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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Andersen, T. R. (2021). Back to Gondwanaland: Deep Time and Planerarity in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 62(1), 97-111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1772714>

Publication metadata

Title: Back to Gondwanaland: Deep Time and Planerarity in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*

Author(s): Tore Rye Andersen

Journal: Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction

DOI/Link: [10.1080/00111619.2020.1772714](https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1772714)

Document version: Accepted manuscript (post-print)

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**Back to Gondwanaland: Deep Time and Planetary in
Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Cormac
McCarthy's *Blood Meridian***

Tore Rye Andersen

Aarhus University, Department of Comparative Literature, Aarhus, Denmark

Corresponding author:

Tore Rye Andersen
Department of Comparative Literature, Aarhus University
Langelandsgade 139
DK-8000 Aarhus C
Denmark
E-mail: torerye@cc.au.dk

Abstract

In a recent article, Kate Marshall identifies “an emerging body of US fiction located firmly within the strata and sediment of the Anthropocene,” focusing exclusively on twenty-first century literature. A similar chronological focus shapes discussions of the related concept of *planetary*, which was first introduced in literary theory in Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (2003). The tendency to relegate anthropocenic and planetary concerns to this millennium is prevalent, and it is evident in the reception of Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (both 2006). However, anthropocenic and planetary concerns have been around much longer in literary fiction, and the two authors have treated them much more elaborately in their most important works, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) and *Blood Meridian* (1985). Both novels were written before concepts of the Anthropocene and planetary became theoretical staples, but I aim to show that their thoughts on humanity and the planet prefigure the recent literary works that critics have centered their discussions of the Anthropocene on. Furthermore, I will show how both novels reflect on language as yet another technology that violates nature’s continuum, and how language is thus presented by Pynchon and McCarthy as a significant force in the Anthropocene.

Keywords

Gravity’s Rainbow, *Blood Meridian*, Anthropocene, deep time, planetary

In an article in *American Literary History* from 2015, Kate Marshall identifies “an emerging body of US fiction located firmly within the strata and sediment of the Anthropocene” and argues that a “growing body of literary fiction published in this decade understands itself within epochal, geologic time” (524). Marshall locates the Anthropocene awareness squarely in the twenty-first century, and she only considers what she calls “new novels of a newly self-aware geological epoch” (ibid.) from the last decade (2010-13), as if there were a causal relationship between scientific debates about the Anthropocene and literary fiction’s preoccupation with humanity’s impact on the planet.¹ The Anthropocene epoch itself is of course still very much up for debate, and scientists continuously discuss whether such an era even exists, and how to date it if it does.² The current predominant view places the beginning of the epoch in the mid-twentieth century and proposes that the golden spike marking its beginning is “radioactive fallout from the use of nuclear weapons” (Davison, n.p.). But even though the beginning of the new geological epoch is often dated to the mid-twentieth century, it is common as Marshall does to relegate literary awareness of anthropogenic concerns to this millennium. The same practice appears in an article in *New Literary History* from 2012, where Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that the 2007 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was a wake-up call that led to a widespread realization that humans have now become a significant geophysical force. According to Chakrabarty, this interweaving of human and natural history inscribes humans in “differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species” (14) and leaves twenty-first century critics “with the challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurate scales at once” (1).

Similar ideas inform discussions of the related concept of *planetaryity*, which was first introduced in literary theory in the last chapter of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (2003). Spivak argues that the previously dominant concept of globalization is a human abstraction, which primarily concerns trade and the exchange of information, and that no one actually lives in this

nontangible “gridwork of electronic capital” (72). She consequently proposes “the planet to overwrite the globe” and suggests that “we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents” in order to remind us that while we do live on the planet, we only inhabit it on loan (72-73). Spivak’s seminal text thus makes a plea that our idea of globalization as something we can control be replaced by an ecocritical awareness that we are connected with each other and with the planet in complex ways that exceed our grasp. In the influential anthology *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (2015), the editors Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru elaborate on Spivak’s ideas and argue that “the critical-theoretical model of *planetary* attempts a move away from the totalizing paradigm of modern-age globalization” (xi). The discourse of planetaryity represents a fitting response to the twenty-first century world, they argue, an ethical and conceptual shift “from *globe* as financial-technocratic system toward *planet* as world-ecology” (xvi).

Two novels that have often been read in an anthropocenic and planetary context were published close to each other in the fall of 2006, namely Thomas Pynchon’s vast *Against the Day* and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. In a scene from *Against the Day*, a group of mysterious Trespassers claims to have returned from the future in a time machine, escaping “a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty” (415). Realizing “the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth’s resources were limited” (ibid.), they return to a less depleted era as a form of temporal colonization. In light of such scenes, Pieter Vermeulen has recently – echoing Spivak – described Pynchon’s concerns in *Against the Day* as “properly *planetary* rather than global” (81). The world the Trespassers have returned from might as well be the one we encounter in *The Road*. In McCarthy’s postapocalyptic tale, the biosphere has more or less vanished after an unspecified but devastating cataclysm, and the ragged survivors fight a constant battle to secure the few remaining edible resources, which scarily enough include each other. The British environmentalist George Monbiot has lauded *The Road* as “the most important environmental book ever written” (n.p.) – a claim

supported by Andrew O'Hagan, who has called it the "first great masterpiece of a globally warmed generation" (BBC Radio 4), and by Louise Squire, Derek J. Thiess, and Sarah Dillon, all of whom read the novel as a devastating portrait of the Anthropocene epoch.

Vermeulen's, Squire's, Thiess's, and Dillon's analyses of the two 2006 novels are all part of the already mentioned tendency to locate the anthropocenic, planetary mode of thought solidly in the twenty-first century.³ Tellingly, none of them refers more than glancingly to Pynchon's and McCarthy's previous novels. It is my thesis, however, that anthropocenic and planetary concerns have been around for quite a while in literary fiction, and that the two authors have treated these concerns much more elaborately earlier in their career, not least in the two novels that are usually considered their most important works, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Blood Meridian* (1985).⁴ Both novels were written before concepts of the Anthropocene and planetarity became theoretical staples, but in this article, I aim to show that their thoughts on humanity and the planet to a significant extent prefigure the theories and the recent literary works that critics have centered their discussions of the Anthropocene on. Kate Marshall unequivocally claims that the "new novels of a newly self-aware geological epoch" (524) are shaped by "the only recently available conceptual apparatus of the Anthropocene" (530), but I will show that *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* are just as shaped by a set of concerns and a mode of thought that she locates firmly on this side of the millennial divide.

I will also contend that a comparative analysis of exactly these concerns can reveal deep affinities between two writers who are very rarely read together. On a surface level, there are certainly a number of similarities between Pynchon and McCarthy. Both are white males who were born in the 1930s and published their debut novels in the 1960s. Both have been lauded by the late Harold Bloom as some of the most important living American authors, and each year both yield low odds at Ladbrokes when the Nobel Prize in literature is about to be awarded. Furthermore, they are famously both very media-shy, even though McCarthy has shown up in Oprah's and an animated version of

Pynchon has appeared in the Simpsons. But here the superficial similarities end, and more significant differences begin to pile up. Pynchon is often described as an omnivorous maximalist, who includes seemingly everything in his sprawling novels, whereas McCarthy is considered a picky minimalist, who hones his novels and prose to a keen edge, and whose punctuation is practically non-existent.⁵ Pynchon is frequently singled out as the incarnation of postmodernist self-reflexivity and ontological uncertainty, while McCarthy tends to be described as someone who stands above or beyond literary periods.⁶ Pynchon's novels are suffused with a humanistic focus on love and kindness, but the dominant mood in McCarthy's works is misanthropy, and his characters are more likely to scalp you than hug you. As a result of these pronounced disparities, the two authors are rarely mentioned – let alone read – together in academic criticism.⁷ In this article, I will attempt to redress this by comparing *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* and showing that these two principal works of modern American fiction are secret sharers. My analysis will show how they both in line with Chakrabarty's challenge to current literary criticism “think of human agency over multiple and incommensurate scales at once.” Both novels thus move along a spatial scale from the molecular level to the endless cosmos, and along a temporal scale from the deep past, where dinosaurs roamed the earth, to the future, where machines rule the planet. Suspended between these distant spatial and temporal poles, both novels present a detailed slice of brutal human history, which portrays humanity as a temporary infestation in the planet's life span, an inherent spoiler who is both a part of nature and an enemy of it. In continuation of their joint portrayal of humans as spoilers, I will show how both novels reflect very similarly on language as yet another technology that violates nature's continuum, and how language is thus presented by Pynchon and McCarthy as a significant force in the Anthropocene.

The article will thus: a) broaden the discussion of literary treatments of the Anthropocene and planetarity to include fiction from the twentieth century, and point to language as yet another aspect of the Anthropocene; and through this temporal and thematic broadening of the discussion: b) identify

fundamental similarities between two canonical works that due to a number of obvious differences are practically never considered in tandem.

Deep Time – from Gondwanaland to the Raketenstadt

Gondwanaland is the name of a supercontinent that existed from around the end of the Neoproterozoic Era (550 million years ago) until the Jurassic Period (180 million years ago), eons before humans came into existence. It is therefore an exceedingly rare guest in the novel genre, which is mostly concerned with the human condition, but nevertheless, Gondwanaland appears in both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian*. In Pynchon's novel, it is first mentioned in a passage where the African Hereros Ombindi and Enzian discuss Tibet, "one of the last pockets of Pre-Christian Oneness left on the planet" (GR 321). Ombindi argues that this utopian sanctuary is connected with neutral Switzerland "along one of the *true* meridians of Earth," and he goes on to speak longingly of "Gondwanaland, before the continents drifted apart, when Argentina lay snuggled up to Südwest" (GR 321). Later in the novel, an Argentine anarchist pines to return to the same state of oneness: "Back to Gondwanaland [...]. When Rio de la Plata was just opposite South-West Africa . . . and the mesozoic refugees took the ferry not to Montevideo, but to Lüderitzbucht . . ." (GR 388). Commenting on a reference to the Pleistocene in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*, Kate Marshall argues that such a "periodizing self-reference" is a characteristic trait of current novels of the Anthropocene (528), but similar references are already found in abundance in Pynchon's and McCarthy's earlier works. In *Blood Meridian*, Gondwanaland surfaces in a remarkable description of Glanton's cruel band of scalp hunters, who in their singular purpose appear almost atavistic:

Above all else they appeared wholly at venture, primal, provisional, devoid of order. Like beings provoked out of the absolute rock and set nameless and at no remove from their own

loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was and each was all. (BM 172)

In both novels, Gondwanaland serves as an image of a prelinguistic unity long before the reign of men, and this interest in the distant, prehuman past manifests itself continuously throughout the two novels. It is evident in *Gravity's Rainbow's* many descriptions of the sedimentary layers of dead species and carbonized fossil fuel that we are once again releasing into the atmosphere (GR 130, 166-67, 590), and of “the World just before men” (GR 720), where titans ruled the earth. The ancient landscape traversed by the scalp hunters in *Blood Meridian* likewise bears traces of a distant past “before man was or any living thing” (BM 50). The scary and erudite character of the judge shows an abiding interest in this past, as he reads “news of the earth’s origins” in ore samples and orders up “eons out of the ancient chaos” in “an extemporaneous lecture in geology” (BM 116). Elsewhere in the novel, he finds “a great femur from some beast long extinct” and holds forth on paleontology and on “temporal immensities” (BM 251), which I in this article will characterize as *deep time*.⁸

The same concept stands at the center of Wai Chee Dimock’s *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006). In this work, she criticizes American literary studies of artificially delimiting a subject with a long prehistory and broad geographical connections, and she consequently proposes the new term “deep time” to reorient our focus to the “connective tissues binding America to the rest of the world” (3). Dimock proceeds to explain the term with reference to Fernand Braudel of the French *Annales* school of historians and his concept of a *longue durée* – the study of large-scale historical developments across a time span often measured in centuries. To members of the *Annales* school, the study of the *longue durée* was particularly focused on how social structures evolved over time. Accordingly, it was closely connected to specifically human issues, and Dimock suggests a similar focus. Invoking the disciplines of geology and astronomy and the vast

temporal and spatial scales they operate within, she points out that “the humanities have no time frame of comparable length,” and instead proposes that we work with “‘deep time’ in human terms” (6). Most of the topics in her book, including religion, language, genre, beauty, and civil society, are indeed human phenomena and concepts, which – going back to Spivak – must be seen as global rather than planetary concerns. Unlike Spivak, however, Dimock does not seem to distinguish sharply between globalization and planetarity, and in an elaboration of her term deep time, the two seem to merge unproblematically:

Deep time, understood as temporal length added to the spatial width of the planet, gives us a set of coordinates at once extended and embedded, as fine-grained as it is long-lasting, operating both above and below the plane of the nation. The subnational and the transnational come together here in a loop, intertwined in a way that speaks as much to local circumstances as it does to global circuits. (23)

Dimock thus primarily employs the concept of deep time as an ethical challenge for the humanities in general and the study of American literary history in particular; as a historiographical method that transcends national concerns in favor of global matters. Still, her reflections on scale, especially the ones we find in her final chapter, remain very relevant for my analysis of Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s novels. In her concluding discussion of *Homo sapiens* as one relatively new species among many others, she offers us a glimpse of a deep time that moves beyond the merely human and extends to the planet and its countless other species. Here, Dimock shifts her attention to a truly deep time that both precedes and supersedes our own existence on earth, and as such connects to previous uses of the term. Even though Dimock claims in her introduction that deep time is a new term, it was originally proposed already in the 18th century by the Scottish scientist James Hutton to denote

geological time, and it is especially this extensive understanding of the term (which also informs Dimock's last chapter) that is relevant for a discussion of the temporal immensities portrayed in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian*. Like Dimock, both authors naturally focus on the reign of humanity, but at the same time, they both evince a clear awareness that *Homo sapiens* is a temporary infestation in the long history of the planet.

In addition to their visits to a deep past, where dinosaurs, titans, and gorgons roamed the earth, both novels contain dizzying temporal leaps into the future. *Gravity's Rainbow* is rife with futuristic science-fiction scenes from a cartoon-like Raketentstadt, where Space-Jockeys ride polished meteorites (GR 296), and airships plow the skies (GR 674). Moreover, a small scene in the novel describes a human mind being uploaded into a machine, where it can live forever in a "purified Electroworld" (GR 699), and Pynchon's novel thus anticipates science-fiction classics such as William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and the movie *The Matrix* (1999). References to the future are more discreet in *Blood Meridian*, but they are nevertheless present in this gothic western, where a hermit warns the kid of a machine-built evil machine "that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it" (BM 19) – a remarkably prophetic statement by a madman living alone in a cave of mud, and once again a claim that is reminiscent of science-fiction movies like *The Matrix* or *Terminator* (1984). McCarthy's novel also intersperses realistic descriptions of the novel's present with visions of "travelers to come" (BM 111) and reflections on future generations who will once look back on the ruins of our present moment (BM 147).⁹ In such frequent prolepses to a time to come, both novels live up to Fredric Jameson's insistence that "our history, our historical past and our historical novels, must now include our historical futures as well" (quoted in Marshall, 530).

In the midst of these temporal immensities, which include dinosaurs and self-replicating robots, the two novels revolve around human issues – more specifically, thoroughly researched and very detailed slices of human history spanning approximately one brutal year. *Gravity's Rainbow* and

Blood Meridian are set in unusually violent historical periods (World War Two and the years right after the Mexican-American War), and they both contain elaborate reflections on the true nature of war, which serve to underscore how destructive a force human beings really are.¹⁰ Our destructive nature is emphasized in a remarkable passage in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where the narrator takes us back to the moment just before humans entered the scene. The dense passage is as good a reflection as any on the Anthropocene condition, so I will quote it in full:

[H]uman consciousness, that poor cripple, that deformed and doomed thing, is about to be born. This is the World just before men. Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by men directly. They are meant only to look at it dead, in still strata, transputrefied to oil or coal. Alive, it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona about Earth's body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the Creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God's spoilers. Us. Counter-revolutionaries. *It is our mission to promote death.* The way we kill, the way we die, being unique among the Creatures. It was something we had to work on, historically and personally. To build from scratch up to its present status as reaction, nearly as strong as life, holding down the green uprising. But only nearly as strong.¹¹ (GR 720)

The bleak view of humanity is mirrored in *Blood Meridian*, where the hermit tells the kid that you “can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything” (BM 19).¹² Many of the characters in the two novels, not least Glanton's band of scalp hunters, bear these passages out as they kill indiscriminately, whether for financial gain or due to primal urges. In their descriptions of this universal killer instinct, both novels

exhibit a clear awareness of mankind's destructive behavior on the planet and the irreversible consequences hereof. They are, in other words, novels of the Anthropocene.

Pynchon's and McCarthy's depictions of humans' devastating brutality are not limited to the specific years in which the novels are primarily set (1849-50 and 1944-45). *Blood Meridian* is prefaced with an epigraph that tells of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull showing evidence of having been scalped, and both novels contain passages about previous extinctions of species. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, we learn that Katje Borgesius's ancestor Frans Van der Groov hunted dodos in the 17th century, removing "the poor species [...] totally from the earth. [...] Frans could not know that except for a few others on the island of Reunion, these were the only dodos in the Creation, and that he was helping exterminate a race" (GR 110). Toward the ending of *Blood Meridian*, the nameless protagonist known simply as the kid encounters an old buffalo hunter, who tells him an analogous tale of decimating a previously abundant species: "Two year ago we pulled out from Griffin for a last hunt. We ransacked the country. Six weeks. Finally found a herd of eight animals and we killed them and come in. They're gone. Ever one of them that God ever made is gone as if they'd never been at all" (BM 317). The two sequences are remarkably similar, and even though McCarthy did not necessarily have *Gravity's Rainbow* at his elbow when he wrote *Blood Meridian*, the passages attest to pronounced affinities in their vision. And the similarities run even deeper. In both novels, the extinction of nonhuman species stands as a correlation to a concurrent extermination of human races. In McCarthy's novel, various tribes of native Americans are killed off, and in the course of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which casts a wider historical and geographical net, both Jews, Hereros and native Americans are subjected to genocide. Both novels also show that the exterminators do not always distinguish sharply between animals and humans. As evident in the quote above, the poor dodos in *Gravity's Rainbow* are not only described as a species, but also a race (like the Jews and Hereros), as if to connect the nonhuman and the human. This parallel is underlined in a later passage in Pynchon's

novel, where brutal Russian settlers “hunted Sarts, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, and Dungans that terrible summer like wild game” (GR 340), and in *Blood Meridian*, where the vandiemenlander Bathcat callously speaks of hunting aborigines (BM 87), and where Glanton inspects a newly harvested scalp “the way a man might qualify the pelt of an animal” (BM 99).

The systematic extermination of species and races is in both novels portrayed as a colonialist impulse run amok, and it is tied together with the westward expansion invoked in George Berkeley’s famous verse line “Westward the course of empire takes its way” and depicted in the identically titled painting from 1861 by Emanuel Leutze, which shows a group of settlers headed toward the sunset. The full title of McCarthy’s novel is *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, and several passages in the novel depict the company riding into the bloody sunset, most memorably perhaps in a scene describing Glanton’s blood-crazed men leaving Chihuahua after having devastated the city they were originally hired to protect:

They rode out on the north road as would parties bound for El Paso but before they were even quite out of sight of the city they had turned their tragic mounts to the west and they rode infatuate and half fond toward the red demise of that day, toward the evening lands and the distant pandemonium of the sun.¹³ (BM 185)

The bloody westward movement likewise appears a number of times in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for instance in the surrealist description of the Indian-killing “Crouchfield, the westwardman,” who rides into “the coming holocaust” of the sunset (GR 69), or in a remarkable description of yet another sunset, which seems to anticipate the setting, themes and subtitle of *Blood Meridian*. A drunken Tyrone Slothrop leaves a casino in Southern France and is stunned by the view:

“Holy shit.” This is the kind of sunset you hardly see any more, a 19th-century wilderness sunset, a few of which got set down, approximated, on canvas, landscapes of the American West by artists nobody ever heard of, when the land was still free and the eye innocent, and the presence of the Creator much more direct. Here it thunders now over the Mediterranean, high and lonely, this anachronism in primal red, in yellow purer than can be found anywhere today, a purity begging to be polluted . . . of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into those virgin sunsets to penetrate and to foul? (GR 214).

All these passages simultaneously express and critique the American idea of Manifest Destiny, which the doomed Captain White in *Blood Meridian* is a strong proponent of, and at the same time the westward impulse in both novels is just one example of an even broader colonialist urge, which points both forward and backward in time. In *Gravity's Rainbow's* present, the conquest of America is long complete and Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier a thing of the past, but the colonialist instinct lives on and has now been directed toward the final frontier, space, which can be conquered with the latest rocket technology (GR 723). This technological aspect of colonial conquest is naturally more central to *Gravity's Rainbow*, which revolves around the German V2-program, but it is also present in *Blood Meridian*, which contains elaborate descriptions of revolvers (BM 82) and rifles (BM 43, 265-66); advanced technology that makes death from a distance possible and thus enables human-led mass extinction in ways that were not previously possible.¹⁴

In both novels, the brutal, colonizing, technological mankind is thus portrayed in a wider context of a deep past and a distant future, and this interest in history and a broader temporality also manifests itself in reflections on the impossibility of writing history. Pynchon's and McCarthy's novels both contain numerous descriptions of human tracks being erased by nature. Footprints carried away by the ocean (GR 92) or the desert wind (BM 111, 174, 296) speak metaphorically of the

inaccessibility of past human actions,¹⁵ and so do descriptions of crumbling ruins, which represent a continuous erosion of the monuments humans have left on earth (BM 139, 146; GR 167, 485). In addition to these metaphorical expressions, both novels present us with more direct reflections on the difficulty of registering events and the uncertainty of what has been registered. The narrator of *Blood Meridian* frequently wonders who witnessed an event and speaks of “old encounters forever unrecorded” (BM 105). The judge even quizzes the kid whether unwitnessed events can truly be said to have occurred, and he rhetorically asks where yesterday is and points out that “the past that was differs little from the past that was not” (BM 330-31). Brigadier Pudding in *Gravity’s Rainbow* faces similar problems, as he struggles to complete his ambitious historical work *Things That Can Happen in European Politics*, even while the stream of real-life events overtakes his attempt to write down plausible historical scenaria (GR 77).¹⁶

Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s reflections on the challenges of historiography recall Linda Hutcheon’s notion of historiographic metafiction, which “problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge” (106). At the same time, it should not be forgotten that *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* are extremely well-researched historical novels, where even tiny details are often based on historical fact.¹⁷ The research often, but not always, shows itself through loyalty to the actual historical sequence of events, but it is constantly evident in what might be termed historical texture, small factual details that provide the depiction of the periods with a strong sheen of realism. Historiographical skepticism and historical accuracy are thus held in a delicate balance throughout the two novels, just as their depictions of human historical events are tempered by frequent glimpses of a deep time, whose immense scale far transcends what we would usually consider to be within the remit of history.

Planetaryity – from Molecules to the Endless Cosmos

The movement in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* across vast scales does not only take place along a temporal, but also a spatial axis. Both novels span from the submicroscopic molecular level and to the supermacroscopic cosmic sphere; from what *Blood Meridian* symmetrically calls “the uttermost granulation of reality” (BM 247) to “the uttermost rebate of space” (BM 50). Like Gondwanaland, the practically invisible molecular world is something we usually consider to be beyond the normal human horizon of experience, but nevertheless, it plays an important part in both novels. In a surrealist scene in Pynchon’s novel, we are faced with a theatrical dialogue that takes place in the central nervous system, with anthropomorphized melanocytes taking the leading parts (GR 148-49). Furthermore, the novel contains many descriptions of the weaving of molecules, both the natural one that takes place as the fragrance of bananas meanders across Chelsea (GR 10), and the artificial one undertaken by the German company IG Farben, as they manipulate molecules and create new polymers in yet another instance of humans trying to control nature. Similar attempts at subjugating the microscopic natural world are found in *Blood Meridian*, where the judge wishes to gain knowledge of even “the smallest crumb” of nature to become a proper “suzerain of the earth” (BM 198). IG Farben and the judge thus strive to master even the tiniest elements of existence, but in both novels, the narrators are critical of this ambition and show that humans are irrevocably part of the natural spectrum.¹⁸

As part of putting humans and nature on the same footing, McCarthy often employs the pronoun ‘he’ (and less frequently ‘she’) about animals, just as he uses ‘it’ to denote an apache child or a mentally disabled man. This deliberate inversion is carried on in his frequent comparisons of men with apes. A character like Glanton also has a very special affinity with animals. He claims that he “can man anything that eats” (BM 149), and he appears to be able to talk with his horse (BM 117), just as he tames a wild dog (which is later burned alongside his own corpse, as if to seal their

kinship).¹⁹ *Gravity's Rainbow* also contains its fair share of gendered, anthropomorphized animals (e.g. Wernher the owl, the lemming Ursula, Octopus Grigori, Dog Vanya), and at one point Slothrop is even filled with lustful thoughts about Frieda the pig (GR 575). Both works thus exhibit ideas of humanity's equal relationship with nonhumans, which are very similar to Dimock's arguments in the last chapter of *Through Other Continents*, and to Timothy Morton's influential ideas in *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, which is likewise an extended plea for solidarity with nonhuman beings. In Pynchon's novel, this solidarity is even extended to the vegetable kingdom, when Slothrop realizes that "each tree is a creature, carrying on its individual life, aware of what's happening around it" (GR 552-53).²⁰

In addition to equating humans with living, organic nature, both novels somewhat more surprisingly show our affinity to rock. In her analysis of Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*, Kate Marshall singles out the character Elster's fantasy of becoming "stones in a field" (DeLillo 53) as a result of the modern anthropocenic imagination: "Becoming rock and the dedifferentiation of the human from other matter in narrative terms becomes the aggressive anthropomorphism of that matter. And it also makes a historical point, one that shows something of the specificity of the US flavor of Anthropocene fiction" (528), she argues. That flavor was already prevalent, however, in Pynchon's and McCarthy's earlier novels. While Glanton is primarily connected to the animal kingdom, the judge is frequently tied to the mineral kingdom, to stones and rocks. When the gang first encounters him, he is sitting in the middle of a desert on a huge rock, which he has seemingly carried with him (BM 124-25), and subsequently he is portrayed sitting on rocks (BM 148, 173, 199), throwing heavy meteorites several feet (BM 240), or using a hundred-pound rock to kill a horse (BM 219). On one level, the coupling of the diabolical judge with rocks suggests that the mineral world is universally barren,²¹ and the words 'stone' and 'mineral' are indeed also used by both McCarthy and Pynchon as negatively charged adjectives (BM 83, 193; GR 86). However, the matter is more complex than the somewhat

facile metaphorical coupling of death and barren rock, and elsewhere in both novels, rocks and organic life are described as related. The smuggler Frau Gnab in *Gravity's Rainbow* has the astounding ability to insult both animals, vegetables, and rocks (GR 496), and at another point in the novel, we hear of a society of "Sentient Rocksters" who believe that rocks have "a form of mineral consciousness not too much different from that of plants and animals, except for the time scale. Rock's time is a lot more stretched out" (GR 612). This notion of living rocks even extends to the planet itself, which in line with James Lovelock's then popular Gaia hypothesis is described as being alive. On a series of astral journeys, the businessman Lyle Bland has a number of visions that let him experience "the wonder of finding that Earth is a living critter, after all these years of thinking about a big dumb rock to find a body and a psyche" (GR 590). A similar anthropomorphism of matter pervades *Blood Meridian*, where Glanton's men are described as "beings provoked out of the absolute rock" (BM 172). Later in the novel, the narrator suggests that the desert landscape can sense the men riding through it. "[T]he very sediment of things" seems to contain "yet some residue of sentience," and "a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships" (BM 247).

The rock metaphor is thus polyvalent. Both writers employ the traditional comparison of rocks with death and the inorganic, but they also both emphasize that rocks are part of the same natural continuum as humans, and that we share the same atoms. The awareness of this fundamental kinship constitutes a potent version of the planetary perspective called for by Spivak and Chakrabarty, a strong insistence on our connectedness with nature, which is underscored in *Gravity's Rainbow's* famous dictum that "*everything is connected, everything in the Creation*" (GR 703), and in *Blood Meridian's* vision that the natural world is joined in an "endless complexity of being" (BM 141).²² Nonetheless, certain villainous characters in the two novels attempt to rise above the complex chain of life, such as the SS officer Blicero, who wishes to break out of the organic cycle (GR 724), or the judge, who rages at the "pockets of autonomous life" that still exist on earth and megalomaniacally

proclaims that “nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation” (BM 199). Blicero and the judge do not have the final say, however, and the narrators of the two novels as well as a number of more sympathetic characters insist that humans are closely aligned with animals, trees and rocks, even while they remain incorrigible spoilers – a way of thinking about our fraught relation with the planet, which is closely aligned with Timothy Morton’s much more recent writings on dark ecology and the Anthropocene.

As a scalar counterpart to the molecular level, the two novels often take their readers into the far reaches of the universe. The emergence of the planetary and anthropocenic mode of thought is frequently related to some of the first images from space, including the astronaut William Sanders’s famous photo “Earthrise” (1968). The photo shows our fragile blue planet surrounded by the cold darkness of space, and it has been lauded by *Nature* photographer Galen Rowell as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.”²³ Outer space, which makes the planetary totality visible, but which is also like the molecular level “past men’s knowing” (BM 304), is a dominant presence in both *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy’s novel opens and closes with a meteor shower, as if to bracket the story and the life of the kid, and the rest of the novel contains numerous descriptions of heavenly bodies, including stars, meteors, the sun, and the moon.²⁴ The vast spatial distances represented in *Blood Meridian* also evoke the temporal immensities discussed in the previous section, and distant space and deep time come together in the potent image of the judge throwing “an enormous iron meteorite [...] wandered for what millennia from what unreckonable corner of the universe” (BM 240).²⁵

The cosmic perspective in the two novels is not just a neutral ascertainment of spatial immensities, but also serves as a reminder that Earth is the only known life-bearing planet in the universe, and that the surrounding space is a cold and barren void.²⁶ Several characters in *Gravity’s Rainbow* dream of flying a rocket to the moon or even further, but the novel shows that this wish to

leave our planet has to remain a dream – there is nothing out there. The German rocket engineer Franz Pökler considers whether he should have disillusioned his daughter Ilse and “told her what the ‘seas’ of the Moon really were? Told her there was nothing to breathe?” (GR 410), and Blicero tells his sex slave Gottfried that there is no air in the vacuum of outer space, only a cold Deathkingdom (GR 723). The judge in *Blood Meridian* likewise crushes the hopeful speculations of his companions:

The question was then put as to whether there were on Mars or other planets in the void men or creatures like them and at this the judge who had returned to the fire and stood half naked and sweating spoke and said that there were not and that there were no men anywhere in the universe save those upon the earth. (BM 245)

The judge’s unambiguous statement also provides a resounding answer to the remorseful speculation later put to the kid by the old buffalo hunter, who has helped exterminating an entire species: “I wonder if there’s other worlds like this, he said. Or whether this is the only one” (BM 317).²⁷ Both novels thus stress that human beings inhabit the only known pocket of life in the cosmos, and that we manage this huge responsibility carelessly.²⁸ This is of course a central argument in Spivak’s, Chakrabarty’s and Elias’s ideas of a planetary turn in twenty-first century fiction and critical thought, but the preceding analysis makes it clear that ideas of our planetary responsibility are also at the basis of Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s twentieth-century novels.²⁹ Discussions of the Anthropocene and planetarity usually take current debates on climate change or Spivak’s theories as their starting point, and skip the foundation of such ideas in the ecological thinking of the 1960s and 1970s, which has also clearly informed the work of Pynchon and McCarthy.³⁰

For both Chakrabarty and Dimock, questions of the Anthropocene and deep time are very much related to matters of scale, and as my discussion of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* shows,

the two novels are informed by a similar interest in scale. Their argument remains remarkably consistent across the different scalar levels: On the microscopic level, they insist that we all consist of the same kinds of molecules as the rest of the natural continuum, and on the macroscopic level, they show that we all share the same fragile planet surrounded by an immense outer dark; and at the temporal level, they remind us that our history on Earth is only a small pocket of time in the eons that have gone before and will come after. As Dimock mentions in *Through Other Continents*, back in 1833 Ralph Waldo Emerson “singled out astronomy and geology as the two sciences challenging us the most” (55) by reminding us of our insignificance in the large perspective. Through their own representations of geological deep time and the far reaches of the universe, Pynchon and McCarthy make a similar argument, but even while they remind us of our relative insignificance on very large temporal and spatial scales, they show how mankind refuses to accept this humble position, and how our actions have devastating effects that accelerate our own and the planet’s demise. This implicit warning is pushed to extremes in *Against the Day*’s postapocalyptic vision of a future where all resources have been depleted, and in *The Road*’s even more bleak future, which portrays a planetary state of affairs that cannot – as the closing paragraph of *The Road* has it – “be made right again” (241).

Language and the Anthropocene

Humanity is not only a spoiler through technology, brutality, and war. Both novels also depict human language as a dangerous anomaly in the natural continuum. In his recent essay “The Kekulé Problem: Where Did Language Come From?” McCarthy discusses the relation between the nonverbal unconscious and language and argues that the latter is what truly separates us from animals.³¹ The essay thus singles out language as one of the most important characteristics of the human, even while it argues that language is to some extent unnatural, a freak of nature.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian*, language is indeed not depicted as a neutral form of communication, which allows us to interact like birds or dolphins, but as a technique to divide and conquer. The narrator in Pynchon's novel explicitly compares "the German mania for name-giving, dividing the Creation finer and finer" with organic chemistry's unnatural manipulation of molecules (GR 391). This linguistic animosity toward the unity of nature is particularly evident in written language, as shown in the story of the Russian soldier Tchitcherine, who has been sent to Central Asia to give the local tribesmen an alphabet. By imposing an alphabet on "the lawless, the mortal streaming of human speech" (GR 355), Tchitcherine contributes to the demise of the local oral culture. He makes this realization himself, as he witnesses an *ajty*s – a traditional singing-duel – in a remote village and "understands, abruptly, that soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkic Alphabet he helped frame... and this is how they will be lost..." (GR 357). Writing is not described by Pynchon or McCarthy as something that preserves or reproduces reality, but as something that overwrites it and introduces fault lines in the preverbal oneness of Gondwanaland, which existed "before nomenclature was and each was all" (BM 172). Language is a technology that splits things apart, and in *Blood Meridian*, the judge frequently uses his eloquence to control his surroundings and to sow discord rather than to unite. In the same vein, the many notes and drawings in his ledger constitute a dark, linnaic project, whose aim is not to document and categorize, but to overwrite and control the world. He usually destroys the objects that he enters in his ledger (BM 140) and explicitly states that his elaborate note-taking is an attempt to take "charge of the world" (BM 199). "Words are things" that hold "authority" (BM 85), the judge argues, and the novel repeatedly shows us that he is a true master of these authoritative things. At the same time, his verbal authority is subtly undermined throughout the novel by the narrator's over-the-top descriptions of his orations. When the judge is reported "naked atop the walls, [...] declaiming in the old epic mode" (BM 118), we are meant to laugh at his pretension, and when we learn that he does not lose an

“opportunity to ventilate himself upon the ferric nature of heavenly bodies” (BM 240), we will likely see him for a pompous bore rather than admire his eloquence.

In an even more sinister perspective, language is not only used to impose a grid on the continuum of nature or to bully one’s companions. Language also precedes and enables many of the violent actions depicted in the two novels, and *Gravity’s Rainbow* reminds us that “[s]ome typewriters in Whitehall, in the Pentagon, killed more civilians than our little A4 [the V2-rocket] could have ever hoped to” (GR 453-54). Without language, no gathering of the population to support the war effort, no coordinated extermination of other races and species, no dissemination of the dangerous idea of Manifest Destiny. In the sequence in Pynchon’s novel about the slaughtering of the dodoes, we learn that their lack of language was a significant motivation behind their extermination: “No language meant no chance of co-opting them in to what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation” (GR 110), and deprived of the possibility of converting the awkward birds to Christianity, the pilgrims kill them off. Similar justifications of violence appear in *Blood Meridian*, where the kid fights men from distant nations and feels justified in doing so because they sound like animals to him: “They fight with fists, with feet, with bottles or knives. All races, all breeds. Men whose speech sound like the grunting of apes. Men from lands so far and queer that standing over them where they lie bleeding in the mud he feels mankind itself vindicated” (BM 4).³²

Language is thus depicted by Pynchon and McCarthy as an instrument and a justification of violence on a large scale.³³ At the same time, both novels are undeniably wrought in language, and this inescapable imbrication in mankind’s fiercest technology creates a deep, almost desperate ambivalence in the texts.³⁴ On the one hand, they both bear traces of a painful awareness that language is an enemy of nature, and on the other hand, they are both shaped by an unadulterated joy of and wallowing in language. Both contain several passages in other languages, and their use of the English language is especially exuberant in these two novels, which remain Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s most

lyrically intense and linguistically experimenting works. The two authors certainly do not use language in the same way (*Gravity's Rainbow's* hyper-flexible and slangy vernacular is a far cry from *Blood Meridian's* full-throated, biblical register), but there are still many similarities between them, not least in their tender descriptions of nature.

Dana Phillips and other critics argue that nature is primarily depicted as a brutal force in *Blood Meridian*, but this argument is challenged by the lyrical and loving character of many descriptions of the surrounding landscape.³⁵ Even as single-minded a killer as Glanton has a keen eye for the beauty of nature and dwells on it, as the ruthless men ride through a lonely aspen wood: "The leaves shifted in a million spangles down the pale corridors and Glanton took one and turned it like a tiny fan by its stem and held it and let it fall and its perfection was not lost on him" (BM 136). The violent events in both novels are interspersed with such moments, where reflection steps back and the characters become one with the natural surroundings. The clearest instance of this is perhaps found in the last scene of *Gravity's Rainbow* to feature a fully coherent Slothrop (who famously disintegrates as a character in the final part of the novel). The latest of his many incarnations has been the pig hero Plechazunga, bringing him one step closer to the animal kingdom, but in the end, Slothrop even sheds the gaudy pig costume and moves around naked,³⁶ finally at one with the natural world:

[A]fter a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural.... (GR 626)

Reflection and verbal thought are obstacles for this ultimate symbiosis, but like the velvet costume, they can be discarded. The unavoidable irony is of course that Pynchon and McCarthy in their descriptions of such unreflective moments interpose an elaborate stream of words between the reader

and the characters, “setting namer more hopelessly apart from named” (GR 391). Pynchon and McCarthy balance between making nature present for us and distancing us from it, and both novels are therefore ultimately tragic, since the mythical oneness of preverbal Gondwanaland can at most be described, not reached, through the technology of language – any attempt at approaching it spoils the paradisiac condition.

In light of this, McCarthy’s sparse use of punctuation could easily be construed as an attempt at de-technologizing language (as opposed to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s elaborate use of punctuation, which sometimes includes citation marks within citation marks within citation marks (GR 552)). In his reading of *Blood Meridian*, Steven Shaviro argues that “McCarthy’s writing is so closely intertwined with the surfaces of the earth and the depths of the cosmos that it cannot be disentangled from them” (17), and that the novel “refuses to acknowledge any gap or opposition between words and things” (18). However, such a reading does not adequately capture the novel’s deep ambivalence toward its own linguistic medium, which is evident in for instance the portrayal of the language-spouting judge, whose many lies and contradictions have been analyzed convincingly by Dianne Luce. Language is not just a thing in nature, and in many ways, it runs counter to nature, as McCarthy himself argues in “The Kekulé Problem.”

As yet another example of their ambivalent attitude toward language, both of these intellectual novels exhibit a strong touch of anti-intellectualism, which for instance manifests itself in their two main characters. The kid cannot read, even though he is the son of a schoolteacher and carries around a bible pretending to be literate. Slothrop does have the ability to read (and has even graduated from Harvard), but he prefers Plasticman comics and the tabloid *News of the World*. The novels do contain their fair share of intellectual figures, but they are often subjected to ridicule (like the buffoonish governor Angel Trias in *Blood Meridian* and the cuckolded Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck in *Gravity’s Rainbow*), or portrayed as outright evil: The most well-read and erudite characters in the books, the

Rilke-toting SS officer Blicero, who is “so in love with language” (GR 99), and the orotund judge, who is fond of quoting the classics (BM 84), are without a doubt also their most diabolical figures. Their are countless similarities between these two characters, which once again underscore the remarkable parallels between Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s novels: Both Blicero and the judge are pale, satanic, intellectual, oracular, androgynous figures with a penchant for quoting literature and a preference for non-reproductive sex (with children or with persons of their own gender). More than other characters, these inhuman antagonists appear as beings of language³⁷ and perhaps as a result of this, they resist taking part in the (reproductive) cycle of nature.³⁸

Conclusion

The preceding comparative analysis must not be seen as an attempt to reduce Pynchon’s and McCarthy’s masterpieces to each other. The differences between the two novels remain significant, but they seem to have precluded discussions of the deep affinities that also exist between them. Through analyses of the anthropocenic and planetary concerns staged by the novels across immense temporary and spatial scales, this article has focused on such affinities, and thereby it can hopefully lay the foundation for further comparisons, which can add new nuances to our perception of the two authors and their place in literary history. The supposedly arch-postmodern Pynchon shares so many traits with the allegedly aperiodical McCarthy that previous categorizations of the literary periods and traditions they are usually relegated to must be reconsidered. At the same time, it is of course important to keep the differences in mind. McCarthy’s Gondwanaland is for instance a more brutal place than Pynchon’s Gondwanaland, and while McCarthy’s notion of deep time involves a very long continuity of both brutality and beauty, Pynchon portrays the time before men as more innocent. Such differences in nuance should, however, be seen on the background of a remarkable unison in the two novels’ portrayal of human life within vast scales of time and space.

In addition to arguing that Pynchon and McCarthy are covert bedfellows, my comparison of these central twentieth-century American works of literature has shown that literary treatments of the twenty-first century concepts of planetarity and the Anthropocene can also be found in novels before 2000. I am of course not the first to have localized anthropocenic concerns in twentieth-century and even earlier works, but recent years have nevertheless been marked by a clear tendency to limit discussions of literature and the Anthropocene to novels that were written after Spivak, Dimock, and Chakrabarty introduced their influential ideas to literary criticism. In his reading of *Against the Day* from 2019, Pieter Vermeulen thus says of the Anthropocene that “the term has in the last decade begun to serve as a catalyst for questions and anxieties about the impact of human action on the environment” (70). He goes on to argue that the depiction in *Against the Day* of “human life’s entanglement with planetary forces (geological time)” represents “an Anthropocene update” of the historiographic concerns of Pynchon’s previous oeuvre (71). Sarah Dillon likewise sees the “planetary fear” in *The Road* as “indicative of a specific twenty-first century phenomenon” (5). Such arguments, however, bypass the remarkable similarities between *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s and *Blood Meridian*’s concerns and current anthropocenic and planetary thought. It is therefore necessary to move further back in time when answering the question posed by Kate Marshall’s article “What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?” Otherwise we risk painting a reductive picture of literature as a belated reaction to current scientific discussions, rather than as an early and offensive engagement, which offers a clear-eyed representation of human life on the planet in a much larger temporal and spatial perspective, and which at the same time shows a painful awareness that this representation is wrought in the very language that splits Creation apart and may have been instrumental in breaking Gondwanaland into smaller continents.

Notes

¹ More specifically, Marshall analyzes Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*, Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*, Ken Kalfus's *Equilateral*, and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*.

² As of January 2020, the International Commission on Stratigraphy has yet to ratify the term.

³ A special issue of the journal *C21*, "The Literature of the Anthropocene" (6.1, 2018), likewise focuses on literature from this century.

⁴ Throughout the article, page references to the two novels will appear as (GR xx) and (BM xx).

⁵ See for instance Edward Mendelson's seminal article "Gravity's Encyclopedia" or Tom LeClair's *The Art of Excess* for analyses of Pynchon's maximalist, encyclopedic impulses, and Jeremy Robert Bailey and Daniel King for a discussion of McCarthy's carefully crafted minimalism.

⁶ Brian McHale (1992) is one of many critics who have characterized Pynchon as quintessentially postmodernist. In his strong reading of *Blood Meridian*, Dana Phillips laconically states that "[i]t is a difficult text to periodize," and he situates it beyond both modernism and "the apocalyptic tone and the jaded manner of much postmodern fiction (the novels of Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo, for example)" (435). After this somewhat reductive characterization of postmodernism, he proceeds to describe *Blood Meridian* as "a historical novel" – a term that might just as easily apply to *Gravity's Rainbow*.

⁷ When they are mentioned together, it is often – as in the article by Dana Phillips or in Phillip A. Snyder and Delys W. Snyder's chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy* (30) – to contrast them with each other.

⁸ On the basis of such scenes, Dana Phillips quips that McCarthy is not so much a writer "of the 'modern' or 'postmodern eras' but of the Holocene, with a strong historical interest in the late Pleistocene and even earlier epochs" (452). This playful characterization once again confirms the idea of McCarthy as a writer who stands above the usual literary periodizations.

⁹ Through a number of such passages, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian* both prefigure Kate Marshall's discussion of a "posthuman future archeologist" (525) as a specifically anthropocenic figure.

¹⁰ See for instance GR 105, 521, and BM 248-50, 331. The two novels express somewhat different views on the nature of war. For McCarthy, war is an expression of our essential human nature, whereas Pynchon depicts war as being more dictated by political or economical interests.

¹¹ A very similar passage appears earlier in the novel, in a description of the System laying “most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral” waste “when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life” (GR 412).

¹² Note that human beings in both novels are described as “creatures” – a term implying that humans are part of nature’s continuum, even while they constantly violate it.

¹³ Pynchon apparently admires this passage, since he stipulated that his quasi-appearance in the John Laroquette Show be accompanied with the information that his next novel was titled *Pandemonium of the Sun*.

¹⁴ See for instance BM 43, 134, 158, 280 for descriptions of animals and native Americans being shot down from afar.

¹⁵ In her “new novels of a newly self-aware geological epoch,” Kate Marshall also identifies a strong anthropocenic interest in how humans leave “traces in sand, snow, or salt” (525), but such an interest is already abundantly present in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Blood Meridian*.

¹⁶ See GR 56 for further reflections on the challenges of historiography.

¹⁷ The historical accuracy of these two pre-internet novels (both of which took approximately ten years to write) is meticulously mapped in Steven Weisenburger’s *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* and John Sepich’s *Notes on Blood Meridian*.

¹⁸ Dana Phillips also argues that “human beings and the natural world” are ultimately shown by McCarthy to be “parts of the same continuum” (446).

¹⁹ Glanton’s relation to nonhumans is not exclusively benevolent, and elsewhere in the novel, he shoots down random animals to test a new gun (BM 82-83), or whips his horse and dog when they refuse to obey his will.

²⁰ Once again, *Gravity’s Rainbow* seems to anticipate much later ecocritical writings, such as Peter Wohlleben’s popular *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate* (2015).

²¹ In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the cynical scientist Pointsman is also frequently connected with stones and minerals.

²² Similar reflections appear in Pynchon’s *Against the Day*, where the character Kit has a sudden vision of life as “a connected set” (782).

²³ <http://www.abc.net.au/science/moon/earthrise.htm>. Ironically, the ecological thought that is evident throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow* is thus partly made possible by later generations of the deadly V2-rockets whose history the novel traces.

²⁴ John Sepich also notes the celestial sphere as an important trope in McCarthy’s novel, and on pp. 163-67 of his *Notes on Blood Meridian*, he lists its many occurrences in the book.

²⁵ *Gravity's Rainbow* is also replete with descriptions of stars and outer space – see e.g. GR 109, 347, 383, 699.

²⁶ *Blood Meridian* both uses the word 'void' to describe space and the desert landscape, so there is a clear homology between the outer dark and the barren emptiness traversed by the scalp hunters.

²⁷ In *The Road*, the father also tells his hopeful son that humans "couldn't live anyplace else" (205), underlining the universal hopelessness of their situation.

²⁸ Dana Phillips argues that *Blood Meridian* describes the universe "as a continuum, a more or less even distribution of existence throughout a radically unbounded space" (447). In some parts of the novel, we do indeed find such a description, but in the parts I have just quoted in the main text, the novel specifically singles out Earth as a special case and as the only place where this 'existence' is organized as organic life.

²⁹ The word 'planetary' even appears three times in *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 521, 604, 639).

³⁰ See e.g. Schaub, LeClair, McLaughlin, and Coffman for rich discussions of Pynchon's ecological thinking. Especially Schaub and LeClair demonstrate how *Gravity's Rainbow* shows clear affinities to the early ecological ideas of James Lovelock and others. Discussions of McCarthy and ecology have tended to focus on *The Road*, but his ideas of man and nature have remained remarkably consistent throughout his career.

³¹ Kekulé's famous dream, where he saw the circular shape of the benzene molecule as a snake with its tail in its mouth, also appears in an important scene in *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 410-11), where it becomes an emblem of humanity's manipulation of nature, as McLaughlin has pointed out.

³² Much later in the novel, the kid sees "small yellow men with speech like cats" (BM 313) unloading silk and tea in the harbor, once again comparing language from other nations with animalistic noises.

³³ In her analysis of *The Road*, Linda Woodson likewise discusses McCarthy's portrayal of "knowledge-making language that possibly has led to the destruction of the world" (90-91).

³⁴ Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger have also written about language as a form of domination in *Gravity's Rainbow* (88-89), and Paul Maltby has discussed Pynchon's ambivalent relation to the political aspects of language.

³⁵ See for instance the first pages of chapter XIV, where the narrator dwells on the mountain scenery and its beautiful flowers.

³⁶ The judge also enjoys wandering around naked, but the nakedness of this pedophile murderer is somewhat more sinister than Slothrop's.

³⁷ A possible reading of the judge's repeated claim in the final chapter that "he will never die" (BM 335) is that he is fully aware of his own status as a literary, and hence potentially immortal, being.

³⁸ In contrast, Slothrop ends up at one with Earth, and the kid meets his end in a humble shithouse.

Notes on contributor

Tore Rye Andersen is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Aarhus University. He is author of the book *Den nye amerikanske roman/The New American Novel* (Aarhus University Press, 2011), and he has published articles on contemporary American and British fiction in journals such as *Narrative*, *Critique*, *English Studies* and *Convergence*.

ORCID

Tore Rye Andersen <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4358-3942>

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