The Art of the (Deviant) Sentence: Syntactic Variation as Stylistic Tool in Hoban and McCarthy

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1You will notice that I have sneakily slipped the word 'deviant' into parentheses in my title: this is because I'm viewing deviance in a particular way as a result of how deceptively difficult the sentence is to define. Its grammatical definition is fairly straightforward, but we're all aware that the sentence—or at least the words that graphologically occur within 'sentence' parameters—can come in all shapes and sizes, and can be particularly problematic in speech, and, I would add, in a lot of prose fiction.

1. Sentences: Deviance and Foregrounding

Before any claim for deviance from a norm can be made, a 'standard' definition must be established. For the sentence, I use a fairly typical definition from the *Cambridge Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Carter & McCarthy 2006) as my benchmark:

> The sentence is principally a unit of written grammar and is normally easily identified by an initial capital letter on the first word and a full stop after the last word. [. . .] [It] must be grammatically complete (i.e. it must have at least one main clause). (sections 269-72)

Carter and McCarthy also note that in speech, 'the sentence as a grammatical unit is more problematic' (s. 269), something that has a bearing on the 'oral' nature of the narratives of both novels that I discuss below.

1So I'm considering the sentence to be a string of words ending with end punctuation such as a full stop—and my label of 'deviant' refers to the fact that certain sentences do not conform to what is considered prescriptively to be 'grammatically correct'. Yet I stop short of calling them ungrammatical, since, as I will show, deviant sentences play an important contextual role in flowing prose that enables them to contribute both to meaning and to the projection of a fictional world in a much less limiting sense than prescriptive grammar alone might allow. Their deviance stems mainly from the fact that, as written sentences, they appear at a graphological level not to conform: when a reader reaches the full stop, she realizes that something is missing or that the sentence contains too much. Even though a reader reads a number of sentences in sequence and thus establishes context, the reader's eye is unavoidably drawn to the deviance of the incomplete or overly complete sentences. This foregrounds such sentences—and it is essentially the effect of such foregrounding that I wish to explore in this paper.

To do so I will examine two novels from different points in the vast and varied post-apocalyptic canon: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). Both depict a world following what can be presumed to be the devastation of a nuclear holocaust, and while the settings and circumstances of each novel are in many ways different, both project a fictional world characterized by bleakness, desolation, and, arguably, hopelessness. Hoban and McCarthy would appear to have little else in common beyond the fact that they are near contemporaries and both are American, yet these two novels are strikingly similar stylistically: despite their ostensible differences (Hoban's distinctive orthography bears little resemblance to McCarthy's

standard English, for example), the syntax of the two novels is remarkably alike in fundamentally important ways. In particular, the use that each author makes of deviant or foregrounded sentence structures assists, as I will argue, in projecting the fictional world that forms the core of each novel. In many ways the syntactic chaos that *appears* to be (but is not, in fact) at work both mirrors and contributes to projecting the chaos and destruction of the worlds of the novels, acting congruently with other stylistic features to depict an effective, but nonetheless depressing, representation of the post-holocaust landscape.

2.1 Syntactic Deviance in *Riddley Walker*

It is not immediately easy to identify deviant sentences in this novel, mainly as a result of the presence of so many other, more obviously deviant features in orthography and lexicon. For example, it would take some experience with the language of the novel to ascertain that neither of these two sentences, both of which I return to later, is syntactically deviant: ‘This time doing it my self and with the Big 2 not jus regler Eusa show men it took me strange’ (38); ‘There we wer then in amongst the broakin stoans the grean rot and the number creaper with the rain all drenching down and peltering on them dead stoans stumps and stannings’ (77). Of course a claim could be made that the lack of sentence-internal punctuation is sufficient to make these sentences deviant (or, as a purist or prescriptivist might say more bluntly, ‘wrong’); however, while the lack of punctuation in *Riddley Walker* (and similarly in *The Road*) does play a role,[1] there is no deviance in these sentences at the clause level: each has a main clause with a finite verb (‘took’ and ‘wer’, respectively).

The novel does exhibit syntactic deviance in two broad senses: what I am labelling syntactic *under*development and syntactic *over*development. An underdeveloped sentence is deviant in that it has no verb (I call these 'verbless' in my analysis), uses a nonfinite ('participial') verb form instead of a finite form, or is an isolated subordinate clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction ('dependent'); in other words, these sentences lack main clauses. I will continue to call them sentences, however, since graphologically they begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop; this visual clue leads the reader to believe they are sentences, and the defamiliarisation begins to operate most effectively on this level once the reader comes to realise that the sentence does not in fact conform to normal patterns. Since isolated dependent clauses are quite rare, examples of the two more prevalent types of underdeveloped sentence follow:

verbless: Sky all hevvy and grey. (63)

The bloody meat and boan of it. (154)

participial: Arnge flames upping in the dark and liting all the faces roun. (22)

Heading for senter then. (106)

Overdeveloped sentences are similar to what would be marked in student writing as 'run-on': two or more main clauses blended without any conjunctions. The principal, if not sole, form of overdevelopment in *Riddley Walker* is the paratactic construction:

paratactic: Coming back with the boar on a pal we come a long by the rivver it wer hevvyer woodit in there. (1)

While Hoban does write in all types of complete sentence (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex), the prevalence[2] of the deviant sentences illustrated above is

sufficient for us to consider them a form of foregrounding and to lead us to question why such foregrounding occurs, and with what effect.[3]

2.2 Syntactic Deviance in *The Road*

McCarthy's novel has much in common syntactically with Hoban's. Not only do we see similar types of syntactic deviance, but the prevalence of such deviance is almost identical (see Appendix A). Like Hoban, McCarthy relies extensively on underdeveloped sentences:

verbless: At evening a dull sulphur light from the fires. (51)

The long dry crack of searing limbs. (96)

participial: Following a stone wall in the dark, wrapped in his blanket, kneeling in the ashes like a penitent. (54)

The dull bedlam dying in the distance. (97)

Overdeveloped sentences occur frequently as well, but unlike the non-conjoined paratactic constructions of *Riddley Walker*, overdevelopment in *The Road* can be found in excessively conjoined sentences displaying polysyndeton:

polysyndetic: Someone before him had not trusted them and in the end neither did he and he walked out with the blankets over his shoulder and they set off along the road again. (22)

Hoban, it should be noted, occasionally uses polysyndeton as well, although he has a greater predilection for parataxis. Despite the difference in the nature of the two authors' overdeveloped sentences, however, the effects are arguably the same. I now move to the heart of my discussion: the effects of the deviant syntactic features of the two novels.

3. Projecting a Fictional World: the Role of Deviant Syntax

By definition, post-apocalyptic novels deal with the aftermath of nuclear holocaust, and while the plots of the two novels under discussion here are separated by over 2,300 years, both depict a world that has been reduced to rubble and ruin. Granted, it appears that some kind of social, political, and possibly even religious order has been reconstructed in *Riddley Walker*, and a certain degree of 'civilisation' is apparent; by contrast, no such order exists in *The Road*, and the two main characters live in constant fear of death at the hands of cannibalistic bands of savages. Still, for all of the superficial social structures of *Riddley Walker*, the people in Riddley's world are still digging in the layers of ash and dust that obscure the remains of the human and nonhuman elements of the twentieth-century world that was destroyed in the nuclear attack. As Riddley states poignantly when he sees the magnificent iron machines in Fork Stoan (Folkestone) and feels their power, 'O what we ben! And what we come to!' (100). Later, he comments on the lack of progress his people have made in relation to those from 'time back way back', i.e., our present world: 'Dyou mean to tel me them befor us by the time they done 1997 years they had boats in the air [aircraft] and all them things and here we are weve done 2347 years and mor and stil slogging in the mud?' (125). Some aspects of Riddley's world are certainly eerily reminiscent of the more obvious and more recent horrors of *The Road*. Therefore, despite the chronological distance between the novels' plots, and despite the relative lack of social order in *The Road*, the descriptions of the physical landscape (both worlds seem to be permanently grey, wet, and cold, true signs of a long nuclear winter) and the general outlook of the main characters would suggest similar settings.

One of the principal roles of stylistic analysis is to support more objectively a reader's initial subjective reaction to a text. To that end, I have done some fairly comprehensive analysis of *Riddley Walker*, and, among other findings, I discovered that 72 per cent of the words in the novel are orthographically standard, while the others are in a variety of deviant forms; 82.6 per cent of the words are morphologically simple, i.e., they are composed of only one morpheme; and 70 per cent of the nouns in the novel are basic and concrete, and most are monosyllabic.[4] While I have not analysed *The Road* to the same extent, a smaller-scale examination of a 292-word extract from the beginning of the novel shows remarkably similar patterns: 74.7% of the words are morphologically simple, and 81.2% are monosyllabic. More detailed analysis of *The Road* is required, but these preliminary figures are sufficient to suggest at least that both novels are lexically simple.

An analysis of syntax makes an important contribution to supporting such findings, and to prompting others. It is important to note, however, that just as syntax alone does not succeed in projecting every aspect of the fictional world (i.e., the overall effect is achieved through other forms of deviance as well as through character development, narrative technique, and plot structure, among others—all beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in depth), individual sentences do not themselves do all the work. Three things are worth bearing in mind here. First, with an average level of syntactic deviance of close to 50% (see Appendix A), deviant and non-deviant sentences are in constant dynamic tension, both contributing equally to the overall effect. Second, although sentences may be considered syntactic units that are separate from one another, they are not isolated and do not exist in a stylistic vacuum. Readers may consider one

sentence separately from another, assisted by the graphological cues mentioned earlier, but they quickly relate what they are reading to what they have already read, and then just as quickly relate that to what comes next. Context, therefore, is crucial, and it is through context that the overall effect of the syntactic choices is most keenly realised. Third, and directly stemming from the previous point, is the notion of sentences as *utterances* in addition to being units of written meaning. The orality of language, in fact, operates on at least two levels: as readers we can give voice to what we read, either overtly or silently (indeed, *Riddley Walker* almost requires to be read aloud); and both Riddley's first-person narration and the non-omniscient third-person voice representing the thoughts and point of view of the main character of *The Road* closely approximate spoken language. This very connection to oral tradition, with its admittedly stereotypical associations with primitive, non-literate culture, itself grounds the language of the novel firmly in a world stripped, in both cases violently, of any modern embellishments.

It is important, therefore, to illustrate the effects of syntax in both novels by illustrating how sections of text develop as coherent wholes, each sentence working within its larger context to create a certain effect. I will demonstrate this through three selections from each novel as a means of identifying the roles played by the various forms of syntactic deviance that we see in each selection.

3. 1 Syntax and coherence in *Riddley Walker*

(a) Extract 1: p.38, paragraph 1[5]

(1) 1When Dad ben a live I all ways ben there when he done the wotcher. (2) This time doing it my self and with the Big 2 not jus regler Eusa show men it took me

> strange. (3) Dads things all roun the shelter. (4) His weapons and his anrack hanging on ther pegs. (5) His paper and ink and pens on the locker. (6) His doss bag. (7) Even his smel stil there. (8) His smoak and his sweat but no Dad. (9) The black and red spottit dog skin peggit on the wall with the 4 legs out stretcht and the candl flame shimmying in the wind.

Sentences (1) and (2) are complete[6]: the first is a complex sentence containing one main clause ('I all ways ben there') and two subordinate clauses; the second begins with a participial phrase coordinated with a prepositional phrase, and then the main clause ('it took me strange'). The presence of complete sentences in a first-person narrative of this kind serves to reinforce the fact that we do occasionally speak in complete sentences; indeed, much of the work of scholars of spoken language has shown that oral language can be highly complex.[7] Furthermore, the interspersion of complete sentences with deviant ones helps to foreground the latter while also establishing a sense of grammatical order: large-scale deviance is not reader-friendly, and Hoban cannot afford more reader alienation than he is already risking with his orthographic deviance. More important, he needs to stress that this is still English, however eroded and re-formed it might be.

Sentence (3) begins a series of deviant sentences. Like sentences (5)-(8) it is a verbless sentence describing what Riddley sees around him; sentences (4) and (9) are similar, although they are participial rather than verbless (the participles being 'hanging' in [4] and 'peggit,' 'out stretcht,' and 'shimmying' in [9]). In context, this string of deviant sentences can be understood as a list, and a reader would soon catch on to this fact; there is no sentence-internal punctuation (none exists anywhere in the novel), but we might imagine a colon to be 'understood' between (2) and (3). Riddley, of course, would

not know about punctuation, so his writing contains only the barest minimum required to enable readability (we might even consider it an authorial intervention if we extend the notion of the text being Riddley's, rather than Hoban's, to its natural end). When the passage is read aloud, of course, as we imagine Riddley to have created it, the punctuation ceases to be as important, so at a *spoken* level the sense of the paragraph is retained just as our eyes are drawn to the obvious deviance at the *written* level. We are reminded that syntactic order, at least at the written level, has faltered, perhaps a reflection of the ways in which the modern world, represented metaphorically—or perhaps metonymically—by literacy, has also crumbled.

(b) Extract 2: from p. 77, paragraph 4

> (1) 1There we wer then in amongst the broakin stoans the grean rot and the number creaper with the rain all drenching down and peltering on them dead stoans stumps and stannings. (2) Spattering on crumbelt conkreat and bustit birk and durdling in the puddls gurgling down the runnels of the dead town. (3) A kynd of greanish lite to that day from the rain the grean rot and the number creaper and the dead town pong wer going up all grean smelling in that greanish lite. (4) Dog pong as wel a black smel in the grey rain.

Once again this paragraph begins with a complete, albeit lengthy, sentence, which establishes the place context. Sentence (2) is deviant, a participial construction that seems to depend on (1) for its meaning: the subject of the three present participles is 'rain' from sentence (1), and the participles of (2) are a continuation of the participles 'drenching' and 'peltering' of (1). The influence of the oral is clear in this pairing of sentences. The

remaining two sentences are rather more difficult to analyse. In (3) we have a verbless clause ('A kynd of greanish lite to that day from the rain the grean rot and the number creaper') conjoined by 'and' to a standard main clause ('the dead town pong wer going up all grean smelling in that greanish lite'). The sentence is nonetheless deviant, although it would be easy to remove the deviance by inserting the elliptical phrase 'There was' at the beginning of the sentence. Both Leech and Svartvik (2002 [1975])—who note that in verbless clauses 'a form of the verb *to be* has been omitted' (214)—and Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002)—who call constructions such as this 'syntactic non-clausal units'—would trace this type of syntactic phenomenon to spoken language. In fact, Biber, Conrad and Leech go on to state that, '[l]ike other performance phenomena, non-clausal units reflect the simplicity of grammatical constructions resulting from real-time production in conversation. Syntactic non-clausal units can also be related to ellipsis' (2002: 440). Riddley's narration is, after all, a form of conversation with the reader, whom he addresses directly on a number of occasions. Verblessness, however, is also an important contributor to the depiction of the post-apocalyptic world of the novel, in addition to reflecting once again an apparent breakdown of syntactic order.

In fact, sentence (4) is entirely verbless and relies on the context established in previous sentences for its sense. The two elements of this deviant sentence ('Dog pong as wel' and 'a black smel in the grey rain') can be seen as being either in apposition or in a paratactic relationship (even though they are not clauses). The boundary or juncture between the two is where the conventions of written prose would require the insertion of punctuation, in this case a comma or a dash being the best choices. Cumulatively, sentence (4) serves to complete the list of elements that Riddley describes around him

after first establishing the context in (1) (‘There we wer then . . . ‘). Like the description of his father’s hut in Extract 1, this description relies on a series of deviant sentences constructed on the model of spoken afterthoughts. The verbless and participial constructions reinforce the orality of the language, but they also, through their lack of tense, establish that time has ceased to be important, as if what Riddley sees is literally ‘time-less’—but not in any particularly positive way; ‘devoid of time’ might be an even better description. I will elaborate on this crucial stylistic point once I have established the existence of similar features in McCarthy’s novel.

(c) Extract 3: from p.77, paragraph 1

> (1) 1The dead bloaks bow wer on the groun with a arrer near it and his spears a littl way off || he musve had a arrer on the string when they jumpt him. (2) He bint too big a man || I cud use his bow wel a nuff. (3) I took his knife as wel || I emtit his pockits too || I thot I myt as wel hang for a ram as a lam.

This final extract from *Riddley Walker* is important for illustrating paratactic structures, Hoban’s principal form of overdevelopment among his deviant sentences. For ease of explanation, I have marked the paratactic junctures with a || symbol.

Parataxis, and the lack of punctuation associated with it in this novel, is yet another means for Hoban to convey the fact that Riddley is writing in a form of language heavily influenced by the oral. Each paratactic sentence thus becomes a unit of thought—what Chafe (1980) calls an ‘idea unit’ or a ‘single focus of consciousness’—containing related ideas; it is notable that the word following each paratactic juncture is a pronoun that contributes to the overall coherence of the sentence. Once we as readers have

become familiar (and it is here that initial defamiliarisation is subsequently backgrounded as a new level of reading comfort is established) with 'Riddley's' style, we are able to read the sentences aloud with little trouble, since our predictions about the normal patterns of English syntax inform us that punctuation or a conjunction is missing at each paratactic juncture. Nevertheless, we are sufficiently thrown off balance by the written form of the language (syntactically and otherwise) to sense that Riddley's world is different from our own.[8] The sentences seem arbitrarily constructed, but they are not: my analysis of Hoban's sentence structures throughout the novel suggests that he makes intentional syntactic choices; the extracts above corroborate that observation to a considerable extent. The fictional world suggested by the syntax of *Riddley Walker*, then, is anything but chaotic, yet the order it hints at is a far cry from what we expect in our modern, literate (and, by extension, post-industrial and technological) world. New syntactic order parallels new social order: the Whorfian notion of the reflection of culture in language and thought is surely at work here.

3.2 Syntax and coherence in *The Road*

(a) Extract 1: p.4, paragraph 3

> (1) 1When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. (2) Everything paling away into the murk. (3) The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. (4) He studied what he could see. (5) The segments of road down there among the dead trees. (6) Looking for anything of color. (7) Any movement. (8) Any trace of standing smoke. (9) He lowered the glasses and pulled down the

> cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again.

McCarthy starts this paragraph, as Hoban so often does with his, by establishing place or time using a complete sentence, here containing an adverbial clause of time followed by a main clause (‘he glassed the valley below’). In (2) and (3) we have participial constructions that are seemingly dependent on the first sentence for their context; as in Hoban, what is missing from the verbal construction in each sentence is the finite auxiliary. Thus begins a pattern that will recur throughout the novel: a complete sentence using a verb denoting action, followed by a deviant sentence (verbless or participial) that is descriptive of the scene evoked by the governing sentence. To illustrate further: sentence (4), a complete sentence, indicates what the man *did* (‘He studied . . .’); sentence (5), a verbless construction, describes the scene. Sentence (6) is still dependent on (4) for its sense, while (7) and (8) build on that idea with verbless constructions describing possible (but in fact improbable) aspects of the scene being surveyed. The contrast between the activity of the complete sentences (‘he glassed’, ‘He studied’) and the inactivity or inanimacy of the deviant sentences (‘soft ash blowing in loose swirls’, ‘segments of road down there among the dead trees’, ‘Any movement’, ‘Any trace’) is striking, and here both the syntax and the lexicon combine to project a fictional world of desolation. The repetitive nature of the man’s actions in doing what he must do several times each day, with similar results each time, is then shown by sentence (9), whose polysyndetic structure typifies repeated, consecutive actions (‘He lowered . . . and pulled down . . and wiped . . . and then glassed . . .again’).

The true horror of *The Road* is not only the realization of what has happened to the world, but also the sense of futility expressed by the characters (and shared by the readers) over ever finding an alternative—aside from death itself—to their current predicament, an end to the road. The syntax works in concert with the images shaped by McCarthy's lexical choices to reflect this terrifying situation. As in Hoban, different sentence types interact to create a coherent whole: standard sentences advance the plot, to the extent that the plot does advance, while deviant sentences bring home the stark realities of the fictional world; of these deviant sentences, verbless and participial structures help to project a world that is frozen in time (the 'timelessness' that we saw in the extracts from Hoban above), and polysyndetic structures depict with aching monotony the endless cycles of events required for the man and the boy simply to eke out their survival. The second extract below indicates this most strikingly.

(b) Extract 2: from p.5, paragraph 2

> (1) 1When he got back the boy was still asleep. (2) He pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a plastic bag and a plastic bottle of syrup.

This short extract again opens with a complete sentence placing the subsequent sentences in a time context. The second sentence, despite being a simple sentence and therefore grammatically 'correct' in a technical sense, is pragmatically problematic because of its excessive coordination between both verb and noun phrases. There is a childlike simplicity to the repeated use of 'and', the repetition of this same conjunction being

reminiscent of the basic storytelling technique of young children narrating the events of their day or the plot of a film.[9] Yet there is more to the repetition of 'and' than narrative simplicity alone. At a deeper level, the lack of more complex conjunctions, particularly subordinating conjunctions, suggests that the relationship between various actions is at a most basic level. Absent is any indication of cause and effect, contrast, concession, or any of the other high-level relationships that can exist between parts of a sentence.[10] Life for these characters, it seems, has been reduced to hopeless monotony, stripped, like much of the syntax, of all complexity and embellishment.

(c) Extract 3: from p.8, paragraph 1

> (1) 1On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. (2) Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. (3) Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. (4) A burned house in a clearing and beyond that the reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned.

This final extract from *The Road* brings together some of the ideas already discussed while furthering the notion of the interaction of syntactic and lexical choice in enabling McCarthy to project his desired fictional world. Sentence (1) is a complete sentence establishing the place context for the paragraph. It is followed by two participial sentences that add to the description, the verbal participles 'stretching', 'moving', and 'whining' working closely with the adjectival participles 'charred', 'sagging', 'strung', and 'blackened' to depict a bleak, lifeless landscape. Sentence (4) perpetuates this

impression, a largely verbless (the only finite verb, ‘lay’, occurs in a relative adverb clause near the end) and to some extent polysyndetic sentence that uses adjectives evoking desolation (‘burned’, ‘stark’, ‘gray’, ‘raw red’, and ‘abandoned’) to add to the bleakness projected by the first three sentences. Not only, therefore, do we see different syntactic constructions working together for the broader purpose of coherence; we also see the lexical level of language interacting with syntax to compound the effect. Indeed, the inanimacy alluded to in Extract 1 can be seen here too: there is no life in this passage, and what features of the landscape might have once been alive have long since died. The burn is ‘stark’ and ‘black,’ suggesting either that it has dried up or that it is devoid of any aquatic life; ‘burn’ itself is an evocative and apposite synonym here for ‘stream’. The trees are ‘charred and limbless’; the house is ‘burned’; the meadowlands are ‘stark and gray’; and the presumably once vibrant roadworks are now devoid of life. Even the lightpoles are ‘blackened’ and without their source of energy.

This combined effect of different levels of language emphasises the point that an author’s style is an amalgam of features, some working more obviously and frequently than others but all helping to shape the fictional world that the author intends to project. The reader’s attention is drawn to foregrounded elements on several levels at once[11]: just as in *Riddley Walker*, where orthography and lexicosemantics surely disconcerts the reader first and the deeper level of deviant syntax makes its presence felt later, in *The Road* we see deviant syntax collaborating with foregrounded lexical collocations to great effect. For instance, in the final extract above we might not expect to see a burn being ‘stark’ and ‘black’, or meadowlands (usually a source of colour and fecundity) being ‘stark and gray’; even the verbs collocate in unanticipated ways: ‘the road *passed*’, ‘trees

stretching', 'ash *moving*', 'lightpoles *whining*'.[12] This all suggests that examining language on these many stylistic levels (among others), both separately and in conjunction with each other, can expose a great deal about the way in which language can operate locally within phrases and globally across texts to shape an author's projection of a fictional world and the reader's construction of that world.

4. 1Concluding Remarks

So we can see that both authors rely on similar techniques in order to project their fictional worlds.

(a) Both rely on overdeveloped sentences, which I think indicates a certain sense of lack of order in the worlds they're depicting. As I've mentioned, the lack of punctuation leads to clauses being combined in unorthodox ways, either through excessive coordination (in McCarthy's case) or no coordination or conjunctions at all (in Hoban's). Even though the specific type of overdevelopment that each author employs is different, they achieve similar ends. McCarthy's polysyndetic sentences show the repetitiveness and monotony of his endless, one-after-the-other actions, and the reliance on "and" shows no sense of logical connection between his actions: he never does something *because* of something, or *although* something. Hoban also combines clauses, but often without any conjunctions or punctuation. This largely reflects the oral culture of Riddley's world – since punctuation has no meaning in an society without writing. But it also reflects a similar lack of logical connection between clauses that we see in McCarthy: the reader in both cases must do all the work to create order out of the chaos that the sentences and their lack of standard syntactic structure project.

(b) On a sliding scale of sentence completeness, we next see limited use of subordinate or dependent clauses, but a greater use of nonfinite structures in both writers. Participial structures reflect the endless, timeless or tenseless nature of the actions described: this can be dynamic, of course, since present participles suggest progressive, continuous action, but I suggest that here the verb forms help to indicate that the fixed, finite nature of time has ceased to be important in worlds where either time has stood still (McCarthy) or time seems never to end and the world seems never to change (Hoban). Combined with the other descriptions of the landscape and the opinions expressed by the main characters, any hope or dynamism that participial forms *could* suggest is replaced by the hopelessness and futility of nonfinite, ungrounded, tenseless verbs.

The most extreme example of this same phenomenon can be seen in verbless sentences. As Leech and Svartvik suggest on the handout, verbless clauses or sentences have much in common with speech and can be understood when uttered (or written) in the context of other meaningful utterances. Yet as written sentences they still stand out in two ways: (i) they are, like participial structures, without time or tense and are such ungrounded; (ii) moreover, they lack movement and action, and they represent, therefore, again in the larger context of the other features that contribute to projecting the postapocalytpic world, stagnation, lack of progress, and ultimately a lack of hope for the future. Time appears to have stood still, and the desolate, fragmented nature of the world of these two novels remains bleak and motionless.

I hate to end on such pessimism, but at least I can be optimistic that my preliminary analysis of these syntactic features should lead to some interesting discoveries about the use of syntax in both postapocalyptic novels and linguistically

creative fiction more broadly. And in case we need some added optimism or hope, consider the final sentences of each novel–in both we see, perhaps ambiguously, at least a little hope for the future.

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Appendix A: Quantitative Analysis of Sentence Types

In order to ascertain the extent of sentence-level deviance in the two novels, I tallied the number of sentences in two 150-sentence extracts from each novel that fall into the following categories: complete (grammatical) sentence; underdeveloped sentences (verbless, participial or dependent); and overdeveloped sentences (paratactic in *Riddley Walker* and polysyndetic in *The Road*).

Sample 1 in both cases represents the first 150 sentences of the novel; sample 2, as a random comparator, is taken from the approximate midpoint of each novel (beginning at p.106 in *Riddley Walker* and p.115 in *The Road*). Only narrative sentences were included (i.e., no direct speech, songs or embedded stories).

As can be seen, just under 50% of the sentences in each sample are deviant, and the percentages of over- and underdeveloped sentences are similar between samples within each novel; comparison between the two novels shows that McCarthy tends significantly more toward underdeveloped sentences, while Hoban writes in under- and overdeveloped sentences in approximately equal measure.

1 Hoban, *Riddley Walker* McCarthy, *The Road*

	Complete	Over-developed	Under-developed	Complete	Over-developed	Under-developed
Sample 1 *n*=150	81 (54%)	29 (19.3%)	40 (26.7%)	71 (47.3%)	19 (12.7%)	60 (40%)
Sample 2 *n*=150	77 (51.3%)	36 (24%)	37 (24.7%)	85 (56.7%)	18 (12%)	47 (31.3%)
Average	79 (52.7%)	32.5 (21.7%)	38.5 (25.7%)	78 (52%)	18.5 (12.3%)	53.5 (35.7%)

Notes

[1] Hoban has his narrator use only minimal punctuation: full stops and quotation marks only, commas only before direct speech (and colons before large extracts), and nothing else aside from the occasional question mark or exclamation mark. McCarthy, for his part, has quite clear views on punctuation: 'If you write properly you shouldn't have to punctuate'; 'I believe in periods, capitals, and the occasional comma, that's it' ('Cormac McCarthy on James Joyce and Punctuation', 2008). I am nevertheless troubled by his arbitrary inclusion or omission of the apostrophe (e.g. 'cant' vs. 'he'd'). The need to cite McCarthy from such a popular rather than scholarly source here is due largely to his rather reclusive nature and to the fact that very little scholarly work has been written to date on *The Road*. The work that has been done does not, based on my research, deal with McCarthy's use of language. For interesting insights into *No Country for Old Men* as a departure from McCarthy's earlier narrative and syntactic styles, see Cooper (2009).
[2] See Appendix A for a quantitative description of sentence types in both novels.
[3] It is arguable that a 50% rate of deviance would make deviant sentences less foregrounded and more standard across the text as a whole. However, since each deviant sentence is slightly different, and since the defamiliarising effect can be supposed to take place each time a deviant sentence is encountered, I argue that the deviant sentences are nonetheless foregrounded. Indeed, this might be a case of 'extended foregrounding' (Leech 2008 [1965]), which operates very much like an effectively extended metaphor. Still, as stated above, this effect does diminish as the novels progress, as is the case with all forms of foregrounding. I am grateful to Lesley Jeffries for her helpful question on this topic when I presented the paper at PALA.
[4] These are selected figures from an exploratory analysis of a 569-word extract from pp.76-78 of the novel.
[5] In this and subsequent extracts, I have inserted sentence numbers for ease of reference.
[6] I will use the adjective 'complete' to describe a non-deviant sentence. This avoids the ambiguities of the more suitable antonym for deviant: 'standard'.
[7] See, for example, in addition to some of the seminal work by Tannen (1982, 1984), and rather contrary to Ong's (2002 [1982]) extensive categorisation of the characteristics of oral thought and expression, Beaman (1984), who finds that oral language is no less syntactically complex than written language, and Givón (1979), who indicates several ways in which (written) 'syntax' is a natural extension of (oral) 'discourse'.
[8] As Hoban says, the language 'works well with the story because it slows the reader down to Riddley's rate of comprehension' (Afterword to *Riddley Walker*, 225).
[9] It is worth noting that a lack of subordinating conjunctions and an abundance of coordinating conjunctions is not necessarily a sign of spoken language, nor of simplicity. As Beaman (1984) neatly concludes, '[t]he evaluation of syntactic complexity is simply more complex than that' (80).
[10] As with any of the claims made about isolated sections of any novel, such findings need to be supported through a more comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, it is in localised speculation based on small extracts that stylistic analysis begins.
[11] This is what Leech (2008 [1965] and 2008 [1985]) calls 'congruence of foregrounding' as part of a broader notion of 'coherence of foregrounding'.
[12] It is beyond the scope of this paper to present an analysis of how words such as these typically collocate, but it would be possible to do so using a corpus-based software program or by examining a substantial corpus such as the British National Corpus.