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The question of deep time has been widely debated in the field of American Literature, with scholar Wai Chee Dimock arguing that a deep time perspective puts the chronology of different nations against one another. However, this argument has not adequately addressed the issue of how deep time theories would incorporate the material world. My thesis expands Dimock's theories of deep time in American historical narratives by including how these theories interface with natural structures and how those interactions might in turn shape social texts. In my work, I explore the way deep objects recode a set of historical events from American history: the textual representations of a group of scalphunters known as the Glanton Gang. I first look to Dimock's theories to tease out what a deep time reading would look like including deep objects. I then juxtapose Frederick Jackson Turner's definition of manifest destiny with two varying accounts of the Glanton Gang's travels: one historical memoir from Samuel Chamberlain and one fictional account from Cormac McCarthy. By tracing the interactions between deep objects and American

historical narratives, I explore ways social texts are inevitably shaped by natural as well as anthropocentric objects and structures. I argue that by replacing stable histories with timelines of relationality, deep objects de-naturalize the expansion of America's national border. In conclusion, this project, by closely examining the material world's influence upon geologic history in American Literature, sheds light on the ways American empire has tried to naturalize its domination for centuries.

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Primal Matter: Deep Objects in Historical Accounts of the Glanton Gang

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Austin A. Schauer, Author

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Introduction: Objects Across Time

Contemporary theory has recently seen a resurgence in scholarship that uses time and geography to expand, complicate, and nuance historical narratives. Works like Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; José Saldivar's *Trans-Americanities: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*; and the artists within Wai Chee Dimock & Lawrence Buell's collection *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* all aim to reframe literature as more than just a product of a single nation-state's citizen working in isolation from the histories of other countries. Rather, these works situate literature as a product of these interconnected histories, tracing historical points of contact between countries as nodes on a networked globe. For instance, Lowe writes that her book "investigates the often obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (1). The postnational and transnational turn in scholarship responds to the emergence of recent political trends that blur distinction between nations, including the utter saturation of global capitalism, the widespread expansion of information systems, and the realignments of nations under economic and political unions (on the order of the African or European Unions).

In *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*, Wai Chee Dimock expands on the geography-based postnational tradition by adding a temporal aspect: she asks what American literature would look like not only across the space of national lines but also across the times of human histories. Her work proposes a planetary perspective for literary theory, one that interrogates the vast networks of nations and their interrelated histories across

the vast millennia of the earth's timespan; a concept she calls "deep time." For Dimock, the threads of American literature are tangled up in the reticulate makeup of the entire planet through other geographies, languages, and cultures. The large network of other geographies, languages, and cultures that operate in America's history is at work in its literature as well, putting the lengthy literary histories in relation to the US's "short chronology." American literature can trace its multiple genealogies back to oral African histories through the slave trade, to early migrations out of Asia through its first inhabitants, and to European through settler colonialism. In a reflexive manner, other nations might map their histories in relation to America by way of these same tracings, especially if those relations pre-date American influence. The stories of the ancient Middle East traveled to Africa long before European slavery, while ancient Greek and Roman texts were translated in England for centuries. Deep time's process of relation and interweaving expands American conceptions of time, and in doing so, exposes the variety of human life on the planet—which Dimock describes as:

A set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric. Restored to this, American literature emerges with a much longer history than one might think. This elongation is effected partly through the presence of alternate measures—African, Asian, and European—unfolding in its midst. Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time. Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation. (3-4)

The various threads of history stretch from the past and into the present, with many moments of relationality interacting in a given text. And, while alternate histories and chronology coincide, texts must be read not in the context of a single nation but through the many networks of interaction operating transnationally.

Dimock approaches her analysis by using two distinct methods. In her book's introduction, she compares timelines of a relatively young country and an older one—the US and Iraq, respectively—and analyzes how their reactions to a tragic event reveal each country's conception of time. In April of 2003, the Iraqi National Library and the Islamic library in the Religious Ministry were burned to the ground, which resulted in the loss of countless archives and artifacts, including various ancient manuscripts, one of the oldest-surviving Qur'an copies, centuries-old Arabic linguistic treatises, countless records, and an archive that extended back a millennium. Dimock writes that these documents “had survived by sheer luck for a length of time that said something about the human species as a whole: its extended sojourn on this earth, its ability to care for objects in its safekeeping” (1). To the US military, this event was a singular event within its short chronology as a young nation. From the standpoint of an isolated American history, this was the first time the library was destroyed. For the Iraqis, however, this was not the first time their library had suffered throughout their history: the Baghdad archives had been destroyed before, in 1258 by the Mongols, led by Genghis Khan's grandson. In the way Dimock juxtaposes these two narratives together, she illustrates how national chronologies are paradoxically both entangled and unraveling when put into relation with one another. The deep time perspective in this example makes an implicit correlation between America's violence in Iraq and that of the Mongols centuries prior.

Throughout the rest of the book, Dimock utilizes her second approach: discussing the global circulation of abstract ideas. She focuses on concepts such as “Global Civil Society” or “World Religions,” and then tracks ways they might connect over time and space. Dimock discusses “Global Civil Society”—an idea of civil society that can be small factions within a country or large multipartite entities that compose several nation-states, similar to that of NGOs

(like Amnesty International)—entities large enough to operate around the world, yet perform daily duties through small, grassroots organization on the ground. For example, global civil society connects to semantic webs of meaning found in Thoreau's *Walden*, while Thoreau himself is discussing works from ancient India, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Dimock sketches narratives that do not begin and end with the American nation, but stretch beyond its European progenitors to distant Indian cousins. She then looks to the varying degrees of translation, either from ancient tongues (Greek and Latin) into new languages or from cultures that may be physically disconnected but remain in relational loops due to the circulation of and interaction with various texts, ideas, or concepts. The list includes ancient India, Thoreau's mid 1800s America, Gandhi's 1920s London, and Dimock's own 2003 American juncture, allowing her to connect Asia, America, and Europe by looking to what it means to live in a civil society expanded over the entire planet. In this manner, Dimock is able to explore the tangled timelines among and within nations over vast geologies and chronologies.

Your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint. Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible. Finally, you fear blood more and more. Blood and time.

PAUL VALÉRY

It is not to be thought that the life of darkness is sunk in misery and lost as if in sorrowing. There is no sorrowing. For sorrow is a thing that is swallowed up in death, and death and dying are the very life of the darkness.

JACOB BOEHME

Clark, who led last year's expedition to the Afar region of northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkeley colleague Tim D. White, also said that a re-examination of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier shows evidence of having been scalped.

THE YUMA DAILY SUN
June 13, 1982

Figure 1.1

Upon first inspection, Cormac McCarthy's 1985 historical novel *Blood Meridian* seems to perform a similar deep time reading to American and Mexican history. The novel primarily concerns itself with a band of scalphunters—the Glanton Gang—who wander the borderlands between the US and Mexico after the Mexican-American war, laying waste to indigenous, Mexican, and Americans alike. Like the US and Iraq in Dimock's argument, the contested borders between the US and Mexico become fertile ground to explore their relatively brief histories, especially considered against those longer histories of indigenous peoples and the still longer history of the planet. And, like Dimock's global civil society, the novel looks to the themes of war, violence, and death from various texts that circulate in loops of textual relation bound by “continents and millennia.” Before the book begins, its three epigraphs place it in conversation in a global

context (Figure 1.1). Valéry's passage is from a lesser-known 1895 essay titled “The Yalu,” which is about how Eastern and Western cultures differ in their approach to death and violence. Valéry is writing from Paris about the Sino-Japanese war, which correlates well to McCarthy's themes: a clash of cultures through war is echoed throughout *Blood Meridian*, as is the different ways separate cultures approach war. The second epigraph is from the work *Six Theosophical*

Points, “an esoteric work of theosophy written by the German Christian mystic and Theologian Jakob Böhme” (Knox). Living from 1575 to 1624 in Germany, Böhme wrote works primarily concerned with “the nature of sin, evil, and redemption.” While evil and redemption seem to haunt the Glanton Gang’s travels, sin is mostly professed by McCarthy’s Satanic character Judge Holden in his many speeches. The final epigraph is a newspaper clipping which reports finding evidence of a 300,000-year old scalped human skull found in Ethiopia, succinctly linking the violent origins of humans on Africa with violent activities of the scalphunters on North America. The epigraphs alone put the 19th century US-Mexico borderlands in conversation with Paris, China, and Japan circa 1895, 16th-17th century Germany, ancient Ethiopia around 300,000 years ago, and Yuma, AZ c. 1980. A Dimockian reading and archiving would reveal how the themes from the epigraphs—war, violence, death—propose that those attributes which constitute American history—war with Mexico, violence of slavery, death of indigenous Americans—go back farther than we would like to think and interacts with more cultures with histories of longer duration. Moreover, the three epigraphs concisely reflect what Dimock refers to as the “presence of alternate measures—African, Asian, European” (4).

However, Dimock’s deep time accounts only for the ways that cultures interact through the circulation of texts, working in a framework that suggests only human-centered objects can form social texts. Her perspective ignores the geologic processes of the planet that have arranged human life, disregarding ways in which material objects also influence interpretations of texts that deal with the natural world. *Blood Meridian*’s epigraphs all refer to violence and death that occur in wars of land acquisition or in migration across land. *Blood Meridian* highlights the immense effects the geology of this land has on cultures and the texts they circulate, and in doing so expands Dimock’s theory, one that operates under the assumption that deep histories of

nations and their literature are not as intricately bound up with the natural world and its non-anthropocentric notions of time. Texts reflect the environments in which their culture makes them, but Dimock's theory does not account for ways those environments—natural “texts”—have changed as well. Although her project does operate around the idea of using the planet as the nexus around which larger timelines of literature circulate, it more closely focuses on how cultures, languages, and texts course around the globe, but not necessarily on the ways the physical globe affects them. She watches texts migrate across the globe from one place to another, but does not take into account the geology of those locations. In this sense, her model of the globe is a smooth sphere, one missing craggy mountain peaks and deep-sea rifts. Landscapes, continents, and mountains block travel; the earth's minerals affect the spread of social texts; and climates erode geologic and human history. Moreover, while Dimock does hint at the long geologic and astronomic history of the planet, her analysis does not look to the physical objects that have endured for centuries and, in doing so, structured human life on the planet. As a corollary, geologic objects would also have formed cultural artifacts arising from these structured human societies, and in this sense, social texts are inevitably shaped by natural as well as anthropocentric objects and structures.

Just as my model of deep time brings non-anthropocentric time into relation with human-centered time, *Blood Meridian's* desert landscape is consistently rendered with elaborate metaphoric comparison to primordial oceans, prehistoric creatures, and ancient continents—“the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia” (322). In the context of the geological and astronomical scale of the planet McCarthy discusses, cultures, texts, and languages interact with the desert environment and operate through arterial structures. Looking to the physical objects that persist throughout the long planetary history illustrates how the earth itself migrates,

moves, travels, and enacts violence in ways similar to humans and, moreover, is used by humans to enact that violence. These structures I call “deep objects,” or, geological objects that have weathered long stretches of time through several locations in space. These structures operate like the grammar of a metaphor by bringing one area in contact with another, just as a metaphor brings one concept and another together. In the same way Valery’s epigraph brings Paris, China, and Japan into conversation with the borderlands between Mexico and America, deep objects can transport concepts from one location to the next like an ocean current, or violently collide like tectonic plates. What *Blood Meridian* offers, then, is an opportunity to expand Dimock’s notion of deep time through rhetorical representations of deep structures.

Deep structures are essential for understanding relational histories. As a conceptual schema, their arterial structure also lends themselves well to exploring the figuration of deep time in the novel. I take as my two structuring objects the aquatic and the mineral. Rivers and mines take long expanses of time to form: water has to carve out rivers and the earth’s pressure has to craft ore. Both arteries of water and of ore work in three dimensions: that is, across space latitudinally, longitudinally, and topographically—north/south, east/west, and into earth itself, an actual carving into rock, be it a river made by rain over thousands of years or the earth’s pressure forcing ore to be made. These two relational structures within the framework of deep time structures allow us to see the ways nations, boundaries, and the land itself have changed over immense tracts of time. Like Dimock’s deep time, water arteries put *Blood Meridian* in conversation with ancient timelines of relationality—chronologies of change and impermanence based on relation rather than stability. Similarly, mineral arteries enter *Blood Meridian* in conversation with ancient timelines of using the raw materials of the earth. Deep objects complicate our linear and teleological notions of history. Rather than flowing forward, as in a

straight line, these arterial structures branch out and create new forking paths. Societies have always socially constructed concepts of the natural world, concepts that often become “naturalized” by those in power. Deep objects shed light on human behaviors that are socially constructed (even if we would like to think them as naturalized). These deep structures, both aquatic and mineral arteries, structure different relational models of history.

In Chapter One, I explore the ways deep aquatic arteries produce a relational model of humans migration across environments. Using deep aquatic objects we can see European American history as just one small node in the long expanse of human occupation in North America. Deep waterways also show the relational aspect of change—land that was once seafloor is now a barren desert. In *Blood Meridian*, aquatic arteries foreground the singular aspect of this moment in time of the 1840s but orient it within the wide history that has come before it regarding geologic history. In this way, they unite anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives. Oceans do form natural boundaries, and while a nation requires land to exist, water limits that land by putting borders and boundaries on it—water is also then an arbiter of human migration. Deep water objects allow us to read for a relational history of human movement that recodes certain historical narratives bound up in the formation of America. Deep rivers denaturalize narratives of manifest destiny that paint westward settlement as an extension of the “natural” environment. Instead, older indigenous uses and transformations of the rivers displace these claims of natural advance. Deep aquatic objects also become sites by which white American history is put relation to African-American and Native American narratives. These specific histories reverse the idea that manifest destiny’s ultimate claim was to “enrich” the land it seized.

In Chapter Two, I examine deep objects of the mineral world, leaving no rock, ore, or meteorite unturned. Although deep aquatic objects highlight the way human movement has been formed by water, deep mineral objects underscore the means and methods by which humans and nonhumans have shaped the raw materials of the planet. The materials are neutral, but the transformations performed to them often operate in the service of American manifest destiny. The natural world becomes used to legitimize the violence of American expansion westward as a natural progression. When histories are written of this expansion, these deep mineral objects reveal that a culture's texts are formed by human-made and natural objects alike. My study of deep minerals extends from the smallest elemental level, to the largest universal, and settles finally on the intermediary level of continent. Elemental objects reintroduce transformative violence back into American historical narratives, recoding western settlement as a savage process instead of a passive and natural one. Deep minerals at the universal scale de-emphasize American domination from a billion-year planetary perspective. Finally, the deep continental perspective denaturalizes the fashioning of the frontier with reference to an ancient megacontinent, questioning the "natural" boundaries that followed the arteries of geology with images of a time when frontiers did not exist—and neither did humans. The three-level methodology allows us to investigate the ways deep mineral objects undermine manifest destiny at every scale within deep time.

Chapter One

The Flow of Time: Deep Water Objects and American Empire

Scholars from a variety of disciplines contend that because deep time operates on a scale exceeding the years humans can live and at a speed slower than humans can perceive, humans have great difficulties integrating deep time into human histories. John McPhee, who coined the term deep time in his 1981 work *Basin and Range*, argues that “the human mind may not have evolved enough to be able to comprehend deep time. It may only be able to measure it” (127). He also admits the difficulty in quantifying vast tracts of geologic time, and, speaking to the difficulty one might have visualizing the calculated millennia, writes that “numbers do not seem to work well with regard to deep time. Any number above a couple of thousand years—fifty thousand, fifty million—will with nearly equal effect awe the imagination to the point of paralysis” (20). For evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, deep time is both a “notion of an almost incomprehensible immensity” for the human brain and a concept so alien that “we can only really comprehend it as a metaphor” (2). If the human mind can best understand geologic through metaphorical terms, then the inclusion of metaphors within historical narratives most effectively connects geologic history to human meaning.

In *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy consistently renders the fictionalized narrative of the Glanton Gang with metaphors of deep time that push the limits of human imagination. Desert salt pans evoke primordial oceans, distant mountains emulate prehistoric creatures, and dusty borderlands become ancient continents. The novel foregrounds a conception of time beginning not with human history but the geological history of the earth; yet human beings interact with

each other as much as they interface with “the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia” (322). Because of *Blood Meridian*’s obsession with this geologic chronology, Dana Phillips argues that “[f]or McCarthy, the history of the West is natural history,” one that does not offer readily discernible meanings to the human mind (453). In fact, Phillips argues that passages featuring metaphors of deep time “suggest meaning on a scale of time and space which we can only dimly perceive, marked by the scraping of rock upon rock...The meaning of these scrapings is not connected to human value” (453). For Phillips, “meaning” of geologic time comes from its temporal remove from human existence, and that is what disconnects it from human value.

Phillips’ argument operates under a logic of separation—it assumes that a narrative gains meaning by temporally or spatially distancing metaphors of deep time from the events in the story. However, according to Hayden White, a narrative produces meaning not in the way it rejects events but in the way it re-imagines and re-codes the set of events—in this case, the aftermath of the Mexican-American war—using a different metaphoric mode of expression. Instead of Phillips’ ‘separation,’ we might use a logic of combination. Metaphors of deep time create meaning based not on how removed they are from human affairs, but how intertwined they are. We can see this entanglement through the reinterpretation of past events. White writes:

The primary *meaning* of a narrative would then consist of the deconstruction of a set of events (real or imagined) originally encoded in one tropological mode and the progressive restructuring of the set in another tropological mode. As thus envisaged, narrative would be a process of decodation and recodation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom. (96)

For White, a tropological mode is the use of figurative language in writing, the metaphoric structures by which the narrative is formed. *Blood Meridian* takes events (the US conquest of Mexican lands) originally encoded in one tropological mode (the naturalized “God-given” right

of white Anglos to expand their territory to the Pacific Ocean) and restructures it through another tropological mode: the language and codes of the earth's geologic history. In short, McCarthy takes the conquest of once-Mexican borderlands traditionally coded in "shallow time" and re-codes them in deep time. White's theory illuminates ways these metaphors of geologic chronology denaturalize the foundations of American empire by exposing how recently the national border was created through a process of horrific violence. The tropological re-coding of deep time orients American domination within a larger time frame—not to lessen the cruelty of imperialism, but to magnify its recency. Manifest destiny's shallow history begins and ends with American settlement on North America, ignoring both other European colonizers who had been there for a few hundred years and indigenous tribes who had been there for tens of thousands. I suggest that that deep time enables us to reposition the common narrative of manifest destiny in relational rather than static models of time—not just the creation of the American empire, which is often couched in a US-centered notion of time. With deep time, these events can be situated within a network of different narratives from other nations and peoples elided in traditional accounts of shallow time. The histories of other countries, which Wai Chee Dimock refers to as the "alternate measures" of "irregular duration and extension," expand timelines thousands of years into the past to de-center dominant American historical narratives (4). Although the gang murders Native Americans and Mexicans along the US/Mexico borderlands in accordance with the principles of Manifest Destiny's ideology, a deep time framework is critical of these events and also the way in which they tend to be viewed—even in discourses critical of America—as a story that is fundamentally centered in American expansionism. While Phillips' reading separates natural history from American history, my reading integrates White's theory into Dimock's to re-historicize deep time's connection to human value. If the history of the west is

natural history, then I aim to uncover the ways deep time metaphors de-naturalize the expansion of America's national border.

The figurative language *Blood Meridian* employs allows us to understand how deep time functions in the text and at the same time calls into question the founding pretenses of US nationhood found in shallow time: that America advances westward by right, enriches the land it advances upon, and acts in isolation from other nations. John Beck notes that McCarthy's novel is "highly sensitive to the peculiarities of time and space as they are understood in the desert West and how spatiotemporal measurement is imbricated in modes of representation bound up with national ideology" (50). For my own analysis, I look to ways the spatiotemporal metaphors interrogate a fundamental aspect of the American national ideology: that of the border's relationship to the land and its rhetorical representation.

The rhetoric of American expansion largely defined the making of a national boundary as a natural process. The very land that would be taken in conquest was considered "empty" and America's for the taking, ignoring the many Native American groups that had inhabited it for thousands of years and Mexican citizens for hundreds. In other words, it lacked a history before the presence of Westerners, as though Western subjectivity was a prerequisite for temporality. In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner argues the American frontier closed in 1890. Turner looks back from an 1893 vantage point over American history, arguing that it "has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (1). Turner's use of "free land" ignores the indigenous populations living on the continent prior to European arrival. Turner also omits the violence that occurs at each expansion of the border. He describes the similarity of

each successive border advance briefly, mentioning that each expansion “was won by a series of Indian Wars,” and that for the “first frontier,” meeting its “Indian question”—the displacing of Indian communities at each advance westward across the North American continent—was the first step in defining a boundary (3, 5). Every step along the way he elides the violence of displacement and the annihilation of a people that comes with America’s broadening of the frontier border.

With a naturalized, enriching narrative of progress, Turner’s essay encodes westward American expansion in the tropological mode of shallow time. For Turner, America has improved the geology of North America by removing indigenous peoples, by settling the “free” land, and by using its abundant resources to gain material wealth. Turner’s tropological mode, from an 1893 viewpoint, looks back on the settlement of the West after the fact and with a history that begins and ends with white settlers. White would refer to this mode as one of “convention, authority, and custom,” which *Blood Meridian* re-codes in a different tropological mode. In fact, Turner frames the actual expansion of the boundary as a natural process, contending that America grew westward merely following the continent’s natural geology. He writes:

with all these similarities there are essential differences, due to the place element and the time element...The geologist traces patiently the shores of ancient seas, maps their areas, and compares the older and the newer...thus civilization in America has followed the arteries made by geology, pouring an ever richer tide through them. (5)

Turner uses metaphors of the earth to naturalize American westward expansion. He argues that America has followed “the arteries of geology,” a figure which brings to mind both the arterial courses made by rivers and by mines.

Blood Meridian re-codes this “natural” expansion that merely follows the earth through the figurative language of deep time in order to destabilize the type of narrative Turner employs. Images of ancient seas, continents, and creatures denaturalize the dominant narrative of American expansion that Turner exemplifies and reveal its social construction. To explore in detail the ways McCarthy’s novel unravels Turner’s narrative, it is worth considering the double valence of the phrase Turner used to naturalize the border’s expansion, arguing that it merely followed the “arteries of geology”—either as rivers, the rain-worn arteries carved into the earth, or as mineral veins, geologic channels rich in ore material typically extracted through mining. Reworking these arteries of geology as a conceptual system reformulates *Blood Meridian’s* re-encodation of deep time into what I have referred to as “deep objects.” Deep objects in the novel reverse the tropological mode of Turner’s narrative by unraveling the manifest destiny-influenced notion that the western land was “empty” and that pushing westward was natural and enriching process.

Because human settlements nearly always follow the river or oceans, deep water objects control human movement, regulating the nomadic journey of human migration while also tracing its path. Aquatic arteries demarcate the boundaries or borderlands by which societies have operated, and, by the same token, become the source for human innovation: various aquaculture and irrigation techniques had been widespread throughout the Southwest for centuries. According to Thomas E. Sheridan, “The most intensive way pre-Columbian Native Americans transformed their environments was through agriculture,” as tribes such as “the Hohokam and their successors, the Akimel O’odham (Upper Pimas)...dug canals to divert water from Sonoran Desert rivers onto their field. Hohokam canal systems along the Salt and Gila rivers snaked across the desert floor for nearly 100 miles” (107). Irrigation becomes the way in which humans

harness the power of water arteries for their own gain and to continue their existence. But irrigation also becomes yet another limiting agent in the expansion of humanity as it transforms a life of nomadic wandering into one of agricultural-influenced sedentary communities.

Thus, Americans were not the first people to enrich the deep aquatic arteries in the southwest. Other tribes living along the Colorado River had been adapting it for agriculture centuries before the arrival of whites, and Sheridan notes, several tribes including the Cocopas and Yumas, practiced “flood-plain-recession agriculture, planting their crops as floodwaters receded” (107). Indigenous people in the southwest were already “pouring an ever richer tide” through the river long before Turner used the phrase.

Deep water objects in historical accounts of the Glanton Gang show that American advances westward were not enriching the land through which they traveled but actively destroying it. The confluence of the Gila and the Colorado rivers becomes an important juncture in accounts of the Glanton Gang’s travels. In his account of his time spent with the gang, *My Confessions: Recollections of a Rogue*, Samuel Chamberlain details a scene in which the scalphunters seize control of the only ferry at this important juncture—one that happens to be run by the Yuma tribe. Chamberlain portrays the scene in the mode of shallow time, couching his language in a manner similar to Turner. As the scalphunters approach the ferry, the Yumas treat them kindly and allow them a few days of rest at their camp. However, John Glanton is enraged to find them using the hulls of two US ships for a ferry. Chamberlain describes a moment when the “dirty old [Yuma] chief” produces piece of paper bearing the name of an American general—implying that the chief had murdered the general and, rhetorically, that they were not to be trusted. But moral reasons are not enough for Glanton, who also wants to take over the ferry because it is a “goldmine” and an “El Dorado” which they must seize to get rich (288). In

Chamberlain's account, the scalphunters murder the Yumas to "enrich" the river by removing the Yuma tribe. Furthermore, once the gang controls the ferry they increase the price of crossing to \$4 per head, or as Chamberlain describes, "Business was brisk and highly lucrative" (289). Chamberlain might not agree with the Glanton Gang's actions, but his language still affirms that the scalphunters "enrich" the ferry by turning a larger profit than it did under Yuma control.

Deep rivers regulate human movement and act as gatekeepers: structures that determine who may and may not advance. The Glanton Gang uses this gatekeeping to its advantage and to the benefit of American expansion. Turner refers to the frontier's movement westward as a "recession" of land, using passive language as though the land receded of its own accord. In McCarthy's account of these events, these deep rivers reveal how America used violence to control this recession. After the scalphunters seize the ferry and slaughtering several Yumas, Glanton sits his horse at the Yuma river and looks "down at the river who was keeper of the crossroads of all that world" (272). For Glanton, the Colorado River is the crossroads of all that world—here all paths cross. Glanton's description joins the Colorado River to a history of "all that world" which refers specifically to the land near Yuma, Arizona, but more generally to the southwestern lands of the US that once belonged to Mexico. The river would later be used to house Fort Yuma, an important frontier outpost to secure US control of the west. Furthermore, the language directly rejects Manifest Destiny's passive following of geology. Glanton notes that the river is not *the* crossroads, but "keeper of" the crossroads of that area, becoming the decisive force of who advances. The river is not just a byway or a road or a method of travel used to get from point A to point B, but is able to determine and control who is able to cross and travel upon it. The river is not a tool used for travel, but the toll determining who may pass and who may not.

Deep rivers displace manifest destiny by placing African-American and Indigenous histories in relation with white American history. Moreover, these alternate histories eventually lead to the Gang's demise. African-American are often obscured and omitted from Western American historical narratives even as their labor funded its potential. Furthermore, Native American groups become passive non-persons in white America's frontier advance, as Turner's earlier passage casually glosses over a "series of Indian wars." Accordingly, rivers are not a site whereby Americans can enrich the west. Instead, they become a location for violence and the end of the Glanton Gang. In *Blood Meridian*, the Yumas launch a revenge attack after the scalphunters take the ferry. The Yumas' river attack results in the destruction of the Glanton Gang and is a re-coding of the enriching narrative of shallow time Turner and Chamberlain utilize. Rather than enhancing the west as they advance, the scalphunters are an American blight. Jackson, referred to as "the black" in following passage, precipitates the attack in which the Yumas decimate the Gang in the river and stop its ruinous advancement:

At dawn the black walked out to the landing and stood urinating in the river. The scows lay downstream against the bank with a few inches of sandy water standing in the floorboards. He pulled his robes about him and stepped aboard the thwart and balanced there...In the floor of the scow was a small coin. Perhaps once lodged under the tongue of some passenger. He bent to fetch it. He stood up and wiped the grit from the piece and held it up and as he did so a long cane arrow passed through his upper abdomen and flew on and fell far out in the river and sank and backed to the surface again and began to turn and to drift downstream.

He faced around, his robes sustained about him. He was holding his wound and with his other hand he ravaged among his clothes for the weapons that were not there and were not there. A second arrow passed him on the left and two more struck and lodged fast in his chest and in his groin. They were a full four feet in length and they lofted slightly with his movements like ceremonial wands and he seized his thigh where the dark arterial blood was spurting along the shaft and took a step toward the shore and fell sideways into the river. (273-274)

The passage begins with Jackson literally pissing in the river, a parody of (and figurative pissing on) the notion of "richer tides" flowing through Turner's rivers. For how many scenes in the

novel depict the scalphunters in the desert without water, to die in the riparian scene seems particularly ironic. Instead of Americans advancing along the river pathways to enrich the land around them, we see the river become the location of their destruction. The Yuma's ability to fight back and decimate the Glanton Gang goes decidedly against Turner's naturalized "series of Indian Wars." Additionally, Jackson is killed as he inspects the authenticity of the coin, the metric by which Chamberlain's account judges "enriching progress," and Jackson's appraisal becomes the inciting moment for the company's destruction. The scene also features an interesting interplay between Turner's "arteries made by geology" and Jackson's "dark arterial blood" falling into the river. Turner's naturalized arteries become encoded as urine-drenched avenues for destruction, as this passage details the beginning of the scalphunter's demise. It indicates that the arterial systems in human bodies, much like in geographies, can always be changed, often violently.

The scene also speaks to the violence of displacement, both of African- and Native-Americans. Black Jackson picks up the coin and commences the Yuma's slaughter, and, as a black man, he connects to the historical legacy of slavery: boats being the method for transporting slaves across the Atlantic and through the rivers of the America. The narrator and fellow characters often only refer to him as "the black," which suggests his identity for the Glanton Gang is a mere reflection of a race. His historical legacy to Africa also echoes back to the novel's epigraph about Ethiopian scalping. But Jackson becomes the first victim of the Yumas attack, further undoing the trope of enriching progress. In fact, the Yumas had been operating a ford at this river juncture since ancient times. The idea that Americans were enriching the land by repurposing a ferry becomes laughable, as they are merely doing what

natives had done for years prior to their involvement. It is only through a capitalist lens that the gang would even view that as enrichment.

Deep rivers not only decenter the white American narratives of the Glanton Gang by placing them in relation to other human histories, but these objects also decenter the dominance of American histories in relation to non-human animals as well. These modes of relation do not lessen the value of human history, but do dislocate American centrality across temporal planes and geographic climate. Before drying up, the desert was once an ocean and then a wet, tropical marshland wherein other creatures once roamed. Prehistoric biology destabilizes the singularity of humanity's dominant position in this world by revealing other creatures whose lifespans have come and gone. Human existence is just a small section of the long timespan of life on the planet and American dominance is a smaller section yet. Accordingly, rivers become not just the crossroads between the southwest and the larger expansion of the US, but crossroads between space and time. Before the ferry's attack, the Gang has recently gained a character known only as "the idiot," a mentally retarded man who rides in a cage behind them. The Gang then comes into contact with several travelers needing to cross the river. One of these travelers is Sarah Borginnis, a religious woman, who decides that the idiot must be cleaned in the river—a scene that the narrative refers to his "baptism." The river works as the catalyst for changing the tropological mode of the novel. That is, the scene does not use figurative language of deep time until after the fool is submerged and cleaned in the Colorado. He is then put to bed and only a few hours later do we see the fool stumble across, "naked once again, shambling past the fire like a balden groundloth" (258). This reverse baptism brings the fool not into some new life or form, but instead likens him to an ancient prehistoric creature. The baptism ritually links to the first biblical baptism, and are both then recoded in Darwinian terms. It also reverses any notion of

American “progress” over the west, but not necessarily a regression. It is a return, but not to a less advanced state, just a different state of biology, of evolution—biology determined by geology. The fool’s pseudo-baptism displaces human dominance, recalling that other creatures have been “shambling” on this earth in search of water long before man has. Ground sloths first show up in North America “in the late Pliocene or early Pleistocene” or roughly two million years prior to the novel’s events (Van Devender 67). The river keeps the crossroads of the past and present by juxtaposing the ancient ground sloths with the scalphunters and Yumas at the ferry. In this way, rivers become a spatiotemporal location by which deep time is able to penetrate into the present narrative and disrupt the tropological mode of American expansion.

From prehistoric animals to prehistoric geography, the oceanic metaphors reveal *Blood Meridian*’s relational model of history in opposition to the static model implicit in manifest destiny. The figurative language compares desert objects metaphorically to the sea, combining what would seem like opposite images (fire and water; dry and liquid, etc.) to show how much land changes over time, over millions of years, on a geologic timescale instead of on an anthropocentric one. The broadening of focus speaks to the immense changes the earth has made over time and humans with it. The overlaying of oceanic imagery over the desert happens to scalphunters and natives alike through the rhetorical device of apophasis—denying something, and in doing so, foregrounding its presence. For Stephen Skinner, apophasis is an artistic method “that seeks to express the inexpressible in such a way that its unsayability directs the imagination towards it while remaining beyond speech and comprehension” (95). An apophatic reading, then, is “a concern with something ineffable beyond the reach of knowledge, understanding and therefore words, as well as a reflexive awareness in the text itself of its own limits in seeking to sketch out that irreducible, shadowy ‘truth’ for its readers” (96). For example, in a scene where

the scalphunters make camp for the night, the desert wind fans the coals that Glanton watches in the fire: “The bones of cholla that glowed there in their incandescent basketry pulsed like burning holothurians in the phosphorous dark of the sea’s deeps” (243). Cactus embers become holothurians, or sea cucumbers. By calling attention to the cholla in the fire, yet using a metaphor of the sea, the narrative overlays the phosphorous depths of the ocean over that of the desert. This collapse of time and space makes sense—the desert was once an ocean, after all. The travelers of the present can be framed within this absent geography as well. Because the desert is configured as an ocean, the scalphunters themselves are framed accordingly as though they are sea travelers. These “Argonauts,” as they are often called, ride with “a little flatbed cart aboard which the idiot and his cage had been lashed as if for a sea journey” (241) as “far to the south beyond the black volcanic hills lay a lone albino ridge, sand or gypsum, like the back of some pale seabeast surfaced among the dark archipelagos” (251). Although their aquatic descriptions are always in reference to some unknown and ancient sea, it is always clear that the narrator is describing the desert.

In fact, the narrator continually emphasizes the lack of water in the desert, describing how the Glanton Gang “rode through a region where iron will not rust nor tin tarnish. The ribbed frames of dead cattle under their patches of dried hide lay like the ruins of primitive boats upturned upon that shoreless void” (246). At the beginning of this passage, the narrator points out that in this region, “iron will not rust nor tin tarnish.” The narration foregrounds the lack of water—for iron to rust, water needs to be present, and likewise for tin and its tarnishing. Moreover, rust is a sign of time. The narrator juxtaposes the entire lack of water in this region yet continues to make references to oceanic water-traveling crafts from the past. The cattle become like the “ruins of primitive boats,” not just the primitive boats themselves, but the ruined

versions of them, “upturned on the shoreless void.” Boats also imply some sort of human presence, as boats are not some naturally occurring phenomenon. McCarthy references the desert land as a void, a kind of figurative apophysis. It is a void without a shore, implying that a shore once lay there and no longer does.

The oceanic metaphors of apophysis reveal the large scale of deep time’s history and the considerable timescale of indigenous history, placing both into conversation with American history. The figurative language of apophysis evokes an ancient lake that has now become a dry lakebed. In the narrative, two characters—the kid and Toadvine—have recently joined the gang when they come upon a dried up lake bed, and observe that “the floor of the playa lay smooth and unbroken by any track and the mountains in their blue islands stood footless in the void like floating temples” (108). By way of the metaphor, the travellers of the present can be framed within this absent geography. After these two gaze into the desert landscape, a band of Apache warriors attack the scalphunters. During the Apache’s ambush, ocean-desert imagery reaches peak saturation, calling attention to the desert and the indigenous connection to the desert. In these passages of irregular extension and duration of time, indigenous history irrupts through time and enters contact with the American history. The gang watches as “Out on the playa a cold sea broke and water gone these thousand years lay riffled silver in the morning wind” (108). The “riffled silver” of mirage letting prehistoric “cold seas” that once covered the desert poking through. In this instance the narrative calls attention to the thousand years since the desert was an ocean, entering an aquatic artery into the desert’s deep history. In the Apache ambush, the apophatic metaphors abound:

the riders were beginning to appear far out on the lake bed, a thin frieze of mounted archers that trembled and veered in the rising heat. They crossed before the sun and vanished one by one and reappeared again and they were black in the

sun and they rode out of that vanished sea like burnt phantoms with the legs of the animals kicking up the spume that was not real and they were lost in the sun and lost in the lake and they shimmered and slurred together...and the high wild cries carrying that flat and barren pan like the cries of souls broke through some misweave in the weft of things into the world below. (109)

As the indigenous warriors approach the Gang, the ancient lake of a thousand years prior intermingles and “misweaves” itself into the geology of its present state, a desert, and both moments linked by the same sun that becomes both the ancient sea and the riders. Sand becomes pseudo-spume as the riders emerge from the vanished sea. The metaphor puts side by side the ancient past of the lake with the present of the desert and the riders. The natives become both sun and lake, connecting them to their history (they are lost in the lake, the water that once was; in the sun, the same sun that once shone on their ancient homelands) but also reflects their presentness (they ride through a desert basin that once was a lake; the same sun that bore down on their ancestors still bears down on them and the scalphunters). Because referents of the metaphors of the ancient past are absent from the present narrative, we find significance in the absence. The text apophatically foregrounds the ancient ocean to provoke the frontiers, boundaries, and limits of the desert geology. In a novel about the expanding of the frontier, apophatic metaphors to ancient oceans become a way for the text to reveal the artificiality of frontier boundaries. Oceans delimit the idea of a nation, of land, of the consolidated geography of the west, and suggest that borders are temporal as well as geographical.

Apophasis’ seeming inscrutability matches well with Stephen Jay Gould’s view of deep time as an “incomprehensible immensity” only available and comprehensible to the human mind by way of metaphor. The apophasis in this passage, “the spume that is not real,” the “vanished sea,” in which things appear and disappear and are lost, mimics the incomprehensibility of deep time, or change on a geologic scale, rather than an anthropocentric scale. We are not working in

the realm of paradox; rather, “the spume that is not real” serves to displace the narrative at all levels. On a “literal” level the warriors are kicking up sand, which is real; but in the imagery of the passage, it becomes spume; the sand could have been spume in the past, and could be spume again in the future. Because this figurative language connects images of indigenous warriors with that of ancient oceans, the apophatic shift in deep water objects brings the indigenous timeline of history into a relational history with the US and with the earth.

From enriching rivers to ancient oceans, deep objects recode the shallow time of Turner’s manifest destiny into deep time. By pointing to the older indigenous manipulation of rivers, deep objects denaturalize American encroachment westward. Moreover, deep rivers reverse Turner’s passive “recession” of boundaries, pointing instead to the active seizure and regulation of lands that the Glanton Gang engaged in. Deep objects put white American history in relation to other human histories across time and space, including African-American and Native American narratives, and that these histories trouble the ostensible “enriching” narrative of American history. Deep rivers work through time to put all of these human histories in relation to non-human histories. Finally, they put human histories in relation to past geographies, pointing to the irruptions into the present that still occur.

Chapter Two

“If war is not holy, man is nothing but antic clay”:

Deep Mineral Objects and Violent Mutability

Wai Chee Dimock’s framework of deep time is able to explore the tangled timelines between and within nations over vast chronologies. Deep objects introduce a third dimension to this entanglement, interrogating the ways that environments have shaped human behavior (and vice versa) and the effect this relationship has had in shaping social texts. In the last chapter, deep aquatic objects revealed the ways water has shaped human migrations across the globe, regulated the nomadic movement and itinerant wandering throughout time and space of humans and rivers alike. Deep mineral arteries, however, foreground processes by which the earth’s materials have been shaped by humans to different ends, both destructive and creative, in the service of nation-building. By uncovering ways American manifest destiny naturalizes the violence that led to the United States’ western expansion, this deep mineral object intervention lays bare the ways social texts are inevitably shaped by natural as well as anthropocentric objects and structures in regard to the capacity of elements to undergo and cause violent transformations.

As the last chapter indicated, Frederick Jackson Turner’s account of the frontier’s settling mentions a series of “Indian wars” and then moves on, arguing that America simply followed waterways (the “arteries of geology,” in its westward advance). When tracing the way these deep aquatic objects have created and then interacted with American historical narratives, we were able to place historical accounts of the Glanton Gang in relation to chronologies of impermanence and migration based on relation rather than stability. However, interpreting these

deep “arteries of geology” not as rivers but as mineral veins, mineshafts, or alluvial deposits replaces manifest destiny’s narrative of stability of form with mutability and change.

In this chapter, I explore deep objects through three magnitudes: on the elemental scale of raw minerals, on a planetary scale of earth, and an intermediary scale between those two poles, the continental. Throughout this analysis, I contrast the accounts Samuel Chamberlain and Cormac McCarthy argue that deep time lays bare the violence in America’s expansion that Turner’s account conceals. Readings of shallow time in Chamberlain’s history contain metaphors to Spanish presence in the Southwest, human-centered histories, and Biblical notions of time. On the contrary, deep objects in McCarthy disrupt those metaphors by reinserting violence into narratives of America’s foundation, undermining claims of America’s right to land, and denaturalizing the process of creating America’s national border. While traditional historical narratives like Turner and Chamberlain have elided violence of the frontier’s advance over the American Southwest, deep minerals reincorporate human violence of these transformations. The reincorporation covers a long history through which mineral and organic forms have metamorphosed, interfaced, and spiraled around each other in a plaited braid.

Elemental objects, such as gold, copper, sulfur, and iron, each have a history of humans fashioning things from them that ties to political and economic histories—histories that McCarthy disrupts by attending to the prehistories of these elements. Turner discusses an abundant “free land” that in McCarthy’s novel becomes indicative of a particular type of American fantasy of accumulated wealth without exerting effort. Much of the “effort” put into “freeing” land in the west was extremely violent, which Turner’s account conceals. Deep mineral objects re-enter that violence into the narrative of expansion. Elemental arteries, then, let us view the nation as a crafted entity imposed upon the earth, delineated by a frontier border stretching

over vast swaths of sedimented rock in the southwest, by foregrounding the violent collisions and ruptures—both human and geologic—in the name of expansion. This new political perspective destabilizes some of the nastier features of American manifest destiny.

Deep mineral objects have a long history of their own that extends out to the scale of the universe, destabilizing Turner's idea of "free land" waiting to be "put to use" in the west. Turner provides a version of manifest destiny that argues that a mineral's history begins when humans put it to use, whereas a deep time perspective suggests that the transformations that it undergoes in human hands is one of many that has occurred in its lifetime. In this vein, deep objects also destabilize the idea that Americans were the only ones with a claim to the land, when minerals in the west have a long history of use by members of other nations Spaniards, Mexicans, Yumas, and Apaches alike. From a transnational limit, the narrative extends outward to that of the planet, which reframes American dominance as insignificant in the billion-year history of the universe.

On the scale of continents, deep objects emphasize changes the earth has undergone over millions of years. While Turner's narrative describes American expansion as a "natural" phenomenon, deep geologic continents denaturalize that expansion by displacing the Glanton Gang's 1840s environment with images of ancient prehistoric continents. In doing so, these deep objects re-code "natural" borders as crafted tools of empire. Deep continents disrupt notions of American stability again, suggesting that the land upon which the nation was founded on has only looked a certain way for so long.

Because narratives using time remove the violent efforts that went into nation building, deep mineral objects at level of element re-enter that violence which America used to create the national boundary. A Dimockian reading of deep time with an infusion of deep objects would look to the scalphunter's interactions with other nations—the Yuma, the Apache, Mexico—

specifically exploring the types of relation these groups enter into by trying to gain access to these deep minerals. The reading looks to how the Glanton Gang's interactions have been shaped by the deep objects, and how the Gang has shaped those objects in turn, because they represent a violent extension of American empire. As mentioned in the last chapter, Chamberlain writes a passage in which John Glanton describes the ferry using a mining metaphor to El Dorado, collapses commerce, mining, and a mythical city of riches into one figure stating:

Glanton and Holden, after we made camp, had a long conference together, and from Holden's earnest manner I was sure some new devilish scheme was on foot. Next morning Glanton unfolded his plans. He told us that this ferry was our "El Dorado, our gold mine," the gate to California, and he proposed to seize it, kill the Indians if they objected, capture the young girls for wives &c. (288)

Chamberlain's description illustrates that metallic as well as water arteries can be deep objects. He compares the ferry to "El Dorado," the mythological city of gold that Spanish colonial presence was established on; "gold mine," the actual arterial structure through which gold is extracted; and as an "gate to California," the entryway to a metonym for the 1849 gold rush. The scene also foregrounds Glanton's desire to seize the property, and, should members of the Yuma tribe object, to kill them and take their young girls. In these latter two examples, the tableau demonstrates a transformation by force as the gang takes the ferry from the Yumas and making it American-run in the name of profit—or, to advance Glanton's metaphor further, the scalp hunters are taking the goldmine and extracting the maximum amount of gold out of it. Glanton, in this metaphor, sees value in the earth's arteries only as much as it benefits him, rather than observing other non-human purposes.

Chamberlain depicts Glanton using mineral metaphors that place this historical account in shallow time. Shallow time is fundamentally concerned with human-centered constructs, including histories focusing on human endeavors independent of the history of their

environments. Within those anthropocentric histories fall other principles of shallow time, ones that rely on the physical materials of the earth and presume them useful only they serve a human purpose. This latter category contains physical human structures, such as buildings or machines, and abstract structures, such as nations or states. In short, shallow time does not attend to any other functionality to the area other than the functionality associated with human narratives and history. Through Glanton's uses of "El Dorado," "goldmine," and "gate to California," his narrative operates inside a shallow timeframe, centering human histories, human structures, and human states, respectively. Glanton cannot separate the desert from its history of Spanish rule, a reign anterior to US encroachment by a mere 300 years. However, this Eurocentric reading puts Spain's presence in relation only to that of the US, and while the Yumas' long history of using this ferry is ignored, the violence towards them is not. The Eurocentric view ignores Yuman presence in the area for thousands of years, refusing to put American and Spanish histories in relation to indigenous ones. Furthermore, the "goldmine" itself is something to be extracted from the Yumas by violence. The mythological city of El Dorado presupposes gold made into the cities as some "natural" form—not necessarily one created by geologic processes, but in the sense that the city was crafted and waiting to be discovered by Europeans and then plundered. Even in myth, the shallow time of American empire is at work.

Shallow time thinking leads to Glanton's and Coronado's failures. Chamberlain uses mining metaphors in the abstract to describe the ferry's potential accumulation of capital, but also in the Gang's attempts to find and mine gold—even if his tale of searching for gold results in the same failure as Coronado's. On the hunt for supplies in California, Glanton comes across a group of Sonorans whose party "was on its way to upper California where gold had been found in immense quantity" (273). Chamberlain casually continues, adding that "similar rumors of gold

had been reaching Fronterras, so we now decided to go gold hunting” (273). After a few days spent drinking whiskey and eating beef, Chamberlain first uses the mythic language of Coronado’s expedition three hundred years prior:

We started for El Dorado or the mystic city of Cibola. Tradition represented this city as situated in a deep valley surrounded by lofty mountains. It was inhabited by a race of white Indians called Pintos and there was believed to be an abundance of gold and silver in the place. To find this great city, to sack and plunder it, appeared to the crazed brains of Glanton a matter of easy accomplishment. All believed in the legend, and all swore to follow Glanton to the death. (274)

They wander for three days in desert and find a charred wagon and bodies. They find a place to stay for the night, and Chamberlain writes:

Next day after climbing a rugged *cerro*, Glanton, who was at the head of the column, cried out, “El Dorado, at last by God!” We all hurried to the front where a most extraordinary spectacle greeted us. From the other side of an extensive plain rose the houses, towers, domes and walls of a vast city! What appeared to be fortified walls ran for miles, and lofty battlements stood out in bold relief. The city had a strange weird aspect, as of something unreal and unnatural.

We sat in silence gazing on this realization of our hopes, when the mocking laughter of Judge Holden broke the spell. ‘So, Glanton, this is El Dorado, is it? The city of gold and fair women! I wish you joy of the discovery—a city of sandstone built by dame nature!’ (275)

El Dorado and Cibola are fictional cities of gold that caused Spain to head out for the mineral wealth of the West, which, although it is only assumed, would have been built by humans. But Chamberlain’s Glanton cannot also disconnect the desert from a shallow time of Spanish rule. In fact his account is almost a failed reading of deep time: the judge notes that “El Dorado” is a beautiful sandstone tower carved from the rain over the years, which would be acknowledging the deep geologic history of the desert—but Glanton confuses the legendary cities comprised of gold for the rock formation. If El Dorado, in this instance, is a metonym for the mineral-rich landscape, then Glanton is partially right—the gold is in the land, but it requires far more effort

to extract it out of rock than to extract it from a city. Glanton's El Dorado serves as an example of a "shallow object." Shallow objects are objects immediately accessible to humans in a variety of different ways—spatially accessible, accessibility in terms of proximity—but their functional form and the amount of work required to get them out of there make its extraction unwieldy and difficult. Removing gold from rock is a much more difficult process than sacking gold from a mythical colonial city would be.

In *Blood Meridian*, deep mineral objects replace the shallow time of colonialism with deep time to lay bare the artifice of national construction. The scalphunters come across several fortune-seekers attempting to capitalize on the newfound opportunities the gold rush provided. Glanton and David Brown encounter a "conducta of one hundred and twenty-two mules bearing flasks of quicksilver for the mines" and proceed to shoot them all off the cliff (194). In the scene, Glanton and Brown not only mock the Turner-esque narrative of natural resources leading to arterial progress but also parody the mythic language of the Spanish and that of Chamberlain's telling. The two men enact violence on the poor muleteers and their animals whose packs are laden with mercury for gold extraction and are actively preventing mining from occurring:

the animals dropping silently as martyrs, turning sedately in the empty air and exploding on the rocks below in startling bursts of blood and silver as the flasks broke open and the mercury loomed wobbling in the air in great sheets and lobes and small trembling satellites and all the its forms grouping below and racing in the stone arroyos like the imbreachment of some ultimate alchemic work decocted from out of the secret dark of the earth's heart, the fleeing stag of the ancients fugitive on the mountainside and bright and quick in the dry path of the storm channels and shaping out the sockets in the rock and hurrying from ledge to ledge down the slope shimmering and deft as eels. (195)

Mercury was used to extract gold from ore, and in this passage it appears as a breaking open of a mysterious alchemical combination made "from the secret dark of the earth's heart." In the reference to alchemy, *Blood Meridian* draws comparison from its false "lead into gold" motif

and associates this false science with the false aim of nation-building. Lead cannot be turned into gold in the same way that Turner's "free land" was not free to be seized. McCarthy's narrator actually mimics the same metaphor Turner uses, as the blood (that which flows through the arteries in human bodies) becomes inseparable with the mercury (that mineral which grows in the arteries in geology) from the "secret dark of the earth's heart." This mineral figure becomes the primary matter that creates all metals, spawning from the earth's molten core. The "earth's heart" metaphor connects mining to the temporal earth, rather than some fictional city that merely served as a shill for imperial and colonial rule. Here the narrative sets up a difference between mining, a painstaking activity that is deeper than a shallow object and requires accurate evaluation of the landscape, and Glanton's get-rich-quick schemes. For Glanton, El Dorado is a fantasy of accumulation without exertion. Gold within a mine suggests its origin was something other than for human use, while El Dorado can give Glanton gold without suggesting the same non-anthropocentric notion.

Chamberlain relates his narrative of the Glanton Gang using biblical time, an anthropocentric subset of shallow time that centers human importance above all else. The scene of the muleteer's death offers a perspective of deep time by using language and tropes of deep time to parody Chamberlain's mythic language. *Blood Meridian* keeps several elements the same from Chamberlain's versions of El Dorado and Cibola, a "deep valley surrounded by lofty mountains," but replaces the important cities of riches with a long line of muleteers. The race of "white Indians" becomes the Mexican muleteers, individuals with both white and indigenous blood, while the "abundance of gold and silver" is implicit in reference to alchemy and explicit in the globules of mercury. Chamberlain's account connects the desert landscape's long history to a shallow reading of time connected to colonial Spain, which the judge attempts to correct.

Chamberlain notes that after seeing the sandstone formation the scalphunters misread as El Dorado, “Judge Holden mounted a rock for a rostrum and gave us a scientific lecture on Geology” (276). Chamberlain finds the judge’s lecture “very learned, but hardly true, for one statement he made was ‘that *millions* of years had witnessed the operation producing the result around us,’” which Glanton refers to as a “‘d—d lie”” (276). The next morning, they leave “the enchanted city,” searching for Apaches.

Glanton takes issue with the judge’s geologic timeframe because it challenges his anthropocentric view of Biblical time. Biblical time is always operating in shallow time, as it would argue that the earth (and universe) has only existed for around six thousands of years—and, of those 2,191,500 days, humans had only not existed on the earth for only six days before their creation. In deep time, however, the earth existed for millions of years before humans, let alone other forms of life, existed. The earth was getting along perfectly fine without humans for billions of years longer than the six days of biblical time. Glanton makes an appeal to biblical time, and it is important for the Gang that the bible is correct, because it obviates the need to look at this other time frame in which humans were not important. Biblical time is inherently anthropocentric, while the billion-year history that precedes biblical history is inherently de-anthropocentric. The latter is a profound Darwinian history that requires moving human time frames from shallow Biblical time frame to one of deep time.

In McCarthy’s novel, deep mineral objects become the means by which the shallow time of Biblical history is replaced with the billion-year old history of the planet. The judge uses extractions of copper ore to give a lecture on geology, converting the ore into an origin story. The Glanton gang comes across a smeltinghouse “where piles of ore stood about and weathered wagons and ore carts bonewhite in the dawn” and inside the structure is a group of men who were

the remaining members of a party that had "set out for the mountains to prospect for precious metals. They had been barricaded in the old presidio for three days, fled here from the desert to the south pursued by the savages" (114). The men sought precious metals and were attacked by apaches. *Blood Meridian's* chapter glossary refers to this scene as the "copper mines" (108). Later that day, the judge takes a "packanimal" and empties its panniers. The judge then sits in the compound, "breaking ore samples with a hammer, the feldspar rich in red oxide of copper and native nuggets in whose organic lobations he purported to read news of the earth's origins, holding an extemporary lecture in geology to a small gathering who nodded and spat. A few would quote him scripture to confound his ordering up of eons out of the ancient chaos and other apostate supposings" (116). Again in this scene the judge engages with the novel's deep geologic history from the resources taken from the earth. The judge purports to read the "news of the earth's origins" in the ore, rather than the metaphor of El Dorado: instead of a story, the judge attempts to base his findings from the deep structures of mineral arteries. And, although the judge is a monster, he offers an alternative timeframe to ones in traditional narratives of geologic history. The narration notes that Glanton and the other scalp hunters find the judge's geologic timeframe "apostate supposings" because of their own beliefs in Biblical time, which, by definition, inevitably operates in shallow time.

Deep mineral objects transformations put violence back at the forefront of national formation. Although the judge can creatively transfigure the history of the earth from samples of ore, he can also use elements to destructive ends as well, as in the case of sulfur. Tobin tells the kid of when an earlier iteration of the Glanton gang first came across the judge and were immediately at risk for attack by the Apaches. The judge begins orating to the men that "[their] mother the earth...was round like an egg and contained all good things within her" (130).

Although this question suggests the judge is anthropomorphizing the earth into a “mother” and thereby belying his earlier Darwinian allegiance, he makes this rhetorical choice to appeal to the rest of the scalphunters. He intends to convince them to help him fend off the Apache attack, and as mentioned earlier, most of Glanton Gang members respond well to biblical time. From the “good things” the judge fashions a destructive weapon, and as they climb the volcano, the judge begins to chip away at a “weal of brimstone all about the rim of the caldron,” forcing the other men to chip away at the sulfur and collect it. The judge combines it with nitre (potassium nitrate) and then has everyone in the company piss on it. The judge dries the mixture, and loads the manufactured gunpowder into the guns. The scalphunters begin to fire on the Apaches until, as the judge notes, “All dead save me” (134). Tobin the expriest continues to describe the scene as a “butchery,” which seems fitting for the idea that sulfur and nitre and a few other elements could be made into a violent matrix to be used for destructive force. Mineral objects place the violence back into the narrative of settling the west, whereas Turner chalks it up to “a series of Indian wars.” The ability for raw elements from the earth to transform into gunpowder explicitly recodes the violence toward the Apaches in clearing this land on behalf of the American nation, if not larger networks of nations.

The mutability of deep mineral objects enables them to critique larger systems of nation-building across the planet. The Gang transforms these objects and uses them perform violence upon other groups of people within a larger web of interrelation as *Blood Meridian* extends the minerality of the desert to the deepest of space-times: the wider universe itself. The narrative also suggests the violence of a deep object being thrust into shallow time. In Tucson, AZ, the scalp hunters come across a farrier named Pacheco, a crafter and trimmer of horseshoes. For his trade, Pacheco uses as an anvil “an enormous iron meteorite shaped like a great molar” that the judge

lifts up on a wager, and then on a further one, lifts it over his head. The meteorite is made from iron, and is used to shape it as well. But because this particular anvil is also a meteorite, every creative act becomes imbued with the deep time of the universe:

Several men pushed forward to feel the iron and to rock it where it stood, nor did the judge lose this opportunity to ventilate himself upon the ferric nature of heavenly bodies and their powers and claims. Two lines were drawn in the dirt ten feet apart and a third round of wagers was laid, coins from half a dozen countries in both gold and silver and even a few boletas or notes of discounted script from the mines near Tubac. The judge seized that great slag wandered for what millennia from what unreckonable corner of the universe and he raised it overhead and stood tottering and then lunged forward. It cleared the mark by a foot and he shared with no one the specie piled on the saddleblanket at the farrier's feet. (240)

In this scene gold and silver from several countries in the form of coins connect the judge and the iron meteorite, and, in this connection, the narrative makes it clear that minerals from the earth are used by different nations and stretch back for “millennia” to the formation of the universe. Furthermore, the wager is a gamble, a bet, outside of circulation. The meteorite too, by landing on earth, has been removed from its circulation from unreckonable corners of the universe. Like the sulfur, which had lay dormant for a long time, the meteorite is suddenly thrust into an explosive situation.

A visiting celestial object is not the only interaction the scalphunters have with the greater void, as deep mineral objects put the planet in relation to the universe as well. The novel continually places the scalp hunters in relation to both the vast desert, vast planet, and vast universe within they reside:

On a rise at the western edge of the playa they passed a crude wooden cross where Maricopas had crucified an Apache. The mummied corpse hung from the crosstree with its mouth gaped in a raw hole, a thing of leather and bone scoured by the pumice winds off the lake and the pale tree of the ribs showing through the scraps of hide that hung from the breast. They rode on. The horses trudged sullenly the alien ground and *the round earth rolled beneath them silently milling*

the greater void wherein they were contained. In the neuter austerity of that terrain all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence. The very clarity of these articles belied their familiarity, for the eye predicates the whole on some feature or part and here was nothing more luminous than another and nothing more enshadowed *and in the optical democracy of such landscapes all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships.* (247, emphases mine)

First, the narrative draws our attention to the mummied corpse, a product of historic indigenous-on-indigenous violence, and therefore shallow time. The organic body has petrified and become stone-like. In a sense, the man's corpse has already been endowed with unguessed kinship with rocks; the mummy's stability only draws attention to the Gang's mobility. In this way, human spans of time are brief moments of movement within a larger perspective of object stasis or geological transformation. Then, before getting into the "optical democracy" passage proper, the narrative voice looks to the horses' unfamiliarity with the terrain ("alien ground") and then pulls back the scale to earth's orbit: "the round earth rolled beneath them silently milling the greater void wherein they were contained." The text widens its focus to that of the entire planet on its circuitous route in space, only to zoom in to spider, stone, and blade of grass, and claim that none can claim precedence. Here the earth also an example in which "a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships." Both man and the "rock" of planet earth are closer than the wider relation of the universe. The novel emphasizes the kinships between the organic and the geologic, but only when observing at a larger lens from the distance of deep time. In this universal-planetary perspective, all "preference is made whimsical," and there is no inherent or preordained land that by right belongs to America, nor any border that might delineate it. If we can read the Glanton gang as an extension of American imperialism, then here the tropological mode of deep time is imbued with a notion that highlights the artifice of nationhood. Given the

expanse of planetary history, the idea that anything would gain precedence over any other out of its innate qualities—such as America’s border extension—rather than pure violence, is made into a fantasy. The figurative language diminishes America’s existence in a planetary time frame in order to highlight its recent conception. In fact, in the framework of Dimock’s deep time, the mummified Apache that was crucified by the Maricopas that begins the passage connects the American border to other Native American uses for the land, moving beyond a singular American history un-entangled with other histories. The materiality of the planets—the deep object in question—is required for understanding a universal perspective on this scene. It suggests that preference must be a product of singular frameworks rather than relational composites. In other words, the “whimsical” preference for any framework necessitates a comparative or relativistic rather than static and singular framework.

Deep mineral objects at level of continent put American history in conversation with earlier material histories and indigenous histories, focusing on the interactions of all three with their shared and often fought-over land. While *Blood Meridian* moves into deep geologic time through minerals, it also uses puts American and European histories in conjunction with indigenous histories, specifically through their interactions with the stone formations of the desert. The novel seems to answer Glanton’s confusion mentioned earlier in the chapter when he misreads the sandstone formation as El Dorado. Instead, McCarthy acknowledges that older Native American tribes have been adapting the materials of the earth for centuries, and that their spirits have somehow become enmeshed with the environment. The Anasazi suggest a way of integrating shallow and deep times in a way that Glanton’s gang cannot. As the scalphunters look at ancient Anasazi structures built into the stone while the judge rhetorically compares the tribe to stone:

What is true of one man, said the judge, is true of many. The people who once lived here are called the Anasazi. The old ones. They quit these parts, routed by drought or disease or by wandering bands of marauders, quit these parts ages since and of them there is no memory. They are rumors and ghosts in this land and they are much revered. The tools, the art, the building—these things stand in judgement on the latter races. Yet there is nothing for them to grapple with. The old ones are gone like phantoms and the savages wander these canyons to the sound of an ancient laughter. In their crude huts they crouch in darkness and listen to the fear seeping out of the rock. All progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of a nameless rage. So. Here are the dead fathers. Their spirit is entombed in the stone. It lies upon the land with the same weight and the same ubiquity. For whoever makes a shelter of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to the common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe and so it was with these masons however primitive their works may seem to us. (146)

The judge remarks that Anasazi's spirit "is entombed in the stone," and provides a relational presence for the "other races": be they American, Spanish, Mexican, or other Natives. Rather than ignore Native presence in the southwest as does Chamberlain, McCarthy's account points to a deeper history of when other tribes held sway in the southwest and that power or control over these lands has ceded and changed back and forth. McCarthy extends the human material connection to stone outward to that of "the structure of the universe," linking the greater universe to this specific location in the southwest. According to Manuel De Landa, one of the earliest developmental enmeshments between humans and the environment came about by way of stone: the mineralization leading to the human endoskeleton, which he refers to as a "geological infiltration" (27). Mineral arteries then, form not just the backbone of the human body, but also serve as the structuring schematic for the universe and human environment: the continent.

Deep mineral objects decode the nature/culture split in manifest destiny, recoding the Glanton Gang without naturalizing metaphors of expansion. Extending the metaphor from the old Anasazi to the novel's 1840s present, the narrator consistently renders the scalphunters in

metaphors relating them to “stone.” After all, the deep time metaphors always occur in passages saturated with American conquest, enfolding American history into geologic history to bring a billion-year time frame into conversation with the two hundred-year framework of American empire. Although they are hired by the Mexican government, the Glanton Gang become an extension of American violence as they outline the very border America needs to exist by eliminating indigenous peoples. Consider the following passage, in which the Glanton Gang are searching for Apache to kill, when the figurative language of the narrative displaces the scalphunters through deep time:

They wandered the borderland for weeks seeking some sign of the Apache. Deployed upon that plain they moved in a constant elision, ordained agents of the actual dividing out the world which they encountered and leaving what had been and what would never be alike extinguished on the ground behind them. Spectre horsemen, pale with dust, anonymous in the crenellated heat. 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. (172)

In this passage the scalphunters appear as though they are “provoked out of the absolute rock,” and are compared to “gorgons” (mythical creatures that can turn humans to stone at a glance). Stone, again, becomes the link between humans and the materiality of the earth. Through these blending of geologic arterial valences, humans are connected to the materiality of the earth. However, what differentiates the scalphunters from the Anasazi of the past is that the scalphunters transform the land toward destructive ends in the name of nation-building. Rather than becoming the stony earth as the Anasazi, a creative transformation wherein they preside over the desert for centuries, the scalphunters “divide out” the artificial boundaries of the frontier by killing the contemporary Apaches. The Anasazi, by virtue of working in “stone,” enjoin their

shallow time to deep time, whereas the Glanton gang, hellbent on destruction, works in the “reeds” that will be lost to time.

Upon first reading, the dividing out of the landscape could be read as a creative, albeit violently creative, transformation for the US. The land acquired after the Mexican-American war allows America to define itself by a form of geologic consistency, delineated by a borderline separating itself from Mexico. The time in which *Blood Meridian* takes place is, as John Beck notes, “a decisive moment in the process of national identity formation, the moment when the desert lands of Sonora are incorporated into what has become the American Southwest” (49).

Beck argues that

American victory against Mexico served to consolidate the continental national body articulated by the expansionist ideology of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. With the demarcation of an international borderline across the two thousand miles from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico, the United States for the first time achieved a national definition of unbroken continental totality. (49)

But this reading of creative transformation becomes problematic quickly. Just because the acquired lands give the US a continental totality does not take away from the artifice of nation-building or border-extending. In this specific example, US victory in the Mexican-American war allows the nation to “naturalize” its boundary by defining itself in relation to the continent.

Deep mineral objects denaturalize and disrupt the process of frontier-making by displacing that border-making process through time. The members of the Gang, contracted by the Mexican government, are literal “ordained agents of the actual dividing out” of the desert landscape. The land, only referred explicitly as “the borderland,” does not come pre-divided between nations or natural borders like rivers or coastline. Instead, the text emphasizes that the men are “ordained” from above to kill and divide. The scalphunters ‘appear’ “provisional” and “devoid of order” like the very borderlands they are dividing out. McCarthy’s figurative

language compares the provisional aspect of the frontier-dividers to the ancient megacontinent of Gondwanaland, an ancient supercontinent that split from a larger supercontinent, Pangaea, around 200 million years prior to the novel's events, in order to re-code American expansion in a larger geologic timeframe (*OED*). Temporally, the figurative language references a time "before nomenclature," or before language, before human and taxonomizing. *Blood Meridian's* recoding instead foregrounds human value and language: borders and naming only exist coterminous with humans. A time when "each was all" features a lack of division, a lack of difference.

However, the land that would later become North America was actually a part of the other supercontinent, Laurasia, the other half of Pangaea after it split. Because the borderlands between Mexico and America were never part of Gondwanaland to begin with, the narrative recoding displaces the border both temporally and spatially, to emphasize the relatively recent division of the nations and the violence of American incorporation of once-Mexican lands. This image first displaces the scalphunters through present day geography (Central and North America vs. Eurasia and Africa). In this one move, McCarthy connects ancient Africa (and human origins) to the narrative of the story (Yuma, Arizona, the southwest). It might appear that linking the establishment of political borders with the natural separation of the megacontinents into continents might seem to "naturalize" those arbitrary political boundaries. However, because the novel overlays a Gondwanaland metaphor over the southwestern desert, I would argue it actually highlights the absurdity of forcing naturalized arbitrary political boundaries onto geologic formations like continents.

Replacing the idea of stability with material transformation and mutability, deep continents displace the Gang through iterations of past geographies. The image of diving out the landscape represents the physical rupturing of continents as well as the rupturing an idea of

natural stability. The Sonoran desert was not always the desert it was during the 1840s. 58 million years ago, Laurasia, where Mexico existed, was a tropical jungle. 20 millions of years later, it was a deciduous forest. And only within the past 8 million of years has the Sonoran desert become a desert, complete with a unique climate, plants, and animals. The desert also keeps expanding and contracting, seeking a new definition for itself each time. The most recent expansion into Arizona and California happened merely 9,000 years ago, the flora and fauna settling in only 4500 years after (Van Devender 61-62).

The narrative restructures the border backwards from some vantage point in the future, just as Turner justified American conquest and eventual possession of the southwestern lands stretching to California after the fact. As Rick Wallach notes, “the name of the southern landmass would not be coined for another six and a half decades. By invoking it the narrative voice displaces itself both temporally and geographically from the 1848-49 setting of the story” (111). But *Blood Meridian*'s backward-gazing ventures stretch millions of years, rather than the two hundred of Turner's frontier thesis. If, as Hayden White argues, “the explanatory force of the narrative would depend on the contrast between the original encodation and the later one,” then the explanatory force of McCarthy's narrative comes about by allocating America a less privileged position on its timescale than does Turner's narrative (96). The figurative language of deep time metaphor becomes the new tropological mode through which *Blood Meridian* restructures the founding of American borders. The metaphor to Gondwanaland is important, because implicit in it is the notion that the borderland desert is *similar* to a different continent millions of years old before the invention of language, divisions, or boundary, while not exactly it. Thus, geologic time is still allowed to resonate through McCarthy's recoding of history. The scalphunters, then, as the enforcers of the dividing out, are not acting in accordance with

geography (as Turner would have it) because geography itself is contingent on specific moment in space-time. Instead, their hunting for the Apache on the desert becomes denaturalized, and with it, the notions of the teleology of the frontier. *Blood Meridian* narrative renders the “natural” subject to change rather than a repository of some static concept to strive for.

If we understand how deep objects reintegrate materiality into the textual world of deep time, we can start asking what sort of work these objects would do elsewhere in American literature. Perhaps other texts that work with geologic time might offer different kinds of objects beyond water and mineral—objects concerned with volcanic lava, or the earth’s gases, or even vegetation. We might wonder also if there are less violent examples of deep objects. So far, American expansion and the Glanton Gang’s role in it have proved to be a disturbing look at literary violence in historical narratives. Because of their preoccupation with the past, in their current iteration deep objects only work with historical novels. Perhaps an enterprising person might adapt them to the future, in the realm of science fiction or speculative novels—in some of these, the “past” might well be our present right now. Whatever the situation, historical narratives would do well to explore the relationships between humans and objects across the reaches of time and space.

In the current American media landscape, climate change takes on an apocalyptic tone. McCarthy’s rendering of the Glanton Gang uses a similar apocalyptic quality in *Blood Meridian*. But unlike his novel *The Road*, which takes place after an unnamed apocalyptic event devastates humanity, *Blood Meridian* depicts the end of the world by actually delving into it, depicting the end of one synchronic moment in the natural history of the world by framing that moment through diachronic deep time. By entering deeper into the geologic history of the earth, the novel puts its readers into relation with the apocalyptic potentialities that are ongoing. Through a

reading of deep objects in *Blood Meridian*, the narrator puts the crisis for human nations in relation to one another but extends that crisis into relationality with the earth.

My methodology for placing the text in relation to the material environment would work as a template for new materialist readings of other texts as well. This thesis' deep time reading uses "apophasis" as a device to explore objects outside of the human perspective. Because apophasis is about denying something only to call attention to it, the rhetorical construction allows us to gesture toward the non-linguistically representable expanses of geologic time within the linguistic rendering of a novel. As a theoretical apparatus, apophasis in *Blood Meridian* give us a device by which we might study things outside of a human perspective: one predicated on sight, touching, feeling. In effect, apophasis gets outside of language precisely to evoke the things outside of it in the material world. Deep time becomes a chronicling of this world beyond human life, and apophasis, the means to depict it. Apophasis becomes the tool to express the inexpressible, but what aspect of the material world would that inexpressible describe? And what variant of deep time would be expressed in it?

Deep objects act as markers of the natural within this sort of framework. By focusing on different aspects of the physical world, they reveal different types of time. Deep aquatic objects trace the changing and dynamic ways the earth has changed and humans with it. Deep mineral objects track the changes humans have made to the material world and how those changes have in turn affected human surroundings. Tensions between these different types of time might open up space for new theoretical interpretations. But extending Dimock's deep time into a new materiality might have other implications, in the way that refiguring human times holds increases accountability to temporal objects, to other people, other nations, and ultimately to the earth. Deep time holds us accountable and responsible for our actions on a global scale, because

environmental systems are not isolated from one another but imbricated in each other. Rather than distancing the importance of human timelines (an admitted danger within deep time frameworks), this project focuses inward on an entwined network of relational timelines with many strands of history dependent on one another.

These large entwined strands are central to *Blood Meridian*, as a deep time reading of the novel sheds light on large issues that scholars are preoccupied with in the current critical moment. Deep objects within the novel critique manifest destiny, but why does this expansionist doctrine need to be critiqued? Have we not, as a society, decided that this was imperialist and not a good thing? This might be the case, but because the Mexican-American war was the first war in which the term “manifest destiny” was defined (and, really, allowed it to be defined), the novel’s deep time tackles the beginning of a practice that persists into the present. Manifest destiny was predicated on material gain by means of intrusion and although it is a nasty part of history that we would like to forget, the same guiding principals have still led imperial entrees into other countries. They occurred in the years following Vietnam, when McCarthy wrote his novel, and they happen in Southeast Asia and Africa in the years during which this manuscript was written. This sort of expansion on a global stage is often based on sorts of mineral acquisition, whether for coltan in Namibia or iPhone manufacturing plants in China. In these scenes we see human lives intimately imbricated with their environment within the contemporary moment. But a larger extension of this imbrication comes with current climate change issues.

Deep objects provide us with a model for uniting human society with geologic history, in a method to better deal with the current ecological predicament. As a text, *Blood Meridian’s* deep time begins to make portents towards a human failure to engage outside of anthropocentric time. Recently, the Sonoran Desert, whose past iteration we see depicted in *Blood Meridian*, has

in actuality been shifting, expanding outward as drought spreads throughout the southwest. Similarly ideologies tied to the desert have shifted as well. The Colorado River has become rerouted in attempts to stave off this impending aquatic disaster, enfolding a present moment over the past rivers McCarthy depicts in his novel. These ecological ramifications that enfold the human with the environment extend towards a global scale. We can read this as our own failure to connect a deeper time to human centered time; its hard to read anything but a failure to read in anthropocentric time. Deep time “obliterates” the human, but also makes us refocus on climate change and ethical decisions. The world needs models for uniting the human with deep time, of not focusing on the obliterative aspects of geologic time that diminish human presence, but instead cultivating a sense of humility and remaining humble in the face of the eons.

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