

BEYOND THE MERIDIAN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TITLE
BLOOD MERIDIAN OR THE EVENING REDNESS IN THE WEST

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Christopher Muse, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas
May 2013

BEYOND THE MERIDIAN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TITLE
BLOOD MERIDIAN OR THE EVENING REDNESS IN THE WEST

Committee Members Approved:

Mark Busby, Chair

Dickie Heaberlin

Nancy Grayson

Approved:

J. Michael Willoughby
Dean of the Graduate College

COPYRIGHT

by

Christopher Marshall Muse

2013

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work, I, Christopher Muse, refuse permission to copy in excess of the "Fair Use" exemption without my written permission.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Mark Busby, and the members of my committee, Dr. Dickie Heaberlin and Dr. Nancy Grayson, for their invaluable advice, patience, and support. I would also like to thank my parents, Ross and Debra Dawkins, for teaching me to be fearless in the pursuit of my dreams.

Most of all, I would like to thank my beautiful best friend, Casey Muse. Thank you for sacrificing your time, energy, and own personal comfort over the last two years while I worked towards this goal. Thank you for the pep talks when I was discouraged. Thank you for all the late night snacks you provided when I had to meet a deadline. Thank you for your constant words of encouragement, especially the “I’m so proud of you” moments. Thank you, darling, for always believing in me. You are my love, my life, my everything.

This manuscript was submitted on April 8, 2013.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| II. "BLOODLANDS OF THE WEST" | 8 |
| III. INTO THE "TERRA DAMNATA": THE DOOMED REGION BEYOND THE <i>BLOOD MERIDIAN</i> | 26 |
| IV. "BLEEDING WESTWARD" TO <i>THE EVENING REDNESS IN THE WEST</i> | 41 |
| V. CONCLUSION..... | 60 |
| NOTES..... | 66 |
| WORKS CITED | 70 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1976, Cormac McCarthy officially moved from Knoxville, Tennessee, to El Paso, Texas, to work on his fifth novel, an apocalyptic Western set in Texas and Mexico during the 1840s and based on actual historical events. McCarthy did an extensive amount of research for this novel. He visited every locale in the book and even learned Spanish. Nine years later, *Blood Meridian, Or The Evening Redness in the West* was published. Since its publication in 1985, critical response has been divided over the meaning and effect of *Blood Meridian*'s extreme violence and its revisionist take on the myth of the Old West. Bearing a distinct similarity to *Moby Dick*, *Blood Meridian* follows a character called "the kid" who becomes a member of the Glanton gang, a violent community of outlaws that collected scalps along the Texas-Mexico border in the late 1840s. The driving force behind this band of scalp-hunters is Judge Holden, an enormous, hairless savant whose florid speeches are not unlike Captain Ahab's.

Upon its publication, *Blood Meridian*'s regular and often senseless violence against Hispanic and Indian groups alienated critics and horrified readers. In her April 1985 review of the novel published in *The New York Times* Caryn James writes, "*Blood Meridian* comes at the reader like a slap in the face, an affront that asks us to endure a vision of the Old West full of charred human skulls, blood-soaked scalps" and a tree

“hung with dead babies” (31). The novel’s unrelenting focus on the violent history of American expansion has been denounced as excessive. Furthermore, *Blood Meridian* has been accused of being both “pornographically” violent and “terribly beautiful” (Jarrett 32; Winchell 309); it has been criticized for its obsessive detailing of the horrific depravity of the Glanton gang while overindulging in Faulknerian prose (Shaviro 149; Arnold and Luce 1).

Critics also had a mixed response to McCarthy’s openly revisionist treatment of the American West in *Blood Meridian*. Richard Slotkin—who conducted an important series of studies of the revisionary Western in narrative, novel, and film—writes, “The significant reconfiguration of the Western genre coincided with the birth of the nuclear age, taking on an increased urgency in the cold war and the post-Vietnam era” (*Gunfighter Nation* 628). Slotkin calls the various works of this new genre “alternative westerns in the revisionist mode” (628). *Blood Meridian* emerges in this time frame, “[i]n the wake of the films of Sergio Leone, Sam Peckinpah, and the especially popular dark revisionist features of Clint Eastwood” (Frye 73). Central to these modern treatments of Western history is a “dark and honest portrayal of human avarice and depravity” (Frye 73). Although *Blood Meridian*’s excessive violence and its reinterpretation of the West continue to receive scholarly attention, one question in particular still needs to be addressed more thoroughly. Upon reading *Blood Meridian* for the first time, the following question remained with me long after I finished reading the novel: What is the Blood Meridian?

Frederick Jackson Turner claimed in his “frontier thesis” in 1893 that the frontier radically changed the progress of the United States: “What the Mediterranean Sea was to

the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that and more, the ever retreating frontier has been for the United States” (38). Indeed, Turner’s essay marked the West as the key to American development. He emphasized this perception by stating that the “West did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past” (8). Turner’s famed hypothesis promoted the presence of the frontier as the single most important factor distinguishing America from Europe and in the process, created a “mythic space” of the West.¹

However, the “Great West” in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* is imagined as a region of uncharted darkness. Unlike the iconic West in Turner’s thesis, *Blood Meridian* does not present the “frontier” as a territory that offers the American Dream. Rather, McCarthy violently inverts the West and the romantic notions that have become associated with it. He sets the bulk of the action in “eighteen and forty-nine” (*Blood Meridian* 5), a significant year in American history through its association with Manifest Destiny and “all that it signifies of mythic optimism, intrepid pioneering, and the promise of immediate riches” (Cant 158).

In 1845, John L. O’Sullivan coined expansion in America as “Manifest Destiny” and by 1850, the frontier had spread from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. *Blood Meridian* takes a similar geographical path, and we follow the kid from Tennessee to a specific longitudinal boundary and beyond in Texas, across the border into war-torn Mexico, and deeper west to the coast of southern California. Since the publication of McCarthy’s fifth novel in 1985, the critical literature on the main title *Blood Meridian* is that it is the longitudinal line passing through the geographic point in Texas where

Nacogdoches is located. However, critical response has split over which meridian line McCarthy is referring to in the main title. Some critics believe it is the ninety-eighth meridian—which Walter Prescott Webb claimed as the boundary separating “frontier and wilderness”—while scholars like Rick Wallach assert that it is the ninety-sixth meridian. Regardless, the kid’s violent initiation begins near a meridian in Nacogdoches. The kid, along with the judge and Glanton gang, crosses this meridian into an uncharted territory to engage in a violent campaign of scalp-hunting which reflects the bloody acts of nation-building in the Southwest. In McCarthy’s novel, this meridian becomes the “blood meridian” to mark the brutality of expansion in the Southwest which, I argue, is suggested in the novel’s title.

In this thesis, I explore the meaning behind the main title *Blood Meridian* as well as the implications of the subtitle, *The Evening Redness in the West*. In particular, I analyze how the title reflects the overwhelming desire for conquest and the temptation to know and experience that which lies beyond the “blood meridian” and which brings men to a terrible confrontation with their mortality. I offer the interpretation that the “blood meridian” is a literal and figurative boundary, which once crossed, leads to a vast frontier where the promise of freedom and unlimited possibility incites men to engage in primitive violence. For the second part of the title, I argue “the evening redness in the west” is a symbolic reference to the bloody violence that rampantly occurs in the vast region beyond the “blood meridian,” which ultimately leads to the death of the West. I also discuss the differences between McCarthy’s “West” and the frontier myth in order to expand the argument that *Blood Meridian* is a revisionist treatment of Manifest Destiny. My overall purpose in this thesis is to broaden the current understanding of the title of

McCarthy's epic novel as well as provide a new reading of *Blood Meridian*.

To support my thesis, I include my ongoing research of the original *Blood Meridian* manuscripts housed in the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University-San Marcos. I incorporate McCarthy's descriptions, word changes, and notes found in the manuscripts that correlate with the title of the novel and westward expansion in the Southwest. I situate my analysis in response to previous scholarship that has primarily identified the West in terms of the traits associated with the frontier myth, most notably Turner's essay. The historical elements of my thesis are supported by John Sepich's *Notes on Blood Meridian*, Gary Anderson's *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, and Samuel Chamberlain's *My Confession*. Aside from Rick Wallach, Neil Campbell, and John Sepich, critics have devoted only minimal attention to the meaning behind the novel's title and its relation to Manifest Destiny, especially as it applies to the interpretation that expansion in the Southwest resulted in the discovery of an evil territory.

In my first chapter, "Bloodlands of the West," I analyze McCarthy's inversion of the West in *Blood Meridian* as well as his critique of the frontier myth. I outline the specific aspects McCarthy uses to envision the West as a region opposite the classic pastoral image, paying primary attention to war torn landscapes and frontier violence. I also give an account of the history of Manifest Destiny with a specific focus on expansion in the Southwest. John Cant states, the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny "legitimized the cultural and material extirpation of the indigenous population as a divine mission to civilize the savage" (157). In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy deconstructs the very notion that civilization represents progress by presenting the atrocities

committed by John Glanton, the scalp-hunters, and the judge. In addition, I argue that the Glanton gang's violence mirrors the historic brutality that enabled the Anglo conquest of the Southwest. For emphasis, I use the original manuscripts to present extensive notes McCarthy made in an early draft of *Blood Meridian* that describes the West as a "purgatorial terrain" where only "fierceness and savagery could come out of such conditions" (No. 91/box 35/folder 5).

In the second chapter, "Into the Terra Damnata: The Doomed Region Beyond the *Blood Meridian*," I begin my analysis of the first part of McCarthy's title, *Blood Meridian*. The goal is to establish the "blood meridian" not as a cartographical line but as a metaphorical boundary that leads all who journey past this point to a boundless territory that incites within an urge to satisfy the most carnal instincts. In this chapter, I offer the interpretation that the meridian passing through Nacogdoches is indeed the "blood meridian," which, I argue, is the boundary that marks the peak of brutal violence in the Southwest that occurred during Manifest Destiny. I also examine a note I found in McCarthy's manuscripts that suggests the main title *Blood Meridian* came from the line "my blood is all meridian" in Lord Byron's poem "Stanzas to the Po." In addition, I provide an analysis of the kid's journey from Tennessee to the moment he is initiated into violence in Nacogdoches, where he meets the judge for the first time. Furthermore, my examination of the scalp hunter's war trophies and the kid's violent experience near the "blood meridian" reveals what I believe is McCarthy's thesis: mindless violence is the true nature of mankind.

Finally, in the third chapter, "Bleeding Westward to *the Evening Redness in the West*," I examine the subtitle of McCarthy's novel. To begin, I analyze a particular

passage in *Blood Meridian* that presents a monstrous and primitive vision of the West as a world that seems to exist in a “time before nomenclature was and each was all” (McCarthy 172). The purpose of this analysis is to establish the argument that the Glanton gang’s quest for scalps has led to the farthest, most violent point of the Southwestern frontier where “itinerant degenerates bleeding westward” overrun this part of the country (*Blood Meridian* 78). I also track the kid’s journey from the “blood meridian” outside Nacogdoches to the moment he witnesses the Comanche raid to examine the many ways this apocalyptic scene evokes a hellish vision of the West. I focus on the lawful immorality in this territory and how it has become a testing-ground for evil, specifically for McCarthy’s central character Judge Holden. The judge receives much of my attention to explain how his presence is essential to the disappearance of the West. In this chapter, I offer the interpretation that the frequent images of animate fire, accounts of murder and war, and the character of Judge Holden all portray a vanishing picture of the West. In other words, the “evening redness in the west” is an allusion to the death of the West and the Epilogue of *Blood Meridian* underscores the disappearance of the largely borderless region of the frontier.

CHAPTER II

“BLOODLANDS OF THE WEST”

*There's no such thing as life
without bloodshed.*

--Cormac McCarthy

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* exists in a world, or worlds, apart from any we have seen before. Like New Western revisionist historians, McCarthy imagines a transformation of the Western frontier. One of these worlds inverts the romantic notions associated with the mythical ideology of the West through unimaginable acts of violence; another world or zone of *Blood Meridian* represents the brutality of Westward expansion “under the ostensibly swaying flag of a colonial manifest destiny” (Holmberg 161). McCarthy's novel has a great deal in common with the New Western History, which began as a challenge to the mythicized view of the West Frederick Jackson Turner helped to create in his 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” New Western Historian Patricia Nelson Limerick has argued, “Reorganized, the history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences” (26).

Unlike the classic Western, *Blood Meridian* does not offer a region whose Edenic landscape promises unlimited freedoms and opportunities; rather, McCarthy's novel deconstructs the nostalgic view of the West by depicting the frontier as a barbarous

territory overrun by man's primal nature. And unlike Westerns that have the Western hero protecting the landscape from the villain, McCarthy's text features the judge and the Glanton gang whose relentless pursuit of Indian scalps goes uninterrupted by any heroic figure. Susan Kollin writes that *Blood Meridian* is an "anti-western" that "may well offer the most brutal literary treatment of frontier themes in American history" (561).

Since the publication of *Blood Meridian*, scholars have asserted that McCarthy's novel is indeed an inversion of the mythic West. Robert Jarrett agrees with this and argues *Blood Meridian* is a "revisionary western" specifically "parodying elements of the genre and of the historical record in order to critique the historical myth of our traditional narratives of the West" (69), while Sara Spurgeon states the novel is, "In many ways . . . a counterhistory that contradicts the meaning generated from most official histories of the period" (76). In other words, *Blood Meridian* rejects the iconic literary elements associated with the traditional Western and "reorganizes" the received histories of the West to present the frontier as an uncharted region ruled by cultural and physical violence. In this chapter, then, I present an examination of McCarthy's novel as a literary reinterpretation of the West. I incorporate material on McCarthy's research notes from his archives housed in the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University-San Marcos to support a new reading of the novel, since few scholars have seen the *Blood Meridian* manuscripts.

***Blood Meridian's* Historical Influences**

In *Notes on Blood Meridian*, John Sepich convincingly illustrates that the work that most likely influenced Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is Samuel

Chamberlain's *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*.² Chamberlain's "long-lost personal narrative of the 1840s" recounts the unsettling history of scalp hunting that occurred in the Southwest during the peak of westward expansion (Sepich 5). In *My Confession*, Chamberlain presents Captain John Glanton, the leader of the Glanton gang in *Blood Meridian*, as a prominent figure in his memoir, and McCarthy makes him a central figure in his novel. According to John Sepich, the historical Glanton was a Texas Ranger who "fought Mexicans during the Mexican War, and later killed Indians and Mexicans for profit" (8).

Chamberlain's description of his first encounter with John Glanton in a San Antonio saloon portrays Glanton as a man capable of extreme violence. Chamberlain writes that Glanton, in the defense of one of his men, fatally assaults a Texas Ranger who insulted his company: "Quick as a flash, Glanton sprang up, a huge Bowie Knife flashed in the candle light, and the tall powerful young Ranger fell with a sickening thud to the floor a corpse! his neck cut half through" (61). Records indicate that on June 27, 1849, Glanton accepted a contract from the governors of Chihuahua stipulating he would provide the scalps of raiding Apache Indians (Sepich 8). Based on historical accounts, Glanton's active involvement in the scalp trade is said to have originated from the "desire" to avenge his fiancée, who was murdered by Apaches in 1835 (Sepich 10).

Chamberlain's memoir includes detailed stories of other lawless men who accompanied John Glanton in his search for Indian scalps. Among the members of the Glanton gang, the most notable renegade Chamberlain recorded is the enigmatic Judge Holden, describing the historical Judge Holden as a man just as unnatural as McCarthy's character in *Blood Meridian*. Chamberlain writes that Judge Holden "was a man of

gigantic size” who stood “six foot six” and “had a large fleshy frame, a dull tallow colored face destitute of hair and all expression” (271). In McCarthy’s novel, the first time the judge appears in a public setting, he is described as an “enormous man, close to seven feet in height” who is “bald as a stone” and has no trace of facial hair, eyelashes, or eye brows (McCarthy 6). In Chamberlain’s narrative, the historical Judge Holden had a lurid desire for “blood and women,” and was well known amongst different camps for his “horrid crimes” (271). For example, one of Judge Holden’s most disturbing crimes Chamberlain recounts in his memoir occurred in Fronteras, a municipal village in Sonora, Mexico:

And before we left Fronteras³ a little girl of ten years was found in the chapperal, foully violated and murdered. The mark of a huge hand on her little throat pointed him out as the ravisher as no other man had such a hand, but though all suspected, no one charged him with the crime. (271)

In *Notes on Blood Meridian*, Sepich includes an excerpt from Chamberlain’s introduction of Holden that further illustrates the mysterious nature of the Judge: “Holden was by far the best educated man in northern Mexico; he conversed with all in their own language, spoke in several Indian lingos, at a fandango would take the Harp or Guitar from the hands of the musicians and charm all with his wonderful performance, and out-waltz any poblana of the ball” (Chamberlain as quoted in Sepich 16). In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy’s judge has similar uncanny abilities to Chamberlain’s Judge Holden as McCarthy presents him as a savant who is an artist, historian, scientist, linguist, magician, dancer, fiddler, and executioner. By including these historical figures in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy presents a version of the West that contains a violent history opposite to the

one extolled by the mythic frontier historians like Frederick Jackson Turner.

Furthermore, McCarthy's depiction of frontier violence through the brutal actions of the judge and John Glanton's Indian scalpers merges fiction with fact, thus creating a more accurate portrayal of the American West.

In order to effectively examine *Blood Meridian*, readers must understand the historical context of the novel. In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner claimed that "[t]he United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from West to East we find the record of social evolution" (11). Indeed, Turner's essay marked the West as the key to American progress. He emphasized this by stating that the "existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward" were essential in the establishment of the American West (Turner 1). The "area" Turner is referring to is the "frontier," a region he defines as the "meeting point between savagery and civilization" (3). His view of the American West as "free land" advocates the ideology of Americanism through his imagining of the frontier as a space open for conquest. Turner's essay embodies the principles of American superiority and presents a "grand-narrative" of America by portraying Westward expansion as the most important factor in the development of the United States (Campbell, "Liberty Beyond" 217).

As Alan Trachtenberg has written, "The nation needed . . . a coherent, integrated story of its beginnings and its development. Connectedness, wholeness, unity: these narrative virtues, with their implied telos of closure, of a justifying meaning at the end of the tale, Turner would now embody in the language of historical interpretation" (13). Turner's frontier thesis established a creation myth for America—an origin story that

exaggerated the emergence of a democratic nation. His vision of the frontier was forged by the tenets of Western expansion and frontier values, which stated that the “true point of view in the history of this great nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West” (3).

Anglo westward expansion involved the violent conquest of Indians and Turner hinted in his thesis that hostility was imperative in order to achieve American progress. For example, the westward push from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains was “won by a series of Indian wars” (9). He continues: “The frontier army post, serving to protect the settlers from the Indians, has also acted as a wedge to open the Indian country, and has been a nucleus for settlement” (16). Turner justified violence against Indians by emphasizing the positive history of Anglo expansion: “Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion, which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them” (37).

Turner’s thesis disregards the dark history of the frontier, such as the genocide of the Indians, in order to present the frontier as a “mythic space” full of unlimited opportunities. Turner’s essay avidly promotes westward expansion and furthers the dominant stereotype of the frontier, which considers the genocide of the Indians to be acceptable in the progression of Anglo-American civilization. However, when examined critically, Turner’s view of the frontier as the American Dream is deconstructed by the evidence of Indian annihilation. As David Holmberg writes,

Until the mid-twentieth century, Turner’s theory about history of the formation of the United States and the US psyche through the colonization of the North

American continent was considered an accurate and insightful examination of historical events; from a twenty-first century perspective, his theory is little more than a rationalization for colonial genocide. (144)

In the 1960s, the disillusionment of the Vietnam War influenced a generation to reevaluate the history of the United States, most notably the conquest of Western America. Led by Patricia Nelson Limerick, the New West Historians began to review critically Turner's frontier thesis with the intent to direct attention from his glorification of the frontier to a darker truth. According to Limerick, the purpose of New West Historicism has been to examine the West as a region rather than a process, reject the term "frontier," consider white settlers as invaders, explore the "continuity" between the nineteenth and twentieth century Wests, and feel sympathy for the Indian ("What on Earth" 85-7).

New West Historians object to Turner's definition of the frontier as the "meeting point between savagery and civilization," simply for its suggestion that the frontier is a border between Indians ("savagery") and white settlers ("civilization"). Limerick offers a different interpretation: "When clearly and precisely defined, the term 'frontier' is nationalistic and often racist (in essence, the area where white people are scarce)" (85). However, the main issue New West Historians have with Turner's thesis is how he essentially ignores the brutal history of expansion. In *The Legacy of Conquest*, Limerick asserts that unlike slavery, the mythical view of Anglo conquest was immortalized in "national memory" as a significant event in United States history:

In the popular imagination, the reality of conquest dissolved into stereotypes of noble savages and noble pioneers struggling quaintly in the wilderness. These

adventures seemed to have no bearing on the complex realities of twentieth-century America. In Western paintings, novels, movies, and television shows, those stereotypes were valued precisely because they offered an escape from modern troubles. The subject of slavery was the domain of serious scholars and the occasion for sober national reflection; the subject of conquest was the domain of mass entertainment and the occasion for lighthearted national escapism. An element of regret for ‘what we did to the Indians’ had entered the picture, but the dominant feature of conquest remained ‘adventure.’ Children happily played ‘cowboys and Indians’ but stopped short of ‘masters and slaves.’ (19)

In other words, the celebratory image of the “noble” cowboy battling the “savage” Indian for control of the frontier created a romantic view that negated the violent and domineering nature of the Anglo conquest of the West. As Limerick further states, “Conquest forms the historical bedrock of the whole nation, and the American West is a preeminent case study in conquest and its consequences” (27-8). Moreover, Turner’s portrayal of the frontier as an area of progress collapses once his view is compared to the violent history of Anglo genocide. Limerick’s thorough examination of the American West reveals that the majestic “frontier” envisioned in Turner’s thesis is an unrealistic account of expansion and addresses the disturbing era in America’s history that was marred by the violence of Manifest Destiny.

In the mid-nineteenth century, pioneers believed that America had a divine obligation to extend its boundaries to the Pacific Ocean. This desire for expansion westward originated from a spirit of nationalism following the victories of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The Andrew Jackson era, which had spawned

the “every man is equal” mentality, only encouraged this sense of optimism and the demand for more territory. At this time, the Louisiana Purchase had already been explored and land leading up to the Mississippi River was claimed and settled. Now, fueled with the hope to discover personal fulfillment in an undiscovered region stretching from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast, Americans headed west in droves. John L. O’Sullivan, a newspaper editor, coined the term “Manifest Destiny” to describe the essence of this mindset. In an article he published in the *Democratic Review* in 1845, he defined conquest as an act ordained by God:

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the most high—the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God’s natural and moral of equality, the law of brotherhood—of ‘peace and good will amongst men.’ (O’Sullivan as quoted in Pratt 797)

In these terms, O’Sullivan’s depiction of Manifest Destiny reads as a calling for Americans to establish democracy in the name of God. Indeed, many settlers came to embrace the belief that God blessed the growth of the American nation. In the Southwest, however, O’Sullivan’s divine interpretation of Manifest Destiny was viewed differently, for Anglos considered Manifest Destiny to be a doctrine that justified America’s westward expansion into Indian and Mexican territories.

Gary Anderson's account of the political motivations concerning expansion in Texas and the Southwest in 1844 focuses on the presidential nomination of James K. Polk and his involvement in the annexation of Texas. In *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, Anderson states, "The nomination of James K. Polk, as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, came with a promise to annex Texas to the union. His victory in a close election in the fall of 1844 convinced the U.S. Congress to offer statehood to Texas" (212). Achieving independence significantly affected every Texas community, instilling a strong sense of pride, especially once the Republic of Texas finally came to an end and statehood became official. For Texas, annexation occurred at a time when the "geopolitical philosophy" of Manifest Destiny was infectiously spreading across America, and settlers were expanding even further into the West at an extraordinary rate (Anderson 212). Anglos in Texas perceived Manifest Destiny as an idea that not only encouraged forceful expansion into other territories but also supported some of the more pivotal aspects of the Texas creed.

According to Anderson, the Texas creed emphasized "[t]hat it was the destiny of Anglos to dominate western lands, that Indians and Hispanics had little idea of what to do with the land they claimed, and that Americans were destined to advance into the West bringing democracy and Protestantism" (212). Manifest Destiny only enhanced the rhetoric embodied in the Texas creed and as a result, influenced Anglos to engage in racial violence. Driven by a "spirit of revenge" that had been growing since the Texas Revolution, Anglos carried out their version of Manifest Destiny in raids that "claimed the land, stock, and lives of Mexicans" (Montejano 26). For example, one of the most violent incursions occurred in the old Mexican town of La Bahia. With over a thousand

residents, La Bahia became one of the first communities to “feel the vengeance for the massacres at Goliad and the Alamo,” when Anglos demolished the fort and set fire to the church (Montejano 26).

While racial warfare between Anglos and Mexicans spread throughout the state, Texas was growing more rapidly in population than any other region in America. In 1845, 140,000 people resided in Texas; by 1860, Texas had increased to 600,000 inhabitants (Anderson 213). Indian societies occupying land in Texas were tragically affected by the sudden influx of pioneers as the new Texas state legislature forcefully took land away from Indians and sold it to the incoming settlers for a profit. Indian tribes that chose not to relocate were decimated by diseases that accompanied the overwhelming numbers of new residents, and bison, a primary form of sustenance for Indians, were slaughtered at will by Anglos. Overall, the newcomers disliked Indians and viewed the indigenous people as “heathens” impeding the progress of Anglo civilization.

Relations between Indians and Mexicans were also drastically disrupted by the ever-increasing number of Americans moving into Texas and northern Mexico. Population pressure on the region heightened tension between Indians and Mexicans, and eventually violence erupted across the Southwest. In 1849, Mexican authorities resorted to a genocidal campaign against Apaches that was first instituted in the 1830s and consisted of the governors of Sonora and Chihuahua activating a “policy of Apache extermination conducted by means of bounties offered for Apache scalps” (Hall, *Social Change* 161). The financial reward for scalps varied between “one hundred pesos for an Apache man’s scalp, fifty for a woman’s, and twenty-five for a child’s” (Anderson 232). Large gangs of Mexican renegades and “young Indian warriors” from the Shawnee and

Delaware tribes were organized by ex-Anglo soldiers to hunt Apaches for money along the Texas-Mexico border (Anderson 232). The scalp trade instantly became a lucrative market for renegades to profit from; however, some Anglos seized the opportunity to turn the genocide of Apache Indians into an enterprise. Among them was the Glanton gang, McCarthy's choice of subject matter in *Blood Meridian*, and he fashions Glanton's mercenaries from this historic group of scalp-hunters hired by Mexican governors. In *Blood Meridian*, the men hunting scalps with ex-Ranger John Glanton are several Delaware Indians, the Brown Brothers (Charlie and Dan), Judge Holden, and an assortment of other renegades (McCarthy 152).

While the scalp market was thriving in Texas and northern Mexico, the American frontier expanded from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. Following the Mexican-American War in 1848, Mexico ceded control of California and New Mexico to the United States in 1849. Commercially, acquiring California from Mexico significantly affected the economic position of the United States, for the ports in San Diego and San Francisco permitted commercial classes to "facilitate trade with Asia" (Hall 171). Overall, the acquisition of California provided the United States with an empire that stretched from east to west and ultimately led to hegemony over Indian territories.

In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy sets the bulk of the action in "eighteen and forty-nine" (5), and his novel takes a similar geographical path of Manifest Destiny through the journey of the kid, who wanders from Tennessee to the ninety-eighth meridian in Texas, across the border into war-torn Mexico and farther west to the coast of southern California. As defined by Walter Prescott Webb, the ninety-eighth meridian is the boundary between "frontier and wilderness" (*The Great Plains*, 4). The kid, along with

the judge and the Glanton gang, crosses the ninety-eighth meridian into “wilderness” to engage in a violent campaign of scalp-hunting along the Texas-Mexico borderlands while under contract to Mexican governors.

From the perspective of the kid, we bear witness the horrors of conquest and become immersed in a territory where ruined churches like the historic La Bahia dominate the landscape. Unlike the iconic West of Turner, *Blood Meridian* does not present the “frontier” as a territory that offers the American Dream. Rather, McCarthy sees the paradox of the frontier as a place that attracts men with its promise of freedom and all the expectations linked to personal fulfillment and delivers all who cross the “meridian” into a kind of madness (Campbell 221). McCarthy’s text defamiliarizes us from the “Hollywood western” and inverts the genre by transforming the “mythic space” of the West into a region that has become a testing-ground for evil, specifically for McCarthy’s central character Judge Holden. According to David Holmberg, “*Blood Meridian* creates a postmodern heterotopian zone in which multiple disparate spaces come to exist impossibly together, leaving [McCarthy] to dispatch a gang of historical figures into a neomythic, postapocalyptic, and postmodern unreality that is and is not Texas, that is and is not the West” (142).

Rewriting the West

Throughout its history the American West has represented different versions of the American Dream. During the eighteenth century, it was imagined as a vast region of opportunities, freedom, and refuge for those in search of a place of release from the severe economic and political conditions of Europe and Asia. In the nineteenth century, it

acted as a symbol of hope for people around the world, and of the millions who ventured West in search of fulfillment, there were many individuals who found success, enough to keep the notion of the West as a utopia alive through the twentieth century. Over time, the West of the imagination became the West of myth, a land that “served as a soothing contrast to the harsh realities of the contemporary world” (Steckmesser 29).

According to Gerald Nash, in the decade of the 1890s, men and women were born at a time when “Western frontier conditions” were still significant in parts of the United States, particularly in their youth (198). However, by the time of their middle age that was no longer true. As a result, Nash writes:

The generation that wrote during the years from 1890 to 1920 was overcome with a profound sense of loss, a feeling of nostalgia for the disappearance of a world which they had cherished, a world which had been at the very center of the American Dream, of the national mythology which Americans used to explain themselves not only to each other, but to the rest of the world. (198)

American novelists were inspired by the efforts of these historians and reinforced the impression of the West as myth through a romanticized portrayal of the establishment of western civilization. Between 1890 and 1920, a “lost golden age” of a West emerged that was “an uncomplicated, sparsely populated area characterized by a majestic, uncluttered landscape rather than by a crowded urban environment” (Nash 208). The type of people who inhabited this West were “noble and distinctive individuals, personified by mountain men, trappers, or cowboys, and hardy pioneer farmers” (Nash 208). Pulp western novels and magazines contributed to the embellished perception of the mythic West, which was further enhanced by the Wild West shows of Buffalo Bill. And by 1905, millions were

able to experience the nostalgic period of the West through the emergence of the Western film. Eventually, in the United States and around the world, the mythical perception of the West formed a deep impression on the consciousness of people who had never actually seen the region (Nash 209).

In one of the very few interviews Cormac McCarthy has given, he says “ ‘I’ve always been interested in the Southwest. There isn’t a place in the world you can go where they don’t know about cowboys and Indians and the myth of the West’ ” (Woodward, *NY Times*). McCarthy’s decision to select the American West and the Western as frame for *Blood Meridian* was no mere coincidence. In fact, the western paradigms in *Blood Meridian* indicate McCarthy is well acquainted with the Western genre and its association with the mythic West. However, in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy’s version of the West goes far beyond the enshrined portrayal of the mythic West historians created in the nineteenth century to much earlier, darker perceptions. In Dante’s *Inferno*, Ulysses remembers his words to his men:

‘Brothers,’ said I, ‘that have come valiantly
 Through a hundred thousand jeopardies undergone
 To reach the West, you will not now deny
 To this last little vigil left to run
 Of feeling life, the new experience
 Of the uninhabited world behind the sun.’ (Canto XXVI)

A West “behind the sun” is composed of unexplored terrain—a place governed by the “Other,” a territory “beyond reckoning” (McCarthy 245), like that drawn in *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy’s West is a region of the unknowable. What was once Mexico and

now Texas has been transformed by the hyper-violent Judge Holden, who is in search of a Godlike existence in a place “beyond men’s judgments [where] all covenants were brittle” (106).

Unlike the picturesque landscapes in the Western films of John Ford, McCarthy imagines the American West in *Blood Meridian* as a neobiblical wasteland dominated by “brutal deserts and blinding snow, ghost towns and bleached skeletons” (Holmberg 149). McCarthy’s descriptions of the land portrays a paranormal world that is no longer the West. Instead, the West has become a “hallucinatory void” composed of “land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear” (McCarthy 113, 47). In McCarthy’s draft material is an outline of descriptions strictly related to the landscape in *Blood Meridian* both typed and written in pencil. The outline is titled “December 1st 1983”, and listed underneath are the following descriptions: “Barren peppercorn hills (?) Naked and resigned ground ~~Hallucinatory void~~ Scablands (?) Sparebone terrain ~~Loathsome terratoid~~ they endured upon that plain Brooding and godabandoned land (godless quadrant) Manvoid and inpopulate waste” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/6). Overall, this outline suggests McCarthy intended to depict a West completely devoid of the pastoral elements found in Western novels.

McCarthy’s research further demonstrates his intent to avoid the mythic West and instead focus on the violent history of the forgotten era of Manifest Destiny, particularly as it played out in the Southwestern frontier. Throughout McCarthy’s draft material are meticulous and extensive notes regarding the savage nature of frontier violence. For example, one passage records in detail the aftermath of a Comanche massacre: “Arms (and) legs severed, genitals smashed or amputated Breasts sliced off, eviscerated,

decapitated, entrails burned Left young girls eviscerated to die, staked victims to face the sun w/ eyelids amputated” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/5).

One of the more graphic accounts of genocide listed in McCarthy’s research is taken from George Frederick Ruxton’s *Life in the Far West*. It reads: “Ruxton says in the village of Galeana at a peacemeeting Kirker slaughtered 160 Apaches. One pregnant woman rushed into the church and clasped the altar crying out for mercy and was pierced with a dozen lances, ripped open, her child baptized, and then its brains bashed out against the altar (reread this).” Written directly above this paragraph is “purgatorial terrain (mine)” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/7). In the novel, the Glanton gang’s slaughter of the Gilenos reproduces the barbaric imagery featured in Ruxton’s *Life*:

There were in the camp a number of Mexican slaves and these ran forth calling out in Spanish and were brained or shot and one of the Delawares emerged from the smoke with a naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden stones and swung them by the heels each in turn and bashed their heads against the stones so that the brains burst through the fontanel in a bloody spew and humans on fire came shrieking forth like berserkers and the riders hacked them down with their enormous knives and a young woman ran up and embraced the bloodied forefeet of Glanton’s warhorse. (156)

McCarthy’s reinterpretation of the massacre at Galeana in *Blood Meridian* indeed portrays a “purgatorial terrain” where primal acts of “pornographic” violence seem altogether possible in such hellish conditions (Jarrell 32).

McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* is a literary reinterpretation of the American West based on the bloody history of Anglo expansion in the Southwest. Steven Shaviro writes

that McCarthy's novel "is not a salvation narrative" and that "everything in *Blood Meridian* is violence and blood, dying and destruction" (149, 157). In the blood soaked Southwestern landscape, the Glanton gang search methodically for Indian scalps in an uncharted region. McCarthy's draft material suggests he intended to avoid the mythic West to reveal the violent era of Manifest Destiny history has forgotten and to explore the primal nature of man. Judge Holden and his gang of mercenaries represent the primal urge of man, and the American West is imagined as a land that seems to have originated from the carnal instincts of the human condition.

CHAPTER III

INTO THE “TERRA DAMNATA”: THE DOOMED REGION BEYOND THE *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

My blood is all meridian.
--Lord Byron

One of the more interesting aspects of Cormac McCarthy’s fifth novel is the main title, *Blood Meridian*. Aside from a small number of scholars, only minimal attention has been given to the meaning behind the title *Blood Meridian* and its relation to the narrative’s predominant image of a “bloodred” sun accompanying the kid’s extremely violent passage west. In the Western genre—especially in Western films—the cowboy, or hero, is often romanticized through the recurring image of the heroic character galloping full speed towards a golden sun either rising or setting in the distance. In Westerns, a sunrise—or sunset—symbolizes a new beginning and a promise for more adventures. In *Blood Meridian*, however, the sun is a malevolent force that is compared to a “holocaust” that burns like “some great fire at the earth’s end” (McCarthy 105, 21). In *Blood Meridian*, there are no heroes riding into the sunset; rather, all characters in McCarthy’s novel have “hearts of clay” and are led to their eventual demise by the maniacal vision of the group’s two leaders, Judge Holden and John Glanton (McCarthy 5).

In *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy acknowledges the extraordinary brutality that occurred at the height of Manifest Destiny and in this context, the “blood meridian” of the title can be interpreted as a peak or climax. Neil Campbell writes, “The ‘mythic

space' of the West is an emptiness that challenges the self to assert its existence against the death that always lurks there. McCarthy's 'blood meridian' is the point at which one reaches the fullness of life and simultaneously recognizes the proximity, even the inevitability, of its end" ("Beyond Reckoning" 57). In other words, Campbell's interpretation of the title is that the "blood meridian" is a realm that pushes men to a terrible confrontation with their mortality, ultimately ending in death. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "meridian" can be defined as "the point or period of highest development or perfection, after which decline sets in" (*OED*). Apparently, Campbell's perception of the title leads him to this definition of "meridian" in his interpretation of McCarthy's main title, *Blood Meridian*.

In the original *Blood Meridian* manuscripts, among Cormac McCarthy's notes is an old manila folder he used to organize his research. Written in pencil on the back of the folder is the following note: "SEE OED Meridian—Byron quoted (get full quote)," and underneath this note, McCarthy wrote "Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness In The West" (McCarthy, draft n. pag. 91/35/6). Other than in the title pages of the *Blood Meridian* manuscripts, this reference is the only one to the novel's full title. "OED" is a clear reference to the *Oxford English Dictionary*; however, McCarthy's self-reminder to obtain a "full quote" of Byron's proved more difficult to trace.

My examination of the concordance of Byron's complete work of poetry reveals that the word "meridian" is used in the following poems: "Fugitive Pieces," the tenth canto of "Don Juan," and "Stanzas to the Po." In "Stanzas to the Po," specifically in the eleventh and twelfth stanzas, the line "blood is all meridian" is the quote that most resonates with Cormac McCarthy's title *Blood Meridian*. Although descriptive of a

desirous longing for love, Lord Byron's "Stanzas to the Po" is deeply introspective and self-concerned, as the poem shifts from a reflection of lovesick feelings to an attitude of apathy regarding the possibility of a relationship based entirely on love. At the conclusion of this poem, the poetic persona—the classic Byronic hero—realizes that any hope of love bringing an end to his self-destructive behavior has passed. The poet in "Stanzas" imagines that another man has taken possession of his love's interests, and disgusted by this notion, he claims that he is once again a "slave to love" and his "blood is all meridian" (Byron 45,48). Byron's persona ultimately longs to return to "dust" for it is from "dust [he] sprung," as he believes death is the only solution to his self-inflicted emotional torture.

According to Deborah Lutz, "The Byronic figure's lonely soul, while withdrawn . . . needs to be witnessed; he desires to have someone hear his story, to see his depths of pain" (29). In "Stanzas to the Po," the line "blood is all meridian" suggests that the poet's state of isolation and own self-affliction have culminated at the highest emotional point, and because he is unable to share his pain with the one he loves, he welcomes the prospect of death. In McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, self-torture is not exactly a theme; however, the senseless violence in *Blood Meridian* depicts the historical period when the bloodshed of the West was at its peak. Similar to the poet who wishes to return to dust in "Stanzas to the Po," man is condemned to "dust and nothingness" in *Blood Meridian* (McCarthy 145). As the judge says to Glanton's scalp-hunters, man's "spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his darkening and the evening of his day" (McCarthy 146-147). Like William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," in which the line "no country for old men" became the title of McCarthy's ninth novel, it

seems likely that the line “blood is all meridian” was the phrase McCarthy had in mind for the main title *Blood Meridian*.

Another interpretation of McCarthy’s main title is that the phrase “blood meridian” refers to a line of longitude—specifically the ninety-eighth meridian—which is the cartographical line Walter Prescott Webb defined in his influential work, *The Great Plains*, as the boundary between “frontier and wilderness” (4). Webb describes the Plains as a vast region stretching from the ninety-eighth meridian in the east (the line passing through the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas) to the Pacific slope of the Rocky Mountains of the west (extending through Washington state, Oregon, and California) and stretching from Canada in the north to Mexico in the south across the North American continent (4). Webb concluded that the Great Plains stands alone as a distinct environment radically different from the wet timbered areas of the East, specifically in that three physical characteristics—scarcity of lumber, level land surface, and semi-arid climate—differentiated the Plains from the rest of the North American continent. Upon examining the Plains, Webb realized that these physical changes occurred around the ninety-eighth meridian and that the two most essential elements of life in the eastern United States—abundant rainfall and large stands of timber—were missing.

Webb stated that the treeless region stretched from the “ninety-fourth meridian to the ninety-eighth meridian on the east of the Pacific Slope of the Rocky Mountain system” (5), and that the semi-arid climate produced only 20 inches of precipitation annually, spreading the rainfall pattern from “roughly the ninety-eighth meridian to the one hundred and eighteenth or one hundred and twentieth” (7). The pioneers called this

area the “Great American Desert,” and they had great difficulty coping with the arid climate. Many moved their entire settlement from the “desert” to California and Oregon, leaving behind an enormous region that lay uninhabited and undeveloped. Eventually, the “Great American Desert” was settled by a number of frontier societies and over time, this area became known as the “Great Plains.” According to Webb, the ninety-eighth meridian is significant to the American West because the area between the ninety-eighth meridian and the western slope of the Rocky Mountains is the Great Plains, and this meridian happens to be the very line that marks the eastern boundary.

One reason the ninety-eighth meridian is associated with the “meridian” in the title of McCarthy’s novel is that it corresponds with the line of longitude that passes through the geographic point in Texas where “in the spring of the year eighteen and forty-nine [the kid] rides up through the latterday republic of Fredonia into the town of Nacogdoches” (McCarthy 5).⁴ However, critical response has split over which meridian line McCarthy is referring to in the main title. Steven Frye writes, “Tellingly the kid’s initial experience of the events that will define him occurs in the east Texas town of Nacogdoches, which is located on the ninety-eighth meridian, identified by Frederick Jackson Turner as the boundary line that separates civilization and savagery” (69). In an interview with Peter Josyph, McCarthy scholar Rick Wallach asserts that the “meridian” in the title does not refer to the ninety-eighth meridian; rather, he argues, it is a different cartographical line that deserves recognition:

I think the *Blood Meridian* is an oblique reference to the 96th parallel, which Frederick Jackson Turner defined as the boundary of the horizon of the West.

Beyond that, the laws and regulations of civilized America didn’t apply. When the

rougher and readier among us went out and carved the malleable proto-matter of the new civilization from the wilderness, the 96th meridian followed them westward, so to speak. About the time the book is set, that meridian would run mighty close by Nacogdoches, which is where the Kid meets the Judge for the first time. (Josyph, *Adventures in Reading* 93)

Indeed, the coordinates of the ninety-sixth meridian situates this longitudinal line closer in proximity to Nacogdoches by one degree north and one degree west. In addition, much of the narrative of *Blood Meridian* occurs to the west of the ninety-eighth meridian so it is possible the “meridian” in the title is, as Wallach suggests, a reference to the ninety-sixth meridian. However, the coordinates for Nacogdoches— 31.6033° N, 94.6553° W—places this locale closer to the ninety-fourth meridian rather than Frye’s ninety-eighth or Wallach’s ninety-sixth. Also since there is no mention of any cartographical line in McCarthy’s novel it is difficult to determine if the “meridian” in the title is in fact a reference to a specific longitudinal line.

In *Blood Meridian*, the kid, along with the judge and Glanton gang, head west from Nacogdoches and cross the boundary separating “civilization and savagery” to engage in a violent campaign of scalp-hunting that reflects the bloody historical acts of nation-building in the Southwest. As stated previously, Frye argues that the boundary the kid crosses is the ninety-eighth meridian and could also be the “meridian” in the main title. However, this is a literal interpretation of the title *Blood Meridian*. I offer a different interpretation and argue that the “meridian” of the title is a metaphorical boundary that leads all who journey past this point to a boundless territory that incites within an urge to satisfy the most carnal instincts. In other words, the ninety-eighth—or ninety-fourth or

ninety-sixth—meridian becomes the “blood meridian,” which is the boundary that marks the brutality of westward expansion in the Southwest.

We are introduced to *Blood Meridian*'s unnamed protagonist in the first sentence—”See the child”—who was born during the famous Leonids meteor shower of 1833 (McCarthy 3). Like Huckleberry Finn, the “child” embarks on an escape to the west, reminiscent of the theme in the American masculine romance that is best described as “lighting out for the territory”—a journey in which the Western wilderness represents a new beginning (Jarrett 64). However, McCarthy deconstructs the innocence of the Western hero by transforming the “American Adam” into a ferocious youth (Kollin 565).⁵ The “child” in *Blood Meridian*, for instance, is presented as dangerous from birth, his mother becoming his first victim, who “did incubate in her own bosom the creature who would carry her off” (McCarthy 3). Unlike the virtuous frontier hero, McCarthy’s “child” is the opposite and has an inherent capacity for brutality: “He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence” (McCarthy 3).

When he turns fourteen, the “child” abandons his father in Tennessee and heads west. His journey westward is sketched for the next few pages in which he travels from Memphis to St. Louis and “fights with sailors” on a steamboat (4), is shot in the back and below the heart by a “Maltese boatswain” in New Orleans (4), spends two weeks recuperating in a tavern (4), boards a boat “going to Texas” (4), disembarks in Galveston and lives in alleys where “whores call to him from the dark like souls in want” (5), heads north from Galveston and sees a man “hanged in a crossroads hamlet” (5), accepts a donkey as pay for his work in a “diphtheria pesthouse” (5), and finally, “aback this animal in the spring of the year eighteen and forty-nine” he rides into Nacogdoches (5). The

“child,” upon leaving Tennessee, has left Western civilization behind him, seemingly in pursuit of the American Dream of starting anew in the West.

As a literary theme, David Mogen states that the American Dream embodies the philosophy that “Americans are manifestly destined to achieve prosperity and power” (“The Frontier Archetype” 22). On the other hand, Mogen also argues that although “the allure of the [American] Dream” is tantalizing, the Dream can also be “potentially destructive” (29). McCarthy’s West is not the regenerative West of conventional American ideology, especially in regards to the pursuit of the American Dream; rather, the West in *Blood Meridian* denies the “child” an authentic rebirth and portrays the wilderness escape as a purgatorial journey: “Only now is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become remote as is his destiny and not again in all the world’s turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man’s will or whether his own heart is another kind of clay” (McCarthy 4-5). By the time he arrives at the “blood meridian,” “the child” has lost his childhood, and at this point in the novel he becomes the character known as “the kid.”

In Nacogdoches, near the “blood meridian,” the kid meets Judge Holden and experiences a violent initiation. The kid first meets the judge at a religious revival led by the Reverend Green who “had been playing to a full house daily as long as the rain had been falling and the rain had been falling for two weeks” (McCarthy 5). As soon as the judge enters the tent, the kid and the rest of the congregation take notice of his monstrous physical stature:

He was bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close to seven feet in height and he stood

smoking a cigar in this nomadic house of God and he seemed to have removed his hat only to chase the rain from it for now he put it on again. The reverend had stopped his sermon altogether. There was no sound in the tent. All watched the man. (6)

Here, the judge formally addresses the audience with a speech that exposes Reverend Green as a fraud and reprobate while revealing the intellectual aptitude and guile of Judge Holden:

Ladies and gentlemen I feel it my duty to inform you that the man holding this revival is an imposter. He holds no papers of divinity from any institution recognized or improvised. He is altogether devoid of the least qualification to the office he has usurped and has only committed to memory a few passages from the good book for the purpose of lending his fraudulent sermons some faint flavor of the piety he despises. In truth, the gentleman standing here before you posing as a minister of the Lord is not only totally illiterate but is also wanted by the law in the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Arkansas. (7)

David Cremean writes, “[r]epresenting a relatively formal Victorian style of speech, that of an educated person, even legalese, Holden’s speech serves both to deceive and impress” (10). In one bold stroke, the judge is presented as an expert rhetorician with extraordinary charisma whose speech allows him to assume an air of authority. This point is made evident when Holden’s following accusations bring the crowd to a riotous uproar: “On a variety of charges the most recent of which involved a girl of eleven years—eleven—who had come to him in trust and whom he was surprised in the act of violating while actually clothed in the livery of his God . . . Not three weeks before this

he was run out of Fort Smith Arkansas for having congress with a goat” (McCarthy 7). These allegations incite those in attendance to attack the preacher—and also one another—as the revival suddenly becomes a scene of pandemonium: “Already gunfire was general within the tent and a dozen exits had been hacked through the canvas walls and people were pouring out, women screaming, folk stumbling, folk trampled underfoot in the mud” (McCarthy 7). In the scene following the eruption in the tent, the judge admits to the kid and a group of men present at the revival that he had “never even heard of [Reverend Green]” and the graphic acts the judge accused him of were complete fabrications (McCarthy 8). Joshua Masters asserts, “The judge’s entrance into the novel in Reverend Green’s revival tent immediately establishes him as a trickster—as a figure who turns the world upside-down, who spits at convention and embraces taboos, who essentially transgresses any and all boundaries that establish order” (25). In the beginning of the novel, the “blood meridian” is the boundary the judge infringes upon with his chaotic order; at this boundary and elsewhere, the judge disrupts civilization merely for his own sadistic pleasure.

Throughout the novel, violence occurs at random and without motivation and is “never heroic or in any way justified or justifiable” (Softing, “Desert Pandemonium” 16). Softing continues: “At times the violence in *Blood Meridian* seems in itself an element whose purpose is to accentuate the historic brutality of westward expansion—and the heroic journey westward—in an extremely grotesque manner” (16). Near the “blood meridian,” the kid’s own westward journey is interrupted by a trivial episode of mindless violence with Toadvine, a vagrant who later becomes a member of the Glanton gang. Drunk and outside “the jakes” on a muddy boardwalk in Nacogdoches the kid assaults

Toadvine, who lunges “after [the kid] with [a] jagged bottleneck . . . to stick it in his eye” (McCarthy 9). The fight comes to an end when Toadvine manages to knock the kid unconscious with a “huge shellalegh” (McCarthy 9). When the kid regains consciousness, he sees Toadvine clearly for the first time and notices that Toadvine’s physical appearance has been altered by frontier violence:

The kid looked at the man. His head was strangely narrow and his hair was plastered up with mud in a bizarre and primitive coiffure. On his forehead burned the letters H T and lower and almost between the eyes the letter F and these markings were splayed and garish as if the iron had been left too long. When he turned to look at the kid the kid could see that he had no ears. (11)

We learn later in the novel that scalps and human ears act as “receipts” for those Judge Holden, John Glanton, and other scalp-hunters have killed (McCarthy 98). In the shocking scene of Glanton’s casual execution of an old Indian woman in a Mexico village, Glanton’s ruthlessness is emphasized by his calm demeanor as he examines the woman’s scalp in “the way a man might qualify the pelt of an animal” (McCarthy 98-99). Another unforgettable image glorifying these “receipts” is the scapular of rotting ears, which Toadvine ironically wears as a primitive war trophy. Barclay Owens writes, “The ears are a literal string of ‘witnesses’ attesting to frontier killing—a badge of merit earned by participation in primal violence” (24). However, the scalp-hunters of *Blood Meridian* have to enter a realm alien and strange to collect their “receipts,” a place which is, “like some demon kingdom summoned up or changeling land” that exists beyond the “blood meridian” (McCarthy 45). This “demon kingdom” which the scalp-hunters travel through is a mutated hellscape where fear, violence, and malevolence are the ruling features of the

terrain. When the scalp-hunters return to civilization, they are filthy, depraved, and regenerated only in further violence, with even more trophies of war hanging from their “scapulars” (McCarthy 78). At one point, the kid sees them as

a pack of vicious-looking humans mounted on unshod Indian ponies riding half drunk through the streets, bearded, barbarous, clad in the skins of animals . . . the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears and the horses raw-looking and wild in the eye and their teeth bared like feral dogs . . . the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh. (78)

Megan McGilchrist writes, “Humanity has here become feral, less than feral, beyond feral: reduced to some depraved state which mimics the wild, but lacks the dignity of the natural world, and it is controlled and led by the avatar of science, the Judge. The world represented by the visitation of the scalp-hunters is one in which ordinary life becomes its opposite” (122). In *Blood Meridian*, mankind at some point has been greatly disturbed and as a result, has regressed to a primal state of hyper-violent masculinity.

It is not clear why mankind has become so brutal. However, the third epigraph to *Blood Meridian* points to an earlier feral state and indicates that mankind has been primitive for quite some time:

Clarke, who led last year’s expedition to the Afar region of northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkeley colleague Tim D. White, also said that a re-examination of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier shows evidence of having been scalped. (*The Yuma Daily Sun* June 13, 1982)

In *Blood Meridian*, we are given the impression that the promise of unlimited opportunity

in the West has further corrupted the human condition and “stimulated a monstrous ambition against authority, an obscene Faustian lust to satisfy nature by violating all bonds of obedience, religion, and morality” (Slotkin, *Regeneration* 35). However, man’s primordial bloodlust seems only really to take form once the narrative moves beyond Nacogdoches, or more specifically, beyond the “blood meridian.” The novel provides numerous descriptions of the violent terrain that exists beyond the “blood meridian,” with death serving as “the most prevalent feature of this landscape” (McCarthy 48). This region is a “terra damnata” (61), a “purgatorial waste” (63), a land where “war is god” (249).

Upon arriving in Nacogdoches, the kid is not yet prepared to cross the “blood meridian” and continue further west into the “terra damnata”; rather, he must be initiated into violence and form a bond with blood before he can proceed. During his westward journey from Tennessee to Texas, the kid witnessed violence and bloodshed but never fully engaged in violence himself. In McCarthy’s West, it is the judge and John Glanton’s band of scalp-hunters whose extreme capacity for violence helps them succeed as they endure the trials of the desert. In one passage in particular, Glanton and his men are depicted as a force of mythological power:

They rode like men invested with a purpose whose origins were antecedent to them, like blood legatees of an order both imperative and remote. For although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined they made a thing that had not been before and in that communal soul were wastes hardly reckonable more than those whited regions on old maps where monsters do live

and where there is nothing other of the known world save conjectural winds.

(152)

In other words, these men are able to endure the primitive conditions beyond the “blood meridian” because they “have no spirit of seriousness or of enterprise, [and] unwittingly pursue self-ruin rather than advantage” (Shaviro 156). The “order” these men follow is one of total savagery, and before the kid can continue west he must be inducted into the Western culture of violence. After recovering from his bloody brawl with Toadvine in Nacogdoches, the kid amicably forms an alliance with Toadvine, in which they set fire to a hotel and murder a man by kicking him to death (McCarthy 13-14). As the kid pauses on his way out of Nacogdoches to look back at their handiwork, the judge smiles approvingly (McCarthy 14). Judge Holden, who is “the hero-villain who straddles the border between life and death” and is “at turns mad and magical, murderous and maternal” and who “hovers ‘beyond the worst,’ mocking and denying the presence of death,” is essentially the one who assures—with his Cheshire smile—the kid’s initiation into violence has prepared him for the “terra damnata” that lies beyond the “blood meridian” (Campbell 58).

In conclusion, the “blood meridian” of the title essentially has two meanings: (1) in the context of “meridian” as a peak or climax, the “blood meridian” of the title is associated with the historical period when the bloodshed of the West was at its peak; (2) the “blood meridian” is a reference to either the ninety-fourth, ninety-sixth, or ninety-eighth meridian and is the longitudinal line that serves as the precise location of the novel’s setting. However, the meridian passing through Nacogdoches also serves as a boundary that separates civilization from a territory fueled by primal violence. When this

line—or zone—is crossed, it leads to a region that is unnaturally violent and governed by Judge Holden, who signifies chaos, lawlessness, and transgression. Ultimately, the “blood meridian” is “The point past which human fealty to the repressive mechanisms of the civilized psyche begins to disintegrate and give way to the unbounded gratification of the libido” (Josyph, *Adventures in Reading* 93). Even further west is a symbolic landscape beyond the “blood meridian” that lies at the edge of existence, where all that remains to discover is the proximity of death and an ever-present “redness” that resembles an earthly hell.

CHAPTER IV

“BLEEDING WESTWARD” TO *THE EVENING* *REDNESS IN THE WEST*

*To go west, to go as far west as you
can go, west of everything, is to die.*
--Jane Tompkins

Compared to the main title *Blood Meridian*, the allusions regarding the subtitle *The Evening Redness in the West* are more intricate, which perhaps explains why the subtitle has received little scholarly attention. However, a few scholars have examined the subtitle, and similar to analyses of the main title *Blood Meridian*, critical response has split over the meaning for *The Evening Redness in the West*. In *Notes on Blood Meridian*, John Sepich uses the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Jungian psychology, and the first and second epigraph to *Blood Meridian* to interpret the subtitle:

The ‘red’ in the subtitle can, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refer to ‘North American Indians,’ or something ‘golden, made of gold’ (which, the *OED* notes, is ‘now only *thieves’ slang*’), or, probably best, something ‘having, or characterized by, the colour which appears at the lower or least refracted end of the spectrum, and is familiar in nature as that of blood, fire.’ McCarthy quotes Jacob Boehme on ‘the life of the darkness,’ but in a mandala Boehme drew, ‘red leads to the region of fire and the ‘abyss of darkness,’ which forms [its] periphery’ (Jung). The epigraph’s blood pulse in time (from Valery) is absolutely

present in the title. (130)

In the Introduction to *Cormac McCarthy: Modern Critical Views*, Harold Bloom suggests that the lone figure in the epilogue to *Blood Meridian* is Judge Holden, who represents the “evening redness in the west”: “The subtitle of *Blood Meridian* is *The Evening Redness in the West*, which belongs to the Judge, last survivor of the Glanton gang. Perhaps all that the reader can surmise with some certainty is that the man striking fire in the rock at dawn is an opposing figure in regard to the evening redness in the West” (7). Michael Carragher asserts, “The sub-title *The Evening Redness in the West*, employs a pun to suggest that the redness of blood, and the thirst for it, is the ‘evening’ factor in us all” (“I Tego Arcana” 13). In his thorough interpretation of the subtitle with the support of Jungian psychology, Sepich implies that the “redness” in the title refers to a mental state of fire and darkness, which could easily be the mindset of a number of men in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*. Bloom associates the “evening redness in the west” with Judge Holden, mainly because the judge is the only character in the novel who officially usurps death. In the context of Carragher’s interpretation, it is possible the “redness” of the subtitle is indeed referring to the redness of blood in McCarthy’s hyper-violent West. Although these interpretations seem accurate, I argue that the “evening redness in the west” evokes the symbolic image of a “bloodred” sun fading beyond the horizon to its eternal resting place, never to rise again. In other words, the subtitle signifies the death, or end, of the West.

In the original *Blood Meridian* manuscripts, there are no distinct references to the subtitle or even the term “redness” among McCarthy’s notes. Unlike my research for the main title, I was unable to successfully find or even make connections in McCarthy’s

notes to *The Evening Redness in the West*. In addition, since the The Wittliff Collections acquired the papers of Cormac McCarthy in 2007, scholars also have not indicated or written about finding any references to either the subtitle or “redness” in the manuscripts. However, on John Sepich’s website there is an even more thorough concordance to *Blood Meridian* that lists every word that does not appear in the novel more than 337 times. Among his list of words, these are the following terms that are most similar to the “redness” in the subtitle: “redskins” (132, 134); “redrimmed” (16); “redly” (18); “redhot” (153); “reddish” (251); “reddened” (229); “reddening” (274); “red-eyed” (106, 240, 265); and “red” (31, 44, 52, 60, 69, 73, 110, 116, 120, 126, 137, 157, 163, 185, 187, 205, 212, 229, 240, 244, 254, 256, 266, 275, 281, 289, 322, 324) (johnsepich.com). On page 281 in *Blood Meridian*, there is a short description that I argue is the most direct reference to the subtitle and occurs after the Yuma massacre in which the kid, Tobin, and Toadvine are being pursued by a group of Yuma Indians across a desert: “Evening was coming on and in the red land to the west the Yumas were gathering in the silhouette before the sun” (McCarthy). In this description, the Yumas represent impending doom for the remaining members of the Glanton gang; however, it is not the Yumas who kill them. Rather, “in the red land to the west” there is nothing left to discover except the proximity of death. In this context, I argue the subtitle implies that McCarthy’s West is a place where men come to die and that there is no escape from the violent elements this land harbors.

Midway through McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, the Glanton gang—depicted as mythic beasts with a mandate for blood—wander an undiscovered land that seems little reminiscent of any previously seen elements associated with the American West:

They wandered the borderland for weeks seeking some sign of the Apache . . .

Above all else they appeared wholly at venture, primal, provisional, devoid of order. Like beings provoked out of the absolute rock and set nameless and at no remove from their own loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was and each was all. (172)

In this passage, McCarthy calls the Glanton gang “gorgons” which in Greek mythology is the term that refers to any of the three sisters having snake-entwined hair and glaring eyes capable of turning the beholder into stone. “Gondwanaland” is the name for one of the two continents—the other being Laurasia—that formed when Pangea, the supercontinent, broke up.⁶ McCarthy’s use of these recondite terms presents a barbarous and archaic vision of the West as a world that exists in a time before humans were based on a system of names and terms. As David Holmberg writes,

[t]he imagery of *Blood Meridian* is one of the most bizarre features of the novel because McCarthy’s images speak of a land that is not entirely present; for a majority of the novel, the images all address a neomythic, postapocalyptic world that the narrative action does not necessarily support. This is the language of blood and masculinity, of sea creatures and personified darkness; this is Homer’s world not John Ford’s, a realm more similar to *The Odyssey* than any John Wayne film. (“In a Time Before” 149)

In other words, McCarthy eliminates the West from his Western novel. This becomes more evident as the kid and Glanton gang trace the nineteenth-century Southwestern frontier at its farthest, most violent extent south and westward. Historically, the violence was most extreme at the outermost point of civilization, where Anglo and Native

American cultures regressed into a violence that seemed primordial. According to Leonard Thompson and Howard Lemar, “[t]he Southwestern frontier during Manifest Destiny was a border zone of collision in which three cultures contended for territorial and cultural hegemony: the American Anglo, Native American, and Hispanic” (*The Frontier in History* 7). In *Blood Meridian*, this “border zone of collision” is set at the margins of existence where Glanton’s scalp-hunters ply their “trade” and where brutality is rendered in full naturalistic detail—most notably depicted in the massacres of the peaceful Tiguas and various Mexican villagers or even more senselessly in the judge and Vandiemender’s use of newborn puppies for target practice (*Blood Meridian*, 173-74, 180-81, 192-93).⁷

Over and over again, we are subjected to the ruthlessness of Southwestern expansion through savage depictions of the Glanton gang’s indiscriminate slaughtering of men, women, children, and even each other. Susan Kollin writes, “McCarthy’s portrayal of American brutality rips the lid off sentimental understandings of the past; page after page, as bodies pile up, readers marvel at McCarthy’s ability to imagine new means of describing human atrocity” (563). McCarthy makes his West more than the West and creates a West of mythic regions; the descriptions of the land leave the world of Texas and enter into a netherworld that exists “behind the sun” (Dante, Canto XXVI):

The riders rode on. They crossed a vast dry lake with rows of dead volcanoes ranged beyond it like the works of enormous insects. To the south lay broken shapes of scoria in a lava bed as far as the eye could see. Under the hooves of the horses the alabaster sand shaped itself in whorls strangely symmetric like iron filings in a field and these shapes flared and drew back again, resonating upon

that harmonic ground and then turning to swirl away over the playa. As if the very sediment of things contained yet some residue of sentience. As if the transit of those riders were a thing so profoundly terrible as to register even to the uttermost granulation of reality. (McCarthy 247)

Like Ulysses in Dante's *Inferno*, the judge and his band of mercenaries see the West as a testing-ground for themselves, a place of "endless complexity" where man is the sole "witness to the uttermost edge of the world" (McCarthy 141). Here death is the only law, and what counts here is experiencing life contending with the risk of being at the edge of existence at the point of true West (Campbell 57). The temptation is to know and experience that which lies beyond or "behind the sun" even at the risk of destruction for that moment makes one almost Godlike. That voyage West is fraught with danger,

left-handed, ill-omened, sinister . . . A turning away from the direction out of which the sun rises, signifying salvation, to the direction into which it sets, signifying death; a flight compared by implication to the fatal course of Phaeton⁸ . . . it is mad, since to enter the West is to try to live in a dream, i.e., to go insane. (Fiedler, *The Return* 32-33)

In *Blood Meridian*, the West lures individuals with its promise of unlimited opportunities, only to deliver a kind of madness, a "fatal course." Neil Campbell writes, "[t]he 'mythic space' of the West is an emptiness that challenges the self to assert its existence against the death that always lurks there" (57). As stated in the previous chapter, one interpretation of McCarthy's "blood meridian" is that it is the point at which one reaches the fullness of life and simultaneously recognizes the proximity, even the inevitability, of its end. In this context, the blood is both life-giving and life-destroying, hence the

qualification of the novel's subtitle "or the evening redness in the west," which reminds us of a larger mythic fear about the West as a place where the sun "dies." Erich Neumann has written,

the western hole into which the sun descends is the archetypal womb of death destroying what has been born . . . For before the earth and human consciousness existed, everything was contained in the realm of the dead in the West . . . thus the West is the place of the world before the world. (184)

Indeed, McCarthy's West is a land where "all was darkness and without definition," where "in the morning a urine-colored sun rose bleakly through panes of dust on a dim world and without feature" (100, 47); it is, at times, a world without form, a world straight out of Genesis. According to David Holmberg, "in the opening of Genesis, the emphasis is on a formless world in which the only divisions are based on light; in *Blood Meridian*, the focus, too, is on night and day, light and darkness, and a physical world without definition, where there is, just as in Genesis, 'nothing other of the known world save conjectural winds'" (151). In Genesis, there is creation and the beginning of life as Genesis unfolds the record of the origins of the world, of human history, of civilization, of salvation, and of the sun, which illuminated the world with light and represented a sovereign creator.

However, in *Blood Meridian* the sun is a "malevolent" being that repeatedly saturates the sky with a redness that resembles blood as it rises and sets over a land where there is no God, creation, or moral code. Rather McCarthy's "bloodred" sun supplies an allegorical context—that of the earth's "holocaust," which will presage the end of earthly time in the Christian apocalypse (Jarrett 68). Throughout the novel, the West is described

frequently in images of fire, and the fires often seem to be alive: “the fires leaned downwind in the darkness and hot chains of sparks raced among the scrub” (91); “like hot scurf blown from some unreckonable forge howling in the waste” (214); “a region electric and wild where . . . the wagonwheels rolled in hoops of fire” (47). In other words, if McCarthy’s West has elements of Genesis, then it has a similarity with the book of Revelation.

In one of the most vivid prophetic visions in Revelation, John the Apostle sees “a vast crowd, too great to count, from all nations, and provinces, and languages” worshipping a throne of light (*New International Version*, Rev. 7:9). In *Blood Meridian*, the Glanton gang see large groups of people of every race and creed heading west in search of gold as “patched argonauts . . . bleeding westward like some heliotropic plague” (McCarthy 78). A “heliotropic plague” is a contagious illness that is stimulated by and oriented towards sunlight, and like the enormous crowd that is drawn to worship a throne of light in Revelation, there are hordes of “itinerant degenerates” exalting a “bloodred” sun throughout *Blood Meridian* (McCarthy 78). In Revelation, God returns to the world to vindicate the faithful and judge the wicked, leaving His enemies behind to experience hell on earth as the world comes to an end. Like in Revelation, McCarthy’s West is a world that is quickly approaching its end; however, this world is devoid of any faithful followers. Rather the world in *Blood Meridian* was left behind long ago by its creator allowing the wicked to rule “[l]ike a patrol condemned to ride out some ancient curse. A thing surmised from the blackness by the creak of leather and chink of metal” (McCarthy 151). In *Blood Meridian*, this attitude is revealed most fully early in the novel as the kid witnesses an attack by Comanches who descend upon Captain White and his

army troop as if from another world.

Shortly after the kid rides out of Nacogdoches and crosses the “blood meridian,” he engages in a brawl with a barman that makes him “eligible” for recruitment into the company of filibusterers led by Captain White, who attempts to lure the kid into enrolling with the promise of a homestead in Mexico territory at the end of the expedition (McCarthy 25, 34). Captain White informs the kid that the purpose of his campaign is to cross the border into Mexico as “instruments of liberation” and civilize every Mexican inhabiting that “dark and troubled land” (34). In the following passage, Captain White clearly represents the most insidious version of Manifest Destiny:

What we are dealing with is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better. There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there’s no God in Mexico. Never will be. We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That’s right. Others come in to govern for them. (McCarthy 34)

White relies on the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny to justify his hatred of Mexicans and his urgent desire for more Anglo-controlled land. Ultimately, White’s true desire is expressed when he tells the kid, “And we will be the ones who will divide the spoils. There will be a section of land for every man in my company. Fine grassland. Some of the finest in the world. A land rich in minerals, in gold and silver I would say beyond the wildest speculation” (McCarthy 34). In other words, White’s racism justifies taking land from Mexicans and Indians because he believes they are inherently unfit to possess it.

On their way to Mexico, Captain White and his company stop for a drink in a

tavern located on the border and they are approached by an old Mennonite who warns them to not “cross the river” for they will “not cross it back,” and he tells them of what lies beyond: “The wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a million years ago before men were and only men have power to wake it. Hear me. Ye carry war of a madman’s making onto foreign land. Ye’ll wake more than the dogs” (McCarthy 40). Indeed, White and his men are not prepared for the “accursed” territory they are about to enter (McCarthy 251). As White and his troops head west from the tavern and into the desert, a sun of ill omen saturates the sky with a “redness” that resembles blood:

They rode on and the sun in the east flushed pale streaks of light and then a deeper run of color like blood seeping up in sudden reaches flaring planewise and where the earth drained up into the sky at the edge of creation the top of the sun rose out of nothing like the head of a great red phallus until it cleared the unseen rim and sat squat and pulsing and malevolent behind them. (McCarthy 44-45)

In the course of Captain White’s expedition the ever-present “redness” of the sun accompanies them as they ride through a desert that is littered with death: “They saw half-buried skeletons of mules with the bones so white and polished they seemed incandescent even in that blazing heat and they saw panniers and packsaddles and the bones of men and they saw a mule entire, the dried and blackened carcass hard as iron“ (46). White and his troops sleep “like pilgrims exhausted upon the face of the planet Anareta” (46), which, as Leo Daugherty notes, is an obscure but very apt Renaissance allusion to a “planet which destroys life” where “violent deaths are caused” (“Gravers False” 161). At night the landscape which “they rode on,” becomes a surreal nightmare of lightning storms: “[They] quaked sourceless to the west beyond the midnight

thunderheads, making a bluish day of the distant desert, the mountains on the sudden skyline stark and black and vivid” (47). Eventually this desert environment erodes the men’s conviction of the righteousness of their quest as they fall ill and die under the scorching sun. As one man says, “[t]his looks like the road to hell” (45).

Two days later the men encounter a large dust cloud, and seeing a few Indians, Captain White anticipates that he and his men “may see a little sport here before the day is out” (51). However, White does not register the fact that the approaching party might be a threat to him and his men. Rather, he believes that the small number of Indians are nothing more than a “parcel of heathen stockthieves” (51). Instead, Comanches appear by the hundreds:

Legion of horribles . . . wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of cranefeathers or rawhide helmets . . . and one in the armor of a spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust. (52)

The surreal quality in these descriptions of dress refers to warfare in other places and times. McCarthy’s description of “breastplates” and “pauldrons” evokes the image of conquistadors, who in the spirit of expanding the Spanish empire in the 1500s, slaughtered thousands of Indians to conquer the New World. However, as the kid witnesses the Comanche war-party feverishly approach the army troops, they appear as if

they come from another realm as their demonic appearance mirrors apocalyptic imagery:

All howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of christian reckoning, screeching and yammering and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and lip jerks and drools. (53)

What happens next to Captain White and his troop of filibusterers emphasizes that the “redness” in McCarthy’s subtitle implies that McCarthy’s West is an earthly version of hell:

Everywhere there were horses down and men scrambling and [the kid] saw a man who sat charging his rifle while blood ran from his ears and he saw men with their revolvers disassembled trying to fit the spare loaded cylinders they carried and he saw men kneeling who tilted and clasped their shadows on the ground and he saw men lanced and caught up by the air and scalped standing and he saw the horses of war trample down the fallen and a little whitefaced pony with one clouded eye leaned out of the murk and snapped at him like a dog and was gone . . .

[Comanches were] stripping the clothes from the dead and seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals, some of the savages slathered up with gore they might have rolled in it like dogs and some who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows. (53-54)

Michael Carragher argues that Captain White and his “pitiful expedition” is “damned to

hell when the adventurers come upon the Comanche war-party” (14). Indeed, the nightmarish quality of this passage depicts the West as a “demon kingdom” ruled by violence and bloodshed, and Captain White’s attempt to establish order in this condemned country inevitably leads to his brutal end (McCarthy 47). Barclay Owens writes, “McCarthy’s amoral vision of frontier violence is one of mankind running amok, subverting law at every bend in the trail and rendering all moral questions ‘void and without warrant’” (7). Captain White and his men are out of their element and ill-equipped to combat man’s lust for the “redness” of blood, unlike Judge Holden who is every bit as ruthless and inhuman as his enemy.

In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy depicts Judge Holden—a Faustian, Herculean, genius devil—as an agent of disappearance. This incredibly fascinating character is a being of forceful personality and of myriad accomplishments: he’s a “nudist, a dancer, fiddler, magician, world-traveler, linguist, legal expert, natural scientist, chemist, anthropologist, philosopher, and a supreme warrior” (Spenser, *Evil Incarnate*, 100). In other words, Judge Holden is an enigma; discovering a single identity for the judge is a daunting task because he does not have just one identity. Emily Stinson writes, “[The judge] is one, and he is all” (“*Blood Meridian’s Man*” 9). However, in the context of the subtitle, the judge is the embodiment of conquest and disappearance, for it is his nature to capture and erase all that he encounters. *The Evening Redness in the West* signifies that the West is vanishing and the judge is the one who is driving the West to its end. He devours the earth because in the minerals “he purported to read news of the earth’s origins,” as if they were God’s words because God “speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things” (McCarthy 116). His lust for knowledge permits his violence as he hacks his

way to the “bones of things” to “know” them before it all disappears.

As he travels with the Glanton gang, the judge meticulously records the natural and historical artifacts he comes across. In one scene the judge leaves camp to explore “among the rocks of the gorge” and the rest of the surrounding country for Indian and Spanish artifacts and returns with Indian flint, potsherds, primitive tools, and a Spanish suit of armor. He immediately draws each item in his “leather ledgerbook”: The judge “sketched with a practiced ease . . . his fingers traced the impression of old willow wicker on a piece of pottery clay and he put this into his book with nice shadings, an economy of pencil strokes. He is a draftsman as he is other things, well sufficient to the task” (McCarthy 140). The last item he sketches is a “footpiece from a suit of armor hammered out in a shop in Toledo three centuries before, a small steel tapadero frail and shelled with rot,” and the judge draws this item in his sketchbook “citing the dimensions in his neat script, making marginal notes” (McCarthy 140).

After he finished sketching he “took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil and pitched it into the fire” and then “gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire . . . Then he sat with his hands cupped in his lap and he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation” (McCarthy 140). This strange ceremony is repeated throughout the novel; each time the judge makes a perfect copy of the objects and subsequently destroys them. In this way, the judge reduces the West to its “bones”—he records it, reads it, engulfs it, controls it, and ultimately destroys it. We find another example of the judge as an agent of conquest, when Glanton and his men stop at “the Hueco tanks, a group of natural stone cisterns in the desert” (McCarthy 173). In the

following passage, we learn that this cistern has been the site of Indian culture for generations:

The rocks about in every sheltered place were covered with ancient paintings and the judge was soon among them copying out those certain ones into his book to take away with him. They were of men and animals and of the chase and there were curious birds and arcane maps and there were constructions of such singular vision as to justify every fear of man and the things that are in him. Of these etchings—some bright with color—there were hundreds. (McCarthy 173).

After studying and copying a petroglyph, the judge “rose and with a piece of broken chert he scrapped away one of the designs, leaving no trace of it only a raw place on the stone where it had been” (McCarthy 173). The judge’s act of drawing and destroying artifacts demonstrates how he “wants everything: to be ‘suzerain of the earth’ (BM 199). . . . challenging the gods, nature, time itself to permanently recapture a lost moment of perfection” (Campbell 61). In a later passage the judge is asked why he keeps the notebook: “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent . . . Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth . . . This is my claim. In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation” (McCarthy 198-99). In other words, there can be no conflicting accounts, no culture or nature outside of the judge’s will, and he has made it his mission to destroy all he encounters to bring an end not only to the West but also to human existence to assure his permanence.

The judge also acts out his consuming nature when he destroys children. As Neil

Campbell writes, “[i]nfanticides abound in the novel, but always around the judge” (“Beyond Reckoning” 60). This fact is best illustrated when the judge takes a young boy as his prisoner after the Glanton gang attacks and scalps a sleeping tribe of Gilenos Indians. As Glanton and his men ride south from the camp, they leave “behind them on the scourged shore of the lake a shambles of blood and salt and ashes,” while the judge rides “at the head of the column bearing on the saddle before him a strange dark child covered with ash” (McCarthy 160). For three nights, the boy camps with the judge, and some of the men take time to nurture the child. However, at the margins of existence, the judge exerts a godlike control over the territory and ultimately decides who lives and dies in this frontier. Toadvine witnesses the aftermath of the judge’s decision about the boy: “Toadvine saw [the judge] with the child as he passed with his saddle but when he came back ten minutes later leading his horse the child was dead and the judge had scalped it” (McCarthy 164).

One could argue Holden scalped the child for economic reasons since scalps are paid for in gold; however, it seems that money is the least of the judge’s concerns. Rather, I argue he kills the child—and many others—because he is symbolically, metaphorically regenerating himself by taking the lives of the young. As D.H. Lawrence once wrote, “To know a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily” (*Studies in Classic* 76), and according to Richard Slotkin, “[t]he act of destruction itself somehow makes us believe in our manhood and godhood, our Ahab’s power to dominate life and to perpetuate and extend ourselves and our power” (*Regeneration* 563). This form of renewal defeats time and keeps the judge “child-like”⁹ and powerful, as if he deceived the natural order of life by regressing in age—killing

young children to steal their power and youth to prolong himself in order to be the “one” and delay his move “down into darkness” while the West gives way to its end.

Near the end of *Blood Meridian*, the Glanton gang is indeed run to ground after much time and blood. Tracked by the very forces of the governments that once hired them, the judge leads the Glanton gang further and further west to Yuma where they uncharacteristically take over a fort, only to suffer a violent massacre by Yuma Indians. Those gang members that survive—the kid, Toadvine, and Tobin—flee into a desert that is littered with thousands of “yellow bones and carcasses” (McCarthy 287). Missing from the group is the judge who mysteriously disappears during the Yuma massacre. After the kid, Toadvine, and Tobin wander aimlessly across the desert, and eventually arrive at what seems to be the ends of the earth: “The desert upon which they were entrained was desert absolute and it was devoid of feature altogether and there was nothing to mark their progress upon it. The earth fell away on every side equally in its arcature and by these limits were they circumscribed and of them were they locus” (McCarthy 295). This point is the “uttermost edge of the world” where westward expansion has finally come to an end and “run plumb out of country” (McCarthy 141, 299). The Western landscape is no longer an endless terrain for it appears to be vanishing along with the West. However, it is *Blood Meridian*’s enigmatic Epilogue that significantly deepens our understanding of the “evening redness in the west,” which, I argue, is the end of the West.

The Epilogue is roughly set thirty-seven years after the Yuma massacre and is only half a page long. It begins, “In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground. He uses an implement with two handles and he chucks it into the hole and he enkindles the stone in the hole with his steel

hole by hole striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there” (McCarthy 337). Other figures follow this man across the ground and they are “the wanderers in search of bones and those who do not search”—two groups behind the man digging holes. There are various interpretations of the Epilogue, and one of the most well-received critiques of the Epilogue is that it is a haunting depiction of the closing of the West, as Philip Snyder asserts:

The 1886 advent of barbed wire, represented by the digger of the fencepost holes, brought to a close the era of open range culture, and bonepickers, who removed all evidence of the near extinction of the iconic buffalo, vanished, just as the buffalo hunters did, when their material resources ran out. The epilogue anticipates the fenced-in Southwest borderland world of the trilogy, with it nuclear testing and other representations of the destruction of the natural world.

(133)

Indeed, the Epilogue imagines a West that has been depleted of not only its resources but of everything. Man’s lust for the “redness” of blood led to the extinction of the buffalo, and the only remaining evidence of their existence was a desert of bleached bones. In the Epilogue, the first group of wanderers are gathering the bones of exterminated buffalo while the second group seems to be wandering aimlessly, perhaps in search of whatever nourishment they can find. Jay Ellis argues that they are either “running new fence lines, or surveying the landscape. If fencing, they are working with fence posts enabled by the man digging; if surveying, they are placing some similar posts as markers” (92). Based on Snyder’s and Ellis’s interpretations, the wanderers in the Epilogue are limited in their quest because barbed wire has partitioned off most of the land. In the context of the

subtitle the “evening redness in the west,” I think these wanderers are what is left of those who journeyed West to achieve victory over the landscape and its inhabitants. At the end of *Blood Meridian*, expansion has come to an end, the buffalo are dead, the land has been taken, now surveyed and fenced; there is nothing left in this country. These wanderers are “bleeding westward” to their end—to the Evening Redness—where the sun dies along with the rest of the West.

Harold Bloom suggests that the “evening redness in the west” represents the judge; however, Bloom also submits that the fire striker in the Epilogue may be the new Prometheus to oppose the judge’s nihilism (*Modern Critical Views* 7). Indeed, this argument is persuasive for the subtitle and its relation to the Epilogue. However, my interpretation of the subtitle is that the “evening redness in the west” symbolizes the end of the West and in this context, the Promethean motif is inverted. Prometheus stole fire from the gods and brought it back to man; in *Blood Meridian* the man is using a primitive tool to strike fire from the rock “God put there,” and based on the Promethean motif, it would seem he wants to create fire to save man from the unrestrained depravity of McCarthy’s West. In the final scene of *Blood Meridian*, humanity is vanishing along with everything else and somewhere, riding under the blood soaked sun, is the judge who “never sleeps” and patrols the outer lands. The man striking fire will never form a flame of salvation either for man or the West for there is nothing left to save.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the elements of Cormac McCarthy's main title *Blood Meridian* and subtitle *The Evening Redness in the West* to discover if the title provides any significant insight into the novel. In the first chapter, "Bloodlands of the West," I explored McCarthy's dramatic rewriting of the traditional Western in its deconstruction of the codes and motifs upon which the genre usually depends. I also examined the notion of the frontier, first theorized by Frederick Jackson Turner as the "meeting point between savagery and civilization" (3). I demonstrated how Turner's theory has been viewed critically by Patricia Nelson Limerick in order to illustrate the complexities of America's westward expansion. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy goes farther than Limerick in his reinterpretation of the West by illustrating the particular violence of the historical Glanton gang's scalp-hunting expedition through the Southwest.

Virtually every critic of the novel has argued *Blood Meridian* is a revisionist take on the myth of the Old West and has placed McCarthy's text "within Richard Slotkin's project of productive western myth revision, which may have the capacity to open literal and figurative western spaces to other voices and other readings, thus transforming these spaces into sites of fragmentation for the monolith of traditional western history and culture" (Snyder 127). However, in the first chapter, I incorporated McCarthy's draft material to support my argument that McCarthy intended to invert the myth of the

American West while also directing attention to the violence of Manifest Destiny, which occurred during an era many would have preferred to have suppressed. In addition, the draft material emphasized my reading of *Blood Meridian* and perhaps even contributed to the field of McCarthy scholarship, since few scholars have seen McCarthy's manuscripts.

In the second chapter, "Into the Terra Damnata: The Doomed Region Beyond the *Blood Meridian*," I analyzed the main title, *Blood Meridian*. I argued that the "meridian" of the title is not a reference to the zenith or noon position of the sun in the sky but is rather a metaphorical boundary that, when crossed, leads to an immense region that corrupts the human condition and incites a primitive bloodlust. More specifically, I offered the interpretation that the meridian passing through Nacogdoches—where the kid's violent initiation begins—is the "*Blood Meridian*," which is the boundary that marks the peak of brutal violence in the Southwest during Manifest Destiny.

In addition, my interpretation of the "blood meridian" in the title included an analysis of what exists beyond the "meridian," which is the "terra damnata," a land of "purgatorial waste" that serves as the hunting grounds for Glanton's band of scalp-hunters. So deranged are these scalp-hunters that even their horses are carnivorous, as Glanton and his men represent disorder incarnate and are denizens of a world in which nature has revolted against itself. Scalps and severed heads act as "receipts" for those they have killed, while scapulars of human ears suggest that the native people to whom these ears once belonged are viewed by the scalp-hunters more as natural resources than human beings, and are simply just another part of an infinitely violent landscape.

I have been puzzled by the main title *Blood Meridian* ever since I read the novel.

One of my goals was to determine if there were any influences behind the main title. As I wrote in the second chapter, there is a note in McCarthy's draft material that implies a quote of Lord Byron's had an association with the main title of *Blood Meridian*. An examination of a concordance of Byron's works revealed the line "blood is all meridian" from "Stanzas to the Po" was likely the phrase McCarthy had in mind for the title *Blood Meridian*.

In the third chapter, "Bleeding Westward to *The Evening Redness in the West*," I examined the subtitle of McCarthy's novel. I offered the interpretation that the "evening redness in the west" evokes an image of a bleeding sun that is fading beyond the horizon to die and never rise again. In this context, the subtitle represents the death, or end, of the West. In *Blood Meridian* the Glanton gang's relentless pursuit of scalps leads to the furthest point of civilization where all that remains to discover is the proximity of death. Here, at the "uttermost edge of the world" westward expansion has finally come to an end and "run plumb out of country" (McCarthy 141, 299).

As the landscape vanishes into nothing, the judge seeks to erase the history of the Southwest while exerting his will over man. While he traverses the country, the judge records all that he sees in his sketchbook, perfectly documenting the dimensions of every artifact, only to destroy the artifacts later, for it is his "intention to expunge them from the memory of man" (McCarthy 140). The judge is an agent of death who wants not only to bring an end to humanity but to all of existence by sending the "remorseless sun on to its final endarkenment, as if he'd ordered it all ages since, before there were paths anywhere, before there were men or suns to go upon them" (McCarthy 243). The Evening Redness in the West signifies war, bloodshed, violence, genocide, and in the famous *Blood*

Meridian passage in which Captain White and his troop of filibusterers are brutally slaughtered by a horde of Comanches, all of these savage elements converge into one to represent a malevolence that transcends culture and civilization, oceans and continents, as well as time and history. Overall, McCarthy's West is an apocalypse of death, and here in this "demon kingdom" there is no salvation or God; rather, in the end there is only a lone figure digging, progressing, striking fire out of rock in a burnt desert where all that remains are bones and wanderers still "bleeding westward" to their death.

My reading of *Blood Meridian* also points to another area that can be examined. In the critical literature, the role astronomy and heavenly phenomena in *Blood Meridian* have not been adequately explored. In *Blood Meridian*, the landscape of McCarthy's Southwest is composed not only of deserts and mirage effects but also of celestial wonder. The novel begins and ends on nights of meteor showers that occur during the birth and death of the kid. It is the sun that powers the novel's hallucinatory mirages and constellations that are present throughout as the stars act as both clock and compass in many of the scenes in *Blood Meridian*. And of course there is the "meridian," the great circle of the celestial sphere, passing through Canada, the Dakotas and further to Texas to serve as a barrier between the civilized and the primitive. This interpretation of the main title is the most well received among critics; however, McCarthy's manuscripts provide scholars with an opportunity to examine the role the "meridian" and celestial phenomena have in the novel.

Over the last year and a half, I have been engrossed in the visceral vision of *Blood Meridian* which is at times so powerful I have had to stop reading out of the fear that the judge would reach through the pages and clasp his infant hands around my throat. The

descriptive passages in *Blood Meridian* are truly cinematic, and I have often imagined such scenes like the Comanche raid, the kid wandering a bone-strewn desert, or the Glanton gang illuminated by an enormous bloodred sun translated onto film. Since its publication, *Blood Meridian* has captured the imagination of major artists in other fields, especially in film. According to Rick Wallach, the interest filmmakers have in *Blood Meridian* is “ironic to a fault because over the past decade and a half or so some of Hollywood’s biggest guns—Michael Mann, Tommy Lee Jones, and Ridley Scott, for example—have declaimed their intent to make a film of it, only to throw up their hands in frustration once they became engaged in the challenge of bringing it to the screen” (“Twenty-five Years” 6). After the release of *No Country For Old Men* and *The Road*, it was expected that the arrival of other McCarthy adaptations were not too far down the line. As of March 2013, McCarthy readers avidly await James Franco’s film adaptation of *Child of God* and Ridley Scott’s *The Counselor*—which is based on an original screenplay by McCarthy—to be released in fall 2013.¹⁰ As I look forward to these adaptations, I cannot help but think *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy’s epic novel, will never be filmed. Rick Wallach states, the complex nature of *Blood Meridian* is almost impossible to adapt:

O I don’t think the book can be filmed. I think you can make a film called *Blood Meridian*, and I think you can make the diagesis—the action, the storyline, the sequence of episodes—you can film those, but I don’t think you could ever film the book . . . there is a fairly consistent tone in much of *Blood Meridian*, and you can’t have too much of that because you’re going to be depending on real-time chronometry to present the impression of action in the film, and not the

ruminations of the imagination which can be spurred by the turn of a phrase. (as quoted in Josyph, 96)

On the other hand, perhaps it is best that *Blood Meridian* remains in its novel form. In my examination of the title and subtitle to McCarthy's novel, I became all too familiar with the power of evil and how morality can be erased from civilization when evil faces no opposition, nor has any moral boundaries. What remains with me is the judge seated on the closet in the jakes, naked and smiling like a demon, gathering the kid against his "immense and terrible flesh" as the barlatch slams the door shut behind him (McCarthy 333). We are left to imagine what happens to the kid behind that door and whatever it is must be truly horrible. Afterwards, the judge returns to the bar "huge and pale and hairless" to dance naked in "light and shadow" while whispering to anyone that will listen, that he "will never die" (McCarthy 335). Long after finishing *Blood Meridian*, the judge is still dancing in my head.

NOTES

1. Richard Slotkin defined the West as a “mythic space . . . defined by the illusions we create about it” (“Prologue” 422).

2. First published in the summer of 1956, Chamberlain’s memoir was featured as a series of three articles in *Life* magazine. In the Forward to *Notes on Blood Meridian*, Edwin T. Arnold states this particular volume contained excerpts from Chamberlain’s memoir that were complemented by watercolors and sketches drawn by the author (as quoted in Sepich, xii). In the original *Blood Meridian* manuscripts, there is a collection of notes listing the various sources Cormac McCarthy used as research for *Blood Meridian*. Among these sources is the July 1956 volume of *Life* magazine consisting of selected passages from Chamberlain’s memoir. In McCarthy’s notes, this source is listed as: “Life (magazine) volume 41, #'s 4, 5, 6 (July 23 '56 68-91)” (McCarthy, draft n. pag. 91/35/1).

3. An examination of McCarthy’s research of the historical figures in Chamberlain’s *My Confession* surprisingly reveals only a few notes regarding Judge Holden. Compared to the multiple Southwest stories that mention John Glanton, Judge Holden’s “historical existence rests solely on information provided by Samuel Chamberlain in *My Confession*” (Sepich 14). In McCarthy’s notes, the evidence linking Judge Holden to the child murdered in Fronteras is the most significant detail recorded from Chamberlain’s memoir. McCarthy summarizes the incident with the following line: “Holden killed ten year old in Fronteras” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/7). Based on the judge’s

association with several dead children in *Blood Meridian* (118-119, 164, 239, 333), the brief note on the Fronteras murder suggests McCarthy intended to apply the “predacious” nature of the historical Holden to the fictional judge (*Blood Meridian* 146).

4. McCarthy’s research regarding the town of Nacogdoches provides an insightful glimpse into his appreciation for detail as well as his intent to maintain historical accuracy. Among his notes is the following entry: “Main Street Town Plaza Old Stone ‘fort’ was the house of Capt Gil Y’ Barbo built about 1778 and w s [sic] later a trading post. It was at Main and Fredonia and visible at end of street looking east (it faced the northeast corner of the Plaza Principal where the two branches of the Camino Real merged)” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/7). However, the historic detail of Nacogdoches McCarthy included in the published novel is a line from his notes that reads, “This latterday republic of Fredonia (under Edwards, named by Dr Mitchel (prior to Texas Independence)” (McCarthy, draft n. pag., 91/35/7). Scribbled in pencil next to this note is “use page four?” On page five in the published novel, McCarthy writes, “In the spring of the year eighteen and forty-nine he rides up through the latterday republic of Fredonia into the town of Nacogdoches” (5).

5. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), Richard Warrington R.W.B. Lewis’ first major work, examined De Crevecoeur’s viewpoint of the American as a “new man,” and analyzed the “Adamic” theme in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, and a number of others.

6. In 2006, independent scholar Shane Schimpf self-published *A Reader’s Guide to Blood Meridian*. His notes in this reader’s guide provide a page-by-page analysis of all

the novel's esoteric terms along with short essays on the historical figures and locations found throughout the text. Originally Schimpf set out to write an annotated edition of McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. However, after contacting McCarthy's literary agent Amanda Urban with a request to correspond with McCarthy himself, Schimpf was denied such a privilege in the following letter: "Dear Mr. Schimpf, Cormac McCarthy wishes his novels to be read the way he's written them. I do not believe he would be able to help you with your well-intentioned questions. Best wishes, Amanda Urban" (as quoted in *Reader's Guide*, i). As for my own research, Schimpf's guide proved to be a resourceful reference for several unfamiliar terms, especially "Gondwanaland."

7. A "Vandiemlander" was the term for a prisoner or fugitive from Van Dieman's Land which was the original name the British used for what is now Tasmania. Van Dieman's Land was Australia's primary penal colony from the 1830's up to 1853. In *Blood Meridian* one of the members of the Glanton gang is known as "The Vandiemlander," who is also occasionally referred to as Bathcat.

8. In Greek mythology, Phaeton was the son of Helios, who was the god of the sun. Perhaps the most well-known version of the myth of Phaeton is given through Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. Phaeton seeks assurance from his mother, Clymene, in telling the truth that his father is the sun god Helios (as her husband is Merops, a mortal king). When Phaeton obtains his father's promise to drive the sun chariot as proof, he fails to control it and the Earth is in danger of burning up until Phaeton is killed by a thunderbolt from Zeus to prevent further disaster.

9. The judge is referred to as "child-like" the first time he enters the novel (6) and "like an enormous infant" (335) as he departs.

10. In 1996, Cormac McCarthy's screenplay *The Gardener's Son* was published; however, it was originally written in 1976. *The Gardener's Son* was McCarthy's first screenplay and until now, it was his only published script. On the cormacmccarthy.com forum, there is a post that reads McCarthy's screenplay *The Counselor* will be published October 8, 2013 on Amazon.com. In *The Counselor*, a lawyer finds himself in over his head when he gets involved in drug trafficking.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Gary C. *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. Print.
- Arnold, Edwin T., and Dianne C. Luce. *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999. Print.
- Blood, Harold. *Modern Critical Views: Cormac McCarthy*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2002. Print.
- Cant, John. *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Campbell, Neil. "'Beyond Reckoning': Cormac McCarthy's Version of the West in *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West*." *Literature of Region and Nation: Proceedings of the 6th International Literature of Region and Nation Conference, 2-7 August 1996*. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 11 Feb. 2012.
- . "Liberty Beyond Its Proper Bounds: Cormac McCarthy's History of the West in *Blood Meridian*." *Myth, Legend, Dust: Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy*. Ed. Rick Wallach. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.
- Carragher, Michael. "'I Tego Arcana Dei': Aspects of the Demonic in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1997): 13-21. Print.

- Cremean, David. "On Cormac McCarthy." *Critical Insights: Cormac McCarthy*. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013. Print.
- Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. Robert and Jean Hollander. New York: Doubleday, 2000. Print.
- Daugherty, Leo. "Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy." *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*. Eds. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999. Print.
- Ellis, Jay. "'What happens to country' in *Blood Meridian*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2006): 85-97. Print.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *The Return of the Vanishing American*. New York: Stein and Day Publ., 1968. Print.
- Frye, Steven. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009. Print.
- Hall, Thomas. *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989. Print.
- Holmberg, David. "'In A Time Before Nomenclature Was And Each Was All': *Blood Meridian*'s Neomythic West And the Heterotopian Zone." *Western American Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2009): 140-156. Print.
- The Holy Bible. *New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. Print.
- James, Caryn. "Is Everyone Dead Around Here?" *New York Times Book Review* 28 April 1985: 31. Print.
- Jarrett, Robert. *Cormac McCarthy*. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997. Print.

- . "Revisioning the Western?: Three Recent Cases." *Canon: The Journal of the Rocky Mountains ASA* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1995): 24-51. Print.
- Josyph, Peter. *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010. Print.
- Kollin, Susan. "Genre and the Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western." *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2001): 557-588. Print.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Studies in Classic American Literature*. New York: Viking, 1961. Print.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: Norton, 1988. Print.
- . "What on Earth is the New Western History?" *Trails: Toward a New Western History*. Eds. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde Milner, and Charles Rankin. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991. Print.
- Lutz, Deborah. "Love as Homesickness: Longing for a Transcendental Home in Byron and the Dangerous Lover Narrative." *Midwest Quarterly*, No. 49 (2009): 23-28. Print.
- Masters, Joshua. "'Witness to the Uttermost Edge of the World': Judge Holden's Textual Enterprise in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 40, No.1 (1998): 25-37. Print.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian, Or The Evening Redness in the West*. Draft material, 1980-85. Collection 91, Boxes 35-45. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.

- . *Blood Meridian, Or the Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage International, 1985. Print.
- McGilcrist, Megan Riley. *The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Mogen, David. "The Frontier Archetype and the Myth of America: Patterns That Shape the American Dream." *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream: Essays on American Literature*. Eds. David Mogen, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989. Print.
- Montejano, David. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987. Print.
- Nash, Gerald. *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Print.
- Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. 1955. New York: Princeton University Press, 1972. Print.
- OED* online. "meridian, n." December 2012. Oxford University Press. 12 February 2013
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116769?rskey=dwd0m&result=1>>
- Owens, Barclay. *Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. Print.
- Pratt, Julius W. "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny.'" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1927): 795-8. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 Aug. 2012.
- Sepich, John. *Notes on Blood Meridian*. 1993. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. Print.
- . "A Concordance to *Blood Meridian* (337) by Cormac McCarthy." Web.

18 March 2013

- Shaviro, Steven. "‘The Very Life of the Darkness’: A Reading of *Blood Meridian*." *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*. Eds. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999. Print.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Print.
- . "Prologue to a Study of Myth and Genre." *Prospects* 9 (1984): 407-432.
- . *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1973. Print.
- Snyder, Phillip A. "Disappearance in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Western American Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2009), 127-39. Print.
- Softing, Inger-Anne. "Desert Pandemonium: Cormac McCarthy's Apocalyptic Western in *Blood Meridian*." *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1999): 13-30. Print.
- Spencer, William. "Evil Incarnate in *Blood Meridian*: Cormac McCarthy's Seductive Judge." *Publications of The Mississippi Philological Association*, (1995): 100-105. Print.
- Spurgeon, Sara. "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in *Blood Meridian*." *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions*. Ed. James D. Lilley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002. Print.
- Stinson, Emily. "*Blood Meridian*'s Man of Many Masks: Judge Holden as Tarot's Fool." *Southwestern American Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Fall, 2007): 9-21. Print.

- Thompson, Leonard and Howard Lamar. *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. Print.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Incorporation of America*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1982. Print.
- Tompkins, Jane. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. Ed. Ray Billington. 1920. New York: Holt, 1962. Print.
- Wallach, Rick. "Twenty-Five Years of *Blood Meridian*." *Southwestern American Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer, 2011): 5-7. Print.
- Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Plains*. New York: Ginn and Company, 1931. Print.
- Winchell, Mark Roden. "Inner Dark; or, the Place of Cormac McCarthy." *Southern Review*, Vol. 26 (1990): 293-309.

VITA

Christopher Marshall Muse was born in San Angelo, Texas, on June 9, 1982, the son of the late R. Alan Muse and Debra Ruth Dawkins. He graduated from Central High School in May 2001, and enrolled in the University of North Texas in the following semester. Upon completing his B.A. in December 2006, Chris worked as an outdoor guide in Seattle, Washington and married the most gorgeous woman he's ever seen before entering the Literature Graduate Program at Texas State University-San Marcos in the spring of 2011.

Permanent Address: 1260 W. Mill St.

New Braunfels, TX 78130

This thesis was typed by Christopher M. Muse.