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# Ungessed Kinships: The Undercurrents of Poetic Language in Heart of Darkness and Blood Meridian

Emily D. Spunaugle

*Olivet Nazarene University*, [espunagu@olivet.edu](mailto:espunagu@olivet.edu)

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"UNGUESSED KINSHIPS": THE UNDERCURRENTS OF POETIC LANGUAGE IN  
*HEART OF DARKNESS* AND *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

By

Emily D. Spunaugle

Honors Capstone Project

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the similarities in plot, themes, and characterization between Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. The two texts differ, however, in terms of genre and language style: whereas *Heart of Darkness* avoids giving explicit details of its depraved character Mr. Kurtz in the Congo, *Blood Meridian* is frank in its enumeration of violence in southwestern America. Also, whereas the landscape of *Heart of Darkness* is described in terms similar to Julia Kristeva's female-oriented semiotic language, the landscape of *Blood Meridian* is similar to Kristeva's male-structured, symbolic language. McCarthy's text thus serves as the explication and fulfillment of the reticence and ambiguity of *Heart of Darkness* within the American genre. Using Kristeva's poetic languages and Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque, this paper also shows how these differences of language style are subverted, yielding a reading of *Blood Meridian* that is much less phallogentric than a superficial reading would suggest.

Keywords: "Heart of Darkness," "Blood Meridian," "poetic language," "Julia Kristeva," "symbolic," "semiotic," "postmodern American literature," "carnavalesque"

"UNGUESSED KINSHIPS": THE UNDERCURRENTS OF  
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For its arid yet poignant prose, Cormac McCarthy's style has been rightfully venerated with the likes of Faulkner and, for its authoritative rhetoric, likened to Scripture. Numerous critics are anxious to draw connections between McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) and fellow American author Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*: the likeness between the plotlines and the crews of scalphunters and whalers are, according to one critic, "fairly obvious" (Phillips 440). Some studies have also equated Manifest Destiny-era *Blood Meridian* with Joseph Conrad's imperialist novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) on a superficial level. Although the parallel has been drawn between McCarthy's and Conrad's texts, no critic has expanded this connection much beyond mere allusion. Sara Spurgeon, for example, in her article "The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness," compares the judge to Kurtz, holding that the judge acts as "an almost Conradian expression of white American civilization" (84); Dana Phillips's "History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*" counts the judge as the culmination of the most diabolical characters in world literature—"especially *Heart of Darkness*" (435); Susan Kollin reads the judge as a "pastiche of imperial figures such as Joseph Conrad's Kurtz" (568); Adam Parkes briefly compares McCarthy's and Conrad's works, writing that among other literary antiheroes, the judge "also reminds us of Conrad's Kurtz by adopting the attitude of an 'icon' and by inspiring Captain Glanton's gang to raise severed heads on poles" (108). The similarities, then, must be compelling.

The critics coming the closest to suggesting direct parallelism, however, include Vereen Bell and Brady Harrison. Bell's evaluation is concerned with the "psychopathology of conquest," reading Judge Holden as a more sophisticated villain

than Conrad could conjure—as “both Marlow and Kurtz” and “a more terrifying figure than either Ahab or Kurtz because his madness is wholly under control and because he rather than justice—divine or social—prevails” (119). Brady Harrison’s article “That Immense and Bloodslaked Waste” avers that if *Heart of Darkness* circumscribes the “hollowness within the Western imperial self,” then *Blood Meridian* stands as “a late modernist critique of the notion” (35). In Harrison’s words, McCarthy’s intent is to demonstrate that “Americans have not learned from history, have held onto, without critical reflection, the vicious tradition of negation” (40), and McCarthy’s excessive violence serves as a “cautionary tale” (41) against the propagation of bloodshed. But Dana Phillips issues his own caution: *Blood Meridian* does not give a lesson in morality or “try to adumbrate a more sophisticated, more political version of that insight, something on the order of ‘scalp hunting is imperialism by other means’” (449). Indeed, while both texts suggest an undeniable dialectic between the East and West when considering the manners of foreigners on foreign soil, one must avoid reducing McCarthy’s entire purpose to a critique of U.S. expansionism. Postcolonial studies stands as an undeniable commonality between the two texts, but to relegate either text to allegory or didactic recasting of history is to severely undercut the rich literary potential of each work.

Without ascribing authorial intent to the similitude of the two texts, a genealogical connection can be drawn, acknowledging *Heart of Darkness* as informing and sculpting the text of *Blood Meridian*, as the nature of these similarities attest to something greater than coincidence. McCarthy’s novel exhibits major similarities to Conrad’s in plot, theme, and characterization, but varies within language style and genre—differences that offer significant commentary on the achievement of McCarthy’s

novel. An in-depth juxtaposition that explores the myriad similarities between the two has yet to be published: McCarthy's text, as will be shown, can be read as the explication and fulfillment of the reticence and ambiguity of *Heart of Darkness*. What one leaves to the imagination, the other fulfills in graphic lewdness, violence, and in the unmasking of the linguistic and philosophic "nothingness," characteristic of the postmodern era.



## THEMATIC SIMILARITIES

*Plot and Characterization*

As a cursory comparison, *Blood Meridian* mirrors *Heart of Darkness* in terms of its mock-epic plot of setting out on a specific quest—for both novels, a government-contracted mission goes awry, whether it be a defected station manager or a band of scalphunters gone renegade, heralded as heroes, but “doffing their hats to folk whom they would murder before the month was out” (McCarthy 176); both contain an unspeakable yet harrowing truth that is withheld from the reader’s knowledge—one hidden within the oft-quoted “The horror! The horror” (Conrad 69), the other in the kid’s mysterious fate at the hands of the judge within the Griffin jakes; and, perhaps most significantly, both works feature an inscrutable and perverse anti-hero wielding a mystic sort of power, one mirroring the other to startling lengths in various elements of their characterizations. Kurtz, for example, is “impressively bald...like a ball—an ivory ball” (Conrad 48) and, when lying down, is judged to look “at least seven feet long” (59). McCarthy’s judge is similarly hairless, being “blinding white” (79) and “bald as a stone” with “no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them,” and, like Kurtz, is “close on to seven feet in height” (6). Aside from physical characteristics, each character is a Renaissance man, existing, according to Spurgeon, as the “ultimate expression of EuroAmerican manhood” (84) amid his respective band of undereducated miscreants. Kurtz is an artist, “a prodigy,” “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else” (Conrad 25). The judge is polymathic as well, but to near mythic proportions. The judge is a “draftsman as he is other things, well sufficient to the task” (McCarthy 140); he is multilingual, can “write with both hands at a time” (134), and is well-versed in chemistry and law and literature and the classics.

Both men also possess a compelling power of speech to match their talents. The rhetoric of each man acts as testimony to his philosophical power. Of Kurtz, Conrad writes that “[t]he man presented himself as a voice” (47) and that his most exceptional quality is “his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression” (47). Long before meeting Kurtz, Marlow’s perception of the man is built from testimonies of the ivory hunter’s grandiloquent rhetoric. In fact, Marlow, under arrow-fire while approaching the Inner Station to apprehend Kurtz, doubts the efficacy of the mission, lamenting, “Now I will never hear him” (Conrad 47). The significance is not, Marlow realizes, that he will never see Kurtz or “never shake him by the hand” (Conrad 47), but rather that he will never experience the power of Kurtz’s words. On his deathbed, Kurtz’s voice outlasts his physical body and “rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart” (Conrad 68). Kurtz’s eloquence “carried with it a sense of real presence” (Conrad 47), as if his utterances are disembodied from his failing somatic self and are derived not from the “barren darkness of his heart” (Conrad 68), but instead from the fertile darkness that feeds the collective human experience. The seemingly autonomous quality to Kurtz’s language both affirms and defies context, asserting the historicity of the colonial atrocities in what is presumably the Congo while simultaneously eschewing that very history to ascend to the order of the timeless and the immutable.

In McCarthy’s text, the judge, too, is famed for his speaking abilities. The judge is a wordsmith and a “formidable riddler” (McCarthy 141). By moniker alone, the judge is characterized as the director and deliverer of illocutionary speech acts throughout *Blood Meridian*. It is through language that Holden gives greetings, makes peace, issues orders for making gun powder, and declares the kid guilty of “reserv[ing]... some corner

of clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy 299). Tobin recalls the judge having delivered one particularly memorable address before a close encounter with the Apaches: "It was like a sermon but it was no such sermon as any man of us had ever heard before" (McCarthy 129). McCarthy writes that when luring Tobin and the kid from their ox-hide shelter, the judge "called out points of jurisprudence, he cited cases. He expounded upon those laws pertaining to property rights in beasts mansuete and he quoted from cases of attainder insofar as he reckoned them germane.... Then he spoke of other things" (McCarthy 293). Trying to evade the judge, Tobin warns the kid, "Stop your ears" (McCarthy 293), as the puissance of the judge's voice is not a matter of simply resisting temptation, but of obstructing the judge's power of language.

The language of Kurtz and the judge seems to effect something far more insidious than representation alone. Instead, the language attributed to Kurtz and the judge, as well as that language which surrounds and proceeds from these characters, holds some diabolically creative power of coining new metaphors to replace the old modes of existence. Their bald and luminous bodies with heights of near-fabled proportions, containing implicitly or explicitly lurid capabilities, both act as something iconically human, but very much like the Devil himself as well. Vereen Bell writes that "reading back to *Heart of Darkness* from *Blood Meridian* reminds us that Marlow's confession is tinged with regret as well as self-reassuring relief, since obviously Kurtz would not be worth telling stories about if he were not, so to speak, one of us" (119). It is the fact that Kurtz and the judge contain these folklorish qualities—their startlingly massive and starched appearances coupled with their status as mythic manifestations of the culmination of human achievement—that enables the two characters to embody both the diabolical and the human simultaneously. And it is from this dual identity that

their creative power stems, for by containing all that humanity has been and controlling the installment of the new metaphor, that is, the new philosophy, the full comprehension of the vacuousness and literalness of the previous models, Kurtz and the judge bring about revolution in thinking. The Russian, among others, testifies that Kurtz "enlarged my mind" (Conrad 54) and "made me see things—things" (55), as if Kurtz's impact introduces a paradigm shift to each mind he encounters. To the Glanton Gang, the judge proclaims, "Your heart's desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery" (McCarthy 252)—revealing the vacuity behind progress as humanity's motivation and dismantling, in an instant, the very crux of modernity. Perhaps the true horror of *Heart of Darkness* lies in this, the Congo's challenge to Western ideals, which comes to fruition in the laying-bare of these Western ideals in *Blood Meridian*.

Furthermore, both characters act as the editors of history, regulating the national memory through the erasure of past civilizations. Marlow discovers "seventeen pages of close writing" (Conrad 49) that Kurtz has written, ending with the scrawled postscript "Exterminate all the brutes!" (50). The judge, too, manages memory through carefully copying in his notebook the artifacts of ancient cave-dwellers before destroying them in order to "expunge them from the memory of man" (McCarthy 140), insisting later that "[w]hatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent" (198). Kurtz and the judge are thus similar in physical characteristics as well as in their desire to control the dissemination of history. As for the characteristic actions of each man, however—in effect, the true nature of Kurtz and the judge—Conrad and McCarthy observe distinct stylistic differences in the treatment of each respective antihero and the novels from which they come.

### *Stylistic Differences*

Conrad buries any true explication of Kurtz's character within carefully constructed circumlocutions, effecting an ambiguous and hauntingly impressionistic work. The language surrounding Kurtz enacts a centripetal force that draws all equivocal terms towards the nature of his character. For example, Conrad writes that Kurtz "lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (57), as evidenced by the collection of skewered heads along the riverbanks; Kurtz awakens the "memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (65) within the African rainforest; Kurtz is said to have presided at "certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (50); and Kurtz is ultimately characterized by "exalted and incredible degradation" (66), making him resistant to any appeal to conscience. Marlow testifies to there being "something wanting in [Kurtz]," hinting at a dearth of goodness effectively buried underneath his "magnificent eloquence" (Conrad 57). But for all of the ambiguities surrounding Kurtz's actions in the jungle, his Intended remains convinced to the end that "his goodness shone in every act" (Conrad 76). The painstaking prevarication on Conrad's part, coupled with the ignorance of the Intended, creates an epistemological void upon which a gendered silence seems to settle. With the exception of the few words at the end from the otherwise unnamed Intended, the novella allows only male characters to speak. It is these males acquainted with Kurtz's actions in the Congo that control the dissemination and discussion of the unspoken ascribed to Kurtz, withholding information from those communities considered "unprivileged."

This absence of information is curious, and Andrew Michael Roberts writes that the novella "generate[s] a rhetorical and narrative intensity around the idea of something to be known, without ever specifying what that something is" (457)—an

avoidance, Roberts holds, very similar to that which is adopted when discussing same-sex desire. In rapid-fire succession, Roberts lists a handful of snippets from various characters about Kurtz that indeed, when juxtaposed, could suggest homoerotic desire between Marlow and Kurtz or between Kurtz and the natives. Asking the literalist question of what exactly has Kurtz done that could be so taboo, Roberts responds, "He has murdered and brutally exploited African people, but this he has in common with the others involved in the imperialist project" (459). Indeed, Roberts holds, the nature of Kurtz must be exceedingly worse than what is freely articulated, and, because the reader is assured that murder and exploitation exist in *Heart of Darkness*, the unspeakable-truth-that-cannot-be-named must be, culturally speaking, so repugnant as to dissuade even Marlow from disclosing it. While Kurtz's unspeakable actions may not be classified as exclusively homoerotic, considering the reserve of Marlow's and Conrad's milieu, these unspeakables may be read as sexual in nature.

This delicacy of Conrad's language contrasts sharply with the illustrative language of *Blood Meridian*, however, in which McCarthy spares no gory detail. McCarthy's murders are graphic and distinct—a decapitation within Glanton's band of horrors results in "[t]wo thick ropes of dark blood" spurting from the victim, the head rolling to rest at another's feet "with eyes aghast" (107). McCarthy's landscape is populated with bushes hung with dead babies that have been punctured through their chins "bald and pale and bloated," rendered "larval to some reckonable being" (57). McCarthy's churches are littered with the murdered who "lay in a great pool of their communal blood," which has "set up into a sort of pudding crossed everywhere with the tracks of wolves or dogs" (60). McCarthy's Indians pass "their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike," some "holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals,"

while others "fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows" (54). In such instances, McCarthy leaves nothing to the imagination.

In one particularly bloody raid through an Apache encampment, McCarthy writes that one of the Delaware scouts of the Glanton Gang had a "naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden stones and swung them by the heels each in turn and bashed their heads against the stones so that the brains burst forth through the fontanel in a bloody spew" (156). In the same slaughter, some men along the blood-tainted lakeshore "lay coupled to the bludgeoned bodies of young women dead or dying on the beach" (McCarthy 157). Later, Sproule and the kid happen upon fellow members including scouts and a couple deserters who have been strung up by their feet in a tree: "They hung gray and naked above the dead ashes of the coals where they'd been roasted until their heads had charred and the brains bubbled in the skulls and steam sang from their noseholes" (McCarthy 227). Merciless infanticide, necrophilia, and sodomy populate McCarthy's pages more frequently than do commas in his seamless narrative.

These horrors of the novel especially pervade the character of the judge. Although the judge represents an equally appalling figure as Kurtz, McCarthy provides stronger contextual clues as to the depth of the judge's personal darkness, which, although not as explicit as the descriptions of the novel's violence in general, are just as telling. The judge pinpoints children, the mentally disabled, and minorities as targets for his unrestrained darkness. For example, the judge temporarily adopts a young Apache boy, feeding it and playing with it about the campfire, "dandling it on one knee while the men saddled their horses" (McCarthy 164). Within ten minutes, however, "the child was dead and the judge had scalped it" (McCarthy 164). Stopping off for the night at an

abandoned compound, Glanton's Gang meets an orphaned twelve year-old Mexican boy. During the thunderstorm that night, "[s]omeone reported the judge naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelations of lightning, striding the perimeter up there and declaiming in the old epic mode" (McCarthy 118). In the morning, the boy is found dead, "lying face down naked" (McCarthy 118). At the ferry crossing, the "idiot" entrusted to the Glanton Gang for conveyance westward falls into the river naked in the middle of the night. The judge, who happens to pass "at just this place stark naked himself," rescues the "idiot" from the water, "gather[ing] the naked and sobbing fool into his arms and carr[ying] it up into the camp and restor[ing] it among its fellows" (McCarthy 259). When writing of the two nude men, McCarthy charges his narrative with sexual suggestion, writing that "such encounters," rather than "such *incidents*" or "such *occurrences*," are "commoner than men suppose or who would survive any crossing by night" (259). The bluntness of detail in *Blood Meridian* sets the novel apart from the shy treatment of similar themes in *Heart of Darkness*.

Toward the end of the novel when the judge has commandeered this ferry crossing, Glanton rides through the settlement, and a "young Mexican girl was crouched naked under the shade of the wall...covering her breasts with her hands. She wore a rawhide collar about her neck and she was chained to a post and there was a clay bowl of blackened meatscraps beside her" (McCarthy 272). Glanton sees the judge victoriously presiding "on the rise in silhouette against the evening sun....wrapped in a mantle of freeflowing cloth beneath which he was naked" (McCarthy 272). Added to the enslaved young girl and a naked Judge Holden is the "black man Jackson...dressed in a similar garb" (McCarthy 273), coming out from one of the bunkers, similarly naked underneath his robe as if guilty of complicity with the judge in some lewd act. The



recurring motif of the judge's nudity in each of these scenes more than suggests an appetite for various sorts of aberrant sexual behavior, intensified by the heinousness of his brutal imprisonment or murder of his child victims.

Although the judge's actions are not always expressly described, McCarthy's portrayal assures the reader of the nature of the judge's transgressions, even if leaving only an impression of the particulars. The judge's nature culminates in the fate of the now grown-up kid in the Griffin jakes. When read within the context of the judge's previous actions, McCarthy leaves the reader with little doubt that the incident is necessarily sexual. As the kid enters the outhouse, he finds the judge "seated upon the closet. He was naked and he rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him" (McCarthy 333). The judge is again nude, as in all previous encounters, and is in a setting that has been rigorously socialized as one appropriate for uncovering the body's shame—a place of safety and release, shrouded in privacy. For two men to be occupying this place of personal privacy simultaneously implies an inescapably sexual nature to the fate of the kid, as the judge has had many opportunities for killing the kid in much more open settings than the outhouse. The ongoings in the outhouse must also be socially objectionable even amid the butchery of the Wild West for one man to admonish a few full-bladder fellows, "I wouldnt go in" (McCarthy 334) and for one of those men, upon entering, to mutter, "Good God almighty" (334). The omniscience of McCarthy's text observes the writers' dictum of "showing," rather than Marlow's seemingly unreliable and ambiguous re-"telling."

## POETIC LANGUAGE

While allowing *Blood Meridian* to build upon its thematic similarities with *Heart of Darkness*, the difference in language styles also makes the two novels distinct. Existing in each novel is a relationship determined through the ecological interplay of organism and its environment. Conrad's novella, set within a "great wall of vegetation" with its "exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs" (30) indeed seems voluptuous and filled with greater mystique than McCarthy's stark stage for slaughter. In fact, rather than the land of opportunity, McCarthy fashions a barren landscape as a foil to his characters, inured to nihilism and bereft of modernity's trust in an assumed yet unfounded hope. Although both works feature violence and atrocity, McCarthy's cleared landscape lends itself more readily to comparison with those surfaces designated for death—the burned wheat field, the pyre, the sacrificial altar, the chop-block. Indeed, added to the difference in the setting and genre of production, it is in the difference of language styles describing the surfaces of the two landscapes that the novels differ. Of *Blood Meridian*, Phillips writes that the "narration is omniscient, but there seems to be no knower providing us with the knowledge it imparts. And this knowledge does not really develop; it merely accrues. The most often repeated sentence in *Blood Meridian* is 'They rode on.' So the plot moves, but it does not thicken" (Phillips 443). Where *Heart of Darkness* uses the richness of impressionistic, modernist style and its oft-quoted "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 69) within a carefully constructed frame narrative, *Blood Meridian* is characterized by its arid style—its Scripture-like rhetoric, its objectivism, its lack of punctuation, its dearth of narrative emotion.

The difference in language between the two works can thus be evaluated in terms of the variance in diction and, subsequently, the style of the two texts. Theorist

Julia Kristeva takes a special interest in the development of language, viewing language in its viable state as a highly socialized practice, as it is regulated through implicit societal agreements of coinage and use. Language style and production are contingent upon the setting and the subsequent discourse community of a given setting, and language must follow carefully constructed rules of appropriateness according to a given situation. It is this network of scaffolding, this elevated system of constructs, that Julia Kristeva deconstructs. Kristeva seeks to identify the inner motivation for language—that transitory stage during which language is birthed before entering the realm of structured, communicative utterances. Hypothetically, language in this unprocessed form would be natural and raw, emerging direct and unadulterated from its source. Kristeva describes this emergence of raw language, or the *semiotic*, as originating from a womblike metaphorical structure she labels the *chora*, which denotes “distinctive mark” or “precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign” (25). The *chora* is a “nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated” (Kristeva 25). The *chora* is neither sign nor signifier, but is, instead, “generated in order to attain to this signifying position” (Kristeva 26). Bursting forth from this creative space is the raw, organic, inarticulateness of the semiotic, which precedes understandable language, being “irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation” (Kristeva 29). The semiotic is “enigmatic,” “rhythmic,” and “unfettered,” possessing a greater likeness to music than to anything articulate or comprehensible (Kristeva 29).

In the introduction to Kristeva’s book *Desire in Language*, Leon S. Roudiez explains that this poetic language of the semiotic is “distinct from language as used for ordinary communication—not because it may involve a so-called departure from a norm;

it is almost an otherness of language" (5). Roudiez describes poetic language as one of "materiality as opposed to transparency" (5), in which the word is valued for its function within the process of signification. Rather, poetic language is concerned less with the abstract value represented by a word and more with the typographical, tangible, and audible qualities of words themselves, or the "sounds and rhythms of words in transrational fashion" (Roudiez 5).

The symbolic, by contrast, is language made invisible for its purely significative purpose, being a "social effect of the relation to the other established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (Kristeva 87). The *chora* gives birth to the semiotic, which is then, in turn, processed into this highly structured language via signification. The symbolic, which Kristeva gives the practical term "phenotext" to show its identity of language as physical product, is characterized by being "constantly split up and divided, and is irreducible to the semiotic process that works through the genotext" (87). The phenotext "obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee" (Kristeva 87). The symbolic, then, is defined by its organization and communicative purpose.

Just as the body acts as metaphorical producer of language for Kristeva, so does the earth generate the language that creates the differences between *Heart of Darkness* and *Blood Meridian* that permeate each of the works. Although reading the orientation of language back into each work cannot suggest anything definitive in terms of authorial intent, it does provide another means of comparing the two works on a level deeper than the externalities of characterization. Focusing on the nature associated with the

words of the text itself yields a fresh interpretation of the overall effect of a given text—often differing greatly from the immediate impressions of a work.

In Kristeva's terms of language, the jungle of Conrad's novella is dense in the undergrowth of semiotic language, harkening back to its rich and unfathomable origins. Conrad describes his Congo in feminine terms such as those describing Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, holding the capability or potential of bearing fruit as a "virgin forest" (Conrad 29) or "primeval forest" (26) with ivory stations "clinging to the skirts of the unknown" (35). The foliage, Marlow claims, mystically absorbs one of its native inhabitants "without a sound...into its bosom again" (Conrad 23), as if reclaiming its own, snatching back its child from whence it came. Conrad's earth mirrors the *chora* as Mother Earth, both birthing and nourishing the language that emerges.

The descriptions of the jungle speak of its deep and lengthy history, for the geography of Conrad's Congo is ancient, being soft, fluid, and impressionable, emitting the "smell of mud, of primeval mud by Jove" from the "high stillness of primeval forest" (26). From this fertile and primitive ground stems Conrad's landscape, which is populated by a mosaic of energetic viridescence: "The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek to sweep every little man out of his little existence" (30). The preexistent forest thus makes the presence of man seem ridiculous and superfluous, as if the constructs of mankind and of society, its extension, are rendered ineffective, ready to be swept out of its "little existence" against the "rioting invasion of soundless life" within the forest (Conrad 30). Marlow recalls that "[g]oing up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world,

when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine" (Conrad 33). Conrad's language thus adds a certain imaginative quality to the landscape it describes, harkening back to the world's nascence and an age in which the trees reigned supreme over the verdure, predating and uninterrupted by mankind. Elsewhere, Conrad writes that his characters are "wanderers on a prehistoric earth" and that they are part of "an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet" (35).

From the depths of this ancient forest rises the clamor of preverbal voices "like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, simply mean without any kind of sense" (Conrad 48). The forest thus births seemingly semiotic utterances—a sort of musical un-language, free from the burden of comprehension, being "analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (Kristeva 26). The natives, too, are characterized by their other-worldliness and are set in opposition to the colonizing power, the controllers of understanding, as they "shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language" (Conrad 67). Thus, Conrad's descriptions of the Congo exude the mysterious, the inarticulate, the feminine, having preceded masculine signification, contrasting greatly with the colonial power with which it collides.

Marlow does not elaborate on the novelty or newness of his experiences, but categorizes them with the extra-sensory, like "an unrestful and noisy dream remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants and water and silence" (Conrad 34). Elsewhere, Marlow relates similar emotions paired with frustration at being unable to express his experiences articulately: "It seems

to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams” (Conrad 27). Marlow’s “vain attempt,” or his inability to adequately describe his experiences, echoes the inarticulate amorphousness shrouding the semiotic. This speechlessness and inability to categorize the Congo according to empirical sensation, coupled with Marlow’s sneaking suspicion that it is a “dream remembered” (Conrad 34), and not something capable of being experienced newly, speaks for the mysterious aura surrounding the Congo.

If Conrad’s novella exudes a wild freeness of life, then McCarthy’s landscape, by contrast, is characterized by Kristeva’s highly structured symbolic language and the deathly ambiance of what Kollin calls the “hypermasculine Western landscape” (563). Existing within a genre that venerates the masculine, the tough, the victorious, *Blood Meridian*, while avoiding that explicitly didactic strain of postcolonial writings, still claims part of the imperial struggle by virtue of being a “Western.” The novel is entirely devoid of developed characters and is especially deprived of females, thriving instead on purely masculine brutality. In the “neuter austerity” (McCarthy 247) of McCarthy’s Southwest, the land mimics this privileging of language with the sun presiding over this land, described as the “head of a great red phallus” (McCarthy 44). Upon rising, the sun “cleared the unseen rim and sat squat and pulsing and malevolent behind them” (McCarthy 44-45), creating a literally phallogocentric sky to reign over the hostile ground below—an image emphasized most apparently in the very title of *Blood Meridian*.

McCarthy’s ground is “pale gastine sparsely grown with saltbush and panicgrass” (111), “gastine” speaking for an entire region of uncultivated desert land. Rather than

forests of luscious undergrowth, McCarthy's landscape features spiny "forests of saguaro" (242) and terrain so "thick with cholla" that "clumps of it clung to the horses with spikes that would drive through a bootsole to the bones within and a wind came up through the hills and it sang with a wild viper sound through that countless reach of spines" (242). The air is so arid that "iron will not rust nor tin tarnish," and the "ribbed frames of dead cattle under their patches of dried hide lay like the ruins of primitive boats upturned upon that shoreless void" (McCarthy 246). The ground is populated not with flourishing life, but with "lurid and austere the black and desiccated shapes of horses and mules that travelers had stood afoot" (McCarthy 246). Conrad's organic fluidity is thus replaced with the austere death and the antagonistic angles of cactus needles.

Of the geography itself, McCarthy writes that Glanton's Gang rides "upon a hollow ground that rang so loudly under the horses' hooves that they stepped and sidled and rolled their eyes like circus animals and that night as they lay in that ground each heard, all heard, the dull boom of rock falling somewhere far below them in the awful darkness inside the world" (111). The "hollow ground" (McCarthy 111) of the earth's crust is cushioned by its separation from the "dull boom of rock falling" (111) deep within the earth, speaking for the weaning and rejection of its tectonic origins. The ground is "alien" (McCarthy 247), strange, and divorced from its beginnings.

This hollowness of ground has been the focus for a number of critics. Phillips writes that this "desert floor is literally a 'hollow ground' across which Glanton and his band ride...in the literal darkness of a deeply buried cave or fault in the earth. In *Blood Meridian* darkness is not a 'theme,' a dire metaphysical possibility mad characters can urge upon saner men, but a reiterated fact" (Phillips 438). Alex Engebretson's "Neither



in Nor out: The Liminal Spaces of *Blood Meridian*" studies the value of those voids and in-between spaces featured as settings in the novel. Engebretson writes that "[a]ttending to [liminal spaces] suggests a different perspective on *Blood Meridian's* spatiality, not a novel of sharply delineated spaces but rather one of blurry, disorienting, middle spaces" (9). Spurgeon, too, notes the recurrence of hollowness, writing that "McCarthy's earth in *Blood Meridian* and many other works is hollow, full of empty caves and echoing caverns, at once womb and tomb, signifying the hollowness at the heart of all myths" (93). However, even though there is "no center to the sacred hunter myth, any more than there is to its antithesis," myths retain their power to influence and alter cultures, and, as such, "McCarthy has done more than simply invert the sacred hunter and the eucharist of the wilderness; he has altered their form in several significant ways" (Spurgeon 93). The hollowness of *Blood Meridian*, whether as indicator of myth or undifferentiated territory, recalls that the brutality of mankind is within the bones of the living and the dead, and upon interment, the bones of the barbarous weather and lithify into an equally savage landscape.

Curiously enough, while the maternal seems to have no place in the language or motifs of *Blood Meridian*, the maternal ties cannot be entirely broken although they are covered, repressed, severed, hacked, and bloodied. Kristeva writes that in a signifying system, the elements cannot stand divorced from one another, but are all subject to the irruption of varying forces. The text stands as the embodiment and embrasure of the cooperation between its various components, being "the dialectic of two heterogeneous operations that are, reciprocally and inseparably, preconditions for each other" (Kristeva 66). Kristeva describes the codependence of the two processes: "These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language...in other words,

so-called 'natural' language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic" (24). No signifying system "can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (Kristeva 24).

In this light, aspects of a text may exhibit traits more befitting of one textual operation than its counterpart, but both kinds of language must be present for semantic value to exist. While the language and motifs of *Heart of Darkness* emphasize the rhythmic and the musical nature of the exuberant Congo, and while *Blood Meridian's* style and genre speak for its masculine-domination, each is linguistically and thematically violated by the "opposing" language's presence. While the semiotic is the supposed "precondition of the symbolic," it continues to function "within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic" (Kristeva 68). It is at this intersection that the true interplay of texts occurs: *Heart of Darkness* and *Blood Meridian* are configured as antithetical works within the canon, positioned opposite one another in terms of philosophic paradigms and orientation of predominant gendered language and yet threaded together through reciprocity—the invasive emergence of the feral amid the domesticized, of fastidious structure upon the whimsical.

Although the relationship between these two languages has been described as a sort of cooperation, Kristeva chooses the phrase "transgression of the symbolic" (68) to describe this interplay of the semiotic within the symbolic, which suggests something more antagonistic than symbiotic. The connotation of "transgression" is aggressive, implying a negative sort of breach or violation of the symbolic's essence. Indeed, considering the controlled, structured, and organized nature of the symbolic, any

manifestation of the semiotic, however brief, would necessitate a transgression of the established codification of language.

## SUBVERSION IN LANGUAGE

While maintaining the guise of masculine domination, there occur undercurrents that create an alternate reading of subversion beneath the surface of McCarthy's landscape of violence and order. These undercurrents exist as elements of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque, the aberrant sexuality of the Indians (and the judge, for that matter), and the irony infused in the novel, all of which surge through McCarthy's sparse ground as an electric current of sorts—perhaps flowing through the cavity of his reiterated "hollow ground" (McCarthy 111)—flaring up in subtle opposition against the reigning ideology. These undercurrents create a self-consciousness about the text, upending the novel's supposed thesis of masculinity.

Bakhtin's "carnavalesque" refers to those aspects of "unofficial culture that resist official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through laughter, parody, and 'grotesque realism'" as found in the historical celebration of Carnival (Leitch 1187). In his work *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explores this infringement of order by examining Renaissance-era social norms and crystallizing them into a series of recurring tropes and tendencies within subsequent literary works. Bakhtin writes that the carnivalesque functions as a social institution in which the temporary suspension of societal constructs (including class distinctions) is understood to be acceptable by all participants. Being similar in nature to Mardi Gras, Carnival, encompassing feasting, dancing, and gambling, "drew the players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated them from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities" (Bakhtin 234-35). These "conventionalities" thus characterize the carnivalesque by a fluid set of traits, rather than by any stringent definition.

The carnivalesque penetrates deeper than social interactions alone, but also includes the individual body in its upheaval of norms. Bakhtin, predating Kristeva, also expounds upon the body as text, holding that the carnivalesque juxtaposes public culture with the private sphere, thus making "reveling, dancing, [and] music...all closely combined with slaughter, dismemberment, bowels, excrement, and other images of the bodily lower stratum" (Bakhtin 223-24). In fact, Bakhtin sees the carnivalesque body as amorphous and as inviting interpretation, as the "dividing lines between man and beast, between the consuming and consumed bowels are intentionally erased," and, invoking a none-too-coincidental similarity with Kristeva's theory, "fused with the generating womb" (Bakhtin 226). Death is thus inextricably meshed with rebirth, disposal and decomposition with renewal.

While *Blood Meridian* appears stark and boasting of an uncompromising phallogocentrism, it is punctuated with occurrences of the carnivalesque through slips of language and upheavals of social norms, creating subversive nuances. The Glanton Gang is often described in terms of the carnival in the literal sense—the horses at one point "rolled their eyes like circus animals" (McCarthy 111). In Bakhtin's sense of the term, the Glanton Gang witnesses a funeral procession which evinces the carnivalesque by its grouping of mourning, playful music, and attempted (and successful) homicide:

The fiddler and the cornetist were making little bows to each other and their steps suggested the martial style of the air they played. It's a funeral, said the judge. As he spoke the drunk with the knife now reeling in the doorway sank the blade deep into the back of the man named Grimley. None saw it but the judge. Grimley put a hand on the rough wood frame of the door. I'm killed, he said. The

judge drew his belt pistol and leveled it above the heads of the men and shot the drunk through the middle of the forehead. (McCarthy 178)

The dual postures of the mourners and onlookers—grief as connoted by the funereal procession itself, the musicians delivering bows as if dancing between the strides of their militaristic march, the drunken bystanders, the murderous swipes—combine to create irony upon the frontier.

Another example of the carnivalesque in *Blood Meridian* is the multiplicity of identities among characters. Parkes views McCarthy's amalgam of names for Glanton's men as "carnavalesque theatricality," as the Gang is referred to as "adventurous, scalphunters, pilgrims, and refugees," among other things (112-13). This theatricality does indeed function as an aspect of the carnivalesque, as the masking and exchanging of identity enacts a certain suspension of class, status, and personality. Quoting from Rabelais himself, Bakhtin writes, "Men will change their dress so as to cheat others, and they will run about in the streets like fools and madmen; nobody has yet seen such a disorder in nature" (234-35). And, truly, McCarthy does perpetuate the "picaresque tradition" (Parkes 113) by focusing on the externalities of the characters, and Parkes's enumeration of the Gang's nomenclature fits the theatrical nature of the carnival. But even more reminiscent of the carnivalesque is the description of Indians that the kid meets under Captain White, who are ridiculously attired in the clothing of their victims. The Indians are "clad in costumes attic or biblical," including the "coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of cranefeathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards" (McCarthy 52). Their horses appear as

literal clowns with their tails "worked with bits of brightly colored cloth and one whose horse's whole head was painted crimson red and all the horsemen's faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns" (McCarthy 53).

The Indians thus evince a greater theatricality through their motley costumes, parading as various entities ranging from soldiers to transvestite brides. With their costumes and makeup, the Indians are a circus, comprising a darkly comical scene that makes "death hilarious" (McCarthy 53). As a second layer of the carnival, each costume has been acquired by means of murdering, pillaging, scalping, or some other transgression of law and social norms. Even Bakhtin's erasure of the line between human and animal is carried out, as some Indians have "their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts" (McCarthy 52). The appearance of the Indians, then, stands as more proof of the rupture of the Western mode.

Elsewhere the Glanton Gang adopts a band of "bufones" (McCarthy 89), or "clowns"—essentially a caravan of gypsies—to travel with them. The gypsies are a curious addition to the group of mercenaries, using tarot cards to foretell the future and, to the chagrin and outrage of some of the Gang, their disastrous fate. As the eclectic convoy moves through town, McCarthy describes the citizens' reactions in equally bizarre terms: "The people watched them go. Some of the men stood hand in hand like lovers and a small child led forth a blind man on a string to a place of vantage" (90). For a man without sight to be led to "a place of vantage" (McCarthy 90) is ironic, and to describe two men as being "like lovers" is to offend the crux of modern masculinity, for any aberration of heterosexuality must be an unacceptable violation to the reigning Western ideology.

Perhaps this, the disruption of sexual norms, acts as the strongest insurgency within *Blood Meridian's* male-structured text. The sodomy written into the Indians' bloodiest raid, is, according to Shaw, an "inconspicuous allusion to the Comanches' uninhibited sexuality" that "introduces male-to-male sexual assault to the androcentric, super-masculine frontier culture of *Blood Meridian*" (148). Shaw mentions another scene which targets the "super-heterosexual white warriors" (154) in which victims are found wearing "strange menstrual wounds between their legs"—without "man's parts for these have been cut away and hung dark and strange from out their grinning mouths" (McCarthy 153). Shaw writes that this scene "sharply focuses the cultural mortification of male-to-male sexuality" (154); aside from being obscene, this scene epitomizes the fear of the novel's culture, which is the horror of feminization.

While carrying out the postmodern unmasking and laying bare of modernity, McCarthy's novel enacts a double exposure—that is, the laying bare of both a culture's phallogocentrism and the novel's own postmodern style. In an interesting denial of both, the novel becomes instead a traitorous pastiche of information and power as realized through the gentle subversions throughout the novel and in the hellish party of the final chapter: "Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he'll never die" (McCarthy 335). The judge is again described in terms of his childlikeness, being somehow devoid of moral maturity, speaking for the prolonged immaturity congruent with American fiction and, simultaneously, the actualization of the metaphor he has been embodying and speaking into existence throughout the novel—that is, those



Nietzschean ideals that venerate the will to power as the only response to the nothingness within the heart of modernity.

### BLOOD MERIDIAN AS ADAPTATION OF A GENRE

For McCarthy to expose and explicate these ambiguities established by *Heart of Darkness* on the American frontier of modernity within the American genre is to introduce an added facet of significance, augmenting the novel's commentary on the human condition. McCarthy carves out space in history, embellishing facts with great attention to historical detail as John Sepich's exhaustive *Notes on Blood Meridian* shows. McCarthy's choice in genre shifts from his earlier works like *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) and *Outer Dark* (1968) that are steeped in Appalachian vernacular to an ostentatiously western style, capitalizing on the themes afforded by the 1850s era Manifest Destiny period of American history. While his shift from Appalachia to the West is a conscious one, McCarthy is trapped by the authorial constraints of his own nationality and has no choice but to carry on the tradition handed to him—storytelling with a distinctively American flavor.

Leslie Fiedler speaks of this entrapment in his book *Love and Death in the American Novel*: "There is a sense in which our prose fiction is immediately distinguishable from that of Europe, though this is a fact that is difficult for Americans to confess. In this sense, our novels seem not primitive, perhaps, but innocent, unfallen in a disturbing way, almost juvenile" (24). Fiedler goes on to write that the classics of American fiction are typically catalogued with the children's books in libraries, their "sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent" (24). It is this immaturity in style and reception that Fiedler sees as characteristic of American fiction: "This is what we mean when we talk about the incapacity of the American novelist to develop; in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with his childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody"

(24). R. W. B. Lewis, too, notes this theme of innocence within American literature, pushing it further to yield the emergence of what he dubs the American Adam—the maverick, the pioneer, the wanderer, the adventurer—those figures and their conquests that comprise the so-called “American experience” of the lone figure discovering and conquering. American writers such as Melville, Twain, and Faulkner, Lewis holds, have frequented these motifs to create a uniquely American strain of writing within the literary canon.

By dictate of tradition, then, McCarthy writes within these confines while adding his own modifications to the legacy he has been handed. Within the first pages of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy describes the kid as the lone figure who has spurned all family, leaving on him only the slightest palimpsest of any impression of his parents; family can never be completely erased, however, for every man, in the words of the judge, “carries before him the idol of a perfection to which he can never attain”—the image of his father (McCarthy 145). McCarthy refers to the kid by nonspecific sobriquet, further emphasizing his split from family. The kid would seem to have no first name given to him by his mother and no surname by which to carry remembrance of his father. The kid has “eyes oddly innocent,” “big wrists, big hands,” and a face “curiously untouched behind the scars” (McCarthy 4), which, combined with his epithet, emphasizes both his youthfulness and the potential and capability symbolized by his large hands. These known characteristics of the otherwise indeterminate kid echo Lewis’s characterization of the American Adam: each is “liberated from family and social history” and advances into “a complex world he knows not of” with the certainty of defeat, whether by being “hanged, beaten, shot, betrayed, abandoned” (Lewis 127-28). The Adam progresses with some sort of hope for posterity, “leaving his mark upon the world, and a sign in

which conquest may later become possible for the survivors" (Lewis 127-28). The kid, having a history inconsequential, a future providentially unwritten, exists with the burdening expectation of bringing about a change in circumstance, a reversal of fortunes, a hope for a barren landscape.

On top of existing within the American tradition, the kid is ironically also similar to a Conradian hero, which, according to Morton Zabel, necessitates that the character experience "moral isolation," be "young and irresponsible," be "estranged...from the ties of a normal life," and have a "fatal vein of skepticism in his nature [which] had induced a nihilism of all values" (27). McCarthy's kid, then, seems to be the American Adam in a sort of degenerative communion with his setting, combined with a Conradian twist, which accounts for the certain amount of doubt surrounding the nature of his character: the kid is a hybrid, the product of a rich and convoluted literary history.

Although in "moral isolation" (Zabel 27), the kid is not entirely alone or without company as he joins Glanton's band of rogues, which is powered intellectually and philosophically by the judge. While antagonistically oriented, the kid and the judge function in tandem throughout the novel. From the outset, the judge is bound in enmity with the kid, saying, "Our animosities were formed and waiting before ever we two met" (McCarthy 307). Within the American tradition, Lewis writes that there is also a tendency toward resisting "the painful process of growing up," as evidenced by "repeated efforts to revert to a lost childhood and a vanished Eden, and issuing repeatedly in a series of outcries at the freshly discovered capacity of the world to injure" (129). The judge fits as this antagonistic undertow within the American tradition; he has the appearance of innocence, as he is referred to as "outsized and childlike" (McCarthy 79) and "serene and strangely childlike" (6), having the "ruddy" cheeks (79) and "oddly childish lips"

(140) of a small boy. The similarity of youthfulness between the judge and the kid effects an animus, causing the judge's innocence to double that of the kid.

Fiedler writes that the violence that happens within these "juvenile" books is also in line with the establishment of the genre as a whole. The violence of Americanist Mark Twain, for example, is always dubbed "humor," rather than indecent or off-putting gore. Fiedler sees this as "a last desperate attempt to convince us of the innocence of violence, the good clean fun of horror" (27)—a final "stab" to cope with the violence of history. Perhaps most related to McCarthy's writing is Fiedler's assertion that "[o]ur literature as a whole at times seems a chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park 'fun house,' where we pay to play at terror and are confronted in the innermost chamber with a series of inter-reflecting mirrors which present us with a thousand versions of our own face" (27). The extreme savagery and violence of *Blood Meridian*—as evinced by the symmetrical barbarity from Apaches and Anglos alike—seem a hyperbolic extension of that darkly comedic quality of American literature that is more akin to horror and without the safety afforded by humor that distances reality's interpretation from reality itself.

As yet another play on the American genre, McCarthy's natural world is in direct opposition to the natural world in which the American hero generally exists. Susan Kollin writes that while the typical western landscape is the "prelapsarian garden and space of retreat for the American hero, McCarthy's text features an anti-Edenic landscape whose ownership is violently contested and overturned by the group of mercenaries" (562). It is this perversion of Lewis's American Adam and the national myth from which the Adam stems that results in what Sara Spurgeon calls a "countermemory," or a "sort of antimyth of the West, illuminating especially the roots of the modern relationship

between humans and the natural world" (76). This trope is an adventurous Arcadia in which the maverick figure seeks to understand his convoluted relationship with the "female landscape in its troubling metaphorical appearance as both fruitful mother and untouched virgin; one image offering nurturing fertility, the other demanding penetration and conquest" (Spurgeon 76). McCarthy's enigmatic epilogue features a perversion of this land-as-nourishing-mother image with the posthole diggers fencing in the West, perforating the land as if 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" (337).

*Blood Meridian* simultaneously adheres to and flouts the American tradition. McCarthy, by creating an adaptation of the American Adam out of the kid, alters the makeup of the hero so that the kid represents the failure rather than the hope of modernity through his inglorious death in the outhouse. *Blood Meridian* thus not only fits and builds upon the characterization and motifs laid out by *Heart of Darkness*, but also alters the legacy of the American tradition by infusing postmodern pastiche into the genre. All members of the Glanton Gang are dead, and upon quickly finishing the kid in the jakes, the narrator writes that the judge takes up his timeless dance: "He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die" (McCarthy 335).

## UNGUESSED KINSHIPS

*Blood Meridian* resembles *Heart of Darkness* in plot, theme, and characterization.

As myth-and-man, the judge is the diabolical reincarnation of Kurtz, for he has put words to what could only be hinted of Kurtz; for, after all, as Tobin tells the kid, "Every man in the company claims to have encountered that sootysouled rascal in some other place" (McCarthy 124), and indeed they all have. The judge has cousins in Captain Ahab and Mr. Kurtz and any number of diabolical characters across canons. "The ugly fact is that books are made out of books," McCarthy himself said in an interview with the *New York Times*, and "[t]he novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written" (qtd. in Woodward). The judge has been alive in the haunting suspicions Marlow feels in the Congo. That same sense of unknowing that Marlow notes about the Thames—"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth'" (Conrad 5)—is one with the darkness to which the southwesterners are accustomed; the horror of Kurtz's final words in Africa is the "horror" that speaks to the "inmost heart" of McCarthy's mankind (McCarthy 331).

While Marlow is plagued by his "remote kinship" with the "wild and passionate uproar" of the jungle (Conrad 36), McCarthy's characters are inured to these "unguessed kinships" between "man and a rock" (McCarthy 247). "But darkness was here yesterday" (6) Conrad writes, and amid the din of the rioting darkness, "if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning it in which you...could comprehend" (Conrad 36)—and, as McCarthy shows, that which can still be comprehended. There is nothing new under the sun, McCarthy seems to suggest. Not even at man's apotheosis, his zenith, his meridian, can he measure up to anything

greater than his history of failures: his failure in Africa to conquer the resilient earth, his failure to subjugate the Apaches with Western mores. As the judge says, man's "spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement" (146-47), exposing the modern man's penchant for Progress as ultimately futile. Surpassing temporal restraint and location, impervious to cultural dictates, the sun is the same at either end of the sky, at either meridian—whether casting or denying light to the East or the West—bleeding from the heart of darkness.



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