

Representational Violence
In
***Blood Meridian's* Heterotopian Frontier**

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Abstract:

This thesis is an exploration of violence in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Using David Holmberg's reading of the frontier space as a "heterotopian zone," this thesis examines how the framing of America's western frontier shapes that space as one which is susceptible to both physical and representational violence. Via this complex framing of the frontier, McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is a text that criticizes America's violent history in the West and simultaneously recreates the racial and ideological components of that violence for a modern audience to embrace.

Introduction:

Cormac McCarthy's historical novel *Blood Meridian* (1985) tells the story of a group of American scalp hunters in the United States-Mexican borderlands in the years immediately following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War. Following a group of headhunters traveling through the American frontier, *Blood Meridian* is filled with instances of horrific, graphic violence that are glorified by McCarthy's lofty prose. While many literary critics interpret this violence as a dramatization of historical events meant to critique the physical cruelty of American expansionism, this thesis will explore how McCarthy depicts the act of representation as violent in and of itself and how engagement in that representational violence plays an essential role in shaping the frontier space.

Although *Blood Meridian* was published in just 1985, its historical setting in the late 1840s puts the novel in conversation with a range of frontier historiographies attempting to incorporate the western frontier culturally into the expanding borders of the United States. Most notably, the novel seems to respond to Fredrick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and its romantic depiction of Manifest Destiny as bringing American opportunity and civilization into an empty savage land. McCarthy reframes Turner's idyllic vision of the American West as a space that is violated through both the physical and representational brutality of the American frontiersman. Within the text, representation is a violent, destructive force and ideological frameworks like science, philosophy, and anthropology can only interact with the West by irreparably altering or destroying it first. In this thesis I will argue that, while many critics praise *Blood Meridian* for demythologizing America's expansion into the western frontier by making forgotten physical violence against Native Americans grotesquely visible, the novel's problematic framing of the West and its peoples as heterotopian

undermines this process of demythologization and, in fact, serves to facilitate, legitimize, and, at times, glorify representational violence against the West for a new modern audience.

Historical Fiction, Demythologizing the West:

Blood Meridian focuses on a “forgotten” aspect of American history that went significantly undocumented in favor of romantic stories of chivalrous cowboys traversing a frontier filled with hordes of uncivilized natives (Sepich, 93). The events of the novel directly follow the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, one of the United States’ largest land annexations in history, which was facilitated by President Polk to uphold the “political and rhetorical initiatives” of Manifest Destiny (Shaw “Evil Empires,” 209). The war began when Polk and his administration sent American troops south in order to extend the border of Texas into Mexican territory and better facilitate future expansions westward by way of the newly-acquired Rio Grande river (Shaw “Evil Empires,” 210). Shaw frames the Mexican-American War as “particularly vicious” and provides a grueling report from the siege of Vera Cruz: “Mexicans variously estimate their loss at 500 to 1000 killed and wounded, but all agree that the loss among the soldiery is comparatively small and the destruction among the women and children is very great” (Shaw “Evil Empires,” 210). McCarthy’s novel does not deal with the Mexican American war explicitly, but rather depicts the period of continuing, hyper-violence that followed the war. According to Shaw, “In 1849 and 1850, a number of American mercenaries, many of whom had spent time in the military [like the Glanton gang], contracted with Mexican government officials to hunt and kill Native American populations” (Shaw “Evil Empires,” 211). This period of scalp collecting demonstrates an unsated taste for violence

amongst American mercenaries as they shifted the target of their aggression from an organized Mexican military to the native peoples of an unclaimed frontier.

Beyond the novel's specific historical setting, American history is a major player in *Blood Meridian* from the outset of the text. McCarthy, despite insisting that "everything he [has] to say [is] there on the page" (Woodward), alerts his readers to the novel's extra-textual historical roots on the novel's dust jacket: "The dust jacket of the novel's hardcover edition states flatly that John Joel Glanton, Judge Holden and 'a number of their followers . . . actually existed, and various accounts of their exploits can be found in chronicles of the period'" (Sepich, 93). Despite his general insistence on reading fiction for its own value, McCarthy frames his novel from the beginning as one which is based, however loosely, on real characters and events in American history. In his work with *Blood Meridian*, John Emil Sepich compares the events of the text to the sparse historical documents dealing with John Joel Glanton and Judge Holden in order to identify where history ends and McCarthy's fiction begins.

Citing Jeremiah Clemens's *Bernard Lile* (1856), Samuel Chamberlain's *My Confession* (1840), and a number of historical documents, Sepich establishes John Joel Glanton's involvement in the scalp hunting industry as prolific, calling him a "legend" of the time (Sepich, 93). "[Glanton's] name punctuates any number of histories of the mid-nineteenth-century Southwest and even when nameless his legend is unmistakable" (Sepich, 93). Just like McCarthy's version of Glanton, the historical Glanton killed Mexican peasants for their scalps when Native Americans were hard to find and worked closely with the city of Chihuahua because of their unique willingness to purchase the scalps of women and children.

Sepich goes on to detail a number of specific stories about Glanton and Judge Holden which are taken directly from Chamberlain's *My Confession* and transplanted to the text of *Blood*

Meridian. Characteristics like Judge Holden's talents with language, geology, and botany, as well as his peculiar full-bodied "baldness," are all borrowed from *My Confession* (Sepich, 96-97). McCarthy, however, enhances these details to the limits of their believability, transforming the Judge from an eclectic historical anomaly into a supernatural force within the novel. He possesses vast, encyclopedic knowledge and is depicted as both physically commanding and "huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant" (McCarthy, 348).

As Sepich describes at the end of his article: "Many of the novel's scenes (the lottery of arrows, the bull's goring of James Miller's horse, Jackson's death in the river) are essentially found objects: available for explication" (Sepich, 105). The value of McCarthy's historical characters for Sepich is not as much rooted in the retelling of their true stories, but rather in McCarthy's re-appropriation and "explication" of their stories within the context of his own Western mythology.

Modern critics provide a variety of readings for the significance of historiography in *Blood Meridian*, but, "most often, scholarly readers choose to understand this novel and its ubiquitous violence as a demythologizing of the American West; as a revisionist western that challenges and critiques the once-popular view of the West as a place of romance and honor" (Peebles, 231). Some critics read the novel's gratuitous violence as an aesthetic device which "emphasizes the novel's lack of a moral center or grounding," serving as a "reminder of how powerful the Western myth remains and how powerfully McCarthy has challenged it" (Mitchell 299). Conversely, others argue that the violence is not aesthetic and that McCarthy's characters do not grow or "undergo a process of regeneration through violence. Instead [suggesting that] violence in *Blood Meridian* [. . .] is presented simply as one of the hard facts of frontier life" (Eaton, 157).

While these critics differ slightly in their reading of the aesthetic nature of the violence, the general consensus amongst McCarthy critics is that violence in the novel serves to demythologize American settlement of the West. This analysis suggests that readers cast a more critical eye on the novel's violence, not because the text itself demands it, but because they read that violence primarily as a product of history, rather than as a product of McCarthy's contemporary role as mythmaker. Shaw writes that, "by disguising his brutes as historic personae [McCarthy] strengthens their credibility and thereby makes it more difficult for us to dismiss them as the mad illusions of an eccentric mythmaker" (Shaw, *The Modern American Novel of Violence*, 140). According to Shaw, the inclusion of historical characters masks McCarthy's own acts of violent authorship on the West by conflating his graphic description of their violence with the historical fact of its existence. This thesis will expand on Shaw's claim and show specifically how the novel regenerates and re-mythologizes certain types of violence under the guise of historiography.

Framing the Frontier Space:

In order to make an argument about violence against the frontier space as an entity, it is important to first examine how the frontier operates within the novel. Critics vary widely in their interpretation of McCarthy's frontier landscape, but, for the purposes of this thesis, I will be considering the West, as David Holmberg suggests in his 2009 analysis of *Blood Meridian's* "Neomythic West and Heterotopian Zone," as an example of Michel Foucault's "heterotopian zone." In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Foucault defines the heterotopian zone as a space of "otherness" which exists in both real and imagined space by its referential connection to other real spaces. Foucault writes that, "Places of this kind are outside of all

places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Foucault, 3).

Heterotopia’s nature as “outside of all places” implies a perceived impossibility to the heterotopian space despite its very real grounding in physical space. Foucault uses the mirror to further demonstrate the concept of heterotopia, saying that the mirror; “makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault, 4). The mirror demonstrates Foucault’s heterotopia in a number of ways. First, although the mirror as an object exists in real space, its function is derived from its imagined space, the reflection. The second important component of this heterotopia is the fact that the imagined reflection is constructed by its relationship to real spaces which exist outside of itself and make up its borders.

Already Foucault’s heterotopia draws a striking resemblance to the western frontier, not just in *Blood Meridian*, but throughout this period of American expansion. Although the frontier can be easily located on a map, it is not defined by its geographical location or physical landscape. These real physical characteristics are secondary; the frontier is instead defined by its otherness and oppositional nature to the established nation. While the West does not function as a literal mirror of the bordered land which precedes it, it does engage in a distorted reflecting of American ideologies and cultural practices as they are reproduced and re-appropriated onto what Turner and others characterized as a “blank page.” Campbell writes, “For Turner then, “‘West’ offered a transparent text” that he could translate and reproduce as a myth of America [. . .] Thus Turner’s blank page filled up with the tenets of Americanism, forged by the notions of Western expansion and frontier values” (Campbell, 55-56). Campbell’s suggestion that these tenets of Americanism must be “translated” so that they can be reproduced in the West suggests that

Turner's blank page is not simply an "imagined" West, but a heterotopian space which simultaneously exists as both imagined and real space.

In his examination of *Blood Meridian's* heterotopian zone which inspired my own use of the concept, David Holmberg suggests that Foucault's heterotopia provides a compelling reading of McCarthy's frontier space because it successfully accounts for the variety of biblical, historical, and mythological allusions throughout the text. Holmberg argues that McCarthy's frontier is a liminal space which is neither purely historical nor purely fantasy, but instead exists as a simultaneous blending of real and imagined spaces. In Holmberg's words:

[In] the creation of these multiple fictional zones, reproduced simultaneously and unbearably; McCarthy's text creates a postmodern heterotopian zone in which multiple disparate spaces come to exist impossibly together, leaving him to dispatch a gang of historical figures into a neomythic, postapocalyptic, and postmodern unreality that is and is not Texas, that is and is not the West (Holmberg, 142).

Although the novel does occupy a number of real temporal and geographical spaces throughout post-war Texas, it simultaneously frames the frontier as constructed with a number of disparate imagined spaces.

Holmberg suggests that the construction of this heterotopian space goes well beyond the text's many competing allusions and even applies to the physical characteristics of the frontier landscape. "McCarthy goes to great artistic lengths to make his West into *more* than the West, a type of hyperimagined West; the descriptions of the land leave the world of Texas and enter into a quasi-unimaginable land of the post-apocalypse" (Holmberg, 149-150). *Blood Meridian's* frontier space, then, is at once grounded in the reality of McCarthy's historical references and made fictional by his "neomythic" narration. The Judge and his gang of scalp hunters traverse

an impossible western landscape that more closely resembles “the planet Anareta” than it does Earth; it is a “demon kingdom summoned up or changeling land that come the day would leave them neither trace nor smoke nor ruin more than any troubling dream,” and “a land of some other order [. . .] whose true geology was not stone but fear” (McCarthy, 47-48). According to Holmberg, these descriptions transform the West from a real space in American history into a “hyperimagined space.” He writes, “The language creates a schism in the text, and in this rift the heterotopia is enacted” (Holmberg 149).

While Holmberg’s analysis of this textual rift provides a compelling case for viewing the West as a heterotopian space, it does little to examine the significant cultural role of this ideology in the novel. Like the mirror, McCarthy’s frontier cannot exist on its own; although it is a real space on a map, the West is made simultaneously unreal by McCarthy’s language. As Holmberg notes, the landscape is described with sensational language which tries at every turn to rip McCarthy’s frontier from its grounding in reality. Instead, the West is defined as a distorted reflection of the nation that it appears west of. It is, as Campbell suggests above, a translation or reproduction of American ideologies onto a space perceived as an empty, clean slate, though it actually contains a fully formed real space that either distorts the Americana placed upon it or is destroyed in the process of translation and reproduction. The mythological, religious, and anthropological ideologies that Holmberg identifies as mixing together in the frontier’s heterotopia are in fact the muddied reproduction of an America that now finds itself in an unregulated frontier. *Blood Meridian*’s frontier space is transformed, by McCarthy’s language, into a heterotopian one, a space which, like Foucault’s mirror, exists in a state of liminality between the real and the imagined and is defined, in truth, by its interaction with spaces outside of itself.

What is most interesting about *Blood Meridian*'s heterotopian zone then is not the nature of the space itself, but the way that this liminal space is shaped, like Foucault's mirror, by its interaction with the world around it. McCarthy's frontier is a space of otherness and uncertainty, which seems to resist conventional depictions of the West in favor of fantastical descriptions of an otherworldly landscape. As Holmberg suggests, it is a place in which all the ideologies of the civilized world are reflected, a functional imagined space for frontiersmen, and yet the West simultaneously resists definition by any one ideology because it is still a distinctly separate real space from the border which imposes on it. It is this resistance by the frontier to definition, to logic, and to representation itself which Judge Holden attempts to conquer throughout the novel.

Included in his analysis of *Blood Meridian*'s heterotopia, David Holmberg makes a compelling argument for the value of McCarthy's seemingly odd recycling of historical characters and stories throughout the text. He writes:

Through the force of simile, McCarthy essentially eliminates the West from his otherwise western novel; what was once Mexico – and now Texas, thanks to men like Glanton – is now a neobiblical wasteland. [. . .] McCarthy goes to great artistic lengths to make his West into *more* than the West, a type of hyperimagined West; the descriptions of the land leave the world of Texas and enter into a quasi-unimaginable land of the post-apocalypse.

(Holmberg, 149-150)

For Holmberg, the text is at once grounded in reality with McCarthy's historical characters and made mythological by its deeply artistic, and often impossible, description. While many critics interpret McCarthy's use of historical characters as an attempt to illuminate and condemn an otherwise hidden period of violence in the American frontier, Holmberg, by focusing on the contrast between the novel's use of history and its fantastical stylistic elements, asserts that the

novel is instead working to analyze how American history and American mythology of the West are conflated. Holmberg concludes that this conflation works to, “undermine traditional notions of historical record and national mythologies, while simultaneously validating their existence as necessary for, if for no other reason, their final dismissal” (Holmberg, 152).

Although Holmberg’s analysis of the relationship between myth and history in the heterotopian space provides a compelling argument for the novel’s ironic deconstruction of frontier narratives, it does not address how the novel’s framing of the West as a heterotopia affects the nature of violence in the novel or the impact of that violence on the modern reader. In my reading of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy’s novel is at once a criticism and replication of America’s history of violence in the West. The novel works as criticism in the ways that it illuminates the genocide of scalping that was masked by the myth of Manifest Destiny and perpetrated by American mercenaries following the Mexican-American War, even as it simultaneously fortifies the myth itself in the novel’s contemporary glorification of violence against Native Americans and the western frontier. Thus, while, “McCarthy’s novel works to deflate the now obvious historical fraudulence of the heroic settlement of the West,” its violent representation of the frontier space simultaneously recreates and emboldens the very myth it works to undermine (Holmberg, 146).

Violence Against the Western Landscape:

The novel’s framing of the frontier as heterotopian space is inherently problematic because of the ways in which it positions the frontier space as susceptible to representational violence from Euro-American settlers. Though Neil Campbell does not read *Blood Meridian*’s frontier as heterotopian, he does recognize the troubling nature of its perceived blankness and

otherness and the role it plays in inviting violence from travelers who would set out there. Campbell describes McCarthy's frontier as, "a testing-ground for [the Judge], a place 'beyond men's judgments (where) all covenants were brittle'" and as "mythic space [. . .] that challenges the self to assert its existence against the death that always lurks there" (Campbell, 57). For Campbell, McCarthy's frontier simultaneously denies the laws and ways of being that exist back within the nation's borders and demands that frontiersmen declare that same way of being against the liminal space in order to survive. Travelers can either force their "civilized" selves on the liminal frontier, re-writing the West until it becomes recognizable, or they can be swallowed up by the uncertainty and otherness that lies there beyond the border.

It is in this quest to ideologically reconstruct the West that Judge Holden enacts his great violence against the frontier space. Although defining the frontier as a liminal, heterotopian zone does emphasize the importance of imagined spaces in the text, it is important to remember that the frontier and the heterotopian zone, as Foucault defines it, is a real geographical space as well. The western frontier resists representation not just because it exists outside of the nation's physical border, but because it is not truly the "blank page" that Turner suggests. The frontier is, in fact, a real space that contains native people, creatures, and landscapes that do not have a measured place in Judge Holden's ideological framework for the world and are thus not adequately represented with his scientific and anthropological ways of knowing. Judge Holden's great violence in the novel, then, is not so much physical as it is representational. Rather than acknowledge a shortcoming in his tools for interpreting the world, the Judge chooses to irreparably alter the West so that it fits inside of his limited worldview and then represents it to the rest of the world as such. Campbell writes:

The Judge keeps a ledger in which he re-writes *what was* into *what could be* and thereby wrests control of the past by authoring it. As readers we witness his ruthless efforts to alter the past while recognizing that that is akin to the process by which the West itself has been written into our mythology. As the Judge says, “men’s memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not” (Campbell, 59).

Although this quote from Campbell refers specifically to the Judge’s treatment of the history of the frontier, it translates well to his application of other ways of knowing in the western frontier space. As Campbell notes, the Judge is “ruthless” and violent in his attempts to re-write the unknown frontier space from “*what was* into *what could be*,” reclassifying and reshaping the West for his personal gain. “Such is the Judge’s way,” Campbell writes, “consuming those around him and drawing out their strength as he plunders the world for knowledge” (Campbell, 59). While the Judge does, in essence, consume the West in order to know it, he does not, as Campbell suggests, do so for the sake of knowing, but rather for the sake of regenerating himself through violence. “The cost of such self-validation is immense and bloody [. . .] and the Judge’s actions suggest the true brutality behind the myths of American regeneration in the West” (Campbell, 62). The cost of the Judge’s violence, which Campbell identifies here, is not so much about physical destruction of blood, but the exercise of “Turner’s ‘dominant individualism’ at its most extreme,” as time and time again the Judge strips the West of its agency and replaces it with a singular, American authorship which suits his view of the world (Campbell, 62).

In one scene, after drawing a number of artifacts in his book, the Judge says, “My book or some other book [. . .] What is to be deviates no jot from the book wherein it’s writ. How could it? It would be a false book and a false book is no book at all” (McCarthy, 147). The

Judge believes that the truth that is differs little from the truth he writes and that, simply by authoring his version of the West within his book, he makes it true. The Judge even says that, “it was his intention to expunge [the artifacts he records in his book] from the memory of man” (McCarthy, 147) and takes great satisfaction in his ability to record and represent them, “seem[ing] much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation” (McCarthy, 146). The Judge does not see himself as a scholar or even an observer of the world around him, but as a creator and, in this case, re-creator. Because Holden could not really be present at the creation of the West he now inhabits, he can only create that world by undoing or destroying whatever acts of creation are already complete. By breaking down the heterotopian frontier space and reshaping it with his tools of scientific and anthropological representation, Judge Holden violently reshapes the unknown, unquantifiable West into a tool which perpetuates his own domination.

One of the most significant intellectual disciplines that Judge Holden uses to manipulate the unknown frontier is anthropology. On several occasions throughout the text, Holden and his gang of scalp hunters come across archaeological artifacts of native peoples who have disappeared from the land. Although there is physical evidence of their existence in the West, it is important to note that when the Judge conducts his “anthropological studies,” there are no native representatives present to author their own history; instead their existence is validated and contextualized by the Judge and his perceived academic significance. In one instance, the men decide to camp for the night in the ruins of a mountain tribe. Despite the loose sand and interference of local animals that have tracked through the ruins, Judge Holden is able to conjure up archaeological artifacts, hundreds of years old, with little to no effort:

The judge all day had made small forays among the rocks of the gorge through which they'd passed and now at the fire he spread part of a wagon sheet on the ground and was sorting out his finds and arranging them before him. In his lap he held the leather ledgerbook and he took up each piece, flint or potsherd or tool of bone, and deftly sketched in into the book (McCarthy, 146).

The Judge begins his anthropological study harmlessly, collecting artifacts from the earth, organizing them, and recording their details in his book with accurate sketches and measurements. The Judge's most notable find is a three hundred year old footpiece from a Spanish suit of armor which he takes particular care in sketching and measuring.

McCarthy describes the Judge as a careful and precise sketch artist, drafting each piece into his book with ease. The Judge even goes on to provide his men a cautionary tale about the lasting power of representation. He tells them that: "he'd once drawn an old [man's] portrait and unwittingly chained the man to his own likeness" (McCarthy, 147). The portrait is so accurate that once the man sees it, he feels so bound to that representation of himself that he is unable to touch it and fears his enemies will vandalize it to besmirch his image. The man buries his portrait underground where the likeness can outlast him and his enemies alike. Realizing the lasting power of the sketch as a representation of himself, the man hides the portrait forever, protecting his own agency by ensuring that he cannot be misrepresented after his death. While we do not think of desert artifacts as having the same agency as a human being, this anecdote suggests that readers should view the Judge's representation of these objects in a similar light as he sketches each artifact into his book.

Once the Judge believes that he has sufficiently recorded the objects as they exist, he destroys them, so that his representation of the object will be its only lasting record.

When he had done he took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil and pitched it into the fire. He gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire and he shook out the wagon sheet and folded it away among his possibles together with the notebook. [. . .] he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation (McCarthy, 146).

The Judge engages not only in physical violence against the frontier by destroying the ancient artifacts he finds in the ruins, but he also commits a significant representational assault on the frontier space.

Later in the scene, after the Judge has completed his re-writing of history, he tells the men a history of the natives who left the artifacts behind. The Judge suggests that the artifacts are “Anasazi” in origin and that those people: “quit these parts ages since and of them there is no memory. They are rumors and ghosts in this land and they are much revered” (McCarthy, 152). Herein lies the problematic nature of the Judge’s anthropological work: The Judge asserts that there is no memory of these people but proceeds to tell their story and create a permanent, historical narrative of them in his sketchbook. The Judge even grants the Anasazi people a certain degree of agency through their artifacts; he says, “The tools, the art, the buildings – these things stand in judgment on the latter races” (McCarthy, 152). Once again, the artifacts seem to hold a sense of agency in the West, speaking for their long-dead creators who cannot. The Judge even goes on to say that: “who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe and so I was with these masons however primitive their works may seem to us” (McCarthy, 152). The irony of the Judge’s anthropological pursuits is that he not only recognizes the agency of native peoples represented in their artifacts, but he sees their value, no matter how primitive, and knowing that, destroys them in favor of his own incomplete, hegemonic narrative of the past.

By replacing “the past that was” with his own representation of the past as he perceives it, the Judge robs the frontier space of any historical agency and makes himself the sole author of its representation. The Judge feels as though he was privy to the world’s creation because he has, in a sense, recreated the world through his act of representation. He has “expung[ed the real artifacts] from the memory of man” and all that is left for others to interact with are his “pictures, lacking the article itself” (McCarthy, 147). In destroying the original artifacts, the Judge eliminates all questions of heterogeneity in the ruins, stripping the place of its variety of cultural and historical influences and, instead, ensuring that his representation of that place and time will exist as a sole, undisputed truth. In Turner’s own words, “Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time” (Turner, 4). The Judge actively engages himself in this process of historicization of the West, but, in his solo authorship of that space, he does more than simply enforce the “uppermost conditions of his time.” The Judge’s recording and conscious rewriting of history is both physically destructive and ideologically violent as it strips the liminal West of its cultural agency and past and, instead, binds its existence wholly to the Judge’s interpretation.

Archaeological artifacts are not the only things inscribed in the Judge’s book, however; Judge Holden devotes a significant portion of his journey across the frontier to cataloguing the local flora and fauna. Just like his method of recording archaeological artifacts, the Judge’s representation of animal life also requires the physical destruction of the original in order to complete his act of representation. Rather than simply observe and record the area’s animal life, the Judge chooses to represent the creatures with taxidermy, a process which relies on the destruction of the living creature. “He would dress expertly the colorful birds he’d shot, rubbing the skins with gunpowder and stuffing them with balls of dried grass and packing them away in

his wallets” (McCarthy, 206). Once again, McCarthy depicts the Judge’s powers of authorship as inherently linked to the violence he enacts against the object he attempts to represent. The Judge notably does not sketch the West as it exists in the wild, but instead shoots birds out of the sky and rips plants from the earth before stuffing or drying them into an unnatural state which he then documents as representative of their place in nature. In order to use taxidermy, like anthropology, as an empirical means of representing the previously undocumented frontier space, the Judge must assault that space and reshape it to fit his tools of representation.

Perhaps most important about this taxidermy scene, however, is how the Judge frames his study of frontier species: “Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (McCarthy, 207). The Judge’s zoological study via taxidermy stems not from the desire to learn about the undocumented West for the sake of intellectual curiosity, but from the desire to control the frontier space by knowing it completely. The Judge goes on to say, “This is my claim, he said. And yet everywhere upon it are pockets of autonomous life. Autonomous. In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation” (McCarthy, 207). The Judge’s language of “claiming” the land is particularly interesting in this context, because he seems to believe that his physical claim, or ownership, over the land is legitimized by his scientific claim of complete knowledge over the area. Holden seems, in this moment, self-aware of his representational power to not only make scientific claims about the frontier landscape, but to use those scientific claims as a means of controlling and physically claiming the land for himself. In Holloway’s words, “The control which Holden has over others is thus sourced in the act of representation, the expropriation and exclusion of meaning” (Holloway, 193).

Additionally, Holden seems disturbed by the idea of any creature existing independent of his representation, his claim, and, when he speaks, he pauses over the idea of the West as autonomous. The “autonomy” of unknown creatures and “the freedom of birds [are] an insult to [him],” and the Judge believes that, by authoring the sole representations of these creatures, he can strip them of their agency and recontextualize them as pieces of his own constructed frontier space (McCarthy, 208). He continues by saying:

These anonymous creatures, [. . .] may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men’s knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth (McCarthy, 207).

Like his use of archaeology as a tool for self-gain, the Judge uses his mastery of taxidermy as a means of manipulating and redefining the frontier space in order to gain power over it. Just as the Judge destroys the historical artifacts he collects in order to ensure that he is the lone author of their representation, he hopes to capture every last creature of the frontier, because only by representing them all in their entirety can he be “suzerain of the earth” (McCarthy, 207). The birds and creatures under rocks bear no physical threat to the Judge, but their mystery undermines his representational authority in the West and thereby his power to manipulate the heterotopian zone as a tool for his own self-interest.

Perhaps the Judge’s most explicit manipulation of the frontier landscape comes from his application of geology. While his anthropological and zoological tools of representation give him certain metaphorical and ideological power over the West by providing the Judge with the ability to violate the frontier space with his hegemonic authorship, the Judge’s geological

exploitation of the frontier grants him with a more tangible power. Geology in the text does not simply function as an ideological tool for defining the West, but actually serves as a vehicle for enacting physical violence against the frontier space and helps to ensure the domination of the American frontiersmen. In one of the novel's most memorable scenes, Tobin tells the kid about a time when the Judge and his men found themselves trapped in the mountains by a hoard of fifty-eight Native American warriors with no supplies and, worse yet, no gunpowder.

As the warriors track Judge Holden and his men into the mountains, the Judge takes his men through the mountain caves and has them chip away at the walls with their knives seeking charcoal, silica, nitre, and sulphur. After his men have gathered two pounds of the caustic stones, the Judge orders them to urinate on the bizarre mixture while he kneads it with his hands and prepares the "foul black dough, a devil's batter by the stink of it" to bake in the sun (McCarthy, 138). While the mixture cooks, the men watch the enemy warriors slowly climbing the side of the mountain and look for ways to slow their ascent, but the Judge simply sits, ambivalent, "making entries in his little book" (McCarthy, 139). The Judge's geological knowledge appears less academic and more like witchcraft as the story goes on. It is a dark and mysterious power which none of the men understand, but all of them believe in to the degree that they stand their ground against the incoming enemies.

Once the Judge has presumably catalogued his recipe in his book, he calls the men back and tells them to load their weapons with the makeshift gunpowder. When Indians finally reach the top of the mountain, Judge Holden and his men open fire, killing all fifty-eight warriors and shooting some from as far as a mile away. At the end of this anecdote, Tobin tells the kid: "It was sharp shootin all around and not a misfire in the batch with that queer powder" (McCarthy, 141). Not only does the makeshift powder work as intended, but it seems to work better than the

standard powder the men carry with them and even gives the men the ability to shoot more accurately as they gun down all fifty-eight Native Americans with no losses to their own ranks. The Judge's ideological power is not just cerebral, it is physical and it grows in his calm powerful demeanor atop the rocks as he waits for the mixture to dry and manifests itself in the clap of the gunpowder as he fires on the natives.

The Judge's use of geology to manipulate the western frontier is particularly significant because it enacts violence against the frontier space on both representational and physical levels. Like in his application of anthropology and zoology, the Judge uses his extensive knowledge of geology to manipulate the frontier space into something self-serving. However, while the Judge has previously only been able to use his empirical knowledge to enact ideological violence against the West, reshaping it to fit the expectations of his various intellectual fields, he now uses his knowledge to manipulate the western landscape into a consumable agent of violence against itself. The Judge takes the very stone which once made up the heterotopian landscape and uses it as a weapon against the frontier's native peoples. Although this example is the most extreme, it demonstrates physically how the Judge weaponizes various scientific discourses in order to dismantle the heterotopian "otherness" of the West and repurpose it as a tool for his own survival in the frontier.

Despite his supposed quest for knowledge, the Judge shows little concern for uncovering some unknown truth about the frontier and instead commits himself to knowing and defining the West as a means of exercising his own agency over what he perceives as an undefined space. Regardless of the landscape, peoples, and creatures that exist within that real space, the Judge is intent on shaping it to fit his imagined conception of the West as a reflection of the America that

borders it, subject to definition by the same empirical ways of knowing. The Judge believes in a philosophy of domination by representation and says:

The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate (McCarthy, 208).

Whether that man can identify a single thread in the tapestry, some fundamental truth, appears irrelevant compared to the power that individual gains in his ability represent the world as he so chooses. The Judge does not fear the idea of the unknown itself; he fears that not knowing will one day “erode the deeds of his life” and erase him from the West he now inhabits, just as he has erased those who inhabited it before him. Only by taking charge of that world and defining it in his own terms can the Judge hope for survival and even a sort of immortality in the frontier.

Whether he is erasing ancient artifacts from the memory of mankind, taking flight and freedom from birds, or literally molding the stone and earth to his will by making gunpowder, the Judge constantly uses empirical ways of knowing to re-shape the world around him in a way that ensures his survival in the uncertain, inhospitable frontier space.

Although Judge Holden enacts significant violence against the abstract frontier in his manipulative, self-serving representations of the West, he is only one piece of a much larger violence against the frontier committed in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. By misidentifying the real spaces in the heterotopian west as empty spaces lacking proper definition, Judge Holden and others in the novel deny the West and its native inhabitants their autonomy and implicate themselves in the reconstruction of hegemonic myths about Manifest Destiny, myths in which

brave frontiersman bring order and reason to a wild, unknowable frontier. This rejection of real spaces and people in the heterotopian west in favor of a purely imagined frontier represents perhaps the greatest violence in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* because it denies the frontier and its peoples their existence until after they could be successfully circumscribed within American mythology as an oppositional force to Manifest Destiny. Like the artifacts, animals, and stones in Judge Holden's notebook, the West becomes a place whose representation has singularly American authorship.

While the novel focuses primarily on the individual violence committed by Holden and his men, the end of the text does make reference to the broader implications of this ideological war against the frontier. As the narrative advances into the kid's adulthood, he is surrounded not only by stories about Judge Holden's continued activity in the area, but also by a replication of his ideologies on a frontier-wide scale. At the beginning of Chapter 23, the kid encounters an old buffalo hunter who tells him about his years spent hunting on the frontier and about the eventual extinction of the buffalo. Though this scene does not deal explicitly with taxidermy, the passage seems to be a replication of the Judge's taxidermilogical and anthropological ideologies, developed to the point of mass production. While Judge Holden kills individual unknown animals in order to know them and, thus, exert his power over them, the buffalo hunter's story suggests that the average frontiersman now kills these animals en masse, not for the sake of harvesting them as a commodity, but solely as an exertion of their power over them. The hunter tells the kid about:

The animals by the thousands and tens of thousands and the hides pegged out over actual square miles of ground and the teams of skimmers spelling one another around the clock and the shooting and shooting weeks and months till [. . .] hides by the ton and hundred

ton and the meat rotting on the ground and the air whining with flies and the buzzards and ravens and the night a horror of snarling and feeding with the wolves half crazed and wallowing in the carrion. (329-330)

Although the buffalo hides are still stretched and tanned and the hunter insists that “eight million hides [. . .] reached the railhead,” the narrator makes it clear in this scene that the slaughter of the buffalo was frivolous and wasteful. No matter how many hides reach the railroads, the carcasses and meat from the animals are littered across the plains, unused and rotting. These hunters, like the Judge, no longer kill their prey for their value as a commodity or for some intellectual pursuit, but instead destroy the buffalo as a means of exercising their power over the West.

As the kid, Judge Holden, and their companions make their way west, their individual spurts of violence witnessed throughout the novel have escalated, at the closing of the western frontier, into the mass extermination of an entire species. Their violent domination of the West on an individual level has grown into a systematic restructuring of the frontier space on a fundamental level. While his story contains none of the intellectual pursuits of Judge Holden’s taxidermy, it is rooted in the same quasi-religious desire for domination over the frontier space’s flora and fauna. Just as the Judge says that: “it was his intention to expunge [the artifacts he records in his book] from the memory of man” (McCarthy, 147) and takes pride in his ability to become the sole author of their representation, “seem[ing] much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation” (McCarthy, 146), the buffalo hunter seems to take pride in the successful extermination of the buffalo. He tells the kid: “We ransacked the country. Six weeks. Finally found a herd of eight animals and we killed them and come in. They’re gone. Ever one of them that God ever made is gone as if they’d never been at all” (McCarthy, 330). Both the Judge and the buffalo hunter take pride in reverting, or at least

reenacting, an act of God as it pertains to the frontier space. These frontiersmen are unwilling to accept the West as it is, as a real space, and instead embrace its existence as a heterotopia, an imagined space that they can mold to their will. In this ideological understanding of the frontier, these men become capable of enacting unspeakable violence against the West until they can reshape it as they see fit – as a piece of America.

At the end of the novel, this mass produced reconstruction of the frontier space reaches its zenith as the reader witnesses the literal partitioning of the open, abstract frontier into closed, measured spaces. The epilogue, which occurs many years after the conclusion of the novel's main plot, shows a man using a machine to dig countless symmetrical holes across the plains, presumably for the purpose of planting fence posts on the plains. The post hole digger digs a “track of holes that runs to the rim of the visible ground and which seems less the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality as if each round and perfect hole owed its existence to the one before it” (McCarthy, 351). Like the slaughter of the buffalo, the post hole diggers' individual actions seem to have little value on their own. Each post hole is meaningless, in and of itself, and only becomes significant in its “verification of a principle,” its perpetuation of a border ideology, property beyond the border space.

This passage is especially problematic because “fencing in” the frontier space functions as a literal transformation of that space from an imagined heterotopian space into a “real” closed off space. The fence posts are markers for the physical mapping of the frontier into real space, despite the frontier's continual framing throughout the novel as a space of fractured, impossible geography and fantasy. According to Weiss, this process of mapping is violent in nature, as it encourages a single, hegemonic authorship of the frontier space. He writes, “maps represent an

historical process where native or indigenous spaces are appropriated, recreated, or destroyed, or where objects mapped are effaced from existence altogether. The Judge's sketching in *Blood Meridian* represents a similar process of destruction and recreation" (Weiss, 64). While the post hole digger does not voice the same desire for authorship that the Judge does regarding his sketchbook, his planting of the fence posts and mapping of the empty frontier represents the natural progression of Judge's ideological war against the frontier space.

Like the Judge and the buffalo hunter, the fence post digger engages in a destruction and reconstruction of the West, which dates back to its very creation by God. In his ideological authorship of the West, the Judge wants to feel as "if his counsel had been sought at its creation" (McCarthy, 146). The hunter has to kill "[every buffalo] that God ever made [as] if they'd never been at all" (McCarthy, 330). Now, just as the Judge commodified the western landscape by making fire from the rock in the form of gunpowder, the post hole digger must divide the open, heterotopian frontier into buyable plots of land by "striking fire out of the rock which God has put there" (McCarthy, 351). Linking this reconstruction of the frontier space with God's creation of the earth effectively strips the frontier of its autonomy and aligns the book with one of the most troubling pieces of the Turner thesis as identified by Daniel Weiss. Weiss writes:

Turner characterizes the empty space beyond the frontier line as becoming "American" only with progressive advance. The objective of the transformative advance was not what was beyond the line, but how the space behind the frontier boundary became transformed, or Americanized. The land beyond was empty, and thus was not recreated but created for the first time (Weiss, 64).

Just as Weiss postulates regarding the Turner thesis, when Judge Holden, the buffalo hunter, and the post hole digger rebuild the frontier as they see fit, they are not "Americanizing" the frontier

space so much as they are creating it in earnest for the first time. They are depicted as either undoing the work of God or working alongside him, because, although the West predates them all as a real space, their ideological framing of the West as an imagined, heterotopian space prevents them from recognizing the autonomy of the frontier. Instead, each man feels that they must wipe the canvas clean, erasing the native peoples, buffalos, and other “mistakes” on that land so that they can author and map that space anew in a way that fits with their pre-established, American ideologies about the order of the world.

Violence Against Frontier Peoples:

Although this violence against the frontier space as an entity pervades the novel, critics generally subordinate it to focus on the more graphic physical violence aimed at Native Americans and other human inhabitants of the West. Like the violence perpetrated against the frontier itself, this violence against the people of the West goes beyond the physical warfare and scalping that most critics focus on and becomes representational, stripping those who live beyond the border of their human agency and instead crafting a racist caricature of the southwest United States. Rather than focus on the gory atrocities of John Joel Glanton and his gang of scalp hunters, this section will focus on the representational damage done by the group in their conception of the Native American other and on the representational violence inherent in the language that surrounds the act of scalping.

The first layer of this representational violence comes from the slurs used by the frontiersmen in relation to Native Americans and Mexicans throughout the novel. Native Americans in *Blood Meridian* are rarely described by Americans using their names or even the names of their respective tribes. Rather, Americans characterize Native American bodies as

“barbarians,” “savages” (36), “redskins” (138), and “niggers” (266). These racial epithets do more than emphasize the frontiersmen’s perceptions of white superiority in the frontier and instead demonstrate a violence of authorship similar to the recordings in Judge Holden’s notebook. The use of racial epithets effectively strips Native American and Mexican bodies of their individual cultural identities and frames them all as an oppositional “other” to the white pilgrim. After one bloody engagement with a group of Comanche Indians, Sproule, an American from Captain White’s company, asks the kid, “What kind of Indians was them?” The kid replies, “I don’t know” (McCarthy, 59). The problem with this racialization of the frontier is inherent in the kid’s response. Not only are he and Sproule unable to identify the specific nature of their Native American enemy, but, in the end, they do not care; all non-white bodies in the frontier space function the same as oppositional to whiteness regardless of their individual cultural identity. When all Native American bodies are equally racialized in the West, Comanche, Apache, and Yuma become indistinguishable and all bodies are re-authored as simply “other.”

This conflation of all frontier bodies as an inferior racial “other” develops dangerously throughout the novel and is reflected in the growth of the scalp industry. When the kid first joins John Joel Glanton and his gang of scalp hunters, he does so to help them fulfill a contract with the Mexican city of Chihuahua that will pay “a hundred dollars a head for scalps” of Native American victims (McCarthy, 83). The physical violence of this scalp trade becomes increasingly problematic due to the men’s linguistic representation of scalping. When the men find and kill an old woman on their journey, Glanton asks his men to retrieve her scalp, saying, “Get that receipt for us” (McCarthy, 103). This linguistic classification of the scalp as a “receipt” is interesting because it frames the scalp as part of multiple synecdoches. On one level, the scalp is only a small part of the body, but representative of the whole Native American, and,

on another, the scalp is a small piece of post-mortem violence, representative of a larger violence – the murder of Native Americans. “The scalp is [. . .] an emotional “proof” of the Indian’s death, given the lengths to which an Indian would go to protect against this disfigurement” (Smith, 39).

When McGill, a Mexican man in Glanton’s troop of scalp hunters, dies in a battle with a group of Apaches, the scalp metaphor becomes even more convoluted. After Glanton and his men decapitate the Apache chief and scalp his warriors, they also remove the scalp of their fallen ally. McCarthy writes, “The dead Mexican McGill had been scalped and the bloody skulls were already blackening in the sun” (McCarthy, 165). This sentence begins by emphasizing McGill’s individuality by name and his cultural identity; it ends, however, with his body reclassified as unidentifiable amongst the other bloody, blackening skulls. In the simple act of scalping, McGill’s body is transformed from ally to racial other.

Shortly after McGill’s death, the scalpers arrive in “Chihuahua to a hero’s welcome,” where they are ushered into the governor’s palace to trade their scalps for money (McCarthy, 173). McCarthy writes, “There were one hundred and twenty-eight scalps and eight heads and the governor’s lieutenant and his retinue came down into the courtyard to welcome them and admire their work. They were promise full payment in gold” (McCarthy, 174). In this moment, the Mexican government purchases a number of false receipts from Glanton. While they believe they are buying receipts which signify violence against Native American bodies, they are, in fact, purchasing a number of scalps obtained by violence against their own Mexican people.

The group begins scalping Mexicans with increasing frequency over the latter half of the novel. At one point, when the men become involved in a drunken bar fight, they slaughter forty-one Mexicans. As their bodies lay scattered throughout the cantina, the Judge tells his men,

“Hair, boys [. . .] The string aint run on this trade yet” (McCarthy, 188). The Judge recognizes that as long as there is an economic demand for violence against Native Americans, he and his men can transform ethnic human bodies into capital commodities. By ordering his men to take these Mexicans’ “hair” (or scalp), Judge Holden shifts the synecdoche of the scalp to refer to all ethnic bodies in the frontier. At this point the men are selling Mexican “receipts” back to their own Mexican government under the pretext of sanctioned violence against Native Americans. The receipt remains representative of racial violence, but it is disassociated from Native Americans specifically and instead becomes a marker for all non-white victims in the frontier. This synecdoche strips all non-whites of their agency as individuals in the frontier and, like the racial epithet, it erases cultural identities of Apache, or Comanche, or Yuma, or Mexican. Any ethnic body in the frontier space is susceptible to the violence of scalping, because, inside of this metaphor, all non-white frontier bodies can function as “receipts” of government sanctioned violence.

The frontiersmen’s racist classification of Native Americans is historically justifiable, given the novel’s setting; *Blood Meridian* takes their disenfranchisement as a people to new heights in its depiction of Native Americans by the narrator. While Foucault’s concept of heterotopia was formulated to analyze physical spaces, specifically architecture, I would like to suggest that this concept can be extrapolated to describe *Blood Meridian*’s portrayal of Native Americans. Just as the West exists within the novel as an imagined, “othered” space, which simultaneously reflects and distorts the America enclosed within borders, the Native American body is depicted as an imagined person lacking identity or agency as an individual and instead acting as an amalgamation of racialized stereotypes and Euro-American cultural icons. Perhaps the most striking instance of this heterotopian framing occurs when the kid first encounters

Native Americans as enemies. Early in the novel, a group of Comanche warriors attack Captain White and his company, including the kid. As the warriors crest the hill, McCarthy delivers one of the most famous sentences from the novel:

A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of crane feathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground and their horses' ears and 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, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning, screeching and yammering and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools. (McCarthy, 55)

This passage treats the Comanche warriors in much the same way as Holmberg reads McCarthy's treatment of landscape. They are fractured, schismatic individuals that are defined not by their humanity, but by a bizarre, fantastical combination of historical, biblical, and mythic

allusions. These Comanche warriors are not just “savages” or “niggers” as Captain White or John Joel Glanton would describe them, they are “vaporous beings [from] regions beyond right knowing.” It is no wonder that violence against Native Americans is glorified throughout the novel, as McCarthy’s narrator transforms these real Comanche warriors into imagined “vaporous beings” that cannot be encompassed within the language or imagination of the frontiersmen, let alone incorporated physically into the nation’s growing borders. The Comanches become “heterotopian humans,” existing historically as real bodies on the frontier, but represented by the narrator as imagined bodies for the new modern reader.

The most remarkable part of this heterotopian framing of Native Americans, however, is their twisted mirroring of the frontiersmen and the Euro-American imperialism which they carry into the West. Like the mirror, these Native Americans exist in a real body, but their function in the novel is derived from an imagined space – the reflection. What is interesting about this passage, and Native Americans throughout the novel, is the way in which their bodies are formed from a bizarre amalgamation of European and American cultural artifacts dating back to their discovery of the New World. These Comanche do not wear traditional, tribal garb, but are instead clothed in a bizarre assortment of items presumably stolen or raided from European and American pilgrims. Some of these items, like the silk finery layered with animal skins, the stovepipe hat, and the backwards pigeontailed coat, seem to convey an ignorance, or rejection, of civilized living from the Comanches. They have somehow obtained these markers of high status and wealth, but clearly misuse or incorrectly value them in the eyes of the frontiersmen. Others, like the cavalry uniform stained with its previous (presumably white) owner’s blood and the bloody wedding veil, convey a vicious savagery to these warriors, willing to kill a bride and wear her veil as a prize. Still others, like the conquistador’s armor, seem to suggest an unnatural

immortality to this hellish band of warriors, suggesting that they have existed in opposition to white pilgrims for hundreds of years and countless battles, still wearing the armor of previous conquests which is now “deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust” (McCarthy, 55).

McCarthy repeats this phenomenon later in the novel when John Joel Glanton and his men meet with a small group of Yuma Indians. McCarthy describes them as men: “clad in such fool’s regalia and withal bore themselves with such aplomb that the paler riders were hard put to keep their composure. The leader [. . .] wore a belted wool overcoat that would have served a far colder climate and beneath it a woman’s blouse of embroidered silk” (McCarthy, 266). Once again these Native American bodies are depicted as ill fitted to their clothing from the “civilized” world that has come to the West. Not only is their leader’s jacket designed for a cooler climate, but, beneath it, this warrior is dressed in a fancy, embroidered women’s blouse. As the white men struggle to withhold their laughter, Glanton says simply, “Aint you a crazylookin bunch of niggers” (McCarthy, 266). Though Glanton’s racialized dismissal of the Yuma is just one of many slurs used throughout the novel, this specific dismissal demonstrates the relationship between the representational violence enacted by the frontiersmen and the problematic framing of Native American bodies provided by the narrator. In other words, the frontiersman’s violent linguistic representation of these Native American bodies, in the form of a racial slur, is facilitated, or at least legitimized, by McCarthy’s depiction of the Yuma as fractured “others,” ill fitted to civilized clothing.

In both of these scenes, these real native bodies are made bizarre by their inability to interact or integrate with elements of American influence on the West. Instead of creating sympathetic or even human Native American bodies that force the reader to criticize the novel’s

violence against them, McCarthy's narrator frames Native Americans for the reader as inhuman, imagined bodies that cannot integrate into the rapidly changing frontier. Framing the Native American body as heterotopian implies that the native body, like the frontier landscape, cannot fit within America's expanding borders without first being destroyed like the buffalo or damaged and re-authored like the items in Judge Holden's notebook. Instead of undermining violence against Native Americans in the novel, as many critics suggest, this heterotopian framing of both place and person serves to legitimize the violence of scalping, suggesting that no "real" people are victims of the violence, only imagined "othered" bodies which must be permanently altered in order to exist in the new American West. The reader, then, becomes an accomplice to *Blood Meridian's* frontiersmen, taking some voyeuristic pleasure in the gang's physical and representational violence against Native Americans because the narrator frames that violence as the only way to fit native bodies into the rapidly changing frontier space. Native American bodies do not fit in the reader's perception of the West until they have been racialized, commodified as "receipts," or destroyed altogether. They are not presented as real, autonomous individuals, but as imagined ghoulish caricatures that can only be accounted for by violence.

Heterotopia and the Legitimization of Violence in the Frontier:

Representational violence against both the frontier space and its inhabitants is a central feature of McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Much of the violence committed by Glanton, the Judge, and the various frontiersmen and scalp hunters can be contextualized by those characters' historical ideologies. They view the frontier space and its people just as Turner's Frontier Thesis suggests they should in their time: as a dangerous, mysterious land, beyond the laws of men, ripe for exploitation and redefinition. This violence is complicated, however, by the ways in which

McCarthy's narrator legitimizes that violence for the reader, making them not only complicit in the destruction of the West, but granting them some voyeuristic pleasure in the violence.

By framing the frontier as a fractured heterotopian space and framing Native Americans as heterotopian humans, *Blood Meridian* prepares its reader to indulge in the violent incorporation and representation of the West. The frontier and its peoples are not depicted to the modern reader as real, suffering entities with an autonomy that predates their interaction as pilgrims, but, rather, as fractured, imagined entities whose function is purely oppositional to the real America and who demand incorporation via destruction and subsequent reconstruction.

In terms of the frontier space as an entity, characters like the Judge, the buffalo hunter, and the post hole digger are granted the opportunity to recreate the West according to their own ideological beliefs because the frontier space itself is first presented to the reader as a heterotopia. The frontier beyond America's border lacks autonomy as a preexisting "real" space and is instead presented as an unreal space, defined primarily by its opposition to the "real" America that is contained within the border. As a counterpoint to the "real" America, the heterotopian frontier acts as a proving ground for Euro-American ideology, challenging the Judge's ability to know and represent the world, and demanding that he, and others, do violence to that frontier space until it can fit within their ideological framework for the world. Similarly, the frontiersmen's ability to conflate multiple Native American cultural groups into a single ethnic "other" stems from the novel's framing of the Native American body as heterotopian. Because the Native American body is depicted as a counterpoint, even an oppositional force to the white pilgrim, and not as its own autonomous being, the reader accepts that body's destruction and incorporation into an American ideological framework of capitalism, even if the real body is destroyed in favor of the symbolic scalp.

Rather than simply demythologizing America's violent history in the West by casting a critical eye on the gruesome scalp trade, McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* takes additional steps to craft its own myth for a new, modern audience. By presenting the frontier as a space that requires violent alteration and reconstruction before it can become a part of the growing United States, *Blood Meridian* legitimizes certain representational violence against the West and crafts a new myth of American expansion parallel to the 19th century myth of Manifest Destiny. McCarthy's construction of this new American myth is perhaps most important after Glanton and his men are massacred at the Yuma ferry. According to Peebles, it is: "here [that] the historical content of the novel ends, and McCarthy greatly reduces his cast of characters to a small group who track into the desert to have a showdown of sorts" (Peebles, 233). In this narrative space, where McCarthy is the sole author of the novel, independent of historical accounts, the Judge and the kid faceoff in a showdown which seems to decide what kinds of violence are permissible in *Blood Meridian*'s newly mythologized frontier.

The Kid, the Judge, and the Showdown in the Desert:

When the kid and the Judge separate and begin their fatal game of cat and mouse, they appear, as characters, to represent two types of violence in the western frontier: The kid, a practitioner of senseless physical violence, and the Judge, a calculated author of the representational violence described in this thesis. On the novel's first page, McCarthy presents the kid as uneducated and dangerous: "He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence" (McCarthy, 3). The kid is capable of participating in the gruesome physical violence at the center of *Blood Meridian*, but his namelessness and his illiteracy prevent him from engaging in the representational violence of authorship that Judge Holden represents.

When the kid first begins his journey west, he comes across an old man at a campfire. They speak about the origins of the world and, more importantly, the kid's ability to alter it for his own benefit:

God made this world, but he didn't make it to suit everybody did he?

I don't believe he much had me in mind.

Aye, said the old man. But where does a man come by his notions. What world's he seen that he liked better?

I can think of better places and better ways.

Can ye make it be?

No. (McCarthy, 20)

The kid sees faults in the world as it exists, but he does not see himself as an author like the Judge, capable of reshaping the world for himself. Without his own name or the ability to read or write, he has little hope of shaping the frontier with his own ideological representation of it and so his violent nature is mindless, meaningless, and, in the end, futile.

This final conflict between the kid and the Judge is rooted, then, in their differing approaches to violence. The Judge turns against the kid not because he poses a threat to the Judge, but because Holden identifies a "flawed place in the fabric of [the kid's] heart." He says, "You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy, 312). Most critics read the Judge's condemnation as a criticism of the kid's morality and his perceived unwillingness to kill Native Americans with the same pleasure as the Judge. Peebles calls this "flawed place:" "The small part of the kid that held back from complete, orgiastic, communal destruction with the Glanton gang [. . .] [that] is odious and damning in the judge's eyes" (Peebles, 239). As Peebles suggests, the Judge does take issue

with the kid's unwillingness, or inability, to participate in the "complete orgiastic" violence of the scalp trade. The kid's participation in that violence is not, however, limited only by a superior moral compass; he is as guilty of brutal violence against innocents as any other. It is also limited by his inability to participate in the representational violence endorsed by the Judge. The kid holds some mercy for Native Americans and the West because, unlike the Judge, he cannot view them as heterotopian, imagined spaces for exploitation and authorship. His illiteracy makes him incapable of authoring the West and means he cannot fully engage in violence, like the Judge, as a means of establishing his own power.

When the two finally come face-to-face in the novel's final scene, it is the Judge who emerges triumphant. As the kid opens the door to the jakes, the Judge, naked on the toilet: "rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him" (McCarthy, 347). He kills the kid, though we do not see how, and "gathers up" his existence in his arms, taking sole responsibility for his representation. Like an artifact from his notebook, the Judge erases the kid and regenerates his own power by making himself the sole author of their history.

The violence that persists at the end of the novel is not physical; it is the Judge's violence of authorship and representation. All the great purveyors of physical violence, Captain White, John Joel Glanton, and, finally, the kid, have been wiped from the earth leaving only the Judge and his violence of authorship. The novel even concludes, saying, "He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die" (McCarthy, 349). While the Judge may have some supernatural power inside of the novel, his eternal nature in the novel's final lines stems not from a physical immortality, but from the nature of his violence and its ability to regenerate itself long after his death. It is a violence which, as the old man tells the kid, is

inherent in man's ability to create. He says that man: "can do anything. Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it" (McCarthy, 20). According to Masters, the Judge is: "a nightmarish embodiment of the myths of colonial expansionism, myths that he extends, rewrites, and reconstructs to apocalyptic ends" (Masters, 25). It is appropriate, then, that the Judge's violent reconstruction of the West is reflected in the novel's epilogue, as the post hole digger trudges over an apocalyptic plain of sand and bones with his own self perpetuating "machine of evil," digging hole after hole, each hole validating the existence and purpose of the holes before and after.

The Judge's immortality stems from his ability to become the sole author of the West and, in the end, the kid. His form of representational violence not only shapes the frontier itself, but also shapes the ideological perceptions of the frontier for all those who will come to read his journal or rely on his distorted representation of American history in the West. That ideological reshaping of the West is the old man's "machine to make a machine." A violent representation which, like the fence post holes, perpetuates itself as future violence in the form of racism, hegemony, and forgotten history that will last an eternity. Like the Judge, McCarthy, knowingly or otherwise, facilitates new violence against the West via his own role as author and mythmaker. Despite the novel's ability to illuminate forgotten physical violence, it simultaneously works as another cog in the old man's machine, reinventing, mythologizing, and even legitimizing American violence against the West by way of heterotopia. Manifest Destiny as a movement may be over, but *Blood Meridian's* ideological war against the frontier provides the modern audience with a voyeuristic pleasure that ensures Judge Holden and his prejudiced representation of the West can run themselves "a thousand years, no need to tend them."

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