

Grotesque and Southern Gothic in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*

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Abstract

This article offers a post-southernist reading that challenges and problematizes the impacts of haunted past of the American South with implications of violence embodied by Judge Holden in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, or *The Evening Redness in the West*. In order to present a moral compass to the reader, the text presents good-evil dichotomy and the world of human through the uncanny and grotesque characters of "the kid" and "the judge." Through this dichotomy, the reader acknowledges the possibility of alternative narratives that escape from the control and totalizing gaze of dominant power and discourses. The counter- narratives complicate any types of subjugation, mythologized history, and refuse to approve the violence that the prevailing power practices against innocent people. This paper aims to analyze the struggle between the good and evil and the degree of insanity performed by the evil depicted through southern gothic and grotesque scenes. Thus, the paper contributes to grotesque reading of the selected text through a number of elements: "exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness," generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 303).

Keywords: Gothic, grotesque, violence, past, memory.

Cormac McCarthy'nin *Blood Meridian* Adlı Eserinde Grotesk Ögeler ve Güney Gotik

Öz

Bu makale Amerikalı yazar Cormac McCarthy'nin *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West* adlı romanında post-southern okuma yaklaşımıyla the Judge karakteriyle somutlaştırılan Amerikanın Güney eyaletlerinde etkisini sürdüren tarihi travmatik olayların sorunsallaştırılmasını ve eleştirilmesini amaçlamaktadır. Okuyucuya ahlaki bir pusula sunabilmek için, metin iyi-kötü dikotomisini ve insan oğlunun tuhaf ve grotesk dünyasını 'the kid' ve 'the judge' karakterleri aracılığıyla sunmaktadır. Bu dikotomi aracılığıyla, okuyucu baskın güç ve söylemlerin bakış açısından ve kontrolünden kaçan olası alternatif anlatımların ve hikayelerin varlığını kabul etmektedir. Karşıt anlatımlar her tür boyun eğdirmeyi ve efsaneleştirilmiş tarihi sorunsallaştırmakta ve baskın gücün ezilmişler üzerinde sürdürmeye çalıştığı şiddeti reddetmektedir. Bu bağlamda iyi ile kötü arasındaki mücadele ve kötünün sergilemiş olduğu çılgınlık seviyesi Bakhtin ve Thomson'un ileri sürdüğü grotesk ögeler, abartı, mübağala ve aşırılık, ışığında irdelenmesi amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gotik, grotesk, şiddet, geçmiş, anı.

INTRODUCTION

Gothic is a literary genre that arouses “anxieties, fears, and terror, often in tandem with violence, brutality, rampant sexual impulses, and death” (Fisher, 2008, p. 145). In order to conjure nervous and tense world of brutality, violence, terror, sexual aberrations, and death, Gothic literature presented scenes that confronted the logic and civility while uttering aberrant, horrific, and unacceptable desires and thoughts. In *The Grotesque: The Critical Idiom*, Philip Thomson notes that grotesque has a number of elements: “disharmony (conflicts, unresolved), the comic (vulgarily funny), the terrifying (uncanny, supernatural to disgusting and repulsive), extravagance and exaggeration (extremeness), abnormality (such as physical features), the satiric and playful” (Thomson, 1972, p. 20-28). In his groundbreaking work *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser suggests that grotesque “could be considered as an aesthetic category because the term is used in connection with several different fields, from literature to the plastic arts, from music to dance and even a form of lettering” (Kayser, 1963, p. 17). Kayser presents a larger picture in which we can see application of grotesque to different disciplines and areas of life. In that sense, literary works challenge and problematize the abnormalities and terrifying brutal practices of human being that bring destruction to universal unity and coherence.

Specifically talking about American literature, southern literature predominantly portrays elements of grotesque and gothic. Southern Gothic is extensively studied and became a unique strain of literature following the conventions of southern literature. Flannery O’Connor, as one of the most renowned literary figures of the American South, adequately affirmed that the southern literature beseeched “an image of Gothic monstrosities and the idea of a preoccupation with everything deformed and grotesque” (O’Connor, 2000, p. 28). Although the Southern gothic emerged from the English and American gothic traditions, the racial tensions and aberrations—the lost cause, slavery, removal of native Americans from the southern states can be just a few of these aberrations—that the South experienced gave way to the southern gothic. In this vein, this paper attempts to read *Blood Meridian* as a gothic novel that deals with historical atrocities with its incomprehensible and frightening implications presented with the narrative of violence. The first part of the paper presents background information on the novel, the author, and focuses on mainly two characters that presented the moral agenda of the novel. Then in the second half, the paper focuses on analyzing textual violence that presents human condition as a pathological aberration from the norm.

The U.S. South and Southern Gothic in *Blood Meridian*

Charles Crow has noted, the South became “the principal region of American Gothic” in literature (Crow, 2013, p. 124). The Southern Gothic brings to light the extent to which the idyllic vision of the pastoral, agrarian South rests on massive repressions of the region’s historical realities: slavery, racism, and patriarchy. The gothic becomes a convenient form for American literature especially to explore its unique experiences which enable the reader to perceive the elusive tension between dichotomies: “order and disorder, containment and excess, utopia and reality, official and unofficial history” (Vieth, 2010, p. 57). The particular aspects that McCarthy problematizes are slaughtering of Native Americans, the abrogation of the slave trade in which “the black man, rum, and money were inextricably entwined in a knot of guilt” (Fiedler, 2003, p. 143), and exploitation of space for capital investment that create a sort of apocalyptic space. The physical substance of the landscape and immense formations of the space accentuate the impact of gothic creating, what Scott Sanders calls, “a geological

Gothicism” that shelters the ghosts and brutality of the haunted past. Through presenting the darker past, McCarthy aims to rewrite the southern history and past as a counter-narrative to “include all of the aspects of our origins as a country” (Veith, 2010, p. 59).

Following the Civil War, the haunting, violent, and burdened history of the South, dilapidated plantations and mansions, and destroyed nature provide phenomenal locations for Gothic stories. With its haunting past of slavery, backwardness, and poverty, the South is symbolized by mostly negative adjectives from yellow fever, diseases, and societal violence of massacres, to mobs, and lynching. The South has always been obsessed with physical, racial, sexual, and class boundaries. In that sense, southern gothic literature challenges and problematizes the region’s historical realities depicting grotesque, wicked, deformed, and brutal figures. The deformities were portrayed either as physical or psychological one. Thus the gothic novel enables the reader to indirectly experience dismay realities. Francis Russell Hart describes the southern gothic style as fiction “*evocative of a sublime and picturesque landscape... depicting a world in ruins*” (qtd. in Morledge, 2008, p. 10).

Similarly, physical grotesques and abnormalities symbolize corrupted moral compass and highlight how southern gothic tackles the contradiction of “*perceived, heteronormative normalcy and the repressed realities beneath that assumption*” (Marshall, 2013, p. 13). American gothic is most perceptible in regional literature and most notably southern literature. For the unique space that southern gothic has in American gothic, Teresa Goddu states that “*identified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation’s “other” becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wishes to dissociate itself*” (qtd. in Castillo, 2016, p. 2), because the traumatic and plantation history of the South reinforces “*irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot*” (2). Flannery O’Connor, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and Cormac McCarthy, among many others, successfully use Southern gothic elements that supported irrational impulses such as “*the impulse to evil and uncontrollable unconscious*” (Nelson, 2004, p. 48). McCarthy’s text, the focus of this paper, depicts post-apocalyptic space to disassociate the South from its lost cause and questionable past related to slavery and Native American removal.

McCarthy began his literary career with four novels *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979). His novel *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West* was published in 1985. Following these novels, McCarthy published *The Road* (2006) which depicts a post-apocalyptic story set in a southern location. The novel is read by some critics as “*haunted both by Old Southern slavery guilt and by anxiety over New Southern consumption*” (Ellis, *The Road* 2013, p. 50). McCarthy is associated with “*grit lit*,” a sort of Southern tradition. The distinguishing characteristics of this group is that they applied gothic elements to support their desolate portrayals of the American South. His novels were all dark and deeply violent influenced by William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor’s gothic style since they were recognized as the pioneers of southern gothic novel.

Through the story of the Glanton Gang of the 1850s, *Blood Meridian* narrates humanity’s innate tendency for violence, depicted through southern gothic style. Based on historical accounts, the novel’s trajectory follows the adventures of a 14-year-old runaway boy, the Kid, who falls in with the Glanton gang and encounters the monstrous and enigmatic Judge Holden, referred to as *the judge*, to discover animalistic and angelic aspects of human character. The kid who leaves his home and wanders in the post-apocalyptic wasteland without a certain direction is described as “*unwashed*” but as his “*eyes oddly*

innocent" and his propensity is towards the "mindless violence" of simple aggression (4). Leaving his home, the kid enters a circle of violence inhabited by men who fight in every opportunity and situation regardless of their origin, race, and ethnicity. The animalistic drives that they had during these fights were depicted as, "Men whose speech sounds like grunting of apes" (McCarthy, 1985, p. 4). Already animalistic, the gang who murder Native Americans for their scalps at \$200 each, starts scalping anyone who falls across their path, and they sell the scalps for gold. The fearful gang is a mixture of whites and Indians and described like "a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh" (78). Through these grotesque scenes and eccentric characters McCarthy seems to revel in their taste for blood and death.

The influence of Southern grotesque is visually and thematically apparent in *Blood Meridian*. The visual and cinematic descriptions are presented vividly to create the desired impact on the readers' mind. The novel's major themes are presented through shifting the focus between the kid and the judge. The kid is left in the background as the Judge is foregrounded. All men in the gang are relentlessly bloodthirsty; for that reason, McCarthy aims to position his reader to evaluate the moral and philosophical stances of his characters. For the Judge, war lacks morality disguised under the excuse of a civilized ritual. The kid, to create this impact, frequently responds to the Judge's grandiose speeches by saying, "You're crazy" – that questions and thus undermines the authority the judge practices over others. In so doing, the kid occasionally dissociates himself from the evil and double gothic consciousness.

Using Southern grotesque and metafictional journeys, McCarthy describes the evil side of people using poetic language brilliantly. From this standpoint, among many other topics *Blood Meridian* suggests that people possess evil and evil is a part of humanity. Abominable bloodshed and incongruous violence are perfectly intertwined into the story to delineate the evil and rapacious side of people. "The kid" and "the Judge" embody the struggle between good and evil. The Glanton Gang kills, rapes and marauding without abstinence that lurch perceptibility and repeatedly disturbs sanity of imagination. Such a horrific slaughter cannot be explained with mere greediness; the stakes are higher. The best explanation for such greed is the existence of evil in humanity, which is narrated as: "when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything. [...] And the evil that can run itself for a thousand years, no need to tend it. Do you believe that?" (McCarthy, 1985, p. 19).

Blood Meridian is about contention between good and evil. While the judge is the heroic antagonist, the kid is a heroic protagonist. It can be argued that the kid is flawed, yet throughout the novel, we see that the kid is also the heroic good. There are ways in which the kid approaches people with mercy. When the kid saw McGill coming out of fire and looking around blankly at the crime scene, he waved at him out of the water and approached him. However, Glanton warns him to "Get away from him" and shoots McGill through his head (163). Since the man is tortured and burnt with a ferocious weapon, the kid approaches him sympathetically. A similar sympathetic attitude can be seen when Davy Brown was injured with an arrow on his leg. When everybody refused to help him, the kid did help him. The struggle between good and evil is on the stage once more in the following manner: Boys, said Brown, "I'd doctorfy it myself but I can't get no straight grip." The Judge looked up at him and smiled. "Will you do us Holden?" "No, Davy, I won't, but I tell you what I will do." "What's that?" "I'll write a policy on your life against every mishap save the noose." "Damn

you, then" (167-8). However, the kid is the only one in the gang that still has the tinges of mercy in his heart, and he stands and says: "I'll try him," and he helps Brown to take the arrow out (169). During the story, the kid, like Toadvine, has a chance to kill the Judge but he does not. These moments show that the good inside him has not died out entirely although he goes on killing and scalping people for money. Nevertheless, the traces of this mercy will lead him to complete his journey to maturation and then to salvation.

It is not only the Judge or the gang members that display evil side of man The Judge narrates the parable of a traveler to depict that evil is hereditary. For the Judge's imagination, the story becomes an instructional material to instruct people around him. In the story, Judge narrates how a harness maker accosts a traveler passing through a wild section of the mountains. The harness maker intends to get money from the stranger which ends up receiving a moral lesson from the stranger. The harness maker is controlled by his anger which leads him killing the stranger. The harness maker's wife figures out what happened and helps her husband to disguise the traces of his heinous action. The harness maker tells his son what he has done as he lay dying. The son travels to the west and "he becomes himself a killer of men" (151). The purpose of the parable that the judge tells is to show that evil is an inherited trait. The story embodies the fact that "the ugly fact of violence and the ugly face of evil that existed since the creation of human beings" (Philips 23). The tragedy is portrayed through inheritance of genes that controls the evil inside us.

The relationship between the kid and the Judge is compared to good and evil, which depicts "disharmony" and "terrifying" nature of this type of relation (Thomson, 1972, p. 20). The border between good and evil is sometimes blurred as it is hard to distinguish sometimes these two. For that reason, religious discourses are used for the final decision on good and evil. There are biblical references in *Blood Meridian* that insinuate the war against the evil in the good book. Judge Holden embodies the ideology of war which "was always here. Before man was, war waited for him" (259). This war is the evil side of people that waited for the arrival of man. The Judge proclaims "War is God" (259) and asserts that "if war is not holy, man is nothing but antic clay" (319). The man who proclaims the war is odd is affirming a rigorous metaphysic, and claiming an excuse for barbarism. In one scene, the gang sits around the fire and discusses the war, the war in the Bible. Black Jackson and Irving, two members of the gang, express their ideas on war and evil respectively as follows:

Jackson: *The good book says that he that lives by the sword shall perish by the sword,*

Irving: *What right man would have it any other way?" , "The good book does indeed count war an evil," "Yet there's many a bloody tale of war inside it. (259)*

Their conversations presents and aims to legitimize evil and war as natural sources of human beings. The novel, however, problematizes and criticizes the internalization of war and evil doings by highlighting animalistic and antagonistic actions of the gang members.

The Judge's evil speeches that castigate moral law are ambiguous. He claims that people created moral law "for the enfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak" (261). The references to war were give through religious discourses to face of the perversion that human psyche encounters at times of hardship and distress. The Bible counts war as evil which resonates in *Blood Meridian* with one exception. Bell argues that "evil like war is holy or must be affirmed as being holy for man's existence to have any sanctity at all, for evil is the undeniable feature of human and exists all the time"(116). Successive wars and the desire to

destroy everything become an obsession for the Judge, which feeds the desire for war. What is interesting is that the novel encourages the reader to face off devilish aspects of life, darkness, violence, death, torture, and all other mishaps, as natural sources to emphasize the naturalness and innateness of evil doings (Philips, 2002, p. 23). It is only evil that can force the Judge and others in the gang to kill innocent people—children, women—like an ordinary act.

Blood Meridian presents moral opposition through physical, rhetorical and symbolic violence that dominate the novel. The Judge is a well-educated, charismatic, and compelling character; the kid, on the other hand, is neither educated nor compelling. They develop a type of apprentice and master relationship that evolves into conflicting interests, focused on the spiritual salvation and an extended pilgrimage of the kid. For the kid, the novel is a bildungsroman. For Manuel Broncano the kid's quest and journey is a "*migration [that] takes him from the 'flat and pastoral landscape'*" (Broncano, 2005, p. 4) of the South to a gothic and nightmarish territory which increasingly becomes more and more grotesque, a surreal frontier land where "*he undergoes a true metamorphosis*" (33). McCarthy employs gothic to achieve metamorphosis which is reflected the Kid's simple story in which the protagonist experiences various forms of violence in this journey to salvation. The most significant event to delineate this occurs when the kid arrives in California. He attempts to help an old woman, brings a confession of the good and portrays the transformation narrated as: "*He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her country people who would welcome her and that she join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die*" (McCarthy, 1985, p. 315). This implies that it is a sight of another massacre with grotesquely described tortured, mutilated bodies of innocent people thrown around the space. His intention to save the woman signifies his departure, although this departure may not be physically but mentally, from the acts of the gang. His compassionate act towards to immigrant woman is the embodiment of his mental disengagement with the gang. His act represents hope for redemption.

As most critics agreed, The Judge represents a huge, daunting man with a threatening past, and he is guilty of raping and murdering several children. For Douglass, the Judge is the "*best theorizer of violence and its best practitioner*" (Douglass, 2002, p. 15). Joshua Masters, similarly, defines the Judge as the "*nightmarish embodiment of the myths of colonial expansion*" (Masters, 1992, p. 25). In that sense, he embodies evil and violence motivated by the evil. The Judge wants to be both child-like and "*suzerain of the earth,*" when he embodies many roles—who rules even when there are rulers—(McCarthy, 1985, p. 207), and able to declare, "*in order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon earth save by my dispensation*" (207). He challenges God, nature, time itself on a blasted heath, and desert "*like some egregious salt land bard*" (228).

Within the moments of violence, the Judge is devoid of pity, affection, and morality which is depicted in a scene when he was cradling the native American boy on his knee the amusement of the gang members. Unexpectedly, or may be expectedly, in the morning the Judge kills the boy, and scalps him, and wipes his hands on his pants. This is a typical behavior of a man as evil as the Judge. Lincoln Kenneth states that "*the Judge remains the most morbidly captivating character in Blood Meridian*" because he represents Satan and albino monstrosity. Through judge Holden, the text challenges and problematizes a sort of

holocaust [...] of Manifest Destiny and white supremacy, the devil's genocidal shibboleths" (Kenneth, 2009, p. 87).

The Judge is depicted as a ubiquitous figure and sophisticated in science, religion, and the natural world. McCarthy's portrayal of him is devilish and is parallel to the description of a corrupt preacher who condemns the gang. The judge's omnipotent status is depicted through compelling language that the readers want to listen to. His rhetoric owes to oral tradition and his eloquence does not prevent him being evil. In *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*, Bernard Mc Elroy states that modern grotesque focuses on the unequal struggle between the self and such a hostile environment (Mc Elroy, 1989, p. 17). In this sense, through the physical and internal journey of the kids, the text aims to depict this struggle. The Judge sets the kid apart from many vices and wrongdoings including himself and the gang. It is for the first time in the course of his adventure, the kid has some moral superiority and resistance to the prevailing violence. This type of moral superiority can be seen when the Judge meets the kid in prison: "Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not. Can you tell me who that was?" "It was you," whispered the kid. "You were the one." [And then I'm going to skip down a little bit.] "Our animosities were formed and waiting before we two met, yet even so you could have changed it all" (319). The Judge accuses the kid of betraying the gang, and he suggests that he has deceived the authorities. He accuses the kid of actively working against the gang when he implies that the kid had cooperated with the Yumas and contributed to the obliteration of the Glanton Gang.

Physical Violence, Gothic and Grotesque in *Blood Meridian*

Vince Brewton explains that "while all literary violence can be viewed as formal in the sense that it has achieved literary form" (2004, p. 122). For him there are two types of violence: governed by rules, agreements, and cultural assumptions, and informal violence, a fragmentary, unconsidered, random, or "senseless," violence (122). It substantiates that violence recurs as the irrefutable common statistic of its presence in time. Steven Shavero notes that death leaves behind its memories, its momentos and its predelictions: the scalps collected by Glanton and his men, the tree of dead babies(59), the crucified mummy (253), the circle of severed heads (226), the eviscerated bodies of men with "strange menstrual wounds between their legs" (1993, p. 159).

Multisensory rhetoric, to use Dirk Remley's term, seeks to represent violent action in a way that extends the experience of the text's violence from its characters onto the reader. The most immediate and visceral way the novel seems to embody a form of violence is through its vivid descriptive passages that aim to represent physical violence in all its graphic detail. During the first encounter with the Indians the kid witnesses "the hordes of evil, devastating and merciless" (Broncano, 2005, p. 37), and the description of the Indians reminds us of Bakhtin's grotesque body depictions: "legion horrible" "mongolhordes" and "barbarous tongue" and "gaudy and grotesque" (McCarthy, 1985, p. 52-3). McCarthy's impeccable prose delineates brutal experiences in the American West and contains instances of outlandish violence at every turn. The narrator grotesquely depicts slaughtering of people in a Mexican sanctuary when the victims: "lay in a great pool of their communal blood" (63). The intense of the horrific scene exacerbated through the descriptive narrative of the symbolic pool that adds violence and brutality to the scalping: "It had set up a sort of pudding crossed everywhere with the tracks of wolves or dogs, and along the edges, it had dried and cracked into a burgundy ceramic" (63). The depiction of the evil scene complicates the psychology of frontier theory due to its

extremism. Vereen M. Bell states that the story “*compels us to call forth from ourselves a capacity for understanding the evil that the various meanings of our lives otherwise cause to be suppressed*” (1988, p. 119).

The grotesque and gothic description that challenge the monstrosities of violent acts is depicted through the massacre of Captain White's army. As Mc Elroy states, “*The psychic reasons for this proclivity are far from clear, but the proclivity itself has left its mark on a variety of cultures, from the most primitive societies to the most sophisticated*” (Mc Elroy, 1989, p. 1). The level of brutality and abnormality that ripped the members of the gang from their humanity embodies the anachronistic characteristic of grotesque inclination that Mc Elroy discusses above. This can only be explained through grotesque and strange that is out of standard and accepted norms of sane human individuals. What intensifies the brutality and evildoing is that they scalp people when they are alive that accentuates the level of the torture and at the same time monstrosity inside us: *passing their blades about the scalps of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs, and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals ... and some who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries ... and everywhere the dying groaned and gibbered and horses lay screaming* (McCarthy, 1985, p. 56-7). The depictions of chopping naked bodies and sodomizing them add “*terrifying*” level of violence through the perverted behavior of the wicked presenting the abnormalities we encounter. For that reason, the description of physical violence applied to body evokes grotesque and gothic features that create disgust and hatred towards brutality. The narration also tests the limits of endurance and acceptability. The depiction is visually horrifying to a sane mind and psyche. It is primitive and uncanny. It emphasizes the fact that the grotesque “*transforms the world from what we 'know' it to be to what we fear it might be*” (Mc Elroy, 1989, p. 5). The monstrosity of the evil is heightened by adding auditory reactions to violence that not only visually portrays the brutality but also allows the reader to hear them so that all dimensions of violence can be perceived by the reader.

Another significant scene that deserves close attention regarding the dichotomy between evil and good is the unnamed town where the castaways were taken by a traveling family. The depiction of the town seems to be a “*recreation of a grotesque painting*” (Broncano, 2005, p. 38): “*a primitive circus [...] cages clogged with vipers, with great lime green serpents or headed lizards with their black mouths wet with venom*” (McCarthy, 1985, p. 69). The depiction adds carnivalesque to the odds of the Glanton gang's adventures. For Bakhtin, Carnivalesque is a mode of literary expression in which the world is turned upside down, though temporarily. Social hierarchies dissolve or become inverted, the sacred and the profane are mixed, and riot and disorder prevail over certainty and stability. The upside down and distorted world view is very much depicted in the analyzed text to criticize the “*exaggeration*” and “*excessiveness*” of eagerness and confusion that evil side of men created. The description of mouths of the reptiles with venom symbolically represents the gothic aspect of human behavior and implies that the evil inside humanity should be caged to prevent giving any harm to those around. Otherwise, the evil in human may paradoxically bring destruction to humanity.

Bakhtin notes that “*exaggeration of the inappropriate to incredible and monstrous dimensions is the basic nature of the grotesque*” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 306). The monstrous dimensions of the grotesque are depicted through multiple eruptions of mostly unrelated

violence. They also imply the simplicity of some motivating factors behind the violence. For example, a bar fight is brought on by *"a muttered insult from a nearby table"* (McCarthy, 1985, p. 188), and then transformed into a bloodbath and scalping of the slain men (190). Next follows the decimation of a Mexican township, whose inhabitants seeking refuge in the local church, are *"dragged howling one by one"* (191), to be *"slain and scalped on the chancel floor"* (191). Shortly after that, the filibusters gun down a company of mounted lancers, leaving them *"dead or dying on the ground"* (192), before riding down and scalping the fleeing survivors (193-94). These depictions overlap with the elements of grotesque that Thomson defined. Scalping and slaying innocent people delineate abnormality and terrifying extravagance. The scenes beyond comprehension of a sane mind.

The gang's next stop is Chihuahua whose inhabitants and the monstrosity they were exposed to are depicted grotesquely. The kid is imprisoned here and his cell was a dark room full of half-naked and ape-looking penitents of unknown sins. A riotous scene of debauched revelry follows, and the celebration soon devolves into exuberant, non-specific gunfire amidst a distressed street harpist, and " " (180), some of whom are grappling and tumbling over *"in a crash of brandy glasses"* (180). Among this chaos, we witness Jackson's rush into the street and vowing to *"Shoot [sic] the ass of Jesus Christ, the long-legged white son of a bitch"* (180). When morning arrives, *"Bathcat and the harpist [lie] asleep upon the banquet table in one another's arms"* (180), surrounded by *"dark patches of drying blood,"* while outside in the street the remains of a bonfire can be found. The depiction reminds the reader of the fact that *"a grotesque world in which only the inappropriate is exaggerated is only quantitatively large, but qualitatively it is extremely poor, colorless, and far from gay"* (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 308). They also remind us of extravagance and disharmony through terrifying scenes.

Implying historical brutality, tensions, and aberrations, *Blood Meridian* portrays how desires and irrationality can lead people to destroy humanistic values. This approach problematizes the peculiar institution of slavery in the U.S. South, the frontier west and the destruction it brought to humanity. It may be possible to read the novel symbolically as the charges of the extreme violence performed by several asinine people. However, the violence in the novel, although disturbing, compels the readers that people have evil inside them. Leo Daughtery inquires that if everybody has an evil, how evil got into the body and asserts that *"evil is simply everything that is, with the exception of the bits of spirit imprisoned here"* (1993, p. 160). Inherently, people have good and bad characteristics. Some people resist the motive to be evil and struggle all their lives to stay innocent, while others sustain greedy desires which transform them into evil beings.

The dance at the end, which can be interpreted as the collective violence of war, and the description of the Judge carries the message that evil is not dead yet because he has not fulfilled his desires to destroy humanity in us. The evil side of the human psyche urged people to kill so that they can consume and satisfy their greediness. The dance, which rhetorically emphasizes the centrality of violent struggle, indicates that the survival of human species is contingent upon to the dedication and pursuit of such struggle. The Judge's attitude highlights the paradoxical reliance of war's cohesive function. He both partakes in and directs this dance by taking possession of one of the fiddles, continually repeating his mantra: that he will never die. The dance is emblematic of the arts, of human creativity. However, as the judge points out, this dance is also predicated on founding violence – it can only begin with the *"letting of blood"* (McCarthy, 1985, p. 347).

Some factors and the environment that people live in may trigger or annihilate the evil in them. For that reason, I contend that McCarthy created a character with no name – “the kid” – to support the idea that everybody has an evil side. “The kid” becomes a member of the gang, yet he does not become evil like the Judge. According to Bakhtin, “the object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 310). The kid erases the limits when he symbolically carries a bible. The kid, although illiterate, carries the Bible he found in a mining camp. For Amy Hungerford, the Bible is “*the sign of some change in him, the signs of his departure from the murderous life he had led*” so far (2010, p. 92). The kid has mercy and signs of innocence that will distinguish him from the Judge. Another peculiarity of “the kid” is that McCarthy uses a lower case letter “k” for the kid instead of a capital “K” to show that everybody can be in “the kid’s” position. While describing the face of the kid in the opening lines of this novel as, “*All history present in that visage, the child, the father of the man,*” McCarthy uses poetic language which is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s phrase from “*My Heart Leaps up when I Behold*” (3). The kid cannot read or write that could be explanation of his mindless involvement in the violence acts of the gang, yet the visual rhetoric of his face described as *curiously untouched behind the scars, the eyes oddly innocent* creates innocence. Since space is devoid of law and morality, the readers are tested with the degree of violence. The historical references are aptly intertwined in the story to insinuate this fact. From the duality of the good and evil, or from the characters of the kid and the judge, the reader’s task is not compelled to determine who is more evil. In contrast, it is the reader’s task to explore the gothic duality in us and the nature of evil, our inner conflicts that made us either persistent in our wrongdoings or enable us to transform to achieve physical and spiritual redemption.

At the end, the tone of the novel shifts into the present tense, and the Judge emerges as a preeminent character. This is the time when the Judge dances and the readers get the refrain that he is immortal. It is arguable that the Judge himself is fate, indecent evil, a profane evil, or just a fake judge who *takes the place of a slain dancing bear* (Lincoln, 2009, p. 89). McCarthy draws the Judge character as elegant as a painter does a portrait in a canvas. There is an assertion that he is immortal. The only way to understand that assertion is to see him as a literary character. At this moment the Judge, a character that will live in the literary tradition, is similar to Milton’s Satan. In these lines, McCarthy’s literary ambition becomes apparent. The vision of the Judge dancing naked at the end of the novel is a “*terrifying image of a man*” who was a product of “*violence of death and possession.*” The fact that the judge “*rages against totalizing authorities like the Church, Government, and History, only to replace them with his own regime of power and control*” makes him unstoppable (Campbell, 2000, p. 225). For the judge, the natural, preferred state of the world is war: aggression is paramount, and subjective violence is likened to wolves culling themselves (154). According to the judge’s claims, war is the true culmination of man’s violent nature, his singular purpose is to exist timelessly: “*War endures [...] War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner*” (262). As he proclaims, “*War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is God*” (263).

CONCLUSION

Blood Meridian depicts that the power of representation to excuse or justify violence is inherent. Whether or not an act is recognized as violent depends entirely on the symbolic meaning ascribed to this act. The murders and violence show the animalistic aspect of human nature controlled by anger and instincts rather than the principles of the Enlightenment which urges people to use their reason and consider the result of one's actions. By highlighting the animalistic aspect of evil, the text aims to evoke the idea that on the opposite end of the spectrum there is reason and goodwill that would heal people and prevent them from turning into bloodsucking monsters. The evil act does not only destroy people around us but also the agent who performs the evil action. Through the countless examples of outrages brutality, the text implies the absurdity of our actions through the graphic murder of infants (165), the drowning of a litter of puppies (203), the unceremonious killing and subsequent scalping of an Apache child after it has come to trust the judge (173). The Glanton Gang traces a fractal path upon the surface of the earth; they display an intra-dimensional space in which the extremities of good and evil intersect. The destiny of the Kid and the judge covers a huge space and comprises various dichotomies including good and evil. Evil and goodness are the two extremes of these opposites just like the affections of man of war and man of god. The evil inside man fails the priest, and he becomes a seducer and murderer. McCarthy describes the Judge in the end with a shift in tense usage to imply that the war between good and evil is not completed and will not be completed forever. McCarthy depicted massacres, brutal killings, and rapes to show how devastating evil is. The priest is one of the best examples of the notion that the borders between good and evil are porous. The kid, as a heroic good, manages to stay away from the Judge, yet the winner, in the end, is again evil. Civilization does not signal a break from primal violence but can be seen as a continuation of it, as part of a continuum of violence where our ability to speak has enabled violence to proliferate in new, unpredictable ways.

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