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## **Lucy Bond**

‘In the eyeblink of a planet you were born, died, and your bones disintegrated’: scales of mourning and velocities of memory in Philipp Meyer’s *American Rust*

### **Abstract**

As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) has famously argued, the advent of climate change requires us to think questions of capital alongside ideas of species. However, Tom Cohen (2012) contends, critical accounts of climate change have exhibited a tendency to collapse the ecological into the economic, reinscribing the privileged epistemological and ideological homelands of liquid modernity (Bauman). Such slippages underscore the manifold conceptual insecurities inherent in imagining the era of the Anthropocene, which unsettle the fundamental categories of historical experience. As Robert Markley (2012) asserts, the Anthropocene “poses questions about [...] different registers of time”, most specifically, how to negotiate the complex interrelation – and simultaneous irreconcilability – of embodied time, historical time, and climatological time. Timothy Clark (2012), meanwhile, foregrounds the seismic “derangements of scale” engendered by the continuous shifts between local, national, and global spaces that are required by any attempt to examine the causes and consequences of climate change. Finally, Ursula Heise (2004 and 2008), among others, contends that the imbrications of the Anthropocene pose a challenge to established modes of narrative and cognition. Bearing these observations in mind, this article examines the ways in which Philipp Meyer’s (2009) *American Rust* attempts to reckon with the shifting dynamics of the Anthropocene without abandoning the ecological to the economic or collapsing disparate temporal and

spatial scales of historical and geological change. Exploring the social and environmental degradation of the American Rustbelt that accompanied the deregulation of the market in the late 1970s, Meyer posits the post-industrial era as a period of conjoined economic and ecological precarity. Continually shifting beyond its apparent historical and geographical roots in late-twentieth-century America, the narrative veers restlessly across diverse temporal and spatial scales, linking the casualties of the Rust Belt to other stories of dispossession and dislocation. Ultimately, I argue, Meyer's novel suggests that the study of literary planetary memory must examine not just the *scales*, but the *speeds* that inform cultural and critical practices of remembrance, analysing the uneven *memorative velocities* that shape the imagination and thought of diverse forms of suffering and loss across human and more-than-human milieux.

**Keywords:** memory; mourning; scale; speed; myth; nation; wilderness narrative; American pastoral

In his seminal work on climate change, Timothy Clark argues that 'the Anthropocene enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time, something which alters significantly the way that many once familiar issues appear'.<sup>1</sup> Such 'scale effects' register the manner in which 'at a certain, indeterminate threshold, numerous human actions, insignificant in themselves [...] come together to form a new, imponderable physical event, altering the basic ecological cycles of the planet'.<sup>2</sup> For Clark, the latency and invisibility of many of these phenomena act as a barrier to thought and action because they 'resist representation at the kinds of scale on which most thinking, culture, art and politics operate'.<sup>3</sup> Tom Cohen similarly

contends that the belated recognition of the manifold ecological crises that threaten the foundations of human and more-than-human life on this planet has been perpetuated by a *cultural amnesia* towards the destructive industrial legacies of modernity, and a concomitant *critical nostalgia* for intellectual ‘systems of security’ that previously promised ‘a properly political world of genuine praxis or feeling’.<sup>4</sup> For Cohen, such discourses have continued to prolong ‘the construct of ‘homeland security’ (both in its political sense, and in the epistemological sense of being secure in our modes of cognition)’ in ways that have simultaneously ‘accelerated the vortices of ecocatastrophic imaginaries’<sup>5</sup> and ‘anaesthetized’ the public to the dangers of climate change by allowing attention to the ‘supposed urgencies of threatened economic and ‘monetary’ collapse’ to ‘occlude and defer any attention to the imperatives of the biosphere’.<sup>6</sup>

This ‘collective blind or psychotic foreclosure’<sup>7</sup> arguably reinscribes an illusory separation of human and ‘natural’ history, which has, in turn, led to a widespread disavowal of the innate connection between socioeconomic insecurity and ecological vulnerability (and the elevation of the former over the latter as a category of cultural and critical concern). Together, Clark and Cohen conceive of the failure to adequately recalibrate culture and criticism to address the manifold crises of the Anthropocene as a *disorder of memory*, arising, on the one hand, from an unwillingness to relinquish outmoded regimes of imagination and thought, even in the face of their scalar derangement, and, on the other, from a refusal to remark or remember the myriad forms of social and environmental exploitation that attended the advent of industrial modernity. Bearing such issues in mind, this article will examine the ways in which Phillip Meyer’s (2009) novel, *American Rust*, foregrounds the

connection between socioeconomic and ecological precarity in order to expose the fallacious blindspots highlighted by Clark and Cohen.

Meyer's novel forms part of a growing corpus of American fiction that aims to problematise older conceptions of human/more-than-human relations, refusing the elevation of anthropogenic suffering above environmental catastrophe, and destabilising the institutional and epistemological biases that sustain the problematic modes of imaginary outlined above.<sup>8</sup> Unlike more prominent modes of 'cli-fi', many of these texts do not explicitly explore the topic of climate change, or its incumbent phenomena, rather, these issues are registered, tangentially, in the cracks and elisions of the narratives. Although they share many differences, each of these novels position the manifold (conceptual, ontological, ideological, and ecological) challenges of the Anthropocene as a crisis of memory, and, more specifically, of mourning, manifested in the failure to attune individual and collective losses to the scales of planetary destruction and the inability to relinquish anachronistic narratives that serve to mask the historical connection between socioeconomic and ecological violence.

Exemplifying such gestures, Meyer's novel explores the slow decline of the American rust-belt in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. The text traces a complex topography of loss, in which personal catastrophes (a death in the family, redundancy, homelessness, imprisonment) foreshadow and intersect with communal disasters (the closure of a steel mill, infrastructural collapse, racism, societal unrest), whilst the spectre of larger, human and more-than-human, calamities (terrorism, war, climate change) haunt the margins of the novel. Although it is rarely overtly addressed, the reality of ecological destruction hovers constantly in the background of the narrative, gestured towards in passing references to polluted rivers, climate change, the disrupted migration patterns of local birds, and the degraded

landscape of post-industrial Buell, the fictional setting of the text. The bucolic portrait of the Mon Valley is repeatedly unsettled by transient allusions to the invisible toxins by which it is pervaded. As Isaac, one of the protagonists, notes near the opening of the novel:

the water was slow and muddy and the forests ran down to the edge and it could have been anywhere, the Amazon, a picture from *National Geographic*. A bluegill jumped in the shallows – you weren't supposed to eat the fish but everyone did. Mercury and PCB. He couldn't remember what the letters stood for but it was poison.<sup>9</sup>

Isaac's romanticized natural imagery (peculiarly deterritorialized) is here abruptly disrupted by the implicit acknowledgment that this ecosystem has been poisoned by the region's industrial history. Such toxins trace chains of 'transcorporeal' relations that have the potential to reveal, in Stacey Alaimo's terms, 'the often unpredictable and always interconnected actions of environmental systems, toxic substances, and biological bodies', and, of course, the essential entanglement of human and more-than-human pasts, presents, and futures.<sup>10</sup> However, such links are never made overtly by the protagonists, eliding the fact that the socioeconomic and ecological crises facing present day Buell have their roots in the same historical processes.

The novel's polyvocal narratives draft the landscape of Buell into a nexus of historical violence in which personal, collective, and ecological crises are collapsed into an undifferentiated culture of mourning, in which the heat death of the universe comes to provide a screen memory for the loss of a parent, whilst the environmental damage wrought by Buell's industrial past is masked by a misplaced nostalgia for a timeless and redemptive natural order. Meyer thus problematizes the act of remembrance, foregrounding numerous examples of faulty, absent, or fictional

memory, in order to highlight the ways in which recuperated forms of national imagining (notably, the romanticised ideals of the American pastoral and the mythological struggles of the wilderness narrative) have been conscripted into flawed ‘memory regimes’ (to use Cohen’s evocative phrase) that foreclose any recognition of the imbrication of disparate modes of historical and environmental violence across variegated reaches of space and time. Attendant to such slippages, I suggest that the study of literary planetary memory must examine not just the *scales*, but the *speeds* that inform cultural and critical practices of remembrance, analysing the uneven *memorative velocities* that shape the imagination and thought of diverse forms of suffering and loss across human and more-than-human milieux.

#### **A. Rescaling literature and memory**

Such contentions have significant implications for the ways in which we think about the role that both literature and memory play in formulating a *planetary* imaginary. As Ursula Heise asserts, ‘climate change poses a challenge for narrative and lyrical forms that have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations, since it requires the articulation of connection between events at vastly differing scales’.<sup>11</sup> Sebastian Groes, in turn, argues that ‘[m]emory has been rethought [...]; much more central now are climatological and geological memory, and perhaps cosmological memory which dwarfs the individual, embodied memory that is part of anthropogenic thinking’.<sup>12</sup> Such ‘derangements of scale’ (to borrow Clark’s phrase) challenge orthodox frames of literature and memory, which have often been regarded as central to the creation of a *national* imaginary.

Benedict Anderson famously connects the birth of the modern nation-state to changes in print technology that led to the emergence of new forms of literature: the novel and the newspaper. He contends that ‘each of these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation’,<sup>13</sup> enabling geographically dispersed individuals and groups to picture themselves as part of a larger collective. Similarly, Pierre Nora’s seminal study of ‘lieux de memoire’ examines the ways in which official forms of commemoration aim to bind individuals into a ‘temporally-extended narrative’<sup>14</sup> by constructing a ‘geography of belonging’,<sup>15</sup> which positions national borders as containers of shared historical experience. However, the recent transnational (or transcultural) turn in literary and memory studies challenges such geographically delimiting approaches to imagination and history, highlighting the myriad ways in which past, present, and future experiences may be represented and remembered across local, national, and global scales.<sup>16</sup>

Wai Chee Dimock asserts that, as an imaginative framework, ‘the nation tends to work as a pair of evidentiary shutters, blocking out all those phenomena that do not fit into its intervals, reducing to nonevents all those processes either too large or too small to show up on its watch’.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, Dimock argues, literary studies must open this bounded imaginary to ‘the abiding traces of the planet’s multitudinous life’,<sup>18</sup> adopting a ‘set of multitudinous frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into [...] a densely interactive fabric’.<sup>19</sup> Positioning the work of mourning as an ethical foundation for interpersonal relations, meanwhile, Judith Butler argues that memory regimes should not be determined by exclusionary nationalist politics, but facilitate the expansion of the cultural, political, and juridical frames through which human life is acknowledged



as grievable so that ‘an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community’.<sup>20</sup>

Although such appeals to the unboundedness of literature and memory have been highly influential, certain aspects of these discourses are not without problem. Whilst giving Dimock ‘considerable credit for broaching the issue of scale in literary studies’,<sup>21</sup> Mark McGurl questions whether her apparent desire to ‘acquit culture of its complicity in historical violence’ by ‘dissolving it in a ‘deep time’ now recognisable as *aestheticised* time’ risks reducing the expanded scales and complicated causalities of the Anthropocene to ‘a remarkably frictionless conduit of transnational sympathy and identification’.<sup>22</sup> In his critique of Butler’s work, moreover, Cohen contends that, in the face of a ‘suddenly reset referential horizon’,<sup>23</sup> *Precarious Life* engenders a ‘negotiated back-loop to a more humane order’, ‘a residual humanism [that] cannot stop re-inscribing itself in familial *oikos* or boundedness’.<sup>24</sup> Thus, whilst McGurl indicts Dimock for too easily eliding culture’s role in facilitating or forgetting historical violence, Cohen criticizes Butler for too readily recuperating the anthropocentric frames of memory he considers to be complicit in upholding ideologically and ethically suspect regimes of thought and action. In both of these instances, then, there is a sense that the ‘premise of *mourning* [is] itself the problem’ with these expanded literary and memorative imaginaries.<sup>25</sup>

Such contentions have been echoed in other critical readings that posit the conceptual and imaginative challenges posed by the Anthropocene as a consequence of failed or misappropriated mourning. Stephanie LeMenager examines the ‘conditions of grief’ that have defined a ‘petro-melancholia’, which accompanies the dwindling of global oil resources.<sup>26</sup> For LeMenager, the failure to ‘acknowledge that conventional oil is running out’ has led to an ‘unresolvable grieving of modernity

itself'.<sup>27</sup> Whilst LeMenager highlights a refusal to relinquish the exploitative approaches to human/more-than-human relations that structured historical modernity, and led to the emergence of the Anthropocene as a geological epoch, Claire Colebrook critiques an oppositional tendency to seek solace in dreams of a pure and redeemed nature. In such scenarios, she comments, 'we mourn what we will have done to the planet', on the grounds that it 'implies an impossible counter-scenario where we might have lived in perfect harmony with a nature that might have been ours'.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Colebrook contends, 'rather than find recompense in mourning, we [should] look to [...] an evolution that was not one in which 'man' emerges from a background of life, but where humans and earth are both historical'.<sup>29</sup>

Collectively, then, McGurl, Cohen, LeMenager, and Colebrook suggest that unreflexive attempts to embrace the expanded spatial and temporal frames of the Anthropocene risk reproducing a misplaced nostalgia for, and rehabilitation of, outmoded imaginaries that reinscribe the very modes of denial that have facilitated the problematic separation of human and more-than-human life worlds (and the enduring exploitation of the latter by the former). Such anxieties are mirrored in *American Rust*, as Meyer examines the ways in which the impulse to open the frontiers of contemporary American experience beyond the geographical or historical frameworks of the United States repeatedly results in a romanticised recuperation of established national narratives that threaten, on the one hand, to reinscribe naive illusions of withdrawing from the complexities of social life into a timeless natural world, and, on the other, to remediate anthropocentric fantasies of taming the 'natural' wilderness. Each of these approaches manifests, in different ways, a failure of mourning, and a disavowal of the scalar, systemic, and cognitive complexities of the

Anthropocene and the disparate, yet interconnected, modes of precarity engendered by humanity's historical emergence as a geological force.

### **B. Derangements of scale: space and time in *American Rust***

Whilst Clark's call to expand the geographical and historical scales through which the Anthropocene is considered amounts to an exhortation to enlarge both the spatial and temporal frames of cognition through which climate change is understood, one of the peculiarities of Meyer's novel is that the protagonists are only able to make an imaginative leap across one of these axis at a time: they attempt, respectively, to confront the various socioeconomic dynamics that shape local, national, and transnational relations across the 'now' of the global present, or to acknowledge the complex processes of evolution and entropy that inform the 'here' of the geological past, but they cannot find a way of holding 'then' and 'there', globe and planet, together. This inability to think the history of economic and ecological change simultaneously across space *and* time replicates certain intellectual biases that have informed the spatial and temporal turns of critical theory over the past thirty years.

In her seminal account of the 'spatial turn' that preoccupied a number of theorists working across the social sciences and humanities in the late twentieth-century, Doreen Massey contends that space 'is the subordinated category, almost the residual category [...] within modernity, having suffered depriorisation in relation to time'.<sup>30</sup> Drawing upon the work of critics such as Edward Soja, Massey argues for a reconsideration of the political dimensions of space in order to challenge its naturalisation as a static or homogenous dimension of history, and expose the heterogeneous imbrication of local, national and global concerns. In so doing, she lays

out three principles that she believes should undergird a reconceptualisation of spatial dynamics in the early twenty-first century: ‘that we recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’; ‘that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality’; ‘that we recognize space as always under construction’.<sup>31</sup>

Charting the myriad ways in which the landscape of Buell, Pennsylvania, has altered in the post-industrial period, Meyer’s *American Rust* goes some way towards foregrounding the interrelation of spatial scales in the era of globalisation. The narrative constantly evokes the connectedness of different places and regions – as Poe, one of the protagonists remarks, ‘they could hear a stream running down to the ravine where it met the other stream and then the river. [...] From there it met the Ohio and the Ohio met the Mississippi and then down to the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. It was all connected’.<sup>32</sup> However, whilst this sense of interconnection can be contemplated harmoniously whilst framed in natural terms, when reconceptualised in the historical context of globalisation, the recognition of Buell’s essential imbrication with other spaces is perceived as inherently negative.

The inhabitants of the Mon Valley see themselves as having been abandoned by the federal institutions that ought to have protected them, falling victim to cheaper labour overseas and foreign governments more willing to invest in industrial infrastructure than the United States. As Poe’s mother, Grace, notes, ‘most ships and barges were now made in Korea, where the government owned all the industry’,<sup>33</sup> meanwhile her son remarks that, whilst he ‘wanted to believe in America’, ‘anyone could tell you that the Germans and the Japs made the same amount of steel America did these days [...] glory days are over’.<sup>34</sup> Believing themselves to have been

disenfranchised by processes of globalisation that saw ‘American’ industry exported abroad, Meyer’s protagonists seek to escape their disintegrating lives by heading ‘[b]ack to nature’,<sup>35</sup> figured as the timeless and stabilising antidote to an entropic socioeconomic order.

Massey describes such impulses as embodying a ‘retreat to place’, a ‘protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions’ engendered by globalisation. She continues ‘[p]lace, in this reading, is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal’.<sup>36</sup> Heise similarly critiques the elevation of a sense of place above a sense of planet that she sees at work in contemporary American environmentalism, contending that, whilst the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries might be regarded as ‘a cultural moment in which the entire planet becomes graspable as one’s own local backyard’,<sup>37</sup> this exposure to global forces has impelled the resurgence of a nostalgic strand of ‘ecolocalism’,<sup>38</sup> which functions as a ‘principal didactic means of guiding individuals and communities back to nature’.<sup>39</sup> Like Massey, Heise indicts this phenomenon as a ‘visionary dead end’,<sup>40</sup> comprised of ‘pastoral residues’, which ‘manifest themselves variously in longings for a return to premodern ways of life, “detoxified” bodies, and holistic, small-scale communities’.<sup>41</sup>

Such tendencies have considerable precedent in American cultural history. Leo Marx argues that the ‘pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery’.<sup>42</sup> This narrative presents the United States as ‘an unspoiled hemisphere’, providing settlers with the opportunity to ‘withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape’ (3).<sup>43</sup> From its earliest manifestations, the imaginary of the American pastoral has provided an important conduit for conceptualising human/more-than-human relations, and

thinking through – or paradoxically, eliding – the connection between land and nation, history and environment.<sup>44</sup> As Marx contends, successive incarnations of the pastoral imagination have evidenced a ‘powerful metaphor of contradiction’,<sup>45</sup> coupling the ‘urge to withdraw from civilization’s growing power and complexity’<sup>46</sup> with a ‘simple-minded wishfulness, a romantic perversion of thought and feeling’ that negates, even as it responds to, the intimate imbrication of nature and culture.<sup>47</sup>

This contradiction reached its zenith in the nineteenth century, as a new strain of the pastoral, ‘formed in reaction against industrialisation’,<sup>48</sup> intensified ‘the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialisation as counterforce to this myth’.<sup>49</sup> Marx perceives this ‘clash of opposed states’ in the work of the Transcendentalists, most notably the seminal writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. As has been widely remarked, there are numerous tensions in Emerson’s work that mirror the paradoxes of the American pastoral more generally. Whilst Emerson, on the one hand, positions nature as a place of solitude where man might ‘retire [...] from society’,<sup>50</sup> on the other, he collapses the distinction between these realms, arguing that ‘[n]ature is so pervaded with human life, that there is something of humanity in all, and in every particular’.<sup>51</sup> Emerson’s nature is simultaneously ‘inviolable by us’,<sup>52</sup> and endlessly exploitable ‘in its ministry to man’.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps, most importantly, however, nature is figured as both amnesiac and renewing – the sphere in which Emerson seeks ‘an original relation to the universe’ as a corrective to ‘the dry bones of the past’, to ‘the sepulchers of the father [...] biographies, histories, and criticism’.<sup>54</sup>

*American Rust* is replete with traces of resurgent Transcendentalism. Recalling the cabin to which Thoreau withdrew to practice his dreams of self-

sufficiency, Harris, Buell's chief-of-police, describes his homestead as his own 'Walden'. Such pastoral residues, to echo Heise's term, recur frequently throughout the text and primarily function to reinforce a romantic conceptualisation of nature, figured as the redemptive outside of human history. As Harris remarks at one point:

There was a mountain of paperwork as always, but he decided to let himself watch the river for a while, twenty minutes to sit and watch the sky change, the river just flowing, it had been there before man laid eyes on it and would be there long after everyone was gone. [...] Nothing mankind was capable of, the worst of human nature, it would never linger long enough to matter, any river or mountain could show you that – filthy them up, cut down all the trees, they still healed themselves, even trees outlived us, stones would survive the end of the earth. You forgot that sometimes, you begin to take the human ugliness personally. But it was as temporary as anything else.<sup>55</sup>

For Harris, the retreat to natural space can be perceived as an attempt to erase the violence of historical time, eliding the worst excesses of socioeconomic decline through the regenerative cycles of nature. However, throughout *American Rust*, this impulse to withdraw from history coexists with a contrasting imperative to escape the degraded *spaces* of post-industrial Buell through an invocation of immemorial cosmological *time* – a fantasy once again mediated through the framework of a foundational national narrative.

In response to earlier attempts to catalyse a critical reconceptualisation of space, in recent years an emerging body of scholarship has sought to reprioritise the theorisation of time. Such accounts typically contend that orthodox theories of globalisation have devalued attention to temporal experience in favour of examining its spatial dynamics. Sarah Sharma argues, for example, that, in a spatially biased

culture, ‘the very fact that shared space, social space, or the public sphere is the privileged ground of political life is symptomatic of the negation of the temporal’.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, Sharma asserts, whilst it may be true that ‘space continues to be the valorised site of political life at the expense of time’, it is important to recognize the temporal as constituting ‘a site of material struggle and social difference’ in order to ‘balance the spatial imaginary with a temporal imaginary’.<sup>57</sup>

For Sharma, as for other exponents of the temporal turn, the alleged spatial bias of globalisation theory has led to a homogenisation of time, which masks the fact that the global present is comprised of multiple temporalities, all constructs of power relations. As Jeremy Rifkin asserts, the essential diversity of temporal experience has, since the industrial revolution, been negated by ‘artificial time worlds’, structured around the parameters of the working day, which have ‘increase[d] our *separation* from the rhythms of nature’.<sup>58</sup> This separation from natural time is, of course, the very problem that Emerson and Harris seek to counter, hoping that the cyclical rhythms of nature will respectively renew or erase the quantified linearity of historical time. However, as Barbara Adam contends, rather than enacting a strict separation of two distinct temporalities, modernity engenders an ‘economic commodification of time’ through which the ‘time of ecological give-and-take becomes subsumed under the time logic of economic exchange, consumption and globalised market forces’.<sup>59</sup> Paradoxically, this appropriation of ‘natural time’ at once subordinates the differential periodicities of the more-than-human world beneath the homogenising time frames of industry, and facilitates the nostalgic recreation of nature as a timeless, alternative realm outside of commodification and consumption.

Whilst Adam, Rifkin, and Sharma argue that the impact of industrialisation historically facilitated the imposition of a normative chronopolitics that masked the



differential temporalities at work in both social and ecological life (or indeed, socioecological life), Robert Markley suggests that the consequent environmental legacies of industrial modernity have led to a reconfiguration of temporal dynamics.

For Markley:

Climate change invariably poses questions about time or, more precisely, different registers of time: experiential or embodied time, historical time, and climatological time. Each of these registers resists hard and fast definition, in part because climatological time – accessible through and mediated by a range of complex technologies – complicates and disrupts the connections among personal identity, history and narrative that Paul Ricoeur, for one, identifies as constituting the phenomenological and historical perceptions of time.<sup>60</sup>

Attendant to these complexities, Markley argues for a ‘critical archaeology of time’ able to acknowledge the variegated temporal relations engendered by the emerging phenomena of climate change.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout *American Rust*, Meyer’s protagonists struggle to navigate relations between embodied, historical, climatological, and even cosmological time. Although the narrative present remains embedded in early-twenty-first-century America, the characters reflect, nostalgically, upon the industrial heyday of the twentieth-century, conjuring heroic fantasies of reclaiming America’s settler past, seeking imaginative retreat to earlier geological epochs, and projecting themselves into the immemorial vastness of the universe. In each case, however, the scaling up of time can be construed as an attempt to escape the more localised problems of their present environment. For twenty-year-old Isaac, the landscape of the Mon Valley is a hopelessly haunted terrain. Whilst Harris sees his surroundings as a redemptive retreat from the violence of history, for Isaac, the natural world is a landscape of suffering

and pain: from the woods in which he inadvertently murders a ‘transient’ known as ‘the Swede’, to the river that is the site of his mother’s suicide, Buell is a topography of painful memory, from which Isaac attempts to flee, both geographically and imaginatively.

Hoping to start a new life in California, Isaac retraces the steps of the original pioneers, casting himself as the protagonist in his own wilderness narrative, and investing heavily in the idea that the past can be redeemed and the world made anew. Much like the American pastoral, the wilderness narrative is one of the foundational mythologies of the New World. As Ruland and Bradbury contend, ‘the essential Puritan myth’ was that of ‘a chosen people crossing the sea to enter a wilderness peopled with devils, suffering, trial and captivity’.<sup>62</sup> As seen in the writings of settlers such as William Bradford, and later commentators such as Cotton Mather, the wilderness narrative depicts the struggle to tame the landscape of the New World and conquer its native people. Like the American pastoral, the wilderness narrative has had an enduring (and varied) impact upon American literary culture,<sup>63</sup> and it, too, has been remediated in the face of the encroaching developments of industrial modernity and its afterlives.<sup>64</sup>

In the nineteenth-century, the wilderness narrative served as the model for the critical writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, who, in 1893, published his seminal work, ‘On the Significance of the Frontier in American History’. Turner’s essay is essentially a eulogy to the settlement of the New World (and the related ideology of manifest destiny, which underscored the ethos of national expansion throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries). He frames the period of industrialisation (and the closure of the frontier) as a time of historical transition, which poses a threat to the essential fluidity of pioneer life. ‘The peculiarity of American institutions’,

Turner proclaims ‘is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.’<sup>65</sup> Turner perceives the frontier as the regenerative force in American culture - a shifting terrain, at once constitutive of and unburdened by historical forces. He argues:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.<sup>66</sup>

Turner’s quintessential American is the frontiersman – a rugged and courageous individual, half outcast, half hero. Meyer’s Isaac possesses few of these characteristics, however, as he journeys across the United States, he reimagines himself as ‘the kid’ – a symbol of resourceful youth, afraid of nothing and no one. Over the course of Isaac’s travels, the kid assumes transhistorical dimensions. He becomes a roving figure, ‘[c]omrade to Arab traders and astronauts. All wanderers’,<sup>67</sup> a timeless hero ‘beyond the places he knows anyone. His material comforts falling away, no place will be foreign. The world is his home’.<sup>68</sup> Unmoored in space, the kid roams wide in time, however, for all the symbolic freedom promised by his alter ego, Isaac is plagued by recollections of his mother, and his own violent actions back in Buell.

Desperate to drive such thoughts away, Isaac immerses himself in fantasies of cosmic oblivion. Surveying the night's sky, he ruminates:

Closest star is twenty-five million miles. Proxima something. Burning before the dinosaurs. Burning still when there isn't any human left on earth. Different galaxies, a trillion stars. However small you feel you're nowhere close to the truth, atoms and dust specks.<sup>69</sup>

The exhaustion of a single life pales into insignificance when confronted with the vastness of the universe, and Isaac seeks solace in the erasures of cosmological time.<sup>70</sup> He comments, 'the stars stretched down to the horizon. Billions of them out there, all around us [...]. Come from and go back. Star becomes earth becomes man becomes God. Your mother becomes river becomes ocean. Becomes rain. You can forgive someone who is dead'.<sup>71</sup> However, whilst this vision of cosmic harmony may seem to offer a tentative mode of closure, Isaac is forced to concede that it is really a form of 'weak thinking' – another mode of denial in which the vastness of cosmological time is conscripted as a screen memory to displace troubling thoughts of more immediate loss and violence.<sup>72</sup>

### **C. Rethinking space-time relations: the question of speed**

Harris and Isaac thus construe contrasting scalar trajectories in their attempts to evade the memory of historical loss: whilst Harris hopes to dehistoricise space by seeking refuge in the amnesiac regenerations of localised place; so Isaac hopes to despatialise time, by evoking the immemorial cosmos in order to evade the unwelcome memories he associates with Buell and its environs. In so doing, both Meyer's protagonists evoke universalising cycles of decay and regeneration to negate the historical and

geographical complexities of their present, collapsing different scales of space and time into one another.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, each of these impulses implicitly evades the connection between historical and environmental violence: whilst Harris laments the social unrest generated by the closure of the mills, he does not acknowledge the ecological effects of this industrial heritage, unable to see the Mon Valley as anything other than a pure and unspoiled terrain; by contrast, Isaac characterises this landscape as a haunted place, bespoiled by remnants of unburied pasts, but cannot comprehend that these toxic traces, material and psychological, are also legacies of the region's industrial decline, which acted as a catalyst for both the suicide of his mother and the dispossession of the Swede and the other 'transients' that populate the text.<sup>74</sup>

The problem, then, is twofold: firstly, an inability to think spatio-temporal relationality in a nuanced or meaningful manner without dehistoricising space or despatialising time; secondly, a refusal to acknowledge the imbrication of socioeconomic and ecological precarity, without purifying nature or naturalising social violence. Clark suggests that such forms of denial are intrinsic to the 'Anthropocene disorder', which he describes as 'the emotional correlate of trying to think trivial actions in scale effects that make everyday life part of a mocking and incalculable enormity'.<sup>75</sup> Such reactions commonly attest to the difficulty of thinking beyond the quotidian 'terrestrial' framework of imagination and experience and the incapacity to escape that 'prereflective sense of scale inherent to embodied human life on the Earth's surface'.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Meyer's novel, these 'scale effects' catalyse a mode of disavowed mourning, which sees the recuperation of normative narratives – characterised by foundational national mythologies – through which the protagonists attempt to stabilise the uncertain present and redeem the unwelcome past.

Throughout the novel, Meyer implicitly connects these characters' individual modes of denial to a wider culture of forgetting. Despite the contrasting attitudes they appear to impel to human/more-than-human relations (the American pastoral constructing a harmonious vision of nature as the nurturing ground of human society and morality, the wilderness narrative documenting attitudes of domination and submission), both the American pastoral and the wilderness narrative have historically served to mask the imbrication of socioeconomic and ecological precarity. *American Rust* contains countless instances of the ways such imaginaries have naturalised manifold connections between the exploitation of people and landscapes. Looking out across the Mon Valley, Poe comments 'Christ it was a nice day. It could have been back in Indian times'.<sup>77</sup> This harnessing of the present into a premodern pastoral narrative occludes the fact that the displacement and genocide of Native American peoples, central to the establishment of the modern United States, was concomitant with the attempt to settle and 'tame' the American wilderness. Similarly neutralised is Isaac's romanticised allusion to slavery: 'looking out over the rolling hills, forest interspersed with pastures, the deep brown of the just-tilled fields, the wandering treelines marking distant streams', he caught sight of his father, sleeping. 'It was a peaceful scene [...] Like an old planter looking over his plantation'.<sup>78</sup>

Cleansing American history of its troubling elements, these lingering national imaginaries resemble the emotional and ideological homelands that Cohen holds responsible for upholding faulty memory regimes. Given the ways in which certain derangements of scale can be so easily elided, even appropriated, by problematic frames of memory, it thus appears as though a reflexive engagement with historical loss (human and more-than-human) might require a different mode of attention to both spatiotemporal and socioecological relationality. Accordingly, it seems

instructive to note that, in recent years, a growing body of work has begun to redress the unhelpful binary between space and time by calling for a critical reconsideration of *speed*. As Sharma contends, whilst globalisation theory has often privileged ‘a set of questions that focused on the impact of technologies built for acceleration and faster-moving capital on the democratic fate of a sped-up globe’,<sup>79</sup> ‘the complexity of lived time is absent’ from such accounts,<sup>80</sup> which fail to acknowledge the differentiated temporalities of contemporary life alongside their dispersed spatial relations. Critiquing the tendency to view the period of liquid modernity (Bauman) as an undifferentiated era of acceleration (which she identifies in the work of Paul Virilio, among others), Sharma calls for ‘a balanced space-time approach to understanding differential temporalities under global capitalism’.<sup>81</sup>

Also positioning speed as a key power dynamic in contemporary life, Lauren Berlant has argued for closer attention to the various modes of ‘slow death’ that escape dominant cultural and critical imaginaries, calling for greater awareness of ‘the temporalities of the endemic’<sup>82</sup> that accompany ‘the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence’, exposing ‘the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality’.<sup>83</sup> Berlant’s conception of slow death resonates strongly with Meyer’s portrayal of Buell as a town in which ‘*half the people went on welfare and the other half went back to hunter-gathering*’.<sup>84</sup> As the title of the novel makes clear, this is a region in slow decline: once the prosperous heart of America’s steel industry, Buell is ‘rust[ing] away to nothing’, ‘return[ing] to a primitive state’, populated by ‘the last living souls’.<sup>85</sup> The town has become ‘[t]he

ugly reverse of the American dream' where hard work will bring no reward, monetary or spiritual.<sup>86</sup>

Dispossessed by institutions of the American public sphere, the inhabitants of Buell ruminate on their status as second-class citizens. As Grace comments:

The mill had stayed closed, and then it had stayed closed longer, and eventually most of it was demolished. She remembered when everyone came out to watch the two-hundred-foot-tall and almost brand-new blast furnaces called Dorothy Five and Six get toppled with dynamite charges. It was not long after that that terrorists blew up the World Trade Center. It wasn't logical, but the one reminded her of the other. There were certain places and people who mattered a lot more than others. Not a single dime was being spent to rebuild Buell.<sup>87</sup>

Highlighting the disjunction between the attention garnered by the spectacular attacks on the Twin Towers and the gradual collapse of the American rust-belt, Grace's comments recall Rob Nixon's recent work on 'slow violence', which provides a useful correlate to Berlant's discussion of slow death.

Noting that '[p]olitically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft', Nixon argues that, in contrast to '[f]alling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes and tsunamis [which] have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power',<sup>88</sup> 'slow violence' manifests 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space'.<sup>89</sup> Crucially, Nixon asserts, slow violence affects 'the staggered and staggeringly discounted causalities, both human and ecological',<sup>90</sup> that arise 'in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded' – in places such as Buell, for example.<sup>91</sup> In drawing attention to the



imbrication of human and more-than-human vulnerability, Nixon's notion of slow violence thus underscores the need to think economic and ecological precarity together, whilst acknowledging differentiated speeds at which loss occurs across diverse scales of space and time.

Crucially, Berlant and Nixon posit the problems of slow death and slow violence as disorders of memory. Berlant argues that slow death construes 'a zone of temporality [...] where the structural inequalities are dispersed, the pacing of their experience intermittent, often in phenomena not prone to capture by consciousness organized by archives of memorable impact'.<sup>92</sup> Nixon similarly contends that '[t]he long dyings – the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological'<sup>93</sup> that arise from slow violence 'are underrepresented in strategic planning as well as in human memory'.<sup>94</sup> Thus it seems that, in order to engage with the 'representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility' of slow death and slow violence,<sup>95</sup> to make visible the imbrication of diverse forms of economic and ecological precarity, to counter the denials of the Anthropocene disorder identified by Clark, and to destabilise the imaginative and conceptual homelands critiqued by Cohen, it is necessary to rethink the relationship between different *scales* of mourning in order to attend to the diverse *speeds* (as well as the disparate *subjects*, both human and more-than-human) of historical violence.

#### **D. Memorative velocities and the planetary imaginary**

This endeavour should not only take into account the uneven speeds at which death and violence occur, as Berlant and Nixon suggest, but also attend to the immediacy or belatedness with which processes of loss are recognised and remembered. These

contentions seem particularly important in relation to the unfolding crises of industrial modernity and its afterlives. As has been suggested throughout this article, in many ways, the Anthropocene might be considered to invoke a crisis of mourning, not only because (as Cohen and McGurl suggest) of the challenge it poses to established regimes of thought and action, but also (as LeMenager and Colebrook contend) because the object of mourning is fundamentally opaque. The catastrophes of the Anthropocene are so widespread, engendering so many kinds of violence, across such large scales of space and time, that there is no clear focus of loss. This situation inevitably poses a change to orthodox psychoanalytic (Freudian) paradigms of grieving, which propose the act of mourning as a process through which, in Dominick LaCapra's terms, the mourner gradually relinquishes their attachment to the lost object 'in ways that permit a reengagement with ongoing concerns and future possibilities'.<sup>96</sup> The ambiguous causalities and uneven scales of the Anthropocene disrupt such neat formulations of individual or collective 'working through', as the object of loss is neither discrete nor fixed, but continually emerging and evolving.

In this sense, it seems imperative to regard Anthropocenic history as an ongoing process of mourning, continually frustrated and ultimately incomplete, in which disparate forms of slow and fast violence, entropic or sudden death, affecting myriad forms of human and more-than-human life, emerge, immediately or belatedly, into cultural and critical visibility. Accordingly, I suggest that it is important to attend to the differential *memorative velocities* at work in contemporary memorial culture. The concept of *memorative velocities* foregrounds the relationship between the scale and speed at which an event or experience takes place (its reach, duration, etc) and the scale and speed at which it is registered in cultural and critical discourse (the immediacy and breadth of its acknowledgement, its impact on thought and

imagination, etc). Highlighting tensions and intersections between the representation of disparate phenomena across embodied, historical, and climatological time and local, national, and global space, this approach aims to provide a way of thinking critically about diverse forms of historical violence without eliding attention to either macro or micro scales of loss. In so doing, it demands that we acknowledge all forms of imagination and thought as contingent and open to revision, as new images of disaster become, or are made, visible at unequal speeds, challenging existing conceptions of the world we inhabit, and the historical and geological processes that have shaped, and continue to shape, human and more-than-human existence on this planet.

Opening the past and its texts to revision in this way offers the possibility that renewed attention to the uneven and unequal trajectories of different memorative velocities might facilitate, in turn, the emergence of a literary counter-memory of modernity. Whilst Cohen, Berlant, and Nixon rightly suggest that cultural and critical discourses have been slow to register the extended violence (and prolonged dyings) of industrial modernity, the recent work of Clark and McGurl argues that the emergent literature of planetary memory requires a planetary recalibration of literary memory itself. Clark contends that the Anthropocene's challenge to normative models of interpretation engenders a 'breakdown of inherited traditions of thought',<sup>97</sup> which impels a reconsideration of established literary texts 'in relation to a newly recognized planetary context whose breadth and nature would not have been known to their writers at the time'.<sup>98</sup> McGurl argues that this process forms part of a 'new cultural geology', comprising 'a range of theoretical and other initiatives that position culture in a time-frame large enough to crack open the carapace of human self-concern, exposing it to the idea, and maybe even the fact, of its external preconditions'.<sup>99</sup> This

recalibration of literary memory reveals the ways in which challenges to the ‘residual humanism’ of contemporary writing and criticism are:<sup>100</sup>

already as it were *there* as a latency in the postmodern, in fact already there in the discourse of the ‘modern’, whose narrative of the progressive domination of nature by science has long been ironized by the discovery, in that very process, of the bizarrely humiliating length of geologic time, the staggering vastness and complexity of the known universe, the relative puniness of the human in the play of fundamental and evolutionary forces.<sup>101</sup>

*American Rust* does something interesting to the forms of retrospective reading outlined by Clark and McGurl. In their nostalgic appeal to older imaginaries, characters like Harris and Isaac reveal the continuing pull of established national fantasies – testifying, in Cohen’s terms, to the ongoing forms of security provided by these ideological homelands. However, throughout the novel, Meyer makes it clear that these discourses are inadequate to the task of framing, or containing, historical experience. As much as Harris tries to conjure a vision of an uncorrupted nature able to provide a panacea to historical violence, the narrative continually slides from pastoral to the social, gesturing towards the intimate imbrication of these two realms, and the inability to separate ‘timeless’ nature from the history of industrial modernity. Similarly, whilst Isaac tries to escape his own traumas through imaginative immersion in the amnesiac cosmos, the ghosts of his past cannot be tamed by his ineffective dreams of extinction, or his desperate desire to ‘scale-up’ embodied experience.

The idealised imaginaries to which Harris and Isaac turn in an attempt to disavow the destabilising effects of the present are thus exposed as nostalgic romances. Even more importantly, however, in gesturing to the traces of their earlier

iterations, Meyer also underscores the fact that such mythologies have always served a compensatory function: evoked to legitimise and stabilise an uncertain present; to impel a false sense of continuity over time; and to negate the violence that so often accompanies periods of historical transition. In foregrounding the flimsiness of these fantasies, *American Rust* suggests that, from the earliest settlement of the New World, to the remediation of these forms during the rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth-century, and onto the present day, the appeal to national mythologies such as the American pastoral and the frontier narrative is always already too late, invoked in a last-ditch-attempt to stave off processes of change (not necessarily of progress) that are irrevocably in force. In their heroic recreation of American history, such imaginaries thus seek to conceal the fact that they are essentially paradigms of mourning, evoked as elegies to a romanticised past that is perceived to be slipping away. Thus, whilst the recuperation of these imaginative homelands may, as Cohen suggests, superficially seem to buttress historical and cognitive blindspots, it seems important to acknowledge, as Clark and McGurl might argue and as Meyer demonstrates in *American Rust*, that a critical rereading of such texts has the potential to expose the essential emptiness of their promises, opening these frames of memory up for revision, and revealing the occlusions and biases naturalised by their tropes.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.72.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.x.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Cohen, 'Introduction', in Tom Cohen (ed.) *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), p.15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.14.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.15.

<sup>8</sup> For other novels in this corpus, see Blake Butler, *Scorch Atlas* (Chicago: Featherproof, 2009); Joshua Ferris, *The Unnamed* (London: Viking, 2010); Jonathan Lethem, *Chronic City* (London: Faber, 2010); Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Philipp Meyer, *American Rust* (London: Pocket Books, 2009), p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010), p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p.205.

<sup>12</sup> Sebastian Groes, 'Introduction to Part III: Ecologies of Memory', in Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Memory in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), pp.140-146.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p.25.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan A. Bell, 'Mythscape: Memory, mythology, and national identity', *British Journal of Sociology* 54.1 (2003), p.69.

<sup>15</sup> Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Patterning the National Past', in Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007), p.169.

<sup>16</sup> For examples of the transnational turn in literary studies, see: Geoffrey V. Davis, Peter H. Marsden, Bénédicte Ledent, and Marc Delrez (eds), *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth CP, 2011); Franke Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff (eds), *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009). For a discussion of the transcultural turn in memory studies, see: Aleida Assmann, Aleida and Sebastian Conrad (eds), *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds), *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); Rick Crownshaw (ed.), *Transcultural Memory*. (London: Routledge, 2014); Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Susan Gillman (eds), *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p.145.

<sup>18</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. pp.3-4.

<sup>20</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), pp.xii-iii.

<sup>21</sup> Mark McGurl, 'The Posthuman Comedy', *Critical Inquiry* 38.3 (2012), p.536.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.534.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, 'Introduction', p.21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), p.102.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>28</sup> Claire Colebrook, 'Time that is Intolerant', Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Memory in the Twenty-First Century: Critical Perspectives from Sciences and Arts and Humanities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), p.151.

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- <sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.157.
- <sup>30</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p.29.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.9.
- <sup>32</sup> Meyer, *American Rust*, p.71.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.44.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.94.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.11.
- <sup>36</sup> Massey, *For Space*, pp.4-5.
- <sup>37</sup> Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, p.4.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.9.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.21.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.122.
- <sup>42</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p.3.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> As evidenced in the writings of John Winthrop, the New World is perceived as a 'city upon a hill', a divine nation, whose providential history is preordained by 'covenant' with God, and whose exceptional destiny is inscribed upon its very landscape. As Malcolm Bradbury and Richard Ruland contend, in the eighteenth century, this typological mode of the American pastoral shifts into a more secular register, as 'the American metaphysic that would merge man and terrain' into an ever-closer relationship emerges in the work of writers such as Thomas Jefferson and J. Hector St John de Crevecoeur, whose thought, in their terms, 'provides a powerful demonstration of how a new nature and a new social order might generate a new kind of man and close the great circle of civilization on American soil'. See Malcom Bradbury and Richard Ruland, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: a History of American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.37.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.4.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.9.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.10.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.201.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.229.
- <sup>50</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Marston Gate: Amazon Publishing, no date), p.6.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.46.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.47.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.10.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.4.
- <sup>55</sup> Meyer, *American Rust*, pp.122-3.
- <sup>56</sup> Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), p.12.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.10.
- <sup>58</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, *Time Wars: The Primary Conflict in Human History* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), p.12.
- <sup>59</sup> Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.14.
- <sup>60</sup> Robert Markley, 'Time', in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), p.43.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.45.
- <sup>62</sup> Bradbury and Ruland, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, p.27.
- <sup>63</sup> The influence of this form can be clearly seen in the eighteenth century gothic novels of Charles Brockendon Brown, as well as the nineteenth century romances of Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

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<sup>64</sup> In terms that resonate strongly with the tropes of *American Rust*, for example, Raymond Malewitz notes that the cultural imaginary of the twenty-first century U.S. has been characterized by the return to 'nostalgic notions of rugged individualism 'that 'mediate between the mythic modes of self-sufficiency required by [America's] older, frontier culture and the empty and rusty realities that characterize its transition to a postindustrial economy'. See Raymond Malewitz, "Regeneration Through Misuse: Rugged Consumerism in Contemporary American Culture", *PMLA* 127.3 (2012), p.527.

<sup>65</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History'. (1893). <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner/chapter1.html> [Date accessed: 17 March 2016].

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Meyer, *American Rust*, p.101.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.103.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. pp.105-6.

<sup>70</sup> Throughout the novel, a scaled-up sense of time is repeatedly used to occlude the fear of death and loss. Confronting his own mortality, Henry, Isaac's father, remarks, 'Earth is made of bones. From wood and back to wood and you never know what came before you' (286). Fearing that he will die in his prison cell, Poe similarly asserts, '[t]he truth was people died every minute [...], really, when you were born, you were the same as a name on a gravestone. A gravestone of the future. A born destiny' (320). Whilst Harris asserts, '[a]ll the dead men of the world – they had once been alive. That was what people forgot' (327).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp.342-3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.105.

<sup>73</sup> These impulses expose the ways in which our approach to the more-than-human – whether regenerative nature or the inhuman cosmos – is always already framed by anthropocentric perspectives. As Colebrook argues, we do not 'exist as historical agents against a stable and timeless nature, for nature is part of an overall milieu of composition in which we are affected as respondents to a world that is always unfolded from our practices'. Similarly, Mark Currie contends, it is a 'mistake to align phenomenological [or embodied] time with the life of the mind and cosmological time with the outside world' for, ultimately, 'we are left with a kind of cosmological time conceived and perceived from within human experience and the mind'. See: Colebrook, 'Time that is Intolerant', P.147; Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), p.77.

<sup>74</sup> In this sense, it seems instructive that the woods in which Isaac murders the Swede contain the ruins of Buell's industrial infrastructure, whilst the river in which he mother committed suicide historically powered the steel industry. However, the recognition of this essential interconnection of social and natural history is further elided by the protagonists' repeated naturalization of industrial ruins throughout the novel. As Isaac remarks, in tellingly evocative terms, of the former steel mill, 'its buildings [were] grown over with bittersweet vine, devil's tear thumb, and tree of heaven. The footprints of deer and coyotes criss-crossed the grounds: there was only the occasional human squatter' (8). In Harris's words, this process manifests '[n]ature assimilating man's work' (53), as both the material remnants of the mill, and its invisible ecological afterlife, are dehistoricised.

<sup>75</sup> Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, p.140.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.34.

<sup>77</sup> Meyer, *American Rust*, p.97.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>79</sup> Sharma, *In the Meantime*, p.5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.14.



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- <sup>82</sup> Lauren Berlant, 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)', *Critical Inquiry* 33.4 (2007), p.756.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.754.
- <sup>84</sup> Meyer, *American Rust*, p.120.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.8.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.230.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid. p.45.
- <sup>88</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2011), p.3
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid. p.2.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.3.
- <sup>92</sup> Berlant, 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)', p.759.
- <sup>93</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p.2.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.3.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.2.
- <sup>96</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), p.45.
- <sup>97</sup> Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, p.xi.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid. p.52.
- <sup>99</sup> Mark McGurl, 'The New Cultural Geology', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3-4 (2011), p.168.
- <sup>100</sup> Cohen, 'Introduction', p.22.
- <sup>101</sup> McGurl, 'The New Cultural Geology', pp.380-1.