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NATHANIEL JOSEPH SPAIN

ABSTRACT

In postmodernity, wilderness still occupies a space in our cultural imagination. This is perhaps surprising considering the decline of uncontrolled natural spaces in recent history and postmodernity's typically subversive attitude toward previous cultural ideas and narratives, of which the wilderness image – as a hallmark of religious writing, medieval romances, folklore and many other forms – is evidently a part. While this thesis will explore the possibility that postmodernity is less subversive than typically assumed, it will also uncover the fact that wilderness spaces have thematic commonalities with the intricacies of postmodern critical theory, such as Derridean deconstruction. This thesis will therefore take a comparative approach, examining a selection of postmodern texts against a wide spectrum of earlier manifestations of the wilderness theme. This will demonstrate the prevalence of the wilderness image, reveal trends and narratives concerning its significance throughout history, and explore how postmodernity preserves, critiques or otherwise responds to prior representations of wilderness spaces and the values they promote.

CALLING BACK TO THE WILD:

POSTMODERNITY AND THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF WILDERNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Wilderness and postmodernity are temporally discordant. Wilderness embodies what is 'wild' as a physical space: the untamed, the unpredictable, and perhaps uncontrollable. Postmodernism, as an aesthetic form characterised by elements such as irony and self-consciousness, or postmodernity, as an epoch featuring amongst other things the insertion of capitalism into many spheres of cultural life, is generally considered to cover a period from the late 1950s or early 60s to the present day.[1] As this time has already seen mass industrialisation and domestication, with global exploration and colonisation leading toward satellite mapping and worldwide electronic and digital infrastructure, this kind of wilderness becomes difficult to situate within lived experience. This is particularly the case in more economically developed countries, but the proposed geological epoch of the Anthropocene refutes that any part of the world lies outside humanity's influence. Suggested by Paul Crutzen in 2000 and awaiting verification as part of the official Geological Time Scale, the Anthropocene is a term founded upon the idea that human presence has a significant and measurable impact on Earth as a global system.[2] In this case even remote

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xix-xx. Whether postmodernity continues to the present day will be discussed later in this section. Patricia Waugh further disseminates the nature of postmodernism in *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992): postmodernism can be described 'firstly as a mood or style of thought which privileges aesthetic modes over those of logic or method; secondly as an aesthetic practice with an accompanying body of commentary upon it; and thirdly as a concept designating a cultural epoch which has facilitated the rise to prominence of such theoretical and aesthetic styles and which may or may not constitute a break with previous structures of modernity', 7. Its preoccupations range from merging high culture with the low to anti-humanism and 'a pervasive cynicism about the progressivist ideals of modernity', 4-5.

[2] Clive Hamilton et al, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 1-2. The most obvious example of this is manmade climate change through carbon emissions, but this concept may also extend to urbanisation, manipulating, distributing and eliminating plant and animal species, and mining, to name but a few. In August 2016, experts recommended to the International Geological Congress that it should be officially adopted. Damian Carrington, 'The Anthropocene epoch: scientists declare dawn of human-influenced age', *Guardian* (2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth> [accessed 08/09/16].

wildernesses such as the Arctic and Antarctic are subject to human influence, particularly considering that our impact extends into the atmosphere.

In addition to this practical issue, wilderness is semantically problematic within the theoretical developments of recent intellectual and cultural history. The word itself is arbitrary; to use the language of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose work provides a foundation for the postmodern or post-structuralist approach to meaning, wilderness as a concept (or sign) is composed of an essential value for which the written or spoken word is a signifier indicating this idea.[3] We can go further in saying its perceived essential value is also arbitrary. Primarily 'wilderness' is culturally understood as 'wild or uncultivated land', stemming from 'wilddeor' meaning 'wild deer', therefore a place inhabited by such undomesticated creatures.[4] In the Oxford English Dictionary, the foremost use of 'wild' is to describe a creature that is 'Living in a state of nature; not tame, not domesticated'.[5] In definitively being *not* part of the human world, this idea of wilderness relies upon a binary opposition of wild/domestic in which the concepts only gain meaning through the counterpoint of another term, thereby having no independent validity. If wilderness can only be defined through the existence of a civilisation with which it is to be contrasted, its status as a space inherently opposed to human control is undermined. We may therefore argue from a purely logical standpoint that wilderness has never existed.

This approach is in keeping with Jacques Derrida's deconstructive technique, characterised by 'an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system'.[6] In this

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[3] Ferdinand de Saussure, 'from *Course in General Linguistics* (1916)' in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. by Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan, 2nd edition (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 6-7.

[4] 'Wilderness', definition 1. a., *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229003> [accessed 03/02/2016].

[5] 'Wild', definition A. I. 1., *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/228988> [accessed 03/02/2016].

[6] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' in *Jacques Derrida: Basic Writings*, ed. by Barry Stocker (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 132.

case, this involves understanding that wilderness is arbitrarily in opposition to domesticated nature, the latter having been generally hierarchically favoured throughout history, and instead of only substituting a new opposition (which may subversively be that domestication is *bad*, wilderness is *good*) we must question and undermine the reason why these oppositions occur in the system of produced meaning.

As the wilderness concept is produced in this way, its meaning is influenced through social discourse; the way ideas are discussed and claimed to be understood within communities, institutions, and society in general. As what is believed to be known is culturally relative, discourse is inter-subjective. Michel Foucault works to reveal 'historically how truth-effects are produced inside discourses which are not in themselves either true or false'; that is, not simply establishing how beliefs within specific time periods are wrong, as that would also be temporally subjective, but how and why ideas of correctness are produced and what this reveals about the societies producing them.[7] Foucault suggests this is due to 'relations of power'; society not only represses thought but creates it, that 'it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge… it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body'.[8] Discourse therefore serves to maintain systems of power within society via the way its culture operates, including but not limited to validating normative but hierarchical assumptions concerning class, race and sexuality. In postmodernism, the discourse-led wilderness concept becomes problematic, particularly as it may credibly form part of one or several metanarratives. Theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard argue that postmodernity is characterised through scepticism, disillusionment and plurality which has

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[7] Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power' in *Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. By Meghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 36.

[8] Foucault, 'Truth and Power, 33, 36. Examples from his work including how ideas of sexuality change over time in different cultural climates: 'the political significance of the problem of sex is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection between the discipline of the body and the control of the population', 46.

led to the collapse of metanarratives; that is, overarching human projects such as forming religious monocultures or the idea that progress is bound to capitalist economic development.[9] One example of a narrative embodied in the idea of wilderness is the perceived divide between nature and culture.

Nature/culture describes a binary opposition between the natural world 'external to society and governed by slow and steady laws' and human civilisation being 'teleologically oriented by progress toward a freedom understood as humankind wrenching itself out of any natural determination'.[10] This struggle to create a human space external to worldly limitations can be seen to have gained particular prominence when the individual disciplines of natural and social science were established as industrial society developed, separating knowledge into distinct categories of the human and non-human worlds.[11] In the context of the Anthropocene this is problematic. Industrialisation has created a precedent for enormous ecological exploitation without recognising the wider impacts of human development upon the physical world. The Anthropocene is built upon a premise that 'human history and Earth history are commensurable and deeply interconnected', and while it centres humanity as an enormously important influence upon our planet it moves to decentre our material needs – they are no longer isolated, nor without consequence, nor should be prioritised.[12] In the age of the Anthropocene the concept of wilderness is at least outmoded, if not part of a dangerous imagining of strict differentiation between human and natural zones, thereby ignoring the impact of human development.

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[9] Jean-François Lyotard, 'from *The Postmodern Condition* (1984)' in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, 206-14; Jean-François Lyotard, 'Apostil on Narratives' in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997), 17-21.
[10] Hamilton et al, 'The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis', 6.
[11] Hamilton et al, 'The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis', 6.
[12] Hamilton et al, 'The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis', 6.

Together these elements suggest that wilderness has little relevance to postmodernism. If anything, it exists only as a cultural memory regenerated through nostalgia. If wilderness no longer exists, both as a physical actuality and a theoretical concept, it can only be discussed through the lens of earlier cultural representations. Such portrayals may fall prey to Fredric Jameson's critical account of postmodern culture being plagued with the 'pastiche' mode, or 'speech in a dead language'; as the pastiche only imitates prior modes of thought, it is therefore non-progressive and ultimately unproductive.[13] Certainly the attitudes of figures such as Chris McCandless, the main subject of Jon Krakauer's non-fiction account *Into the Wild* (1996) who distances himself from society to 'front only the essential facts of life' (using the words of Henry David Thoreau), are heavily derived from past literature.[14] At the site of McCandless' death in the Alaskan hinterland 'Jack London is <u>King</u>' was found carved on a piece of wood, a hyperbolic declaration of the perceived ongoing relevance of works such as London's *Call of the Wild* (1903).[15] Regardless of his protagonist's point of view, Krakauer sustains an unbiased approach. He neither ignores the foolishness of McCandless' actions and beliefs – particularly in his dedication to writers such as London, Krakauer discrediting his works as heavily idealised – nor dismisses his values out of hand.[16] The text both attempts to uncover a common mentality between various young American male adventurers who similarly sought out wild places, Krakauer included; there were 'unsettling parallels between events in his life and those in mine'.[17] Similar non-fiction texts such as Cheryl

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[13] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 16-17.

[14] Jon Krakauer*, Into the Wild* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1998); Henry David Thoreau, 'Walden' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. by Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, vol. B, 8th edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 1028.

[15] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 10; Jack London, 'The Call of the Wild' in *White Fang and the Call of the Wild* (London: Penguin, 1994), 195-278.

[16] '…they were works of fiction… London himself had spent just a single winter in the North… he'd died by his own hand on his California estate… maintaining a sedentary existence that bore scant resemblance to the ideals he espoused in print', Krakauer, *Into the Wild,* 45.

[17] Krakauer, *Into the Wild,* 45, x.

Strayed's *Wild* (2012) fully commit to the ideal of embracing wilderness, her journey giving her the quasi-spiritual means to reclaim her identity: 'back to the person I used to be – strong and responsible, clear-eyed and driven, ethical and good'.[18] Such texts might, from Jameson's perspective, be deemed reiterations of a generic template rather than expressions of the new and are therefore lacking in existential depth.

Conversely, dismissing texts which non-critically regenerate past ideas as pastiches can be considered reductive, holding a position of intellectual superiority over the past and the perceived low culture of the present. Whether a repeated concept is just a baseless trope or a perennial truism is ultimately a subjective value judgement and impossible to determine in any definitive sense as an absolute value. However, what can be maintained is that the idea of wilderness is resilient and therefore has significance in postmodernity. Even a writer such as Robert Macfarlane, within the more blatantly domesticated landscape of the British Isles, states: 'I did not believe, or did not want to believe, the obituaries for the wild'.[19] This commitment to retain, or return to, an idea of wilderness will be a focus in the upcoming discussion; what it might represent in the present and why it seems to exert such lasting power and influence.

A major preoccupation of this thesis will be to examine how wilderness is considered essentially oppositional. While the wild/domestic split is problematic through being an enforced dichotomy, interesting associations might be established through extrapolating this relationship further to the related binaries of uncontrolled/controlled, or chaos/order. The image of wilderness, external to human authority, is thereby external to the strictures of law, institutions, systems of power, the predictable nature of the world we have come to expect, and perhaps even language. In the words of Toni Morrison: 'Not wilderness where there was system, or the logic of lions, trees,

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[18] Cheryl Strayed, *Wild: A Journey from Lost to Found* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 57.
[19] Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2008), 11.

toads, and birds, but wild wilderness where there was none'.[20] The purer the wilderness, the less

defined it becomes. Surely the strongest cultural manifestation of wilderness is the unmapped *terra*

incognita? Saussure revealingly describes thought without the definition of language as

'uncharted'.[21] Given that wilderness without the proximity of human imposition cannot exist as a

concept, it is difficult to deny that from the perspective of our cultural conception of the term,

wilderness becomes wilder as human interaction with it decreases. Based upon this, wilderness

should predate civilisation and perhaps even humanity, and therefore language. The wilderness

concept can therefore be seen to be intrinsically subversive of any schema enforcing fixed concepts

upon sensory data and the physical world.[22] This has the benefit of being a useful epistemological

tool for understanding, and undermining, the world around us. Specific applications of this will be

explored throughout the following chapters.

This thesis will also examine further how wilderness as a historical concept is embraced

and disseminated in postmodernity. This subject provides some peculiar challenges and the manner

of my approach requires some justification. Firstly, the assertion that postmodernity continues into

the present day is not without issue. In *The Mourning After*, Neil Brooks and Josh Toth collect a

sequence of essays supporting the idea that postmodernity has ended its reign as the

'epistemological dominant'.[23] Brooks and Toth date this potentially to the fall of the Berlin wall,

the end of the 'last viable political alternative' to capitalism, and therefore the end to the non-

capitalistic 'latent utopian impulses' against which postmodernism itself was aligned – marking

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[20] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (London: Picador/Macmillan, 1989), 138.

[21] Saussure, 'from *Course in General Linguistics* (1916)', 6.

[22] A potentially useful allegory is the rhizome-image developed by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, representing the world as a complex, entangled root-cluster of associated meaning. Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome' in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3-25.

[23] Neil Brooks and Josh Toth (eds.), *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism* (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), 2.

the end too of a postmodern project and the beginning of a re-appreciation of 'the utopian, the teleological, the religious'.[24] Perhaps more convincing is their suggestion that the World Trade Centre attacks of 2001 generated a 'new cultural dominant' of "moral outrage" and a 'culture of fear'.[25] While it is incontestable that this event led to dramatic political consequences, it can be argued that cultures of paranoia and dichotomies of east versus west were still present during the Cold War years which dominated the period generally ascribed as postmodern. Toth and Brooks argue that a body of work they describe as '*postmodern mourning*' indicate a shift in critical theory from postmodernism to new modes of thought.[26] However, the texts they use to support this fail to convincingly demonstrate postmodernism has expired at all, and in fact seem to more indicate that it is alive and kicking. For instance, in 'Postmodernism in the Age of Distracting Discourses', Robert McLaughlin looks at recent cultural-political trends of suppression of expression as a 'twisted postmodernism' characterised by its 'dismissal of content, its privileging of discourse over truth-value, its emphasis on dialogue, negotiation, and contingency over principle', using examples of the silencing of those speaking out against the political norm on the basis of the inappropriate use of their social position as a platform for these views (such as teachers) or the rights of their audience not to have their world-view challenged.[27] McLaughlin states this is inherently opposed to a true postmodernism of valuing truth and creating a progressive social project. However, he situates this within a small group of postmodern authors. If postmodernism is a cultural movement marked by plurality and an understanding of the tie between ideology and what we consider to be knowledge, then it cannot be argued that this is a 'twisted' form but rather simply a form of postmodernism with which the author is not in ideological agreement. Indeed,

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[24] Brooks and Toth, *The Mourning After*, 2.
[25] Brooks and Toth, *The Mourning After*, 3.
[26] Brooks and Toth, *The Mourning After*, 3.
[27] Robert McLaughlin, 'Postmodernism in the Age of Distracting Discourses', *The Mourning After*, 57-59.

the increasing integration of such plurality and knowing language games into the political Right suggests that postmodernism is in fact even more relevant today than in the recent past. This thesis will demonstrate throughout that contemporary texts and texts produced closer to the conception of the postmodern period have many commonalities and reveal that they have been produced from within similar (now referred to as neo-liberal) cultures, supporting my claim that we have not yet moved from the postmodern.

This approach also addresses the question of categorising and contextualising texts. As the postmodern is used to describe a style and/or an epoch, this raises the question of whether it matters if a text is an example of the postmodern in that it actively embraces the style, or simply a contemporary text set within a postmodern period, and whether this has any effect on how they should be read. Certainly overtly experimental authors such as J. G. Ballard, and to some extent Angela Carter, conjure postmodern preoccupations with plurality and subversion to a greater and more vivid extent than the film *The Edge* which relies more on conventional narrative devices. I will take my cue here from Jameson, who describes postmodernism not as a style of writing as much as a 'cultural dominant' which has the potential to infiltrate and influence the content of the text; he describes it as a 'force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses… must make their way'.[28] Considering postmodernism is largely about resisting uniformity, describing it as an expansive cultural condition allowing for different forms of expression (albeit with overlapping preoccupations) is more compelling than viewing it reductively as simply a mode of cultural production. Accordingly, I have intentionally moved between creative non-fiction and fictional texts throughout this thesis. Culture does not end at the fiction novel, and the non-fiction text is not a mimetic account of the actual lived world unmediated by the cultural conditions in

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[28] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 4-6.

which it is written. Both forms of text are valuable in determining the way in which culture understands environment.

Despite the construction of the wilderness image being a global matter, including its link to ecological concerns, this thesis will largely focus on case studies from Anglophonic literature and film for the purposes of specificity and clarity. With the inclusion of older literary examples, the area of study will remain wide-ranging, and historical texts have been selected to best represent a spectrum of thought across previous centuries and to interact with postmodern counterpoints in the most meaningful and revealing of ways. This approach has much in common with the concerns of ecocriticism regarding the ways in which society conceptualises a distinct 'nature', what this reveals about ecological attitudes within that culture, and what problems this raises.[29] Largely this will be a 'culturalist' approach, in Timothy Clark's words 'reading a text's stances in terms of various kinds of cultural identity projected or at issue' rather than examining in a realist fashion how a wilderness text fails or succeeds in accurately representing the natural world.[30] However, as this thesis is in many ways using the wilderness motif as a vehicle for cultural interrogation of the idea of postmodernism against the cultures of the past, ecocritical theory as such will be less foregrounded as a tool for analysis than those provided by theories of postmodernism, alongside imaginative works that are also indicators of the broader culture.[31]

Another area of study this thesis overlaps with is that of critical posthumanism. The form in which postmodern wilderness representation challenges humanist assumptions of human exceptionalism, and our inherent authority over the natural world, can be seen as a partner to a

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[29] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.
[30] Clark, *Literature and the Environment*, 93.
[31] While this is largely for the purposes of brevity, it is a problematic stance – the 'autonomy of culture as on object of study' is arbitrary (Clark, 166). In this case, this thesis will hopefully serve as a platform for further reading into ecocriticism, for which Clark's *Literature and the Environment* is recommended.

theoretical position representing, as Pramod K. Nayar states, a '*radical decentring of the traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human in order to demonstrate how the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines'*.[32] The theoretical focus of posthumanism on machines stretches its relevancy to a thematic area such as wilderness with its persistent recourse to the organic, but the interrogation of historical notions of human supremacy over nature as explored in chapter one, and postmodern conflations of human/animal/ecosystem identities demonstrated throughout this thesis can be read as one appendage of a posthumanist impulse.[33]

The way in which culture influences ideas of wilderness through discourse, and how an analysis of wilderness may be read back upon culture itself, will be examined in the first and second chapters concerning religious writing and more pluralistic folk traditions, respectively. The epistemological role of wilderness will be expanded upon in chapter three, while its retention as a means to self-development will be revealed in chapter four. Finally, the postmodern redefinition of wilderness' borders will be explored in the fifth chapter, looking at backwoods spaces, the shifting distinction between urban and wild spaces, and the merging of ruin and wilderness in apocalyptic fiction. This will demonstrate that when wildernesses are made subjective they no longer need to rely on categorical borders, allowing for subversive redefinition. Together these chapters will both use wilderness as a demonstration of postmodern preoccupations, but challenge the solidity of postmodernity as a concept. When wilderness becomes a form of perennial deconstructive metanarrative, deconstruction undermines itself through the paradox of a constant deconstructive symbol, and the idea of the lack of metanarratives distinguishing postmodernism

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[32] Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).
[33] Posthumanism's examination of the conflation of human and machine is most famously found in Donna Harraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1984), which can be found in further essays on this subject in a collection edited by Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 69-84.

from previous history is also brought into question. Wilderness is therefore a valuable subject of analysis in the context of postmodernism for providing an insight into the way we think and our position in the history of cultural thought.

PARADISE AND WILDERNESS

> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have
> dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over
> all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.[34]

The above passage from Genesis provides an appropriate case study for exploring the role of discourse in shaping wilderness concepts. Humanity is divinely sanctioned to hold a position of superiority over the natural world. This exemplifies what scholars such as Arthur Lovejoy have defined as the 'Great Chain of Being': a model of the universe 'composed of an immense… number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents… to the highest possible kind of creature'.[35] This hierarchy can be based on criteria such as "perfection" – the physical quality and complexity of the organism – or "powers of soul" – the possession of special traits such as rationality.[36] In this model, the wilderness is designated lowly through its nonhuman components, and is an affront to God's plan for humanity claiming dominion over nature. This negative representation is compounded when wilderness spaces are used as sites of rejection, such as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden into the uncultivated world of 'Thorns' and 'thistles' beyond.[37] The wilderness is clearly outside God's favour.

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[34] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Genesis 1:26.

[35] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 59. Lovejoy traces this concept from its roots in Classical thought, a period from which many Judeo-Christian ideas mentioned in this chapter are similarly developed. Even if Genesis may not be the true point of origin for these ideas about wilderness, the Christian faith system is more blatantly present in the Anglophonic cultures upon which this thesis will focus, justifying a focus on the Bible as a source of discourse.

[36] Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 58-9.

[37] Genesis 3:18.

In order to justify use of the term 'discourse' in how these ideas influence cultural thought and therefore literary production, the purpose this representation serves in maintaining systems of power must be exposed. This aspect is provided by Roderick Nash. Working from a premise that 'the energy of early civilisation was directed at conquering wilderness', he establishes a Christian precedent for ecological exploitation through negative portrayals of wild places.[38] This makes sense; not only is a high incidence of wilderness undesirable in a newly emerging civilisation due to the farmland requirements of growing populations, but the geographic isolation of communities dispersed within or separated by large wilderness areas limits communication, thereby restricting the establishment of a common identity with other communities and religious orthodoxy.

Nash highlights the way this cultural practice of discrediting wilderness is manifested in theology through the image of paradise, wherein the domesticated garden landscape is portrayed as an ultimate good, wilderness an antithetical evil.[39] Judeo-Christian writings follow in this tradition, Eden being an idealised landscape catering to the needs of Adam and Eve, segregated from the harsh uncultivated lands of the rest of creation.[40] The expulsion of Adam and Eve comes with a message from God that 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread'.[41] The task of Adam and Eve is to strive to cultivate the land, to recreate the domestic nature of Eden so that it may provide for their needs. This becomes a divine imperative to go into the wild places and cultivate them; to 'replenish the earth, and subdue it'.[42] Because of this close association through binary

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[38] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xii.
[39] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 8-9. Nash finds blatant Classical prejudice to wild places in the writings of those such as the poet Titus Lucretius Carus, who portrayed wilderness life before Roman civilisation as a 'nightmarish existence, hounded by dangers on every hand and surviving through the ancient code of eat or be eaten', and the idea that wilderness is a waste of valuable Earthly space, 10.
[40] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 15.
[41] Genesis 3:19.
[42] Genesis 1:28.

opposition and the desirability of transforming one to the other, much of this chapter will be preoccupied with images of Eden as well as wilderness.

Nash's position exposes an obvious logical flaw: why would God create such a negative Earthly space, containing hardship and danger? In *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, Susan Power Bratton offers an alternative analysis working from the premise that wilderness gains positive significance as a tool for the development of the human subject.[43] Many of the examples of wilderness she highlights in the Bible fit with an idea of 'wilderness as a setting for spiritual events'; wilderness providing a particular space in which the righteous can be tested by God and God's will therefore revealed to them.[44] Throughout her analysis she notes the significance of 'stress' in these experiences, wilderness' extra-societal status providing a fitting site for self-development, introspection, and the isolation required to have personal encounters with God or his messengers, and to express the strength of their faith by withstanding physical hardship, such as Christ's forty-day fast.[45] Christ's sojourn is mentioned in several books; in Luke it is stated that Jesus 'was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing'.[46] The Devil attempts to convince Jesus to worship him instead of God. Jesus resists, thereby proving his faith. Wilderness provides a place of seclusion for this test, and a harsh environment to make the test greater; if faith in God is conditional, shaken by trying experiences, it is not true faith. Similarly, Bratton asserts that the reason the 'children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin' in the book of Exodus is not coincidental: the period of forty years living off manna from heaven was intended to teach dependence on God.[47] Bratton argues

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[43] Susan Power Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993).
[44] Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 16.
[45] Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 52.
[46] Luke 4:1-2.
[47] Exodus 16:1.

that a separation from society allowed them to develop their own ideas of self-government and establish a new society.[48] This subverts the idea of wilderness lying outside God's favour, and establishes a new element of discourse: that wild sites enable human development.

However, Bratton does not diverge so greatly from the views of Nash. The use of wilderness as a source of spiritual growth is not wholly positive, as it still offers threat. In the temptation of Christ, the spirit must lead Jesus to the wilderness in order to find the Devil, suggesting that these spaces are where this evil most readily resides. Bratton herself allows that the lesson of Exodus is not well learnt by the children of Israel; they constantly 'murmur' against Moses despite miraculous gifts of food and eventually succumb to paganist practise in creating a false idol, suggesting that wilderness is equally capable of encouraging deviant behaviour.[49] While this suggests wilderness sojourns are an imprecise stimulant for human development, it can be countered that without the option to deviate the wilderness experience is not actually a rigorous test of character. Regardless of this, because wilderness is used as a tool for improving human relationships with God it reaffirms the hierarchy of the natural world as lower than humanity; it is a means for human development rather than having value in itself.

Additionally, Bratton demonstrates bias through leading with her own religious experiences of the natural world, having a deep spiritual connection with wild places. Simply because as a modern Christian she holds these views does not confirm their universality. Nash offers competing examples of Christian interactions with wilderness which draw radically different conclusions. One example he gives is Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux where, under the influence of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, the poet realised that 'the world's beauty diverted men

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[48] Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 53.
[49] Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 46-8.

from their proper concerns' of spiritual self-development.[50] The wilderness is the material world in its utmost form, lacking the presence of human souls, and should therefore be rejected. There is no space for aesthetic appreciation, or an appreciation of any intrinsic worth to wild places, with this world view. Bratton's theological position is a more recent development; in *Man and the Natural World*, Keith Thomas evidences a change in attitudes from the early modern period into the modern, wherein prejudice against animals and nature in Tudor Britain gradually receded and the idea of humanity's right to subdue nature became 'increasingly abhorrent to their moral and aesthetic sensibilities'.[51] Thomas sees this as due to the lessened necessity for the imperative to domesticate:

> The growth of towns led to a new longing for the countryside. The progress of cultivation had fostered a taste for weeds, mountains and unsubdued nature. The new-found security from wild animals had generated an increasing concern to protect birds and preserve wild creatures in their natural state. Economic independence of animal power and urban isolation from animal farming had nourished emotional attitudes which were hard, if not impossible, to reconcile with the exploitation of animals by which most people lived.[52]

While Bratton is North American, certainly the same social changes have occurred there as in Britain. In 1913, J. E. Mercer suggested that a new model of Western spirituality – dubbed 'nature mysticism' – sourced divinity in nature, citing the works of British Romantics like William Wordsworth and American Transcendentalists such as Walt Whitman.[53] Bratton's spiritual standpoint is in keeping with this recent tradition; the concept of personal growth through contact

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[50] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 20.
[51] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1984), 300.
[52] Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 301.
[53] J. E. Mercer, *Nature Mysticism* (London: George Allen, 1913).

with nature is not outside religious discourse, but rather an ideological subdomain. The persistence of this idea into postmodernity, and its effects on cultural thought, will be explored with more detail in chapter four through the motif of the wilderness sojourn, it being an expansive subject. The prevalence of the concept of the ungodly wilderness, as evidenced through the more self-contained images of the paradise/wilderness dichotomy and the chain of being, will be exposed in the remainder of this chapter. The way these ideas are regenerated and disseminated in postmodern thought will also be exemplified to test the notion that postmodernity is typically more resistant to large ideological narratives. What will be demonstrated is that such religious images still frame and inform the way wilderness is presented, even if the typical negative connotations themselves are problematized.

THE RELIGIOUS WILDERNESS CANON

As John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) focuses upon retelling the first passages of Genesis, it is a natural subject for comparison and a significant text considering it is the first explicitly Christian, let alone Protestant, epic poem.[54] More than narrating the fall of humanity, the text seeks to 'justify the ways of God to men'; to illuminate and offer solutions to theological conundrums such as why God gives humanity free will knowing that they will fall, why he permits Satan to exist, and why he banishes humanity from Eden considering these points, in an attempt to erase disparities between the beneficent God of Milton's time with the vengeful God of the Old Testament.[55] Largely this is achieved through contextualising humanity's fall as the beginning of the development of early civilisation and the great human project of establishing society and religion.[56]

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[54] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 2003).
[55] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I:26.
[56] The proceeding events of the Old Testament are related to Adam by the angel Michael in books XI-XII.

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Despite therefore diminishing the cruelty of God's actions regarding the fall, the text does not extend this process to removing the negative theological connotations of wilderness, and it is retained as a site of vindictive banishment. The most striking example of this is the incorporation of certain signature biomes of untrammelled wilderness into the landscape of Hell; the fallen angels discover a terrain consisting of 'many a frozen, many a fiery alp, // Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens'.[57] That these are identified as part of a 'universe of death' cements their negative connotations.[58] Here 'nature breeds, // Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things, // Abominable, unutterable'; Hell produces hideous wildlife.[59] While this is an extravagant caricature of wild places, it demonstrates that there is a cultural foundation for seeing the demonic in wilderness and its inhabitants.

Another image of wilderness is the 'wild abyss' Milton describes as present between the zones of Hell and the world.[60] Similarly this is not an analogue to worldly wilderness, but displays a seething mass of elements all in competition with each other:

> …Into this wild abyss,
> The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave,
> Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
> But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
> Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
> Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
> His dark materials to create more worlds[61]

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[57] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:620-1.
[58] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:622.
[59] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:624-6.
[60] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:917.
[61] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:910-6.

These 'dark materials' are the building blocks of creation and can be considered a pure form of wilderness; defying order, a panoply of natural parts intertwining, predating the world and humanity and perhaps exceeding them through being both the 'womb' and 'grave' of nature. This seething void is obviously inhospitable to humans, consisting largely of 'Night' and 'Chaos'.[62] While the wastes of Hell embody wilderness as wilfully antagonistic, the wild abyss embodies wilderness as necessarily antagonistic through its incompatibility with the solidity and consistency required for human life. While in this case the void is morally neutral, the nature of these elements shows how they may be purposed to create antagonistic environments.

This is demonstrated in Earth's representation outside the Garden of Eden. As Satan draws close to Paradise, the world 'seems a boundless continent, // Dark, waste, and wild', providing a hostile environment to which Adam and Eve will later be banished for their disobedience.[63] At this point it contains no organic life: 'for other creature in this place // Living or lifeless to be found was none'.[64] Satan first discovers flora on the slopes guarding Paradise: 'a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides // With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild, // Access denied'.[65] Here wild plants are used by God to delineate borders, a zone which cannot be passed, and evidences their antagonistic nature. A negative portrayal of wilderness is maintained, whereas the Garden of Eden, as in Genesis, features the natural world catering to its human inhabitants.[66]

While these representations form a consolidated image of wilderness within strictly negative parameters, such an extended narrative struggles to restrict the wild within the religious discourse, and its chaotic and morally confused nature begins to emerge. A significant figure to be

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[62] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II:894-5.
[63] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III:423-4.
[64] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III:442-3.
[65] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III:135-7.
[66] For instance: 'goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit'. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV:147.

used in revealing this ambiguity is the infamous serpent. While in Genesis the serpent is presented as merely a conniving or 'subtil' creature, Milton explains its transgression against God through being possessed by Satan: 'in at his mouth // The Devil entered… possessing soon inspired // With act intelligential'.[67] Despite this, the serpent is still 'accursed // Above all cattle, each beast of the field' by God on discovering its temptation of Eve.[68] This is a miscarriage of justice considering the serpent was possessed by satan and therefore not in control of its actions. Or, if we are to believe the serpent exerted some degree of will in its actions (or was completely self-willed if we use the Genesis version) then the moral situation becomes increasingly complex. Explaining human capacity for evil when they have been made in the image of God is difficult enough, but to do so in animals presents an even greater challenge. The following rhetorical questions are inevitable: if animals do not possess the same critical faculties as humans, resting hierarchically lower with no right to ownership over the natural world and simply there for God to test the spiritual fibre of humanity, what use is the kind of self-will ascribed to the serpent? If the serpent is just a tool for testing the spiritual strength of Eve, why was it punished? Even more so if the fall from Eden is, as Milton suggests, a beneficial one for the development of humanity. Is the cursing of the serpent not purposeless collateral damage? The effect this has is to make wild animals such as the self-willed serpent blurry in their spiritual status, confusing and seemingly outside any straightforward idea of morality or purpose to the natural world. It renders the treatment of non-domestic animals by God vindictive through lacking clear motivation.

Despite these logical issues, the religious discourse of the ungodly wilderness is tenacious, postdating such potentially iconoclastic developments in cultural thought as the theory of evolution. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, first published in 1859, should have significant

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[67] Genesis 3:1; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX:187-90.
[68] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, X:175-6.

ramifications for the idea of a hierarchically lower wilderness.[69] Firstly, humanity is inextricably tied to the undomesticated natural world via our ancestors, as we were not placed into the world fully formed as in the creationist view, and therefore the wilderness is written upon our physical bodies through how they have been encouraged to develop through its trials. Secondly, the previous idea that all species are allotted into a set hierarchy – to use Darwin's words, 'that species were immutable productions, and had been separately created' – becomes problematic when creatures are in a constant state of flux and shift in and out of ecological niches.[70] In this context, Genesis begins to lose its hold as a credible account of how humans and animals gained their place in the natural world.

However, discourse can still modify these ramifications. Even in Darwinian thought a hierarchy can be inferred through the notion that 'Natural selection almost inevitably causes much extinction of the less improved forms of life'; the worth of a species can be derived from its evolutionary tenacity.[71] Writers such as Timothy Morton indicate that Charles Darwin went to lengths to avoid such reductive reasoning, taking the approach that 'all that we call Nature is mutation and often pointless'; species do not adapt to their environment but rather mutate inexorably and randomly, certain features being passed down for a number of reasons and inevitably becoming beneficial for certain environments.[72] However, the subtlety and potential nihilism of this point means that there are those who would reject this conclusion in favour of the 'survival of the fittest' trope; an example Morton gives is capitalist ideology using this as both motto and justification for competitiveness for its own sake and materialistic body fetishization.[73]

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[69] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, 6th edition (London: John Murray, 1920). This edition was originally published in 1872.
[70] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, xiii
[71] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 3
[72] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 44-5.
[73] Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 72.

Another simplistic but pervasive reading of Darwin can be that humanity's technological development and subjugation of wilderness becomes in itself an indicator of superiority, as it displays a high degree of evolution. This is not a new idea, particularly when it comes to race, as Thomas states: 'uncultivated land meant uncultivated men' and 'when seventeenth-century Englishmen moved to Massachusetts, part of their case for occupying Indian territory would be that those who did not themselves subdue and cultivate the land had no right to prevent others from doing so'.[74] However, in the context of evolution this develops to suggest that racial others are 'less improved'; they are stuck in the evolutionary past and are inherently inferior, science being used to maintain this prejudice. Textual evidence for this reading of Darwin (the use of language based in the science of evolution to support prejudice) can be found in Jack London's *White Fang* (1906) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902).[75] While Thomas suggests England's attitude toward nature had become more positive in the nineteenth century these texts demonstrate that, in the far-removed wildernesses of Alaska or the African continent at least, Western civilisation was deeply suspicious of undomesticated nature even into the early years of the twentieth century.

Despite being a secular text, *White Fang* draws heavily upon the unhallowed wilderness motif and the hierarchy of beings.[76] In the opening pages, London personifies the landscape as possessing 'a laughter more terrible than any sadness' which 'was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life'.[77] This

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[74] Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 15.
[75] Jack London, 'White Fang' in *White Fang and The Call of the Wild* (London: Penguin, 1994), 1-194; Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).
[76] While *Call of the Wild* is admittedly a more well-known text, *White Fang* is greater in length and therefore more explicitly developed, particularly on the theme of race, as well as having very similar themes albeit in reverse: 'Jack London defined the theme of *White Fang…* Beginning at the very opposite end – evolution instead of devolution; civilization instead of decivilization'. Franklin Walker, *Jack London and the Klondike: The Genesis of an American Writer* (San Marino, CA: The Huntingdon Library, 1966), 228.
[77] London, *White Fang*, 3.

anthropomorphism not only establishes the wilderness as self-willed but as deliberately antagonistic, further cemented in the following pages when London states: 'Life is an offense to it, for life is movement; and the Wild aims always to destroy movement'.[78] The use of capitalisation to make wilderness a proper noun further invests power by designating it a named entity, removing any notion of plurality and difference between wild sites and instead creating a universal antagonist. In an unusual move London divorces wilderness from its component parts, and is even antagonistic toward them – 'It freezes the water to prevent it running to the sea; it drives the sap out of the trees till they are frozen to their mighty hearts' – further individuating it as an entity outside and above the world, like an evil demiurge.[79] London states that the wild treats humanity the 'most ferociously and terribly of all', as humanity is 'ever in revolt against the dictum that all movement must in the end come to the cessation of movement'.[80] We may extrapolate this to be the unfortunate consequence of consciousness and a deliberate attempt to overcome the material world and our own mortality, leading to a more bitter defeat when humans fail at this challenge, or alternatively in the language of London that the wilderness considers this an affront and seeks vengeance for our arrogance. Our evolutionary position still sets us apart from the rest of the natural world, but places us in an antagonised position. Together these points heavily reinforce an idea that the wilderness is a site outside of nourishing spiritual favour.[81]

The chain of being again arises in a secularised form through the manner in which the eponymous wolf-dog crossbreed relates to other living beings. Throughout the text, animals and

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[78] London, *White Fang*, 4.
[79] London, *White Fang*, 4.
[80] London, *White Fang*, 4.
[81] Earle Labor suggests London does see spiritual value in such cold, waste wilderness, but it is not ultimately tenable: 'although a place of spiritual and moral purgation, it provides neither warmth nor security. It is a region to escape FROM – not TO… Man may find a certain serenity in the arctic wastes, but it is the blank serenity of death'. Earle Labor, 'Jack London's Symbolic Wilderness: Four Versions' in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 17:2 (1962), 150-1.

humans continue to claim a position in the natural hierarchy through the power they have other others. From White Fang's perspective, these positions are imbued with value and respect. He acknowledges his subservience to some life forms while claiming dominance over others, keenly demonstrated in the way he relates to humans. The first time White Fang sees them a 'great awe descended upon him. He was beaten down to movelessness by an overwhelming sense of his own weakness and littleness. Here was mastery and power, something far and away beyond him'.[82] That other animals recognise power in humans affirms their supremacy, and throughout much of the text humans are referred to as the 'gods' of dogs.[83] The criteria for godhood London creates is that of mastery over the material: 'their capacity to communicate motion to unmoving things; their capacity to change the very face of the world'.[84] This has problematic consequences when examining race. The first humans White Fang encounters are Native Americans. When the dog sees 'his first white men' his viewpoint supports a discourse of racial superiority; they are 'a race of superior gods. They impressed him as possessing superior power, and it is on power that godhead rests'.[85] The chain of being merges with Darwinism to create a narrative of racial inferiority based on a model of technological advancement, a criteria established within a white cultural framework.

This finds an ideological partner in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Here the evolutionary narrative is used as a source of fear; rather than finding commonality with other racial groups through shared human ancestry, they are alienated through their perceived primitive culture. This is largely achieved through the idea of the 'primeval' wilderness.[86] Marlow's entry

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[82] London, *White Fang*, 67.
[83] London, *White Fang*, 77.
[84] London, *White Fang*, 73.
[85] London, *White Fang*, 116.
[86] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 56.

into the African continent is presented as a temporal as well as spatial journey: 'Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world'.[87] Consequently the indigenous population are presented as predecessors to modern, civilised, white humanity. Explicitly they are 'prehistoric man'.[88] A black boat operator is an 'improved specimen' through his education in technical skills.[89] Once again white technological development is used as a criterion for racial superiority, the text establishing that the subjugation of wilderness spaces is desirable; to live in proximity to wilderness makes you a 'savage', and as worthy of subjugation and improvement as the landscape. The following passage describing the uncultivated environment demonstrates as much: 'The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free'.[90] The world's essential character is warped within uncultivated spaces, returning to the notion that the natural world is inherently antagonistic to human presence. In other passages it is again embodied as a thinking, dangerous being, perceiving interlopers with a 'vengeful aspect'.[91] At the beginning of the novel, Marlow notes similar wild origins to the British Isles, having been also 'one of the dark places of the earth'.[92] Overall our evolutionary and societal roots are a source of fear. Wilderness is portrayed as a beast we have overcome to our mutual benefit; civilisations who have not tamed their wild places are looked upon with disdain. The cultivation of the landscape is the high-point of history, an escape from the dark grasp of wilderness.

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[87] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 66.
[88] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 68.
[89] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 68.
[90] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 69.
[91] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 66.
[92] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness,* 29.

RELIGION IN POSTMODERN WILDERNESS IMAGES

Postmodernity in the West has largely seen the fulfilment of the project of cultivating the landscape, as well as the development evolutionary thinking and therefore the widespread breakdown of dedication to creationism as narrated in the Old Testament. It may therefore be assumed that religion has less of a role to play in how we currently perceive wilderness, particularly as the imperative to dominate wilderness for the purposes of establishing and maintaining civilisation has lessened. Yet recent texts such as *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and *The Crossing* (1994) of Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy and J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) demonstrate the perseverance of religious thought when it comes to wilderness, despite being radically different texts.[93] *The Drowned World* was published at the very beginning of postmodernity while McCarthy's novels are more recent. *The Drowned World* is a work of science-fiction imagining a future of dramatic climate change, notably written before global warming was even recognised, whereas *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing* are set in the early-mid twentieth century and therefore before the advent of postmodernism. This selection of novels will therefore indicate the breadth of religion's hold upon the postmodern imagination.

All the Pretty Horses and *The Crossing* both explore the maturation experience of young men travelling from the security of their homeland in the US across the Mexican border into what they perceive to be a wilder country.[94] Both experience the collapse of their home; in the first novel John Grady Cole's grandfather dies and his family ranch is to be sold, and Billy Parham of the second novel returns home after his first journey to Mexico to discover his parents have been murdered. Their departures may therefore loosely analogise an expulsion from the Garden of Eden,

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[93] Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (London: Picador, 1993); Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (London: Picador, 1994); J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012).
[94] A useful summary and analysis of events in these two novels can be found in: Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 101-12, 113-128.

particularly as their ages are around sixteen, the moment of losing childhood innocence and beginning to gain the burdens of adulthood. The loss of Eden is more thoroughly evoked through depictions of the landscape and how it has changed under human presence. The past is idealised through a sense of loss commensurate with the progression of the American colonial project: 'In eighteen-eighty three they ran the first barbed wire. By eighty-six the buffalo were gone'.[95] Similarly with *The Crossing*, 'Most of the game was slaughtered out of the country. Most of the forest cut to feed the boilers of the stampmills at the mines'.[96] The entry into an unfavourable worldly space is presented as temporal rather than spatial; idealised worldly spaces are impermanent, and it is not so much a matter of geographically finding them but of preserving them, or having a knowledge that these spaces are already lost. Robert Hass notes of *The Crossing* that the wolf plaguing the cattle in the area in which Billy lives poses an anachronistic problem as, given that no wolves were thought to still live in that country, the associated trapping skills have been forgotten: 'it is an emblem of their moment in the history of the West that the last trapper who might know how to go about it is gone'.[97] With the absence of the expert trapper Mr. Echols traditional wilderness skills have disappeared, inferring that those postdating the frontier lifestyle are inferior to their predecessors, and that human culture degenerates rather than progresses with the removal of wilderness.[98]

The ghostly nature of the pre-colonial wilderness is represented by the remains of Native American civilisation. Near the beginning of *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady Cole rides out to

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[95] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 7.
[96] McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 25.
[97] Robert Hass, 'Travels With A She-Wolf', *New York Times: Books* (1994), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-crossing.html> [accessed 19/11/15].
[98] The changing nature of knowledge and skill in respect to wilderness and non-wilderness lifestyles will be explored more in the third chapter.

the furthest reaches of his ranch and has 'a dream of the past' wherein these earlier peoples are imagined:

> When the wind was in the north you could hear them, the horses and the breath of the horses and the horses' hooves that were shod in rawhide and the rattle of lances and the constant drag of the travois poles in the sand like the passing of some enormous serpent and the young boys naked on wild horses jaunty as circus riders and hazing wild horses before them and the dogs trotting with their tongues aloll and foot-slaves following half naked and sorely burdened and above all the low chant of their traveling song which the riders sang as they rode, nation and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives.[99]

This passage contains a complicated mixture of Edenic and primitivist imagery, with uncertain value placed on these people as a model of communion with nature. Certainly the image of 'young boys naked on wild horses' evokes the Garden of Eden insofar as it portrays unabashed innocence in intimate contact with wild nature, but of course these are 'secular' peoples not subscribed to a Judeo-Christian faith system. In part this idealises non-Christian cultures as maintaining a greater balance with the natural world. Other excerpts support this, such as 'The black crosses of the old telegraph poles yoked across the constellations'.[100] Here Christian iconography merges with technology in subjugating the natural world, in concordance with a view such as that of Nash wherein organised religion is part of a system of social expansion. However, the members of this society are represented as leading 'violent lives' through their possession of weaponry in the 'rattle of lances' and the ownership of slaves. In this case the metaphor of the 'enormous serpent'

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[99] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 5.
[100] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 11.

embodying the sound of material conveyance is significant as it suggests that sin exists in this quasi-Edenic community through the presence of violence, particularly as this description immediately follows the mention of lances associated through similar physical form with the 'travois poles' used for dragging loads. This is of course a caricature of Native American culture, becoming a captivating but threatening spectacle. It is difficult to extract a straightforward value from this passage as to whether we should mourn the loss of this kind of civilisation, or be glad of it, or believe it to be inevitable, regardless of the accuracy of its description. As a potential parallel to an Edenic state, it suggests that a return to this may not be as desirable as we would believe.

This position is reinforced later in the novel. John and his friend Lacey Rawlins, searching for work in Mexico, are directed to the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, 'a ranch of eleven thousand hectares'.[101] Jokingly they refer to it as the 'Big Rock Candy Mountains' and even 'paradise' based on the descriptions of others, but as they approach it these descriptions become founded in reality.[102] Here 'grasslands lay in a deep violet haze', they see 'flights of waterfowl', and even the dust is 'golden'.[103] Shortly after, it is revealed that the land is 'well watered with natural springs and clear streams' and is a habitat for 'species of fish not known elsewhere on earth and birds and lizards and other forms of life', further cementing its status as a paradise with high biodiversity.[104] This version of Eden is also secluded within a harsher landscape: 'the desert stretched away on every side'.[105] As this is a managed site, used for domesticating wild horses, it may therefore be assumed that it is superior to wild, uninhabited regions, thereby asserting a view of wild spaces as hierarchically lower to domesticated ones.

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[101] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 97.
[102] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 55, 59.
[103] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 93.
[104] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 97.
[105] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses,* 97.

However, the tenability of this landscape as an attainable paradise for John and Lacey becomes problematic. The law of God is replaced by that of humanity, restrictive and often corrupt, debasing the idea of Eden through making it not so much a sanctuary but an expression of power. John and Lacey, as foreigners without money or strong social standing, are scapegoated as bandits by corrupt Mexican police officials. When John is bailed from prison by Alfonsa, the matriarch of the household, it was arranged on the condition that he ceases his affair with the Don's daughter and never sees her again. These events succeed in driving the two young men away from the ranch and they do not return. By contrast, wilderness provides a sanctuary from the laws governing cultivated environments. In *All the Pretty Horses*, John flees into the wilderness after reclaiming his horses taken unlawfully by the authorities. In *The Crossing,* after the wolf he was attempting to return to the wild is seized by local authorities and killed in a dog-fight, Billy 'wandered on into the mountains… He thought to become again the child he never was'.[106] He wishes to revoke the laws and responsibilities of normal society and obey only his instincts in solitude. The undesirability of paradisiacal spaces is compounded by how little relation they have to the lived reality of marginalised groups these young men come across. During his wilderness sojourn, Billy finds displaced settlements of Native Americans – 'wild indians deep in the sierras' – who are routinely scapegoated by members of Mexican society who 'blame them for the crimes they committed among themselves'.[107] Idyllic, cultivated spaces are reserved and maintained for those with money and considerable social standing. While the wilderness is not ideal, it offers refuge and an alternative way of life.

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[106] McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 129.
[107] McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 133.

BALLARD'S NEW EDEN IN *THE DROWNED WORLD*

The desirability of wild places, and the problem this poses for the idea that paradise and wilderness are antithetical spaces, are major elements of Ballard's *The Drowned World*. There are several explicit references to Genesis within this text. In a scenario wherein global temperatures have risen due to increased solar radiation, much of the planet has been overcome by swamps, lagoons and jungles. Humanity has retreated and declined, drawing to a theoretical final point in which, as the central character Dr. Kerans hypothesises, 'a second Adam and Eve found themselves alone in a new Eden'.[108] Recourse to Edenic metaphor becomes increasingly plural as the text develops. Firstly, the landscape becomes filled with a panoply of 'walled gardens in an insane Eden', and finally as Kerans journeys to the equator he becomes 'a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradis*es* of the reborn sun'.[109] This plurality, coupled with the repetitious blatancy of this image, confers upon the metaphor a mutable, superficial quality. Furthermore, Ballard sustains a deconstructive approach to the paradise/wilderness dichotomy through compounding ideas of desirable and undesirable landscapes and destabilising the relationship between them and humanity.

Largely this is achieved through persistent recourse within the text to Thanatos; a psychoanalytic concept suggesting the desirability of the undoing of self, also termed the death drive or death instinct. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)*,* Sigmund Freud draws upon a mixture of psychoanalytic observation, evolutionary science, and the inevitable fact of mortality to question whether there is an impulse within humans to die.[110] He suggests that there is '*a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state*', based upon such

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[108] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 23.
[109] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 53, 175. Emphasis added.
[110] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003), 43-100.

evidences as the repetitious compulsion of trauma victims, or the fact that embryonic development recalls 'the structures of all the forms from which the animal is descended'.[111] Freud suggests: 'If we may reasonably suppose, on the basis of all our experience without exception, that every living thing dies… for *intrinsic* reasons, then we can only say that *the goal of all life is death*'.[112] Ballard follows this tradition via the concept espoused by other psychoanalysts such as Sándor Ferenczi that Thanatos leads us to particularly desire a return to pre-birth oblivion and therefore the mother's womb, but also Ferenczi's suggestion that copulation symbolises a desire to return to the sea, our evolutionary roots, the uterus or amniotic fluid making the external reproductive processes of aquatic creatures internal.[113] This is explicitly referenced by Kerans, who states that the lagoons mirror the 'drowned world of my uterine childhood'.[114] In his sleep he is visited by dreams involving swimming in the waters, which 'now seemed an extension of his own blood-stream', ending with 'the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving'.[115] This dissolution of self perfectly illustrates the idea of birth-in-reverse, culminating in a disappearance of the subject and gaining a sense of destructive plenitude.

While these ideas are scientifically dubious, being more theoretical than empirical, they are significant in that evolutionary theory is used less to support existing hierarchical systems of prejudice but to establish new modes of thought. Similarly to *Heart of Darkness* the new tropical world represents a temporal regression, but this 'avalanche backwards into the past' goes beyond the history of humanity and, as Kerans and his colleague Bodkin realise, is more of a return to 'the Triassic period'.[116] The significance of this is that not only does humanity become 'distinctly

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[111] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 76-7.
[112] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 78.
[113] Sándor Ferenczi, 'The Phylogenetic Parallel' in *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, trans. by Henry Alden Bunker (London: H. Karnac, 2005), 44-51.
[114] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 28.
[115] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 70.
[116] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 42.

anomalous', an anachronism inverting the relationship between Marlow and the African wilderness which he perceives as some kind of abhorrent living fossil, but any idea of this world as Edenic uncharacteristically involves hostility towards or complete displacement of the human.[117] In other words, it is distinctly uncultivated and highly self-willed. Kerans' final journey into what he views as this new Eden is less than idyllic, involving suffering: 'through the increasing rain and heat, attacked by alligators and giant bats'.[118] As Brian Baker notes, the overall effect is 'the insistent re-insertion of humankind into the biological realm. There is no sense that humans can stand outside evolutionary processes and pressures'.[119] Here evolutionary theory is used not as a justification for humanity's self-appointed superiority but as a revelation of our fragile, temporal nature, thereby thoroughly revoking the chain of being. As well as the existential threat of the termination of the human line due to extreme environmental pressures, it is also possible that humanity will morph into some strange new thing, hinted at in Kerans' 'manifest miracle' of weathering the daytime sun when bound and left outside by the antagonist Strangman.[120] In this distortion of human nature via natural processes, the barrier between wilderness and human begins to collapse, aligning with posthuman notions of 'the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment'.[121]

The desirability of a lethal new wilderness is revealed through much of the novel's focus being upon Kerans' strange compulsion to escape to the equator, rejecting all social ties to humanity. His predecessor on this journey, Hardman, who Kerans discovers on his journey south, displays this in the extreme. While severely sunburnt, cancerous and starved – 'no more than a

[117] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 42.
[118] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 175.
[119] Brian Baker, 'The Geometry of the Space Age: J. G. Ballard's Short Fiction and Science Fiction of the 1960s' in *J. G. Ballard*, ed. by Jeanette Baxter (London: Continuum, 2008), 19.
[120] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 138.
[121] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, 4.

resurrected corpse' – he still desires to look upon the sun, his destructor, as 'the sole entity now strong enough to impinge its image on his fading retinas'.[122] As Hardman and Kerans' journey is fundamentally suicidal, talk of becoming a second Adam and returning to Eden may simply be a self-comforting ideology. Rather than being complicit in prolonguing the death of the human species, Kerans mythologises his equatorial journey as spiritual and fantastical. Although his act surrenders the individual human subject to the natural world, in acting against the regulations of the remainder of human society he gains a different sort of personal agency. We can therefore interpret Kerans' position as presenting a certain logical conclusion to the religious discourse, further bolstered by observations such as remembrance of flooded tombs his team had discovered, with 'corpses floating out in their unravelling winding-sheets in a grim rehearsal of the Day of Judgement'.[123] For Kerans these are truly the end-times. His journey to the equator accepts this judgement, legitimising his suicidal impulses through quasi-religious expression. The subjectivity of this viewpoint as simply discourse-led is exposed in certain moments of clarity wherein Kerans' romanticised view of the external world disappears, realising that it is 'nothing more than a garbage-filled swamp', although these become fewer and further between as the text develops.[124]

Other characters similarly gain power over themselves, the external world, and other people through dedicating themselves to ideological worldviews. The military leader of Kerans' expedition, Colonel Riggs, possesses a 'brisk military front' and 'self-discipline and single-mindedness'.[125] As Rigg's dedication to regulations widens the gap between them, Kerans perceives that 'It was Riggs, and not himself, who was the time-traveller', committed to a

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[122] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 170, 173. Notably as soon as Kerans brings Hardman back to a semblance of health he vanishes to compulsively continue his southward journey.
[123] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 63.
[124] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 13.
[125] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 12, 62.

completely different, and what he considers outdated, mode of thought.[126] The 'uncannily white' artefact-hunter Strangman is an image of colonial exploitation, described as 'half-buccaneer, half-devil', complete with dubious racial caricatures presented through an entourage of black assistants.[127] Officer-in-the-jungle and exploitative-colonial-gentlemen figureheads offer competing worldviews to that of Kerans. This contrast exposes the subjective quality of these approaches for dealing with the new jungle world. Finally, as Kerans is still searching for his 'forgotten paradises' at the end of the novel, the ability to map a worldview as established by the religious discourse onto the lived world, to realise an ideological vision, is seriously brought into question.[128]

READDRESSING THE STATUS OF THE ANIMAL

The she-wolf of *The Crossing* further exposes the way wilderness is represented for manipulative agendas. When the wolf is seized by authorities she is first given to a circus. Here they put her on display for paying visitors with 'a sign at the front that gave her history and the number of people she was known to have eaten'.[129] The trope of the savage beast is used to titillate consumers. With a later dog fight, the wild animal is similarly used with impunity for the entertainment and financial gain of others. When Billy discusses with locals their opinions of the wolf, there is a striking difference in representation. One group feeds directly from the wolf myth, giving fanciful histories of its origin: it had 'been brought from the sierras where it had eaten many school-children', that 'the hunters who had brought the wolf… had been followed by other wolves who howled at night from the darkness beyond their fire and some of the hunters had said that these wolves were no

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[126] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 158.
[127] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 92, 115.
[128] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 175.
[129] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 104.

right wolves'.[130] These people are the target at which the wolf as a profitable spectacle is aimed, imbuing wild animals with suspicion and a sense of the paranormal. However, another group displays scepticism: 'They said a wolf was a wolf. They did not believe that she'd eaten anyone'.[131]

This reveals the limits of ideology in presenting a credible narrative, particularly when ulterior motives such as financial gain are so evident. The question is where Billy lies between possessing a willingness to generate a wild mythology and treating representations of wild animals with scepticism. Hass sees Billy's self-appointed task of returning the wolf across the border into the Mexican wilderness as Quixotic:

> …a young man on a cow pony dragging behind him a wild and recalcitrant she-wolf through ranches, American and Mexican, where wolves are a remembered tale of ravenous ferocity and terror, may well seem to replay that story, with the same mix of comedy, cruelty and philosophical wonder.[132]

Billy's treatment of the wolf does hold a position of absurd tension, both wishing to retain its wild nature through restoring the creature to its natural wilderness lifestyle while performing an act of subjugation and dominance through trapping, muzzling, feeding and leading it at the end of a rope. The line between wild and domestic shifts constantly, the act of muzzling seeming a betrayal of Billy's view of the wolf as wildness incarnate. In Billy's younger life he sought out wolves in order to watch them in awe: 'they seemed of another world entire'.[133] Wolves repeatedly represent something outside everyday reality, ranchers believing that the creatures 'brutalized the cattle in a way they did not the wild game. As if the cows evoked in them some anger. As if they were

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[130] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 102.
[131] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 104.
[132] Hass, 'Travels With A She-Wolf'.
[133] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 4.

offended by some violation of an old order. Old ceremonies. Old protocols'.[134] Through such representations, wolves are removed from the limitations of the religious discourse described at the beginning of this chapter; rather than being mere parts of the untamed natural world either waiting to be domesticated or used by God to carry out his will through tests of character and punishment, the wolves have their own agency, and their own laws. Furthermore, the suggestion that domesticated cattle violates a code suggests that they are an abomination; the Christian chain of being, wherein humanity may act with impunity in domesticating animals, is suggested to be inherently false. That humanity has violated 'protocols' in such a way positions the wolves as challengers to any idea that humans have the right to dominion over nature, in keeping with a posthumanist rejection of situating humans above other forms of life.[135]

   In *All the Pretty Horses*, domestication is not an inherent affront to the natural world but is discussed in similar terms. Before breaking, the horses 'did not smell like horses. They smelled like what they were, wild animals', their breath abstractly described as 'news from another world'.[136] Again they belong to a different order of being outside the world of human cultivation. However, the process of breaking the horses is not portrayed as overtly violent. John's method involves the removal of fear and allowing them to grow accustomed to human presence and touch, 'stroking the terror out', treating them with sympathy and care.[137] A commonality between humans and horses is presented throughout the text which justifies domestication as a way to nurture this close association; a vaquero named Luis tells John and Lacey that 'the souls of horses mirror the souls of men more closely than men suppose', an opinion the two young men readily accept.[138]

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[134] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 25.
[135] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, 3.
[136] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 103.
[137] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 104.
[138] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 111.

Through stating that horses possess souls and share attributes with humans they are presented as holding a similar or equal position to humanity in the hierarchy of beings. When Luis is asked a question supposing that all horses vanished from the world, he responds that 'it was pointless to speak of there being no horses in the world for God would not permit such a thing'. [139] Although this reinforces the notion that God purposefully inserts all beings into the world, this is not justified through assessing horses' value as a tool for humanity but through respect for the horse and a belief in its inherent worth.

In postmodern responses to the religious wilderness discourse, as evidenced through these case studies, biblical allusions are used frequently but in an ironic fashion. There is no explicit attack launched against the religious discourse, but it is undermined through a scepticism facilitated by the introduction of competing ideas. These include: the major lived experience of loss being not that of Eden but of wilderness; Edenic spaces becoming unattainable or reserved for those with good social standing; Eden being re-categorised as a wild space and posing considerable threat to human individuals; or the true inheritors of wilderness being not those who would cultivate it but indigenous groups living in a greater balance with nature, or the wild animals which live there. The great chain of being disintegrates as a functional model of the universe due to a more enlightened response to evolutionary theory and criticisms of the validity and desirability of humans holding a dominant position. Discourse is questioned in general through revealing the subjectivity of worldviews, and the way so-called truths are created in order to serve ulterior motives. Finally, wilderness begins to represent a reality to the world which we cannot access through normal modes of thought or discussion, revealing something of the past – 'Old orders. Old

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[139] McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 111.

ceremonies. Old protocols' – which we have forgotten, outside of conventional religious traditions. The following chapter will look at a tradition beyond the strictures of religious orthodoxy; that of folklore, presented via the archetypal wilderness symbol of the forest.

2

FOLKLORE AND THE SUBVERSIVE FOREST

The forest features heavily in European concepts of wilderness and the external, from the 'dark wood' in which Dante's pilgrim finds himself in *Inferno*'s opening lines, to that in which antihero Buccmaster hides from Norman invaders in Paul Kingsnorth's *The Wake* (2014).[140] Furthermore it has been a recurrent belief, as Robert Pogue Harrison states, that 'the forests were *first*', that 'their vast and somber wilderness was there before, like a precondition or matrix of civilization'.[141] The forest's historical omnipresence has of course been exaggerated in the popular imagination. In *Gossip From the Forest*, Sara Maitland states that 'less than 7% of Scotland was ever ancient forest', that wooded areas were more correctly "wood pasture" where trees were spaced out in grassy areas maintained by grazing mammals, that the return of forests and humans into northern Europe after the last ice-age was 'symbiotic', woodland providing for human needs and active forest management encouraging tree growth.[142] As civilisation developed, the forest's importance in providing for a variety of livelihoods is discussed by Corinne Saunders, who mentions 'swineherds, charcoal-burners and woodcutters' along with outlaws and 'those seeking the eremitic life' as archetypal medieval forest inhabitants.[143] While these sources diminish the idea of the untrammelled forest wilderness as a significant element of European experience, arguably

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[140] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2013), 1:3; Paul Kingsnorth, *The Wake* (London: Unbound, 2015). It is worth noting that this European tradition also carries into American literature, such as the forest of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and the folkloric 'Black Man' or Devil who is supposed to reside there – Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'The Scarlet Letter' in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. by Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, 8th edition, vol. B (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 551.

[141] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

[142] Sara Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of Our Forests and Fairytales* (Granta: London, 2012), 5-6. Much of Maitland's research in this area is derived from the works of Oliver Rackham, a good example of further reading in this instance particular to the British Isles is: Oliver Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1978).

[143] Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 3.

the close association between society and forest fuels its cultural significance more so than if it had been removed from daily experience. This is clearly illustrated if one compares the relatively small amount of wilderness representations in the Bible as discussed in the previous chapter (the desert wildernesses which were to be suffered or avoided) with the weight of forest imagery in the works of the Brothers Grimm. Maitland isolates 116 of the 210 stories in the 1857 edition as having explicit forest locations.[144]

While the extent to which these forests can be considered a wilderness is therefore questionable, their wild nature is partially retained through the threat of becoming lost, the abundance of tress providing an additional threat of concealing what or who else may be present in this space.[145] Culturally the wild nature of forests is exaggerated, particularly through recreating (or fabricating) images of the wild forests of the past. A prominent subject of Harrison's analysis are the writings of Giambattista Vico, whose eighteenth-century *New Science* incorporated the forest wilderness into a theological history of humanity's origins.[146] Vico establishes a narrative wherein Noah's descendants degenerate into forest-dwelling 'brutes'; in Harrison's words, lacking 'any notion of a higher law than their own instincts and desires'.[147] This is presented as a specific consequence of inhabiting the forest. The canopy was so thick it obscured the sky which, as Harrison suggests, has always been related to Western concepts of God: '*Where divinity has been identified with the sky, or with the eternal geometry of the stars, or with cosmic infinity, or with "heaven," the forests become monstrous, for they hide the prospect of god*'.[148] This attitude returns to the preoccupations discussed in chapter one regarding the inherent ungodly nature of wild

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[144] Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, 16.
[145] Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, 6.
[146] Harrison, *Forests*, 3.
[147] Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, 3rd edition, trans. by David Marsh (London: Penguin, 2001), 8; Harrison, *Forests*, 3.
[148] Harrison, *Forests*, 6.

spaces. Non-theological forest representations are not so definite. Maitland emphasises the possession of contradictory traits in popular northern European conceptions of forests, being 'dangerous and generous, domestic and wild, beautiful and terrible', embodying seemingly oppositional characteristics.[149] Classical roots for the term add additional significant elements – the Oxford English Dictionary states that *forest* originates from the Latin *forest-em (silvam)*, meaning woodland external to human management.[150] The stem word *foris*, meaning outside, demonstrates an intrinsic opposition to human-manufactured environments. Saunders expands further upon the etymology of *silva*, first of all in that it not only implied a physical woodland space but 'an allegorical world of untamed emotion and passion'.[151] The Greek word *hyle* is significant in this instance as it also denotes both the forest, 'primordial matter', and 'chaos', Saunders isolating its usage first with Plato and then Aristotle who uses *hyle* as a term for the original unformed material of the universe.[152] The forest is therefore synonymous with not only a lack of order or control but the origins of the world as we know it. *Hyle* appears strikingly similar to Milton's 'wild abyss' and the idea of wilderness as an unadulterated source of creation. The Roman philosopher Chalcidius then translates *hyle* to *silva*, thereby affirming their association.[153]

The forest is therefore an external, oppositional space. It is chaotic and contradictory, in a constant state of becoming, exemplifying wilderness as embodying deconstruction. This is embraced into postmodernity; Roger Deakin's creative non-fiction text *Wildwood: A Journey Through Trees* explores woods 'constantly spreading', collapsed trees sending 'roots into its own detritus… growing vigorous new shoots', living trees 'grafted themselves together, joined at the

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[149] Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, 6
[150] 'Forest', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73187> [accessed 11/04/16].
[151] Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 19.
[152] Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 19-20.
[153] Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, 20.

trunk, locked in an arboreal embrace'.[154] The borders between death, life, and different species are blurred, and the wood's borders itself in a constant state of flux. As in *Wildwood*, so in the classical wild wood – the goddess of which, Artemis, combines the human and animal and confounds sex divisions through exhibiting on her statue a 'proliferation' of the 'testicles of bulls' upon her chest, or in legends such as the Welsh 'Pwyll Prince of Dyved' from *The Mabinogion* in which a fellowship with inhabitants of the underworld is made in the forest, thereby breaching the division between the living and the dead.[155]

Deakin's work poses problems for the notion of the perennial deconstructive forest in that it seems to be fuelled by a sense of nostalgia. His woodland descriptions frequently fall into romanticised appeals to the trope of the ancient mythological woodland: 'Venus shone from above the trees in an inky-blue sky, and the wood was a black castle'.[156] If the forest is displaced into the past it cannot effectively be deconstructive, firstly because this limits the forest's ability to have a progressive influence on the present, and secondly it becomes a grand narrative in itself with hard mythic borders. But this romanticised appeal to a mythic past does not claim the whole text. Deakin frequently juxtaposes such descriptions with an admittance of change and the technological developments of recent times; 'a fragment of vapour trail from a jet leaving Stansted forty miles away. Strange how beautiful such sky-litter can be'.[157]

Another forest trope is that of the outlaw, similarly shifting between destroying, subverting and reinstating a narrative: the ideal of law. Harrison observes that figures such as Robin Hood 'were neither mere criminals nor enemies of justice', as they simultaneously reject and embrace

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[154] Roger Deakin, *Wildwood: A Journey through Trees* (London: Penguin, 2008), 134.
[155] Harrison, *Forests*, 20; Charlotte E. Guest (translator), 'Pwyll Prince of Dyved' in *The Mabinogion* (New York, NY: Dover, 1997), 1-15.
[156] Deakin, *Wildwood*, 46.
[157] Deakin, *Wildwood*, 46.

the law: 'placing themselves outside an arbitrary or corrupt law, they appear as the true champions of natural justice, while institutional law appears as the mere shadow of its resplendent ideal'.[158] Harrison furthermore suggests this is an example of the comic absurd due to the inversion of roles through the playful assumption of warped and masked identities as both outlaws and law-bringers, performing games of disguise and revelation regarding the individual and institutional corruption.[159] The forest is a natural extension of this, being a location of concealment. Any concept making its way through the forest seems to diverge, conflict, and become warped through processes of illusion and disillusionment. This will be further evidenced throughout this chapter, with recourse to case studies from myth and folklore and suitable postmodern counterparts.

ARTHURIAN LEGEND AND JOHN BOORMAN

Arthurian tales follow the biblical tradition of an adversarial wilderness providing a ground for demonstrating the worth of individuals, while also harbouring morally or spiritually dubious antagonists. In the tale 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', Sir Gawain travels through the 'wild lands of North Wales' on his way to honour an oath, traversing 'lonely valleys and deep forests, forced often to sleep out under the stars by night, and to do battle by day with robbers and wild men'.[160] Other figures associated with the forest are not expressly evil, but rather tricksters whose task it is to test the knights. When Gawain finds the Green Knight in the Forest of Wirral he reveals that he was 'sent to Camelot, to test the truth of the renown that is spread abroad concerning the valour of the Knights of the Round Table'.[161] In 'The Story of Launcelot and Elaine', Elaine

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[158] Harrison, *Forests*, 77.
[159] Harrison, *Forests*, 79.
[160] Roger Lancelyn Green, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' in *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* (London: Penguin, 1994), 87.
[161] Green, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', 100.

exploits Launcelot's love of Guinevere, disguising herself through sorcery to attain his love, doing so 'at the skirts of a great forest'.[162] The obfuscating nature of the forest is embodied in these figures through their duplicity and powers of illusion. Hybridity is another aspect, shown prominently in the figure of the wild man. He may be a straightforward antagonist, incorporated into the threat of the forest wilderness toward civilised humanity; an individual possessing superior skills through spending time in the seclusion of the forest, such as Percivale who 'grew strong and hardy in the wild wood, of deadly aim with the dart'; or the civilised man who becomes wild through trauma, such as Launcelot's sojourn spurred by his distress at being tempted and manipulated through his love of Guinevere – 'Launcelot cried aloud in his agony of mind… and rushed away still crying aloud, until he was lost in the forest. And there he wandered… his wits quite gone from him'.[163] In all of these instances, the wild man presents a human figure dramatically transformed by the effects of wilderness, losing autonomy and control over their own identity through the influence of this powerful external force.

The films of director John Boorman demonstrate how these elements of the forest – being a testing ground for character, a place of moral ambiguity, containing illusions and hybridised figures like wild men – are retained in the postmodern imagination, albeit with alterations. Boorman's *Excalibur* is a direct adaptation of Arthurian legend, but it is a limited text, valuable mostly as a demonstration of pastiche, having little historical basis and more relying on spectacles and fantasy tropes.[164] The presence of Arthurian legend in the director's filmography gives

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[162] Green, 'The Story of Launcelot and Elaine' in *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table*, 222.
[163] Green, 'Sir Percivale of Wales' in *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table*, 198; Green, 'The Story of Launcelot and Elaine', 223.
[164] *Excalibur*, dir. by John Boorman (Orion Pictures, 1981). Boorman himself said that the film was purposefully ahistorical and more composed of raw mythic material: 'The film has to do with *mythical* truth, not historical truth'. The idea of mythical truth is heavily tautological, but this shows a conscious appropriation of archetypical myth images. Harlan Kennedy, 'John Boorman – In Interview', *American Film* (1981), found online at American Cinema Papers, <http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com/files/EXCALIBUR.htm> [accessed 13/01/16].

grounds for examining other works by the director in contrast with this staple of mythology. As *Deliverance* and *The Emerald Forest* more closely engage with the forest and the relationship between forest-dwelling groups and outsiders, they will be the subjects of a more extended analysis.[165]

Looking at such texts in an Arthurian context may seem surprising considering their focus on North American locations and/or characters, and therefore may be more directly related to the US wilderness myth outlined by Nina Baym, who argues that 'the essential quality of America comes to reside in its unsettled wilderness and the opportunities that such a wilderness offers to the individual as the medium on which he may inscribe, unhindered, his own destiny and his own nature'.[166] However, as an English director Boorman brought his own mythological history to these productions, and as an outsider to American cultural heritage this may explain why *Deliverance* is so subversive of the American action-adventure genre. Additionally, the medieval tradition is fundamentally part of Anglophonic America's cultural heritage too, and the notion of a clear divide at the point of American independence would be artificial. Significantly, the American cultural project of inscribing identity upon the (so-called) uncivilised landscape finds a conceptual mirror in the mythical narrative of Arthur's court being forged and the generation of a civilised, chivalric tradition.

Both *Deliverance* and *The Emerald Forest* refer to the mythic quest in featuring journeys through vast, wild forests. For the former, the quest is arbitrary – to travel by canoe through a backwoods area of the southern US as a form of wilderness tourism. In his opening voiceover the leader of the group of city-dwelling men, Lewis, describes their route as 'just about the last wild,

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[165] *Deliverance*, dir. by John Boorman (Warner Brothers, Elmer Enterprises, 1972); *The Emerald Forest*, dir. by John Boorman (Christel Films, Embassy Pictures, 1985).
[166] Nina Baym, 'Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors', *American Quarterly*, 33:2 (1981), 132.

untamed, unpolluted, un-fucked-up river in the South', the journey being the grasping of an opportunity – 'this is the last chance we got to see this river' – before it is dammed. This ecological sentiment provides an element of heroic value. When Lewis' companions laugh at the vehemence of his convictions, saying that the dam will provide electricity for society, he retorts: 'we gon' rape this whole God-damn landscape'. Through setting himself apart from this act he strives to establish himself as a person of values, furthered through his dedication to paying tribute to wild nature through moving out of complacency and into discomfort via the wilderness journey.

However, as Lewis is merely exhibiting bravado and not actively resisting the dam, it can be questioned to what extent this position is true to his nature. Alternatively, the trip is mythicized as a demonstration of archetypal masculinity and wilderness prowess through eschewing civilised society, echoing the use of wilderness as a test of skill for Arthur's knights. Lewis is purposefully reckless, telling Ed: 'I never been insured in my life. I don't believe in insurance… there's no risk'. The motivation behind this is partly revealed when he drives them through the woods, determined to find his own way to the river, informing Ed that 'sometimes you have to lose yourself, before you can find anything'; Lewis values forging identity through chaos and challenge, surrendering personal security in the hope of acquiring self-truth.

The Emerald Forest begins with a more straightforward quest of a father trying to find his son who has been kidnapped and adopted by an Amazonian tribe. In this case Bill's journey to find Tommy also demonstrates his prowess, particularly when he stumbles across a cannibalistic tribe and must fight his way to safety. Ultimately this quest is futile. Tommy has fully embraced the tribal lifestyle when Bill finds him and Bill returns to the city without his son. Meanwhile, the cannibals or 'fierce people' have attacked Tommy's tribe, capturing the women to exchange for weapons at a local brothel. Tommy journeys out of the rainforest to seek his father's help against

the weapons of the cannibals and the brothel's owners. This being done, Bill has a final task – to destroy the dam he has been working on for over ten years, as he realises it will do considerable damage to the forest and its inhabitants. This prioritises the livelihood of marginalised groups above his own; following the Arthurian tradition, Bill resists a corrupting influence and proves his moral worth (in this case, against expanding capitalistic society) while Tommy embraces the positive institution of the tribe and proves loyalty through supporting its needs.

Deliverance similarly displays how an outwardly simple task can quickly become complex within the forest. The group's desire for a wilderness experience leads to disaster when two men in the woods hold Ed and Bobby at gunpoint, raping Bobby and threatening to do the same to Ed. Lewis arrives and kills one of the attackers with his bow, the second escaping into the trees. The city men decide to hide the body and head back to civilisation. Here the trials of the forest journey have not catalysed a display of virtue; they flee from guilt, construct lies to save themselves from the law on their return, and kill a potentially innocent hunter who they think is the accomplice stalking them. Sally Robinson contextualises the film and the men's behaviour against both James Dickey's original novel and the men's liberation movement.[167] Robinson sees Dickey's novel as heavily concerned with ideas of emotional blockage regarding white masculinity, wherein civilisation has conspired to restrain the expression of male feelings and thereby traumatically restrict their identity.[168] The events of the novel allow a release of this identity through the challenge of survival: 'The revitalisation Ed feels stems not only from the experience of whitewater rafting; it comes, as well, from his experience of violence controlled'.[169] This is problematic as it sees violence not only as something inherent to masculinity, but in some way desirable. The film

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[167] Sally Robinson, "Emotional Constipation' and the Power of Dammed Masculinity' in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 133-147.
[168] Robinson, 'Dammed Masculinity', 137-8.
[169] Robinson, 'Dammed Masculinity', 139.

itself is more critical of the violent expressions of the characters. Robinson describes this as 'a darkly pessimistic view of the powers of therapeutic male release' with the characters 'hysterically torn between repression and expression'.[170] She interprets the film as embodying the unattainability of a secure contemporary masculinity satisfying both the need to suppress primitive urges and express identity. This seems contrived when the erratic behaviour of the characters can be considered a result of the trauma of rape and murder, as well as their ineffectiveness in acting upon it. When Lewis breaks his leg in the rapids after they flee the scene of the murder, rendering the most capable member of the group inactive, Robinson states that his body 'comes to signify the failure of the myth of masculinity'.[171]

This idea of male myth can be carried beyond the trauma of repression and expression into a criticism of the mythic, performative nature of masculinity in its entirety. The most blatant emasculation in the text is not achieved through societal forces but through the rape of Bobby, a dominative act which robs him of power and authority. The main characters appear to be successful businessmen, locked in masculine competition with Lewis who has rejected the social and financial success of the other characters in favour of an active outdoors lifestyle. At the beginning of the film the others laugh at his values in order to demean them, attempting to secure their lifestyle choices and regain a sense of superiority. Lewis' injury is ironic as it demonstrates he is not as invulnerable or effective as he believes himself to be. The deficiencies in stereotypical masculinity of the others are not due to repression, as in Robinson's reading, but to absence; at the beginning of the film Ed is unable to shoot a deer with Lewis' bow because he cannot bring himself to take a life, even if he wishes to do so in order to support his masculine self-image. After Bobby's rape, appealing to a simplistic narrative of survival through believing they are being hunted allows

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[170] Robinson, 'Dammed Masculinity', 139.
[171] Robinson, 'Dammed Masculinity', 140.

them to reclaim their masculinity. They absorb themselves in a mythicised version of masculinity wherein they are strong, capable, and fighting against easily identifiable antagonists. When Drew leaps from the canoe after they bury the rapist's body, they convince themselves he has been shot rather than it being a suicidal act due to his guilt and mental instability, which would emasculate him within the narrative they have constructed. Certainly they are spurred to incredible feats of strength, such as Ed scaling a cliff to reach the aforementioned huntsman who they believe is waiting to shoot them. However, he still struggles to kill the hunter, and when he finally manages this task he accidentally pierces himself with an arrow in the process, thereby revealing the limits of his capabilities. The chaotic and destructive fabrication of this masculine narrative of hunter versus hunted can be used to criticise stereotypical masculinity as overly simplistic. The characters wrongly believe that there is a viable compromise between survival and moral correctness, and that male behaviour can be mapped across these domains in a straightforward manner. In other words, the text deconstructs male behaviour as an act which, under a certain amount of pressure, can quickly fall apart. Surprisingly this does feature in Arthurian legend; Launcelot's degeneration into madness, becoming a wild man, exemplifies the inability for the self-styled heroic male to live up to the standards he has imposed on himself, traumatically collapsing in the process.

The wild man trope is more explicitly present in both films. The 'hillbillies' of *Deliverance* and the indigenous Amazon tribes of *The Emerald Forest* are identifiable by outsiders as wild men. The tribespeople possess semi-mystical traits; they use dyes to camouflage themselves amongst the trees, creating a symbolic merging of identity with the forest, and have portentous visions through using hallucinogenic drugs. The 'hillbillies' are isolated from civilisation, lead impoverished lives, and inbreeding is suggested through physical deformity. However, the status of these groups becomes questionable through comparison with outsiders and city-dwellers. The

social life of the tribespeople is presented in an unbiased manner, displaying a level of group cohesion and philosophical conviction which the outer world lacks. When contrasted with the destructive dam construction project or the exploitative nature of the brothel's owners and clients, the external society is the one designated barbaric. This is not so say that the wild man trope disappears, but it is presented in a positive light. Tommy's wilderness upbringing aligns him with Percivale, gaining combat and survival skills through his experiences, while the 'fierce people' are maintained as antagonistic wild men. Similarly in *Deliverance*, the rapists are the epitome of depraved and malicious wild men, but the violence of which the city-dwellers are equally capable demonstrates the thin line between being civilised and becoming wild.

It is worth noting that the status of the modern forest differs from the Arthurian model in that it is vulnerable. The seemingly omnipresent wild forest has retreated out of Europe, surviving in parts of the American continent, but is under threat even there. In both texts this is due to dam projects; in *Deliverance* the dam will flood the forest valley, and in *The Emerald Forest* it will rob the forest of water as well as involving mass deforestation in its construction. The damming of a river demonstrates sheer technological power in halting a formidable natural process. As the vast, unmapped wild places are controlled and reduced, the forest's character converted from a brooding and unpredictable mythic figure to simply a landscape, groups of wild people can provide the forest's violent last word, unsettling the complacency of city-dwellers.

FOLK TERROR

The threatening nature of the forest, combined with the aforementioned character of obscuring and concealing whatever may be inside it, means it can easily become a source of horror. A seminal discussion of folk terror directed toward the woods can be found in the works of the Brothers

Grimm. The archetypal form this takes is that of the instructive fairy tale demonstrating the value of good behaviour for children. The well-known 'Little Red Riding Hood' educates children in obedience, being wary of the forest and not talking to strangers via the antagonist of the wolf, who Red Riding Hood directs to her grandmother's house before straying into the woods, allowing the wolf to seek out and eat her grandmother uninterrupted.[172] After the huntsman saves the girl and her grandmother from being digested by cutting open and killing the wolf, Red Riding Hood provides the moral in her own words: "As long as I live, I will never by myself leave the path, to run into the wood, when my mother has forbidden me to do so".[173] The message of obedience is reinforced when Red Riding Hood follows her grandmother's instructions in order to kill a second wolf by tempting him into drowning in a trough filled with sausage water.

Other tales subvert the conventions of woodland fear. 'The Singing Bone' begins with a forest creature, a monstrous wild boar, terrorising locals – it 'laid waste the farmer's fields, killed the cattle, and ripped up people's bodies with his tusks'.[174] This is a straightforward fearful forest creature, embodying wilderness antagonism toward civilisation. However, this fear is exploited by the immoral. After the King announces that the boar's killer will marry his daughter, two brothers go into the forest to kill it. The younger succeeds, and when the older discovers this he kills his brother, hides the body, and claims he has killed the boar himself. True horror lies more in the act of fratricide, a product of human greed and disloyalty, than the monster in the forest. 'The Owl' subverts the seriousness of such tales in being a humorous commentary on folk terror and rural ignorance.[175] In this tale 'one of the great owls, called horned owls, had come from the

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[172] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Little Red Riding Hood' in *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales* (New York, NY: Fall River, 2012), 122-5.
[173] Grimm, 'Little Red Riding Hood', 125.
[174] Grimm, 'The Singing Bone' in *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*, 54.
[175] Grimm, 'The Owl' in *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*, 104-5.

neighbouring woods into the barn of one of the townsfolk'.[176] The locals, unfamiliar with the creature, are briefly terrorised by it before they set fire to the barn – 'and with it the owl was miserably burnt'.[177] While this tale mocks superstition, nonetheless it is an admittance of the power of folk terror even when misplaced.

For certain postmodern texts, folk terror is regenerated and exploited to create a subgenre of horror tapping into forest-based fear. These tales can similarly subvert narrative expectations, although not so much through altering or dismissing the grounds of fear, but by playing with storytelling conventions. Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods* is significant regarding the limitations of the traditional narrative, or indeed language in general, as it is a graphic novel and therefore does not need to rely purely on words to convey meaning, its illustrations providing additional signification.[178] 'In Conclusion' indicates the concealed presence of forest antagonists as the wooded hills surrounding a young girl's journey are painted to suggest the forms of wolves. 'Our Neighbour's House' features solid black masses of pines as a brooding, implacable presence overshadowing the family household, dispassionately backgrounding the family's collapse when the narrator's father dies and his daughters are tempted one by one out of the house by an unseen visitor. Both of these inspire reactions purely through visual stimuli in an instant, bypassing the protracted nature of language.[179] This text is also significant as a representative of postmodern cultural responses to wilderness. Firstly, the graphic novel medium is specific to this period, but

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[176] Grimm, 'The Owl', 104.
[177] Grimm, 'The Owl', 105.
[178] Emily Carroll, *Through the Woods* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014). Pages are not numbered in this publication.
[179] A. S. Byatt similarly comments upon the failures of the written text versus visual experience in 'The Thing in the Forest', wherein the physical fairytale text takes on a character of uncertain artificiality: 'Primrose thought it was a very old book. Penny assumed it was nineteenth-century mock medieval', 23. Moreover, the character Penny uses the spoken word at the end of the text to transform her traumatic experience of a monster into a story as a coping strategy, demonstrating that in that form it has a less immediate reality. A. S. Byatt, 'The Thing in the Forest' in *Little Black Book of Stories* (London: Vintage, 2004), 3-51.

also through evoking the children's picture book while containing horror directed toward a more mature audience it exemplifies how postmodern culture perpetually subverts and re-creates itself.

Neither is the text without elements suitable for more typical literary analysis. Two devices Carroll uses to subvert fairy or folk-tale conventions are narrative suspension and intentionally limited perspectives. 'The Singing Bone' finds a natural partner in 'His Face All Red', the latter also featuring fratricide motivated by jealousy; the narrator goes to kill a forest monster with his more socially accomplished brother who succeeds at the task. The narrator kills his brother and hides the body. He returns to the community pretending that he himself had killed what turned out to be a wolf, lying that it had killed his brother, in order to gain fame and sympathy. The stories differ in that the otherworldly horror of the forest persists when the brother inexplicably returns unharmed. The narrator observes that both the original monster and his revenant brother 'came from the woods // (Most strange things do)'. In the case of the 'beast', this parenthesised side-note can be interpreted as an attempt to use folk wisdom to contain the threat. Its designation within parentheses suggests a resignation to the state of affairs, or a self-evidential aspect, and represents a voice of experience, acceptance, and bravery in the face of the forest wilderness. However, when the narrator's brother returns the repetition of this mantra suggests that the depravations and mysteries of the forest are interminable.

Contrasted with the scene in which the narrator kills his brother, such linguistic devices of self-assurance come to seem feeble and inappropriate. In the episode of murder, the written word is abandoned for the visual image; a sequence of static panels solely feature the forest behind them, one bathed in red to signify the act of killing (following a convention established when the wolf is shot) to mark the murder without it being seen. The narrator then wordlessly drags his brother into a pit. In a fairy tale, the brother's return would be explained through magic, but we are bound to

the guilt-ridden perspective of his killer and there is no sufficient explanation. At the end of the story, words are also abandoned as the narrator sees his brother digging a pit in the middle of the night. When he follows his brother into the hole, surprisingly he finds the bloodied corpse he had dumped. It then turns to look at him. Horror is conveyed effectively through the image alone, the linguistic silence creating suspense, and the lack of resolution ushering in the fear of the unknown.

This is similarly used in 'In Conclusion'. This story references 'Little Red Riding Hood' with a girl in a red cape being sent on a journey through the woods. Here the girl does not disobey her father and travels through the woods unharmed. When she reaches her mother's house and goes to bed, she congratulates herself: 'What a fine night! // What a good walk! // I knew the wolf wouldn't find me!'. This feeling of comfort quickly disappears:

> Oh, but you must travel through those woods again & again…
> SAID A SHADOW at the WINDOW.
> …and you must be lucky to avoid the wolf every time…
> But the WOLF… the WOLF only needs enough luck to find you ONCE.

The final line is accompanied by a full-page panel of a demonic wolf's eyes and jaws shining white against a black background, the speech trailing from its fangs against a splatter of red, this haunting image ending the collection. This observation converts perceived knowledge of security into a false assurance; as safety lies in luck, it is not true safety at all. The threat of the woods is ever-present and may only be delayed, not escaped. The narrative is completely suspended.

The relevance of these horror devices to the specific landscape of the forest wilderness is manifold. Hiding antagonists, their true nature, and what they will do next fits naturally with the obscured landscape of dense forests. Monsters and abominations within the forest fit with Harrison's idea of the forest as antithetical to Christian theology through the obstruction of the sky

and therefore illumination; the proliferation of shadows creates an otherworld of ungodly creatures. This is furthered by another story in the collection called 'The Nesting Place' wherein a woodland cave harbours a being resembling a mass of red worms which can wear a person's skin for a disguise. Again, disguises and false identities are closely tied to the forest both through this creature and the revenant or doppelganger of 'His Face All Red'. The eschewing of traditional narrative and language in general can be seen as the postmodern fairy tale's replacement subject for subversion, while it wholeheartedly embraces the topic of folk terror. This leaves a question as to why the image of the terrifying forest is retained in postmodernity. Certainly its image is not outwardly positive toward the wilderness, and therefore does not help the cause of ecological preservation.

Through the Woods may provide an answer as to why forest-based folk terror is particularly relevant to postmodernity. Its forest landscapes are resolutely set in the past – broadly identifiable through the clothing of its characters, even though no specific dates are given – and fear can therefore be enjoyed for the purposes of excitement without real-world risk. However, this past world of forests has also become alien. The inability to control or predict a landscape, and the acute bodily risk of becoming lost in an organic mass and being consumed by forest animals, is so foreign that the fear of the woods may actually be increased now we are less familiar with them. In this regard, forests have the potential to be especially frightening in postmodernity through their exotic nature. Part of the impulse to resurrect these spaces in our culture may be to recreate a world we feel is lost, regenerating the excitement and challenges of a world intensely lived under the

shadow of the untamed, unpredictable forest. The audience is fearfully torn between a wish for the past and the knowledge of its dangers.[180]

FANTASTICAL SEXUALITY AND THE ROMANTICS

While the forest may be fashioned as a landscape of fear, it can also be one of desire. The mythological history of the woods as a site of vivid sexuality is demonstrated through Romantic works such as John Keats' 'Lamia' (1820).[181] The poem begins with the 'ever-smitten Hermes' descending 'Into a forest on the shores of Crete' wherein lives 'A nymph, to whom all the hoofed Satyrs knelt'.[182] All beings within this mythos are engaged in lust and desire. This world is reached via a progression backwards through folkloric trends, dated 'before the faery broods' claimed the woods.[183] The figure of Lamia herself – when she gains a human form – is a fantastically beautiful object of desire: 'a lady bright, // A full-born beauty new and exquisite'.[184] In this way she is mirrored by the Geraldine of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Christabel' (1816), who is 'a damsel bright' and 'Beautiful exceedingly!'.[185] Both of these figures originate in woodland spaces: for Lamia the Cretan forest, for Geraldine the 'midnight wood' wherein she is found by Christabel.[186]

The situation of the woods outside social conventions may mean that it is an appropriate space to manifest personal desire. Jonas Spatz sees Christabel's journey into the forest at the

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[180] Further reading on *Through the Woods* and a selection of its illustrations can be found at Sarah Woods, 'Beautiful Horror: Emily Carroll's 'Through the Woods' is a Comics Masterpiece', *Comics Alliance* (2014), <http://comicsalliance.com/emily-carroll-through-the-woods-review/> [accessed 18/08/16].
[181] John Keats, 'Lamia' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Vol. D, 8th Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 935-50.
[182] Keats, 'Lamia', 1:7, 1:12, 1:14-7.
[183] Keats, 'Lamia', 1:1. Mention of King Oberon links to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the power Shakespeare's woodland fairies have over desire through the use of love potions. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Gail Ken Paster and Skiles Howard (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999).
[184] Keats, 'Lamia', 1:171-2.
[185] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Christabel' in *The Norton Anthology*, 58; 68.
[186] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 29.

beginning of the text as having an intensely sexual context.[187] He notes that symbolically the situation of the text in the early stirrings of spring places it in a time of sexual reproduction.[188] The reason for her expedition is that 'She had dreams all yesternight // Of her own betrothed knight' and has gone into the woods to pray for his well-being.[189] While these dreams have a connection to desire through their betrothal, Spatz looks at Coleridge's early drafts to more find that 'two lines erased before publication indicate that they have upset, confused, and perhaps erotically stimulated her'.[190] Escaping the confines of civilisation, as symbolized through the castle and its gate, to process her own sexual confusion gives a more compelling motivation for her journey. Spatz interprets Geraldine as 'the projection of this sexuality', embodying Christabel's more sexually powerful alter-ego.[191] However, both this relationship and that of Lamia and the young man Lycius she seduces are far from straightforward. Both have internal tensions, the most obvious of which being that desire is combined with the monstrous and the fearful. Before Hermes gives Lamia a human form in exchange for revealing to him the nymph he is seeking, she is 'a palpitating snake', heavily hybridized through possessing several animal features – 'Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard' – with the only human aspect being 'a woman's mouth'.[192] Geraldine is also related to the snake – Christabel catches a glance from her when 'the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head, // Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye'.[193] Desirous female figures are therefore intrinsically related to Eve's temptation, framed within a narrative of anxiety toward female sexual maturity and agency. This returns to the preoccupations of the first chapter: the wilful serpent rests outside a worldly order, and the wilderness, here the wild forest, undermines control and authority.

[187] Jonas Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros: Sexual Initiation in Coleridge's 'Christabel'', *PMLA*, 90:1 (1975), 107-116.
[188] Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros', 111.
[189] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 27-8.
[190] Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros', 112.
[191] Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros', 111.
[192] Keats, 'Lamia', 1:45, 1:49, 1:60.
[193] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 584-5.

These two Romantic texts find partner in the works of Angela Carter. 'The Erl-King' and 'The Company of Wolves' of her collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) both involve the discovery of fantastical and desirous figures in the forest.[194] Significantly, the relationship between the sexes are inverted, as the objects of desire are masculine. 'The Erl-King' features a woodsman whose identity is blended with that of the forest, and the forest-dwelling werewolf of 'The Company of Wolves' displays overt masculine sexual virility in his possession of 'genitals, huge'.[195] Carter's work can be seen as aggressively revisionist toward Romanticism's own rewriting of the chivalric tradition, wherein women are desirous objects infused with sexual anxiety. The killing of the Erl-King by the protagonist is a strike against patriarchal control over the relationship – she interprets his keeping of caged birds as foreboding her own fate under his influence: 'I shall become so small you can keep me in one of your osier cages and mock my loss of liberty'.[196] The lack of sexual fear in 'The Company of Wolves', where the young woman refuses to be preyed upon by the werewolf and instead enters into a consensual sexual relationship with him – 'sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf' – is a riposte to the sexual anxieties of texts such as 'Christabel'.[197] Analysing Coleridge's letters, Spatz outlines the poet's 'repugnance for the beast that man becomes when erotically aroused', and that sexual arousal is only valuable as part of an honest, loving relationship.[198] In contrast, the masculine beast of the werewolf in 'The Company of Wolves' is wilfully embraced. In her thesis, Angela Lambrix further interprets the werewolf's disregard of the thrown Bible and apron the grandmother believes will protect her as 'a mockery of the Church and the patriarchal strictures

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[194] Angela Carter, 'The Company of Wolves' in *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 2006)*,* 96-104; Angela Carter, 'The Erl-King' in *The Bloody Chamber,* 129-39.
[195] Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', 136.
[196] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 103.
[197] Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', 139.
[198] Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros', 108.

within it that would regulate performative gender roles', wherein the apron represents domesticity.[199] The wild woods, and the monsters within it, are used as an external site in which the conventions and expectations of society toward femininity and sex can be dismantled – or in this case, devoured.

This all presumes that 'Lamia' and 'Christabel' are only demonstrations of patriarchal power playing out sexual fantasies regarding submissive females. While this is certainly present in the inability to escape certain tropes (such as intense beauty being a necessary part of all female characters), Lamia, Geraldine and Christabel resist straightforward moral analyses. Despite her duplicitous nature, Lamia is only deemed to be negative from the perspective of Lycius' tutor Apollonius, who believes Lycius has become 'a serpent's prey'.[200] In her pre-human form she is represented as alien, but not evil or hideous: 'She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue'.[201] Geraldine, while also strange and having inexplicable effects upon those she encounters, is also not expressly evil. Douglas Kilday suggests that a passage in which Christabel leads Geraldine through the castle gate, causing the lady to sink 'belike through pain' before Christabel carries her over, is not due to the common interpretation of Geraldine being an evil spirit thereby having difficulty crossing thresholds.[202] Instead Kilday looks at the previous incongruous couplet: 'The gate that was ironed within and without, // Where an army in battle array had marched out'.[203] Kilday suggests that Geraldine 'is implicitly oppressed by the gate's martial images and what they suggest about the place she is entering'.[204] She is extremely sensitive to the affective content of the world, affirmed through her emotional reaction to the tones of ringing bells at the beginning of

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[199] Angela Renee Lambrix, 'Gender and Hybridity in the Works of Angela Carter' (unpublished thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2012), 38.
[200] Keats, 'Lamia', 2:298.
[201] Keats, 'Lamia', 1:46.
[202] Douglas Kilday, 'Coleridge's 'Christabel'', *Explicator*, 53:3 (1995), 143-5; Coleridge, 'Christabel', 129.
[203] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 127-8.
[204] Kilday, 'Coleridge's 'Christabel'', 144.

the poem's second part, when the 'merry peal' of a second bell dispels the 'dread' of the first.[205] Though a small observation, this is significant in shoring up the impression that Geraldine represents desire in its multifaceted whole, including being closely attuned to the world of emotions. Spatz notes that through carrying Geraldine into the castle in this manner, Christabel assumes a male sexual role via the wedding tradition of carrying the bride over the threshold.[206] Christabel takes sexual control of the situation, undermining the idea that Geraldine and herself are counterparts respectively embodying desire and its absence. Of course, when Christabel brings Geraldine to her room Geraldine assumes the dominant role, first undressing to reveal 'her bosom and half her side', and then 'lay down by the maiden's side!– // And in her arms the maid she took', indicating if not the act of sex certainly sexual intimacy.[207] Christabel begins to view Geraldine in a negative light only when Christabel's father, Sir Leoline, hears Geraldine's story of mistreatment and comforts her: 'fondly in his arms he took // Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace, // Prolonging it with joyous look'.[208] At this point Christabel has a 'vision of fear' concerning Geraldine, but this is left unspecified. Geraldine was not obviously doing anything untoward, but in the context of the sexual relationship between the two women Geraldine's intimate interaction with Christabel's father could sexually confuse her.[209] Kathleen Wheeler also notes that, while Geraldine has a 'serpent's eye' as mentioned before, Christabel herself also assumes snakelike qualities through making 'a hissing sound' on several occasions, similarly associating her with the tempting serpent of Eden.[210] Combined with the fact that the poem is unfinished, moral assessment and the consequences of their sexual behaviour are suspended.

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[205] Kilday, 'Coleridge's 'Christabel'', 145; Coleridge, 'Christabel', 361-2.
[206] Spatz, 'The Mystery of Eros', 112.
[207] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 252, 262-3.
[208] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 447-50.
[209] Coleridge, 'Christabel', 453.
[210] Kathleen M. Wheeler, 'Disruption and Displacement in Coleridge's 'Christabel'', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 20:2 (1989), 89; Coleridge, 'Christabel', 459, 591.

This sexual uncertainty has further ramifications in these texts considering the relationship between the fantastical and the material. If it is generally assumed that sexuality is linked to the base and material, 'Lamia' problematizes this in that Lycius' and Lamia's sexual and romantic relationship is wed to the fantastical, to the extent that reductive reasoning destroys it. Apollonius' perception of Lamia's essential serpentine nature causes her to vanish and Lycius to die: 'And Lycius' arms were empty of delight, // As were his limbs of life, from that same night'.[211] Rational thought is inherently restrictive and destructive, the poet's voice earlier stating that 'Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings, // Conquer all mysteries by rule and line'.[212] Paul Endo sees 'Lamia' as an expression of the futility of the search for romantic fulfilment, which is 'to contain reality *and* deliver oneself from its anxieties', this attempt to consolidate a world of ideals with lived experience being an impossible task.[213] In 'Keats and the Humanistic Paradox', Donald Reiman further suggests that Keats' critical attitude toward the world of rational thought is part of a disavowal of prescriptive knowledge: '*Lamia* delineates a universe in which all absolutes have been relativized'.[214] This is supported in the consciousness of the progression of culture and its shifting trends of metaphysics in the opening lines of the poem, wherein he notes the change from the mythological world of antiquity to their woodland fairy tale successors. Regarding 'Christabel', the mutable nature of the fantastical and the difficulty Geraldine has in crossing into the castle (potentially representing defined material reality held within fortified walls) also tangentially interacts with these ideas. Wheeler questions whether Geraldine may embody not so much desire but imagination, being 'Coleridge's way of expressing his early fears that imagination

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[211] Keats, 'Lamia', 2:307-8.
[212] Keats, 'Lamia', 2:234-5.
[213] Paul Endo, 'Seeing Romantically in 'Lamia'', *ELH*, 66:1 (1999), 177.
[214] Donald Reiman, 'Keats and the Humanistic Paradox: Mythological History in 'Lamia'', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 11:4 (1971), 659.

is somehow essentially pagan and non-Christian, and must be supplemented by the Christian Will or Reason if it is to be the benison to humankind that we desire it to be'.[215] Of course, reason by itself is not sufficient for a rounded human experience: 'reason without imagination is lacking in energy, while imagination without reason and will is energy unshaped… therefore potentially dangerous as a destructive and disruptive force'.[216] It would be contrived to suggest that Christabel and Geraldine are strictly differentiated counterparts of reason and imagination, as Christabel is not an expressly rational figure, but it is certainly compelling that Geraldine embodies the non-rational, unpredictable imaginary in the human mind. The way she struggles against the material world surrounding her is demonstrative of the clash in human thought between the worlds of the fantastic and of pure reason.

In the case of Angela Carter, this critical approach toward the nature of human response to reason and fantasy is also found in explicit relation to the woods of 'The Erl-King'. Specifically it deconstructs the fantastical content of the woods as a cultural product; 'A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny's house but this light admits of no ambiguities and, here, she will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is exactly as it seems'.[217] There is an intrinsic divide between the material world and the imaginary (here tied to the world of the fairy tale through explicit reference) as the illusion specifically belongs to the girl, while the wood 'admits of no ambiguities' and is nothing more than the straightforward sensory perception of what it 'seems'. Nonetheless, she is 'trapped in her own illusion', suggesting that the world of inferred content is fundamentally inescapable. This much is alluded to further: 'the intimate perspective of the wood changed endlessly around the interloper,

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[215] Wheeler, 'Disruption and Displacement in Coleridge's 'Christabel'', 87.
[216] Wheeler, 'Disruption and Displacement in Coleridge's 'Christabel'', 87.
[217] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 97.

the imaginary traveller walking towards an invented distance that perpetually receded before me'.[218] This confounding and receding aspect suggests a fundamental inability to conceptualise a world without recourse to the imaginary and arrive at a coherent position. This both reinforces the idea of the woods as a traditional site of deconstruction and destroys this concept altogether through a criticism of tradition.

Harriet Kramer Linkin suggests that, in a similar manner, 'The Erl-King' is a meditation on the lasting effect of the Romantics.[219] Linkin rightly assesses *The Bloody Chamber* as a project which 'recodes literary history to sanction the feminist writer who comes to embrace her own desire', and further in 'The Erl-King' explicitly assesses the Romantic ideology 'to see whether and how its contours might embody a female aesthetic form'.[220] The most compelling textual basis for the following selection of quotes Linkin assembles, with direct reference to William Blake's 'How Sweet I Roam'd', Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market', John Keats' 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', and Percy Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind':

> How sweet I roamed, or, rather, used to roam… And shakes over me dead leaves as if into a stream I have become… Eat me, drink me; thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden, I go back to him… He spreads out a goblin feast of fruit for me, such appalling succulence… I shall become so small you can keep me in one of your osier cages and mock my loss of liberty… now I know the birds don't sing.[221]

Linkin suggests this creates a framework for positioning the character of the Erl-King as 'male Romantic poet', and the protagonist's killing of him is a symbolic overthrowing or usurping of the

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[218] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 97.
[219] Harriet Kramer Linkin, 'Isn't it Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in 'The Erl-King'', *Contemporary Literature*, 35:2 (1994), 305-323.
[220] Linkin, 'Isn't it Romantic?', 307.
[221] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 101-3.

Romantic canon.[222] This provides a potential explanation for why the protagonist strings a fiddle with the Erl-King's hair at the end of the text, demonstrating the author appropriating the superficial characteristics of Romanticism (here the woodland romance fantasy). However, the final line becomes baffling in this context, as these strings 'cry out: 'Mother, mother, you have murdered me!''.[223] If she is the successor to the Romantics, suggested when she fantasizes that 'I could lodge inside your [The Erl-King's] body and you would bear me', why is she presented here as mother?[224] On one hand, this elevates her to a place of authority, but the evocation of child murder is so awful that it defies feminist celebration. Linkin sees the protagonist's act of murder as unwarranted: 'the erl-king she encounters neither indicates he will harm her nor hints that the caged birds she repeatedly marks are former narrators enchanted by a transforming spell'.[225] Rather, the protagonist projects her own fears of entrapment upon him. In this case, the protagonist and the author assume a maternal role through the act of imaginative creation. The writer is at war with the Romantic past, and the struggle is far from clear.

Can such complexity be mapped upon 'The Company of Wolves'? Jim Shepard believes that it is the story's 'relationship to reason that's probably its most truly subversive and unsettling aspect. We all as readers know we should celebrate passion and release but we also by the very act of reading cling to the primacy of reason'.[226] That is, Shepard assumes that reading typically requires a causal progression and logical order. He sees the text as running opposed to conventional rationality in subverting and collapsing 'the antipodes of predator and prey, of being undone and becoming, of loving and consuming, so that the frightening becomes comfortable and the

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[222] Linkin, 'Isn't it Romantic?', 319.
[223] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 104.
[224] Carter, 'The Erl-King', 102.
[225] Linkin, 'Isn't it Romantic?', 319.
[226] Jim Shepard, 'On Keeping Company with Wolves', *Ecotone*, 9:1 (2013), 71.

comfortable frightening'.[227] To develop this further, a particular line demonstrates the uncertainty of reason in the text: 'of all the teeming perils of the night and the forest, ghosts, hobgoblins, ogres that grill babies upon gridirons, witches that fatten their captives in cages for cannibal tales, the wolf is the worst for he cannot listen to reason'.[228] This statement seems bizarre: why would the only real-world being in this list be the one opposed to reason? Significantly the other beings are governed by reason as rationality confines them to a world of fantasy. The wolf cannot be so logically controlled and reduced. Its presence in the world defies any influence of the human mind, and therefore the tie between the material and the rational is torn apart. There is no place for thought in such a reductive world, and reason becomes unnervingly insufficient when dealing with worldly experience.

The forest image therefore begins to collapse upon itself with a discussion of desire. Stereotypically occupying a realm of ideals and emotions, romantic desire brings into question the way we invest the material world with emotional content. As a physical space frequently imbued with the fantastical in mythological history, the forest becomes questionable in the context of the relationship between fantasy and the material world. The cultural production of the forest image is threatened as completely arbitrary, but is nonetheless difficult to escape from. Like sexual anxieties, religious imagery, deviancy and emotional intensity forming a chain of associations inextricably underlying the concept of sexuality, the folkloric history of the forest is tightly woven into its spatial identity. This is not expressly negative; the world of the imaginary presents something in itself otherworldly, and reason alone cannot provide a satisfactory account for our experience of the world or meet human needs.

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[227] Shepard, 'On Keeping Company with Wolves', 71.
[228] Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', 130.

While the forest wilderness and the folklore representations surrounding it actively encourage a criticism of institutions and concepts, as demonstrated through the criticisms of masculinity and subversion of wild man tropes in the films of John Boorman, the fantasies this landscape is infused with still reveal more about the preoccupations of cultures than anything reducibly intrinsic to the forest. Certainly this is informed by elements of the landscape; the obscuration of the sky and lines of sight within the cover of trees inspiring themes of hiding, disguise, and mystery. Postmodern culture struggles to fully reduce the forest down to its bare material essentials, still compulsively regenerating fantasies. Perhaps the backdrop of ecological exploitation and deforestation in these tales – explicitly in the case of Boorman's destructive dam projects, or implicitly in Carroll's need to situate her stories in the past – comments upon a reductive mindset robbing the forest of any value other than the price of land and lumber. Conversely the recourse to mythic structures encourages a recreation of value. This suggests that while tradition can be problematic, as with Carter fearing the shadow of Romanticism, we cannot help but lose something when we reject it. The simple presence of forests in texts can therefore root us in a tradition, deflecting the fear that we have lost something.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRODUCTION OF WILDERNESS

So far I have established a precedent for dividing wilderness from a coherent system of knowledge. The representation of wild places within iconoclastic and/or subversive traditions, such as postmodernism and folklore, has been shown to undermine or reject typical assumptions or logical beliefs regarding the world in which we live. This lends credence to the idea that there is a deep-rooted cultural belief in the inherent unknowability of the natural world when in a wild form. To be 'Bewildered' is to be confused, to not know or understand the state of things.[229] From this, one key observation and one problem can be drawn: firstly, knowledge is not irrelevant to wilderness, for if a lack of knowledge does produce wilderness then it is still interacting with the idea of knowing. Secondly, it is experientially false that knowledge cannot be applied to wilderness, as without developing a system to understand and overcome the rigours of wilderness there would be no domesticated landscapes nor society today. Despite its lack of scientific rigour, traditional wilderness wisdom regarding such things as the behaviour of wild animals and the techniques of survival is still a system of knowledge. Hub Zwart's *Understanding Nature* seeks to critique the prejudice against such non-scientific systems of thought, demonstrating the value of folk wisdom in understanding the natural world: 'different, but not necessarily deficient'.[230]

However, this kind of knowledge typically respects the limits of human capability and the inherent difficulties in understanding or predicting wildernesses. At the death of Chris McCandless in the Alaskan hinterlands, locals with long-lived experience of this wild space commented upon the young man's foolishness. His actions '*amount to disrespect of the land… just another case of*

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[229] 'Lost in pathless places, at a loss for one's way; *fig.* confused mentally', 'Bewildered', definition 1, *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/18466> [accessed 01/04/16].
[230] Hub Zwart, *Understanding Nature: Case Studies in Comparative Epistemology* (Berlin: Springer, 2008), 3.

underprepared, overconfident men bumbling around out there and screwing up because they lacked the requisite humility'.[231] Wilderness can never be known too well, and the modern subjugation of wilderness only equates to the physical, not epistemological, mastery of this environment. It still stands that the *terra incognita* – uncharted, far from the support of civilisation and filled with unknown dangers – is the most vivid depiction of wilderness we can imagine. A striking cultural example of this the secret Amazonian plateau of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), filled with numerous horrifying prehistoric creatures.[232] Such fictional wildernesses symbolise the limit of human knowledge by going fantastically beyond what we expect to discover in our world. This chapter will therefore analyse the role of knowledge in producing wilderness, either through the loss or absence of knowledge, or the application of certain competing knowledge systems. The first section will look at knowledge imposed upon the wilderness through the symbol of the map. The second will look at what kinds of knowledge are associated with existing in wilderness spaces, being primarily the art of survival.

THE MAP AS REDUCTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE

When Chris McCandless went into the Alaskan interior he was considerably ill-equipped: 'He had no ax, no bug dope, no snowshoes, no compass. The only navigational aid in his possession was a tattered state road map he'd scrounged at a gas station'.[233] Arguably the deficiency of this last item was the most significant in contributing to his death. When Krakauer visited the site of the young man's death he possessed a 'topographical map' which was 'exquisitely detailed'.[234] This allowed him to find a crossing point downstream which McCandless did not discover, therefore stranding

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[231] Quote from a letter written by Nick Jans to the author, Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 73.
[232] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World* (London: Penguin, 1994).
[233] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 5.
[234] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 172.

the latter in the wilderness when the river swelled with spring water. The threat posed by a wilderness area is directly linked to the level of specific knowledge held about its landscape. This is clearly displayed in the 1997 film *The Edge*, wherein a trio of men crash-land without a map in the Alaskan backwoods; as their biplane's flight deviated from their expected route they must hike to the area in which rescue patrols would presume to find them.[235] McCandless willingly created a similar scenario through removing the security of the map, arguably because he was enamoured with the idea of self-sufficiency. An RV delivery man, with whom McCandless hitchhiked for a thousand miles, informed Krakauer that the young man 'wanted to prove to himself that he could make it on his own, without anybody else's help'.[236] Although Krakauer states that the site which McCandless chose for his sojourn 'scarcely qualifies as wilderness by Alaska standards' due to its proximity to civilisation, his eschewal of the map (or at least one practically useful) converted such a space into an unknown wilderness.[237] As Krakauer suggests: 'In his own mind, if nowhere else, the *terra* became *incognita*'.[238] This drive to escape the map is a tradition in itself. For instance, in *Heart of Darkness* Marlowe describes his fascination with maps in his youth and 'blank spaces on the earth', the unmapped territories full of 'delightful mystery', which he swore to visit in later life.[239] The uncharted landscape is represented as an exciting epistemological challenge, of navigating and interpreting the landscape in one's own terms, and of being the first to do so.

In postmodernity the map is ubiquitous. Denis Wood demonstrates the extent and variety of mapping in recent history in *Rethinking the Power of Maps*: 'we map the weather… the locations of sex offenders, the residences of donors to political parties… school attendance zones,

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[235] *The Edge*, dir. by Lee Tamahori (Art Linson Productions, 1997).
[236] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 158.
[237] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 164.
[238] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 173.
[239] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 33.

atmospheric ozone, the conversion of rainforest to farmland, the route to any cinema from your home address…' and the list continues.[240] The existence of Google Maps, transmitted through the physical world via wireless signals, has the effect of rendering the Jorge Luis Borges' tale 'On Exactitude in Science' as something approximating contemporary reality, wherein the cartographers of an unnamed Empire impose a perfect scale map upon the physical world.[241] With the advent of digital signal the map now literally permeates reality. Consequently, we have become increasingly dependent on the map to inform our understanding of the world. Jean Baudrillard expands upon the Borges story, stating that whereas the tale asserts the fictive nature of the map in attempting to represent the physical territory of the world, the world now is shaped by the power of maps: 'it is the map that precedes the territory'.[242] Here the map serves mostly as a symbol for the general artificial nature of postmodernity, wherein concepts of reality are produced through cultural thought.

Wood unpacks these ideas in more thorough and practical terms. He asserts that maps are 'discourse functions', in the same manner as other cultural products, thereby informing our understanding of the world and what we believe to be true.[243] They are 'propositions', enforcing a world view, rather than 'representations', accurately relaying the lived world.[244] A clear example of this is how maps came into being with the emergence of modern nation states from around 1500, spurring the demarcation of definite borders and therefore the 'shape of the nation' – which becomes in itself a logo or symbol, affirming the legitimacy of the political territory through such

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[240] Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York, NY: Guilford, 2010), 21.
[241] Jorge Luis Borges, 'On Exactitude in Science' in *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 325.
[242] Baudrillard, 'from *Simulations* (1983)' in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader,* 218.
[243] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 2.
[244] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps,* 39.

explicit and exact a diagram.[245] A more recent example he gives of the map supporting systems of power are the electoral returns from the 2000 and 2004 US elections. The classification of states as either Republican or Democrat and the numerical superiority of states in support of George W. Bush suggested that the majority of the country was in support of him and his values; it was 'a mirror of the national will as refracted through the polls'.[246] Wood provides alternate maps indicating a more even split in votes through expanding and contracting states based on population rather than geographical size, and then the electoral returns of counties, to expose that in fact the entire country was completely electorally divided, and Bush could not rightly act with impunity based on the assumed narrative of electoral support.[247]

The suitability of the map in producing and supporting world views as applied to the wilderness can be found across several texts. To diverge from the typical Anglophonic texts examined so far, the Akira Kurosawa-directed Russian film *Dersu Uzala* (1975) demonstrates maps functioning in the service of the modern state in early 20th Century Russia, fitting into a narrative of Tsarist Russification in which dynastic, imperial spread is redefined as a homogenous, well-defined nation.[248] In the film a group of military cartographers travel to the eastern wilderness of the country, attempting to improve knowledge of its more unexplored regions. This can be seen as the officialdom of the metropole expanding outwards into the ethnically and linguistically diverse hinterlands of the nation in order to establish 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality', reducing pluralistic identity in favour of a cohesive national monoculture.[249] This is particularly exhibited in how the party enlists the help of the eponymous Goldi woodsman. The group's leader,

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[245] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 32; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 175.
[246] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 39-40.
[247] Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, 41-43.
[248]*Dersu Uzala*, dir. by Akira Kurosawa (Daiei Film, Mosfilm, 1975); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 86.
[249] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 87.

Vladimir Arsenyev, later convinces Dersu he should return with him to the city as he is becoming old and cannot weather the hardships of the wilderness. This is not portrayed as an insidious process in the film, but rather an inevitability of modernisation. Feeling inherently at odds with this new lifestyle, Dersu returns to the woods despite being mostly blind and is killed by bandits for the rifle Arsenyev gave him as a present. The old, individual, and freer ways of life are therefore erased.

In *Into the Wild*, Krakauer reveals from McCandless' notes that the young man intended to 'map the area' in which he was camping in Alaska.[250] This would have limited practical benefit without precise cartographical instruments, but would nonetheless have created the impression that he was defining the wilderness landscape in his own terms. This again displays an impulse to use the map as a tool for establishing identity, albeit on an individual scale rather than national. In the film adaptation of the same name, McCandless is shown carrying out the act of mapping, placed within a montage of creating amenities such as a bucket-shower, therefore associating the action of mapping with the conversion of the wilderness into a personal, quasi-domesticated space.[251] Pre-postmodern literary examples such as *The Lost World* and Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1874) display similar mapping impulses in those exploring or stranded in wild environments.[252] Obviously this serves a highly practical purpose in order to understand and therefore survive the wilderness, but in this straightforward way it still concerns using the map-sign to exert control over the physical world. In *The Mysterious Island*, the act of surveying the landscape and naming locations is explicitly used for comfort; the survivors decide to think of themselves not 'as castaways, but as colonists', and so they name locations in homage to their homeland (and their

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[250] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 164.
[251] *Into the Wild*, dir. by Sean Penn (Paramount Vantage, Art Linson Productions, River Road Entertainment, 2007).
[252] Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, trans. by Jordan Stump (New York, NY: Random House, 2004).

allegiance in the civil war) such as 'Union Bay, Washington Bay, and Mount Franklin', the island itself becoming 'Lincoln Island'.[253] In convincing themselves they are part of a greater national project they can distance themselves from their immediate individual concerns.

To return to postmodernity with *The Drowned World*, the problematic nature of even precise mapping begins to be exposed. The military team Kerans and his research companion Bodkin are accompanying are surveying the ruined cities and lagoons of the new waterlogged tropical world, 'mapping the shifting keys and harbours', while Kerans and Bodkin themselves are carrying out 'biological mapping'.[254] Kerans believes the categorisation of organisms to be a 'pointless game, the new flora following exactly the emergent lines anticipated twenty years earlier', and even Riggs admits that 'All this detailed mapping of harbours for use in some hypothetical future is absurd'.[255] Such activities appear to be purely ceremonial. In the case of harbour-mapping, this is evidently an exercise to convince the remnants of humanity that they will someday return south from their refuges, when it is unlikely they ever will. The map is therefore an attempt to re-assert human control over the landscape. Against such a formidable new wilderness, such propaganda becomes a hollow gesture.

This issue is further discussed in *The Crossing* through the idea of the map's deficiency in representing wilderness. As Billy and his brother, Boyd, travel to Cases Grandes they ask an old man for directions. He draws a map for them in the dirt of the square: 'He sketched in the dust streams and promontories and pueblos and mountain ranges'.[256] Once completed, a quartet of onlookers disparage the validity of the map, one labelling it as 'un fantasma' – literally a ghost, and therefore immaterial and dead (therefore temporally irrelevant), but semantically linked to

[253] Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 118, 120-1.
[254] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 12, 8.
[255] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 8, 17.
[256] McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 184.

fantasy or phantasm and therefore illusory and fictive.[257] When Billy enquires as to why, the man

expands on the futility of mapping such a country in general:

> He said that what they beheld was but a decoration. He said that anyway it was not so much
> a question of a correct map but of any map at all. He said that in that country were fires
> and earthquakes and floods and that one needed to know the country itself and not simply
> the landmarks therein… a bad map was worse than no map at all for it engendered in the
> traveler a false confidence and might easily cause him to set aside those instincts which
> would otherwise guide him if he would but place himself in their care.[258]

This statement proposes two different methods for interacting with the physical world: map

knowledge, which is discredited as irrelevant to such a wild landscape, highlighting its perpetually

outmoded character and therefore unreliability (it does not represent, its proposition is false); and

a kind of experiential, folk and/or innate knowledge which is the natural inheritance of the human

individual, the 'instincts which would otherwise guide him'. The beseeching tone of 'would but

place himself in their care' suggests the speaker truly believes that empirical map knowledge is a

corrupting influence, humanity having strayed from intimacy with the lived world. The map is

therefore not only false but a negative influence upon an individual's character, further lending

credence to the idea proposed in the first chapter that socio-technological development in

McCarthy's works is presented as a loss, deviance or regression from the past condition of

humankind. However, the fervency of this assertion is quickly mitigated through competing,

milder views from the other onlookers. One states: 'it was a mistake to discount the good will

inherent in the old man's desire to guide them for it… would in itself lend strength and resolution

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[257] Mccarthy, *The Crossing*, 184.
[258] McCarthy, *The Crossing*, 184-5.

to them in their journey'.[259] Here the map is divided from its epistemological issues and seen more as totemic; the inaccuracies of the map are irrelevant, as possessing a degree of confidence over the landscape will aid in surviving it. This theoretical discussion is finally dismissed as another of the onlookers 'rose laughing' and leads the boys away, setting them on an easterly track and therefore ending the discussion of the relevancy of maps to the lived world and replacing theoretical knowledge with the acquisition of experience.[260]

This discussion of the fallibility of the map and its inaccuracy in depicting the lived world is of course limited in application. *The Crossing* explores the wildernesses of the early- to mid-twentieth-century US borderlands and *The Drowned World* proposes a hypothetical wilderness of the future. Within postmodern experience, maps are constantly updated and employed with faith in their reliability. Satellite mapping allows navigation through even the most chaotic terrain if the traveller has the correct technology. This may understandably spell the end of wildernesses, other than the instances in which the individual abandons or loses the map entirely, as in *Into the Wild* or *The Edge.* However, in the US the relationship between maps and wilderness is unusual, as wilderness becomes delineated on the map. In 1964 the National Wilderness Preservation System was created in order to protect environmentally unspoiled areas from development.[261] The act itself presents the following definition:

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[259] McCarthy, *The Crossing,* 185.
[260] McCarthy, *The* Crossing, 186.
[261] 'Wilderness: Frequently Asked Questions', National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, <http://wilderness.nps.gov/faqnew.cfm> [accessed 10/03/16]; 'Wilderness', US Forest Service, <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/cda/wilderness.shtml> [accessed 10/03/16].

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.[262]

Through this the US Congress can delineate wilderness on the map (more than 106 million acres of it), thereby empirically qualifying and quantifying wild places.[263] While this incontrovertibly comes from a position of environmental preservation, holding a decidedly pro-wilderness standpoint, it is not unproblematic. Firstly, the idea of the Anthropocene observes that the Earth is significantly affected in its entirety as a global system by human influence, rather than environmental destruction being isolatable. This discredits the idea that environments can be satisfactorily preserved in standalone geographic units, such as designated wilderness areas. Secondly, a paradox is established through wilderness being defined by humanity in being *allowed* to exist in certain spaces, significantly diminishing its status as wild and uncontrolled. It would appear that designating areas as wilderness through legal institutions is a means to continue believing that the pure natural world still exists, that it can be extricated from the influence of humanity, and that it is unitary rather than being part of a global system. It may therefore inadvertently support a narrative of denying or minimizing the global environmental impact of the human race.

In *The Wild Places*, Robert Macfarlane does not see these issues as too great a barrier to define and locate wildernesses. Exercising a similar practice to the US, he creates a map of wilderness in the British Isles, subverting expectations through orientating the landforms on a west to east vertical axis (thereby superficially rejecting the dominance of typical map endeavours), and

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[262] 'The Wilderness Act', Section 2c, US Congress (1964), <http://wilderness.nps.gov/document/wildernessAct.pdf> [accessed 10/03/16].
[263] 'Wilderness: Frequently Asked Questions', National Park Service.

removing all data apart from black points denoting wild places and their names. As mentioned in the introduction, Macfarlane admits that he 'did not believe, or did not want to believe, the obituaries for the wild'.[264] He puts forward his arguments for various sites in the British Isles to be classified as wilderness, the map working to enforce this proposition. This is particularly useful when he begins to redefine wilderness to more easily accomplish his task; that wilderness may exist microcosmically, such as a 'jungle' of wild plants growing in the crevice of a gryke – 'Miniature, yes, but fabulously wild' – or that it is unnecessary for them to be untouched by civilisation, some of the wild places he selects having been previously inhabited but abandoned.[265] In this case, his map gives the increasingly vague form of wilderness he proposes a worldly reference, attempting to transform what has essentially become subjective into an objective truth through the now firmly trusted medium of the cartographical diagram.[266] Indeed, Macfarlane intends the book itself to be a 'prose map that would seek to make some of the remaining wild places of the archipelago visible again, or that would record them before they vanished for good'.[267] This final clause is significant in that it acknowledges the temporal specificity of the map and, instead of purely serving the fulfilment of Macfarlane's wish to find a source of wild experience in the British Isles, it proposes the map as a gauge for measuring the disappearance of wilderness in specific sites, or to preserve its character when it is gone.

An example of the contemporary individual accessing wilderness through its delineation on the official map is provided by Strayed's autobiographical work *Wild*. Strayed first discovers the 'continuous wilderness trail' she then hikes for over two thousand miles when she by chance

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[264] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 11.
[265] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 168. 'My idea of wildness as something inhuman, outside history, had come to seem nonsensical', 176.
[266] This reimagining of the spatial parameters of wilderness in postmodernity, focusing instead upon the concept or values behind wild spaces, will be further discussed in the final chapter.
[267] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 17.

picks up a guide book with maps called '*The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume I: California*'.[268] While Macfarlane's work is filled with qualifiers that wilderness has become a tenuous concept, that 'Remoteness has been almost abolished' and 'Only a small and diminishing proportion of the terrain is now more than five miles from a motorable surface', Strayed displays none of these epistemological insecurities about whether her wilderness experience is legitimate.[269] As the wilderness trail is officially delineated, she believes that she is in a wilderness. Her narrative can therefore focus upon personal struggles, rather than the struggle of sourcing a suitable wild landscape.

Of course, it may be argued that the US provides a greater quantity of outwardly uncontrolled natural landscape than the British Isles, and all it requires is a visit to some of the more remote regions to convince the individual that wilderness does in fact still exist in such corners. Theoretical notions of wilderness being essentially artificial may be considered irrelevant to such direct experience, in which the wildness of a place becomes self-evident. However, Strayed is following a trail with designated resting points with cabins, her route crosses roads and she meets other individuals. By contrast, Macfarlane's destinations include natural spaces without such elements, such as Rannoch moor which is 'vast and trackless and has a reputation for hostility at all times of year'.[270] He therefore has more legitimate wilderness experiences in a nation which is generally presumed to have lost its wild places. While conclusive observations about differences in view between a nation with officially delineated wildernesses and one without regarding whether wildernesses still exist could only be achieved through the use of surveys, based on this comparison and the application of a generalized logic it is more than reasonable to suggest that the

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[268] Strayed, *Wild*, 4. Significantly she later admits that this book becomes her 'bible', 58.
[269] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 9.
[270] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 66.

US is less convinced by the idea of wilderness having vanished than the UK, and that ideas of wilderness are culturally relative. This demonstrates the power of the map in shaping the way postmodern individuals decide what they know about the world.

WILDERNESS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

As well as wilderness being subjected to an external epistemology regarding how it is defined and topographically conceptualised, existence within wild places requires a certain kind of knowledge. Major wilderness figures, fictional and actual, are culturally understood to have a specific wisdom enabling them to survive in such environments. Michael Punke's historical novel *The Revenant* (2002) provides an account of the life of frontier trapper Hugh Glass who was attacked by a bear and then abandoned by those left to keep vigil over him in his dying hours.[271] Punke presents Glass' subsequent recovery and hunt for revenge as achieved through an art of survival, interweaving knowledge of the requirements of the self, of correct tool use, the behaviour of animals, botany, medicine, combat, and so on. A notable episode involves Glass being moved to kill a rattlesnake as he is in need of its nutrients in order to heal, taking particular care as he 'had once seen a severed snake head implant itself on the nose of a fatally curious dog', and then skilfully skinning and preparing the carcass with only a razor blade.[272]

The importance of engaging with wilderness knowledge was not lost on the otherwise compulsively self-sufficient McCandless, gathering skills through deferring to the knowledge of others. He 'relied on the advice of hunters he'd consulted in South Dakota, who advised him to smoke his meat'.[273] Unfortunately, the specificity of the Alaskan environment meant that this was

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[271] Michael Punke, *The Revenant* (London: HarperCollins, 2015).
[272] Punke, *The Revenant,* 94-6.
[273] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 165.

a small substitute for the wisdom gained through a lifetime of local experience: 'Alaskan hunters know that the easiest way to preserve meat in the bush is to slice it into thin strips and then air-dry it on a makeshift rack'.[274] The consequence of not knowing this for McCandless was that he could not properly preserve the meat of a moose he killed. The meat spoiled and was overrun with maggots due to the voracity of flies in the area. Wilderness wisdom is not universal, but specific.

As there are different schools of thought regarding the art of engaging with wilderness, inevitably hierarchies of knowledge arise. There has been a broad traditional prejudice against the epistemology of those living in proximity to wilderness. As previously mentioned, in the early modern period it was widely held as truth that 'uncultivated land meant uncultivated men'; that there was an inherent link between an untamed landscape and the general deficiency of its inhabitants.[275] The survival skills of Westerners, born out of a combination of practical skill with advanced technology and a the scientific predisposition of Western society from the early modern period onwards – if not a rigorous scientific education for the individual – has been portrayed as superior to the wisdom of indigenous tribes gained through lifelong proximity with wild places. The lasting influence of this idea is evidenced in the colonial adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1895), in which a trio of white men find a land undiscovered by Westerners called 'Kukuanaland' in the wild hinterlands of South Africa.[276] Using their guns and other tools of scientific precision such as an almanac, allowing them to accurately predict an eclipse and therefore pretend to summon it, they convince the indigenous population that they are supernatural spirits and are therefore revered.[277] The epistemology of the locals is therefore caricatured as naïve, foolishly relying on superstition and emotion rather than logical, empirical thought. Haggard has

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[274] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 165.
[275] Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 15.
[276] H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London: Penguin, 1972).
[277] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 94-7, 139-40.

the Westerner's black servant, who is revealed to have been born in Kukuanaland, admit so much by stating to the narrator: "I am but a child in wisdom beside thee".[278] This is similarly displayed in the previously mentioned Grimm's tale of 'The Owl' wherein rural locals of the past 'were far from being so crafty and cunning as they are now-a-days'.[279] Rather than their proximity to the woods affording them a keen knowledge of the natural world, their hierarchically lower position in the progression of time and civilisation – therefore lacking technological and/or intellectual development – means that they are presented as mentally deficient.

In postmodernity there has been a movement away from this attitude. In *Comparative Epistemology*, Hub Zwart seeks to present cultural or folk wisdom regarding the natural world as outside a hierarchy of value with scientific knowledge, rather falling into a different epistemological category. One element of this assertion is how science makes 'diffuse nature discrete'; it relies on the controlled laboratory experiment as the height of discovering worldly truths, when in fact this process enforces an artificial condition which can only ever explore a problematically isolated unit of the sprawling character of nature.[280] The less rigidly defined development of thought in folk wisdom may allow for a more unfettered examination of worldly truths, as the sprawling, chaotic and interconnected wilderness may not be truly understood if cut into scientifically understandable segments. Largely Zwart relies on dated literary examples, such as Jack London's dog stories, to give an insight into how the world functions which is more rapid, experiential and intuitive than the slow and limited empirical processes of scientific investigation, in this case exploring the mental workings of non-human animals.[281]

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[278] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 171.
[279] Grimm, 'The Owl', 104.
[280] Zwart, *Understanding Nature*, 257.
[281] Zwart, *Understanding Nature*, 118-25.

Examples from postmodern literature are more generous in extending this assessment beyond the boundaries of Western cultural products to appreciate the wisdom of non-white groups living in proximity to wilderness. As previously mentioned, *The Emerald Forest* asserts the validity of the lifestyle of its focal Amazonian tribe, positioning their practises as virtuous in comparison to the exploitative technology of outside civilisation. While they may not be as epistemologically sophisticated, their use of ritual and reverence for the natural world displays an admirable sensitivity. Compared to the poverty of the city and the squalor in which other dispossessed tribespeople live, the Invisible People display a strong communal bond lost to the outside world.

Paul Henley counters the idea that this representation is a purely postmodern development; in 'Recent Themes in the Anthropology of the Amazonia', he begins by outlining a view of the indigenous Amazonian tribespeople he states 'has remained remarkably consistent over 400 years', holding status as both 'noble savages and barbarians, both a model of what we once were and of what we should aspire to be, child-like innocents and primevally wise at the same time', from Michel de Montaigne's *Of Cannibals* to *The Emerald Forest* itself.[282] The assertion here is that every proficiency these groups are believed to possess is paired with deficiency, and ethnic others continue to be narrowly conceptualised even when using a positive intonation.

Dersu Uzala may fall prey to a similar criticism. The film is based on the accounts of Vladimir Arsenyev himself, who made several expeditions to the Ussuri region in the opening years of the twentieth century, and so the postmodern text praising the wisdom of the wilderness-

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[282] Paul Henley, 'Recent Themes in the Anthropology of Amazonia: History, Exchange, Alterity' in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 15:2 (1996), 231.

dwelling individual is anticipated before the period begins.[283] On one hand this may simply establish a more longstanding validation of alternative epistemologies, but Dersu's character must be examined to determine whether his proficiencies are matched by deficiencies. When the military cartographers first meet Dersu in the film they consider him an eccentric; he believes in a form of panpsychism, imbuing animals, objects and the elements with personhood, referring to them as 'fellows' with the capacity to experience emotions such as anger. However, despite his philosophical differences it is evident that Dersu possesses considerable skill. When the soldiers engage in rifle practise through attempting to hit a bottle swung from a piece of twine, Dersu outmatches them by shooting the string. When he and Arsenyev are lost on a frozen lake, Dersu improvises an overnight shelter using a surveying tripod and reeds. It becomes clear that Dersu's life in the wilderness has bestowed him with a powerful knowledge and set of skills. Arsenyev comments: 'I couldn't help admiring him. He was so wise. He had a deep knowledge born of a lifetime spent in the wilds'. It is significant that Dersu does not only match the military party in this regard, but surpasses them. However, when Dersu moves into urban civilisation he fails to adapt or understand the laws and ways of life there. He falls into a malaise and gets in trouble with the police when he goes to cut a tree down from the park for firewood. While he is perfectly attuned to the wilderness he does not display adaptability to other ways of life – unlike Arsenyev, who can exist in any environment, be it urban or wilderness.

Despite this, the idea that a double-sided narrative of indigenous proficiency and deficiency has been retained is problematized when considering what the film omits. In *Between Worlds*, Francis Karttunen expands upon the history of Arsenyev's discoveries on his expeditions and the

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[283] Francis Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 252-8. Arsenyev's account *Dersu Uzala* was originally published in 1923. It was first published in English in 1941 as *Dersu the Trapper*, translated by Malcolm Burr.

social condition of the Goldis in general. Karttunen notes that Arsenyev displayed a prejudice towards the Goldi as 'primitive people', confirmed by Dersu's manner of interacting with 'animals and fire and the earth itself' as if they had personhood and thereby forming part of a 'primitive' animism-like spirituality.[284] The film omits this reaction in that Arsenyev is purely a silent observer to this behaviour, watching with interest but not prejudice. Karttunen notes that during Arsenyev's expeditions the Ussuri region was in a state of turmoil due to Korean, Chinese and Russian depravations, and the Goldis were a damaged people; Arsenyev and his fellow Russians were 'appalled by the tiny Goldi communities where the men always outnumbered the women, the women were addicted to opium, and the parasite ridden toddlers learned to beg tobacco before they stopped nursing at the breast'.[285] Karttunen suggests that Arsenyev valued Dersu because he was outside this social decay, rejecting the communal life for a solitary one in the woods, and was therefore exceptional.[286] In the film this social background is omitted. Without this frame of reference regarding the Goldi people, Dersu is not exceptional and is valued for his own sake rather than contrasting with an ethnic context. Furthermore, Dersu's inability to adapt to civilisation outside the wilderness in the film is presented not as a deficiency on the part of the individual, but of broader society. He is forbidden to do such things as fire his gun within the town or set up a tent purely because they are illegal, rather than having the reasons for these laws explained to him. From his perspective, this makes them appear arbitrary and nonsensical. This dynamic can also be seen in *The Emerald Forest*, where the natural lifestyle is presented as wholly preferable by the end of the text. Unlike earlier films involving the kidnap or adoption of white children into marginalised ethnic groups, such as *The Searchers* (1956), *The Emerald Forest* does not end with

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[284] Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 255.
[285] Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 253-4.
[286] Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 253.

the white adolescent being successfully returned to their society but remaining with the indigenous people in the wilderness environment.[287]

A large aspect of the unfavourable nature of modern (or postmodern) civilisation can be seen as directly related to the specific forms of knowledge and skill accrued in recent years, for instance that of highly advanced technology, which has replaced or displaced older skillsets. McCarthy's representation of the loss of traditional wilderness skills or ways of life as akin to spiritual decay has been noted on several occasions in this chapter and in chapter one. The development of industry has certainly seen a degradation of traditional 'manual craft' skills.[288] The bleakest of outlooks regarding the state of lifestyle and employment in recent post-industrial society propose that there is a 'securely employed, multiskilled core and a much larger periphery of insecure, semi-skilled, part-time labour to be used and discarded into habitual unemployment as required by the latest demands of production'.[289] *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing* are set prior to the advent of postmodernity; while this idea of skill loss can be seen as a postmodern concern superimposed upon the past, there is a historical tradition of favouring simpler wilderness ways and the fundamental skills of survival in American writing, the most notable example being Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. It may be suggested that Thoreau is less concerned with the direction in which knowledge, skill and technology are headed than we are in postmodernity. Thoreau sees the flaws of society as largely economical, that 'men labor under a mistake', that they 'are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them'.[290] That is, the system of working within the social-economic system is one of unnecessary strain. Thoreau presents it as wage-slavery, being fundamentally

[287] *The Searchers*, dir. John Ford (Warner Bros., C. V. Whitney Pictures, 1956).
[288] Pat Ainley, *Class and Skill: Changing Divisions of Knowledge and Power* (London: Cassell, 1993), 4.
[289] Ainley, *Class and Skill*, 3.
[290] Thoreau, 'Walden', 982-3.

degrading. While post-industrial society provides labour-saving devices and the mechanisation of the workplace, removing the tremendous strain of labour Thoreau discusses, the technology itself becomes problematic. Largely this is due to the advent of such phenomenal technology as nuclear weaponry, being the height of scientific knowledge made terribly manifest, as well as the full realisation of the scale of human impact on the environment.[291] Such immoderate use of technology spurs immoderate individual reaction; in the article 'What it Means to Rewild', Patrick J. Kiger reports upon a recent phenomenon in the US of 'rewilding', proponents of which eschew the comforts and economic system of contemporary life, believing our modern ways are mentally unhealthy, and instead learn survival skills and live self-sufficiently in backwoods areas.[292] One of the rewilders Kiger notes is named Thorn, a man who 'lives in an improvised hut that he built from wood and leaves, dines upon beans and squirrel meat, and wears mittens fashioned from raccoon pelt'. Kiger notes this forms part of an American tradition of eremitic wilderness dwelling, but the eschewal of modern tools provides an interesting development; that it is not just society which must be escaped, but even its simplest technologies or products.

By contrast, nineteenth-century writers such as Jules Verne had no reservations about the progression of knowledge and technology. In *The Mysterious Island*, the production of technology by the castaways is not a rebellion against civilisation but an homage to its ingenuity. The sailor Pencroff is keen to repeat that 'they were a hundred arm-lengths ahead of the Robinson Crusoes of yesteryear, for whom any success seemed a miracle' – they are privileged by recent technological advances – Verne's authorial voice reasserting: 'they 'knew', and the man who

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[291] The idea of technology having a moral value, and particularly the significance of Robert Oppenheimer and the atom bomb regarding the negative social view of technologists, is explored in the prologue to Richard Sennet's *The Craftsman* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-18.

[292] Patrick J. Kiger, 'What it Means to Rewild', *National Geographic Channel*, <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/live-free-or-die/articles/what-it-means-to-rewild/> [accessed 08/04/16].

'knows' succeeds where others unavoidably falter and perish'.[293] The group is comprised of highly skilled and learned individuals, their leader being Cyrus Smith, 'an engineer possessed of a first-rate mind', his fellow castaways such that he 'could not have been backed up by a more intelligent set of companions'.[294] With Smith's exhaustive knowledge of technology and the boy Harbert's knowledge of nature the castaways-turned-colonists domesticate animals, mine metals, divert watercourses with explosives, create a telegraph wire, and generally subdue and improve the natural environment of the island in order to suit their needs. This is presented as positive and necessary, and their actions demonstrate the sheer brilliance of human endeavour. Knowledge cannot be seen in anything but a positive light.

Verne's anthropocentric narrative, displaying the virtues of using knowledge to subdue wilderness, extends to the colonists' enthusiasm at completely eliminating the jaguars of the island: 'Spillet vowed to wage a merciless war against these beasts, and rid the island of them forever'.[295] They perceive the creatures as a threat to their dominance, despite the fact that they exist on a side of the island the colonists rarely visit and have therefore caused little problem for them. From a postmodern standpoint of ecological preservation this bloodthirsty attitude is considerably distasteful. A demonstration of the postmodern change in ecological values is provided by the 2001 television adaptation of *The Lost World*, wherein Doyle's original ending is altered as the explorers realise the precious and unique life forms of the plateau would be horrifically exploited by civilisation, and instead of claiming fame in their discovery they portray the whole affair to the public as a hoax.[296] Here the value of democratising knowledge and truth is considerably diminished; the environmental damage such information would cause is of primary concern.

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[293] Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 208.
[294] Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 12, 136.
[295] Verme, *The Mysterious Island*, 141.
[296] *The Lost World*, dir. by Stuart Orme (A&E Television Networks, BBC, RTL, 2001).

In the film *The Edge*, the manner in which late twentieth-century individuals interact with wilderness wisdom, in particular wilderness survival skills, is explored at length. The protagonist Charles Morse is a millionaire who has a thirst for knowledge which he satiates through reading. On numerous occasions it is stated by other characters, such as his wife Mickey, that 'Charles knows everything'. Charles self-deprecatingly states that it is a 'not an accomplishment, it's a freak'; the retention of so much information is simply a weird aspect of his character, and at the beginning of the film his general knowledge functions only as a party trick when he correctly guesses the design on the other side of a Native American paddle in order to win a bet. His erudite knowledge remains theoretical until he and two companions crash into a lake in the Alaskan wilderness. Their escape from the lake is followed by a shot of a survival guidebook Charles was reading sinking deep into the water; the book as a vehicle for knowledge is no longer relevant, and what is known must be exercised practically.

In comparison with the unusual Charles Morse, his companions Bob and Stephen are portrayed as typical contemporary individuals who lack the necessary knowledge to survive in such an environment. Whereas before they saw Charles' knowledge as a gimmick, they now depend on his wilderness wisdom and his more highly trained mind. Charles sees the practice of critical thought as an essential part of survival. The mantra he imparts to the other two men is that 'most people lost in the wilds they… die of shame'; they obsess upon their inability to cope with the situation rather than thinking their way out of it. A significant motif is the design on the Native American paddle, with a panther on one side and a rabbit smoking a pipe on the other. Charles reveals that the rabbit smokes the pipe because 'he sits unafraid' due to being 'smarter than the panther'. The rabbit's attitude refers to that of Charles, who trusts in his mental faculties to deliver him from physical danger. It may be suggested that the central conceit of the film is that theoretical

knowledge translates seamlessly into survival skill, but the inexperienced men still struggle in applying what they know to the wilderness. Charles tries to make a compass by magnetising a needle but leads them in circles due to it being magnetically attracted to his belt buckle. Stephen tries to cut a wooden spear but the knife slips and he slices into his leg. Charles does believe that all skills are fundamentally accessible, though, and that survival skills are not irreparably lost to contemporary humanity. When dealing with the threat of a bear, he proposes that they use the animal's own weight to kill it when it rears to attack, skewering it with a spear according to Native American method. While Bob is incredulous as to their ability to replicate this skill, Charles drums into him a second mantra: 'what one man can do another can do'.

This final quote is dubious considering the vestiges of wilderness knowledge are held in the mind of a millionaire. While Robert is desperately striving to make his fortune Charles has already achieved this; he has the time and the ability to read and accrue knowledge. Wilderness knowledge is not democratised in postmodernity because of the specific knowledge-demands of postmodern life. Without the correct knowledge, one person cannot simply do what another can. The film also raises a question regarding whether Charles' knack for survival is tied to the fact he has been so adept at amassing wealth. In his infuriation with Charles' unflappability Bob observes: 'sit up there, drinks and golf, screwing the maid, but get you in an emergency and you bloom', going on to suggest that people like Charles may in fact be perfect for sitting at the top of the ladder of power and capital precisely because of their single-mindedness. The idea that certain individuals are predisposed to being able to successfully engage with the wilderness also becomes evident in television survival shows such as *Bear Grylls: Born Survivor*; the title states that surviving is

Grylls' birth-right, which he seeks to confirm by performing daring and slightly superfluous stunts such as abseiling down waterfalls.[297]

The question therefore arises as to whether wilderness wisdom has been exoticised through its inaccessibility. Television shows such as *Bear Grylls* turn the wilderness experience and the art of survival into a spectacle for consumption. *The Emerald Forest* certainly exoticises the wilderness knowledge of indigenous groups. The focal Amazonian tribe is versed in the supernatural art of visions through using a hallucinogenic drug, allowing them to understand and respond to changes in their environment. For instance, Tommy predetermines the location of a certain kind of green stone which allows the tribe to camouflage themselves. This skill binds them mythically to their wilderness environment as the visions are revealed through a spirit animal, thereby linking the human subject to the local fauna. By contrast, *The Edge* demystifies wilderness wisdom when rituals have solid foundations. When Charles tells Stephen to spit under a round stone to cure a stitch, being a Native American method, Bob observes: 'Old Indian remedy, makes sense, feller's got a stitch in his side, make him slow down, find a round stone, take his mind off of it, make him stretch, bend over'. What seems to be a piece of folklore is revealed as sound practical advice.

The film *Walkabout* (1971) goes further, destabilising the typical divide between different manifestations of knowledge.[298] In this text a pair of white siblings are taken out into the Australian bush by their father who attempts to kill them before committing suicide. The children try to walk out of the wilderness and are helped in their efforts by an aboriginal boy. The boy's actions are contrasted with those of the white children's society through editing; when the boy hunts animals

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[297] 'Costa Rican Rain Forest', *Bear Grylls: Born Survivor*, season 1 episode 3 (2006), (Diverse Productions, 2006-11).

[298] *Walkabout*, dir. by Nicholas Roeg (Max L. Raab Productions, Si Litvinoff Film Production, 1971).

and prepares their meat, shots are interspersed of a butcher at work. The inference here is that while the practises and skills of white civilisation versus aboriginal culture are outwardly different, they are not as dissimilar as we would imagine due to sharing the same fundamental purposes. This is further established through the use of non-diegetic didgeridoo music, associated with aboriginal culture, accompanying shots of cityscapes and thereby dismantling typical cultural divides. The text therefore begs the question as to whether the delineation of a distinct wilderness wisdom is part of a narrative Othering less technologically advanced cultures, the film instead presenting an alternative, interconnected view of human societies.

Knowledge and wilderness therefore have a convoluted relationship. While a lack of knowledge magnifies the threat of wilderness, surviving a wilderness does not invalidate its legitimacy, and therefore applying knowledge and skills successfully to a wild place constitutes an equally genuine wilderness experience to one fraught with failure and misery. Wilderness skills can therefore be seen as a substantial element of the wilderness motif, constituting a major element of narratives regarding these environments. Technology, as a physical manifestation of knowledge, is a different issue; beside technological advancement being synonymous with the physical disappearance of undomesticated spaces, the more advanced technology is the less need there is to even notice the arduous character of wilderness. Wilderness narratives therefore typically involve a setting in a period before invasive technology, being located in an area distanced from technology, or creating a scenario where technology is invalidated or cannot be relied upon, such as the crashed plane in *The Edge*. This allows the blossoming of human ingenuity, the practicing of skills, and the application or gaining of knowledge.

While not all individuals possess the correct knowledge or skills to survive in such environments, those who do possess them gain a platform on which to demonstrate this virtue. Without the map the wilderness will appear more wild, but the creation of a map and correct orienteering within a wild landscape demonstrates the skill of those traversing this space. Of course, the great majority of contemporary individuals do not have this skill and instead rely on the maps of others to interpret the world. The blank spaces on the map have generally been filled, providing us with a global image lacking a demarcation of wilderness beside areas of conservation, such as in the US. The consequence of this is that wilderness is difficult to quantify or qualify. This seems entirely appropriate given its amorphous conceptual nature.

4

SELF, SOCIETY AND THE SOJOURN

Throughout the previous chapters, the significance of the wilderness sojourn has been discussed in brief as a means to access the self, whether through uncovering inner truths or influencing the development of identity. Chapter one highlighted the biblical trope of the religious wilderness sojourn, of 'wilderness as a setting for spiritual events' stimulating moral development and improving the individual's relationship with God.[299] Further examples have appeared throughout cultural history, from Arthurian forest-quests to Strayed's restorative hike along the Pacific Crest. The solitude of wilderness enables self-reflection; its trials, self-development. If wilderness indeed poses the rigorous epistemological challenge chapter three suggests, self-identity potentially becomes the only field the subject can truly know, or exert control over, in this environment. Again this suggests that the wilderness' relationship with knowledge is more complicated than would be first assumed, providing a domain in which knowledge of the self, if nothing else, can be more readily accessed.

The wilderness sojourn beneficial to the self is not a predominant narrative. As previously mentioned in relation to Thomas' *Man and the Natural World*, a strongly positive attitude toward wild nature only developed in the past few centuries. Nash expands upon this in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, detailing the prejudices of white colonisers toward what they perceived as the vast wilderness of the American continent. Nash's central concept is that only after the wilderness has been subjugated, and individuals can spend much of their lives removed from its hardships, can its 'ethical and aesthetic values' be appreciated; before this, 'Constant exposure to wilderness

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[299] Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 16.

gave rise to fear and hatred on the part of those who had to fight it for survival and success'.[300] Its

challenges detracted from its virtues.

However, it is a narrative with appeal extending beyond the Western cultural focus of this

thesis. The Australian aboriginal 'walkabout' is described in Roeg's film of the same name:

> In Australia, when an Aborigine man-child reaches sixteen, he is sent out into the land. For
> months he must live from it. Sleep on it. Eat of its fruit and flesh. Stay alive. Even if it
> means killing his fellow creatures. The Aborigines call it the WALKABOUT.

This suggests that while the self-developmental sojourn is a narrative the West has found

problematic (arguably due to Judeo-Christian concerns with the moral content of the wilds) it is a

narrative which holds true across a wide range of experiences, or at least is something the West is

fascinated by in the context of other cultures.[301] Its allure is particularly evident considering such

an idealised concept has survived into typically iconoclastic postmodernity. Krakauer frequently

casts Chris McCandless as 'a latter-day adherent of Henry David Thoreau', both possessing ideals

of escaping the spiritually destructive character of capitalist American society, of living by their

own means from the land.[302]

This chapter will examine postmodernity's place in the tradition of wilderness sojourns

and the value placed upon them. The range of self-truths discovered through the departure from

society into wilderness will be demonstrated, from personal identity to gender observations and

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[300] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 43.
[301] Lee Tenant suggests that the concept of 'walkabout' is problematically mythicised by non-indigenous or non-Australian groups as 'a cultural artefact of the traditionally-aimless nomadic lifestyle of the Australian Aborigine', contributing to an idea of directionless behaviour and also homogenising disparate groups of aboriginals. Lee Tenant, 'The Myth of Walkabout', *Galtha* (2008), <http://galtha.blogspot.co.uk/2009/02/myth-of-walkabout.html> [accessed 09/07/16]. A scarcity of additional material upon the walkabout as an adolescent rite of passage suggests that Roeg's film, and the original novel by James Vance Marshall, may also be exaggerated. Even so, this demonstrates a romantic captivation with the sojourn.
[302] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 28.

the state of society and humanity in general. The concept of the 'state of nature', accessed via the positions of the philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, will be framed against the critical views present in texts such as *Heart of Darkness* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), questioning whether these texts are in fact more critical of society rather than casting a light upon humanity in its natural state.[303] Arguably texts such as these provide a final word on the brutality of man's natural state, which is only modified by the degree of brutality represented in later postmodern contenders such as McCarthy's *The Road* (2006).[304] Perhaps owing to this development, the majority of prominent postmodern wilderness sojourns have moved away from social narratives into intimate studies of the individual's inner emotional world, as demonstrated by Strayed's *Wild*. It may be said that such texts differ in that they are more concerned with those electing to go voluntarily into the wild places. However, even narratives in which characters are unwillingly cast into wilderness experiences frequently suggest the benefits of this experience, from Verne's *The Mysterious Island* to *The Edge*, in which the protagonist Charles states: 'all my life I've wanted to do something that was… unequivocal' after killing the bear, later stating that 'I'm gonna start my life over' after his wilderness experience. Survival experiences and intentional sojourns therefore serve similar functions, and so both will be treated as wilderness sojourns for the purposes of this chapter.

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[303] Thomas Hobbes, 'Of the natural condition of mankind, as concerning their felicity and misery' in *Leviathan* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2014), 95-9; John Locke, 'Of the State of Nature' in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2014), 717-23; William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
[304] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2009).

LEAVING SOCIETY

The opening lines of the twelfth book of William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805) encapsulate an archetypal Romantic attitude toward nature.[305] The poet admits that 'Long time have human ignorance and guilt // Detained us', moving onward to state the virtues of nature in opposition to human flaws, the use of 'detained' inferring that nature is the correct destination for his project and therefore of great significance.[306] This is particularly evident in the following:

> Ye motions of delight, that haunt the sides
> Of the green hills; ye breezes and soft airs,
> Whose subtle intercourse with breathing flowers,
> Feelingly watched, might teach Man's haughty race
> How without Injury to take, to give
> Without offence [307]

Nature possesses a virtue human society lacks, being that of subtlety and moderation in action and response. Wordsworth praises 'The wondrous influence of power gently used' in the way the breeze is able to 'Bend the complying heads of lordly pines', demonstrating that nature's components function in harmony rather than exhibiting internal clashes.[308] Wordsworth's nature is thematically wild; it is inherently divided from human society and its concerns. To journey into this other world, to 'Feelingly' observe nature, is highly beneficial: 'Oh! That I had a music and a voice // Harmonious as your own, that I might tell // What ye have done for me'.[309] As the book develops, Wordsworth suggests that the individual retains in memory 'spots of time' which have

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[305] William Wordsworth, 'Book Twelfth: Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored' in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 417 – 437. The twelfth book was introduced in the 1805 version.
[306] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:1-2.
[307] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:9-14.
[308] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:15-6.
[309] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:26-8.

'A renovating virtue' when recalling them in times of difficulty, as 'our minds // Are nourished and invisibly repaired'.[310] In particular these are moments of immersion in vivid natural landscapes. Wordsworth recounts a solitary journey to the summit of a crag after the death of his father in which he surrendered security and comfort – ''twas a day // Tempestuous, dark, and wild' – in order to gain a pure experience of the natural world.[311] Wordsworth suggests that such activities impart a sense of perspective, the memory invigorating our minds when 'depressed // By false opinions and contentious thought' or by 'trivial occupations, and the round // Of ordinary intercourse'.[312] However, such sojourns also allow connection with God: 'in the deepest passion, I bowed low // To God, Who thus corrected my desires'.[313]

The sourcing of religious experience in nature has been presented in previous chapters as a complex issue, with varying levels of popularity throughout the history of Western culture. To recapitulate, biblical journeys into wildernesses are frequently accompanied by religious experiences – such as Hagar being visited by an angel who outlines God's plan for her and her son – or sojourns into these places being specifically undertaken in order to demonstrate spiritual strength, such as Christ's forty days.[314] Wild spaces could therefore be a tool for God to test the piety of his believers, and to enable their personal development. However, such wildernesses are not characterised as harmonious; their depravations are unmeasured, sojourns into these places often requiring a level of endurance not accessible to the typical individual. It was a mark of exceptionalism to perform this task, distinguishing the spiritually superior, and was not something to be enjoyed. Pre-Romantic texts such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Mary

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[310] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:208, 210, 214-5.
[311] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:297-8
[312] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:211-3.
[313] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XII:315-6.
[314] Genesis 16; Matthew 4.

Rowlandson's 'Narrative' (1682) exhibit that the view of wilderness as something to be suffered, with value solely as a test of faith, persisted centuries later.[315]

Defoe's protagonist, the voice of the narrative, names the 'horrid' or 'dismal unfortunate island' he has been shipwrecked upon as the 'Island of Despair'.[316] Making a list of the favourable and unfavourable aspects of his condition, the negatives incline toward his solitude: '*I am singled out and separated… from all the world to be miserable… I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society… I have no soul to speak to, or relieve me*'.[317] Leaving society is heavily undesirable. The positives rely on the assurance that events could be much worse than they are: he could have died with the rest of the crew, or be without food or supplies. However, the fact he returns repeatedly to the issue of isolation, and that he ultimately names the island 'Despair', indicates that his attitude toward living in this wilderness has a firm negative bias.

As in biblical sojourns, however, Crusoe's isolation stimulates personal theological development. After experiencing an earthquake on the island and falling prey to a fever, Crusoe believes that he is being punished: 'I began to reproach myself with my past life, in which I had so evidently, by uncommon wickedness, provoked the justice of God to lay me under uncommon strokes, and to deal with me in so vindictive a manner'.[318] From this point he is converted to active religiosity. Although he fluctuates between negative and positive outlooks at the beginning of his sojourn, years later he becomes thankful of his situation: 'I frequently sat down to my meat with thankfulness, and admired the hand of God's providence, which had thus spread my table in the wilderness'.[319] It is still significant that providence had spread his table in the wilderness, rather

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[315] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Bath: Robert Frederick, 1998); Mary Rowlandson, 'A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson', *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. by Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, vol. A, 8th edition, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 257-88.
[316] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 47, 52.
[317] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 48-9.
[318] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 66.
[319] Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 94.

than wilderness being his table itself, providence therefore acting in spite of rather than through the natural world, unlike later texts such as *The Mysterious Island* wherein the wilderness in itself is characterised as bountiful.

In *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Ian Watt argues that *Robinson Crusoe* is a more positive representation of the castaway experience than would be admitted by such an assessment.[320] He suggests that Crusoe's shipwrecking is 'really not so much divine retribution for Crusoe's sin in disobeying his father, as it is a miraculous gift of the means of production, rendered particularly fortunate by the death of all potential rivals'.[321] This concept has some credence. Crusoe is meticulous in his use of resources and converting them into products. At the conclusion, after his deliverance, he industriously converts the island into a colony. That Crusoe's experience was not divine punishment for his forsaking of his father and general noncommittal to God is subjective depending on the religiosity of the interpreter, as the narrative voice makes this claim in no uncertain terms. The notion that his companions perishing was beneficial for Crusoe in allowing him to take advantage of a 'businessman's Utopia' without competition runs stridently opposed to the actual content of the text; not only does Crusoe's chief torment come from his isolation, but logically without other individuals on the island he has no one to conduct business with.[322] His ability to monopolise the resources of an uninhabited landmass only serves to (unsatisfactorily) distract him from his solitude, and Crusoe seizes the first opportunity presented to him to share his life with another through the figure of Friday.[323]

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[320] Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[321] Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism*, 156.

[322] Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism*, 165.

[323] Watt rightly states that Crusoe perceives Friday, and indeed many other non-white figures in the text, as a material or means toward his own ends, thereby not having his own legitimate humanity, 168-9. This does not discount the fact that Crusoe craves company as much as material possessions.

Rowlandson's *Narrative* similarly displays the overpoweringly negative condition of being separated from one's own society in a wilderness sojourn. This is understandable given her situation: Native Americans attacked her settlement, killing most of the inhabitants – 'burning, and destroying before them' – then kidnapped her and her children, separating them into different groups.[324] Rowlandson was taken on 'several removes… up and down the wilderness', a space she describes as 'vast and desolate'.[325] Similarly to the fictional Crusoe, Rowlandson sees God's treatment as both cruel and kind: 'He wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other', the positive being that she believed she was 'upheld' by God's grace and so survived her ordeal.[326] Again the sojourn is a test of faith. Rowlandson sees her spiritual duty as surrendering personal agency, instead allowing God to provide the means of deliverance: 'I was not willing to run away, but desired to wait God's time, that I might go home quietly, and without fear'.[327] Eventually the Native Americans relinquish her willingly back to her own society, thereby proving for Rowlandson that the correct path is humility toward God's plan: 'As Moses said, 'Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord".[328] Notably the companionship of Native Americans does not count as legitimate social interaction, they being described as 'ravenous beasts' and therefore presented as an inextricable part of the wilderness environment.[329]

The trials of living outside a society are reflected in the philosophy of the time. Crusoe comments that he lives in a 'state of nature', this term being a theoretical concept relating to what

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[324] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 257.
[325] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 259-60.
[326] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 261.
[327] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 285.
[328] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 288. In truth, when analysing Rowlandson's account of her sojourn she appears more to have been morally damaged by her experiences, being glad of the death of a Native American baby as it gives her more sleeping space, 274, and taking food from an English child without guilt, 277. The religious sojourn narrative of hardship is used to guard her from her immorality: 'Thus the Lord made that pleasant refreshing, which another time would have been an abomination', 277.
[329] Rowlandson, 'Narrative', 259.

the condition of humanity may be prior to the advent of a defined society – what humans can be said to naturally be, assuming that society is a construct (thereby reinforcing the nature/culture divide).[330] Although John Locke and Thomas Hobbes disagree on what humanity's natural state is, both view society as an improved condition. In the chapter 'Of the natural condition of mankind, as concerning their felicity and misery' in his *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes asserts that individuals are in essential nature equal, inasmuch as all pose significant threat to others through devious means if not through brute force.[331] Because of this, any conflict of desires (which Hobbes believes to be inevitable) will lead to conflict. The state of nature is therefore 'a war… of every man against every man' in which violence is used to take, to defend, or simply exhibit the strength of the self.[332] Consequently humankind becomes unproductive, leading meaningless lives in 'continual fear, and danger of violent death'.[333] To quell this violent instinct and unite individuals in productive projects, they require 'a common power to keep them all in awe'; that is, society, or the body politic, bearing a strong head of state in order to generate and maintain rule of law.[334]

John Locke's 'Of the State of Nature' in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1764) has a less pessimistic tone, perhaps due to the amount of time having passed since the brutalities of the English Civil War, in the proximity of which Hobbes was writing. Rather than the state of nature's defining characteristic being freely dispensed violence between all, Locke begins by more generally describing a condition of loose regulation: 'a state of perfect freedom to order their actions… within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man'.[335] Locke presents this law of nature not so much as something actually codified

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[330] Defoe, *Crusoe*, 86.
[331] Thomas Hobbes, 'Of the natural condition of mankind, as concerning their felicity and misery' in *Leviathan* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2014), 95.
[332] Hobbes, 'Of the natural condition of mankind', 97.
[333] Hobbes, 'Of the natural condition of mankind', 97.
[334] Hobbes, 'Of the natural condition of mankind', 97, 98-9.
[335] Locke, 'Of the State of Nature', 717.

but as a way of thinking unaffected by the discourses of society. As individuals are isolated and simply engage in surviving in the world, there is no need for violence between peoples:

> …being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise maker… and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours.[336]

This is of course heavily idealistic, inscribing what Locke feels ought to be the case upon a description of what individuals naturally are. He interprets the state of nature as not essentially lawless but of being guided by pure reason. This may imply that the advent of society, introducing a complex web of beliefs and loyalties which may cause destructive subordination (and insubordination), is less desirable than humanity existing in a state of nature. However, Locke goes further to describe the level of justice within a state of nature; if individuals run opposed to 'reason and common equity' in needlessly harming others, they will incur the retribution of humanity at large in proportional degree.[337] This system is difficult to standardise and Locke admits that it invites hypocrisy: 'it is easy to be imagined that he who was so unjust as to do his brother an injury, will scarce be so just as to condemn himself for it'.[338] In this case society can provide an impartial, nuanced, and standardised system to introduce a rule of law remedying 'the inconveniences of the state of nature'.[339] Society is therefore flawed but useful overall.

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[336] Locke, 'Of the State of Nature', 718.
[337] Locke, 'Of the State of Nature', 719.
[338] Locke, 'Of the State of Nature', 722.
[339] Locke, 'Of the State of Nature', 722.

As Western states industrialised, these flaws became more apparent. Urban city-sprawls became an overarching symbol of society gone awry: heavily structured, oppressively populated, eclipsing nature and polluting it, forming a world belonging not to God but solely to humanity. Rebecca Harding-Davis' 'Life in the Iron-Mills' (1861) provides a vivid picture after the advent of intensely industrialised urban spaces, in which the 'air is thick, clammy with the breath of crowded human beings', with 'Smoke everywhere!', filled with 'fog and mud and foul effluvia'.[340] Nash states that 'Appreciation of wilderness began in the cities', the division from the harsher truths of wilderness existences fuelling Romantic portrayals of wild nature.[341] Arguably this was as much to do with problems of urbanity and the industrialised work ethic, as demonstrated by Harding-Davis, and Thoreau's assertion that 'men labor under a mistake'.[342] An upheaval of aesthetic norms brought in the idea of the 'sublime' wherein wild landscapes such as mountains were characterised less as 'warts, pimples, blisters' but as having their own form of beauty based on their capacity to inspire awe, these features therefore being linked to something of the awesome nature of God.[343] British Romantic texts, such as the aforementioned Wordsworth poem, find American counterparts in transcendentalist works such as *Walden* which express the value of moving beyond civilisation's borders and connecting with wild nature. Thoreau plainly states that 'We need the tonic of wildness… At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild' and that 'We can never have enough of nature'.[344] Wilderness is portrayed as a purely virtuous space in opposition to society.

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[340] Rebecca Harding Davis, 'Life in the Iron Mills', *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 1706-7.
[341] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44.
[342] Thoreau, 'Walden', 982.
[343] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 45. Nash notes that some of these ideas were born out of the enlightenment and an understanding of the scale of the universe, which consequently led to an appreciation of all matter as being made with purpose by God and therefore having its own virtue, 45.
[344] Thoreau, 'Walden', 1146.

From this point wilderness sojourns progress uncertainly. *The Mysterious Island* treads a middle ground between the virtues of the wilderness experience and the security of society. The rigours of island life are mitigated by the companionship the castaways hold, forming a positive social community. While Verne's assertion that 'It would truly have been difficult to bring together five men better suited to this struggle against fate, or more likely to triumph in the end' does suggest the individuals are exceptional, it can also be interpreted as a celebration of the apex of human achievement and harmonious social projects as symbolised through these figures.[345] At the end of the text, the island having been destroyed by volcanic activity and an escape having been made, the colonists use the wealth gained through their mysterious benefactor Captain Nemo to 'acquire a vast domain in the state of Iowa'.[346] Here they create a community living from the land inspired by their time on the island, being both an escape from wider society, an exercise in self-sufficiency, and an attempt to create a perfect society, therefore indicating that wilderness has a positive influence upon human development but that society is also desirable.

Later texts, such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies*, take a contrasting approach in challenging the virtues of both wild and civilised domains. *Heart of Darkness*, as previously mentioned, portrays the wilderness as a zone stimulating temporal regression to a time of savagery, while also detailing colonial violence. *Lord of the Flies* takes this to more explicit lengths through establishing its perpetrators of violence as children, thereby suggesting any idea of human innocence is illusory. At first this would seem to identify with a Hobbesian view; that in an essential and natural state – the desert island wilderness providing a fitting environment outside of society for these ideas to be explored – humans revert to violence in order to gratify their desires. This ranges from hunting pigs to stealing the glasses of a boy nicknamed Piggy (thereby

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[345] Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 137.
[346] Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 722.

designating him as animal, a means to satisfy the wants of the others, making him less than legitimately human) in order to use the lenses to create fire, or ultimately killing him in an ecstasy of xenophobic hatred by dropping a boulder upon him.

In this reading, the arrival of a naval officer at the end of the text may enable a rescue from the horrors of the state of nature and a welcome return to controlled society. The closing sentence of the text demonstrates that things are not so simple. Embarrassed by the crying children, the officer 'waited, allowing his eyes to rest on the trim cruiser in the distance'.[347] With the ironic use of the enormous military ship as a source of comfort and distraction, the reader is reminded that the novella is contextualised within the wider violent horrors of the Second World War. The children will be rescued from one kind of warfare only to find themselves in another. If Golding suggests society is as equally problematic as the lack of it, the notion that the text is Hobbesian becomes harder to justify.

Ralph, the first leader of the group of castaway boys, enforces an administrative leadership with Piggy's help based upon acting responsibly and democratically; in Piggy's words, to "put first things first and act proper".[348] A challenge to his leadership comes in the form of the choir-boy Jack, who provides a charismatic political leviathan when he forms a separatist group, attracting an increasing number of the island's inhabitants until he claims full leadership. In both cases, society exists through the communal organisation of the boys. Only the "littluns", the very young children, live in something approximating a state of nature in which they are uncoordinated, leading a life of instant gratification through consuming fruit and playing, shown in the assertion that 'their passionately emotional and corporate life was their own'.[349] Even the use of 'corporate'

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[347] Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 225.
[348] Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 45.
[349] Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 61-2.

implies a community, the uniting into one body, and while the extent of its organisation is limited to group play it continues to cast doubt upon the idea that in a state of nature individuals will be divided rather than existing in social groups. More compellingly, the older children realise the need to engage in projects in order to survive, and so form more complex social structures.

Ralph is a poor leader; while his project of keeping a fire lit to attract rescue is logically sound he cannot compete with Jack's leadership, which rests on the carnal yet carefully orchestrated project of hunting pigs. Largely this depends on Jack's ability to generate 'Others' against which the group can define itself in order to create a coherent identity.[350] A religious or superstitious impulse can be found in the identification of a supernatural Other through a 'beast' which the children believe haunts the island; deciding they are unable to kill it, they give it ritual offerings of pig-meat – "When we kill we'll leave some of the kill for it. Then it won't bother us, maybe" – thereby generating structure and purpose to their hunts, as well as preserving a fear against which the group must be united.[351] Individuals resisting Jack's society are treated as more straightforward Others in being enemies of their new island-state. After killing Piggy, they hunt Ralph through the island in an attempt to kill the last tangible Other. Violence rages both in the outer world and on the desert isle; wilderness does not provide a refuge from the brutalities of society, for humans will organise themselves into social groups defined by violence.

Straddling the divide between modernism and postmodernism, *Lord of the Flies* establishes a postmodern attitude toward how individuals act outside the strictures of society. From Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* to the television series *The Walking Dead*, texts featuring the removal of ordered society display the image of groups of survivors engaging in bloody violence with one

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[350] Chris Barker, 'The Other', *Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: Sage, 2004), 139-40.
[351] Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 147.

another.[352] This is not to say that the temporary wilderness sojourn from society is treated in a similar manner. With the ability to slip between both states, neither society nor wilderness being total, the idea of sojourns being restorative is returned to – though not without reservation. The nuances of this position will now be examined in regards to *Into the Wild* and *Wild*, but also the film *Couple in a Hole*.[353]

In previous chapters the nonconformist content of *Into the Wild* has been discussed to some extent, regarding McCandless' desire for self-sufficiency and independence from society. This of course ended tragically, significantly questioning the virtue of the sojourn. José Joaquín Sánchez Vera compellingly identifies and critiques a romantic bias in Krakauer's representation of McCandless' actions.[354] While Sánchez Vera acknowledges Krakauer is open to contrasting views regarding the courageous and tragic versus foolhardy actions of his subject, he suggests an overwhelming recourse to Thoreauvian thought limits the reliability of the account.[355] A major element is Sánchez Vera's assertion that Krakauer understands Thoreau as 'a transcendental economist opposed to market economy and materialism', citing a passage when McCandless burns his remaining money, an action which Krakauer states 'would have done both Thoreau and Tolstoy proud'.[356] Sánchez Vera suggests that while both Thoreau and McCandless avoided superfluity in material acquisition, Thoreau did rely on the market economy to acquire materials and live safely within nature, his project therefore not being one of the complete rejection of society but restructuring the way one relates to it.[357] Similarly McCandless did occasionally work during his journeys to support his lifestyle, thereby limiting the relevancy of an idealised interpretation based

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[352] *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-present).
[353] *Couple in a Hole*, dir. by Tom Geens (011 Productions, Chicken Factory, A Private View, 2015).
[354] José Joaquín Sánchez Vera, 'Thoreau as a Mirror for Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*' (unpublished thesis, Åke Karlstads Universitet, 2013).
[355] Sánchez Vera, 'Thoreau as a Mirror', 1-3.
[356] Sánchez Vera, 'Thoreau as a Mirror', 4; Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 29.
[357] Sánchez Vera, 'Thoreau as a Mirror', 6-8.

on economic rejection. He was also impractically reckless with his money and how he could use materials to aid his sojourn, also dividing him from the actuality of Thoreau's more practical belief system. While the 'romantic and partial image of Thoreau' Krakauer uses to interpret McCandless has ramifications upon its reliability as a non-fiction account, it can give valuable insight into a certain American mind-set.[358]

Nina Baym's analysis of the American wilderness myth provides a useful viewpoint in this regard. The narrative of forging personal identity against the rigours of wilderness and outside social control – that 'individuals come before society… exist in some meaningful sense prior to, and apart from, societies in which they happen to find themselves' – permeates a cultural history of which the selective mythicisation of Thoreau as stridently nonconformist can be said to be a part.[359] This extends beyond *Into the Wild* to other recent non-fiction texts such as *Wild*. Strayed documents her establishment of the wilderness trail as a project of personal recreation through self-control founded on the self-reliance required by an extreme physical activity, describing the space of the as:

> …a world I'd never been to and yet had known it was there all along, one I'd staggered to in sorrow and confusion and fear and hope. A world I thought would both make me into the woman I knew I could become and turn me back into the girl I'd once been.[360]

While this project seems to be one of conforming to certain social expectations, escaping a destructive lifestyle of immoderate sex and drug use in the wake of personal tragedy, the gradual realisation Strayed comes to is that being comfortable with one's self stems from embracing the

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[358] Sánchez Vera, 'Thoreau as a Mirror', 20.
[359] Baym, 'Melodramas of Beset Manhood', 132.
[360] Strayed, *Wild*, 4.

chaotic nature of the individual. While she was not proud of her past mistakes they were an intrinsic part of her being, as with all her experiences: 'So very close, so very present, so very belonging to me'.[361] In this case the individual's experience of life can embody the uncontrolled nature of wilderness: 'How wild it was, to let it be'.[362] The sojourn allows the wild landscape to positively influence the subject's perception of their inner self. Society becomes irrelevant in this process, as ultimately the process of self-acceptance requires the pursuit of a relationship with the self rather than others within the isolation of a natural environment.

European sojourns in recent texts may follow similar lines of positive wilderness representation, such as Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, bearing a straightforward appreciation of wild landscapes and following a tradition of 'wildness as an energy both exemplary and exquisite'.[363] The recent multinational independent film *Couple in a Hole* takes a more critical approach.[364] After the death of their son in a house fire, a Scottish couple retreat into the Pyrenean backwoods to live in a cave, surviving upon what they can trap and scavenge. With this premise, the film draws upon both the aforementioned Romantic tradition of using nature as a source of comfort and the multifaceted 'wild man' trope of being driven to a basic existence outside of society after a traumatic experience. As the film develops, it becomes clear that their woodland sojourn is not a tool for combatting their loss but to preserves their anguish and in order to debase themselves with it; they live in squalor, the wife barely leaving the cave, with little romantic engagement left in their relationship and both debilitated by an inability to act rationally and control their emotions. Wilderness is not restorative. It is not even a refuge. Geens suggests that

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[361] Strayed, *Wild*, 311.
[362] Strayed, *Wild*, 311.
[363] Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 31.
[364] The director, Tom Geens, is Belgian. The film is in both French and English, filmed in the South of France, funded by bodies such as the British Film Institute.

existence outside social support is totally unfeasible when the wife is bitten by a venomous spider, the husband needing the assistance of a pharmacy in order to get medication. The film can therefore be presented as an exercise in demystifying wilderness as a space of enlightenment or emotional satisfaction.

This would be compelling if the film was not rife with internal tensions threatening to pull apart its integrity and ability to have a coherent message. The text swings uncertainly between realism and avant-garde styles. Its central scenario is bizarre and therefore invites a metaphorical reading, but when the husband returns to society the tone becomes something more naturalistic. As the text develops film conventions of dramatic twists force a strong plot onto what was a drifting portrayal of a singularly strange lifestyle; it is revealed that a French man the husband has been talking to was responsible for the house-fire which killed his son. In attempting to drive the Scottish couple away, the wife is shot and dies. The total division from wider social institutions, such as the police, removes suspension of disbelief as the film becomes isolated from credible reality. The director himself comments upon its generic instability: 'I like the idea of constantly wrongfooting people and making them feel as if they're in some sort of storyline and then it turns out to be something totally different'.[365] The text wilfully avoids commitment to a particular reading.

At its conclusion, the film turns to symbolism-infused melodrama when the husband takes his dead wife to the burnt-out ruins of their former home to light a funeral pyre. He tells the French man to shoot him in order to end his emotional suffering when a wild boar emerges from the ruins to charge at the husband, the pair vanishing into the flames. The erratic shifts in tone and uncertain symbolism limit the coherence of a film which initially condemned positive wilderness

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[365] Lou Thomas, 'From Herzog to *Come and See*: six films that influenced *Couple in a Hole*', BFI (2016), <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/six-films-influenced-couple-hole> [accessed 01/07/16].

representations. The film struggles to move against a consensus that wild sojourns are essentially restorative, either due to a commitment to classic postmodern indecision or an inability to formulate a compelling argument against the sojourn. Significantly, while wilderness has not restored the couple, it is not the wilderness in itself which has destroyed them but the actions of other humans and a lack of social support. The text therefore expresses an unwillingness to fully reject the wilderness sojourn myth, suggesting that it still has significant cultural tenacity. This will be demonstrated in the following section through analysing less destructive postmodern sojourns focused upon personal growth or self-realisation.

IDENTITY IN POSTMODERN SOJOURNS

The question whether human violence resides in our intrinsic selves or in the machinations of society, and whether wilderness provides a legitimate escape from this violence, is a topic of such thorough past dissemination that postmodernity may struggle to engage with it explicitly. Preferring micronarratives of subjective interpretation to the sweeping metanarratives of the nourishing Romantic wilderness or the godforsaken wilderness, postmodern wilderness sojourns may instead focus upon individual relationships with wilderness and the use of a space external to society in which to explore their identity. To demonstrate this, *Walkabout* and *The Edge* will provide discussions of gender, sexuality, class and race from both from early and late postmodernity.

In many ways, wilderness has been mostly considered a masculine space. Previously discussed texts such as *Deliverance* portray excitable male engagements in extreme wilderness sports, or exploring and exploiting wild nature in *The Lost World*, or engaging with a masculine tradition of politicised self-sufficiency in *Into the Wild.* While its sojourners may be predominantly

male, wild nature itself is classically female, be it as Mother Nature, or the huntress Artemis, or the maligned female victim who Lewis in *Deliverance* claims masculine society is 'gon' rape': control and despoil. Male wilderness explorers are therefore displayed as acting upon, if not subduing and sexually assaulting, a feminised natural world. Feminist writers such as Sherry Ortner and Val Plumwood explore the link between women and nature as being one of shared theme and the subject of prejudice at the hands of human (patriarchal) culture.[366] Ortner describes culture as having to 'subsume and transcend nature', and believes that if women are aligned with nature this may reveal the reason as to their widespread oppression.[367] A major element of this is the biological reduction undergone by the female as culturally represented; that women are firmly tied to the reproductive process, therefore the physicality of the species, and thus are rooted in the natural world.[368] This commentary is shared by Plumwood, who also asserts the relevance of the sex-stereotype of reason versus sympathy; that rationality has been described as the province of masculinity and culture, whereas women are stereotypically placed in psycho-spiritual or emotional alignment with nature – the "angel in the ecosystem", relying on a problematic generalisation of all woman as 'empathic, nurturant and co-operative'.[369]

Such writers build upon a foundation laid by Simone de Beauvoir, who in *The Second Sex* (1949) explores the symbolic potential of difference between the sexes; that a woman's body is 'something other than her', prioritizing the natural process of furthering the species at the cost of the female's own health.[370] Women 'endlessly start up the labor of gestation' in the menstrual

[366] Sherry Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', *Feminist Studies*, 1:2 (1972), 5-31; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[367] Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', 12.
[368] Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', 12-14
[369] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 9.
[370] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second* Sex, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovony-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 64.

cycle, are subject to the strains of pregnancy and dangers of childbirth.[371] These biological

conditions or restrictions then serve as a basis for gendered cultural prejudice reducing the female

to her sexual function, thereby aligning her with the world of nature, and proposing that the male,

released from such biological determinism, can freely express his individuality. As Ortner states:

'woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, on the other hand,

lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally'

and therefore is seen to be the producer, or icon, of culture.[372]

This definition of women through the image of nature can also be seen in an inverted

relationship. As Baym says: 'nature has been feminine and maternal from time immemorial'.[373]

Nature is seen to be the nourisher and the producer, and with these culturally-designated feminine

qualities being displaced onto a natural landscape the idea of women-as-nature becomes more

subsumed into cultural discourse, the concept becoming increasingly circular and self-supporting.

Male wilderness explorers exemplify their stereotypical sex-role of being active, rather than the

corresponding female passive; that men should dominate, rather than be subordinated.[374] The

natural world becomes passive in this arrangement, being the object of heroic male conquest in

establishing culture upon the wilds. Again from Baym, male wilderness heroes 'turn to nature as

sweetheart and nurture, anticipating the satisfaction of all desires through her and including among

these the desires for mastery and power'.[375] I would argue that mastery and power are the stronger

allures of raw wilderness, rather than the idyllic pastoral landscape which, in Edenic generosity,

provides for material wants. Many of the protagonists discussed throughout this thesis –

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[371] de Beauvoir, *The Second* Sex, 62, 64-5.
[372] Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', 14.
[373] Baym, 'Melodramas of Beset Manhood', 135.
[374] Jack Sawyer 'On Men's Liberation' in *Feminism and Masculinities*, ed. by Peter F. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.
[375] Baym, 'Melodramas of Beset Manhood', 136.

particularly earlier works – have been male, conforming to a notion of male identity as causal

agents, successfully dominating the physical world through creating shelter, killing and eating wild

beasts, defeating rivals and generally bending events to their will, from the castaways of *The*

Mysterious Island to the adventurers in *King Solomon's Mines*. Even if the wilderness may resist

such domination the men are ultimately victorious, their success sweetened through the increased

challenge. Through this they demonstrate male power, courage, and resourcefulness.

In reality this kind of masculinity is hard to achieve. As Jack Sawyer states: 'success in

achieving positions and influence is necessarily not open to every man, since dominance is relative

and hence scarce by definition'.[376] *The Edge* explores the effects of this on contemporary male

identity through the socially created dominance gap of class and that created by immersion in an

unfamiliar (wilderness) environment. Charles and Bob offer two forms of masculinity: the

comfortable, knowledgeable, successful older businessman and the younger, aggressive, posturing

man trying to find his place in the world.[377] Bob's socio-economic emasculation by his millionaire

superior is mitigated by his efforts to denigrate the older man, attacking areas of potential

insecurity. The four main subjects of this are: the man's infirmity or lack of courage, his sexuality,

the supposed inferior minds of the upper class, and his younger fashion-model wife. At the

beginning of the film Bob pranks Charles by dressing in a bear-skin and scaring him, repeatedly

asking 'are you alright?' while laughing, blatantly undermining any sincerity in his question. Later

he accuses him of 'latent homosexuality'. When Charles remains unfazed during their wilderness

experience, Bob suggests his kind – the upper classes – are atypically suited to these forms of

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[376] Sawyer, 'On Men's Liberation', 25.
[377] This of course ignores Stephen, who is black. Notably Stephen embodies the trope of being the first to die in the text. This is part of a hugely problematic Western cinematic tradition of only being interested in the personalities of white individuals. While Roger Ebert suggests this is satirical, he does not provide enough evidence for this claim for it to be a compelling assessment. Roger Ebert, 'The Edge', *Roger Ebert.com*¸ <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-edge-1997> [accessed 26/06/16].

stress as they are 'the only ones dense enough', not having the mental faculties to understand the severity of the situation. Lastly, Bob openly flirts with Charles' wife and is ultimately revealed to be having an affair with her. Bob therefore uses all the tools at his disposal to upset the balance of dominance in their masculine relationship, including the exertion of sexual power over Charles through having intercourse with his wife, inferring that Charles cannot satisfy her. In keeping with Sawyer's description of male power-play, the woman is used as a resource for reinforcing masculine egos through treating them as inherently suitable for domination. Unfortunately, the text itself falls prey to such sex-role stereotypes, Charles' wife being the only significant female character, remaining on the outskirts of the action and embodying a passive role, thereby demonstrating the pervasiveness of such beliefs.

As in *Deliverance*, the wilderness environment serves to demonstrate the fragile nature of masculine dominance performance. In this case Charles uses the system in order to explore his own identity and ultimately survive unharmed. He displays a keen awareness of mythic male identity. While Bob half-jokes 'that's the spirit which beat the Japanese!' as they spontaneously take a biplane to the Alaskan wilderness to find a photography subject, Charles draws upon heroic masculinity to later motivate his companion when things fall apart. Faced with the challenge of killing a bear, Charles decides to use a Native American bear-hunting technique of getting the creature to rear and then fall upon a spear, mentioning that 'Masaii boys, in Africa, eleven years old, they kill lions with spears' and 'Indian boys used to run up to the bear and slap him', in order to state: 'what one man can do another can do!' thereby creating an effective mantra tying the individual to a history of cross-cultural masculine capability, strengthened by the use of examples implying that if boys can do these things, so can men.[378] Indeed, his assertion that 'people in the

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[378] Returning to the romanticisation of the concept of 'Walkabout', this drawing upon cross-cultural wilderness bravery demonstrates Western society's utilisation of the exotic as inspiration and aspiration.

woods… die of shame' makes explicit the male fear of being unsuccessful in action, if not totally inactive, suggesting that it is more the self-loathing born of failure than the failure itself which leads to disaster, as it denies the possibility of lateral thinking. Arguably Charles' ability to think himself out of the situation comes from a position of calm masculine self-assurance; due to his secure social status, he does not need to prove his dominance and therefore reacts less violently to failure.

In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*, Susan Faludi comments upon the use of violence by the disenfranchised male as a method for exerting dominance and control when he feels socially emasculated.[379] Despite Charles providing Bob with a connection to mythic masculinity through their shared killing of the bear, temporarily improving their relationship, as they draw closer to society the prospect of resuming their previous social roles draws closer and Bob still betrays Charles. Finding a cabin full of wilderness supplies, Bob takes a rifle and threatens to shoot the older man, his affair with Charles' wife being discovered. Stating 'you would have died out here if not for me, with all your wealth', Bob denies his dependence on Charles. While the example from Faludi is specific to domestic violence, its perpetrators gain a sense of power through dominating someone they perceive as weaker. In this instance, Bob attempts to establish himself as essentially superior to Charles through upwards-directed class-based prejudice. He creates a story of his own masculine accomplishment with which to return to society, along with the ability to make his relationship with Charles' wife legitimate, and thereby gain access to his wealth, claiming all of Charles' masculine accomplishments from him.

This is ultimately futile. Charles outmanoeuvres Bob, walking him backwards into a bear-pit. The phallic symbol of the rifle is outmatched by the phallic wooden stake, penetrating Bob

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[379] Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (London: Vintage, 2000), 8-9.

through the leg and therefore rendering him figuratively impotent, unable to act and now totally dependent on Charles for his survival. Bob later dies and Charles displays no further need to use a myth of masculinity to support his character. When asked what happened to his companions by a journalist, Charles states: 'they died saving my life' – transferring any personal need for heroism upon the deceased. This is an admission of the greater need of his companions to appear masculine than himself.

Walkabout also uses the wilderness to explore the anxiety of superiority dynamics, albeit primarily through a discussion of race. The film moves through three phases concerning this. When the white children first meet David Gulpilil's character, an aboriginal boy, they depend upon him as an exotic outsider skilled in an art of survival beyond their knowledge and abilities. Jenny Agutter's character, a white schoolgirl, provides a female gaze directed toward him. Her point-of-view shots, lingering on the buttocks of the boy as he walks ahead, may both be interpreted as exotic based upon his clothing (being a revealing loin-cloth) and his status as a racial Other, or erotic, or a combination of both. The girl's nascent sexuality will be discussed in more detail shortly.

As the white children grow more used to the aboriginal boy he is characterised less as an outsider; as mentioned in the previous chapter, his skills and lifestyle are frequently paired with a close-cut montage of white society performing similar actions and therefore erasing the disparity between them. Notions of racial hierarchy are dismantled as all cultures become an expression of essential human behaviour. However, it is clear that the girl retains some social conditioning, relying on cultural stereotypes. She suggests with no factual evidence that 'I expect we're the first white people he's seen', therefore conjouring notions of the isolated and naïve 'savage'. She becoming increasingly uncomfortable with him as they return closer to white society. The climax

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of this behaviour occurs when the aboriginal boy leads them to an abandoned house. While the boy is cheerful and excited at the prospect of staying here, likely with the thought of forming a family unit with the two white children, the girl sees it as a place of death; she gravitates toward a set of graves and cries over the photographs of its previous inhabitants. Going out to catch food, the aboriginal boy witnesses the bloody excesses of white hunters, suggesting the commonalities of the two cultures are not as strong as they appeared earlier in the text when the wilderness provided a removal from problems with white society. In desperation, the aboriginal boy performs a courtship dance for the girl. She rejects him, hiding within the house in fear and confusion.

While the girl feels comfortable in freely directing a sexual gaze toward the boy, when the reverse occurs she becomes afraid of sexual threat; expressing her wish to her brother that they should leave without the aboriginal boy, she states 'suppose he tried to do something, suppose he…' the unfinished implication being one of sexual violence, thereby revealing a fear rooted both in gender and race. The next day the two white children discover him dead by suicide, hanging from a tree. Through this the film suggests that there is a deadly rift between white and aboriginal cultures; this may be temporarily cured in the wilderness, but does not last the closer it draws to white society and the erosion of natural space. This tragedy also returns to notions of masculinity regarding the boy's inability to cope with his failure; in this case, sexually attracting the white girl.

Despite her problematic relationship with a racial Other, the girl's sojourn does enable personal development in the form of rejecting societal reservations toward her own behaviour and establishing a new sexual identity. At the beginning of the text the girl's behaviour is strictly controlled by societal pressure; she has lessons in elocution, wears a uniform, and is perpetually barraged by a sense of what is proper, such as when she listens to a radio programme on etiquette, telling her in received pronunciation that 'you have to learn to tell a fish knife from a meat knife,

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and a fish fork from a meat fork'. The first erosion of this world of behavioural control occurs when the three play amongst a tree's branches. Considering the Y-shaped forking of the branches, she discovers they are a graphic match to a woman's – even her own – legs and crotch, an intercut shot of her own leg sliding along a branch reaffirming this connotation. At the sexual connotations of such imagery she states a feeble 'oh dear'. Her reservations are more fully abandoned when she later swims naked in a wild pool, blatantly enjoying the sensuality of eliminating the divide between the wild external and the self. As in the works of Angela Carter, the wilderness provides a space for female sexual self-actualisation. This allows for a feminine claim upon the wilderness, reducing the masculinisation of such a space. It also means that, rather than adopting a male model of transcending the wilderness – a position with connotations of prejudice and dominance – the female subject re-appropriates alignment with the natural world in order to subvert the conventions of patriarchal society.

Her rejection of the aboriginal boy's sexual advances as she returns to society demonstrates that this revelation may be short-lived. She lists the elements of her society she misses – 'eat with real plates and knives and forks! And a proper sheet! And records! And clean my teeth properly!' – as she makes herself and her younger brother presentable, use of 'real', 'proper' and 'properly' indicating a return to notions of what is correct based upon the etiquette of her society. Even as they discover the dead body of the aboriginal boy she asks her brother 'did you eat your breakfast properly?' and tells him 'you should always sit down when you eat', indicating that such mantras provide a way to distance the self from reality's harshness.

This is not to say that she fully rejects the benefits of the sojourn. When the girl has returned to society at the film's conclusion (having become a woman and possessing a white husband) she reminisces, or fantasizes, about the freedoms her sojourn offered. An idyllic sequence returning to

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this past life features herself, the aboriginal boy and her brother in casual nudity beside a wild pool. A voice-over quotes from A. E. Houseman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1887)*,* the final stanza being the most significant:

> That is the land of lost content
> I see it shining plain
> The happy highways where I went
> And cannot come again.[380]

Through use of these lines, the children's departure from the wilderness is evidently stated as an irretrievable loss. Jenny Agutter's character regrets her return, no longer feeling completely comfortable in her society. The final shot of the film presents their school uniforms discarded, hanging on a line, unused and therefore symbolising a desire to reject society's strictures. The fact that the uniforms linger suggests that society's effect upon identity will not fully disappear. The girl's return to society was inevitable, even if she does regret it; it is too deeply ingrained in her character.

It is clear these texts demonstrate that while society has been physically escaped the sojourn does not provide a true departure from its effects. In both cases the characters express or react against the framing of their identities within society. Wilderness is not a total other space, but neither does it simply provide a slate devoid of its own pressures and significations upon which elements of society can be cleanly and simply dismantled, inspected and subverted. To reference the essential concept of Hub Zwart's assertion that laboratory spaces are too unitary for proper scientific procedure, enforcing an 'artificial and preformatted' version of nature separated from its

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[380] A. E. Houseman, *A Shropshire Lad*, *Project Gutenberg* (2009), < http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5720/5720-h/5720-h.htm> [accessed 18/08/16], XL:5-8.

a broader interconnected system, the wilderness is not simply a valueless space removed from the clamour of society in which relationships between two or three people can be examined as a social microcosm. [381] It brings its own pressures and complexities which individuals' social conditioning must react to, such as the bear in *The Edge* which encourages recourse to a mythic masculinity inclusive of racial and cultural others.

What then may the value of the sojourn be for uncovering personal identity? On one hand, there is a notion that true identity is uncovered through the 'unequivocal' test provided by a challenging wilderness experience. In *The Edge*, Charles' initial assertion that he retains erudite knowledge but applying it 'to any useful purpose is another matter' proves ironic, as discussed in the previous chapter, when the sojourn provides an opportunity to flourish in the practical application of knowledge. Alternatively, physical removal from society does not isolate the individual from social conditioning, but rather makes society seem alien. In *Walkabout*, the radio providing etiquette lessons in the Australian outback renders white social practise totally bizarre, this disembodied voice an inappropriate manifestation of the human condition, providing an identity which is completely artificial. In this case wilderness combats social conditioning, rather than directly producing an identity change or revelation in itself.

This is not to say that the process of discovering identity in the wilderness can be neatly placed into the camps of provoking development through challenge or providing a space in which social conditioning is abandoned, or that this is inevitable, or even desired. The manner in which wilderness is experienced may reveal vastly different conclusions regarding personal identity and the value of the sojourn, as evident with *Couple in a Hole*. When contrasted with *Wild*, a significant difference is uncovered concerning methods of dealing with trauma through the sojourn: while the

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[381] Zwart, *Understanding Nature*, 257.

Scottish couple remain in a hole, therefore anchored in their misery, Cheryl Strayed engages in a journey, thereby allowing for a range of experiences and emotional development. The manner in which a sojourn is taken, and the motives for doing so, therefore affect the outcome. The sojourn is therefore not a distinct entity or act with inherent value, but rather forms part of an experience interlocking with the sojourner, the environment, and the way it is experienced.[382] In this way the barrier between the external and internal is dissolved, environment and individual feeding back upon each other. Such a complex space as wilderness naturally encourages a broad spectrum of emotional and intellectual responses. The wealth of stimulation such a landscape provides may provide part of an explanation for its continued allure into postmodernity; a space of shifting signification, thematic potential, or unalloyed aesthetic content, as well as a perceived 'blank slate' onto which the sojourner can transcribe their own agendas. This begs the question as to what solutions postmodern literature provides when such a source of spatial mental excitement is depleted. This will be addressed in the following, and final, chapter.

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[382] This could be further explored through the idea of psychogeography, and an experience of wilderness journeys could be read in the style of the situationist movement. The way the individual is effected by landscape, 'drawn by the solicitations of the terrain', is particularly relevant. See further: Tom McDonough, 'Situationist Space' in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 241-262. Quote from 257.

5

DELINEATING A NEW WILDERNESS

The previous four chapters have established that while a narrative of the ungodly and destructive wilderness has run throughout the history of Western civilisation, so too have narratives suggesting its benefits. These range from its value as a space external to society in order to understand and critique human nature to a setting for the development of self-identity, or its allure as a source of physical and mental challenge absent from our daily lives. The compulsive return to wilderness – the regeneration of its myths through literature, film and other social products – indicates that it occupies a significant space in our collective cultural imagination (although perhaps not one immediately identifiable on the surface). While nations such as the US have spaces officially designated as wildernesses, and a recent past in which their landscape was characterised as predominantly wild, other places with a longer history of domesticating their landscapes do not have as simple a way to return to the wild places their imaginations draw them toward. *The Wake* must travel back to England at the time of the Norman conquest in order to discover its deep, wild forests and fens, and even then the narrative is one of the old wild ways being replaced by a strictly controlled social order in the form of Norman conquest, of which Buccmaster comments: 'the gods of the secg and the water will die… the wilde will be tacan from these fenns and the wilde will be tacan from in me', saying he must work to keep 'the wilde lands from the tamers'.[383] The question then is whether there is a way to retain the essential nature of wilderness, with its complexities, benefits and trials, in the post-wilderness age; to perform a latter-day defence, in keeping with the

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[383] Kingsnorth, *The Wake*, 4-5.

sentiments of Buccmaster, of the wild against the omnipresence of regimented, authoritative society.

Across various postmodern texts this is achieved through displacing the thematic potential and character of wilderness onto spaces not traditionally considered as such, delineating a new wilderness. This may be achieved through drawing the circle of civilisation tighter about the urban centre, redefining less developed landscapes such as rural and backwoods areas as wilderness, as in Niall Griffith's *Sheepshagger* where the remotenesses of Wales become sublime, brutal and wild.[384] It may be achieved through examining elements of suburban, urban or outskirts areas for evidence of the unpredictability, the mixture of the coarse and the beautiful, we would traditionally attribute to wilderness. This examination is displayed in Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* and J. G. Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1973), the latter also updating the desert island survival narrative to the urban space.[385] Speculating a future in which the civilisation-displacing-wilderness process is inverted, as in *The Drowned World*, also serves to upset traditional spatial borders. In all these cases, the typical division between the social and the natural as a condition of wilderness' legitimacy is erased, thereby fully dismantling the nature/culture dichotomy. This is particularly evident if humans have created the environments now designated wilderness, or even individually embody elements of the wild as Ianto does in *Sheepshagger*; we are the generators of wilderness, and perhaps are wilderness itself.

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[384] Niall Griffiths, *Sheepshagger* (London: Vintage, 2002).
[385] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Vintage, 2012); J. G. Ballard, *Concrete Island* (London: Vintage, 1994).

Ianto, the deeply troubled protagonist of *Sheepshagger*, leads a life defined by violence. His childhood was spent in the 'brutal beauty' of the mountainous Welsh landscape in which he was subjected to both the aesthetic power and the underlying violence of the natural world, the latter through experiences such as seeing a lamb whose eyes had been pecked out by a raven.[386] In adulthood he and his similarly marginalised friends lead a life of habitual violence, in one episode raiding the house of several young men and women who had organised a rave they attended, brutalising them in the process.[387] Individually Ianto engages in more heinous violence by murdering three people in the Welsh hills. The text suggests that this is due to an event in his childhood wherein he was sexually assaulted. Griffiths describes the causal nature of this episode and its tragic outcome in natural terms, in the language of predator and prey, through the image of a spider the boy watches as he recovers from his ordeal:

> *Not once does he see it feed but his recovery is hastened by the spider itself, its patience, the annihilation imminent in its soft thorax throbbing and spread suspended legs. This insect his restorative, its hunger in his healing.*
>
> *And he will wait like the spider for whatever the wind will bring. For however long it takes. He will wait like the spider unaccompanied except by an urge for murder for whatever the wind will bring to him, and for however long it takes.[388]*

In this manner, a corrupted version of the Romantic trope of nature's restorative power is regenerated and human violence is related in no uncertain terms to the drives of the natural world.

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[386] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 195, 4-5.
[387] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 78-81.
[388] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 237.

After the previous four chapters the essential character, or thematic signification, of the cultural concept of wilderness can be securely reduced to the following: sublime aesthetic power combined with the threatening potential of a landscape. This may be physical, through its hostility to the order imposed by humanity and its civilisation or to human life itself, or epistemological, through challenging and subverting the supposed logical order of the world. Wilderness therefore becomes a test of civilisation and its inhabitants in their capacity to exert control over the material world or individuals (including themselves), successful or otherwise. Backwoods violence regenerates the power of wilderness in the modern era in terms of hostility to order and human life, the marginalised space wreaking vengeance upon individuals as icons of civilisation. *Deliverance* portrays this from the position of an outsider, thereby revealing fears of the centre toward marginal spaces, but *Sheepshagger* is firmly rooted in the experiences of those constantly living in this new wilderness.

Wales is a significant location for this re-situation of wilderness. Large tracts of rugged, underdeveloped terrain relate it more closely to a natural wilderness than much of the domesticated, pastoral landscape of the British Isles, and Griffiths conveys the sublimity of the landscape in many passages, including the following: 'this vista, this long and powerful prospect; the swooping dingle and the spread estuary beyond… A space too huge for the eye to drink'.[389] However, its political status more firmly positions it as a site in opposition to the tenets of civilisation. The novel is set during discussions of Welsh devolution; Ianto watches television programmes evoking the 'Re-enfranchisement and re-empowerment and rebirth and renewed respect' to come as Wales moves further from the control of English power.[390] His friend Danny has a more cynical take: 'It's all bollax, mun, devolution won't change a fuckin thing. Still be

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[389] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 15.
[390] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 57.

answerable to Westminster. Still be in their fuckin power, mun, always fuckin will be'.[391] The power that the political centre wields over this space, primarily through economic strength, is symbolised through characters from Southern England owning property in Wales, such as Ianto's ancestral home when it was repossessed as collateral on a loan. As Ianto says: 'Got nowhere to fuckin live and that's my fuckin house. Those bastards use it as a second home like for eyr holidays an I haven't even got *one*'.[392] Ianto and his friends reject the authority of economic power by disobeying its laws, engaging in drug-peddling and theft. They embody wild behaviour. The novel's title, a stereotypical insult aimed toward the Welsh, embodies the Othering of Wales in relation to the administrative centre of the UK: England. The act of bestiality designates them as outside any notion of morality, legality or legitimate humanity. At the novel's conclusion, Ianto's once-friends realise that their relatively light sentencing for killing him under the influence of drugs is due to the lower value placed on the lives of Ianto and his kind (as Ikey calls him, an 'inbred backwoods feeb psycho mong') relative to the value of his victims.[393] As Danny says, 'Regardless of what he'd done, likes, murder or rape or anything, I doubt very fuckin much that we'd all be sittin yer now gettin wrecked an talkin if Ianto had've been, like, higher up on-a social scale'.[394] Impoverished Welsh society is therefore presented as wilderness inasmuch as its inhabitants reject the order of wider society and are Othered by the centre, it is hostile to productive human life through poverty and violent depravations, while also exhibiting a startling vitality of landscape in the space it occupies.

Sheepshagger's setting also provides a location for analysing and deconstructing traditional dichotomies. The character most firmly associated with this process is Danny. In the

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[391] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 57-8.
[392] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 20.
[393] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 73.
[394] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 240.

novel's opening pages he asserts that Ianto was not 'put yer on this earth fully formed as a murderer, like', arguing instead that a sequence of events lead him to his path of violence, that he was a product of his environment.[395] In Danny's eyes this dispels the idea that Ianto could be purely evil, as he does not have control over his actions due to the terrible causal chain driving him towards destruction, in keeping with the spider motif as previously mentioned. Later in the text Danny comments upon his confusion regarding the role of parasitic organisms in the chain of being ('why-a fuck are they yer') but is similarly reluctant to dismiss them as evil; 'nothing natural can ever be truly evil… Evil is when yew know-a difference between right an wrong an yew still commit wrongness'.[396] Danny then almost stumbles across a classic move in Derridean deconstruction when he suggests that the mutually reliant definitions of good and evil lead to a collapse of the terms as binary opposites; 'yew must've had part of that, or the sense of it at least, within yew to begin with otherwise yew never would've even been able to make it or recognise it, likes'.[397]

This deconstructive approach extends also to the divide between nature and humanity when examining the way in which Ianto relates to the natural landscape. Firstly nature/nurture (and the associated nature/culture) is conflated regarding the question of moral culpability, as in Danny's reading the world is a reactive system in which beings are simply shaped by the condition of their lives, any ability of being able to 'know-a difference between right an wrong' damaged by the seemingly arbitrary status of good and evil, Ianto therefore being subject to the same amoral laws of the universe. Ianto is also physically presented in a state of becoming-wilderness throughout the text. In one episode he prostrates himself in a bog in the middle of the night to be covered in

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[395] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 1.
[396] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 119-20.
[397] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 122.

mud and swamp-weeds, described as 'a creature bog-born and engendered by mud and moisture, conceived of filth and fly', stating that 'Fuckin *belong* yer I do'.[398] He carries the wilderness around on him in the form of dirt and grime, thereby demonstrating its influence upon his character, and demonstrating a posthuman impulse in dissolving the difference between subject and environment.

Is Ianto himself a symbol of wilderness? His violence is cast in terms of the predator/prey relationship; when stalking his second and third victims he observes fossilised markings on a stone of a trilobite, 'first and original predator father' which Ianto 'knows fully what they signify'; a tradition of violence within the natural world of which Ianto is inferably a part.[399] However, logic dictates that unlike the animals in the natural system which need to kill in order to survive, Ianto's violence is purposeless. His victims bear no relation to his attacker apart from wearing red cagoules and being English, and their brutal murder goes beyond excusability as a reaction against English oppression or revenge for his abuse. In 'Warmth and Light and Sky: Niall Griffiths in Conversation', Ian Peddie introduces the interview with an assertion that 'Ianto's desire for cosmic significance emerges as a basic human need', citing when Ianto as an infant is confronted by the eyeless lamb he places pebbles in its sockets through a compulsion to 'bring substance upon emptiness'.[400] The need to fill a void is supported in various instances throughout the text, such as Ianto experiencing himself as 'utterly empty' and howling anguished obscenities into the world, 'entreaties beseechings nonwords and nonsense', if not consciously certainly indirectly at God or his absence.[401] Peddie's inference is that when utterly dispossessed and destitute, human nature as a rational, moral being collapses. This gives some meaning to his actions, though again they are so disproportionate as to rob value from the sentiment of 'cosmic significance'. Griffiths himself

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[398] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 26.
[399] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 202.
[400] Ian Peddie, 'Warmth and Light and Sky: Niall Griffiths in Conversation', *Critical Survey*, 20:3 (2008), 116.
[401] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 255, 215.

states that Ianto 'gets it terribly wrong' in regards to reacting against the suffocating effect of modernisation, that 'he embodies this kind of rootless, idiopathic rage that doesn't really know what it is angry against – just that it's angry against something'.[402] In this case Ianto is more a victim of his environment than a symbol of it; something the newly designated wilderness, with its inability to protect or nurture, has birthed only to destroy – a victim more than a herald.

However, this assumes that wilderness is a logical system. Danny again makes recourse to an aspect of the problem of evil when he evokes the image of natural disasters: 'The storm does nothin but destroy… all it wants-a do is knock things over an cause chaos an maybe even kill'.[403] Here he is refuting the idea of a logical system, that chaos is the essential nature of 'the fuckin *world*, this vast fuckin, this randomness'.[404] In this case, Ianto can be seen as an agent of a latent wildness in the universe; a symbol of self-consuming chaos and destruction biting mindlessly at the edges of civilisation, significantly disrupting its complacency. That Ianto lacks the capacity for logical thought reflects the unthinking wilderness system. Of course, that the wilderness' depravations are unmeasured has been the cause for its downfall at the hands of civilisation, and similarly Ianto's violence destroys him too.

LIMINALITY AND URBANITY

If the semi-domesticated backwoods landscape invites a version of the wilderness conflating the once distinct ideas of nature and culture, situating wilderness in more thoroughly manmade environments collapses the dichotomy completely. The subtitle of the creative non-fiction text *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* infers that the true wilderness of England

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[402] Peddie, 'Warmth and Light and Sky', 123.
[403] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 120.
[404] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 122.

lies not in natural landscapes but on the fringes of our settlements – 'where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their borders' – in the neglected wastelands subsumed by nature, sites such as sewage farms inhospitable to human presence, and the entropic chaos of ruins and landfill sites.[405] The fiction novella *Concrete Island* is set in one such edgeland which Ballard, in his introduction, identifies with the archetypal desert island:

> The Pacific atoll may not be available, but there are other islands far nearer to home, some of them only a few steps from the pavements we tread every day. They are surrounded, not by sea, but by concrete, ringed with chain-mail fences and walled off by bomb-proof glass.[406]

This inhospitable character of the postmodern urban or semi-urban environment links it to the wilderness' physical antagonism toward human interlopers, but these liminal spaces also offer an epistemological challenge in keeping with its symbolically subversive character. After all, it is heavily paradoxical that a manmade space could ever be identified with something dictionary-defined through its opposition to human influence.

Liminality infers a threshold, a between-state with spatial implications of, in Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts' words, 'a boundary, border, a transitional *landscape*, or a doorway', but also temporal implications; 'a beginning as well as an end, but also duration in the unfolding of a spatio-temporal process'.[407] Liminality as a concept is useful to identify shifting marginal zones, potentially occupying the middle stage between those binary oppositions postmodern critical practises such as deconstruction seek to eliminate; in the context of wilderness, to relocate

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[405] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 5.
[406] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 4.
[407] Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts, 'Introduction: Re-mapping Liminality' in *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 1.

a wild space into a liminal position between the perceived opposites of urbanity and the natural world serves as a triumph over the nature/culture divide.

Concrete Island's protagonist Maitland is involved in a car accident wherein he ploughs from the motorway onto a patch of rough ground: 'a small traffic island, some two hundred yards long and triangular in shape, that lay in the waste ground between three converging motorway routes'.[408] Here he must survive, being isolated from the outside world – 'the island was sealed off from the world around it by the high embankments on two sides and the wire-mesh fence on the third' – and in doing so experiences the liminal nature of his new home.[409] Maitland's island bears a direct relation to the urban waste-landscapes explored by Farley and Symmons Roberts:

> It's an uncanny openness. Most of our cities will contain several sites just like this, either lying completely fallow or in the process of being redeveloped. It's always a surprise, walking along a busy city street, to find a gap in the shiny advertising hoardings or a bent-back sheet of corrugated iron which affords a view on to an open wasteland carpeted with flowers in summer, or the archaeological earthworks of new building work where foundations are being laid. The city, suddenly, has a new scale, an underness and overness, and the eye, having scarcely a moment to readjust from the enclosing streets and buildings, is overwhelmed.[410]

This significant passage reveals not only the spatial liminality of such sites, being an 'uncanny' disruption to the uniformity of the urban environment and inviting a new understanding of 'scale' through this disruptive new dimension to the cityscape, but also their transience. They exist between phases of urban development, admitting the collapse of old spaces and the potential of the oncoming new. This is similarly the case in Ballard's *Concrete Island*: 'The compulsory

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[408] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 11
[409] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 13.
[410] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 137

landscaping had yet to be carried out by the contractors, and the original contents of this shabby tract, its rusting cars and coarse grass, were still untouched'.[411] It serves as a time capsule – 'it was far older than the surrounding terrain' and in exploring it Maitland finds ruins from previous times, from 'the ground-courses of Edwardian terraced houses' to churchyards and air-raid shelters, serving as a reminder of the transient nature of spatial identity.[412]

Beyond the kinship of mystification the liminality of these spaces hold with wild places, in order to claim that they are newly delineated postmodern wildernesses the criteria from the previous subsection must also be met. Again, these are sublimity coupled with antagonism toward civilisation. Partly this is achieved through the entropic incursion of wildlife upon disregarded manmade spaces, thereby usurping regulated human order and inviting a form of natural beauty; the 'unplanned ecosystem' of the edgelands where 'all that matters is a biological opportunity'.[413] *Edgelands* is primarily a project of appreciating the aesthetics of these chaotic, semi-decayed spaces, drawing upon the ideas of those such as artist Keith Arnatt who celebrated a 'new kind of English sublime' focused upon the intersection of "beauty' and 'banality", photographing rusting oil-drums and 'corrugated iron… against a scrubby brake of trees'.[414] Farley and Symmons Roberts similarly comment upon the 'inaccessible wilderness' of the pesticide-free road verge 'mundane and sublime in its infinity'.[415] In *Concrete Island* the wasteland bears a 'mantle of deep grass and coarse shrubbery', the former offering a curious sublimity as the wind stirs it into 'circular waves, beckoning him into its spirals', Maitland seeing it as an 'immense green creature'.[416] As well has having a sublime quality, this inclination to move into a space designated

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[411] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 13.
[412] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 69.
[413] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 61, 68.
[414] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 68-69.
[415] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 100.
[416] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 43, 68.

otherworldly or folkloric is similarly present in *Edgelands*, the authors noting such strange phenomena as 'the will-o'-the-wisp' in the form of ignited methane discharge from landfill sites: 'This is English folklore on steroids, a ghost running on industrial megawatts'.[417]

As well as usurping a notion of order or predictability in the landscape, and therefore the ability for humans to exert control over it, these spaces reject human existence through a more direct physical threat. In *Edgelands*, an underlying violence is present not only in the dangers of collapsing unmaintained spaces, but through active design, particularly in how the space is partitioned: 'Coils of barbed wire, like a well-trained bramble coiled along the top of a fence, are threatening enough, but razor wire takes latent violence to a new level'.[418] Similarly *Concrete Island*'s surrounding motorways are highly aggressive spaces, not only being the site of his crash which 'hurled him like a broken punch-bag on to the steering wheel', but due to the hostility of the high-speed traffic he cannot escape the island even after scaling the road embankments.[419] The inability to reach the outside world means Maitland must fight for his continued existence. In *Grave New World*, Dominika Oramus compellingly suggests that this 'struggle to survive' within the urban environment is not simply a contrived dramatic situation but symbolic of a wider urban condition in which 'deranged citizens' are victims and perpetrators of 'death on highways, crimes, paranoia… and the degeneration of culture', as reflected across Ballard's other works.[420] The concrete island is not as separate from the rest of urbanity as may be believed, its wildness having its own inevitability through the chaotic behaviour as produced by postmodern urban society.

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[417] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 60.
[418] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 94.
[419] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 11.
[420] Dominika Oramus, *Grave New World: The Decline of the West in the Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2007), 111.

A more direct human threat is presented within the island itself through the marginalised figures of Jane and Proctor, Proctor being a mentally disabled homeless man and Jane being a 'prototypal drop-out' and young prostitute.[421] Both are highly territorial and swing between hostility and hospitality toward Maitland, Proctor attacking him on sight but then later befriending him, Jane first caring for him and then tormenting him – for example, giving him paraffin to drink instead of water.[422] Such unpredictable behaviour reflects the random violence of the wilderness, but the largest threat on the traffic island is that which Maitland poses to himself. Observing Jane leaving the island at the end of the text, having previously thought she had her own path to leave and enter, he realises 'that there was no secret pathway'; that she simply climbs the embankment and gets a lift from passing traffic.[423] Maitland having chosen the rush-hour to try and escape and not attempting to exit via the road after that first effort, it becomes apparent that he was not really trying. As he is left alone he contemplates that 'he felt no real need to leave the island, and this alone confirmed that he had established his dominion over it'.[424] Escape becomes something he can organise in a relaxed manner, the final line of the text being: 'When he had eaten it would be time to rest, and to plan his escape from the island'.[425] Both statements seem ironic when contrasted with the ease with which he could escape if he simply tried harder; there is no need to plan, and it would appear that instead the island has claimed dominion over him through his reluctance to leave its grasp.

In keeping with Ianto's self-destructive compulsions in *Sheepshagger*, Maitland exhibits the desirability of self-isolation and debasement in the new wilderness. However, the argument

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[421] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 82
[422] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 118.
[423] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 174.
[424] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 176.
[425] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 176.

that the individual consumed by wilderness is a reminder of its power, or a disruption of the complacency of civilisation, would be stronger if Maitland were responsible for destruction beyond that of himself, or if the new wilderness as Oramus suggests were not indicative of a wild characteristic inherent in the urban landscape, wilderness no longer being positioned as an oppositional force but something almost omnipresent. Maitland is certainly a 'deranged citizen' and perhaps so is Ianto; a product or icon of social madness. On one hand the allure of losing agency in order to fully belong to the wilderness may be to regain a sense of belonging absent in the urban lifestyle, or it may be losing a façade in order to seek self-truth. Certainly there is a suggestion that the wild men Ianto, and to some extent Maitland, become lose culpability as moral beings and therefore feel they can act purely on impulse. Again this returns to a notion of the wilderness as a site to access selfhood, supported by Maitland experiencing his time on the island as a psychoanalytic event: 'the island was becoming an exact model of his head. His movement across this forgotten terrain was a journey not merely through the island's past but through his own', remembering his childhood through familiar – if ruined – landscape features, and examining his relationship with his wife and his mistress.[426] Through the brutalities Ianto perpetrates he similarly connects to a sense of history – albeit a more prolonged one, communicated through violence – from the fossilised trilobite as 'first and original predator father' to the sites of ancient battles in which bodies were left upon the landscape 'to be mutilated by local peasant wives dismembered and gutted… the ground here fertile still with this spilled blood and mulched flesh and fuming bones'.[427] While such a history present in the landscape may be more blatant in the backwoods, the overabundance of content within the urban landscape makes it harder to identify

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[426] Ballard, *Concrete Island*, 69-70.
[427] Griffiths, *Sheepshagger*, 202, 199.

a clear narrative. In this case the urban wilderness is perhaps a truer referent due to its complexity; its layers of intertwining history, spatial signification, threat, destruction and renewal.

ENTROPY AND THE APOCALYPSE

In a chapter on ruins, Farley and Symmons Roberts explore domains of abandonment and collapse, of 'disused warehouses and broken, red-brick ruins', places which 'atrophy' as economic pressures and urban planning draw them away from their users and original purposes.[428] The authors claim that 'Feral is the new wild'; that things or places once domesticated now wild have a depth beyond the straightforward instincts of truly wild animals and plants, that they subvert or react against the domestic and civil and therefore have a higher degree of wildness.[429] Feral spaces in terms of ruins are also more profound: 'Encountering the decay and abandonment of these places is to be made more aware than ever that we are only passing through; that there is something much bigger than us'.[430] Returning to temporal liminality in the previous section, ruins reveal the transience of order, purpose and human endeavours.

Ballard's apocalyptic vision in *The Drowned World* is filled with ruins; 'drowned cities' exhibiting the remnants of high-rises and 'abandoned department stores' subsumed by water and tropical vegetation.[431] The spatial organisation of this new jungle is determined by a lower strata of ruined urbanity: 'Many of the lagoons in the centre of the city were surrounded by an intact ring of buildings… Free of vegetation… the streets and shops had been preserved almost intact, like a reflection in a lake that has somehow lost its original'.[432] The echo of the previous urban world,

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[428] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 150-1.
[429] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 158.
[430] Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 157.
[431] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 9, 7.
[432] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 19.

physically influencing the development of lagoons, creeks and sandbars, is an ironic inversion of the real-world relationship in which the natural landscape has been subsumed by the urban but still determines its development through topographical features. This process is heavily imbued with a sense of hubris and a consequent inevitable fall, the flooded cities being 'like a discarded crown overgrown by wild orchids'.[433] The ownership of Earth has passed from organised human society to a renewed natural world.

The universal application of the ruined landscape in apocalyptic fiction serves as the ultimate manifestation of impulses described in the past two sections; to challenge the security of civilisation, in doing so disrupting its systems of power, and to create a wild space in which pure selfhood may be accessed. It is also the notion of chaos through entropy taken to its greatest extreme. As a powerful and dynamic vision of the natural world is superimposed over the old world of human control, the sublime becomes the defining aesthetic of the landscape, Ballard describing fantastical sights such as 'the city emerging from the encroaching jungle, flat sheets of silver water expanding towards the green blur on the southern horizon' or 'the endless tides of silt… in enormous glittering banks… like the immense tippings of some distant gold-mine'.[434] The world has become fecund, dangerous and otherworldly.

Of course, not all apocalyptic visions portray the return of a vibrant natural environment. *The Road*'s destruction extends to the entire global system, becoming a land 'Barren, silent, godless', of 'cauterized terrain… Where all was burnt to ash before them', of 'gray snow', with 'nothing living anywhere'.[435] McCarthy's apocalypse is in keeping with the unpeopled pre-fall wastes of Earth outside Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or indeed the savageness of his Hell

[433] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 21.
[434] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 25, 83.
[435] McCarthy, *The Road*, 2, 13, 30, 29.

complete with the moral depravity of its inhabitants, featuring such horrifying sights and sounds as the 'screams of the murdered. By day the dead impaled on spikes along the road'.[436] If this dying world qualifies as a wilderness at all, it is that of London's Alaska in the extreme: 'eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life', a wilderness which 'aims always to destroy movement'.[437] The environment destroys its parts. George Monbiot sees *The Road* as 'the most important environmental book ever written', due to the fact that, regardless of our presumed superiority over the natural world, the novel reveals how dependent we truly are upon it.[438] With no plants to eat nor animals to hunt, *The Road*'s nameless protagonists must scavenge leftovers they find in ruins. The alternative is cannibalism – as Monbiot says, 'the only remaining resource is human'.[439] Through proposing such an awful outcome of events, the novel demonstrates how significant the natural world truly is to our continued existence, critiquing any blasé attitude toward climate change and its potential for catastrophe. Chris Danta further expands upon the significance of McCarthy's apocalyptic portrayal in that such a haemorrhaging of natural resources also 'presents goodness as being as fragile as any other part of the post-apocalyptic environment'.[440] He compellingly argues the novel is 'distinctly anti-platonic: the mortality of concepts and forms'.[441] This hinges on one particular quote from the novel: 'The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion'.[442] Danta considers goodness no exception, that it is no longer 'an abstract and transcendent quality that allows for truth and knowledge to take place in the world' but is fixed and localised in its last

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[436] McCarthy, *The Road*, 33.
[437] London, *White Fang*, 3-4.
[438] George Monbiot, 'Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?', *Guardian* (2007), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books> [accessed 03/08/16].
[439] Monbiot, 'Civilisation ends'.
[440] Chris Danta, "The Cold Illucid World': The Poetics of Gray in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*' in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's* The Road, ed. by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (London: Continuum, 2012), 18.
[441] Danta, "The Cold Illucid World", 16
[442] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.

bearer: the boy, who his father states is not only a good guy but 'the best guy'.[443] This is hugely significant as it suggests ideas of human knowledge, value and virtue all stem from a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. If the latter collapses, so does everything else.

While apocalyptic fiction is not entirely specific to postmodernity, this kind of scenario is misanthropic both in its Hobbesian depiction of human behaviour and its punitive treatment of humanity, delineating postmodern imaginings of social collapse from those which came before. *After London* is an early example, written in 1885.[444] Rather than social order collapsing completely, it returns to a version of the dark ages in which humanity is largely 'ignorant, rude, and unlettered', and those not living wildly in the woods do so in agricultural 'provinces, kingdoms and republics' in a form of feudal society, featuring widespread slavery.[445] While not idealised, this vision is clearly based on an idea that the strictures of class, rather than total anarchy, is humanity's natural state. Felix, the protagonist, is a member of the petty aristocracy and seeks to 'go forth into the world' in order to win fame and fortune, making a voyage by canoe throughout the waterways of the new wilds and having many adventures.[446] The apocalypse becomes a vehicle to return to the medieval romance, the regressed world being a suitable site for adventure and chivalric resistance against despots and bandits rather than a completely nihilistic wasteland. Eventually Felix proves his martial prowess to several underdeveloped tribes and they compete to have him as king, he finally designating himself as 'Leader of the War' over the region, returning to his love Aurora to share his accomplishments and demonstrate a masculine prowess.[447] This firmly recaptures the notion of wilderness as a site for personal development beyond the strictures

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[443] Danta, "The Cold Illucid World", 16; McCarthy, *The Road*, 298.
[444] Richard Jeffries, *After London, or, Wild England*, *Project Gutenberg* (2004), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13944/13944-h/13944-h.htm> [accessed 04/08/16]. Quotes will be given by part, chapter and paragraph.
[445] Jeffries, *After London,* part I, chap. 3, para. 8.
[446] Jeffries, *After London,* part II, chap. 5, para. 4.
[447] Jeffries, *After London,* part II, chap. 28, para. 4.

of a regulated modern society. By contrast, *The Road* offers little personal development in the wake of civilisation's collapse, only annihilation and an insight into human cruelty.

Alan Weisman's speculative non-fiction work *The World Without Us* displays an alternative exercise in misanthropy, in which 'human extinction is a fait accompli' in a manner which leaves the world intact behind us, not through 'some grim eco-scenario in which we agonizingly fade, dragging many more species with us' but in which we simply vanish.[448] This 'creative experiment' becomes the basis for Weisman to approach how and to what extent the entropic processes of the natural world would unmake our influence upon the Earth.[449] Cataloguing decay and invasion by water and wildlife on a scale ranging from an individual home to the city, Weisman describes how 'nature takes over and immediately begins cleaning house' first through water soaking and rotting through buildings, flooding foundations or, in the case of cities with underground railway systems such as New York, filling tunnels and undermining the streets above to form river-channels.[450] Domesticated plants will degenerate into their unpalatable forebears.[451] Accumulated dirt, weeds and other plant life spreading from outside or carried in the form of seeds in bird droppings subsume urbanity until 'the asphalt jungle will give way to a real one'.[452] The representation of the removal of human life as offering increased ecological opportunities casts our departure as distinctly positive, compounded by a section on the ecological consequences of manmade polymers such as plastic bags, causing death through terminal constipation throughout the marine ecosystem.[453] Weisman portrays this as significant a long-term environmental problem considering the non-biodegradable nature of these plastics, citing scientists such as Tony Andrady

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[448] Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (London: Virgin, 2008), 3-4.
[449] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 3.
[450] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 15, 25.
[451] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 31.
[452] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 28.
[453] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 115-6.

who suggested that it would take 100,000 years for microbes to evolve which are able to break down these substances.[454] Actually, at the time of writing scientific advances have been made in discovering organisms which have developed the enzymes necessary to biodegrade polyelthylene terephthalate (PET), a plastic used in bottles and clothing.[455] While such developments are heartening, characterising the apocalyptic wilderness in terms of *undoing*, exerting an entropic influence upon humanity's urban artefacts, has its own set of ideological problems. Weisman explicitly describes his imaginative project in terms of pre-fall idealism, to 'restore Eden to the way it must have gleamed and smelled the day before Adam… appeared'.[456] Wilderness is firstly defined in terms of the past – perhaps unavoidable considering its diminished character in postmodernity – and the creation of a new wild space is seen as reductive, rather than productive.

The Drowned World blatantly portrays the instatement of wilderness and displacement of humanity as a temporal regression, Kerans stating: "the flora and fauna of this planet are beginning to assume once again the forms… [of] the Triassic period'.[457] This is of course a time predating humanity. Is the termination of the human process and the return to an unsullied natural world in fact a reinstatement of the nature/culture dichotomy? In the first chapter I asserted that in Kerans embracing the new wilderness, and his manner of interpreting his psychological relationship with the landscapes, he figureheads a model of thought which deconstructs the nature/culture dichotomy. One powerful image is his dream in which he 'felt the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swan forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water…'.[458] The imposition of nature upon the ruined urban landscape also

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[454] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 128.
[455] Mark Lorch, 'New Plastic Munching Bacteria Could Fuel a Recycling Revolution', *The Conversation* (2016), <https://theconversation.com/new-plastic-munching-bacteria-could-fuel-a-recycling-revolution-55961> [accessed 01/08/16].
[456] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 4.
[457] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 42.
[458] Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 71.

becomes an exaggerated form of the liminal urban wasteland motif as previously discussed. In 'Images from the Disaster Area', Umberto Rossi focuses on a moment in the text when the history of civilisation's termination is detailed in the fall of the 'enormous dykes' keeping the flood-waters from the cities.[459] In this case the 'natural vs artificial opposition' enforced by the embankments which, as Rossi states, symbolise the border creating 'urban spaces by cutting across the original continuum of prehumen space' – the tradition of enclosure and separation from the natural world.[460] However, herein lies the problem: humanity retreats after this collapse, and culture in most of these ruined spaces is all but terminated. There is no true breakdown of the dichotomy, only a pendulum swinging back and forth between phases of rulership. Kerans' perspective, while subversive, is ultimately suicidal, bearing no promise of compromise between the human and natural worlds.

By comparison *The Road* is perhaps a more responsible parable in the age of the Anthropocene. Rather than humans being displaced, or vanishing as in *The World Without Us* to allow the natural world to comfortingly reverse the ecological damages we have wrought, our fate is more strictly tied to that of the natural world. We are not spared the full knowledge of disaster; those who survive are there to bear witness to the Earth's dying days. In this case the idea of a return to Eden, or a resurrected wilderness, becomes foolhardy. Weisman's creative exercise has little benefit, the notion that humans would be magicked from the face of the Earth with no repercussions extremely fanciful; in a later chapter Weisman acknowledges that machinery such as oil refineries would deteriorate into endless fires without human management, resulting in a 'chemical nuclear winter' as toxins and particulates are released in huge quantities into the

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[459] Umberto Rossi, 'Images from the Disaster Area: An Apocalyptic Reading of Urban Landscapes in Ballard's 'The Drowned World' and 'Hello America'', *Science Fiction Studies*, 21:1 (1994), 81-97; Ballard, *The Drowned World*, 21.
[460] Rossi, 'Images from the Disaster Area', 82.

atmosphere, rendering much of his previous observations of plant-life reclaiming urban spaces totally redundant.[461]

That we can redefine parts of our world as wilderness to fill a personal psychological need neglects a lesson we should be learning from the Anthropocene; that a wilderness concept is problematic in its division of the human and natural. If our polluted urban spaces become wildernesses, if we are convinced that a wild character still exists in the world, the impulse to nurture a more vibrant ecosystem in harmony with our cultural lives slackens. Why should we seek to have a new thematic or aesthetic appreciation for waste-strewn, polluted scraplands? What real virtue is there in ruins? Why are apocalypses so utterly fascinating? In part this returns to a need for conflict, or at least drama within storytelling. We may fall on the side of wilderness or society, defending one and criticising the other, and shift this position many times, but to hold a truly deconstructed view is extremely challenging. Perhaps this particular dichotomy is more firmly established than would be hoped. So much of our history has featured a struggle with what is wild in our world; the depravations of predators, parasites, diseases, natural disasters and natural limitations. We have been torn between the purposeful evil of human cruelty and the purposeless cruelty of natural deprivations, seeking solace in one from the other, for millennia. Significantly postmodern wilderness representations, despite the removal from much of nature's cruelty in more economically developed countries, retain an understanding of the violence of the natural world.

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[461] Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 140.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to map the structure of wilderness and its significations. Many areas could have been explored in greater length. Manmade spaces redefined as jungles like the Calais refugee camp, the American frontier and its lasting effect on the cultural psyche of the US, the significance of wild woods in the horror genre, and wider-reaching cultural comparisons are a few examples.[462] However, as demonstrated throughout these last five chapters the thematic content of wilderness repeats and intertwines between genres, historical periods, and national borders. The competing narratives of the nurturing wilderness and the destructive wilderness reoccur as a perennial issue lasting into postmodernity. The case studies and areas selected have been successful in revealing such trends, as well as demonstrating the complex way postmodernity relates to that which came before.

In many ways postmodernism can be seen as a difficult gestation period between the anthropocentric metanarratives of previous centuries and new modes of thought encouraged by the idea of the Anthropocene. Certainly this latter concept required the iconoclastic impulses of postmodernity to create a space in which to develop and challenge views about economic-technological progression and humanity's place in the world, but as a new grand narrative postmodernity inevitably struggles to fully commit to it. The nature/culture dichotomy is frequently rejected in postmodern literature, but at the cost of entering dark terrain both psychological and physical. *The Drowned World*'s Kerans, *Sheepshagger*'s Ianto, Angela Carter's

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[462] Further reading: 'Learning from the Jungle', *The Economist* (2015), <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21660581-camp-channels-edge-sideshow-europes-migrant-crisis-it-offers-important> [accessed 18/08/16]; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, *Project Gutenberg* <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm> [accessed 18/08/16]; see recent films such as *The Forest*, dir. by Jason Zada (Lava Bear Films, 2016) and *The Witch*, dir. by Robert Eggers (Parts and Labor, RT Features, Rooks Nest Entertainment, 2015).

female protagonists, McCarthy's mistreated men and *Deliverance*'s fearful city-dwellers all explore the borderlands between what is civilised and what is wild with the consequences of madness, violence, suicidal and murderous impulses and sexual deviancy. *Wild* and *Edgelands* provide more measured studies of examining the intersection of society and nature both in the landscape and in our human impulses. *Into the Wild* invites a more moderate compromise between ideological extremes through examining the foolhardy, if captivating, attitudes of its subject in a fairly unbiased fashion. Regardless, in all cases the intersection between nature and society is explored in terms of a conflict, from apocalyptic lagoons subsuming the ruins of old civilisation in *The Drowned World* to Billy's struggle with the wolf in *The Crossing.* This certainly reflects the challenges inherent in creating a stable relationship between the natural and the human, and unfortunately may indicate a lasting inability to commit to a mutually beneficial compromise within the grounds of a collapsed nature/culture dichotomy.

Of course, these chapters have exposed that the wildernesses image upended epistemological conventions well before postmodernity. Popular figures such as the wild man and the lessons learned through wilderness sojourns have disrupted an easy distinction between nature and culture, and challenged their respective virtues. As a space in which violence and beauty, death and life and the chaos of unrestrained nature versus the order of natural systems collide and merge in unpredictable fashions, wild spaces have always challenged dichotomies and foundationalist ways of thinking. The potential for the wilderness to bring individuals closer to God and his lessons or the temptations of the Devil in the Bible, and the monsters, shapeshifters, witches and strange occurrences of folklore and fairy tales, demonstrate a long-lasting cultural belief that through moving outside human society an otherworldly place with its own unpredictable metaphysics will be accessed. This is explicitly referenced in postmodern responses such as the works of Angela

Carter and Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods*. A notion that human identity can be revealed through a confrontation with this unpredictable world – for good or for bad – is similarly regenerated in a wealth of literature and cultural artefacts, from *Deliverance* to *Wild*.

Consequently, the argument that postmodernity is a distinct cultural period becomes harder to justify. As discussed in the introduction, postmodernism is delineated based on various categories such as plurality, a collapse of grand narratives, and according to Jameson a proliferation of pastiche culture. As pre-postmodern examples have demonstrated, plurality and resistance to metanarratives is rife through the subversive tendencies of wilderness. Wilderness as a means to access the self, or the perennial battle between humanity and wilderness, could be considered great narratives which postmodernity recreates. In the introduction, Jameson's notion of the pastiche was problematized as too simplistic a method in which to criticise the regeneration of past ideas, but furthermore what is evident throughout history is that cultural forms are referenced and regenerated with wild abandon. Thoreau's *Walden* project drew upon a long history of wilderness sojourns, and to criticise *Wild* or *Into the Wild* as pastiche would be short-sighted in this regard. What may be said is that postmodernity displays subversive approaches in a more prolific fashion than past literature, and is more self-aware regarding the significance of these activities or the manner in which it responds to narratives and prior ideas, but the latter position at least is difficult to qualify.

While the retention of wilderness myths in postmodernity may seem hypocritical, their continued use is not intrinsically problematic. The perennial significance of the wilderness demonstrates that it has enormous symbolic power and represents some of the great questions humanity has to answer, concerning what our position in the world is and whether it is justified, how we might explain the cruelties of nature, whether there is a metaphysical element to our world,

what are the virtues of society, is there something to be said for a simpler life, and so on. The list could continue endlessly and their answers are consistently elusive. The regeneration of wilderness and its cultural significance is important in exactly those terms; to demonstrate its value is to remind us of our needs in this world, which in this instance is to retain a space outside social conventions to challenge us, stimulate our minds and imaginations, and provide a sense of perspective regarding society and its conventions. Even wilderness portrayals in survival dramas such as *The Edge* or horror stories such as *Through the Woods* which portray the space as dangerous and terrifying are important, as they acknowledge why we have rejected or destroyed the wilderness. We cannot pretend that it is a space conducive for human life; that it is not brutal and frightening. What can be said is that such a zone, threat included, allows for a profundity normally difficult to access. Its revelations may be horrifying, but they are revelations nonetheless. The question is to what extent we value such revelations, and what we are willing to risk for them.

The largest problem with retaining the wilderness myth, to have this space in the background of our cultural imagination, is that we may regard it as a truism we take for granted. As previously mentioned, the designation of official wilderness spaces may have the effect of convincing us wilderness does exist when, on a model of human influence over the global system, this is logically and environmentally difficult to justify. The establishment of heretofore non-wilderness spaces as a new wilderness, as explored in the final chapter, risks abandoning the idea of a vibrant wild ecosystem and with it the compulsion to stimulate such environments. Maintaining an idea of wilderness can also be manipulated for the purposes of escapism from the complexity and rigidity of postmodern society. This can be physical or vicarious, from adventure tourism to survival-based television shows such as Ray Mears' *Extreme Survival*, or *Bear Grylls:*

Born Survivor.[463] The retention of an idea of wilderness is heavily therapeutic; to believe that there is a space external to everyday lived reality, to the authoritative control of states, preserves a sense of freedom. Wilderness therefore serves a similar purpose to Jean Baudrillard's image of Disneyland: 'Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real' or 'The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real'.[464] This relates back to his analysis of the Borges tale in chapter three; that reality is culturally manufactured. In the case of Disneyland, designating one space as blatantly artificial makes us believe that the rest of contemporary life is not a construct. Wilderness can be a similar kind of deterrence machine, in that believing there is a space of pure, unadulterated truth wherein we can 'front only the essential facts of life' allows us to escape from the actuality that there are no essential facts of life; that our day-to-day life is as essential as anything else.[465]

What can be said is that the portrayal of a wildness beneath the everyday, challenging the security of society, reminds us of the tenuous nature of our position. The apocalyptic wilderness reaffirms this; we cannot be complacent. Strangely, in ignoring the lessons of the Anthropocene we may come closer to restoring what we consider a true wilderness than through creating a harmonious relationship between modern civilisation and the natural world. Eventually the despoiled planet will become inhospitable to us. Evidence from previous extinction-level events has shown the natural world will recover, albeit in a distinctly non-human timeframe. If and when the wilderness returns, the wilderness concept will have vanished completely; it will simply be the world as experienced through the eyes of creatures we have designated as inferior for millennia.

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[463] *Extreme Survival* (BBC, 1999-2002).
[464] Baudrillard, 'from S*imulations* (1983)', 220.
[465] Thoreau, 'Walden', 1028.

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