

## The Poetics of Size: Rendering Apocalyptic Scale in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the textual rendering of space in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), two novels depicting the ancient trope of apocalypse. Contributing to the study of geography in literature, it argues that these authors manipulate perspective, language and content to distort the familiar shape of spatial units, creating story worlds that resonate with a crisis of scale. Inverting the spatial enlargement produced by globalisation, they depict societies ruined by a global network they cannot "cognitively map." The consideration of scale is crucial to fully understanding the sense of crisis apparent in contemporary apocalyptic fiction, which manifests, in our era of global connectedness, as an anxiety about the extent of human activity.

**KEYWORDS:** literary geography, space in literature, apocalypse in literature, scale in literature, cognitive mapping, Cormac McCarthy, Nevil Shute

Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) are two literary works depicting the ancient trope of apocalypse. Separated by almost fifty years, the great differences in form, style, pacing, and context of these two novels

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exposes their shared preoccupation with limitation and immensity as they render the magnitude of global finality. Representing characters who are connected to a decaying global world they cannot fully perceive, the techniques and language these authors use to create their story worlds resonate with a crisis of scale. This article examines the textual rendering of scale in these two novels, arguing that both authors use “the scale-shifting qualities of literary language” to invert the sense of spatial enlargement produced by the era of globalisation, portraying instead a global network of geography and power that dwarves the scope of individual lives.<sup>1</sup>

After first providing some general context to the novels, I explain the merits of “scale” as a critical methodology facilitating the close reading of spatial relationships in literary works. I then begin my close reading by unravelling the ways these authors limit the perspectives of characters to their immediate localised settings, thereby creating an atmosphere of frustrated mystery which is shared by the reader. Following this, I demonstrate how the authors “scale back” the spaces enlarged by globalisation by depicting landscapes littered with the skeletons of fuel-run transport and the goods produced by global capitalism. Finally, I explain how each author illustrates the extent to which language and the imagination weave together real and imagined spaces, crossing scales to stitch together distant geographies. By so manipulating spatial scale, these authors produce feelings of limitation and immensity that enact the apocalyptic function of reducing humans to size, and remind their readers of the need to “cognitively map” the global.

## TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Although both novels present apocalyptic scenarios, *On the Beach* and *The Road* are vastly different in terms of content and style. Shute’s novel responds to the palpable threat of nuclear weapons in the 1950s Cold War era, describing the gradual but complete eradication of humanity in the wake of a “short, bewildering war.”<sup>2</sup> Following a conventional plot structure centred on action, the story focuses on four main characters who await the arrival of nuclear contamination as it drifts steadily from the northern hemisphere to their location in Melbourne, Australia. Brian Baker

notes the novel's "clear affinities" with what is termed the "cosy catastrophe"—a disaster novel in which "nothing really happens"—as the catastrophe is offstage and the focus remains on a small group of people.<sup>3</sup> Shute's characters occupy their final days with picnics and hobbies, unable to comprehend total global devastation. Set in Shute's immediate future of the 1960s, the novel was written after the demonstration of humanity's power to instigate a "do-it-yourself apocalypse"<sup>4</sup>—the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1944—and at a time when Britain was, nevertheless, proceeding with nuclear testing in remote Australia.<sup>5</sup> *The Road*, in contrast, presents the journey of a nameless father and son as they struggle to survive in a landscape ruined by an unidentified catastrophe, following "the road" towards the coast in the hope this will prolong their survival. Anything but "cosy," the novel depicts graphic scenes of human entrails, cannibalism, and a foetus charring on a spit as the protagonists move through the wasteland of their post-apocalyptic world. With obscured origins and an indeterminate end, the characters' journey is rendered in poetic prose fragments assembled to mirror their plotless progression along the road—a style dramatically different to Shute's novel. *The Road* takes place in what the reader understands as the United States of the post-2000s future, and while the cause of the catastrophe is withheld, its effect is the destruction of the natural world. Paired with its cultural context—when the urgency to act against anthropogenic global warming had gained mainstream worldwide attention—the novel is considered an environmental statement and "owes much of its cultural impact to climate change."<sup>6</sup>

Despite these dramatic differences, the similarities between the two texts are significant. Both novels achieved immense popular success: *On the Beach* was what Andrew Milner terms "a major local and international cultural event," being printed twice in its year of publication and remaining "more or less continuously in print thereafter"; *The Road* was awarded a string of prizes, including the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and had its general popularity confirmed by its selection to Oprah Winfrey's Book Club.<sup>7</sup> Within three years of publication, each text was adapted into an equally successful Hollywood film—*On the Beach* in 1959, and *The Road* in 2009. In defining apocalyptic literature, David Ketterer claims that the purpose of this genre is

“the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship ... with the ‘real’ world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that ‘real world’ in the reader’s head.”<sup>8</sup> The popular success of Shute and McCarthy’s novels attests to their achievement of this credible, frightening relationship. It is my argument that this credible relationship stems from the idea, central to each, of a shared global geography and biosphere endangered by human activity. Both Roslyn Weaver and Andrew Keller Estes have presented readings of *On the Beach* and *The Road* which focus on national mythologies, Australian and American respectively.<sup>9</sup> Here I argue that more than national consciousness, what can be read in these texts is a powerful sense of global interdependence. Themes of denial and helplessness run through each text as the characters struggle to reconcile their intimate, personal worlds with a global one in ruins.<sup>10</sup> None of them possess the agency to act on a global scale and avert the catastrophes set in motion. Instead, they experience and mediate devastation within the context of their local lives. This mirrors the sense of helplessness experienced by individuals in the real global world, where human actions—from the large, such as nuclear disaster, to the small, such as driving a car—endanger the health of the planet. With enormous power lying in the hands of a small group of political leaders and wealthy corporations, there is the overwhelming sense that the power to effect large-scale change remains beyond the reach of ordinary individuals—and yet, as the planet faces the immensity of anthropogenic climate change, the myth that individuals carry out their personal lives in isolation from their wider context is also shattered. Shute and McCarthy dramatise this crisis of scale, casting their characters as small and puny within a global context. To do so, each author similarly distorts spatial scale through perspective, language, and content to convey the narrowing parameters of human life. Oscillating between the very small and the very large, these works use scale to portray “the end of it, the very very end.”<sup>11</sup>

Scale, as a critical methodology, allows literary scholars to examine the poetics of size. A term borrowed from cultural geography, it “blends horizontal aspects of size and extent with the vertical concept of hierarchy” to examine the intersections and relationships between spatial units such as the body, home, town, region, city, nation,

and globe.<sup>12</sup> As Hsuan Hsu explains, authors manipulate textual elements such as perspective and setting to instil feelings that make “scales cohere, transform, or unravel” in specific ways.<sup>13</sup> John Timberlake, in his recent work on landscapes in science fiction, argues that “juxtapositions of size persist as a recurrent element in the landscapes of science fiction,” where scale is used to render the everyday extraordinary and fantastical, and importantly, to depict shifts in power.<sup>14</sup> While the “exhilaration” of spatial enlargement can be read in literature from the epoch of colonial expansion,<sup>15</sup> Fredric Jameson astutely characterises postmodern cultural output as defined by feelings of spatial confusion and impuissance.<sup>16</sup> Our inability to “cognitively map”<sup>17</sup> the enormous spaces connected by global capitalism, yet observed through flat screens, results in a crisis of scale in which the globe becomes a “textualised no-place.”<sup>18</sup> This sense of disorientation experienced by individual subjects of the postmodern era produces cultural languages “dominated by categories of space,” a quality which manifests in both *The Road* and *On the Beach*.<sup>19</sup> The overarching theme of mapping in *The Road*, as critic Daniel Weiss points out, calls attention to the “oppositional consciousness” of topographical inscription—the desire to know the vastness of space by constraining it with borders—which defines the novel.<sup>20</sup> McCarthy’s characters navigate their post-apocalyptic terrain from a torn up map of a world that cannot be “made right again.”<sup>21</sup> *On the Beach* finds its premise in the spatial positioning of Melbourne on the “edge of the world.”<sup>22</sup> The cognitive reckoning of vast spaces remains a preoccupation of Shute’s characters, who can “visualise” neither the distant global spaces eradicated of life, nor their own impending death.<sup>23</sup> The “widely shared sense of crisis” which germinates the “strikingly long-lived” genre of apocalyptic fiction manifests, in the era of postmodern global connectedness, as an anxiety about the global scale of human activity—and an individual’s capacity to act in it.<sup>24</sup>

## SCALE AND HUMAN LIMITATION

Shute and McCarthy both manipulate perspective, lexicon and content to scale their characters’ personal, local lives as small and limited. The perspective afforded in both

novels is dictated by a sense of limitation. Both authors restrict their narrator's perspective to the scope of individual perception, restricting the point of view to the scale of the individual body. The free indirect discourse of *The Road* is focalised through the father, providing access to his thoughts and immediate perception as he toils across the post-apocalyptic landscape: "they collected some old boxes and built a fire in the floor and he found some tools and emptied out the cart and sat working on the wheels."<sup>25</sup> In simple language, the narrator describes what is happening as the man and boy experience it, without the perspective or foreshadowing granted from an omniscient point of view. While the characters strain to see further, their perceptive faculties remain inadequate, and frustratingly human: "What do you see? the man said. Nothing."<sup>26</sup> Their inability to see across the landscape casts their puny scale against the immensity of what they face and what they lack in meeting it. This is reinforced in the phrase "I don't know," a sustained echo throughout the novel, appearing in the dialogue between the man and boy.<sup>27</sup> Although the language and style of Shute's novel is markedly more loquacious than McCarthy's, the third-person narrator of *On the Beach* similarly limits the reader's knowledge to that of the characters. In the opening passage, for example, the narrator's slow release of information matches Peter's waking brain: "he woke happy, and it was some time before his conscious senses realised and pinned down the origin of his happiness."<sup>28</sup> Shute's narrator stops short of describing what is beyond the characters' perceptual range, building dramatic tension and suspense as well as a sense of limitation. While statesmen beyond the narrative gaze "compare notes and assess the new conditions," our characters turn their gaze to the personal, returning like Peter "to his home and his Morris Minor car."<sup>29</sup>

Reinforcing this perspectival limitation is the crafted lexicon of obscurity and blindness apparent in each novel. The impenetrable "dark" and "gray" landscape of *The Road* obscures the world like "some cold glaucoma."<sup>30</sup> In constant danger from roving cannibals, the man and boy are ceaselessly surveying the landscape, "watching for any sign" of threat.<sup>31</sup> Their survival lies in their ability to see through the "murk."<sup>32</sup> Providing the main source of dramatic tension in a novel with an understated plot, the

foreboding sense that their ability to perceive with clarity is limited keeps their “frailty” at the forefront of the narrative, the reader sharing the man’s anxiety that “there had to be something overlooked but there wasn’t.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the naval portions of *On the Beach* emphasise the narrow lens and perspective of the submerged submarine’s periscope. On their reconnaissance missions north, the officers of the USS *Scorpion*—“the only naval vessel in Australian waters with any worth-while radius of action”—seek signs of life, however their view is impeded by the periscope which “reached barely higher than the wharf decking, and the warehouses then blocked the view.”<sup>34</sup> From Cairns to Port Moresby, San Francisco to Seattle, they study the world through the periscope, “though there was little to look at.”<sup>35</sup> The immensity of the apocalypse remains just outside their vision. The effect is an inchoate claustrophobia which permeates each novel—the sense, as Roslyn Weaver articulates it, that “there is no escape for the characters, no way of preventing or postponing the inevitable.”<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the narrator of each novel withholds details about the catastrophic cataclysm, again contrasting the impuissance of individual subjects with the epic proportions of apocalypse. The “absence of a clear cause for the world’s devastation” in *The Road* has attracted critical attention and a breadth of interpretation.<sup>37</sup> Critics cite climate catastrophe brought on by global warming, nuclear winter, and indeed, the supernatural wrath of God in the arrival of the Revelation, yet neither critics, reader, nor characters can definitively state the cause of the disaster.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the characters and readers are made to feel their inability to penetrate “mystery.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike *The Road*, the cause of the cataclysm is explicit in *On the Beach*, although the details of it are not. Of the “short, bewildering war,” no one’s information is complete, and neither is it provided to the reader as anything but the incoherent morsels of information known by the characters. Dwight Towers remarks, “I was in [the war] for a little while, but I don’t know a thing about it.”<sup>40</sup> On their exploratory mission to Cairns, the characters “learned nothing, unless it was the purely negative information that Cairns looked exactly as it always had before.”<sup>41</sup> It is not until the characters physically go to the northern hemisphere and see for themselves that “everyone’s dead” that the annihilation of life is confirmed.<sup>42</sup> This

spurs the narrative in a new direction as the realisation dawns on both characters and reader that, in fact, “everyone—without exception—is going to die.”<sup>43</sup> The effect of withholding the details of the cataclysmic war is that together the reader and characters reach blindly into the unknown, each clinging to the false hope offered by red herrings—the window frame “teetering” on a transmitting key—and a paucity of information.<sup>44</sup> Thus, sketching the limits of human perception, the characters are dwarfed by the immense scale of the unknown spaces surrounding them.

Led with the symbolic images of their titles, the tension of this human scale is also set against the backdrop of primordial structures. The original cover of *On the Beach* depicts the four main characters huddled on what Shute explicitly stipulated as the banks of the River Styx.<sup>45</sup> Lacking a major plot event which takes place “on the beach,” the beach functions as a persistent setting that at once signifies the characters’ denial of their fate, and the liminal space they occupy as they enter their final months of life. In the opening scene of the novel, Peter feels the sunburn lingering on his back from “their day on the beach yesterday.”<sup>46</sup> Spending their finite time bathing and picnicking, the sunburn brings to their leisurely beach day the ominous hint of catastrophe. As the narrative continues, holiday scene after holiday scene takes place on the beach, where they “drink a cup of tea and eat small cakes,” “stroll,” and smoke cigarettes, “drying their feet in leisurely manner in the sun and brushing off the sand.”<sup>47</sup> The unsettling juxtaposition of the Australian summer seaside with the post-apocalyptic globe connects local, global, and primordial scales, bringing a resonate feeling of doom to characters conducting their lives on the liminal space of the shore. Similarly, in McCarthy’s novel “the road” provides the spine to the characters’ precarious journey and the narrative itself. Moving on and off the road, they follow the direction carved out by this relic of a world now burned, “black lines” on a torn map that used to be state roads.<sup>48</sup> Populated by gangs of roving cannibals, providing no extra protection from the firestorms which sweep the landscape erratically, their path laid on top of the dangerous “road” is given no reasoning except for this loose reference to navigation. Why do they have to follow the road rather than strike out through the wilderness? The road, like the beach, stitches together local, global, and

primordial scales to signify the passage of human life set on its unavoidable course towards death, summoning at once the structure of our eschatological paradigms and the demise of “what used to be called” the United States.<sup>49</sup>

### SCALING BACK THE GLOBAL

In addition to contrasting human limitation with global and apocalyptic immensity in these ways, both Shute and McCarthy “scale back” the spaces enlarged by globalisation. They do this by representing the restricted movement of people and goods in a post-fuel, post-apocalyptic world, while simultaneously placing global networks at the origins of the apocalypse.

The characters’ geographical agency is limited, as each text presents characters whose laborious movement across a landscape now denuded of fuel-run transport distorts familiar territory and easy distances into expansive tracts of land. The authors achieve this rescaling of physical spaces through imagery of defunct human-made transportation. Cars and their post-fuel alternatives feature prominently in *On the Beach*. Although fuel reappears from an unexplained source that allows the characters to meet their end in fast cars, the first two thirds of the novel are characterised by the lack of it, because “all oil came from the northern hemisphere.”<sup>50</sup> Peter is represented pedalling his push-bike across the landscape, and displaying his ingenuity for rejigging defunct motorbike wheels into bike trailers, while his beloved Morris Minor sits immobile in his garage.<sup>51</sup> Only Victoria’s own “brown coal” keeps the trams rattling through the empty streets of Melbourne.<sup>52</sup> Portraying the impotence of human machinery without the global product of oil, Shute extracts the global from the local to depict the receding scale of human mobility. The very last sentence poignantly depicts Moira swallowing her suicide tablets as she sits, facing the sea, “behind the wheel of her big car” which will, now, take her nowhere.<sup>53</sup> Not the only character to die in her car, Moira’s relation John Osborne also ingests his suicide pills behind the wheel of his “glorious” Ferrari.<sup>54</sup> This loud, brave invention of global modernity is transformed into the image of immobility. More explicitly commenting on the evils of consumer capitalism, McCarthy’s man and boy watch “the road fall

away before them” over the handle of a shopping cart pushed relentlessly over uneven terrain, carrying their possessions.<sup>55</sup> Moving slowly across a landscape “trashstrewn” with the remains of consumer capitalism, they come across “empty parking lot[s],” “charred and rusting cars,” a rusted locomotive, and a marooned sailboat.<sup>56</sup> In a post-apocalyptic society ruled by consumption “literally and figuratively,” these metal skeletons depict McCarthy’s vision of the logical end to a capitalist system bred up from the Fordist production line.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the retraction of global goods leaves humans dealing with scarcity and limitation. An ironic reliance on the human-made punctuates the movements of the man and boy as they arduously labour along in *The Road*. While the “bad guys” of the novel turn to cannibalism to sustain themselves in a world emptied of resources and living things, the man and boy’s hope of survival is reduced to the image of a “grocery cart” filled with “canned goods” and gas.<sup>58</sup> McCarthy thus depicts the gross human sin of “blind consumerism” that has reached the scale of a global economy, and for which this apocalyptic wasteland is punishment.<sup>59</sup> Somewhat less dire, in *On the Beach* Dwight’s frustrated search for a pogo stick he will never be able to gift to his daughter in the northern hemisphere dramatises the dwindling presence of the global in the local: “Pogo sticks, it seemed, were off the market.”<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps most significant of all is the image of a Coke bottle, specific and isolated, which features starkly in both novels. A universal symbol of capitalism, this very small object becomes a symbolic artefact of a world governed by global flows of commodities. The last possible hope for life in Shute’s contaminated world is an incoherent signal coming from a radio station on Santa Maria Island, off the northwestern coast of the United States. A station with “global” transmission range, the USS *Scorpion* crosses the ocean from Melbourne to investigate.<sup>61</sup> Their discovery is the above-mentioned window frame “teetering” on a transmitting key, whose corner is unstably supported by “an overturned Coke bottle.”<sup>62</sup> This small, innocuous object is the anti-climax to “something that had absorbed so much effort and attention in Australia, on the other side of the world,” and from here the narrative quickens towards the final, irrevocable end.<sup>63</sup> In *The Road*, the image of a Coca Cola can has a

more complex web of meaning attached to it. In a world Jordan Dominy describes as “commodified and converted to waste,”<sup>64</sup> this normally ubiquitous refreshment has become a scarce “treat” the father presents ceremoniously and selflessly to his son, because he “wont ever get to drink another one.”<sup>65</sup> The Coke thus signifies the boy’s lost future, and the greed of a society who did not safeguard the world for future generations. Yet ironically Coke also symbolises the cause of the wasteland the father and son find themselves in—that is, global neoliberal capitalism. In these two scenes, both authors use the very small detail of a stranded Coke bottle or can to connect the apocalypse at once to global structures and the individual lives that act, inescapably, within them.

### LANGUAGE AND IMAGINATION ACROSS SCALES

In contrast to the global systems that threaten the biosphere and dwarf individual lives, both Shute and McCarthy highlight the role of language in binding together real and imagined spaces, and how this might play out in, and help us to avoid, a post-apocalyptic world. In so doing, they embed hope in our communicative and imaginative faculties, stressing the importance of cognitive visualisation across scales.

Shute highlights the role language plays in allowing individual subjects to “cognitively” grasp vast spatial scales.<sup>66</sup> He demonstrates the power of semantics to stitch together distant geographies in the friendly banter between Peter, Moira and Dwight regarding her “jinker.”<sup>67</sup> An Australianism, Dwight calls her jinker a “buggy,” highlighting his presence as a “stranger far from home in a strange land.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Moira’s jinker is a reconditioned American antique, which causes Dwight to recall his distant childhood in Maine, where his grandfather owned the same model.<sup>69</sup> The power of language to traverse space recedes, however, as the humans in *On the Beach* approach their final erasure. From the outset of the novel, the spatial range of communication networks is shrinking, as Peter takes the train to Melbourne without a newspaper to distract him from his speculations, “for the paper famine had closed down all the daily newspapers and news now came by radio alone.”<sup>70</sup> As Shute’s bleak novel unfolds, the gradual extinguishing of radio contact

with other nations marks the progress of global death, beginning with their inability to relay signals to the distant northern hemisphere and building up to the final, encroaching doom signified by radio silence marching southwards from Brisbane to Sydney, Canberra, and Albury.<sup>71</sup> The characters lament that no history of the war “ever would be written now,” that no “coherent story” will remain once they have died, although logically they know no one will be alive to care.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Shute warns his reader that the only literature we will have about an apocalyptic future is literature such as the novel they hold in their hands, which presents the imagined space of the apocalypse.

While McCarthy stitches together geographies with language, his focus is the new and imagined spaces—rather than existing real spaces—presented by a post-apocalyptic landscape. Denuded of superfluous words and punctuation, the language of *The Road* is as sparse as the landscape it describes. The restricted vocabulary is marked by simple word choice and copious repetition, the words “okay,” “know,” “gray,” and “scared” featuring prolifically.<sup>73</sup> Thus, McCarthy emphasises the shortcomings of our linguistic repertoire in conveying the horror and immensity of an apocalyptic scenario, a thing “without cognate and so without description.”<sup>74</sup> And yet the novel resonates with allusions to enduring works of literature, such as the Bible and Plato’s *Republic*, demonstrating the lasting power of narrative.<sup>75</sup> The novel also portrays the capabilities of the imagination to transport us to other places, as the father stands facing the Pacific Ocean, imagining the possibility that “beyond those shrouded swells another man did walk with another child on the dead gray sands.”<sup>76</sup> So the father forces the child to speak, dredging up their remaining faculties for language as they endure horrific scenes of cannibalism and violence: after a “bad guy’s” brains dry in the boy’s hair, or they witness a “charred human infant ... blackening” on a spit, the father insists—“you have to talk to me.”<sup>77</sup> In the final pages of the novel, the narrative focalisation is shifted to the boy, who thus continues the tradition of storytelling and language in a surprising image of hope in an otherwise bleak novel. The boy “tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget.”<sup>78</sup> Not only describing a son remembering

his father, the boy does not forget language itself, and so continues the art of carving out new spaces with narrative.

The coda constituting the final passage of McCarthy's novel attests to the revelatory scope of stories as it sweeps out to the mode of fables, with its opening words, "Once there were...."<sup>79</sup> Entering the register of distance, the coda expands the reader's view to the scale of natural time, where "all things were older than man."<sup>80</sup> The passage exploits the poetics of size, as it then zeros in on the image of a brook trout, a small creature hidden in "deep glens" on whose back can be found "maps of the world in its becoming."<sup>81</sup> Imbuing this tiny, secret detail with the scope of ancient time, McCarthy emphasises what Estes terms "the sacred quality of nature," taking his novel beyond the anthropocentric globe and economy to "stress the intrinsic rights of nature," highlighting humankind's "erroneous conception of the natural world as something that can be forever thoughtlessly exploited for profit."<sup>82</sup> Estes reads this passage as offering "a way out," a "biocentric map" that urges us to reshape our thinking, to rewrite nature into our spaces, and reveals what we stand to lose—and are already losing—in human-driven ecological catastrophe.<sup>83</sup> McCarthy's giddy final passage uses language to juxtapose the very small and very large to deliver this ultimate message of his novel, one which reminds us of something much bigger and more ancient than global human systems: the mystery of nature, of biota and life forms; a mystery which dwarfs human knowledge.

*On the Beach* and *The Road* thus employ a poetics of scale to render the magnitude of apocalypse as it is experience by the individual subjects of a global world. Manipulating perspective, language, and content, they distort the familiar shape of spatial units to convey that the characters are encountering something much bigger than themselves. They invert the spatial enlargement produced by globalisation, depicting societies ruined by a global network they cannot "cognitively map." Offering bleak warnings to their reader, they emphasise our collective need to cognitively pair real and imagined spaces to redress the dangers posed by human activity in a global world. In today's world the urgency of this has only grown as we receive daily news

items communicating the impact of human activity on the planet—nuclear threat in stoushes between the United States and North Korea; the pollution and devastation of environments through large-scale mining, methods of production, waste, and greenhouse gases; and the ensuing effects of anthropogenic climate change as temperatures rise and ecosystems falter. Considering *On the Beach* and *The Road* together through the lens of scale provides a timely, frightening reflection of the crisis—and responsibility—reverberating through our own everyday lives.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (London: Vintage Books, 2009 [1957]), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Baker, “*On the Beach*: British Nuclear Fiction and the Spaces of Empire’s End,” in *Future Wars: The Anticipations and the Fears*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 151, 156.

<sup>4</sup> David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Baker, “On the Beach,” 146; Anthony Carew, “Beneath Our Radiant Mushroom Cloud: Fallout,” *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, 180 (2014): 98.

<sup>6</sup> Adeline Johns-Putra, “My Job Is to Take Care of You: Climate Change, Humanity, and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 62, no. 3 (2016): 520.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Milner, “*On the Beach*: Apocalyptic Hedonism and the Origins of Postmodernism,” in *Australian Popular Culture*, ed. Ian Craven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190.

<sup>8</sup> Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Roslyn Weaver, *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film: A Critical Study* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011); Andrew Keller Estes, *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Weaver, *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film*, 66; Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007 [2006]), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 312.

<sup>12</sup> Hsuan L. Hsu, "Literature Across Scales," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 175; Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> John Timberlake, *Landscape and the Science Fiction Imaginary* (Chicago: Intellect, 2018), 25, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (1984): 92.

<sup>17</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism," 92.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Walter, "Cyberkill: Melancholia, Globalization and Media Terrorism in *American Psycho* and *Glamorama*," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture and Theory* 68, no. 4 (2012): 132.

<sup>19</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism," 64.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Weiss, "Cormac McCarthy, Violence, and Borders: The Map as Code for What Is Not Contained," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 8, no. 1 (2010): 76.

<sup>21</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.

<sup>22</sup> Roslyn Weaver, "The Shield of Distance: Fearful Borders at the Edge of the World," *Antipodes* (2009): 69.

<sup>23</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16, 29.

<sup>25</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 44, 47, 54, 58, 259 and 260 are a selection of examples.

<sup>28</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 1.

- <sup>29</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 4.
- <sup>30</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 8.
- <sup>32</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 2.
- <sup>33</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 28, 84.
- <sup>34</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 12, 78.
- <sup>35</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 182.
- <sup>36</sup> Weaver, "The Shield of Distance," 70.
- <sup>37</sup> Carl James Grindley, "The Setting of McCarthy's *The Road*," *The Explicator* 67, no. 1 (2008): 11.
- <sup>38</sup> Grindley, "The Setting of McCarthy's *The Road*," 11.
- <sup>39</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.
- <sup>40</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 81.
- <sup>41</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 79.
- <sup>42</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 199.
- <sup>43</sup> Paul Briens, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895–1984* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 20.
- <sup>44</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 193.
- <sup>45</sup> Andrew Milner, "Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia," *Continuum* 23, no. 6 (2009): 835.
- <sup>46</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 1.
- <sup>47</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 104, 116, 120.
- <sup>48</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 43.
- <sup>49</sup> Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 24; McCarthy, *The Road*, 43.
- <sup>50</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 4.
- <sup>51</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 5.
- <sup>52</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 6, 8.
- <sup>53</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 312.
- <sup>54</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 296.
- <sup>55</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 165.
- <sup>56</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 33, 191, 236, 292.
- <sup>57</sup> Jordan Dominy, "Cannibalism, Consumerism and Profanation: Cormac McCarthy's *The*

Road and the End of Capitalism,” *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 13, no. 1 (2015): 144.

<sup>58</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 3, 108, 173.

<sup>59</sup> Dominy, “Cannibalism,” 143.

<sup>60</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 172–173.

<sup>61</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 164.

<sup>62</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 193.

<sup>63</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 193.

<sup>64</sup> Dominy, “Cannibalism,” 144.

<sup>65</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 22, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 20, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 7–8.

<sup>71</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 11, 249.

<sup>72</sup> Shute, *On the Beach*, 3, 81.

<sup>73</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*. See, for example, pages 27, 35, 37, and 79.

<sup>74</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 279.

<sup>75</sup> Alex Hunt and Martin Jacobsen, “Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Plato’s *Simile of the Sun*,” *The Explicator* 66, no. 3 (2008): 155.

<sup>76</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 234.

<sup>77</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 71, 212, 279.

<sup>78</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 306.

<sup>79</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 306.

<sup>80</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.

<sup>81</sup> McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.

<sup>82</sup> Estes, *Cormac McCarthy*, 214, 216, 221.

<sup>83</sup> Estes, *Cormac McCarthy*, 221.