmodernism's theorists, is, of course, easiest understood as a predictable (generational) reaction against the official and long since canonized rhetoric of temporality of the critics and theorists of high modernism, the reversal making for dramatic and visionary accounts of the new order and its new thrills. (365)

This leads us back to Camus's identification of "the passage of time" as central to a recognition of the absurdity of the world. His primary focus on time (and the relative lack of an existential concern for spatiality in general) would seem to support Jameson's configuration if we accept existentialism as a philosophy grounded in modernist thought. The interaction of the temporal and spatial within *Suttree* thus becomes an interesting subject for exploration, since the existential nature of its themes would seem to imply a greater concern for temporal rather than spatial concerns. I will show that this is not quite the case, but in doing so, I hope again to illustrate how McCarthy is able to invert a particular literary focus (~~before~~ Lson, the external, and in this case, the spatial) as a way of circumscribing and rendering its opposite (the internal and the temporal).

My first example relies on an intertextual reference to McCarthy's southern predecessor and modernist icon, Faulkner. In the opening pages of the novel, we see Suttree afloat on the river, tending his lines, when he comes upon the recovery of a suicide's body being taken from the river. His friend Joe, seeing him in the crowd, hails him.

He turned. Hey Joe, he said. Did you see it?

> No. They say he jumped last night. They found his shoes on the bridge.
>
> They stood looking at the dead man . . . . He lay there in his yellow socks with the flies crawling on the blanket and one hand stretched out on the grass. He wore his watch on the inside of his wrist as some folks do or used to and as Suttree passed he noticed with a feeling he could not name that the dead man's watch was still running. (10)

This reference (and several others) to time passing in the following pages supports Prather's notion that knowledge of the passing of time is distinctly present for Suttree in the novel. The reference here to *The Sound and The Fury* calls our attention as well: Quentin Compson begins his last day in Faulkner's novel by pulling the hands off his pocket-watch in a seemingly futile attempt to slow the flow of time; his day ends in a jump to his death off a bridge. The passing of time, initially configured as significant in *Suttree*, is thus linked to the idea of suicide, but for Suttree the implication is that the onrush of time cannot be halted, even in death.

After these initial references to time, however, the rest of the novel largely avoids or obscures temporal matters. Narrative leaps take us both forward and backward; ~~and~~ we first see Suttree after he is out of prison, and ~~later~~ return to his meeting ~~of~~ Harrogate there. We are told at one point that it is an unnumbered Monday in "this year nineteen fifty-one" (66), but McCarthy maintains a lack of specificity as to the exact date from that point on. Mostly, we are simply left without knowledge of the passage of time between the many short sections that compose the novel, and other than the occasional names of days or months and the clues we gain due to description of the weather, we are

largely without temporal grounding.

However, the ways in which time is present in *spatialized* terms is discussed at length in D.S. Butterworth's article, "Pearls as Swine: Recentering the Marginal in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*." Butterworth argues, in a similar fashion to how I have above, that Suttree uses externally spatial figurations to convey temporal qualities:

> McCarthy contextualizes the human subject first and foremost in the world of things, treating even living individuals as archaeological finds, as odd birds whose petrific bones are immune to the chisel, whose stories are nothing more than tracks in mud even as they speak . . . . [He] exaggerates the way in which spatial figure of the individual is implicated by time . . . . McCarthy treats characters as calcified temporal units. Yes, time passes, people die, and events occur throughout the novel. But McCarthy does not trace these events from their beginnings to their endings. (96-7)

This explains the episodic nature of the novel, with little or no concern for Suttree's or others' past circumstances prior to the present moment. Butterworth supports his argument by showing that contexts in the novel "are presented as a series of containers" (97). The river comes to signify a series of archaeological strata, containing the past refuse of Knoxville's inhabitants, the corpses of the suicide and Leonard's father, the catfish and other sources of food, and also the mussels that Reese so values and enlists Suttree's help to extract.[4]

Images of confinement and containment fill the novel on other levels as well. Places of rest and shelter take special

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4 "The paradigmatic image of the body as chronotype [a Bakhtinian term denoting a site of linking between the temporal and the spatial] in *Suttree* is the river mussel with its outer shell, inner meat, and, rarely, its innermost pearl. The mussel, holding its mature pearl inside, is an object in space that is also a distinct exponent of time" (99).

significance: Suttree's houseboat, the ragpicker's and Harrogate's warrens under bridges, Suttree's and Harrogate's stay in prison, and the latter's final resting place in the penitentiary. Suttree's two significant romantic relationships both end with images of closed spaces: Wanda trapped and dead under a rock slide and Joyce frantically kicking out the windshield of the new car that her ~~wages~~ from prostitution have purchased. Suttree moves away from his boat several times throughout the novel in what would seem failed rehearsals of his final escape. Only when he finds the dead body of the "double" in his boathouse does he finally seem capable of ~~lasting~~ escape. And the final image of death, figured as a huntsman whose "hounds do not tire" (471), is one linked with space rather than time: avoiding death involves flight from this hunter, the finding of a hiding place or refuge, or perhaps simply a constant physically configured avoidance that the final line symbolizes: "Fly them."

As with the inside/outside distinction, my argument here is not that McCarthy's use of the external and spatial makes his novel postmodern, but that he is able to turn these postmodern modes in on themselves as a way of rendering the internal and temporal in provocative ways. I have used a rather limited set of definitional characteristics from Jameson's theories because they identify two very central themes within McCarthy's work. Regardless of the value of naming *Suttree* as modernist or postmodernist, Jameson's terminology and distinctions allow us a useful and generative way of entering the novel. If pressed to definitively answer the question I have posed, I would argue that

Not really

McCarthy's novel is ultimately a modernist one, but also that it represents a transitional work between the two . By the time we come to McCarthy's next novel, *Blood Meridian*, the transition will seem much more complete.

A bit weak

Or an advance on both – Hegelian "synthesis"

Magnificent – I couldn't help marking it up; I was that engaged. I urge you to revise (a bit) and publish this – it's as good as anything in Sacred Violence.

A+++

Syntax, grandiloquence

Penalty –

A+

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