

THE POISONED WELL:  
GNOSTICISM IN *MOBY-DICK* AND *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my dearest parents and best friends. I surely would've been consumed by the leviathan myself without you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My committee is full of wizards with an insane amount of patience and knowledge.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1851, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* was published, and over 100 years later, it was followed by Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, published in 1985. Superficially, it may appear strange to link an American classic depicting a whale hunt to a contemporary Western depicting one of the darkest and most violent times in the United States, but *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* certainly share a set of overlapping characteristics. First, most obviously perhaps, both novels are set in a similar era, with the events of *Moby-Dick* taking place in the early to mid-1800s, and those of *Blood Meridian* set in a period from 1833 to about 1878. So, while Melville and McCarthy focus on rather different parts of the United States, there is a similar national attitude present in both narratives. Second, as noted by Richard B. Woodward, "*Blood Meridian* has distinct echoes of *Moby-Dick*, McCarthy's favorite book" (Woodward, par. 32). As a fan of Melville, McCarthy is definitely familiar with *Moby-Dick*, and many of the apparently broad strokes of commonality between *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* themselves invite readers to take a closer look at the two novels' intertextuality. It would be a logical step to investigate more specific similarities that suggest a possible influence of *Moby-Dick* on *Blood Meridian*, as well as looking at more general resonances between them. For my own thesis, the main purpose of this analysis is to gain insight into particularly enigmatic sections of *Blood Meridian* in particular.

Before thorough analysis may begin, further investigation of similarities between *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* is necessary. One might first note that *Moby-Dick* and

*Blood Meridian* are structurally similar in that the first numbered chapter begins with a simple command to witness the protagonist. “Call me Ishmael” and “See the child” are the first and immediate introductions to the protagonists; conspicuously, there is a bizarre lack of overt naming conventions. While we are told that the characters will be called “Ishmael” and “the kid,” those are not their “names.” While Ishmael, as narrator, refers to himself as Ishmael for most of the narrative, he never claims Ishmael as his name, nor does he claim he “is” Ishmael. Instead, “Ishmael” is the moniker associated with the character, but we cannot claim to know Ishmael’s true name. Thomas Dumm offers an analysis of the vague naming convention taken by the novel’s occasional narrator in “Who is Ishmael?” and Eyal Peretz claims that, at the time of his narration, Ishmael has “left his given name at sea and has adopted the Biblical name Ishmael” (36). Similarly, *Blood Meridian* uses the same structure for its protagonist in a more extreme sense. Rather than referring to the kid as a name, even if it is an untrue name, all that is given is a descriptor. He is not even granted the naming conventions of capitalization, as with “the Kid.” By denying the kid even a pseudonym, the narrator makes the character all the more inscrutable. The paralleled structure with *Moby-Dick* creates a forced distance between the narrator and the action, which then allows for the narrator to be present for events that, ostensibly, they would have no way of knowing about, while also being able to enunciate the beautiful philosophical passages that certainly could not be fit into any dialogue.

Second, the plot structures of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* are also undeniably similar. The overarching plots of both novels may be surmised in a single, simple sentence: for example, “Ishmael joins the crew of the Pequod for their final hunt of Moby



Dick and is the only survivor of the encounter” or “The kid joins differing bands of scalp hunters before ultimately dying at the hands of Judge Holden.” However, the apparently simplistic plots are misleading, and these summaries would be ridiculous if taken as a definitive stance. Many important events happen within the novels’ plots, and just as important are the philosophical reflections interwoven throughout each novel. Instead of an overarching controlling narrative, the narrative of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* comprise of a series of small events set apart with philosophizing passages. While it would be inaccurate to say the novels are plotless, they are certainly not plot driven.

Furthermore, neither plot is particularly rewarding for the reader. Strictly in terms of plot, *Moby-Dick* is underwhelming because, for the first 20 or so chapters, it is about Ishmael trying to get to Nantucket, find a ship, and begin his voyage, with no trace of the whaling adventure to come; when the Pequod finally does leave port, the chapters that feature whale hunting are interspersed with chapters philosophizing about the color white, cetology, how a whaling ship works, or the historical context of Jonah, to name but a few topics covered in the encyclopedic text. While these chapters are certainly interesting in their own regard, they do grind the movement of the apparent plot to a halt. Furthermore, the ending of *Moby-Dick* is also unsatisfying in that the monstrous leviathan that the reader has been pursuing for the entire novel is not vanquished, but rather unceremoniously kills the captain and the crew of the Pequod, and Ahab, instead of fulfilling his revenge, is drowned.

The dissatisfying plot in *Blood Meridian* is of a different shade than that of *Moby-Dick* because, rather than have interruptions in the plot, the plot itself is not necessarily satisfying due to the content. Instead of a hunt narrative, *Blood Meridian* features

extreme violence done by and to the Glanton gang. The purpose of this violence also appears almost entirely unfounded, or deeply steeped in racism, so the reader faces this violence without any sense of justification. Moreover, there is not really any justice given to the gang for their crimes. It is true that the members of the gang do not live, and that as a plot point the kid sees the public execution of David Brown and Toadvine (other members of the Glanton gang), but the text denies any sense of justice from these actions. Rather, these deaths appear to be the next logical step, rather than payment for any crimes. However, there is one member of the Glanton gang that is living by the end of the novel: Judge Holden. His survival is particularly unsatisfying because not only is he the most bloodthirsty and brutal member of the gang, but he is also charged with being responsible with the evils of the world. His survival adds a certain nihilistic tone to the end of the narrative because the only redeemable characters have died, and the most evil creature is allowed to live forever and hurt others.

Although the plots of the novels may seem simple, the novels themselves are extraordinarily complex. Because these novels are so complicated, it might be useful here to include brief summaries that will help to make the arguments of this thesis more easily accessible.

In *Moby-Dick*, a first-person narrator (call him “Ishmael”) travels to Nantucket with the intent of going whaling. Throughout large portions of the novel Ishmael functions as the narrator, but as the focus of the narrative shifts from his own experiences and observations to Ahab and other members of the crew, the narrator moves away from Ishmael into a more distant, sometimes even third-person perspective. On Ishmael’s journey to Nantucket, he meets Queequeg, a harpooner from the South Pacific, and both

men sign on to the Pequod, which begins its journey on Christmas Day on an unnamed year. (The date is approximated only by the “some years ago” reference in the first chapter.) Once the ship has reached warmer waters in the open ocean, Captain Ahab makes his first appearance and convinces his crew to join his obsessive hunt of the white whale, Moby Dick. Ahab also explains they will be hunting other, lesser whales in the interim of this singular purpose, and that the first person to spot the white whale will receive a gold doubloon. From this point, misfortune follows the Pequod as various environmental issues such as storms and violent seas take their toll on the ship. Along the way, they encounter whales and whaleships, which allows the narrator to describe details of the whaling industry and to philosophize about their relation to man, society, and the universe more broadly. Finally, the crew is able to track down Moby Dick with information from another whaling vessel, whose crew is full of men who found misfortune in tracking Moby Dick. Ahab ignores the warning, and the Pequod spends three days hunting the leviathan, at the culmination of which the he and the entire crew, except for Ishmael, perish. Ahab, in his final act, throws a harpoon at Moby Dick to slay him, but instead is drowned as the harpoon ropes drag him into the sea. The sole survivor of the voyage is Ishmael, who finds refuge on a buoyant coffin that Queequeg built and is picked up by the earlier seen whaling vessel. Ishmael’s survival assures that someone lives to tell the tale.

The story of *Blood Meridian* is perhaps slightly more plot-driven than the that of *Moby-Dick* in that the protagonist is moving from *pueblo* to *pueblo*, or from a set place to a set place, rather than different portions of the ocean that look nearly identical. However, even if this is the case, the plot of *Blood Meridian* is by no stretch of the imagination very

straightforward or unilinear. The most notable point of departure from *Moby-Dick's* general plot structure is that *Blood Meridian* has a strong historical aspect; whereas Melville's novel was set in the recent past or near present, McCarthy's derives much of its force from being a historical novel, set in a bygone era. The narrative follows the inscrutable protagonist, referred to as "the kid," as he joins different bands of mercenaries. During his youth he roams from Tennessee to the Southwest via various establishments looking for drink and finding fights. Initially, he is recruited by Captain White to fight the Apache tribes in northern Mexico, but later every member of this band is killed in a fight, save the kid. After this he is incorporated into the Glanton gang, headed by John Joel Glanton. The kid rides with them as they murder Native Americans and Mexican people in order to harvest their scalps. As the gang moves from village to village, members die off because of occupational hazards associated with spending so much time in the desert, or from being killed outright by means of self defense or revenge. Most of this plot can be traced back to the historic document *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*, which is a first-person account of Samuel Chamberlain, who rode with the Glanton gang during the Mexican-American War. The novel then skips ahead 17 years where the kid grows into the man, and he meets with the last living member of the Glanton gang, Judge Holden, one final time. It is after their final meeting that the kid is ostensibly murdered by the judge in the nearby jakes. The epilogue shifts away from the narrative entirely, and instead brings into focus a man who is using a post hole digger.

Because of the relatively loose and rambling plots, and because of the importance of the characters within the analysis of this thesis, I would like to add a brief description

of some of the notable similarities and personae in Melville's and McCarthy's novel, which I hope may help to clarify aspect of the analysis later. Initially, there appears to be little direct similarity between the cast of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, but (as will be explained further in later chapters) there are certainly notable similarities that appear to be too specific to be coincidental.

The titular Moby Dick—note that, in the text itself, the whale's name is not hyphenated, as it is on the title page, and this has become a convention in Melville Studies to distinguish the title from its namesake—is the obvious antagonist throughout *Moby-Dick*, at least from Ahab's perspective, as Ahab considers him the representation of all evil in the world. He is a massive, albino sperm whale that is evidently immortal, according to Ishmael; the whale has survived so many hunters' attempts that Queequeg refers to the corkscrew appearance of the sheer number of harpoons and darts that are stuck into his hide. The white whale is a cunning creature who evidently seeks the destruction of the members of the Pequod, as well as all who hunt him; he "dismasted" Ahab during their last interaction, biting off Ahab's leg, and Ahab seems to take this as a personal attack. Moreover, Moby Dick also has garnered quite the reputation as being the most difficult whale to kill, and it seems as though every whaler has interacted with him. The white whale is evidently sentient and is a master of his environment.

Despite his name not being on the title page, Ahab is nearly as important as the white whale. He is a mysterious captain who is very specific and meticulous. In his numerous monologues, his speech is like that of a Shakespearean hero, and he spends a great deal of time philosophizing about the nature of the universe and his place within it. Throughout the novel, Ahab is consistently weighing the role of fate and free-will in his

own life, and he even engages a prophetic figure (Fedallah) to hear his prophecies, but he does not always heed the warnings associated with such foresight. Ahab stands as opposition to Moby Dick, and devotes his entire existence to hunting down the white whale. He is undoubtedly the greatest whaler of all time, mixing contemporary and antiquated methods to accurately track a single whale in all of the seas. Ahab's singlemindedness of purpose and obsession with the white whale distinguish him from other characters in the novel, notably Ishmael, whose own lack of resolve might be contrasted with Ahab's rigidity.

Ishmael is sometimes the narrator for *Moby-Dick* and is (generally speaking) the protagonist of the novel. He initially goes to sea to alleviate his depression or even suicidal thoughts, and ironically, he is the only crew member of the Pequod to survive its encounter with Moby Dick. He represents an intellectual observer, who even while being a sailor is somewhat distant from the action, describing and analyzing it more than take part directly. He uses romantic language to describe his natural environment, and many of his thoughts must be taken ironically, as Melville frequently uses these philosophical asides to make fun of philosophers. To the extent that *Moby-Dick* invites the reader to compare Ahab and Ishmael, the former's obsessive ruthlessness is countered by Ishmael's more philosophical stoicism or fatalism.

In *Blood Meridian*, there is a similar dyad formed by the main two characters. Judge Holden, or the judge, is an enormous, very white, and hairless man that is a member of the Glanton gang. His size and appearance, as noted above, already suggest a connection to Moby Dick, but his character shares more in common with Ahab. Much like Ahab, he is a gifted orator, but he is also an extremely accomplished dancer, linguist,

and fiddler. He appears to operate outside of the regular norms for humans, as he was discovered by the Glanton gang sitting on a rock in the middle of the desert, evidently unbothered by such harsh circumstances. While he commits the most brutal acts of violence within the novel, he also takes careful notes about everything in the environment around him; he documents everything from artifacts to animals to the composition of the rocks surrounding him. While he is clearly very intelligent and able to correctly cite jurisprudence and speak multiple languages, Judge Holden is also an effective liar, as nearly every point he makes about the nature of war, the universe, and how humans fit into the hierarchy of the universe is later contradicted. Above all else, the judge seeks control, and thus justifies lying and hoarding information as means to gain control. Much like the white whale, everyone in the Glanton gang claims to have met the judge before joining the gang, and it appears as though Judge Holden is also immortal.

The kid is the inscrutable protagonist of *Blood Meridian*. While he never serves as the narrator, unlike Ishmael, the narrative is focused on his actions. He runs away from his father when he is fourteen years old and does not speak frequently. Most of his characterization comes through the narrator's description, as well as his actions. Of the Glanton gang, he is certainly the most merciful because he extends help to others when explicitly told not to, or when it is not immediately advantageous to do so. The kid is generally the only one to resist the antagonistic forces within *Blood Meridian* (namely Judge Holden). As such, parts of the novel would seem to pit the kid's relative innocence against the judge's murderous experience.

Among the many parallels and resonances to be found between *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, this thesis will focus on one that may not be immediately apparent to

most readers: the relevance of Gnosticism to the novels' respective worldviews. I argue that Gnostic metaphysics can serve as a framework to make these comparisons between the texts, and that such a framework will provide a more in-depth understanding of the symbolic characters and how they interact. It should be noted that the Gnosticism discussed here is truncated and specific, dealing with a few key ideas as they relate to the novels, and thus my discussion is not meant to be representation of the rich *mythos* of Gnosticism as a whole.

There is already a body of scholarship within McCarthy Studies, notably in the work of Petra Mundik and Leo Daugherty, that discusses Gnostic principles across the author's corpus, and an enormous trove of research in Melville Studies has been devoted to religious themes in *Moby-Dick*, with some focusing on the apparent presents of Gnostic ideas (see, e.g., Vargish). While it is impossible to definitively know if Melville was aware of Gnostic thinking while writing *Moby-Dick*, he was certainly aware of it later in his life, as indicated by his late poem, "Fragments of a Lost Gnostic Poem of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century," which appeared in *Timoleon* in 1891. The poem itself also seems to indicate that Melville was, at the time of writing the poem, aware of ideas discussed within this thesis, although Melville's poem also seems to contradict Gnosticism by asserting that matter, not ideas, will ultimately prevail. Here is the full text of the brief poem:

Found a family, build a state,  
The pledged event is still the same:  
Matter in end will never abate



His ancient brutal claim.

Indolence is heaven's ally here,

And energy the child of hell:

The Good Man pouring from his pitcher clear,

But brims the poisoned well. (*Selected Poems*, 145)

Most clearly demonstrated here is the notion of the good Alien god, "The Good Man," who is the true god within Gnostic thinking. This God is alien to humankind and is the source of agency within humans in the cosmos. From the Alien-God comes the "divine spark," or from his "pitcher clear," into the universe, which can grant humans agency if the "spark" is used correctly. However, the "divine spark" from the Alien-God is difficult to discover and is said to be trapped within the cosmos. In order for it to rejoin the Alien-God in a process called *gnosis* (or enlightenment) it must overcome the barriers present within our universe. Melville refers to the universe as a "poisoned well" because it was not created by the good Alien-God, but rather an *aeon* called the demiurge. *Aeons* are powerful lesser gods who originated from the Alien-God and became corrupted in some way. The demiurge is the *aeon* who, according to Gnostic thinking, is the creator of our universe. Because the god that created our universe is flawed, so our universe is flawed. In order to understand these concepts as they relate to the metaphysics within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, I will pay particular attention to aspect of this sort of Gnosticism in the following chapters.

Chapter II will provide a clearer background on the kind of Gnosticism being used to analyze the metaphysics of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, and in that chapter I will further explain the concepts of *gnosis*, the demiurge, and the Alien-God, *heimarmene*, and the nature of the cosmos. There I will also show how these concepts provide explanation and better the understanding of elements within *Blood Meridian* by tracing them back to themes from *Moby-Dick*. The chapter will discuss the sort of Gnostic thinking—in particular, that of Jakob Böhme—that is predominantly used within *Blood Meridian*, and I will briefly mention other possible interpretations of different kinds of Gnostic thinking (such as Valentinian). The importance of secrets and secretive language will then be discussed in relation to *gnosis*, and I will discuss the ways in which Ishmael and the kid sort through this secret knowledge to glean the truth among lies and false leads. This discussion will then lead into an analysis of *heimarmene* within *Moby-Dick*, using Ahab as a representative example, that concludes that while he may be aware of his fate, he cannot change it without *gnosis*. This understanding also helps to explain the kid's life, particularly the beginning of his life as it is introduced to the reader, and the evidently brutal death at the judge's hand. Similar to Ahab, even if the kid is aware of the path of *heimarmene*, this knowledge will not help him change this path unless *gnosis* is involved in this awareness. The discussion of *heimarmene* will then lead to a closer look at the epilogue of *Blood Meridian*, and, taking a cue from Mark Busby's article "Rolling the Stone, Sisyphus, and the Epilogue of *Blood Meridian*," I will then examine Albert Camus's "The Myth of Sisyphus" as an argument in favor of finding meaning in a repetitious and absurd world. This notion is then applied to *Moby-Dick* in order to gain a

greater understanding of the general unsatisfying ending that is present in both *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*.

In Chapter III, I will analyze Judge Holden in his functioning as the demiurge figure within *Blood Meridian*. The chapter begins by asserting that the judge is able to be both the demiurge and a man because he borrows attributes from both Ahab and Moby Dick, who are not defined as gods themselves; a brief overview of borrowed attributes is provided. The analysis of the shared characteristics between Judge Holden, Moby Dick and Ahab is discussed because there are undeniable similarities, and the consequences of evoking the antagonistic forces within *Moby-Dick* is that the antagonistic demiurge is able to interact with the Glanton gang directly, rather than function as an abstract malevolent force. Afterwards, I discuss the importance of the judge's naming convention in relation to the Gnostic demiurge, where the interchangeability of his name and his title appears to directly nod at the evident nature of the demiurge. The importance of judgment in relation to Judge Holden then leads into an analysis on his need for control. The need for control, according to Gnostic thought, is due to the demiurge's need to keep humans from achieving *gnosis* so that he may keep them in ignorance, and thus enslaved to him, which provides an answer to why Judge Holden gives the Glanton gang so much false information, as well as explaining why he so insistently documents everything around him. Finally, Judge Holden's role as the kid's murderer is examined, and is compared to Moby Dick's killing of Ahab, using the Gnostic thought that creatures must consume one another in order to maintain themselves, and so in order for Holden and Moby Dick to maintain their immortality, they must consume their most pertinent adversaries.

Chapter IV will continue using Gnostic metaphysics to explain the bizarre qualities of the natural environments within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*. Because there is a section of McCarthy scholarship that treats McCarthy's corpus as pastoral work, the chapter begins by addressing pathetic fallacy—a key element associated with writings within the pastoral mode—and agency within the natural environment to posit that the descriptions of the natural environment are not an extended use of pathetic fallacy, but rather the natural environment is acting on its own accord. Within this section the Gnostic notion of an openly hostile natural environment is discussed to further emphasize the agency of the natural environment. Also mentioned within this section is the environment acting of its own volition is an effect heimarmene. The I discuss the relationship between popular attitudes of the period in which *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* take place, such as those concerning Manifest Destiny and the attempted domination of humanity over the natural environment that serve as another example of the adversarial relationship between the men and the surrounding environment. That then leads into a discussion of the narratives of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* featuring the end of an era, as *Moby-Dick* features the decline of the whaling industry through Ahab's demise, and *Blood Meridian* demonstrates the death of the open Southwest through the death of the wandering kid and the epilogue featuring the man with the post hole digger. Another element of the adversarial relationship between the crew of the Pequod and the Glanton gang is discussed in terms of a masculine coded landscape. Afterwards, I engage in a Gnostic analysis of landscape that begins by explaining that a hostile environment is a requisite because of the demiurge's need for control, which also manifests in a constant surveillance. Using a Gnostic lens, the smallness of the crew of the Pequod and the

Glanton gang can be understood as both a subversion of the hypermasculine narrative and a representation of the men's places within the hierarchy of heimarmene.

Finally, in a brief conclusion, I examine the ways that Gnostic ideas animate the readings of *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, which in turn may help us to understand our own relationship to the psychological, social, and natural worlds more clearly.

## II. GNOSTIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN *MOBY-DICK* AND *BLOOD*

### *MERIDIAN*

The metaphysics within *Blood Meridian* at once appear mystical, secretive, and alien. Cormac McCarthy's very language utilizes the theory of omission, where the overarching rules that govern the novel are demonstrated through select and subtle clues. The narrative focalizes events and reactions from the characters, rather than the typical narrative strategy that plainly demonstrates the inner thoughts of characters, which promotes a secretive atmosphere that suggests there is knowledge that is hidden from the reader. Much of the metaphysics concerning *Blood Meridian* comes from aspects of Gnostic thinking. Specifically, McCarthy's rendition of Gnostic thought appropriates the concepts of hidden knowledge, heimarmene, and an inherently flawed universe caused by the demiurge. However, McCarthy was not the first to utilize these concepts; rather, the metaphysics of *Blood Meridian* appear to be in part inspired by the metaphysics of *Moby-Dick* (among other sources), where similar Gnostic concepts can be identified. This is not to say that *Moby-Dick* is itself a Gnostic text, of course. Melville was not wholly unfamiliar with Gnosticism and the mysticisms associated with it, but that certainly does not mean that his novel ought to be read through that lens. I merely mean to identify certain elements that are a part of Gnostic thought that provide explanation for several enigmatic selections from *Moby-Dick*. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the ways that McCarthy's metaphysics can be better understood by identifying a major source of influence.

Despite the Melville's and McCarthy's two novels featuring vastly different subjects, there is an undeniable similarity between the apparent metaphysics that govern the novels. This is not because of a similarity in a so-called cultural moment, but rather a similar pattern among relevant philosophers that Melville and McCarthy seem to have taken interest in. Thomas Vargish discusses at length a number of Gnostic references in *Moby-Dick*, and he asserts that "Melville applied Gnostic myths and doctrines ... and that certain passages in *Moby-Dick* require familiarity with Gnostic *mythos* to be understood" (272). Another prominent critic, Harold Bloom, has affirmed that "Melville was not a Christian, and tended to identify with the ancient Gnostic heresy" (237). According to such interpretations of *Moby-Dick*, Melville appears to have been familiar with the concepts of the demiurge and the resulting flawed universe, as well as *gnosis* (or hidden knowledge). As Vargish puts it, "Melville either knew of the system of the Gnostics, or possessed a frame of mind well prepared to receive it" (274). Despite the fact that the heimarmene is not being mentioned, the evident familiarity Melville had with Gnostic systems suggests that he was likely also familiar with this concept.

Gnostic metaphysics, particularly those centered around the ideas of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century German theologian Jakob Böhme, provide an answer to the secretive language seen throughout *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* because this framework asserts that one may only receive the truth, or *gnosis*, that one is ready to receive. Current scholarship does not indicate that Melville owned or borrowed any of Böhme's texts and was thus ostensibly not immediately familiar with his work (see, e.g., Sealts), but it is known that McCarthy certainly was familiar with this writer. While the particular writings of Böhme's philosophy warrant their own comprehensive

study, the general ideas presented vis-à-vis Gnosticism are in line with other Gnostic ideology, and so will be discussed here. (For example, Leo Daugherty offers an in-depth analysis of the specific type of Gnosticism used in *Blood Meridian* in his article “Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy.”) Böhme’s *Six Theosophic Points* and *Signature of All Things* are the most notable works, at least for the purposes of this thesis, as they provide insight into the framework of the metaphysics that influence *Moby-Dick* as well as *Blood Meridian*. The most pertinent, if simplified points of Böhme’s theories appear to be the assertion that the dependency between good and evil are innate because of the flawed nature of the universe, created by the “Hunger of the Anxiety” (Böhme 19) that permeates and rules the material plane, and the assertion that one can achieve the godly, pure enlightenment (*gnosis*) through careful study of the divine rather than the material. There are a variety of other Gnostic interpretations, such as Valentinian, Ptolemaeusian, and Manichaeism, to name a few, each with differing nuances to the principals of Gnosticism. By instead focusing on the most simplified elements, the representative Gnosticism in *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* is more closely matched, and there is less probability of applying concepts when they are not applicable.

The attention given to secrets in *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* is twofold in its purpose. First, there is the supposition that there is more knowledge to be attained through careful training, in order to achieve *gnosis*, or enlightenment. *Gnosis* is the “divine spark” that originates from the one true God, or the Alien-God (who is not the creator of the universe), and humans must seek *gnosis* because in order to return to the divine state associated with the true god. There is an element of the “divine spark” in



every person, but it is essentially useless because it is “trapped” within humans who have not achieved *gnosis*. The second is the concealment of paths to *gnosis* by the demiurge (the Creator-God who made the universe), and his archons (servants) so that humans who harbor the divine spark will remain enslaved to him. (More attention will be given to the demiurge in Chapter Three).

This twofold function of secrets is first demonstrated in *Moby-Dick* when Ishmael interacts with Elijah, who bears a prophetic name. “Ah, my dear fellow, you can’t fool us that way—you can’t fool us. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man to look as if he had a great secret in him” (102). Melville appears to be confirming that while there is a secret knowledge, it cannot be found within man; this is because humans are creations of the universe, and thus flawed. So, attempts to achieve *gnosis* through understanding the secrets of mankind will lead only to false answers because the material is inherently flawed. Because Ishmael is immediately suspicious of the rhetorically rich but vague speech from the “prophet,” he appears to be closer to *gnosis* than the average man, who may have been fooled by Elijah’s speech. By refusing the evidently false secrets of Elijah, the “ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing, shrouded sort of talk” (Melville 103), Ishmael reveals himself to be privy to some of the true secret knowledge because he is a good judge of who is true in their revelations. Ishmael’s skepticism is also a sign of his innocence and ignorance, of course, since Elijah knows a great deal about Ahab, after all.

McCarthy’s use of secret language and false knowledge shrouded in secrecy takes Melville’s insightful narrator and twists it into one who is constantly bombarded with secret information but is not as capable of telling which revelations are true and which

are tricks. This is most noticeable with the interactions between Judge Holden and the kid because the judge is constantly revealing and collecting information, not all of which is true. The judge is in fact characterized as one whose thirst for knowledge is rampant, but also that he is entirely a liar. In *Blood Meridian*, the most damning of his assertions comes when he discusses the Glanton gang's beliefs and summarily dismisses them, only to ultimately conclude, "'There is no mystery to it,' he said. The recruits blinked dully. 'Your heart's desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery'" (252). It appears as though the judge here is mirroring Elijah from *Moby-Dick* wherein he appears to be revealing one of the deepest secrets that life may offer; both quotes offer the same essential message: that there is no secret. However, in *Blood Meridian* it is less apparent that the characters reject this message because they appear to receive it with absolute apathy. Only the ex-priest responds after Holden moves into the darkness, "Aye ... And no mystery" (McCarthy 252) where the tone is nearly inscrutable as to whether or not he is agreeing with him. The only defense to Holden's remark comes from the narrator, who asserts that the ex-priest is not only a "bloody old hoodwinker" but also a "mystery himself" (McCarthy 252). So, it appears as though *Blood Meridian* follows the twofold use of secrets that is introduced in *Moby-Dick*: there is secret knowledge that can only be obtained through specialized training, and that the demiurge, represented by Holden, actively works to keep this knowledge away from humans.

Holden's insistence that the Glanton gang ignore their hearts and listen to his word becomes particularly insidious when more of Böhme's Gnostic framework is utilized. Within Gnostic thinking, the initial realization that one contains the divine spark of the perfect god is the beginning of achieving *gnosis*, and it comes through innate

knowledge within oneself and careful study of the divine. Thus, here the demiurge Holden is denying the men their true nature as well as their opportunity of salvation. The narrator seems aware of how insidious the situation is and makes it known to the reader, but it is less clear if the characters understand as well. Notably, the kid's reaction to Holden's assertion is missing. The only character who does possibly resist the ex-priest, which is further indicative of McCarthy's studies into Böhme, as he and Gnostic thought is still within the loose definition of Christendom. Thus, to have an ex-priest, or one who has removed themselves from the formal ranks of the Christian church, be the singular person to comment on the judge's assertion that there is no knowledge beyond that which is seen by the eyes rings with a certain irony.

The ex-priest in this scene mirrors Elijah in that both characters are reflections of the texts because characters and readers alike know the same information in the moment. Elijah sketches Ahab before either Ishmael or the reader meets him while Tobin's reaction speaks for the rest of the characters and mirrors that of the reader. Furthermore, Holden's assertion that "the mystery is there is no mystery" certainly seems to be applicable to Melville's own struggles with faith. As many scholars have observed, Melville struggles with his own atheism, not content to be an unbeliever but not capable of belief either, as Lawrence Thomson has discussed in *Melville's Quarrel with God*. And because McCarthy studied Melville, he would have ostensibly been aware of Melville's fairly unique opinions about higher powers, namely that Melville raged about the absence of a god. It is possible to see this rage within *Moby-Dick* when Ahab reflects on his life before the final hunt. "God! God! God!—crack my heart!—stave my brain!—mockery! mockery! bitter, biting mockery . . . let me look into a human eye; it is better

than to gaze into the sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God” (Melville 591) and determines that if the sun is “an errand-boy in heaven” how his own doomed heart beat if it were not a “nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing” that does the beating before dismissing such notions by recognizing this rationale as flawed: “Who’s to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?” (Melville 592). Arthur Versluis claims that a Gnostic reading is imperative to understanding the rage expressed here; as he puts it, “How can God condemn, when it’s God who’s responsible? Once again, the demiurge is impugned” (98).

The reworking of Melville’s “absent-god-rage” in *Blood Meridian* not only serves to show how beautiful the repurposing of ideas can be, but also that in doing so the mythos of another book becomes all the richer. McCarthy’s repurposing of Melville’s rage puts his own readers in Melville’s position: the most god-like and knowledgeable character is proclaiming there is nothing more, while the reader is in a position to believe that there surely must be more, and so we as surveyors of this world are placed in the position that not must we believe, but that we are still absolutely incorrect in this belief—a tragic romanization of Melville’s position. So, while this seemingly underwhelming comment is easy to miss, or even acknowledge as a creation of McCarthy, when acknowledged as a mirror to Melville’s struggles then a connection is made where an entire *mythos* is accessible and applicable to the reader of *Blood Meridian*.

One of the prominent struggles that afflicts the cast of *Moby-Dick* is how much agency they truly have, or, in other words, what are the respective roles of fate and free will within their lives. Ahab is particularly affected by this question, spending many a day lamenting on his purpose and if he really had a choice in his perceived purpose, most

often concluding that his choices are not truly his own, but rather he is driven by some insatiable “monomaniac” force within him. Ahab appears to be a character who is, as Richard P. Brickner words it in “A Hero Cast Out, Even by Tragedy,” “so flattened by fate before they crawl into our view that they exist beneath the reach of tragedy” (1). That is, Ahab was certainly destined to devote his life to hunting Moby Dick, and that his life outside of Moby Dick is irrelevant. The narrator mentions his family “a wife—not three voyages wedded—a sweet, resigned girl ... that old man has a child” (Melville 89) that he was never going to see again. For all intents and purposes, before Ahab enters the novel he is inexorably linked to Moby Dick. Thus, it makes sense that he would become consumed mentally and physically by Moby Dick in that the immaterial and complicated “fate” can be seen in the material world.

Furthermore, it appears as though Ahab himself is aware of his circumstances concerning his fate; while he does lament that he is destined to hunt Moby Dick, he also accepts his lot. During one of many philosophizing sessions, Ahab declares “The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run” (Melville 183). This comment reveals that in his moments of seeming lucidity, Ahab is hyper-aware of his actions, as if he could see the path of fate before him. The language used here could serve as an allusion to a specific tenet within Gnostic thinking: *heimarmene*. Hans Jonas defines *heimarmene* as an “unenlightened and therefore malignant force, proceeding from the spirit of self-asserted power, from the will to rule and coerce. The mindlessness of this will is the spirit of the world, which bears no relation to understanding and love. The laws of the universe are the laws of this rule, and not divine

wisdom” (227-228). Put more simply, heimarmene are the cyclical laws of fate that originate from the cosmos, not the Alien-God.

Essentially, this concept is used to describe the cyclical paths of fate that souls on the material plane are destined to go through and repeat until *gnosis* is achieved. These pathways are often portrayed as nearly impossible to escape from; all persons within the material world would then certainly be “flattened by fate” because of this cyclical nature. Recalling that the universe is made by the demiurge in order to prevent *gnosis*, heimarmene is intended to be inescapable so that the “divine spark” remains trapped in the demiurge’s flawed universe. So, while Melville may have been unfamiliar with the Gnostic usage of heimarmene, he certainly was aware of fate, and thus created the tragic figure of Ahab, who appears to be aware of his own entrapment in fate but ultimately unable or unwilling to change his outcome. Versluis in fact claims that “Ahab symbolizes and manifests precisely this consciousness of man’s subjugation to an implacable fate” (96), which he identifies to be heimarmene. It is possible that Ahab, prophetic in his own right, foresaw his own fateful end and allowed himself to become flattened by his fate, unable to escape from it. Robert T. Tally Jr. discusses the complicated concept of agency in *Moby-Dick*, wherein Ahab’s agency is called into question throughout the text, as when he becomes the subject and direct object in clauses of the same sentence (79). His phrase “Ahab must be both doomed (i.e. fated to die) and responsible (i.e. free to choose a course of action that will require his own death penalty)” (78) succinctly demonstrates the ambiguous nature of Ahab’s role within heimarmene. While Ahab may or may not have known of or chosen his participation in the heimarmene system, there is still a singular outcome: his death.

The idea of characters knowing that they are trapped in their own fate spills into *Blood Meridian* through the kid, the novel's protagonist. McCarthy's approach is subtler than Melville's due to the lack of interiority from characters coupled with the sparse dialogue from the novel's protagonist. However, the bookends of the protagonist's life as "the kid" (he will be "the man" at the novel's end) make it clear that the kid did not have any chance of escaping his fateful arc within this life. The distinction between the kid and the man is a similar, but inverse, kind of distinction that Ahab experiences. This distinction appears to be "preparing for fate" and "fulfilling fate" where there is the setup and the final execution. When we meet Ahab, he has already lost his leg to Moby Dick, formally bound himself to the destruction of him, and is on his final whaling trip, so he has "prepared" for the final leg of his journey before we meet him; then, the text in the novel details how Ahab finally fulfilled his fate by dying while attacking Moby Dick. McCarthy's kid inverts and alters this process as we meet the kid in his childhood and watch as he prepares for his fateful end as he joins both Captain White's regiment and the Glanton gang and watches the other members of those groups die as he escapes. Then, after the final desert scene that we see the protagonist as "the kid," which will be discussed further, he disappears for 17 years. McCarthy alters the schema of Ahab's character by allowing the reader to rejoin "the man" in his final acts as he fulfills his fate. While initially this may appear as though there is nothing that the reader has missed in his 17-year removal, I would argue that it is more than age that turns the kid into the man, and it is only the man who can fulfill the fate that he ensured for himself in his youth. Keeping this structure in mind, the bookends of "the kid's" life may be analyzed more thoroughly.

The introduction of the kid is loaded with prophetic rhetoric where the hints at his fateful end are not clear, but rather what is made clear that his end is the result of heimarmene. The narrator does not suggest, but states as if a matter of fact that a “in him broods already a taste for mindless violence” (McCarthy 3), while his father tells him that there “the stars did fall” on the day that he was born, and that his mother died giving birth to him. So it is immediately clear that the kid will be witness to, if not the cause of, violent deaths. Furthermore, the meteor shower that was part of the kid’s birth are identified the Leonids, which are a yearly occurrence that further serves to introduce and couple the idea of cyclic cycles beyond human control with the kid. It should also be noted that the man’s death also coincides with a meteor shower, ostensibly the same Leonids that heralded his birth. The similarities between the beginning and end of the novel will be further discussed later in this chapter.

The end of the kid’s life comes in the desert in one of the few tender moments in the novel. As the kid finds the *abuelita* huddled in one of the alcoves of the rockface, he offers her help so that he can save her. “He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some part of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for her could not leave her in this place or she would surely die” (McCarthy 315). This is starkly different from the rest of the novel in tone and outcome, as there are precious few instances of anyone in the Glanton gang showing kindness for kindness’s sake at a stranger. If they do ever offer to help someone, it is only because there is a worthwhile material reward for doing so, most often money. More often than not, the kid and the Glanton gang kill almost anyone for almost any reason. Thus, the kid extending help to the *abuelita* appears to be out of character based on his previous actions.



However, the kid has always had more of a moral compass than his compatriots, as he spares Sproule's life when he has been told to kill him and aids the dying man as they attempt to flee from an encroaching hostile tribe, and shares his meager supplies with him, despite the both of them knowing that he is destined to die in the desert. So while the kid is the most likely member of the Glanton gang to offer to help someone, the scene is nevertheless striking because of the kid's apparent concern for a stranger's wellbeing. While the mostly out of character offer to help is striking, the result of this offer is what provides the clearest indication of the path of fate/heimarmene that the kid is on, "She [the *abuelita*] was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years" (McCarthy 315). The kid's kindness at a corpse demonstrates that perhaps the kid was attempting to change his own fate and escape the cycle that he found himself in. In this scene, despite the dialogue serving an immediately more practical purpose in the scene rather than a philosophic tirade, it becomes clear that the kid understands that he too will die like the rest of the Glanton gang, and it will be at the hands of Holden. His attempt to escape his fate failed, and so the conclusion of his preparatory stage is sealed with his seeming exit from the novel. He becomes "the man" after his attempt fails and he is gone from the narrative for 17 years. In this way, it appears as though he has acknowledged his fate, and will continue to see it through to the end. McCarthy mirrors the Ahab schema because he allows us to see the kid as he "fulfills" his fate—to sink into the fleshy eternal embrace of Holden, just as Ahab is swept into the ocean.

While "the kid" prepares for his fate and "the man" fulfills it, there is an undeniable symmetry between the opening and closing of the book, which lends credence to the cyclical nature associated with heimarmene that may be absent in general

statements about fate. First, the father tells the kid that at his birth the stars fell, and as the man enters the jakes for his final meeting with the judge the “stars were falling across the sky myriad and random, speeding along brief vectors from their origins in night to their destinies in dust and nothingness” (McCarthy 333). So, the stars here are meant to describe the man because his life is in conjunction with their movements; most importantly, the stars at the end of his life find their destinies in “dust and nothingness,” indicating that the man has indeed failed to break free from his own cycle and achieve *gnosis*, and thus will be doomed to repeat it in the material plane. Secondly, the violent death associated with the man’s end is his own, while at the beginning it was his mother’s. The father did not detail the mother’s death for the reader, but deaths due to childbirth are not passive nor peaceful deaths. The man’s death is so subtly written that it can be missed entirely. The man finds the judge “seated upon the closet” and “gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him” (McCarthy 333). Paragraphs later, when a nearby man attempts to enter the jakes where we last saw the man, he is cautioned not to go in. When he opens the door to the jakes his only reaction is “Good God almighty” and he leaves immediately after, unable to tell questioning bystanders what he saw. Because of the implicit death of the man, it appears as though it is unremarkable. However, the seamless transition between his life and death leaves some sense of comfort if the cyclical nature of *heimarmene* is considered, as we know that he will somehow be back to try it again.

While the concept of *heimarmene* is present throughout the novel and certainly within the kid, the epilogue makes a case for *heimarmene* for the entire space that *Blood Meridian* occupies. The notably short epilogue details a man who is digging post holes

followed by a group of wanderers who search for bones, and another group who just wander. Petra Mundik has described these three groups of people as the analogous groups of Gnostics—the man who has achieved *gnosis* as the *pneumatic*, the bone pickers who worship objects from the material plane on their path to *gnosis* as materialists, and the wanderers who are the lowest and are wholly trapped and preoccupied in the material world (89-90). Furthermore, the language used here suggests that these groups are following their own cyclical paths, suggesting that even once *gnosis* is achieved, souls still must follow their paths of fate. The bone pickers and wanderers are described as “they move haltingly in the light like mechanisms whose movements are monitored with escapements and pallet so that they appear restrained by a prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality” indicating that their actions are truly not their own, and that they may be too oblivious to realize that they hold no agency. The post digger’s “track of holes that runs to the rim of the visible grounds and which seems less the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality as if each round and perfect hole owed its existence to the one before it” is clearly the work of *heimarmene* because of the repetitive and seemingly infinite nature of the work. The post digger is the only one who appears to have any agency, as he evokes the promethean motif of finding the fire, or in more explicit gnostic terms, he does literally find the “spark” hidden within the tough material world (see Ellis 92). However, even he is almost doomed to this repetitious existence because the holes extend into the visible horizon, and it does not appear as if any of the groups have any intention of stopping. Finally, the epilogue concludes: “Then they all move on again” (McCarthy 337); the use of “again” further implies the cyclic nature of their actions, as well as part of their futility.

Despite the differing levels of “enlightenment” that the groups enjoy, they are still bound to the demands of heimarmene, and they all move together, despite their differing levels of *gnosis*.

While heimarmene is an important factor to consider in that it provides a superstructure that helps to explain character outcomes, there is an element of futility that cannot be denied. Even if one is aware of the direction of the path of fate, one must still follow it if *gnosis* has not been achieved. Thus, it becomes helpful to look at Albert Camus’s analysis of “Myth of Sisyphus” as a model to explain how and why this repetition within these seemingly strict and inescapable confines still worthwhile. Once again, McCarthy did not pluck this idea from the ether, but rather may have been inspired by and compounded on the role of finding meaning in the absurd within *Moby-Dick*, where physically demanding, monotonous actions are the day-to-day activities of the shipmates.

The general rhythm of *Moby-Dick*’s plot movement is driven by the capture of whales for profit. While the text is full of exciting passages that detail the seemingly wondrous events that happen aboard the Pequod, there is a routine to be followed of chasing whales, gathering information about whales, cleaning whales, and maintaining the ship. The seemingly endless tasks mirror Sisyphus’s task of rolling a the stone, and so Ishmael must find meaning in the absurd monotony, where absurd may be defined as an existentialist condition, “a violent world without God marked by death, conflict, chance, suffering, and guilt, where the single individual is on his own, often at the mercy of large forces beyond his control” (Busby 94); Camus’s stance on suicide within “The Myth of Sisyphus” is “it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning;

therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer, underlying and appearing through the paradoxes which cover it, is this: even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate ... Although 'The Myth of Sisyphus' poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert" (Camus 3). Within *Moby-Dick* there is a clear and obvious rejection of suicide by means of willful continuation; in the opening of the first numbered chapter, Ishmael explains why he is going whaling, "This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this" (Melville 3). So, instead of actively committing suicide Ishmael is continuing living, even if he is putting himself in a repetitive situation where he may die. This statement may also be interpreted as Ishmael considering whaling to be another form of suicide, however because he is the only surviving passenger of the Pequod who clings to life on a floating coffin, I do not think this is Ishmael's ultimate stance on whaling. Instead, Ishmael's statement here indicates that this is not the first time he has taken to the ship to alleviate suicidal feelings, and coupled with Melville's rage at a nonexistent god, Camus's interpretation of Sisyphus's endurance fits in well with Ishmael's endurance.

Within *Blood Meridian*, a sensibility like that to be found in Camus's "The Myth of Sisyphus" is what provides the mildly hopeful tone during the epilogue. At the end of the novel, we are left in what appears to be a desolate situation—the kid, who had been seemingly the only consistent adversary for the judge out of all of the Glanton gang—is dead by the judge's hand. From this, it would appear that the ending was entirely symmetrical with the beginning because the events depicted did not make any lasting

impact because nothing really changed. The judge is still all powerful and managed to consume everything around him. The final portions of the novel depict him dancing and playing the fiddle, claiming that he will never die in a maelstrom of power. But, as Busby points out in his essay “Rolling the Stone, Sisyphus and the Epilogue of *Blood Meridian*,” the judge does not get the last word. Instead, the novel formally concludes with the epilogue, and hope is restored by means of Camus’s interpretation because meaning is given to the heimarmenic repetitions.

Busby offers his analysis that considers the Gnostic perspective as well as “The Myth of Sisyphus”: “My analysis offers a third alternative: The epilogue is a parable in which the digger is the embodiment of Camus’s Sisyphus, who achieves spirit by will in contrast to those around who live inauthentic lives” (94). So it becomes clear that Camus’s Sisyphus allows for a more hopeful note to end on because while the kid is gone, there is another who both has agency and may be able to oppose the judge. Those who pick bones and those who only wander are living these so-called “inauthentic lives” that are devoid of *gnosis* because they are either seeking the path to *gnosis* in the material world (which is from the demiurge who blocks *gnosis*) or do not seek *gnosis* at all, and thus will be subjected to the paths of heimarmene without escape. Meanwhile, while it does also appear that the post hole digger is also subject to this same rigid path as the others, this is inaccurate. The post hole digger is “striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there” (McCarthy 337), which is evocative of the process of *gnosis*, where the “divine spark” from the Alien-God is found. Furthermore, he is not engaged in heimarmene because he is foraging a new path—there are no post holes in front of him. Instead, the post hole digger is the one creating the path behind him that others follow.

Gnosticism helps to answer the ever-present quarrel between fate versus free will within the novel, as well as to explain the secretive language used throughout *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*. By understanding heimarmene and *gnosis*, the unsatisfactory ending to the Pequod's crew and the Glanton gang becomes more palatable. However, this information does not fully address all of the antagonistic forces present within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, so it would be necessary to fully investigate the aforementioned demiurge figure, arguably the most antagonistic figure in the universes of these novels.

### III. HOLDEN AS DEMIURGE

There are a number of antagonistic forces that assault the kid throughout *Blood Meridian*, but the primary antagonistic force, and certainly the most sinister, is the enigmatic Judge Holden. Because of the general lack of psychological interiority in the narrative, coupled with characters who do not openly share their thoughts, understanding the judge can become quite the task. To begin to understand such a mysterious and overwhelming character, it is helpful to note *Blood Meridian's* source material, Samuel Chamberlain's *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*. Edwin Arnold details that while Chamberlain's personal narrative is perhaps one of two personal narratives to come of the historic Glanton gang, it is suspected that Chamberlain's account is "engaging but factually unreliable" (14), meaning that while Chamberlain was indeed a member of the historic Glanton gang, his account may be embellished. John Sepich claims in *Notes* that "Judge Holden's named historical existence rests solely on information provided by Samuel Chamberlain in *My Confession*" (14). This account details a man, also named Holden, who has "a face destitute of hair," stands "six feet six in his moccasins" (Chamberlain 271), and has a certain mysticism associated with a man who is vastly more educated than those around him (Chamberlain 271-272). Chamberlain further describes the historic Holden's "desire was blood and women," and that he had a reputation for incredible violence and pedophilia (126).

Through reading Chamberlain's account, the similarities between the historic Holden and McCarthy's Holden become clear. Both men are brutally violent, pedophiles (though that aspect is not analyzed within this document, Patrick Shaw's discussion of



Holden's pedophilia in "The Kid's Fate, the Judge's Guilt: Ramifications of Closure in *Blood Meridian*" provides worthwhile insight), and notably more knowledgeable than the other members of the Glanton gang.

While noting the similarities between the historic Holden and McCarthy's Holden is useful in understanding the historical situation of Judge Holden, simply relying on Chamberlain's account is insufficient in explaining the mystic language surrounding McCarthy's Holden. Ploskonka offers an interpretation that aids in explaining how the mystic elements of the judge combine with the historic element.

McCarthy changes Chamberlain's judge to increase his physical presence, exaggerate his savage bodily desires, and allow him an ever-present capability that keeps his physical presence always relevant. Instead of reducing his body to something less than civilized, less than human, McCarthy combines the judge's physicality with a heightened intellect so that the judge successfully embodies the full spectrum of personhood, from the basest impulses to the highest orders of thinking. McCarthy extrapolates Chamberlain's already imposing description of the judge into a folk-figure of mythic proportions. He is a physical myth, historically grounded in corporeality." (236)

Essentially, it is the emphasis on corporality, or the judge's physical presence in *Blood Meridian* that makes him so terrifying and mystic. While Holden's "exaggerated" form does seem to aid in the enigmatic quality about him, this explanation (if used as the final explanation, rather than as a supplement) is also inadequate.

Instead, I posit that in order to make sense of McCarthy's Holden, one must also compare the aspects that he shares with Ahab and the white whale. These comparisons are necessary because of *Moby-Dick's* influence on McCarthy, and the comparisons help to further explain how Holden may function as the Gnostic demiurge while still being a member of the Glanton gang. Essentially, by containing the mystic qualities from Ahab (who is just a man) and Moby Dick (who is just a whale), Holden becomes more corporeal, and thus can be both a god-like figure and a man.

Firstly, Holden shares the qualities of mythical whiteness, enormous size, and apparent immortality with the white whale. While "immortality" is not generally a quality that is associated with any corporeal creatures on earth, the text of *Moby-Dick* does not assert that the white whale is anything other than a whale; while he does function as a symbol and is mystical, there is never any question as to whether or not he is somehow more than a very powerful whale. Ishmael describes what makes Moby Dick so terrifying as an enemy, but it is not his killing abilities that are the most heinous, instead, "it was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me" (Melville 204), and further explains that "This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds" (Melville 205). While it should be noted that it is only Ishmael who claims to have this stance on whiteness, because he is sometimes the narrator, his stance must also be applied elsewhere in the novel. Essentially, Moby Dick would be terrifying if he were a typically colored whale, but due to his albinism, he has a "nameless horror" (Melville 204) associated with him.

The same logic may seamlessly be applied to Judge Holden because of the emphasis given to his paleness within the text. For example, despite spending considerable time in the desert sun, Holden remains “like the moon so pale” (McCarthy 167) throughout the novel. McCarthy does not use color words (like “white”) as liberally as Melville, instead relying on “pale” as a descriptor for matters associated with whiteness. According to the OED, “pale” may be defined as “light in colour or shade; containing little colour or pigment,” so McCarthy’s method of utilizing paleness instead of overt whiteness both evokes the mythic quality discussed in *Moby-Dick* while emphasizing the lacking quality of whiteness. This lacking quality is perhaps a nod at the demiurge’s lack of *gnosis*, so by using Ishmael’s specific characterization of mythic whiteness, McCarthy is able to put forth Holden’s terror and ignorance as the demiurge to the forefront.

Secondly, the white whale is enormous, even for a whale; Ishmael claims that an average whale’s “skull will measure at least twenty feet in length” (Melville 381), which dwarfs a regular man and ship. Judge Holden’s frame also seemingly dwarfs those around him, as he is initially described as “an enormous man ... bald as a stone and he had no trace of a beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close to seven feet in height” (McCarthy 6). So both *Moby Dick* and Judge Holden are able to physically tower over the men that surround them. Brandy Schilling offers this interpretation of the effect of the scale of *Moby Dick*: “the boundless sea and the white whale (who is impossible, Ishmael tells us, to accurately size beneath the waves) are representations of the gigantic and immeasurable. The whale *Moby Dick* is the complicated site of Ahab’s monomania, but he is also representative of an intangible

quality of superior (and perhaps malicious) vastness” (97). Her idea of “superior (and perhaps malicious) vastness” goes hand-in-hand with their apparent immortality. Ishmael suggests that Moby Dick is “not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)” (Melville 198) So, as the white whale is “ubiquitous” in time, he can also be “ubiquitous” in space.

Judge Holden’s immortality is referenced throughout *Blood Meridian*, but the most obvious instance is after his “immense and terrible flesh” (McCarthy 333) kills the kid, and that the judge “is dancing, dancing. He says that that he will never die” (McCarthy 335). As Ploskonka suggests, the judge’s mysticism is evidently married to his corporeal form, as so as the white whale appears to be “bigger” than mortality, so is judge Holden. The parallels between the white whale and Judge Holden allow McCarthy to evoke the cultural and literary associations with Moby Dick in order to quickly convey the terror of the judge.

Ultimately, however, Judge Holden is not the personification of the white whale. Holden also shares a number of notable characteristics with Captain Ahab. Both men are proficient orators who are able to persuade the crew of the Pequod or the Glanton gang according to their will and are adept at a variety of tasks. It should be noted that while both Ahab and Holden have a group of subordinates, the crew of the Pequod and the Glanton gang respectively, they also both have a member of their crew who is not fully committed to following their cause. This is not to say that the wayward member was necessarily mutinous, but rather he did not fully pledge himself and his mind to either Ahab or Holden’s cause. While Ahab was able to win over the rest of the Pequod’s crew with his first address to them, first mate Starbuck required more persuading for Ahab to

be satisfied with his commitment. The narrator describes Ahab's experience at winning over Starbuck, "something shot from my dilated nostrils, he [Starbuck] has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without rebellion" (Melville 179).

Similarly, Judge Holden also calls the kid's loyalty to him into question: "Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not" (McCarthy 307). Later, on the night of the kid's death, Holden commands "Drink up. This night thy soul may be required of thee" (McCarthy 327), which the kid does. After calling attention to his insubordination, the judge also "enters" the kid through drink, and commands him to his death. So, both Ahab and Holden had to use their persuasive abilities to turn their wayward follower to absolutely commit themselves to their will, which ultimately returns the same results: the death of Starbuck and the kid.

Furthermore, Ahab and Holden utilize elevated speech that demonstrate their superiority over the men around them. Ahab frequently soliloquizes on the decks of the Pequod, while the judge uses his elevated speech to manipulate others to his will, as when he lies to ensure the Glanton gang is not punished when they kill a man in cold blood in the middle of a bar and are seen doing so by a number of witnesses:

Kindly address your remarks to me, Lieutenant, said the judge. I represent Captain Glanton in all legal matters. I think you should know first of all that the captain does not propose to be called a liar and I would think twice before I involved myself with him in an affair of honor. Secondly I have been with him all

day and I can assure you that neither he nor any of his men have ever set foot in the premises to which you allude.” (McCarthy 237)

Here, the judge is using elevated, legal jargon to dominate the Lieutenant into submitting to inaction, showing that he is superior to not only the members of the Glanton gang, but evidently every other person the gang interacts with.

Similarly, Ahab’s adept speaking abilities demonstrate that he is superior to the rest of the crew of the Pequod, even during periods where there is no active pursuit of a whale. Ahab’s elevated speech demonstrates that he is more than the best whale hunter; he is evidently superior in all ways, instead of being proficient in a single skill. Similarly, Holden’s elevated speech also demonstrates that he always has the upper hand, even when he and the Gang are not hunting for scalps.

However, when Ahab or Holden must perform an action, they do so with absolute panache and mastery that goes well beyond what a regular person would be able to accomplish. Ahab is described by Captain Peleg as “used to deeper waters than the waves; fixed his fiery lance in mightier, stronger foes than whales” (Melville 88), meaning that the dangerous task of whale hunting is evidently less than other endeavors Ahab has experienced. Furthermore, the narrator describes how Ahab is able to track a single whale in all of the oceans:

Now, to any one not fully acquainted with the ways of the leviathans, it might seem an absurdly hopeless task thus to seek out one solitary creature in the unhooped oceans of this planet. But not so did it seem to Ahab, who knew the sets

of all tides and currents; and thereby calculating the driftings of the sperm whale's food; and, also, calling to mind the regular, ascertained seasons for hunting him in particular latitudes; could arrive at reasonable surmises, almost approaching to certainties, concerning the timeliest day to be upon this or that ground in search of his prey." (Melville 216)

The language used to describe Ahab's methods indicates that hunting Moby Dick does require his attention and efforts, but ultimately is not an overly difficult task for Ahab to accomplish, and so he does accomplish.

While Holden is not able to track a single whale within the ocean, he is able to miraculously craft a sort of gun powder from the elements within his environment. "[Holden] was on his knees kneading on the mass with his naked arms...and laughing the while and workin up this great mass of foul black dough, a devil's batter by the stink of it and him not a bloody dark pastryman himself" (McCarthy 132), which was then used to summarily slaughter a band of Native Americans. So, both Ahab and Holden are able to accomplish feats that are seemingly impossible. Ahab does not see hunting a single whale as a "hopeless absurdity" and Holden "laughing the while" as he creates gunpowder from the dust of rocks and urine.

Ahab's abilities lead Captain Peleg to describe Ahab as a "ungodly, god-like man" (Melville 88), which evidently means that while Ahab does indeed seem to have supernatural (or godly) talents, he is too morally corrupt to be what is typically associated with godly behavior. Holden also has a supernatural element associated with him and his talents, and certainly would not draw the comparison between himself and what is

typically associated with godly (or typical morally sound) behavior. So, this description of Ahab, if it were taken literally, would result in a flawed god, or (looking to Gnostic metaphysics) the demiurge.

Hence, it is clear there are parallels between Judge Holden, Ahab and Moby Dick. It is through these parallels that Holden is made more corporeal, which allow Holden to function as a character within the novel, rather than an abstract force. As a combination of Ahab and Moby Dick in a novel that uses gnostic metaphysics, Holden is able to fully use his mystic abilities to fulfill his role and be the demiurge. While the comparisons drawn here are certainly not one-to-one, the parallels between Ahab or Moby Dick and Judge Holden are undeniable and plentiful; there are certainly many more that are not mentioned here, but they are not mentioned because they may stray from the most relevant themes within Gnosticism.

Much like the rest of Gnosticism, the concept of the demiurge has many iterations from Valentinus, who claims that the demiurge is not a malicious entity, but rather one blinded by his own ignorance, or Ptolemaeus, who claims that the demiurge is indeed a malicious entity. While there are differing opinions on the nature of the demiurge, there are common threads between the iterations. Most importantly, the demiurge's alternative name is The Creator-God, as he is credited with the creation of the world and the surrounding universe. This creation extends to humankind, as well as the veil of ignorance between them and *gnosis*. The demiurge, like everything else, did indeed come from the one true god (or the Alien-God), but became warped in his creation, coming to believe that he was the actual god, and thus created our world. Because the demiurge is flawed, so is the world he creates. While generally speaking, Gnostic thinking dictates



that while the demiurge may or may not be actively malicious, the world he creates certainly is because of its intent to prevent *gnosis* in its inhabitants.

Because of the demiurge's inability to achieve *gnosis*, his world attempts to keep humans from achieving *gnosis* as well. He is most able to achieve the "slumber-inducing" (or ignorance) through the use of *archons*, "shadows" of such *aeons* (gods, in this case the demiurge specifically) (Chalquist 51), so that they may enforce ignorance. More so, the demiurge and his *archons* are "filled with a primal urge to possess and self-concretize, these negatively charged archetypal 'Authorities of Darkness' exemplify the power principal that enslaves leaders and followers alike ... The archons work unceasingly to keep us unaware of our connection to higher realms" (Chalquist 51.) While there are sweeping differences between *archons* and *aeons*, ultimately the purpose of the *aeon* demiurge or one of his *archons* appear to be functionally the same within *Blood Meridian*, as McCarthy's use of Gnosticism utilizes a simplified version that apparently combines the roles of *archons* and *aeons* as far as Holden is concerned.

Judge Holden is one of the few characters whose name and title may be used interchangeably. The kid is always the kid, Captain Glanton is Glanton and never Captain, but Judge Holden may be the judge, Holden, or Judge Holden; his title is as good of an identifier as his name. Instead of clarifying him as a character, the interchangeable nature of his moniker instead makes him more inscrutable. As previously discussed, the kid is the only one to oppose the judge, and as a result he is also the only one to question his naming convention:

The kid looked at Tobin. What's he a judge of? he said.

What's he a judge of?

What's he a judge of.

Tobin glanced off across the fire. Ah lad, he said. Hush now. The man will hear ye. He's ears like a fox. (McCarthy 135)

Tobin's reaction to the kid's question is akin to a child asking something inappropriate about an authority figure, which only serves to strengthen the question. Because Tobin appears like he doesn't want the judge to know that the kid asked the question, an implicit question emerges: is it dangerous to ask what Holden judges, and if so, why? The kid's unanswered question lingers throughout the text as the gang moves through the desert as the gang moves from *pueblo* to *pueblo*. Throughout, the judge takes studious notes of his surroundings (discussed later) and makes life-altering decisions for the gang. The most obvious answer to the kid's question is a simple one: he was a judge in a court of law; the judge is apparently aware of how to manipulate the legal system, as demonstrated when he blatantly lies about a murder the gang commits (McCarthy 237), or when he recites cases of jurisprudence at the kid from memory (McCarthy 293). But, this does not explain Tobin's avoidance; his avoidance instead hints that the kid should not evoke Holden's judgement because it carries significant consequences. However, the kid's question becomes immediately answerable if the judge is read as the demiurge/an *archon*. Ismo Dunderberg provides this interpretation of the demiurge: "According to Ptolemaeus, the Creator-God's justice is that of a judge" (83) where his judgements are divine in nature and utilize the Old Testament notion of "vengeance" (84). While there are more nuances to the interpretation that Dunderberg analyzes, it does answer the kid's

question: Holden is a judge of everything. Tobin is right to avoid Holden's judgement because not only does it have godly gravitas, it also aligns itself to a strict code of rules that demands that sin be paid for in full. Furthermore, the judgement that Holden imposes on the environment around him is not one of morality, fairness, or any kind of "justice" known in the human sense. Rather, as Daugherty illuminates, "In Holden, the stressed archonic element is of course *judgement*. Yet, like Yahweh [the old Testament], he judges things simply according to the binary criterion of their being inside or outside his will" (125). So, it becomes clear that by questioning Judge Holden's authority, the kid may in fact be placing himself "outside" of the judge's will, and thus deserving of punishment. Because of the intimacy between Judge Holden and his title of "judge," and his position as the demiurge/*archon*, Tobin's avoidance of answering the kid's question becomes not an action motivated by fear, but rather as a survival instinct.

Judge Holden is a fairly inscrutable character, as he meticulously details his surroundings while also destroying with impunity. Assuming that the judge is an *archon* or the demiurge himself, this behavior makes sense; according to Valentinian gnostic thought, the demiurge is absolutely blinded by his own ignorance, so in order to combat this ignorance the demiurge must search for knowledge within his creation. One Valentinian truism that is associated with an ignorant demiurge is: "He created a heaven without knowing the heaven; he moulded a human being, although he was ignorant of the human being, and he brought forth earth without knowing the earth" (Chalquist 122). So, in order to know his creation, the judge studies it at any given moment so that he may come to know it. This evidently extends to all aspects of his surroundings, as he collects information about bones, butterflies, rocks, and evidently as many human creations (such

as language and drawings on cave walls) as he possibly can. Within the text Holden claims that “these are [God’s] words. He held up a chunk of rock. He speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things” (McCarthy 116). While initially this statement appears to be telling of a kinder truth about the nature of the universe, it is much more sinister. Because the demiurge is indeed the creator of the universe, but lacks the ability to achieve *gnosis*, using material objects may indeed be the only form of communication that the demiurge has. Furthermore, because this is an attempt for the demiurge/*archon* to remove himself from ignorance through the study of a flawed creation, and he is telling the gang that they too can gain spiritual insight through the study of the material, the judge is essentially dooming them by preventing their path to true *gnosis*. Certain Valentinian readings suggest that the judge is certainly not sinister when he recommends this method to the gang—the demiurge believes himself to be the one true god, and thus wants his following to know him. A different reading, one that I find to be more accurate for *Blood Meridian*, is that the judge is aware that this is not the correct method to achieve *gnosis* and wants to prevent the Glanton gang from achieving it.

The judge does not take such meticulous notes with the intent of sharing this knowledge to aid anyone else to make a more effective team, but rather hoards it all to himself. While there are again a number of readings of the demiurge that can explain this behavior, what I believe to be most in-line with McCarthy’s rendition is that Judge Holden hoards this information in order to keep humans in ignorance so that they cannot achieve *gnosis* and thus will be trapped on the material plane to serve him. Calquin describes *archons* as “filled with a primal urge to possess and self-concretize” (51), which would further explain why Holden hoards the information he gathers; he must both

possess it, and in possessing it he harnesses it, and thus makes himself more powerful by giving his material creation more energy to sustain itself. As Petra Mundik explains,

According to Gnostic thought, the demiurge and his archons must exercise their tyrannical rule in order to prevent the trapped fragments of the divine form from returning to their source, for if all divine fragments were liberated, there would be nothing left to animate the dead matter of the cosmos... Thus the judge knows that he will never be the suzerain of the cosmos unless he can keep every living thing imprisoned in the manifest realm. (40)

When a member of the Glanton gang confronts the judge about his documentation of his surroundings, he claims that “whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (McCarthy 198). Immediately, this phrase is strikingly bizarre because as members of the planet we are not asked whether or not we “consent” to animals, vegetation, or anything else on the planet; these things simply exist, and humans exist alongside them. So, the implication is that Holden is something different than a human that would require him to question the things that exist around him i.e. if he were the demiurge/an *archon*.

The judge’s demand for life to “consent” to his will fortifies the notion that he is attempting to break his ignorance by studying his own creation, and because he believes the demiurge/himself to be the one true god, anything that exists without his approval heretically goes against god. As the demiurge is intent on control of his material creation, Holden evidently means to strip earthy materials of their agency. Mundik further

connects the Holden's desire to control what exists to another iconic phrase of the judge's: "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" (McCarthy 198). She claims that his desire to be a specific and powerful ruler reflects his connection to judgement and control of the realm (39).

I would further add that the desire for control exhibited in Judge Holden is similar to Ahab's desire for control over the ultimate beast, Moby Dick. Judge Holden's desire for control over living creatures often results in their deaths, and while Ahab is a complex character, his "monomaniac" quest is ultimately Ahab's desire to end the white whale's life. This new iteration of Ahab's singular task of control in Holden results in a terrifying demiurge figure; essentially, these two men's quests for control are the same. Ahab "piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his while race from Adam down" (Melville 200), so by controlling Moby Dick, he will also control these factors. Similarly, because the demiurge's task is to keep humans enslaved to his realm, he too seeks to control everything within it, albeit in a more expanded scope.

The judge's pursuit of control is not necessarily limited to just the trapping of "the divine spark" within humans in order to fuel his realm, but rather takes on the fullness of domination within this realm. While the judge as demiurge must inherently control everything in order to maintain total order, it appears as though he has taken this role a step further: not only must he approve everything, but everything must be filtered through him. This is done because "the demiurge and his *archons* conceal the existence of the divine source, or the alien God, in order to keep human beings enslaved to the cosmos"

(Mundik 35). More simply, if the judge's information is the only that is available, it is easier to conceal this divine source. This filtration comes in a manner of ways. Firstly, while he may document everything, he also must destroy its original so that his version is the only available. The second is much more sinister in that he evidently must also filter the physical matter (i.e. bodies) of humans both to sustain himself and to further assert his dominance.

As previously discussed, Judge Holden's insistence on documenting every conceivable thing around him is an effort to both know and control this environment so he may stay in control. However, only documenting is not enough to remain entirely in control and grant him suzerain status. Rather, the information available must be his own iteration. This methodology is particularly sinister, and when revealed to the Glanton gang, it is seen as preposterous. The judge claims that "the freedom of birds is an insult" to him and that he would "have them all in zoos," to which Toadvine replies "that would be a hell of a zoo" (McCarthy 199). Because the judge is effective as the demiurge/ an *archon*, Toadvine does not consider that Judge Holden is anything other than a man, so he responds to Holden's claim as if it were simple hyperbole.

However, the second portion of his information filtration is that the judge will destroy the original and substitute his own version. He will hunt and stuff birds; using a stuffed corpse as decoration (ostensibly) is quite the demonstration in control, as the old prison used to contain the divine spark is not allowed to return to the earth in order to become something new. It is instead trapped in service to the judge. Furthermore, when he finds a painting on a cave wall or finds an artifact and finishes recording it in his book, he summarily destroys it by scratching it out or destroying it in the fire. When questioned

“what he aimed to do with those notes and sketches,” he says that “it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man” (McCarthy 140). It further appears as though this is more than control over the material plan that Holden is utilizing—it is further alienating the Glanton gang, as well as anyone else who come across these artifacts, from the possible truth of history. We can further infer that the judge’s documentation is not accurate because he is a known liar. While there is no way to confirm (because the judge doesn’t allow the gang to read his notes), there are other instances in which the judge is professing “truths” to the gang that he later contradicts (Mundik provides an illuminating discussion in her chapter “Disciples of a New Faith). Furthermore, the judge is introduced as proclaiming “truths” about a priest, claiming “a variety of charges the most recent of which involved a girl of eleven years” (McCarthy 7). So, from the judge’s actions and oration, it is probable that his documentation of the world around him would also serve the same purpose as his false sermons: to trick and further entrap.

Stuffing birds is not the only instance of the judge manipulating corpses in unseemly ways. Throughout the novel there are subtle hints and instances that indicate that Judge Holden has somehow consumed humans, most notably the kid. As is McCarthy’s style, the text does not openly state this, but rather the narrator indicates such heinous acts through sparse but specific language. One of the initial instances that indicates the judge as a cannibal is after the death of a young boy in a *pueblo*; the child goes missing, and when the judge is shown again he is “quietly picking his teeth with a thorn as if he had just eaten” (McCarthy 128). The surrounding language is mystical in its description of the missing boy: it seems as if he has vanished, and he is evidently not found. The scene of the judge picking his teeth is followed by him smiling again at some



hidden piece of information. However, while it is not immediately clear that the judge may have eaten this boy, it is certain that he is the cause of his disappearance.

Furthermore, the scene suggests secret knowledge, which is evocative of the scene in *Moby-Dick* wherein Ishmael and Queequeg return from their meal “picking [their] teeth with halibut bones” (Melville 95) because they bookend their attempt at uncovering each other’s secret knowledge with cleaning their teeth. Not soon after, they are given a prophecy by Elijah which will detail the doom for the Pequod; in a mirrored setup, the judge smiling at the kid after consuming a different person as if he knows that in the future, he will also eat the kid. While this interpretation of a missing boy may initially seem outlandish, when Gnostic principals are applied, this reading becomes the most effective for explaining Holden’s motivations. An important tenant for general Gnostic beliefs is that in order for energy to be maintained, one must consume another in order to gain its energy; this extends to animals eating plants, each other, and humans eating plants and animals. This is the natural flow of energy that is necessary for a creature to sustain themselves, and so creatures with greater energy needs must maintain themselves by eating more energy. With this principal in mind, Judge Holden as the demiurge/*archon* would ostensibly consume humans so that he may sustain himself.

The kid’s death is so understated that it is easy to miss entirely; the narrative does not appear to stop for a moment to mourn its protagonist. When the kid (now the man) enters the jakes into the judge’s “immense and terrible flesh” (McCarthy 333) it is the last we hear of the kid. The narrator does not mention that the kid is gone, but rather focalizes the judge, enforcing the idea that he is enteral. The reactions to the kid’s death come from other men who are intending to use the jakes, and are warned “I wouldn’t go in there if I

was you,” to which the reply is “Good God almighty” (McCarthy 334). In a novel so interested in demonstrating horrific violence, what could the judge have done that warrants such vagueness? Sepich suggests that the kid “meets death . . . at the hands of a former compatriot named Judge Holden” (16), which is the general interpretation. While murder is an obvious answer, the narration has not shied away from any other of the deaths in the Glanton gang. Instead the kid’s death must be more grizzly. Shaw asserts that “the judge’s essential motivation is to assault the kid sexually” (103) and does so before murdering him. Mundik offers the notion that “the judge did not merely devour the kid’s flesh but also proceeded to regurgitate the meal” (93). While the circumstances of the kid’s death are unclear, it is surely brutal.

As the demiurge/*archon*, Judge Holden must overcome and control what which opposes him, and because the kid was the singular opposition to the judge, he must be dominated so that Holden may sustain himself and his level of control over the world. Furthermore, this is in-line with his treatment of those who exert their own agency; as he parades the corpses of birds, so he displays his mutilation of the kid in the very public jakes. However, the kid seemingly knows and accepts this fate. So, while the judge may think that he is exerting the ultimate expression of control within his realm, he is ironically leading to his own demise by allowing the divine spark to become closer to achieving gnosis. Furthermore, the eating of the kid harkens back to the white whale consuming (at least part of) Ahab because if Judge Holden is indeed able to achieve his demiurge/*archon* status by combining elements of Ahab and Moby Dick, then the novel must end with him consuming his opposition. As the white whale drags Ahab down to his death, so the white Judge Holden envelop the kid in his death. Moby Dick did indeed face

other threats, but the narrative presents that Ahab was the only legitimate threat to him, and the narrative presents that Moby Dick is immortal, and will continue to live because he has annihilated his threat. Utilizing this form, McCarthy is able to again expound and darken the results so that the results are more bone chilling. Furthermore, this allows McCarthy to skip the brutal detail while still evoking the dread at such a heinous act.

Ultimately, the judge using characteristics from Ahab and the white whale allows him to behave as if he were a mere mortal, when this is not the case. As demiurge, the judge functions to control every element of the Gang's life and leads them to their demise so that he may assert his control. However, if the Creator-God is indeed working as a mere man, it surely would not be enough to control an entire cosmos. Instead, the entire cosmos must be working in tandem to aid in the creator's plan.

#### IV. A GNOSTIC ENVIRONMENT IN *MOBY-DICK* AND *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

The natural spaces within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* supplement the narrative in more ways than being merely the space in which the plot takes place; more often, the natural spaces in these novels seem to take a life of their own and interact with the characters rather than serve as a backdrop. Initially, the environments within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* appear to be opposites: an ocean and a desert. However, there are several overlapping characteristics that demonstrate there are more similarities than differences within these seemingly oppositional landscapes. First, it appears as though there is not necessarily a case of pathetic fallacy within the novels because it is not the characters projecting their own attitudes onto the natural environment, but rather that the characters are reacting to the environment. Second, while the characters are surrounded by either ocean or sand, the environments absolutely engulf the crew of the Pequod and the Glanton Gang. Third, the natural environment is rarely helpful to the characters; instead, the environment is openly malicious and seemingly works to impede the crew or the gang, a conception of the environment which aligns with Gnostic thought.

First, it must be established that the environments within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* are not an extended use of the pathetic fallacy, or, in other words, that the narrator and characters are not projecting their own responses onto the natural environment. Asserting that the characterization of the natural environment is not an extended use of the pathetic fallacy is particularly necessary in regard to McCarthy's corpus, as it is treated as a modern pastoral, and the pathetic fallacy is an integral part of the pastoral mode. The Oxford Reference defines the "pathetic fallacy" as "The

attribution of human feelings and responses to inanimate things or animals, especially in art and literature.” The pathetic fallacy provides a specific insight into character interiority, or the inner thoughts and feelings of a character that isn’t otherwise presented outwardly, because they are essentially projecting their emotions to the nonhuman environment around them. So, by analyzing the use of the pathetic fallacy in *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, it is possible to learn more about the attitudes of the characters. However, the pathetic fallacy is not necessarily the appropriate way to gain these insights, as the environment appears to take on a life of its own, instead of merely seeming to.

It would be inaccurate to claim that Ishmael’s narration never utilizes the pathetic fallacy, but this is not always the case. Instead, the sea itself is acting of its own will to sabotage the crew of the Pequod on their hunt, and also when the sea apparently spares the life Ishmael. During their first lowering, the narrator Ishmael describes the animals they hunt, as well as the seas they live in: “Again, it is very often observed that, if a sperm whale, once struck, is allowed time to rally, he then acts, not so often with blind rage, as with wilful, deliberate designs of destruction to his pursuers” (Melville 228), but this whale is lost, and a squall blows in that “the silent ship, as if manned by painted sailors in was, day after day tore on through all the swift madness and gladness of the demoniac waves. By night the same muteness of humanity before the shrieks of the ocean prevailed. ... Even when wearied nature seemed demanding repose he [Ahab] would not seek repose” (Melville 256). So, it is clear that here Ishmael is not utilizing pathetic fallacy in order to improve his telling of the first lowering, but rather the environment is clearly acting willfully, where the whales intentionally attempt to “destroy” their hunters,

and the sea itself makes demands of the crew when they are little more than figures of themselves.

The epilogue of *Moby-Dick* again features Ishmael as the narrator, who describes the whirlpool that ate his ship and crew gently keeping him aloft on his coffin-buoy with the “unharming sharks: gliding by “as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed heads” (Melville 625) where they were previously aggressive. While Ishmael does present a romanticized version of the incident, the sea nevertheless appears to be choosing to spare his life by restraining the animals. Perhaps because the sea has been sated with the number of lives it has taken, perhaps because the story needed someone to tell it is why Ishmael was spared. In any case, it appears further that the material world chose this fated path for Ishmael, indicating that the surrounds environment had an ulterior motive for the characters, which may be aligned with the apparent heimarmene of these characters. Essentially, because Ishmael was fated to survive the Pequod, the environment acted accordingly to ensure this outcome.

The language used to describe the environment in *Blood Meridian* more overtly demonstrates that the environment is an entity with its own agenda as it interacts with the Glanton gang, which is necessary because the desert is inherently less obvious when it acts because a dessert does not have humungous waves that can crash down on the gang. Instead, there is an insidious sun that constantly surveils everything that is within its light and sand and wind that removes any hint of humanity. Instead of utilizing the typical associations of the sun, including renewal and masculine procreation, only the negative associations with the sun are ascribed to the sun in *Blood Meridian* (more explanation will be given later in this chapter). The sand of the desert appears to be endless, akin to

the vast, watery expanse of the sea. So much so that the narrative describes the environment in terms of the sea, claiming that “the wind blew the white pumice from the crests like the spume from sea swells” (McCarthy 175) able to “salt their ruins and there would be nothing, no ghost nor scribe, to tell to any pilgrim in his passing how it was that people had lived in this place and in this place died” (McCarthy 174) and that “the wind had shifted the ashes and the iron axeltrees marked the shapes of the wagons as keelsons do the bones of ships on the sea’s floors” (McCarthy 22). Later, language reminiscent of the language in *Moby-Dick* is used in terms of the environment, as when “the horse was watching, out there past men’s knowing, where the stars are drowning and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and seamless sea” (McCarthy 304).

Once again, the pathetic fallacy fails as a method of interpretation because the environment appears to be intent upon alienating humans from one another, rather than reflecting the nebulous desires of the gang. There is nothing from the gang that would indicate the desire to obscure an entire group of people, rather they kill for profit, not eradication. Vereen Bell notes that “the omniscient narrator in McCarthy’s novels is recessive—merely narrating—and the characters are almost without thoughts, certainly without thought processes, so neither narrator nor characters offer us any help with the business of generalizing” (4), meaning that because of the evident lack of thought within the characters, there cannot be pathetic fallacy. While the narrative is focalized on the kid, the environment continues to act as its own character, working outside the Glanton gang that would not be possible if it were merely a backdrop to the action. Greve indicates that the desolate sea-imagery in *Blood Meridian* “it is if not just supposedly living nature is susceptible to the petrification ... but actually all that is corporeal in the

world eventually strives toward its point of manufacture” (173), which is, according to Melville and McCarthy, the sea (170). Although Greve discusses this “return” in terms of Oken’s philosophy, emphasis is still given to the agency of the environment.

However, like *Moby-Dick*, the natural environment in *Blood Meridian* is not exclusively malicious in every instant. *Blood Meridian* features a scene akin to the one in which the environment spares Ishmael’s life. In the scene, the kid is separated from the gang and must face the freezing desert alone for days without food and little sleep. When he is surely on the brink of freezing, he finds “a lone tree burning on the desert. A heraldic tree that the passing storm had left afire” where “he knelt in the hot sand and held his numbed hands out a while” where numerous animals accompany him, some “deadly to man” (McCarthy 215). Again, the environment seemingly chooses to spare the kid’s life; the verbiage above suggests that the storm intentionally left the tree on fire rather than douse it, and the animals that would normally be in an antagonistic opposition to the kid are simply around him, like the sharks and sea-hawks Ishmael encounters. So not only does the environment antagonize the crew and the gang, it also spares the protagonists where they would surely otherwise be killed.

The antagonistic nature of the natural environment within *Moby-Dick* appears subdued when compared to *Blood Meridian* because the contention is presented in a more standard fashion, as Melville features the typical contention between man and nature, where an open natural environment (the sea) is something to be controlled by the men who venture into it. Ahab and the crew of the Pequod enter the ocean in an attempt to harvest oil from one of the largest creatures in the sea in a manner reminiscent of the American ideal of Manifest Destiny. While the notion of divine providence was used to



conquer the continent, it seems as though that notion did not disappear once both the eastern and western shores were conquered. Instead, the seas must also be controlled. Through this lens, it becomes further apparent that the natural environment is at odds with the crew of the Pequod because they serve as representative Americans who seek to capitalize on this “untamed wilderness,” and thus the wilderness must also fight back to remain untamed. Andrew Lawson comments on the imperialist and anti-imperialist readings of *Moby-Dick*, as well as the political climate associated with the Mexican American war, coincidentally the same period *Blood Meridian* is set in, to conclude that *Moby-Dick* absolutely can be read as a “miniature version of Manifest Destiny” of the mid-1800s (46-47, quoting Dimock 10), where the control of the sea reflects the stressors associated with the annexation of Texas at the time (48). Melville subverts typical expectations of what the American “untamed wilderness” means, particularly in the North East; generally, untamed wilderness is some kind of wooded area mostly devoid of “civilized people” with plentiful trees, a variety of animal life, and an element of danger coupled with self-sufficiency. In *Moby-Dick*, the “untamed wilderness” is instead the open ocean, which appears barren on the surface, but still maintains the elements of danger coupled with self-sufficiency. By subverting the trope of “untamed wilderness,” the narrative enables the natural environment to take on the characteristics of Moby Dick in order to become a difficult enemy, rather than solely exist as an apathetic entity that the crew attempts to contend with. As discussed, the environment acts upon the antagonistic relationship through its actions and reactions toward the Pequod’s crew. An example of this contention is the description Ishmael as narrator gives of the creatures of the sea that reflect the nature of the sea itself:

Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began (Melville 299).

The language here suggests that it is the nature of sea-creatures is to attack anything and everything. The crew ostensibly accepts such terrifying creatures as just another factor in whale hunting. However, the apparent danger that is constantly lurking is a method for the natural environment to lash out at the crew by either eating their payload or eating a crew member. We know that sea-creatures are not always vicious killers, as demonstrated in the epilogue, so the ferocity described here is surely intentionally demonizing.

*Blood Meridian* also invokes the concept of Manifest Destiny to make reference to the historical justification of the scalp-hunting that occurred in the southwest of Texas and northern Mexico as well as the eventual settling of the west. A more typical version of Manifest Destiny is seen as the American Glanton gang roam the United States and Mexico borderlands scalp-hunting for profit. They are under contract to carry out such an act so that Americans may more easily settle the area without interference from the peoples who already lived there. The subversion of “untamed wilderness” seen in *Moby-Dick* is also present within *Blood Meridian*, but rather than an apparently bountiful ocean

there is a desert wasteland. However, as history will tell us, “untamed wilderness” has become nearly synonymous with “undeveloped land.” So, while the only overt characteristics that the desert of *Blood Meridian* shares with the American trope of “untamed wilderness” is the presence of “uncivilized people,” danger, and a necessary self-sufficiency, this enables McCarthy to subtly critique the barbarous activities of the borderlands and the notion of Manifest Destiny. The “untamed wilderness” of the desert does not present a bounty of resources like a wooded area or the ocean does, yet it is still land fought for. Furthermore, the depiction of the desert demonstrates the how hostile the environment is because the gang does not find resources within the desert to make their money from, as their money is only earned through murder and theft. Essentially, the land itself is depicted as having nothing to offer, yet the narrative spends most of its time in the desert as the Glanton gang attempts to conquer it by exterminating life within it.

Furthermore, *Moby-Dick* features the cultural moment in which a way of life is dying. During the time period of *Moby-Dick*, whaling was already an outdated industry because whale oil was replaced by fuel that was ostensibly easier and more cost efficient to use and produce. As Cesare Casarino suggests, “Whaling in *Moby-Dick* never really stood a chance: it was a world that was conjured up precisely so as to be constructed right from the beginning as its own living end, its own catastrophe. The fate of whaling in *Moby-Dick* is undoubtedly the proverbial fate worse than death” (80). So, through the death of Ahab, Melville is metaphorically putting the final nail in the coffin, indicating that the best has died and so the once open seas that offered an escape from the previously discussed domesticity collapses. Instead, the less regulated whaling industry without tight specifications of route and time constraints, are replaced with more

monitored voyages, essentially bringing the romanticized era of “the open sea” to a close. Robert Zoellner discusses the change in human’s relationship to the environment, ultimately determining that “Ishmael’s realization that even the great whale, the mightiest creature of the living earth, is part of a tragic continuum from which *nothing* is free” and that “Absolute freedom, a power essentially transcendental, does not exist. The universal thump is just that: universal. *All* nature suffers” (188-189). So, perhaps the sea was never as free as it seemed.

In Gnostic terms, this confinement of a previously assumed open area indicates the foreboding notion that the demiurge’s power is growing as he appears to be further limiting human movement, which would decrease their likelihood of achieving *gnosis*. While the sea is still just as physically open, there are now imposed rules that include limitations like which hunting grounds are allowed, stricter boundaries that denote different countries’ ownership, and time sensitive voyages. Again, we know that rules that govern the material plane are a result of the demiurge’s enslavement of humans, so rules implemented by humans only serve to add to the “sleep-inducing” elements of the world by, essentially, making the human’s cages smaller by further restricting agency. *Moby-Dick* demonstrates the death of the American open sea through the death of Ahab, the greatest whaler. With him the industry also symbolically dies, and the demiurge gains more power.

Just as *Moby-Dick* features the end of a way of life, so does *Blood Meridian*; this notion does not become apparent until the epilogue of *Blood Meridian*. Most notably, McCarthy’s novel is set closely to the same time period as *Moby-Dick*—just as the open seas are becoming less open, so too do the planes become fenced. Throughout *Blood*

*Meridian* the Glanton gang is able to cross large swaths of land seemingly unimpeded by local or even federal borders. While there are ranchers during this time, there is a notable lack of defensibly marked territories; rather, there is just simply open land for the gang to move through. They are even able to seemingly cross between Mexico and the United States mostly unaccosted. However, the epilogue depicts on its surface “a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground” using “an implement with two handles” (McCarthy 337). Here is the end of the open planes in the desert; we know as modern readers that the post-hole digger is the beginning of an era where territories in this region are strictly regulated with fences and walls. David Monejano identifies the widespread usage of barbed wire fences that forever altered the way of life in the southwest, affecting groups even beyond rogue bands of scalp-hunters, “so it was the introduction of barbed wire in the 1870’s. Before 1875 it had not been necessary to own land with ample water sources and pasture in order to be a cattleman; the frontier was still ‘open’” (56). Once the fences were built, the planes are someone’s property, and the vastness of the planes is divided into neat portions. *Blood Meridian* presents the kid’s death as analogous to Ahab’s death in that both deaths represent the end of a way of life. Throughout the kid’s life the primary obstacle to prevent him from going from one place to another isn’t borders, but rather violent human interactions. Almost immediately following his death is the epilogue, and because of the proximity of these narratives coupled with the lack of time markers, the epilogue appears to be occurring very nearly after the death of the kid, which would suggest that it is through his death that the desert has been fenced off. While the kid does not carry the title that Ahab

does, he is regardless a marked “wanderer,” a sort of Ishmael, who moved through the planes, which has become a relic of the past.

The natural spaces within the novels are also nearly entirely masculine. Within *Moby-Dick*, once the men leave the shore there is not another woman that the crew interacts with, and while the ocean and sky occasionally become feminine coded, there is a resolute masculine presence throughout. Similarly, *Blood Meridian*’s natural landscape is also decidedly masculine; there are no women within the gang, and the women that are encountered are generally within settlements and *pueblos*. In fact, Richard Woodward describes McCarthy as “A man’s novelist whose apocalyptic vision rarely focuses on women, McCarthy doesn’t write about sex, love or domestic issues” (para. 8). The division of masculine outdoors spaces and feminine domestic spaces is typical within western novels, but this concept has been prevalent in American literature since divisions of “spheres of influence” were introduced on modern society. In her study, Monica Rico paraphrases President Roosevelt to explain the American association of the west and masculinity, “western men embodied the ideal of ‘the strenuous life,’ a Darwinian struggle in which men had to test themselves against nature and other men; in so doing, they advanced not merely their individual interests but also those of civilization itself” (4).

Within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, the overwhelming masculinity in the natural environment appears to function as a space where men, intending to represent humankind, are allowed to act without the confines of society as a commentary on the nature of humans. Brandy Schillace explains that “Melville’s seeming contempt for the sentimental, the domestic and the feminine as lesser in scope and purpose than the manly,

homo-social world the novel inhabits” (95) is critical for understanding *Moby-Dick*, which creates a clear link to the sailor sin *Moby-Dick* and the typically western Glanton gang. Rico goes on to explain that “the ritualized killing of wild animals incorporated a rich vocabulary of gestures, objects, sayings, clothing, and images that, when woven together, told a story about masculine triumph over nature” (4). While Rico focuses on the American western frontier, it is clear that the sea also serves as a masculine frontier space that fulfils the same sorts of ritualistic practices that includes a specific set of language, gestures, saying, and the slaying of animals. The text of *Moby-Dick* even proclaims that “but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea” while the air and sky (which the crew does not interact with) is feminine (Melville 589). Furthermore, the controlling environment element in *Blood Meridian*, the sun, is described as “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 [the Glanton gang]” (McCarthy 44-45). So, the texts firmly assert that the natural environments around them are not only masculine, but openly hostile.

Once again, Gnostic thinking may be observed in regard to the environment that shed further light on the importance of a hostile natural environment. As we know, the material world is the creation of the demiurge whose primary function is to prevent humans from achieving *gnosis*, and so the natural environment must be antagonistic to, in a way, distract the crew of the Pequod or the Glanton gang so that they won’t have the time to seek *gnosis*. The natural environments within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*

both carefully survey the crew and the gang, and the vastness of the sea and the desert serves to show their rank within the gnostic system. The sea in *Moby-Dick* and the desert in *Blood Meridian* also differ in their roles within Gnostic thinking, stated by the texts themselves. Ishmael refers to the sea as “terra incognita” (Melville 298) whereas the narrator in *Blood Meridian* refers to the desert as “terra damnata” (McCarthy 61). The progression of severity of the offhanded remarks reflects the supposed state of the natural environment that the Pequod and Glanton gang must face; this also reflects the nature of the material world according to Valentinian Gnostics: the material world is “sleep inducing” (meaning that it prevents the pursuit of *gnosis*) and that the world is inherently flawed because of its creator. Furthermore, *Blood Meridian* extends an apparently “unknown territory” into “damned territory,” which is a quite the extension, for Ishmael describes the sea, the “terra incognita” as “for ever and ever, to the crack of doom, the seas will insult and murder [baby man], and pulverize the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make” (Melville 298). So, because the “starting point” of the state of the environment is already hyper-violent, this means that the extension of this notion will lead to something that is almost beyond comprehension.

The implied vastness of the ocean and the desert subsequently engulf the crew of the Pequod and the Glanton gang, indicating that their inferior size is a reflection of their inferiority within the Gnostic system. Because the crew and the gang have not achieved *gnosis*, they are essentially unimportant slaves to the demiurge, and so the environment may take advantage of their general irrelevancy by capitalizing on this insignificance: they are simply fuel used to animate this material world as they remain trapped in it. While there are scholars, such as Petra Mundik and Harold Bloom, who argue that there



is a presence of an entity—Mundik claims a pneumatic or a Gnostic messiah, while Bloom claims a Promethean motif—within the epilogue that subverts this irrelevancy, this is still a contested topic. While the glimmer of hope that is present in *Blood Meridian*'s hole post thrower and Ishmael's survival, this does not overthrow the rest of the established minimizing the environment imposes on the characters throughout the rest of the novel. Instead, it appears as though the characters are subject to the whims of their natural surroundings, and thus their inferiority is again emphasized. As Schillace further points out in her article that the female “miniature” or domestic spaces become synonymous with “containment” and that larger, free, masculine spaces are given the power. Within *Moby-Dick*, it is the crew of the Pequod that appears to be in “miniature” when compared to the seemingly boundless sea and the white leviathan, and thus become inferior (96-98). Power and freedom becomes fairly interchangeable with masculine spaces, and it is the dwarfing of men by the natural environment that forces them into the meeker feminine containment. As this relates to Gnosticism, the specific sort that is discussed here is also decidedly masculine; the demiurge is identified as male, and thus so his material plane is also masculine coded. It further seems that, at the very least, Ahab is aware of his placement within the system; “for example, he [Ahab] observes that quite indifferent to his own mighty endeavor, the sun continues to shine “unblinkingly” (500), the grass to grow everywhere—in Greenland as well as on Vesuvius (563)” (Schultz 99). Despite his epic quest that has consumed him, ultimately his environment cares very little about his endeavors.

However, despite the evident inferiority of the Pequod's crew and the Glanton gang, the natural environment is also insistent on watching them. As Schultz points out,

the sun “unblinkingly” watches the crew as they search for the white whale, as well as everything else that its light touches; “That unblinkingly vivid ... sun seems the blazing focus of the glassy ocean’s immeasurable burning-glass” (Melville 543). The full quote further indicates that the sun is not only watching everything below it, but it is unwavering in its surveillance, and that it is also the “focus” of the sea. Thus, it appears in this instant that there is a multifaceted kind of surveillance system around the Pequod. This is not the first instant of the sea engaging in a sort of stare down; during the first lowering, Starbuck is “silently eyeing the vast blue eye of the sea” (Melville 240). The uses of “blazing focus” and “eye” as descriptors of the sea imply that even as the sea is being watched, it watches back; it would be remiss to assign ocular verbiage to the sea if it were not intended to see.

In *Blood Meridian*, the Glanton gang is seemingly constantly surveilled by the stars and sun in more overt and malevolent terms. As previously quoted, the sun “sat squat and pulsing and malevolent” (McCarthy 45) over the gang as it rises into the sky, and at night “the stars burned with a lidless fixidity” (McCarthy 213) over the gang, indicating that they are never unwatched. So, the cosmic elements within *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian* would then be evidently watching the groups of men dying without intervention to prevent such outcomes, subverting the typical expectations of divine intervention from the heavenly bodies. Particularly the sun, which generally symbolized paternal rebirth and renewal, as well as revelation. Within Gnostic thought, it is clear that cosmic elements like stars and the sun would certainly not lend aid to any human, nor any sort of revelation, because of the previously discussed efforts from the demiurge and the role of heimarmene. Hans Jonas explains that the cosmic elements, including the sun and

stars, “enclosing the created world, the made it a prison for those particles of divinity which had become trapped in the system” (261), meaning that the sun, stars have also become layers that further trap the divine spark, working as sorts of wardens over the material plane.

Ultimately, *Blood Meridian* utilizes themes of nature also seen in *Moby-Dick* and expands upon them until they are carnivalesque representations that allow for more overt and malicious language where the positive associations with nature are stripped, and only the unbearable vastness and contention are left. Gnostic thinking explains the hostility of the natural environment vis-à-vis the control of the demiurge, and as a result the evident antagonism gains another dimension beyond both imperialism and the typical man-versus-nature literary tropes.

## V. CONCLUSION

By examining the ways that Gnostic thinking constitutes an overarching metaphysics in *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, the reader not only finds a connecting thread between the novels but also discovers a philosophical foundation for the enigmatic ideas to be found in them. While Melville is not typically considered to be an author who uses Gnostic thinking in the way that McCarthy is, using Gnostic thinking as framework for *Moby-Dick* does provide answers to the philosophical excurses in that novel, and Gnosticism may also provide a sort of comfort for the bleak conclusion of the novel. It is possible that Melville himself may have been aware of Gnostic thinking, and so the analysis done here will hopefully inspire further research into this line of thought.

*Blood Meridian* overtly embraces a certain type of Gnosticism, given the epigrams, and thus has enabled a rich tradition of scholarship that attempts to explain the motivations in the seemingly plotless and inexcusably violent novel. By further analyzing the qualities *Blood Meridian* shares with *Moby-Dick*, one may have a greater understanding of McCarthy's book, especially when a close or historical reading of the text has stopped supplying answers. Furthermore, by coupling a Gnostic reading and a line of influence from *Moby-Dick*, *Blood Meridian*'s bleak conclusion still maintains a sliver of hope.

Because these novels are such influential pieces of work, it is necessary to understand the overlying metaphysics so that their cultural influence may be further understood as well. As modern fiction becomes increasingly bizarre or simply "weird," it will become ever more important to be aware of influences, intertextuality, and the somewhat Frankensteinian nature of fiction writing, in which various body parts of past

literature are reassembled, stitched together, and given fresh life by new generations of writers. During his *New York Times Magazine* interview with Woodward, McCarthy claimed “The ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life of the novels that have been written” (Woodward para. 23). And as we have seen here, this trend is certainly not new, nor is it liable to change.

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