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The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Samuel Chamberlain's *My Confession* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* on Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. Cormac McCarthy states that "books are made out of books," and in identifying two novels which McCarthy cites as influence of *Blood Meridian*, the goal was to determine the varying manners in which McCarthy engaged both texts, ultimately coming to the conclusion that *Blood Meridian* is a compression, and literal flattening, of both of these works.

From *My Confession*, McCarthy primarily draws from the work for historical purposes. Many of the men in *Blood Meridian* are historically accurate sketches from Chamberlain's work, and McCarthy's Judge Holden completely owes his existence to Chamberlain, as *My Confession* is the only mention of Holden in any document. In illuminating key passages from Chamberlain's work, and placing them in direct contact with similar passages from *Blood Meridian*, readers are able to comprehend the ramifications of McCarthy's choice to either adhere to Chamberlain's text or deviate from it.

From *Moby-Dick*, instead of primarily drawing from historical sources, McCarthy utilizes Melville's novel in terms of character, plot, setting, and language. The points of contact between the two works are numerous, and at times highly visible. In examining the similarities and differences between the two works in areas of contact, readers are able to better understand McCarthy's compression of the works, as certain aspects of *Blood Meridian* are elucidated in placing them in conversation with *Moby-Dick*.

LITERARY HISTORICAL RELATIONS IN
CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *BLOOD*
MERIDIAN

By

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is a novel that, until the author's recent commercial success, has eluded deliberate critical considerations for countless reasons. The novel is at once violent and regenerative, uncompromising in its decree that "before man was, war waited for him" (248). To illustrate the powerful effects of the unrelenting violence on readers, critic Harold Bloom recounts in an interview with Leonard Pierce his first encounter with the work:

The first time I read *Blood Meridian* I was so appalled that while I was held, I gave up after about 60 pages ... I went back a second time, and I got, I don't remember... 140, 150 pages, and then, I think it was the Judge who got me. He was beginning to give me nightmares just as he gives the kid nightmares. And then the third time, it went off like a shot. I went straight through it and was exhilarated.

Bloom's reaction is not uncommon; the all-consuming and ever present violence is immediately disarming for readers. However, beneath the violence lies a complex novel which has perplexed critics and readers since its publication.

In an interview with Richard Woodward, McCarthy makes the statement that "the ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written." This piece of information should come as no surprise to readers who have attempted to research the veracity of *Blood Meridian*, and John Emil Sepich has done just that; Sepich has attempted to gather all of the historical sources from which McCarthy has drawn in creating

Blood Meridian. From newspaper clippings to historical novels written as first-hand accounts, McCarthy has utilized a plethora of sources to construct the destitute reality of the novel, and in a letter to Sepich, admits that “hundreds” of books have gone into *Blood Meridian* (Sepich, XIX).

To attempt to discern the significance of all these works in *Blood Meridian* is an impossible task. Instead of merely recounting each of the works McCarthy has utilized, I have chosen to focus on two works from which McCarthy has primarily drawn. As Sepich notes, “decorated Union Army general Samuel Chamberlain’s narrative *My Confession* provides McCarthy with his core Glanton tales and the historical basis for his essential character, Judge Holden” (1). Chamberlain’s narrative of his time spent in the Mexican-American War is typically interpreted as the most prominent historical basis for *Blood Meridian*. Yet while Chamberlain’s work is grounded in historical fact, with verifiable characters and events, the liberties that Chamberlain takes with these events and the author’s propensity to put words in the mouths of others, casts the narrative somewhere between history and fiction, and it is the role of both aspects of Chamberlain’s text in *Blood Meridian* which I have chosen to examine. As McCarthy has made the statement that Herman Melville is among his favorite writers, and from the few brief comparisons between *Blood Meridian* and *Moby-Dick*, the second half of my investigation will concern these two novels.¹ McCarthy’s statement concerning books existing as building blocks for other books is pivotal in examining the true nature of *Blood Meridian*; in a novel where readers find difficulty in discerning a point of reference, or a way into the text, I believe that utilizing *My Confession* and *Moby-Dick* allows readers insight into McCarthy’s creative process when crafting the novel, and also into the ultimate statements of the work.

In discerning the importance of both of these works in relation to *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy has ultimately adapted these works to the landscape of his novel. The desert floor, on

¹ In the same interview with Richard Woodward, McCarthy lists Melville, Dostoyevsky, and Faulkner as those he considers “good writers,” because they “deal with issues of life and death.”

which the novel takes place, in its flattened, monochromatic state, is representative of McCarthy's utilization of both texts. The grandiose boasting of Chamberlain, and the consistent need for a social hierarchy in the text is compressed in *Blood Meridian*, to the point where the only remnants of Chamberlain's work are as bare as the artifacts and fossils found by Judge Holden. McCarthy's utilization of *Moby-Dick* is similar, yet distinct. Instead of an obsession with the social dynamics of a group, Melville's novel plunges into the metaphysical depths of existence, and again, McCarthy has adapted this aspect of Melville's work to the landscape of *Blood Meridian*. *Moby-Dick* consistently attempts to display that which lies below the surface; whether through the transmission of internal monologues and psychological states, or through attempts to fully encompass the inner workings of the whale, Melville's novel is driven by depth. This depth is avoided in *Blood Meridian*, both figuratively and literally. The desert floor of McCarthy's novel is not able to be penetrated in the same manner as Melville's ocean, thus the depth that Melville explores has no existence in *Blood Meridian*. Therefore, McCarthy's novel displays a compressed, flattened example of both Chamberlain and Melville's work, through sparsity of language and a rejection of the need to delve into the psychological aspects of each character. Conclusively, I believe *Blood Meridian*, through its utilization of these texts, offers a condensation of both works. This is ultimately evidenced by the landscape of *Blood Meridian*; as *My Confession* exists above the surface of the novel, as it is driven by the lofty aspirations of Chamberlain, and *Moby-Dick* below that surface, *Blood Meridian* exists as a medium between the two, as a blueprint, completely flattened, yet with the ability to show the dimensions through markers which engage both of the other texts. McCarthy has achieved this by literally flattening and compressing both of these works, fully adapting them to the landscape of his novel.

CHAPTER II

BLOOD MERIDIAN AND MY CONFESSION

The first instance of direct contact between *My Confession* and *Blood Meridian* comes at the onset of each and represents moments crucial to the momentum of each work. Nearing the conclusion of his voyage to see his uncle, Chamberlain's boat ride to Alton was marred by bad weather. Departing the boat, Chamberlain recalls the events of that evening:

It was a Saturday night when we reached Alton, a plank was run out, and a fearful voice told me to jump! I stood on the plank hesitating, when the same rough voice exclaimed "Come, don't stop all night! Jump." Seeing the faint glim of a light far below, I sprang into the darkness and landed in three foot of the Illinoise mud. I looked up; the Boat had already cast off and was moving away in the blackness. (19)

McCarthy utilizes Chamberlain's passage by expanding the language of *My Confession*, and also in a direct expansion of the action in the scene. McCarthy's episode takes place in Nacogdoches, Texas, and like Chamberlain's scene, is not the final destination of the kid. McCarthy also relates that it had been raining for sixteen days when the kid meets Toadvine, as both scenes are the results of inclement weather. McCarthy relates the meeting and subsequent violence:

There were boards laid across the mud and he followed the paling band of doorlight down toward the batboard jakes at the bottom of the lot. Another man was coming up from the jakes and they met halfway on the narrow planks. The man before him swayed slightly. His wet hatbrim fell to his shoulders save in the front where it was pinned back. He held a bottle loosely in one hand. You better get out of my way, he said. The kid wasnt going to do that and he saw no use in discussing it. He kicked the man in the jaw. The man went down and got up again. He said: I'm goin to kill you. (9)

Evidence of McCarthy's expansion is visible when reading the two scenes together. While there is no legitimate fight in Chamberlain's account, apparently hotel porters got into a scuffle over who would take charge of Chamberlain. While the porters fight it out, he looks on, "covered with mud, cold, wet, and hungry" and to conclude the fight, Chamberlain writes that when approached by a large man, he "launched out with my left, caught him under the ear, sending him to mud" (20). The sole punch of Chamberlain was enough to end the fight, and in knocking the man to the ground he also ingratiated himself with his landlord for the evening. These details are relevant because they are subverted in *Blood Meridian*.

McCarthy's fight can be viewed as an extension of Chamberlain's in nearly every sense. McCarthy's fight is more drawn out, but also comes closer to resulting in a death. Chamberlain's fight was over with one punch, while McCarthy details numerous blows with varying weapons. While Chamberlain complains that he was "covered in mud" briefly, the kid and Toadvine are immersed in mud, as McCarthy writes the kid's "hands were huge with mud," the mud becoming a part of him (10). While Chamberlain's account is written and read as genuinely authentic, McCarthy's is clearly fictitious. However, McCarthy's tale, because of its proximity to violence and death, and its close contact with nature through mud, feels as though it surpasses Chamberlain's attempt at properly recreating the episode and time-frame.

Also relevant in the comparison is McCarthy's inclusion of a hotel. After the fight, the kid and Toadvine burn down a hotel because an enemy of Toadvine's is sleeping there. On their way out of the hotel, after starting the fire, the two men violently assault the owner of the property simply because he is in their way. McCarthy's choice to include this violence may have been an effect of the emphasis Chamberlain put on his relationship with the landlord of the hotel he stayed in. McCarthy has taken two minute and relatively inconsequential passages from *My*

Confession and out of them has created a scene of desperate violence, diametrically opposed to Chamberlain's enamored tone. He has done so by literally flattening them; the flattened image explains the extended length of McCarthy's scene, and also the more extreme emotions which are detailed. This compression is a model for much of what McCarthy does in *Blood Meridian*; in compressing a wide range of emotions onto a flattened landscape, the emotions that are left on that landscape are naturally more extreme, because they contain the sum of their parts.

In these distinct passages, McCarthy also adapts the language Chamberlain employs to promote the connection of the two works. Primarily, the words "darkness" and "blackness" are instrumental in McCarthy's expansion of *My Confession*. Chamberlain writes that he "sprang into the darkness" to depart from the boat and arrive on land. Reading the passages as points of change and momentum in each, the kid's encounter with Toadvine is also a launching point into darkness. Toadvine and the kid meet up again in prison, shortly before both men join up with Glanton's gang. As darkness is equated with violence in *Blood Meridian*, the kid's meeting with Toadvine on those planks is literally what launches his time with Glanton and the darkness that envelops the gang. Another possible launching point for darkness in McCarthy's passage comes from the presence of Judge Holden during these events.

The kid has encountered Holden for the first time immediately prior to the fight, and as the hotel burns to the ground after, Judge Holden sits and watches, smiling at the kid as he passes out of town. The Judge is the antithesis of the "blackness" that Chamberlain writes of; he is literally a towering man of ivory, hairless and pale. The Judge gives a speech at the conclusion of *Blood Meridian* which also directly addresses Chamberlain's passage, as he speaks to the kid, he warns him that "there is room on the stage for one beast and one alone. All others are destined for a night that is eternal and without name. One by one they will step down into the darkness before the footlamps" (331). Chamberlain has literally stepped down into the darkness, as the

Judge warns that all men eventually do. McCarthy has taken the simple act of departing a boat and compressed it into a warning concerning the mortality of all men. In this instance, the flattening of *Blood Meridian* also appears as an extension into violence. However, this is not the case. Instead, anything flattened in *Blood Meridian* will take on the appearance of that which is more violent, simply because the landscape of McCarthy's novel is fundamentally more harsh and is naturally more violent.

Both *My Confession* and *Blood Meridian* begin with the departures of youths escaping confinement in homes, both moving from east to west, and both have a propensity towards violence. Chamberlain's first tale of his chivalry involves a fight with the organist of his church in defense of a girl he was romantically inclined to protect. Expelled from the church, Chamberlain writes that "thus I lost confidence in woman's love, and faith in religion, and went forth shunned as if I was another Cain" (10). Several themes in Chamberlain's brief statement are consistently employed throughout McCarthy's novel. The first of these is the prevalence of violence in the church; while the church is the catalyst for Chamberlain's initial violence, numerous passages in McCarthy's novel recall scenes of mass-violence in churches, slaughtered bodies lying on the altar, and innocent peasants hiding themselves in churches to delay their deaths. Chamberlain's claim that he had "lost confidence in woman's love," while completely unfounded, evidenced by his numerous romantic follies throughout the work, appears to have deeply influenced McCarthy's novel. Love, in *Blood Meridian*, is non-existent. For that matter, women, in *Blood Meridian* are non-existent; objects of rape and lust, the limited role of women in the novel is obvious. Finally, Chamberlain's comparison of himself to Cain is worthy of discussion. Cain being the son of Adam and Eve, immediately draws attention to parents in each of the works. Chamberlain has utilized the image of himself being evicted from paradise to further intertwine his work into the Biblical text.

In relation to McCarthy's work, the importance of Chamberlain's idea of himself as Cain comes from God's questioning of Cain concerning his brother. Cain responds with the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*King James Bible*, Gen. 4:9). Here it is possible to engage in the first direct character comparison between the two works. The similarities between Chamberlain and McCarthy's kid have been illustrated by Vereen Bell; both leave home at an early age, both join Glanton's gang as an outsider, and neither fully commit to the Judge or his world-view (120). In McCarthy's novel, when the Judge is attempting to kill the kid and Tobin, he tells the kid that "You alone were mutinous. You alone in your soul reserved some clemency for the heathen" (299). Judge Holden has decided to kill the kid because he is his brother's keeper. The compassion of the kid in a world where even the most basic human emotions seem foreign stands out in numerous situations. The first of these comes after the kid and Sproule remain as the only survivors of their attack by the Comanches under Captain White. The kid offers to examine Sproule's wounded arm, refuses to leave him when they hear approaching horses, and finally, stops a bat from drinking his blood.

This scene is reminiscent of one that stems directly from Chamberlain, indicating McCarthy's establishment of the scene's importance, and when read alongside one another the connection is apparent. Chamberlain's passage does not possess the depth of fear found in McCarthy's, but elucidates McCarthy's work to a further degree. Chamberlain encountered his victim post-mortem, and his unfamiliarity with the man allows him distance:

I had seen for miles a flock of vultures circling around in the air above this place, and was somewhat prepared for the horrid sight that greeted me at the end of the stone wall. The body of an American lay in the road, surrounded by a yelping pack of coyotes; the air was full of vultures, Turkey buzzards and eagles, while on the body was seated an enormous bird like a buzzard, in fact, a condor, who kept all the rest at a distance while it finished its disgusting repast. As these birds will not attack a man when alive, the poor fellow must have been alive the night before, because in a few hours the bones would be as cleanly picked as if done by a surgeon. (158)

However, in McCarthy's scene readers see that those who are alive can still be attacked:

They slept like dogs in the sand and had been sleeping so when something black flapped up out of the night ground and perched on Sproule's chest. Fine fingerbones stayed the leather wings with which it steadied as it walked upon him. A wrinkled pug face, small and vicious, bare lips crimped in a horrible smile and teeth pale blue in the starlight. It leaned to him. It crafted in his neck two narrow grooves and folding its wings over him it began to drink his blood. Not soft enough. He woke, put up a hand. He shrieked and the bloodbat flailed and sat back upon his chest and righted itself again and hissed and clicked its teeth. (65-66)

McCarthy recalls Chamberlain's passage, but McCarthy's work is not a simple act of mimesis, but one of expansion. While Chamberlain was horrified at the sight of a dead man being consumed, in McCarthy's work the horror and accompanying reactions that one could have to the scene fall squarely on the reader. McCarthy's work has expanded the possibility of darkness and the appalling reality of nature from Chamberlain's work into a truly disturbing passage, through the process of compression. Even the animal in *Blood Meridian*, which has been altered from a condor to a bat, has been compressed by McCarthy.

Just as Chamberlain's statement that he had lost confidence in women was unfounded, confirmed by his repeated romantic ventures, the same can be said concerning his declaration that he is Cain. Chamberlain, propelled by his over-inflated sense of chivalry, continuously comes to the aid of men and women who have been wronged. While there is little morality behind the actions of the kid, he still refuses to kill those he has fought with and who have not wronged him. Both men, in some way, act as though they are their brother's keeper. But the actions of Chamberlain, defending women who have been insulted, men who have been wronged, or punishing those who go against their command, simply have no place in McCarthy's novel. The kid is a compressed version of Chamberlain's chivalry and morality. McCarthy's world is primarily bereft of morality, where Chamberlain's world is defined by his moral compass. The

relationship between the kid and Chamberlain in this moral comparison illustrates the effects of McCarthy's compression of an emotion in *Blood Meridian*.

To further illuminate points of contact between the two works, it is possible to examine contrasting dueling scenes in each novel. Here again, readers encounter similar situations, yet the violence of McCarthy's duel goes far beyond that of Chamberlain's. Chamberlain's duel comes about by mere circumstance; after having fallen asleep in a bedroom during a party, Chamberlain is warned to escape when he is woken up. Instead, he goes back to the party to find twenty "villainous-looking cutthroats" smoking and drinking around a room (188). In a dash to escape, he hits an older man before being subdued, and soon agrees to a duel with the man. Chamberlain writes that the "greasers were highly elated, and bet freely on the result" (190). The account of the actual duel, however, is brief:

Martiznes placed us in position and cried out *vaya!* when the old fellow threw himself on me with the agility of a cat. I parried his thrust with my knife, and on the impulse of the moment launched out with my left Duke, which took effect on his vulture-like beak with such force as to flatten that appendage and send him with a dull thud to the floor. The fight was over. (190)

Chamberlain's boastful tale of defeating a one-eyed old man in a duel which doesn't even contain a death seems an insubstantial parody. However, several elements in Chamberlain's account allow readers to understand the origin of McCarthy's duel. The first of these is the sketch that Chamberlain has made of the duel (191). In this sketch, Chamberlain has drawn a circle of "greasers" surrounding himself and the old man. The old man's skin is nearly as dark as the door that leads into the room, while Chamberlain has sketched himself all in white, the only other white in the room emanating from the dresses of the women he was attempting to impress. This distinction in color, while in Chamberlain appearing as further evidence of his mild-racist tendencies, was utilized to the fullest by McCarthy.

The black/white duel in *Blood Meridian* takes place between the two men in Glanton's gang named John Jackson, "one black, one white"(81). In the introduction of the two men, McCarthy writes that "bad blood lay between them," and the rest of the company was aware of this (81). Later, one of the men "offered to wager as to which Jackson would kill which" (86). While McCarthy's scene is not set up as a duel in the formal sense, the wagering which takes place beforehand, the black/white contrast, and the onlookers sitting in a circle around the duelers places the confrontation between the Jacksons in the same context of *My Confession*. The duel in *Blood Meridian* begins when the white man warns the black from sitting near him, as McCarthy writes, with "a slurred oath" he was warned (106). The "slur" in McCarthy's text exists because of the state of intoxication of the white man, but this recalls the actual slur, "greaser," which Chamberlain employed to describe the Mexicans. This is McCarthy's subtle, verbal point of contact at the invocation of the duel, and his meditation on the eyes of the men sitting around the fire, some which reflect light and some which don't, immediately following the slur further acknowledges the one-eyed man of *My Confession*.

The tension between the Jacksons escalates when the white man threatens to shoot the black unless he moves away. The black man gives the white one chance at salvation, when he asks "is that your final say? Final as the judgment of God"(106), the other replies, and shortly after readers witness the execution:

The nearest man to him was Tobin when the black stepped out of the darkness bearing the bowieknife in both hands like some instrument of ceremony Tobin started to rise. The white man looked up drunkenly and the black stepped forward and with a single stroke swapt off his head. Two thick ropes of dark blood and two slender rose like snakes from the stump of his neck and arched hissing into the fire. (107)

Just as in Chamberlain's passage, the actual event ends quickly. The majority of the actual duel in McCarthy's work takes place on verbal and psychological levels; the verbal sparring that takes

place prior to the event, and the gradual rise in tension from the introduction of the two men makes this clear. Chamberlain's duel was heavily dependent on the physical aspects of the event; Chamberlain was physically in the wrong place at the wrong time, he was physically superior to the old man, and had to physically prove himself to the women and "greasers" who were watching him to preserve his life. Black Jackson, in contrast, had been psychologically worn-down by the white man to such an extent that when the mental intimidation finally had physical ramifications (having to sit somewhere else) the strain became too much.

McCarthy not only compressed specific episodes of *My Confession*, but also utilized the imagery and language in Chamberlain's work to create *Blood Meridian*. In both narratives, the author attempts to convey the reality of the harsh, unyielding desert plains on which each work exists, and the effects of that landscape on the characters. One of the ever-present features of each landscape was an all-encompassing dust, which covered bodies, food, and all that the men had with them. While marching in Mexico, Chamberlain recounts an opportunity for relief from the dust:

At noon we reached a small stream of most excellent clear cold water; and men and animals rushed into it together. What rest and vitality it gave us to get rid of the two days' accumulation of dust that had settled on our faces, clinging to our hair and the men's long beards to such an extent that we lost all resemblance to humanity and presented an appearance at once grotesque and horrible. (78)

Chamberlain's passage illustrates a high point of contact between the two novels. Chamberlain's statement that the men had "lost all resemblance to humanity" is a prominent theme in *Blood Meridian*. Consistently throughout the text, McCarthy utilizes the power of dust and the landscape to transform the men from persons to other-worldly apparitions. During the kid's first march in the desert with Captain White, McCarthy writes that "the white noon saw them through the waste like a ghost army, so pale they were with dust, like shades of figures erased upon a

board” (46). Later in the evening of the same day, “under the moonlight a strange party of elders with white dust thick on their mustaches and eyebrows” (46).

Chamberlain’s assessment that he and his companions appeared “grotesque and horrible,” appears an apt description for much of what occurs in *Blood Meridian*. However, in his descriptions of men consumed by dust, instead of transforming them into the grotesque, McCarthy simply refers to them as creatures foreign to the world they inhabit. When the kid and Sproule are attempting to make their way out of the desert on foot, McCarthy states that “they were so pale with dust, their hair so white and faces pinched, they looked like little gnomes” (68). In a novel overwhelmed by the grotesque and horrible, McCarthy’s choice to craft his men as ghosts, elders, and gnomes is meaningful. In Chamberlain’s work, the ability and agency to transform men into the horrible exists in nature; yet in McCarthy’s work, transformations through nature do not reach the level of extremity which Chamberlain calls for. This recalls McCarthy’s Mennonite, who warns the kid and another man that “the wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid for a million years before men were and only men have the power to wake it” (40). The implication here is that that which is truly horrible can only come from men; nature does not have the ability to transform to such a degree because that which is horrible and grotesque already exists inside men.

In what appears to have been a simple engagement with dust, the intricacy of McCarthy’s utilization of *My Confession* begins to show. McCarthy also expands on Chamberlain’s assertion that he and his companions had “lost all resemblance to humanity.” Glanton’s gang also loses any identifying marks of their humanity, when further into the novel McCarthy relates the tale of the men coming into a new garrison and being greeted by a lieutenant:

Where in this pukehole can a man get a drink? he [Glanton] said. It was the first word any of them had spoken. Coutts looked them over. Haggard and haunted and blacked by the sun. The lines and pores of their skin deeply grimed with gunblack where they’d

washed the bores of their weapons. Even the horses looked alien to any he'd ever seen, decked as they were in human hair and skin. Save for their guns and buckles and a few pieces of metal in the harness of the animals there was nothing about these arrivals to suggest even the discovery of the wheel. (232)

McCarthy's choice to include the "first word" spoken by Glanton further depicts the men as primates, appearing as though they have actually been birthed from the desert. Chamberlain, in his passage, equates himself and his companions to animals, noting that both man and animal alike rushed to the water. Here both men acknowledge the balancing effect of the desert, and its ability to reduce men to beasts. While the horses in Chamberlain's work were equal to men in their thirst, McCarthy's horses are attired in human hair and skin, connoting a further equality of man and beast. Immediately following this scene, Glanton's gang is refused service in a crude restaurant because the proprietor believes them all to be black. This fact, along with the men's muteness, and their alien appearance, signifies McCarthy's compression of Chamberlain's text through remission of time. Glanton's gang comes to the garrison appearing and behaving like men left behind by time, cavemen who have existed solely in the desert encountering society for the first time.

Chamberlain's text put men on the same level as animals while still in the current time-frame; McCarthy, instead of expanding on the "grotesque and horrible" appearances of the men, chose to present them as men who had somehow failed to properly evolve with civilization. Chamberlain has made the assertion that the desert has the ability to reduce man to the level of animals, but that reduction is only temporary, as evidenced by the "rest and vitality" Chamberlain's group gains from water and respite from the desert. McCarthy's expansion of Chamberlain's passage indicates a belief that the changes Glanton's gang has undergone are permanent; but recalling the Mennonite's statement about the wrath of God, the desert has not changed the men as much as it has brought out the primordial wrath in them which has existed

since man's inception. Chamberlain's work engages war and evil in episodes of contact which are temporary. McCarthy's work is consumed by violence from its opening pages, and thus while McCarthy has utilized Chamberlain's work, the differing views of each man on the presence of war in humanity are apparent.

The varied views on the capabilities of violence in man become clear when examining episodes of violence in each work that are remarkably similar. Early in Chamberlain's work, readers are exposed to one of the most violent scenes in *My Confession*. During their march to Parras, Chamberlain's group was constantly flanked by a group of what he called "Guerillars," who would pick off members of his group, as Chamberlain warns:

Woe to the unfortunate soldier who straggled behind. He was lassoed, stripped naked, and dragged through clumps of cactus until his body was full of needle-like thorns; then his privates cut off and crammed into his mouth, he was left to die in the solitude of the chapperal or to be eaten alive by vultures and coyotes. Such were the daily acts of the Guerillars. (69)

Immediately prior to this passage, Chamberlain has remarked that the march reminded him "of scenes in Don Quixote," and following the warning he launches into an attempt to relate the strangeness of the landscape to readers (68). The importance of Chamberlain's relating this passage to readers is the distance he keeps from the troubling actions of his enemies. The impersonality of Chamberlain's passage is surprising in a work where Chamberlain attempts to inject himself and his personal thoughts on to all that he encounters. On the surface, Chamberlain's attitude towards these episodes comes across as blasé and dismissive; however, this is not the case. To Chamberlain, despite his pugilistic nature and his determination to be a good soldier, violence for the sake of violence is foreign and incomprehensible.

In contrast to *My Confession*'s shying away from brutality, *Blood Meridian* fully engages violence, and allows readers the opportunity to experience the ramifications of that violence. In a

similar scene to Chamberlain's, McCarthy displays a willingness to be in contact with the bloodshed:

Five wagons smoldered on the desert floor and the riders dismounted and moved among the bodies of the dead argonauts in silence, those right pilgrims nameless among the stones with their terrible wounds, the viscera spilled from their sides and the naked torsos bristling with arrowshafts. Some by their beards were men but yet wore strange menstrual wounds between their legs and no man's parts for these had been cut away and hung dark and strange from their grinning mouths. In their wigs of dried blood they lay gazing up with ape's eyes at brother sun now rising in the east. (152-53)

The similarities and contrasts between Chamberlain and McCarthy's passages offer evidence to McCarthy's expansion of Chamberlain's work, and also his willingness to engage violence on a personal level. The victims in Chamberlain's account were men in his regiment, men he would know and would have had interactions with. Yet the passage treats the victims not as men, but as unfortunate soldiers who were easily forgotten once they had straggled behind. The general lack of humanity allowed the victims is striking. In contrast, McCarthy's account of the dead and mutilated deals with men completely foreign to Glanton's gang. In this passage, McCarthy searches for some method to identify the argonauts, examining beards and genitalia to simply know them as men. Chamberlain's passage does relate what happens to the soldiers after they have been killed; they are left to die in the shrubs, and "in solitude," as Chamberlain states. The attitude of death in McCarthy's work is opposed to the isolation Chamberlain writes of. The argonauts "lay gazing up with ape's eyes at brother sun now rising in the east," and this brief statement allows much insight. The "ape's eyes" that McCarthy writes of immediately draw us back to the description of Glanton's gang as un-evolved primates. The desert's neutralizing effect has taken place on these men, but the similarities between these men and Glanton's implies connectivity in all men who have crossed that desert. Thus, contact with the desert has drawn all men into a closer relationship with nature and each other. This fact is further iterated by

McCarthy's belief that the men were gazing at "brother sun," and the close connection that these men share with nature implies that the solitude of *My Confession* does not exist when men are in communion with the desert. After the kid and his companions have discovered the argonauts, McCarthy writes that they "squatted at the fires and boiled water and drank coffee and roasted meat and lay down to sleep among the dead" (153). This passage illustrates McCarthy's compression, by literally making the men one with the desert.

Glanton's gang eats and sleeps with the dead, and the importance of this act is illustrated through the reading of Chamberlain. Chamberlain's implication that in death there is solitude is subverted in this section of *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy's surprisingly gentle treatment of the dead and his desire to find connection for the argonauts in a lonely desert stems directly from Chamberlain's harsh treatment. The utilization of the genitalia in the mouths of the deceased links these two passages without question. Instead of treating death as an unfortunate circumstance, that can be glossed over immediately with details of the landscape, or reminiscing about *Don Quixote*, McCarthy inserts the need to accept death. The men in *Blood Meridian* live alongside death for that night, treating it not as an abnormality, but another facet of the desert surface. In utilizing Chamberlain's work, the compression McCarthy has made here, instead of one of violence, is of connectivity.

Chamberlain's insouciant attitude towards death and war is evident throughout the work, but perhaps no more so than during the first battle he takes place in. Chamberlain introduces "The Battle of Buena Vista" with his statement that "the next morning was glorious. It was February 22nd, Washington's Birthday! The camp was alive with preparations for battle" (114). The giddiness of Chamberlain at the onset of battle is tangible. His nonchalant attitude continues as he writes of the "magnificent" Mexican cavalry, and the moving benediction they performed at the onset of battle. The narration of the actual fighting assumes an omniscient tone, as he is able

to comment on numerous skirmishes and assumes to understand the tactics of his commanding officers. His role as casual observer further illustrates distance between himself and war, a distance which in *Blood Meridian* instantly dissolves. If there is one man in *Blood Meridian* who appears to have the same unconcerned attitude towards war, it is Captain White. White has the same disposition towards Mexicans as Chamberlain; he describes them as a “race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers” (34). While Chamberlain doesn’t go to this extreme in *My Confession*, he does lump all of the lower classes together in his mind. When Chamberlain hears a group of Mexican Lancers humming while on a picket line, he states that “their voices sounded sweet and had that mournful tone that I had noticed among the slaves of the South and the peons of Mexico – the dirge of souls in bondage, the cry of an oppressed race” (129).

Captain White can be seen as an expanded embodiment of Chamberlain’s racism. White shares Chamberlain’s propensity for espousing his political beliefs to anyone who will listen, and his need to maintain rank and class is also similar. Throughout much of *My Confession*, readers are subjected to Chamberlain’s railing against volunteers in the army, at one point describing them as “totally incompetent, and a disgrace to their profession” (68). His sense of self worth is based on his position in the army, touting himself as one who deserves command, but also as one who always follows orders. His need for a hierarchy becomes more prominent when, later in the work, he assumes the task of breaking down soldiers in the army to three classes, while in a realistic sense they are all of the same rank² (186). Captain White also feels the need to promote the hierarchical system of the military, and it is clear that this system is fundamental to his sense of identity. During the Captain’s first interview with the kid, McCarthy repeatedly emphasizes

² The three classes Chamberlain divides the men into are: The Dead Beats, The Old Soldiers, and The “Dare Devils,” and naturally Chamberlain considered himself “a fair representative of the third order” (187). The irony lies in Chamberlain’s belief that he was admired by his companions, since even in the boastful text there are few instances of any admiration emanating from his fellow soldiers.

the Captain's desire, expressed by himself and his lieutenant, for the kid to address Captain White as "sir" (32). In the interview between White and the kid, McCarthy calls attention to when the kid does, and does not properly address the Captain, concluding the interview as the kid calls the lieutenant "sir," gaining the response that there "aint no need to sir me" (36). The emphasis on Captain White's need for hierarchical order places him in immediate contact with Chamberlain, and his casual attitude towards war.

During the company's first march with the kid, the men come into view of a small group headed towards them. White initially calls the group "a parcel of heathen stockthieves," estimates that there are merely a dozen "ragged Indians," and finally, after smiling, informs his sergeant that they "may see a little sport here before they day is out" (51). The "little sport" quickly becomes a massacre. The Comanches had concealed their ranks until within striking distance of White's men, and the utterance of "oh my god" from White's sergeant are the last words spoken before the slaughter (53).³ The importance of comparing Captain White to Chamberlain lies in McCarthy's assertion that death and war cannot be treated as happenstance. Both men approached war and death as random occurrences in life; in establishing Captain White as representative of Chamberlain, through his racism and casual attitude towards war, McCarthy is able to insert his views on the ramifications of treating war in such a manner. While Chamberlain never comes to any serious physical harm due to war, in rewriting Chamberlain as a victim of massacre, also responsible for the deaths of so many in his charge, *Blood Meridian* serves as a revisionary tale of caution.

³ McCarthy's description of the Comanche Indians during the slaughter, "one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained wedding veil"(52), appears to come directly from Colonel Richard Irving Dodge's *Our Wild Indians*. Dodge, recounting a meeting with a Cheyenne chief, writes that "over his head and face he wore an ordinary green veil. Over that, perched on the very top of his head, and at least two sizes too small for him, was a tall straight-bodied stove-pipe hat" (299-300).

McCarthy continues the expansion into death when he revises another of Chamberlain's tales. Chamberlain's "A Night's Adventure in Chihuahua" chapter details an evening Chamberlain spent with two other members of his company that begins in a bar and nearly ends in death (248). Chamberlain's title for this chapter is clearly meant to understate the severity of the event and impress upon readers the brash attitude he holds towards death. In McCarthy's scene, which has clearly evolved out of Chamberlain's, McCarthy's subtitles for this chapter are simply "The cantina" and "A desperate encounter" (166). McCarthy's subtitles are not meant to convey anything besides the bare facts; a desperate encounter occurs in a cantina. Nor are the subtitles in *Blood Meridian* meant to draw attention or emphasis to any one particular element in the work; each episode is merely another occurrence in life, with no more meaning than the one before. Chamberlain's aggrandized speech and method of chaptering his work attempts to highlight the major passages in the novel which Chamberlain believed to be of high importance to readers. Conversely, McCarthy's chaptering treats each element as similar in value, allowing the reader to assign importance wherever one sees fit. Thus, McCarthy has also compressed the titles of Chamberlain's work.

Chamberlain's "adventure" begins in a similar fashion as McCarthy's; two groups of men enter seedy bars in Mexico, and both groups are unwelcome. Chamberlain begins his chapter with the casual attitude one has come to expect from the interloper assuming an air of dominance over a lesser race of people. His tone shifts when he enters the bar:

The room was full of ugly looking cutthroats who greeted our entrance with fierce *carajos* and ribald jests. Common prudence should have caused us to retire, but that wasn't our style, so we swaggered up to the bar and called for the drinks. Then selecting for partners three of the best looking *senoritas* in the room, we took places on the floor and called for a dance, when Moore cried out, "I am cut!" A "greaser" had knifed him in the side. My revolver was out in a moment, and seeing an ugly yellow belly sneaking for the door, I sprang upon the *banqueta*, fired over the heads of the crowd and shot the bravo in the back; with a yell he fell dead. (248)

Chamberlain continues his tale, informing readers that the dead “greaser” was a wanted man, and then relates his brave and intoxicated actions that saved Moore’s life. There would be no happy ending in *Blood Meridian*’s relation of the same tale. McCarthy begins his revision by surrounding the event in death; as Chamberlain and his companions breezily strolled about town, “drinking freely,” Glanton’s gang enters the town in the midst of a funeral procession. McCarthy writes that the Americans in Nacori, *Blood Meridian*’s Chihuahua, were “half crazed with the enormity of their own presence in that immense and bloodslaked waste, commandeering meal and meat or indulging a latent taste for rape” (177). McCarthy’s comment appears to immediately address the attitude of Chamberlain in the impoverished towns of Mexico. Chamberlain’s conflation of himself and his actions evidence the “enormity” of which McCarthy writes, and the “commandeering of meat and meal” speaks to the air of one who, because he descends from a more civilized and affluent culture, believes himself to be above the laws and customs of his surroundings. This hubris of Chamberlain has no place in *Blood Meridian*.

Glanton’s gang enters the cantina, with similar, yet varied results to Chamberlain’s encounter:

Within the cantina the Americans had no more than seated themselves before a muttered insult from a nearby table brought three or four of them to their feet. The kid addressed the table in his wretched spanish and demanded which among those sullen inebriates had spoken...A drunk at the table rose to his feet with a knife and lurched after them...The judge could see over their heads and he raised one hand to those behind him. The bier was just passing...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 a 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. (178)

Within the similarities of each passage, there also exist the notable compressions of McCarthy.

In *My Confession*, Moore’s exclamation of “I am cut” was the source for Grimley’s “I’m killed.”

These two utterances have powerful implications. Both men were “cut,” but Grimley does not die immediately after receiving the wound. Once the fight concludes, he’s found propped up on a wall, gun in hand, defending himself and his companions. Moore, on the other hand, was barely able to walk, and had difficulty making it back to their camp. Yet while one man continued fighting until his death, it is the contrast in each utterance that speaks volumes to the differences in the works. Grimley’s acceptance of his death is immediate; once he has been stabbed he has no hope of surviving. This is the case because death surrounds everything in *Blood Meridian*. Moore is able to save energy in his defense because he knows his companions will defend him, if he makes it back to camp he’ll be treated and cared for, and that at the worst they will be jailed. For Grimley, this is not the case, because there is no camp to return to, and there also exists the possibility that Glanton will order him executed because he would slow the group’s progress.

Chamberlain and Judge Holden both fire over the heads of crowds to shoot the men responsible for both stabbings, yet Chamberlain shoots the man in the back, while the Judge shoots him straight through the middle of the forehead. Altering where the attacker was shot seemingly adds nothing to McCarthy’s revision of Chamberlain besides violence for the sake of violence. The revision was not necessary to advancing the plot, yet it does factor into the discussion of *Blood Meridian*’s over-arching thematic flattening of *My Confession*. The incongruence between the two works appears to stem, once again, from each author’s view of death. Shooting someone in the back, typically considered a coward’s move, creates the notion that death can spring upon the unsuspecting victim at any time. McCarthy’s alteration to Chamberlain’s text presents an alternative view of death. Instead of the immediate act of shooting a man in the back, McCarthy suggests that death is an elongated experience, another symptom of a flattened alteration. Judge Holden shot the man in the forehead because the image of a man staring at death and experiencing it simultaneously creates an expansion of time and

depth in the moment that was absent from *My Confession*. There are numerous deaths in *Blood Meridian* which occur instantaneously, but the relevance of this death in the cantina lies in its existence as a compression of *My Confession*.

The most prominent aspects of *My Confession* which McCarthy draws from are the characters that exist in both works. *Blood Meridian's* two major characters besides the kid, Judge Holden and John Joel Glanton, appear at the conclusion of Chamberlain's text. However, prior to their arrival, several of *Blood Meridian's* secondary characters appear derived from those in *My Confession*. While the inclusion of these characters in *Blood Meridian* affirms McCarthy's use of *My Confession* as a source for the novel, examining these characters in greater detail than mere acknowledgment allows a deeper understanding of *Blood Meridian* and continues the discussion of how McCarthy's book is a compressed version Chamberlain's. In *Blood Meridian* there exists a distinct lack of internal monologue from any of the characters; no clues are given to their emotional states, and no thoughts are alluded to by McCarthy. In examining the relationships of Chamberlain to the characters that also exist in *Blood Meridian*, the opportunity arises to transfer Chamberlain's emotions, which he describes in much detail, to McCarthy's kid. This transference of emotion necessitates one's belief that the kid is written, at least partially, as a representation of Chamberlain. The ability to examine some of the relationships of the kid to those around him opens a wide scope of possibilities in further comprehending *Blood Meridian*.

The first wave of characters which Chamberlain meets, who also appear in *Blood Meridian*, are Doc Irving, Same Tate, and Ben Tobin. The meeting between these men is brief, but telling. On guard duty one evening, Chamberlain was startled by the sound of approaching horses. He calls out to ascertain who is coming, and is met with the reply "'Greasers' by G—d" (100-101). Following this exchange, Chamberlain recounts that "one person came out of the black obscurity and said 'Ben Tobin and Doc Irving and two others of Ben McCulloch's Rangers.

Now who in the D—l are you, and have you any whiskey, for I am as dry as a powder horn!” (101). Immediately the differences between Chamberlain’s Tobin and McCarthy’s become evident. In *Blood Meridian*, there exists no evidence of Tobin’s drinking, nor would the Tobin of *Blood Meridian* speak in racial slurs. Chamberlain goes into some detail when describing Tobin, writing that “Ben Tobin was one of the best fellows in the world, son of a Irish gentleman, was sent to Maynooth College to be educated for the Priesthood, was expelled, came to America, and was now the wild rollicking Texan Ranger” (102). McCarthy refers to Tobin more often as the “expriest,” rather than addressing him by name, and Tobin speaks as one would expect an Irish gentleman to speak, commonly saying “aye” and referring to other men as “lads.” Instead of a “wild rollicking Texan Ranger,” McCarthy’s creation is much more an expriest, consistently engaging Judge Holden in theoretical debates, and at one point warns the kid that “God will not love ye forever” (162). McCarthy’s revision of Chamberlain’s Tobin illustrates the complex flattening of an individual; McCarthy has taken Chamberlain’s direct description of Tobin, and ignored the actions of the character in *My Confession*. Therefore, McCarthy’s Tobin is a condensed version of Chamberlain’s character.

Chamberlain’s relationships with Tobin, Doc Irving, and Sam Tate have impacted McCarthy’s rendering of the kid’s relationships with these three men. When Chamberlain joins up with Glanton’s men in *My Confession*, and sees these three again, he expresses his “great joy” at seeing his “old acquaintances” again (267). Chamberlain was on good terms with the men, and his joy upon seeing them again indicates affection. While *Blood Meridian* is devoid of any sense of affection, McCarthy has utilized this detail in his depiction of the kid’s intricate relationships with each of these men. McCarthy introduces Tate as one “who had fought with McCulloch’s Rangers as had Tobin,” properly placing him in the historical context which Chamberlain had described. Tate’s first interaction with the kid comes during *Blood Meridian*’s tarot scene, in

which the kid's fate is told by an old woman. As the kid is silently mocked and embarrassed by Judge Holden, at once the subject of each man's attention, Tate intervenes and shifts attention away from the kid (95). As episodes of goodwill are minimal in the text, Tate's actions stand out as an aberration of the norm. The kid's next meaningful interaction with Tate comes when the two men are left to decide who must execute Shelby in the desert. Tate alone seems to understand the inner-workings of the kid; he worries aloud that the kid "might not do it" and that "Glanton might come back" (206). Tate behaves, not exactly as a friend, but as one who is concerned for the kid's well-being. Tate attempts to rescue the kid from having to murder two innocent victims; as the juggler who read the kid's fortune inched closer, and the kid's agitation increased, McCarthy appeared to be slowly building the scene to the point of murder. Tate's intervention in the scene immediately broke that tension and allowed the kid to fade out of attention. Tate also appears to offer to kill Shelby, or to at least aid the kid in some way, but he is dismissed. McCarthy has inflated the title of "old acquaintance" which Chamberlain gave to Tate, and adapted that relationship to fit the landscape of *Blood Meridian*. Tate's protection of the kid in McCarthy's text exists as an example of compressed morality and benevolence in the work. There is no room for the frivolity and chummy acquaintances that Chamberlain writes of; there can only be the condensation of evil that permeates the work.

The episode with Shelby in the desert deserves special consideration, as it is another scene from *My Confession* which McCarthy has abbreviated. The most striking difference between the episodes in *Blood Meridian* and *My Confession* comes in the fact that Chamberlain himself was not chosen as an executioner, while the kid was. As the kid has been equated with Chamberlain, the implications of the kid's choice are called to even greater attention. McCarthy also draws attention to the fact that in Chamberlain's narrative, all four of the "poor fellows had watched" the proceedings, while in *Blood Meridian*, Shelby "alone sat watching." The effect of

this shift is humanizing through its consolidation; the anxiety and tension that Chamberlain writes of during the proceedings becomes tangible in McCarthy's prose. Shelby was the only injured member of the company marked to be executed who watched the proceedings, while in Chamberlain's work, the four watched and were quickly dispatched, allowing no empathic emotions to enter into the conversation. Yet in *Blood Meridian*, a work typically devoid of any sense of emotion, McCarthy crafts that empathy through humanizing the kid and Shelby. Thus, Chamberlain's concluding statement regarding the executions, that "all felt sad and guilty," though not surprising given the circumstances, appear to be a mere rectifying statement in lieu of the immense relief that Chamberlain felt at not having to kill one of his companions. Chamberlain was pleased with this, and the sad guilt he writes of is an afterthought. In *Blood Meridian*, guilt and sadness are the driving forces behind the interactions between the kid and Shelby when the execution will supposedly take place. Shelby wept, and the kid's indecision, absolutely propelled by guilt, was derived from the dehumanizing attitude of *My Confession*. *My Confession*'s execution episode had the possibility to be a redemptive, humanizing effort. McCarthy offered evidence of this in *Blood Meridian*. However, Chamberlain chose to propel the impersonality of his text, and thus McCarthy's work, in this situation, may be viewed as a humanizing effort through the consolidation of the emotions which Chamberlain wrote of, despite the possible insincerity of the text.

The two most prominent characters of contact in the works are John Glanton and Judge Holden. Glanton is introduced early in *My Confession*, during a confrontation which Chamberlain witnesses during a poker game in the Bexar Exchange, a saloon in San Antonio. Glanton's physical appearance, which readers of *Blood Meridian* are unable to locate, is described in detail by Chamberlain:

One, who was quietly playing his hand in a mild timid way utterly at variance with his hardened desperate appearance, was short and thick set, his face bronzed by exposure to the hue of an Indian, with eyes deeply sunken and bloodshot, and coarse black hair hanging in snakelike locks down his back. His costume was that of a Mexican herdman, made of leather, with a Mexican blanket thrown over his shoulder. (40)

Immediately, readers notice the confusion over race that Chamberlain comments on, recalling the same confusion McCarthy utilized when Glanton's gang was refused service in a restaurant.

After his introduction, Glanton enters into a dispute with a younger Ranger at the table, and then throws a drink in the man's face. Instead of apologizing, Glanton tells the man to "shoot and be d—d, but if you miss, John Glanton won't miss you!" (40). As the Rangers pistol misfires, Glanton leaps up, slices his neck half-way through, and then stands on the dead man's body.

Chamberlain's description of Glanton as a ruthless killer, at odds with his appearance serves as an explanation for one of the more atypical episodes in *Blood Meridian*. Glanton and David Brown come upon a "large and vicious dog" defending a hotel room, and instead of allowing Brown to shoot the dog, Glanton stops him, feeds the dog, and "when they rode west out of the canyon it was trotting with a slight limp at the heels of Glanton's horse" (149). The dog is the only living creature in *Blood Meridian* with which Glanton appears to have any concern. Occasionally in the text, readers witness Glanton inquiring over the well-being or location of the animal, and McCarthy consistently references the existence of the dog throughout the remainder of the work.

In this episode, readers witness McCarthy's flattening of a statement in *My Confession*, subtly condensing the idea of Glanton being at variance with his appearance. The contrast between appearance and action is the same in both works; in *My Confession* Glanton plays poker in a timid, quiet manner, at odds with his dress. In *Blood Meridian*, Glanton chooses to preserve and nurture a life rather than take it, at odds with his past behavior. Because McCarthy resists a thorough physical description of Glanton's appearance, the only appearance he can be at odds with in *Blood Meridian* is his reputation.

Also of note in Chamberlain's description of Glanton is the location of this first appearance. Bexar, where Chamberlain encountered Glanton, was also the location of one of the kid's early fights in *Blood Meridian*. The Bexar saloon of *Blood Meridian* resembles the one of *My Confession*; both have men playing games at the tables, and both emit an air of suspicion, as evidenced by the silence of the Mexicans when the kid enters (23). However, as Chamberlain enters the saloon at ease, with a friend, and with enough money to comfortably purchase a drink, the kid enters the saloon alone, penniless, and noticeably tense. McCarthy's utilization of Bexar as a location offers a perspective on the opposite end of the spectrum in which Chamberlain exists. The saloon the kid enters could easily be read as the same one Chamberlain meets Glanton in, simply on a different night. Therefore, the relationship between the two works goes beyond mere contact, as *Blood Meridian* begins to overlap in setting and place in *My Confession*.

The kid's experience in the saloon is in contrast with Chamberlain's. The kid sweeps the floor of the saloon in hopes of earning a drink, but when he is told to leave by the bartender, the violent nature of the kid emerges. After cracking one bottle over the barman's head, he "backhanded the second bottle across the barman's skull and crammed the jagged remnant into his eye as he went down" (25). Along with the location of each episode, the most striking similarity between the two is that they both conclude with a death. Both episodes also serve as moments of inception for *Blood Meridian*. So much of McCarthy's work draws from Chamberlain's brief relationship with Glanton that the meeting between the two serves as a launching point for the novel. In the same vein, the kid's murder of the Mexican is what causes Captain White to search him out and induct him into his command, which ultimately leads to the kid joining up with Glanton. McCarthy's engagement with *My Confession* in this instance attempts to display the experience of a man far-removed from Chamberlain, both financially and socially, and how social and financial circumstances fail to remove one from the proximity of

death. The coexisting moments of inception allow the importance of the scene in Chamberlain's work on *Blood Meridian*, made evident only through the brief mention of the saloon in Bexar and the appearance of John Glanton.

While Chamberlain offers a physical description of Glanton that is lacking in *Blood Meridian*, his description of Glanton's past also elucidates pieces of McCarthy's work:

John Glanton was born in South Carolina, but when a mere youth his parents moved to Texas and joined the settlement of Stephen Austin. Nothing remarkable distinguished Glanton in his youth from the other young men of the settlement...A young orphan girl, whose parents had been killed by the Lipans, gained the affections of the young South Carolinian; his love was returned, the marriage day was set, though his affianced was only seventeen. Glanton had built a log hut for his bride on the bank of the beautiful Guadalupe, and one day while most of the male settlers was at Austin's house discussing the threatening attitude of Mexico, a band of Lipan warriors charged on the outskirts of Gonzalez, killing and scalping the old women and young children, and carrying away the girls, Glanton's betrothed among the latter. (268)

Glanton and the men of the settlement attempted to rescue the captives, but the girls were scalped and murdered before they had the chance. Chamberlain notes that when Glanton returned from the rescue mission, he "returned a changed man" (269). From this point on Glanton took to drinking, would leave for days and return with fresh scalps, and "sought the companionship of the most hardened desperadoes of the frontier; in all Indian fights he was the devil incarnate" (269). The effect of this information on readers of *Blood Meridian* immediately humanizes McCarthy's Glanton. The information regarding Glanton's deceased fiancée recalls McCarthy's mention of the "bloodstained weddingveil" that one of the Comanches who attacked Captain White's party was wearing. As readers witnessed Glanton's affection towards the abandoned dog in *Blood Meridian*, Chamberlain's work also references a penchant for caring for creatures which have no one left to care for them, and cannot fend for themselves. Chamberlain has introduced a measure of sympathy for Glanton, explaining his actions and violent nature to some extent. This humanization of Glanton is markedly absent in *Blood Meridian*. In fact, the history or life stories

of all in *Blood Meridian*, save the kid, are lacking. However, McCarthy's work is still attempting to define the nature of man, trying to reveal that human nature is ultimately ruled by war and violence. McCarthy has chosen to do this without allowing basic human traits, such as sympathy, to enter into the text, and thoroughly flattened Chamberlain's description of Glanton in his creation. The decision to forego Glanton's past is indicative of this; Glanton represents humanity because war and violence are second nature to him, regardless of reason or emotion.

While McCarthy eschews Glanton's past, other episodes in *Blood Meridian* involving Glanton directly stem from *My Confession*. Chamberlain relates the events of one evening, sitting around a campfire, after Glanton had become drunk:

Suddenly he sprang up and drawing his revolver opened fire on us right and left. One of the Canadians received a shot in the leg, as a gentle reminder to flee from the wrath to come. Judge Holden seized the madman in his powerful arms, laid him down and soothed him as a mother would a fretful child, and Glanton soon sank into a drunken sleep. (274)

Some days later, Chamberlain returned to camp to find Glanton "raving drunk," and to "prevent trouble Glanton was lassoed and bound fast for the night" (287). In a scene in *Blood Meridian* also marked by the drunkenness of Glanton, readers witness the same actions being repeated:

By noon the day following Glanton in his drunkenness was taken with a kind of fit and he lurched crazed and disheveled into the little courtyard and began to open fire with his pistols. In the afternoon he lay bound to his bed like a madman while the judge sat with him and cooled his brow with rags of water and spoke to him in a low voice. (191)

Again, Glanton has gotten drunk, begun firing wildly at those around him without regard for their identity, been tied to a bed, and finally babied by Judge Holden until he falls asleep.

Undoubtedly, Chamberlain's work is the source for this episode in *Blood Meridian*. However, McCarthy has slightly altered Chamberlain's narrative. In *My Confession*, Glanton shoots a man in the leg, while in *Blood Meridian* there is no direct mention of anyone being shot. As

McCarthy's compression of *My Confession* has typically led to more extreme violence, the lack of a victim in this scene is remarkable. The insignificance of the shots fired in *Blood Meridian* indicates that the shooting was not the focal point of the episode for McCarthy. Instead, the emphasis appears to be on Glanton's relationship with Holden, due to the fact that the interactions between the two men in each scene most closely resemble each other. The image of a parent slowly rocking their child to sleep is at odds with the tone and disposition of *Blood Meridian*. The implication that anything at all can be said to Glanton to calm him down is also extraordinary in a man who thus far responds only to actions rather than words. Therefore, while McCarthy chose not to directly include the details of Glanton's past which were available to him, McCarthy did momentarily humanize Glanton with this nod to his past. As Judge Holden is one who claims to possess knowledge of all history, assuming his familiarity with Glanton's murdered fiancée is not too far-fetched, and thus, Glanton's past exists in *Blood Meridian* in a sole moment, an entire history condensed into a whisper.

While John Joel Glanton has been historically documented in numerous sources, *My Confession* is the only historically verifiable source for McCarthy's Judge Holden. Thus, it comes as little surprise that the Judge Holden of *Blood Meridian* resembles the one of *My Confession* more closely than any other character McCarthy has drawn from. Chamberlain's description of Holden as one of "gigantic" size, and "destitute of hair" clearly matches McCarthy's character (271). Chamberlain goes on to describe the Judge:

Holden was by far the best educated man in northern Mexico; he conversed with all in their own language, spoke in several Indian lingos, at a fandango would take the Harp or Guitar from the hands of the musicians and charm all with his wonderful performance, and out waltz any *poblana* of the ball. He was "plum centre" with rifle or revolver, a daring horseman. (271)

McCarthy's description of Holden, spoken by Tobin, appears to match much of Chamberlain's:

That great hairless thing. You wouldn't think to look at him that he could outdance the devil himself now would ye? God the man is a dancer, you'll not take that away from him. And fiddle. He's the greatest fiddler I ever heard and that's an end on it. The greatest. He can cut a trail, shoot a rifle, ride a horse, track a deer. He's been all over the world. Him and the governor they sat up till breakfast and it was Paris this and London that in five languages, you'd have give something to of heard them. (123)

Beyond the similarities in description, it is also remarkable that both descriptions of Judge Holden come from men who are diametrically opposed to his way of being. Tobin existed as a theological counterpoint to Judge Holden. Chamberlain as well, states that "I hated him at first sight, and he knew it, yet nothing could be more gentle and kind than his deportment towards me" (272). While McCarthy has mirrored Judge Holden's image in *Blood Meridian*, he has also captured the unsettling personality presented in *My Confession*.

In the previous scenes of Glanton's drunken hysteria, it was Holden who calmed him down. However, both of these scenes were marked by reminders of Holden's presumed pedophilia. Though never explicitly stated in *Blood Meridian*, another outcome of McCarthy's compression, Holden's sexual propensity towards children is apparent. Immediately following Glanton's being bound to the bed to prevent trouble, Chamberlain reports a disturbance in the village they occupied at the time. He notes that while he was sketching, "an uproar arose in the village caused by Holden's seizing hold of one of the girls and proceeding to take gross liberties with her person" (287). Chamberlain also notes that when departing one town, they found a ten year old girl "fouly violated and murdered," and that the hand print on the girl's neck could only have matched Holden's hand. Yet, while suspected, he was never charged with the crime. These two mentions of Holden's pedophilia served as ample substance in McCarthy's creation of Holden. Once again though, the Holden of *Blood Meridian* is not an expansion of Chamberlain's Holden, but a compression, as becomes evident when examining instances of this pedophilia in McCarthy's text.

As Holden had talked Glanton to sleep in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy notes that “outside voices called across the steep hillsides. A little girl was missing and parties of citizens had turned out to search the mineshafts” (191). When the Yuma Indians come to kill the Judge, immediately after Glanton’s death, they find “a girl of perhaps twelve years cowering naked in the floor. Behind them also naked stood the judge” (275). Both scenes link Holden to the obvious pedophilia evidenced in *My Confession*; however, the claim is never substantiated in *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy’s Holden exists outside of categorization; Chamberlain saw the Judge as an extravagantly repulsive human, but a human none the less. McCarthy’s Holden appears as one who exists outside the confinements of humanity. To categorize him as a pedophile is to limit the scope of the creation, and thus this statement cannot be made. Instead, *Blood Meridian*’s Judge Holden is a man bent on extracting all he can out of every crevice of the plane on which he exists. As Holden states in *Blood Meridian*, “the freedom of birds is an insult to me,” such is the livelihood and desire of all those he comes into contact with (199).

McCarthy also deviates on the story of Holden and the ten year old girl found murdered and raped. In *Blood Meridian*, the Judge has taken a young Apache boy salvaged from a raid as a companion, and one evening plays with the child fireside:

Some of the men played with it and made it laugh and they gave it jerky and it sat chewing and watching gravely the figures that passed above it. They covered it with a blanket and in the morning the judge was dandling it on one knee while the men saddled their horses. Toadvine saw him with the child as he passed with his saddle but when he came back ten minutes later leading the horse the child was dead and the judge had scalped it....Another ten minutes and they were on the plain again. (164)

The repetition of the number ten in this episode immediately recalls the ten year old girl from *My Confession*. McCarthy’s choice to switch the gender of the child indicates that the actions of the Judge are not sexually motivated, but rather indicate a desire for control over all creatures. Upon seeing the dead child, Toadvine puts a gun to Holden’s head, but does not shoot him. Just as the

Judge was accused but not charged in *My Confession*, his actions once again have no repercussions in McCarthy's text. Here McCarthy reiterates his conflation of the Judge as existing outside of the bounds of typical human law.

Several other episodes in *My Confession* surrounding the Judge illuminate McCarthy's creation. The first of these occurs when Chamberlain, along with Holden, are passing through the desert. Chamberlain writes that "on the third day a strange object miles away attracted our notice. It appeared like a tent, but what was a tent pitched in the desert for?" (275). In the wreckage of the "tent," the men find a scalped family, along with a Mormon Bible. One of the men in Chamberlain's party comments that "this is the work of white men" (275). The image of the tent in the middle of the desert reminds readers of the revival meeting the kid attends when he first sees Judge Holden. Held in a large, "ratty canvas tent," the revival ends in chaos when the Judge accuses the reverend of violating an eleven year old girl, and the entire tent collapses as people flee (7). Numerous aspects of Chamberlain's work lend themselves to McCarthy's tent revival scene. Judge Holden is with Chamberlain, as he is in the tent with the kid, and the evil that presents itself in that tent is the same that led to the slaughter of the family in *My Confession*. Just as evil was the work of a white man in *Blood Meridian*, thus it was in *My Confession*. The correlation between whiteness and the evil Chamberlain mentions is a thread which McCarthy has expanded upon throughout, and also the inability to comprehend the situation which Chamberlain initially feels. In questioning why a tent would be pitched in the desert, Chamberlain suspends belief of the murder and scalping. McCarthy also utilizes this suspended belief in his creation of Holden; in withholding the Judge's past, while ascribing depraved actions to his character, McCarthy suspends judgment on Holden from both readers and the other men in Glanton's gang. This suspended judgment is what allows McCarthy's Holden to thrive; he is never executed for any of the crimes he commits, never held responsible for murder or presumed

rape, and is thus allowed freedom of movement and freedom from death, two traits that no other characters in the novel possess.

The freedom of movement allowed the Judge in both works borders on that of the supernatural, and it becomes clear for readers where this trait originates upon close inspection of *My Confession*. After leaving Judge Holden alone in the desert, fully expecting his death, Chamberlain and his companions awake in the evening to a troubling vision. Chamberlain writes that on the “second night we received quite a fright. It was towards morning when a shout from Ben Tobin awoke us, and the sight that greeted us caused us to seize our arms. Seated cross-legged by the fire, broiling raw meat, was the gaunt spectre of the Judge!” (296). In Chamberlain’s account, readers are exposed to two traits assigned to the Judge which McCarthy has expanded upon. The first of these is the Judge’s ability to survive in conditions which would kill most men. Left alone in the desert, without food, water, or protection, Chamberlain fully expected Holden’s death, but he was saved by compassionate Indians, prolonging his charmed life. The Judge’s ability to survive was condensed by McCarthy to the point of immortality. The final line of *Blood Meridian* reiterates Holden’s belief that “he will never die” (335). The expansion of this facet of Holden’s character is one that draws from many strands in *My Confession*. McCarthy appears to have observed the Judge’s existence outside the realm of typical law; both physically and judiciously, the Judge appears exempt from any harsh reaction to his way of being. While Holden is a minimal character in *My Confession*, and his actions elicit limited responses, casting him more as a nuisance to Chamberlain than anything else, McCarthy, through a flattened expansion, has molded this minimal character into the grandiose being of *Blood Meridian*.

Second, Holden’s ability to simply appear, as a “spectre,” was utilized by McCarthy in much the same way. The kid, also in flight through the desert with Tobin, was attempting to

outrun the Judge, who was intent on killing them both. McCarthy writes that Holden's voice would suddenly emanate from different locations while he called out to the kid, and that when the kid was prepared to shoot where the Judge's voice came from, he was "in another quarter altogether and he had the rifle ready at his shoulder" (289-90). McCarthy's Holden captures the chimeric appearance of Chamberlain's work, and the compression in this episode is one into fear created by these apparitions. In *My Confession*, the alarm that Tobin felt was short lived; soon after finding the Judge, Chamberlain and Tobin were sitting around the fire cracking jokes with him. In *Blood Meridian*, Tobin consistently exhorts the kid to kill Holden, to shoot his horses, and to kill his handicapped companion. In flattening out the fear that briefly existed in *My Confession*, and allowing that fear to wash over the landscape of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy has managed to create an episode in *Blood Meridian* that is at once in contact with *My Confession*, yet distant from the actual events of the text.

The epilogue to *Blood Meridian* is one of the more enigmatic aspects of the novel; however, it offers a final acknowledgment towards Chamberlain's work. In the introduction to *My Confession*, Roger Butterfield writes, discussing Chamberlain, that "there is nothing in the record to explain his artistic ability, though his father's occupation – stonecutter – suggests the ancient Yankee skill of engraving" (1). Though he is attempting to explain Chamberlain's drawings, which illuminate the work in their own way, Butterfield's inclusion of this information is of the utmost importance when deciphering McCarthy's epilogue. The epilogue begins as McCarthy relates the actions of a single man in the desert:

In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground. He uses an implement with two handles and he chucks it into the hole and he enkindles the stone in the hole with his steel hole by hole striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there. (337)

The unnamed man in McCarthy's epilogue is literally cutting stone, the same occupation as Chamberlain's father. Further proof of the correlation between the two works in this scene comes when McCarthy writes that the man's actions represent "a validation of sequence and causality as if each round and perfect hole owed its existence to the one before it there on that prairie upon which are the bones and the gatherers of bones and those who do not gather" (337). The notion of each hole owing its existence to the hole which preceded it alludes to the linear, flattened view which McCarthy has on the novels which have been written. The epilogue to *Blood Meridian* is a reiteration of the fact that "books are made out of books." The bones which lie under the surface of McCarthy's desert plain represent the novels which have come before *Blood Meridian*.

McCarthy's novel does owe its existence to *My Confession*, among so many other works; for one brief moment *Blood Meridian* exists above the surface, because at that moment the novel is not yet a bone. But in the next moment, *Blood Meridian*, like every novel it is made out of, will become a bone or a fossil, will become compressed and hardened, and will contribute in part to another work. If each novelist is a "gatherer of bones," unearthing and displaying these bones contributes to the greater appreciation of the whole

CHAPTER III

BLOOD MERIDIAN AND MOBY-DICK

In terms of works of pure fiction, no novel has been compared to *Blood Meridian* as consistently as Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Concerning the two works, Steven Shaviro writes that in "the entire range of American literature, only *Moby-Dick* bears comparison to *Blood Meridian*. Both novels are epic in scope, cosmically resonant, obsessed with open space and with language, exploring vast uncharted distances with a fanatically patient minuteness" (146). Melville's novel confronts many key features of American literature, including the sublime, the role of violence in shaping a nation, and the isolation that was crucially apparent in the time. McCarthy's novel touched on all of these ideas as well. The question that arises is how? How could McCarthy's stripped down language match that of Melville's in terms of these issues? In answering these questions, McCarthy's compression, or flattening, of Melville's novel can be fully appreciated. According to Shaviro, these are the two epic works of American literature, and while they are similar they are also drastically different, and the differences between the two exist due to McCarthy's compression of *Moby-Dick*. Harold Bloom has explored the possibilities of character correlations between the two works, ultimately offering the view that while McCarthy's work is clearly indebted to Melville's, direct comparisons between two primary characters in the novels are difficult to ascertain. Undoubtedly, *Blood Meridian* is made out of *Moby-Dick*; however, the extent of the connection between the two works has yet to be fully explored.

Melville himself offers insight into the difficulties which arise while attempting to fully examine two things side by side at the same instant in *Moby-Dick*:

Any one's experience will teach him, that though he can take in an indiscriminating sweep of things at one glance, it is quite impossible for him, attentively, and completely, to examine any two things – however large or however small – at one and the same instant of time; never mind if they lie side by side and touch each other. But if you now come to separate these two objects, and surround each by a circle of profound darkness; then, in order to see one of them, in such a manner as to bring your mind to bear on it, the other will be utterly excluded from your contemporary consciousness. (360-61)

Melville's words are powerfully relevant in the discussion of the two works. To attempt to completely compare each element of each novel side by side with the other is folly; instead, common elements and themes in each work must be examined with the goal of attempting to discern precisely what contributions *Blood Meridian* has accepted from *Moby-Dick*, and how McCarthy has condensed those contributions. Melville's suggestion to "surround each with a circle of profound darkness" also speaks volumes to McCarthy's creation. *Blood Meridian* is encompassed by darkness; both in language and tone, and in putting *Moby-Dick* next to *Blood Meridian*, both works become engulfed by that darkness. In examining *Blood Meridian*'s detailed use of *Moby-Dick*, through character, language, setting, and plot, it becomes possible to witness the depth of McCarthy's compression, but also the notable distortions he has enacted on the text. Identifying the similarities and differences between the two works allows us to ascertain a textual philosophy of McCarthy's that would remain hidden without the utilization of *Moby-Dick*.

Both novels begin in creation. Melville's opening remark to "Call me Ishmael," is a declaration of one who has been newly crafted (3). Little is said concerning Ishmael's past, and the mobility allowed to one with no past can be considered a catalyst for the work. McCarthy's novel also begins with a demand; "See the child," giving the distinct impression of one slowly coming into the world, seeing the child for the first time (1). However, as Ishmael is distinctly

created without a past, McCarthy's kid is diametrically opposed to this act of creation. McCarthy writes that in the child, there is "all history present in that visage" (1). Immediately readers of the two works are presented with this dichotomy; one character born without a past, one born with all of history visible in his face. This contrast serves numerous purposes; initially, it illustrates McCarthy's acknowledgment that *Moby-Dick* was pivotal in the creation of *Blood Meridian*. However, McCarthy's work simultaneously begins in opposition to Melville's, visible through the existence of a past in the kid, thus declaring that while *Blood Meridian* owes its existence to *Moby-Dick*, McCarthy's work will not be one of mimesis, but rather one offering contrasting viewpoints on some of Melville's still relevant motifs. Furthermore, the relevance of "all history present" in the kid insinuates a further acknowledgment that *Blood Meridian* is made out of every book which has preceded it. Within the kid lies Chamberlain, along with the numerous other authors and works which have contributed to the composition of *Blood Meridian*.

Textual evidence of the correlation between the two works is present throughout. As Ishmael contemplates his desire to go to sea, Melville comments that "should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever" (4). Undoubtedly, these lines of Melville have impacted McCarthy's creation of *Blood Meridian*. In one of the few mentions of the desert in all of *Moby-Dick*, this statement speaks directly to McCarthy's work. Glanton and his men consistently find themselves athirst in the desert, and they also have in their ranks the "metaphysical professor," Judge Holden. The implication in Melville is that the metaphysical professor offers a level of salvation from the natural world. Once again, the same holds true in *Blood Meridian*; prior to the kid's arrival, Tobin recounts a story of the Judge creating gunpowder out of elements found in the desert, finally admitting that "he saved us all" (124). Within these first few examples of the link between the two novels, it is

possible to witness the vastly different utilization of *Moby-Dick* in the creation of *Blood Meridian* as compared to the utilization of *My Confession*. As Chamberlain's work primarily supplied McCarthy with historical characters and a well-rounded sketch of what daily life consisted of in the time frame of the novel, the expansion came through compressed representations of these events and people. The impact of *Moby-Dick* on McCarthy's novel shaped the work in a different manner; Melville's work shaped the entire composition of *Blood Meridian*, from the inception of the novel to its final pages. The relationship between the two works can be envisioned as *Blood Meridian* existing as a topographical map of which the landscape is *Moby-Dick*; McCarthy's novel contains many of the same elements of Melville's, yet chooses to display them as flattened, rather than with the detailed ornateness of Melville's illustration.

Melville's work, as does McCarthy's, directly addresses the nature of man, as both authors explore the extent of the human propensity towards violence and the capability of man to regress towards primal modes of survival and brutality. Melville addresses this theme more directly than McCarthy however, explicitly describing the process:

Long exile from Christendom and civilization inevitably restores a man to that condition in which God placed him, *i.e.* what is called savagery. Your true whale hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owing no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him. (295)

Melville's message is simple, and also speaks directly to those in Glanton's gang. Absence from civilization and the church cause men to regress to savagery, and for Melville the true example of a savage is an Iroquois. The impact of Melville's example of savagery becomes prominent in *Blood Meridian*. Glanton and his men exhibit all traits of savagery from the moment they enter into the novel, and the kid as well, as his introduction in *Blood Meridian* states that "in him broods already a taste for mindless violence" (3). Very little distinguishes Glanton's men from those they are hunting, and the similarities between the "savages" of the desert and the Americans

are thoroughly explored in *My Confession*. However, in relation to the savage aspects of each novel, the distinguishing trait between *Blood Meridian* and *Moby-Dick* exists in each author's larger view of humanity in general. Melville, as has been stated, believed that all people could become savages with the absence of the church and civilization. Yet for McCarthy, no catalyst is necessary for man to resort to savagery, because men are born savages. As Judge Holden states, "war was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner" (248). While reading Holden's words as indicative of McCarthy's viewpoint can lead to severe mis-readings of the work, the prevalence of violence in the kid from a young age indicates that, at least partially, the Judge's view of war may be somewhat congruent with McCarthy's. Therefore, McCarthy's work is fundamentally distinct from Melville's, and this distinction is vital in understanding the similarities and differences between the two novels.

Commentaries on the nature of men from each author become more apparent with in-depth examinations of rivaling passages from each work. Previously, I have discussed McCarthy's expansion of Chamberlain's text in regards to equating men with animals, and the neutralizing effects of the desert on men. Melville also comments on the ability of a harsh landscape to reduce men to behaving as though they exist in the uncivilized outskirts of society. When discussing the way of life onboard a whaling ship, Melville writes that "never mind how much like an old Mesopotamian family these whalers may, in some primitive instances, live together; for all that, the punctilious externals, at least, of the quarter deck are seldom materially relaxed, and in no instance done away" (159). Melville's message insists that, while the men on board the ship may live as primitively as the Mesopotamians, they did not forfeit the formalities or pomp of the ship as a whole. McCarthy also wrote of his men being reduced to primitive ways of living, and it is possible here to recall his line stating that nothing in the appearance of Glanton's gang could "suggest even the discovery of the wheel" (232). McCarthy's statement

directly precedes an episode of unwarranted violence against an innocent man. Thus, while Melville's men may have lived as primitive people, their actions were those of men accustomed to a social structure, who refused to collapse into savagery. However, for McCarthy, the "punctilious externals" of Melville's crew, these being any traces of existing in a social structure, did not exist. By placing his assertion that Glanton and his men were primitive people in close contact with an episode of savage behavior, McCarthy has fully collapsed the social structure which Melville writes of, creating a single, flattened plane of existence, socially, on which the men can exist.

Episodes of violence permeate *Blood Meridian*, but are less common in *Moby-Dick*, and therefore comparing the scenes of violence in Melville's work with a select few of those in *Blood Meridian* offer further insight into McCarthy's work. Melville's chapter "Stubb Kills a Whale" serves as an example of dominant violence in the text (307). Melville's account of the whale being killed in this instance is notable in comparison to *Blood Meridian* due to the graphic language of the text and the extreme detail Melville goes to in attempting to capture the enormity of the event. After getting a harpoon in the whale, and repeatedly darting it into the creature, Melville recounts Stubb's triumph:

The red tide now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down a hill. His tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake...When reaching far over the bow, Stubb slowly churned his long sharp lance into the fish, and kept it there, carefully churning and churning, as if cautiously seeking to feel after some gold watch that the whale might have swallowed...But that gold watch he sought was the innermost life of the fish. At last, gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frightened air; and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst! (311)

Melville attempts to transmit the whale's death to readers in the same manner in which he attempts to capture the enormity of the whale as a whole; through an abundance of language that

borders on the superfluous. In an episode, by *Blood Meridian's* standards, with comparable violence to Stubb's killing of the whale, McCarthy utilizes a similar language to Melville's, yet in a varied context. As Glanton and his men come upon a peaceful village of Gilenos, McCarthy recounts the slaughter:

Men were moving on foot among the huts with torches and dragging the victims out, slathered and dripping with blood, hacking at the dying and decapitating those who knelt for mercy...One of the Delawares emerged from the smoke with a naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden stones and swung them by the heels so that the brains burst forth through the fontanel in a bloody spew. (156)

Immediately the imagery of McCarthy's scene, specifically the brains of the infants bursting forth, recalls the bursting of the whale's heart. The "bloody spew" of the deceased in McCarthy's text would be the exact same motion of blood spewing out of the whale into the sea. Melville carefully describes Stubb's churning of the lance into the whale's heart, and in a similar manner, McCarthy describes the Delaware's squat as he prepares to murder the infants. These two descriptions come to readers as momentary suspensions of time in the rapid violence which surrounds them, a motif common to Melville and employed sporadically by McCarthy.

The importance of placing the two preceding scenes in contact with each other can be found in the contrast of the victims in each work. Melville's attempt to relate the death of whale is grand and verbose, illuminating the physical size of the whale, which Melville repeatedly emphasizes throughout the novel. However, McCarthy's victims are two infants, placing these murders as at once more barbaric than that in *Moby-Dick*, but also more miniscule due to the physical size of the children. The deaths of *Blood Meridian* are a complete compression of those in *Moby-Dick*, not only due to the size of the victims, but the language used to display those deaths. As grandiose as the whale's death is, the deaths of the infants are succinct and isolated.

The language of McCarthy, in this instance, is mimetic of the actual event; the death of the small deserves brevity of language.

McCarthy has utilized the language and imagery of Melville's to bring attention to the compressions and deviations from *Moby-Dick* in *Blood Meridian*, but he has also made these connections apparent in the sub-titles of his chapters, which bear resemblance to some of Melville's chapter titles. Returning to Melville's "Stubb Kills a Whale" chapter, the simplicity of the title, while correct in the summary of the action in the chapter, fails to convey the true nature of the event. McCarthy's sub-heading "Glanton takes a scalp" (81) correlates with Melville's chapter both in the simplicity of the title and the gruesome events which occur under the guise of that simplicity. In a small, deserted town Glanton and his men come to, Glanton finds a single, elderly woman alone in the town park. Placing his pistol next to her head, Glanton fires, and McCarthy writes that "a fistsized hole erupted out of the far side of the woman's head in a great vomit of gore and she pitched over and lay slain in her blood without remedy" (98). Again, McCarthy utilizes the same language of Melville in this instance; as "gush after gush of clotted red gore" emitted from the whale, the same gore erupts from the woman's head. McCarthy also employs language which would typically be used in describing the death of a whale; the woman "pitched over," as ships or other nautical vessels are typically described. Finally, the woman lies in her own blood, much as the whale rolled "not in brine but in blood."

Both author's titling of their chapters are mimetic of the surface on which their novels exist. Melville's chapters sometimes come as short, one page bursts, at other times in lengthy progressions. The chapters literally come in waves, mirroring the unpredictable nature of each wave on the Pequod. McCarthy's numerical chapters are straightforward and linear. Each chapter progresses chronologically, yet each step taken on McCarthy's barren desert plain contains in it all that lies beneath. Therefore, the sub-titles of each chapter indicate that the action

of the novel is entirely dependent on all that has preceded it. The anonymity of the numbers, contrasted with the detailed sub-titles, indicates that the actions of Glanton and his men will also pass out of the memory of the landscape.

The language of each author is thoroughly entwined in the landscapes of each work. Thus, the language of McCarthy is diametrically opposed to Melville's, as the desert is in opposition to the sea. Melville's descriptive, loquacious style has the appearance of the Pequod itself, able to glide above the turmoil that lies below. In regards to the language of *Blood Meridian*, Steven Shaviro states that "McCarthy's writing is so closely intertwined with the surfaces of the earth and the depths of the cosmos that it cannot be disentangled from them" (153). These contrasting styles are made most apparent in the narrative stance of each work. *Moby-Dick's* Ishmael, while initially appearing as a strict first person narrator, gradually takes on the tone of a limited-omniscient narrator, evidenced in his ability to relate the thoughts and conversations of others to which he is not privy. Melville's narration allows an unlimited mobility of movement, while McCarthy's third person, kid-centric narration allows none of this. As the Pequod traverses the globe in search of Moby-Dick, McCarthy's text is limited to a specific geographical area. As McCarthy's narration is limited to the sights and sounds of the kid, readers of the two works witness another compressed reconfiguration of Melville's text. McCarthy is illustrating the fact that instead of a broad, sweeping narration, a novel can attempt to uncover elements of humanity in a narrow setting. Once again the flattened aspect of McCarthy's work comes into view; Shaviro's statement that McCarthy's prose is intertwined with the landscape is correct, because the flat, impermeable surface of the desert floor is mirrored by the language of the text. As Melville's prose sometimes descended the surface into metaphysical depths, or soared above in exuberant descriptive passages, McCarthy's prose remains as flat as the desert surface.

The inner monologues of *Moby-Dick* provide readers with numerous insights into the mental states of many of the men in the work. *Blood Meridian*, however, appears to consciously resist attempts at engaging internal dialogue. In a novel where language is at a premium, where superfluity in language does not exist, one must consider the gravity of each word or sentence. Shortly after seeing a tree hung with dead babies, Sproule and the Kid continued to walk through a city where a massacre had recently occurred. “Sproule turned and looked at the kid as if he’d know his thoughts but the kid just shook his head” (60). This sentence is a key to interpreting McCarthy’s take on the psychological experience of the novel. In this analogy it is possible to position Sproule as reader and the kid as text. McCarthy implies that texts attempt to lend themselves to being psychologically understood by the reader. That an internal monologue or feeling can be transferred by mere sight or reading seems to be a proposition that McCarthy is refuting. The thoughts that Sproule are having which he would like the kid to comment on must be of hopelessness and desperation; he is injured and will soon die, and has just witnessed one of the more gruesome scenes conceivable. The kid shakes his head for a couple of different reasons. The most obvious is that he understands; he has seen what Sproule has seen and he knows what Sproule knows. He also knows that to speak of what has been seen and the desperation of their present situation will not add or detract from the gravity of that situation. This is crucial to understanding the compression at work in *Blood Meridian*; elaborating on these scenes of violence or desperation cannot add any more than the scenes themselves. In this situation, *Blood Meridian* may be viewed as a direct flattening of *Moby-Dick*’s narrative style; McCarthy is insinuating that an abundance of language and thought is not necessary to transmit the reality of a scene to readers.

Also exemplifying McCarthy’s utilization of *Moby-Dick* are the scenes in each work which contain an elder prophet figure. Ishmael and Queequeg encounter Melville’s prophet

Elijah directly after signing the appropriate papers to ship on the Pequod.⁴ Melville writes that Elijah “was but shabbily appareled in faded jacket and patched trowsers; a rag of black handkerchief investing his neck” (100). Elijah questions the two as to whether or not they have signed with the Pequod, and upon affirmation of this he wonders if there was “anything down there about your souls?” (100). Though he attempts to play aloof, Ishmael is bothered by Elijah’s questioning, and refuses to let the issue rest, and this sequence of events is repeated in *Blood Meridian*.

The kid and some other men from Captain White’s company have gone out to attain supplies for their immediate venture. Upon entering a bar, they encounter the Mennonite, and immediately the similarities to Melville’s Elijah are apparent. McCarthy writes that their “is an old disordered Mennonite in this place and he turns to study them. A thin man in a leather weskit, a black and straightbrim hat set square on his head” (39). Both men appear disjointed through their dress, both clothed in black, giving the appearances of harbingers of doom. Just as Elijah questioned Ishmael and Queequeg’s souls, the Mennonite warns of other-worldly repercussions for the kid’s upcoming excursion. However, instead of wondering over the soul of the individual, McCarthy’s Mennonite warns of a general destruction and evil, when he tells the men that “the wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a million years before men were and only men have the power to wake it. Hell aint half full. Hear me. Ye carry war of a madman’s making onto a foreign land. Ye’ll wake more than the dogs” (40). The warnings of the two prophets exemplify the literary flattening of Melville’s text in *Blood Meridian*. It is in the

⁴ Biblical relevance to the name Elijah, though not imperative in the comparison with *Blood Meridian*, is still worthy of some consideration in the argument. First, according to the *Book of Kings*, Elijah served as a prophet under Ahab’s rule. In the New Testament Elijah was reported to come before the “great and terrible day” on earth, and as both prophets appear before the corresponding purges of many (the Pequod’s sinking, Glanton’s gang being largely destroyed at the Yuma Ferry Massacre) it can be argued that both prophets foresee the ultimate doom of each group. Elijah’s biblical presence is actually more pronounced in McCarthy’s work, though McCarthy’s prophet is only referred to as “the Mennonite.”

severity of the warnings that readers are able to witness McCarthy's compression. McCarthy's Mennonite springs from Ahab's prophet; however, the prophecies contain varying levels of severity, and this is caused by McCarthy's compression of Ahab's prophet onto the harsh landscape of *Blood Meridian*.

Similarities also exist in each prophet's manner of speech. While the two men offer concrete warnings as to the futures of those who undertake their respective ventures, they also resort to obscure statements of foreboding. When attempting to take leave of Ishmael at their first meeting, Elijah launches into one of these deliveries, as he asks "Ye've shipped have ye? Names down on the papers? Well, well, what's signed, is signed; and what's to be will be; and then again, perhaps it wont be, after all. Any how, its all fixed and arranged a'ready; and some sailors or others must go with him, I suppose" (102). The importance of these words lies in the assurance of Elijah that no matter what men go on this voyage with Ahab, the end result will be the same. The ambiguity of the warning is also considerable, in the sense that Elijah is also trying to bypass the inevitability of their trip. With the knowledge that Ishmael survives, it is possible to interpret the warning as an indication that while Ishmael survives the shipwreck physically intact, his soul is lost.

The same sort of cloaked forebodings can be found in the Mennonite's warning to the kid. In a back and forth banter with a member of the kid's party, the Mennonite speaks in an obscure, yet matter-of-fact tone:

They talk of the expedition in loud voices and the old Mennonite shakes a rueful head and sips his drink and mutters. They'll stop you at the river, he says. The second corporal looks past his comrades. Are you talking to me? At the river. Be told. They'll jail you to a man. Who will? The United States Army. General Worth. The hell they will. Pray that they will. He looks at his comrades. He leans towards the Mennonite. What does that mean, old man? Do ye cross that river with yon filibuster armed ye'll not cross it back. (40)

In the Mennonite's warning is the same sense of ambiguity that can be found in Elijah's. First he informs the men that they will not cross the river, that they'll be jailed. Second, he informs them that if they cross the river with arms, they will not re-cross it. Once again, readers know this to be untrue when returning to the passage, because the kid survives, while everyone else in the presence of the Mennonite falls. The key to deciphering these warnings exists in the language and detail both men utilize. The implication is that the kid must not have been "armed" since he was able to cross back over the river. While readers know he was carrying weapons, he was not armed in the sense that he was not equipped or protected on the mental level that was necessary due to his youth. He was too young to be guarded against the horrors that awaited him. Ishmael, on the other hand, recalling the fact that he exists as one newly created by Melville in the opening line of the novel, exists as one who is without a soul to begin the voyage, and thus there is nothing to lose. Therefore, McCarthy, like Melville, has crafted a character that is immune to the warnings of each prophet due to their lacking the prescribed traits that would cause them to fall to the prophecies.

In regards to the soul that Elijah speaks of, there is one more point of contact between the two works. Concluding his musing as to whether or not Ishmael has a soul, Elijah makes the statement that "a soul's a sort of a fifth wheel to a wagon" (100). McCarthy has taken the idea of the soul as a wheel and directly utilized this metaphor in *Blood Meridian*. Given that both prophets appear at the onset of each journey in the two works, the connection between Elijah's statement and McCarthy's passage is firmly established. McCarthy's extensive comments on the wheels of Captain White's party crossing the desert serve as evidence of this correlation:

The wheels shrank and the spokes reeled in their hubs and clattered like loom-shafts and at night they'd drive false spokes into the mortices and tie them down with strips of green hide and they'd drive wedges between the iron of the tires and the sun-cracked felloes. They wobbled on, the trace of their untrue labors like sidewinder tracks in the sand. The duledge pegs worked loose and dropped behind. Wheels began to break up. (45)

As the wheels begin to break, so do the souls of the men. The next line in *Blood Meridian* reminds readers that four men have died only ten days into their march. One of the men in the company remarks that the road they are currently on “looks like the high road to hell” (45). The intertwining of Elijah’s words and the Mennonite’s warning has become full in this moment. The men who have passed are now soulless, and the men who continue on lose their strength and perseverance, or their “arms” as the Mennonite warned.

The depletion of the men’s souls in *Blood Meridian* is largely a consequence of the landscape that dominates the novel. McCarthy’s desert bears resemblance to Melville’s ocean in the sense that both landscapes possess elements of the sublime. In relation to the sublime in *Moby-Dick*, Barbara Glenn summarizes by stating that the ocean is “a rugged and a broken surface; an apparent infinity in the succession of its waves; a vast extension, particularly in depth; and most of all, a vast disorder, terrible, irresistibly powerful and obscure” (167). Without the mention of the waves, Glenn could just as easily have been writing about McCarthy’s desert. It is imperative to keep in mind that it is McCarthy who has assigned these powers to the desert; while Chamberlain’s text speaks to the harshness of the landscape, nowhere in that work do readers feel the “vast disorder” which McCarthy has created. Further placing the desert of *Blood Meridian* on the same plain as *Moby-Dick*’s ocean are the constant references McCarthy makes to the “blue” aspects of the desert floor. Immediately following the passage concerning the wheels, McCarthy first mentions that “the sand lay blue in the moonlight,” followed by referencing the “bluish day of the distant desert,” and finally “the desert all about them, blue and barren” (46-7). In placing readers of both works in areas of disorder and obscurity, each author allows the work itself to overcome the senses. The vast, sublime landscapes allow the dichotomy in language between the two authors to become fully apparent; Melville’s superfluity in language contrasted with

McCarthy's harsh, austere tone must be placed on equal footing for the comparison to be fully appreciated. McCarthy's desert is truly a compressed version of Melville's ocean; it contains many similar aspects to the ocean, yet without the rush of language Melville utilized to communicate it.

Connected to the discussion of landscapes is the occurrence of St. Elmo's fire in each work. St. Elmo's fire is a rare phenomenon, which requires specific atmospheric conditions to take place. The occurrence of this phenomenon in each work is linked to a moment of perceived divine intervention and assistance to the two parties in each novel. In *Moby-Dick*, as the Pequod is in the thralls of a typhoon, Starbuck is the first to notice the illuminated masts, as Melville describes "all the yard arms were tipped with a pallid fire; and touched at each tri-pointed lightning-rod-end with three tapering white flames, each of the three tall masts was silently burning in that sulphurous air" (549). Immediately, Starbuck interprets the flames as a sign of good luck, and upon this proclamation Melville writes that "once more the high tapering flames were beheld with what seemed redoubled supernaturalness in their pallor" (550). The flames strengthen as if in affirmation of Starbuck's assessment that they will bring good fortune to the ship. However, that good fortune, as defined by Ahab, implies that "the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!" (550). Therefore, just as St. Elmo's fire gives the appearance of real flame, but is in fact an imitation, the perceived good fortune which comes out of those flames is ultimately an omen of the impending deaths of all but Ishmael.

McCarthy's utilization of St. Elmo's fire carries the same expectations of salvation, while the end result remains the same. McCarthy writes that "that night they rode through a region electric and wild where strange shapes of soft blue fire ran over the metal of the horses' trappings and the wagonwheels rolled in hoops of fire and little shapes of pale blue light came to perch in the ears of the horses and the beards of the men" (47). This scene occurs while the men of

Captain White's party are engaged in their first long march across the desert. In desperate need of water, one of the men prays for rain, and his prayers are answered. However, the respite is short lived; the rain is not enough, and the men are forced to deviate a little from their path. In another day, the men are ambushed, and all but the kid and Sproule are left alive. The fact that St. Elmo's fire is present in each novel, a rare occurrence in itself, is enough to make a clear correlation between the two works, and is ample evidence that McCarthy utilized this element of *Moby-Dick* in his construction. However, the recreation of the scene in *Moby-Dick* is taken just as far in *Blood Meridian*; the ersatz fire is representative of ersatz salvation. The remarkable aspect of this correlation between the two works is the obscurity of it all; McCarthy's mention of St. Elmo's fire is compressed into one passing sentence, instead of the full chapter Melville devotes to it. The reason no real modifications are made to Melville's original model is that it wasn't necessary in such an enigmatic scene. Instead, McCarthy has merely condensed the original to fit into the language and setting of *Blood Meridian*; this is why the mention of the fire is so brief, and also why the fire is actually in contact with the men, being in their beards, and in the ears of the horses. McCarthy's text is literally in closer contact with the men, and with the landscape he attempts to create.

Shifting from style to content, concrete character comparisons between the two novels are nearly impossible to determine. While the correlation between Ishmael and the kid has been made, the similarities between the two appear to diminish from the openings of each work. Dana Phillips briefly outlines a rough comparison of the characters in each novel and the correlations between the two:

The characters in McCarthy's novel resemble not those of *Waverly* or *The Deerslayer* but those of *Moby-Dick*.⁵ The likeness of "the kid" to Ishmael, of Captain Glanton and the

⁵ *Waverly* was the widely popular first novel by Sir Walter Scott, and was written in 1814. The novel is regarded as the first historical novel ever written.

judge to Ahab, and of Glanton's band to the *Pequod's* motley crew is fairly obvious. But *Blood Meridian's* echoes of Melville's text also help make clear their differences. (440)

While Phillips' character comparisons are valid on the surface, her assertion that the similarities seen illuminate the differences between the two works is a crucial caveat. In the Ishmael/kid parallel, for example, even the ages of the two characters are similar yet altered. The kid was too young to enlist in Captain White's service, and had to lie about his age. Ishmael's age is more an enigma; however, readers are able to speculate that he may be somewhere around college age, from his statement that "a whale-ship was my Yale college and my Harvard" (122). As the typical age for a whaler appears to be older than this, both men are clearly young for their vocations. And this is where the similarities end for the two in terms of where they are in their respective lives. An often overlooked, but imperative distinction between the two comes in their reasons for undertaking these jobs; Ishmael chooses to go whaling to ward off the depression of day to day city living. He has every chance not to enlist on the *Pequod*, and is even warned not to by Elijah. The kid, on the other hand, didn't have these options. When he left home at a young age he was consistently thrust into situations without contemplating any alternatives because none existed. In joining up with Glanton's gang, for example, the decision came down to either staying in prison, or accepting Toadvine's advice and departing. Thus, McCarthy has presented the kid as a counterpoint to Ishmael. Just as Ishmael romanticizes whaling, McCarthy has created in the kid the bare truth of that romanticization. So often, Ishmael speaks in reverential tones about whaling, and the lifestyle it necessitates, yet McCarthy plainly refutes any effort of romanticizing the open desert in *Blood Meridian*.

Just as Melville established Ishmael as an outsider looking in on the *Pequod*, McCarthy did the same with the kid, though to a lesser degree. Much speculation has been given as to why

The Deerslayer, or The First Warpath is an 1841 novel written by James Fenimore Cooper. The novel was the first installment in the life of Natty Bumppo.

the Judge had to kill the kid to conclude *Blood Meridian*, and according to numerous critics, including Vereen Bell, it was because the kid remained an outsider that he had to die (120). Ishmael's place as an outsider was confirmed early in *Moby-Dick*, and made clear when he sits down to breakfast with the other whalers lodging at the same inn. Ishmael attempts to describe many of the men at the table, judging them by skin-tone, and ascertaining how long each had been at sea (33). This type of judgment can only come from an outsider, as one who almost looks down on the men he's surrounded himself with. Instead of this being Ishmael's reality, it comes off as a game to him. This continues, as Ishmael expresses his disappointment with the men for not sharing stories about whaling while they eat. He remarks that they "looked embarrassed," despite the fact that they were "all of the same calling, all of kindred tastes" (34). Ishmael appears to overlook his own presence at the table; the questioning, over-eager, interloper would surely embarrass others who are forced into whaling to make a living. Instead of blending in, Ishmael instead comes off as one attempting to ingratiate himself in a foreign tribe where he doesn't speak the language.

Further solidifying his role as an outsider, Ishmael admits his hesitancy to fully commit to the voyage:

If I had been downright honest with myself, I would have seen very plainly in my heart that I did but half fancy being committed this way to so long a voyage, without once laying my eyes on the man who was to be the absolute dictator of it, so soon as the ship sailed out upon the open sea. But when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up his suspicions even from himself. And much this way it was with me. I said nothing, and tried to think nothing. (106)

Ishmael describes a group-think mentality which results in an individual's desire to remain silent rather than voice dissent against the perceived desires of the group. Starbuck alone is able to continuously stand up for his own beliefs against Ahab's incessant drive. While McCarthy

doesn't allow for this sort of internal monologue, the kid is created in the same vein. Ishmael describes incongruence between thought and action, as he is able to separate the two from each other. In the Tarot scene in *Blood Meridian*, shortly after the kid has joined up with Glanton, the Judge forces the kid into having his fortune told. The kid picks the Four of Cups out of the deck, and while all other onlookers have fallen silent, McCarthy writes that "the judge was laughing silently" (94). The Judge laughs because the card represents one with "a divided heart and has generally associated him with the quality of mercy," as John Sepich points out (107). Just as Ishmael considered himself to be divided, the same can be said for the kid, as one who is engaged in ruthless killings, yet possesses the quality of mercy. McCarthy has compressed the idea of a man divided in his creation of the kid; however, because readers don't have access to the kid's thoughts, McCarthy had to go about displaying this binary in a different method.

It is the quality of mercy that the Judge cites in one of his final conversations with the kid. Judge Holden tells the kid that "there's a flawed place in the fabric of your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (299). Before killing the kid, the Judge gives ample reason for the forthcoming murder; he explains that the kid did not treat war with enough reverence (307), that he sacrificed too many for his own well-being (331), and that finally, there was simply not enough room on the stage of life for the kid and the Judge to coexist (331). Several of the Judge's reasons for the kid's death could have applied to Ishmael as well. When he explains to the kid that "honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood will become excluded from the dance...the dance will become a false dance," one may group Ishmael into the "false" dancer category.

However, Ishmael lived, and Ishmael's existence, compared to the kid's death once again indicates vastly different views on humanity, and each author's belief as to why one deserves life

and one deserves death. For Melville, dissenting from a group mentality, while still contributing to the end goal of that group, was clearly not enough to keep one out of death's hands. Starbuck is the ultimate example of this belief. When it becomes apparent that the Pequod has begun to leak oil, Starbuck voices his opinion to Ahab that they need to pause and examine the damage. The two argue momentarily, until Ahab seizes a loaded musket and points it at Starbuck. Starbuck calms himself, but before leaving, he tells Ahab that "thou has outraged, not insulted me, sir; but for that I ask thee not to beware of Starbuck; thou wouldst but laugh; but let Ahab beware of Ahab; beware of thyself, old man" (518). Regardless of the warning, Starbuck concedes to Ahab, and as Ahab says, "he waxes brave, but nevertheless obeys" (518). Starbuck's moment of dissent comes and goes quite quickly, but his doubts over Ahab's decisions linger until the very end. Opposed to Starbuck is the kid; despite the Judge's accusations, the kid never voices any concern for the well-being of the "heathen." Instead, his actions, according to the Judge, represented both compassion for those they hunted, and a disregard for others in the group. The kid's compassion is a condensed version of Starbuck's; it exists in the only way possible that compassion or sympathy could exist on McCarthy's landscape.

However, while Ishmael is the greatest parallel character to the kid in *Moby-Dick*, it is far more difficult to choose one single character who is representative of Judge Holden in Melville's work. Holden is often thought of as McCarthy's Ahabian figure, but numerous complications arise in this comparison. Harold Bloom surmises that Holden encompasses too much of the natural world to be compared to Ahab, and instead asserts that "McCarthy is warning his reader that the Judge is *Moby-Dick* rather than Ahab. As another white enigma, the albino Judge, like the albino whale, cannot be slain" (259). Bloom's comment raises the most visible contrast between the two, this being that Judge Holden, unlike Ahab, never dies. This is not to say that Holden is not partially constructed out of Ahab; clearly, McCarthy has utilized some aspects of

Ahab in his creation. However, to state that Holden is solely Moby-Dick is also a reductive claim. Instead, I propose that Holden is a condensation of numerous characters from Melville's work: Ishmael, Ahab, and Moby-Dick. In examining the similarities between the Judge and these three entities, it is possible once again, as Phillips has noted, to view the differences that arise and the implications they have in understanding the compressing aspect of McCarthy's work.

The kid can be viewed as an opposite of Ishmael in relation to the two men's pasts. The kid was presented as one with all of the past inside him, as Ishmael is presented as one without any sort of past. The same can be said of the Judge. Despite his knowledge of many languages and of the natural world, no man knows where he comes from or how he came to be with Glanton's gang. Yet as Tobin says, "every man in the company claims to have encountered that sootysouled rascal in some other place" (124). Contrary to Ishmael, the Judge has no point of origin, and while he possesses a discernible past with Glanton's gang and other men he comes into contact with in the novel, never does McCarthy attempt to offer an understanding of the Judge's life. McCarthy goes so far as to write that there was "no trace of any ultimate atavistic egg by which to commence his reckoning," and this fact separates the Judge from anyone else in the novel (310). The implication here is that a point of origin allows at least some understanding of man; Melville gave readers this point in Ishmael, and thus his character is less enigmatic. The idea of personal history and origin, and its effects on character fascinated McCarthy, and in utilizing Melville's initial creation of Ishmael, McCarthy was able to launch his digressions on the theme in *Blood Meridian*.

One of the Judge's defining traits in *Blood Meridian* is his desire to catalogue every new species or artifact he comes into contact with in the natural world. It is true that McCarthy adopted this trait from Chamberlain's portrayal of the Judge; however, it is no coincidence that Ishmael also attempted to put so much of the natural world into a book. In this instance, it can

become problematic in attempting to differentiate the voice of Ishmael and the voice of Melville in certain episodes of *Moby-Dick*. For this reading though, it is imperative to trust that the first person narration of Ishmael holds true. Therefore, the “Cetology” chapter, for example, can be read as Ishmael’s attempt, not Melville’s, at encompassing the grandeur of the whale through words. This desire of Ishmael’s is one of the driving forces behind the novel, as Jamey Hecht correctly asserts that “the prolixity and bounty of *Moby-Dick* is generated by Ishmael’s hunger for the object-world, as much as by Ahab’s hatred for it” (119).

Judge Holden’s cataloguing is similar yet distinct. In an episode in *Blood Meridian*, Holden, who had been making side ventures into gorges and rocks as the company moved forward, displays all the artifacts he has collected before him. After doing so, “he held the leather ledgerbook and he took up each piece, flint or potsherd or tool of bone, and deftly sketched it into his book” (140). Following the completion of his sketches, “he gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire and he shook out the wagonsheet and folded it away,” and then explains that “it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man” (140). The Judge’s desire is to capture and destroy; he is the sovereign protector of these artifacts once they are catalogued and burned. Ishmael’s cataloguing, however, is not an attempt to possess, but rather to share. The immensity of the whale and the rest of the natural world appear to have had such an effect on him to cause these attempts at conveying these elements to readers.

Once Holden has destroyed the artifacts, he engages in a debate with a man named Webster, and this debate speaks directly to *Moby-Dick*. After hearing the statement of the Judge’s intent to expunge the memories of these artifacts from the minds of men, Webster retorts that “no man can put all the world in a book,” to which the Judge agrees (141). Yet attempting to put the world into a book appears to be what Melville has done. Melville writes of the whiteness of the whale, of the sublime, of the immense space on the open sea, but these attempts to capture

the unattainable sometimes result in failure. For instance, when speaking of the tail of the whale, Ishmael comments that the whale is “full of strangeness, and unaccountable to his most experienced assailant. Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will” (414). To this statement, McCarthy, through the voice of Judge Holden, issues a reply. Holden states that “whether in my book or not, every man is tabernacled in every other and he in exchange and so on in an endless complexity of being and witness to the uttermost edge of the world” (141). In short, every man creates his own book in going through daily life. If *Moby-Dick* had been limited to a strict first-person narration, the work would not have been able to encompass nearly as much as it did. Melville’s narrative style is indicative of the veracity of McCarthy’s statement. The conversation between the two works regarding literary conventions goes beyond a mere contact in this case; it is an affirmation that McCarthy’s utilization of *Moby-Dick* goes beyond character and landscape. Also in this exchange, it is possible to view the incorporation of both *My Confession* and *Moby-Dick* in *Blood Meridian*. Without Chamberlain’s initial sketch of the Judge and his desire to catalogue the natural world, McCarthy would not have had a historically verifiable launching point from which he could enter into this debate with Melville.

The influence of Ahab on McCarthy’s Holden cannot be understated. While a glaring distinction exists in the fact that Holden lives while Ahab dies, the similarities and points of contact between the two during Ahab’s life are myriad. To unearth these similarities, one can begin at the initial descriptions of the two. Ishmael’s first view of Ahab comes some time after the Pequod had begun its voyage, and the presence and sight of Ahab appears to have deeply affected Ishmael. He states that “he looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them...His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze” (134). Shortly after, Ishmael notes that a scar on the side of Ahab’s face is

“lividly whitish” (134). Ishmael’s description of Ahab can be compared to McCarthy’s first introduction of Judge Holden. McCarthy writes that the Judge was “bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close on to seven feet in height and stood smoking a cigar” (6). At moments, it sounds as though the two authors are describing the same man. The image of Ahab as one who was engulfed in fire, yet cut away from the stake, could clearly lead one’s imagination to the figure of the Judge, as the fire would result in hairlessness. Also, Ishmael’s statement that Ahab appeared as though he was made of “solid bronze” resonates in McCarthy’s statement of the Judge being “bald as a stone.” Both men have distinct, chiseled features, and both descriptions contain fire imagery; Ahab’s being cut away from the stake, and the Judge’s smoking of a cigar. The prevalence of these fire images suggests that the two men were actually formed out of rock and fire. The two men are introduced as almost supernatural beings, and both of their descriptions are tinted with portentous undertones.

The mention of Ahab’s scar being “lividly whitish” could easily have been a description of the Judge’s entire appearance, and while it is true that McCarthy’s original sketch of the Judge comes from Chamberlain, the emphasis which McCarthy repeatedly places on the whiteness of the Judge alludes to the fact that this description in *Moby-Dick* plays a large part in McCarthy’s creation. Similar also, are the initial reactions that these two men produce in others. Ishmael writes that “powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me” (135), and this statement can be contrasted with Chamberlain’s claim of the Judge that he “hated him at first sight” (272). The kid never explicitly states his hatred of the Judge, but from their first meeting the kid is clearly distrustful of him.

The final similarity in the two men’s introductions comes in the mentions of aspects of their appearances which are incongruent with their imposing descriptions. Ishmael notes that, once the weather had turned warm, Ahab responded to the “playful alluring of that girlish air.

More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look, which, in any other man, would have soon flowered in a smile” (136). The implication here is that a part of Ahab is still reserved, a part which can smile and appreciates sunlight and warm air. Despite his foreboding appearance and attitude, somewhere within the man there is a part of his being which has been preserved, in spite of his years spent whaling. McCarthy has also captured this sort of aspect in Judge Holden, when he writes that “his face was serene and strangely childlike” (6). While the previous description of Holden painted him as harsh, and stone-like, the inclusion of his childish features seems at odds with the man. Both Ahab’s enjoyment of pleasant weather and the Judge’s features allude to the men’s youths, as Ahab’s look of happiness is reminiscent of one returned to childhood for a brief moment. The impact of these two descriptions are humanizing moments for the two larger-than-life creations. Just as Melville understood that there had to be some method of relating to Ahab for readers and other crew-members on the Pequod, by crafting the Judge as he did, McCarthy allows a compressed aspect of that relation in *Blood Meridian*. While the Judge’s humanity is stripped down compared to Ahab’s, the same principles of flattened composition are once again at work.

Both Ahab and Judge Holden are driven by their narcissistic worldviews, and in deciphering these views, it is possible to see the extent of Ahab in McCarthy’s creation. Ahab is fueled by his desire to kill Moby-Dick. He believes that the world has aligned itself against him and him alone. This view becomes apparent when he refuses to help the Rachel search for her lost child; instead of contributing to a greater good, Ahab chooses to serve his own purpose. Nowhere is Ahab’s narcissism more apparent than in the chapter “The Doubloon,” where readers find Ahab alone, examining the coin, musing to himself:

There’s something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here – three peaks, as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is

Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold us but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. (471)

Ahab sees himself in all things, but simultaneously despises those things which he sees as “egotistical” and “proud.” Ahab’s aversion to the natural world stems from the fact that these are elements of life which are uncontrollable to him. Judge Holden has the same disgust for the natural world, but his desire to control that world has manifested itself differently. While Ahab has focused all of his efforts on destroying Moby-Dick, the whale which for him represents all that is wrong in nature, Holden has attempted to catalogue and control everything he comes into contact with.⁶ His statement that “whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent,” is evidence of this (198). Thus, while Ahab believes the world is aligned against him, Holden believes he is the “suzerain of the earth” (198).

Instead of attempting to focus his desire for control on one aspect of life, such as Ahab did, Holden’s quest to conquer all things is a flattening and simultaneous expansion of the desire which Melville first created. Issues of control, which began with each man’s narcissism, display McCarthy’s desire to take elements of *Moby-Dick* further into the disturbed psychological depths of Ahab through Holden. Also, *Blood Meridian* is examining and altering prescribed boundaries of dominance in fiction which *Moby-Dick* initially created. In allowing Holden to actually control so many elements of nature, McCarthy’s text can be read as possessing a Darwinian world-view.⁷ Because Holden chose to control all that he came into contact with, and Ahab only attempted to control one thing, there is a sort of psychological Social Darwinism at play. This is one possible explanation as to why Holden lives while Ahab dies; in a “survival of the fittest”

⁶ For Ahab, Moby Dick is representative of everything in nature that is uncontrollable. The whale has a freedom of movement that, because of the whale, Ahab will never have again. Pride, in others, also appears to bother Ahab, and the pride he sees in Moby Dick is ultimately one that he can never overcome.

⁷ The Darwinian worldview implicit in McCarthy’s novel emphasizes the survival of the fittest, but also of those possessing the most ruthless mental capacities, thus equating the ruthless as the fittest.

mentality, the one who attempts dominance over all things clearly outstrips one who controls a limited aspect of life.

Despite their narcissism, both Ahab and Holden are also presented as saviors of their respective groups, thanks in large part to both men's knowledge of science. When the Pequod's compasses have been destroyed by thunder and lightning, the crew is dismayed and disoriented, temporarily lost on the open sea. Before the men's fears overtake them, Ahab intervenes in an attempt to "revive the spirits of his crew by a stroke of his subtile skill" (563). Ahab assembles a makeshift compass out of regular items found on the ship. Once his demonstration is complete, as many of the men had gathered around to watch, Ahab calls to them to "look ye, for yourselves, if Ahab be not lord of the level loadstone!" (564). Following this proclamation, and as each man separately comes to verify Ahab's claim, Melville writes that "in his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride" (564). The image of the Judge as savior is more pronounced than in Ahab, yet many of the same facts and principles remain the same in *Blood Meridian*. Tobin recounts the story of the men's ordeal to the Kid, as the event took place prior to the Kid's arrival, and just as the Kid was absent from the event, any traces of Ishmael in Ahab's moment of triumph are absent. Tobin begins his narration by stating that the Judge "saved us all" (124), and explains how Glanton's gang had found themselves in the middle of the desert, without gunpowder, being pursued by Native Americans.⁸ Once the Judge was apprised of their situation, he led them to a cave, and through a mixture of guano, urine, and brimstone, the Judge was able to concoct gunpowder. Following this, the Judge led the men in a slaughter of the natives, and he had cemented his position with Glanton and the others. The most notable

⁸ Tobin tells the kid that they came upon the Judge sitting on a rock in the middle of the desert, and "he didn't even have a canteen... You couldn't tell where he'd come from. Said he'd been with a wagon company and fell out to go it alone" (125). The Judge's statement here is of interest because his entrance into *Blood Meridian* appears to come directly after his departure from Chamberlain in *My Confession*. Holden was left with nothing in the desert, therefore assuming he joins up with Glanton's gang, again, is not terribly far-fetched.

distinction between the two episodes is that in *Moby-Dick*, the crew was never really in mortal peril. They were adrift in the ocean without a navigational tool, yet presumably they could have navigated by the sun and stars. McCarthy has intentionally placed Glanton's gang in a dire situation to emphasize the point of contact between the two works, and again, the severity of the landscape of the novel. Both Ahab and Holden display an intricate knowledge of science, and this also implies a communion with the earth. Thus, these acts are a reiteration of how the men were formed out of stone and fire, truly coming from the earth. During the narration, Tobin also mentions that Holden "would stop to botanize and then ride to catch up...Pressing leaves into his book" (127). This detail once again draws attention to the correlation between the two works, as it emphasizes the relationship of the Judge to Ishmael, and to his relationship with the natural world. The similar aspect of both scenes, both casting each man as a savior figure, illustrates the importance of Ahab in defining the Judge. It is important to recall Chamberlain's description of the Judge in this instance; Chamberlain mentions the Judge's knowledge of Geology, but McCarthy took that knowledge and was able to form that bit of information into a recreation and extension of Ahab's actions, a compression of both works resulting in one man. The statement here is that Chamberlain's description of Holden was insufficient for McCarthy's creation; there needed to be a supernatural aspect to Holden, which McCarthy found in *Moby-Dick*.

Ahab and Holden both also serve as protective figures to men who are mentally unfit to exist on their own. On the surface, these acts appear out of character for Holden and Ahab; both are solitary men who appear to have little regard or sympathy for those unable to contribute to their personal well-being, this being a symptom of their narcissism. However, taking complete ownership of another individual bolsters their senses of dominance. In *Moby-Dick*, Pip, a low-ranking member of the crew, falls off a whaling boat and is left alone at sea for an extended period of time, and the ramifications of his time spent alone were jarring and permanent.

Melville writes that “by the merest chance the ship itself at last rescued him; but from that hour the little negro went about the deck an idiot; such, at least, they said he was. The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul” (453). From these moments on, Pip follows Ahab around the decks of the Pequod as a shadow. Later, Ahab fully takes ownership of Pip, and after lamenting Pip’s condition, he tells Pip that “Ahab’s cabin shall be Pip’s home henceforth, while Ahab lives. Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy; thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings” (567). Ahab’s statement that Pip is “tied” to him indicates that Ahab feels that he is responsible for Pip’s life, as it was the Pequod that found Pip on the ocean.

In *Blood Meridian*, readers find a nearly identical correlation. Glanton’s gang offered a man and his mentally handicapped brother safe passage to California, and during their journey, Holden and the handicapped man formed a similar bond. The man is referred to as the “idiot” in *Blood Meridian*, immediately recalling Melville’s statement that Pip went around the decks as “an idiot.” One night, after the idiot is put to bed, he gets up in the middle of the night and walks out into the middle of a river, only to lose his footing and begin to drown. At this point, the Judge, who was making his midnight rounds, “stepped into the river and seized up the drowning idiot, snatching it aloft by the heels like a great midwife and slapping it on the back to let the water out. A birth scene or a baptism or some ritual” (259). The Judge has saved the idiot from drowning, much like Ahab saved Pip. Also remarkable in this scene is the way the idiot is referred to as a thing, rather than a person. The same can be said for Pip; the body that came out of the ocean was not the person who went in. Instead, the body and mouth of Pip asserts that the real Pip is still adrift in the ocean, insinuating that his body is simply a thing without a soul.

An interesting paradox also exists in the “baptism” imagery that McCarthy writes of. The idiot is unaffected by the event; though he is often seen with the Judge after this, it is by the

Judge's will that the two are often together. No change has occurred in the idiot due to his baptism. Yet Pip's entire mentality was altered in his baptism, and in creating this paradox of a false baptism, McCarthy has made the similarity between the two works and character correlations that much more apparent. The idiot also serves as an affirmation of the Judge's statement that nothing in the world can exist without his consent; because he has saved the idiot, he chooses to take it with him, to continue the life under his protection. This correlation serves as another prime example of McCarthy utilizing Melville's text, yet altering the tale in *Moby-Dick* to fit into the realm of *Blood Meridian*. In creating a sort of mock-baptism, McCarthy has compressed the true baptism of *Moby-Dick* into an episode which corresponds to the landscape of *Blood Meridian*. A true baptism could not be possible in McCarthy's creation, thus, the condensed version which exists is the only possibility.

The final similarity between Holden and Ahab is that each man claims immortality. Both Ahab and Holden's claims of immortality are bold and pronounced; neither of them veiled in deceptive language, nor do they make these claims in private. During a conversation with the Parsee, Ahab admits he has been dreaming of his own death. The Parsee informs Ahab that the only thing that can bring about his death is a rope, to which Ahab replies, "the gallows, ye mean. – I am immortal then, on land and on sea...Immortal on land and on sea!" (542). Ahab's proclamation is followed by silence, indicating that despite his claim, he was still contemplating his mortality. Judge Holden's claim of immortality is equally as pronounced, yet is not marked by the serious thought which Ahab gives to his own life. At the conclusion of *Blood Meridian*, after killing the kid, McCarthy writes of the Judge that "he never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die" (335). Immediately, in placing these passages next to each other, it is possible to see the similarities at work. Both authors utilize repetition in their statements of immortality, but as

Melville's repetition serves to emphasize or confirm Ahab's belief, McCarthy's repetition draws attention to his passage's connection to *Moby-Dick*. Despite Ahab's claim, he is eventually killed by Moby-Dick, and the Parsee's prophecy is fulfilled, as a rope around Ahab's neck brings about his death. Ahab's death, and the Judge's prolonged existence, raises the issue of prophecy and its importance in the two works. Holden is cast as a false prophet at the inception of *Blood Meridian*; his claims against Reverend Green in the tent, when the kid first sees him are evidence of this. And though the Judge acknowledges that his allegations against the reverend were untrue, the end result was the same.

The fact that Holden survives at the conclusion of *Blood Meridian* is an authoritative statement by McCarthy that Judge Holden cannot be equated with a single character in *Moby-Dick*. Yet Holden's survival is reason enough to compare him to Moby-Dick. Both are larger than life, both radiate whiteness, both are equated with evil by others in the text, and most of all, both live. However, these reasons for equating one with the other, while valid, do little to explain the depth of McCarthy's utilization of Moby-Dick in his creation of Judge Holden. Most notable is the freedom of movement that McCarthy gives to the Judge, which is reminiscent of Moby-Dick's movement in Melville's novel. Ahab nearly chases Moby-Dick around the entire world, through varying climates and water temperatures, while the whale is able to consistently elude capture and death. The same can be said for Holden; he pops up in varying locations throughout the Texas/Mexico region, he is able to converse in many languages, allowing him the mobility and ease of passage which stymies others. Holden also, avoids capture, and leaves a trail of death in his wake. The argument can be made that Judge Holden is Moby-Dick personified. But without examining the various other influences of McCarthy's character, the achievement of McCarthy's creation cannot be fully appreciated, because above all else, it is the human aspect of Holden which makes him truly terrifying. Judge Holden is an irreconcilable force, and to create a

character such as that, one would have to draw from myriad sources. In the creation of Judge Holden, in more than any other example or character, *Blood Meridian* serves as a Venn diagram of sorts, drawing from the necessary aspects of both Chamberlain and Melville's work, and compressing them into a unified whole. Out of these aspects, McCarthy has molded a character that is still singularly unique, but could still not exist without the sum of its parts.

The most tangible point of contact between the two works comes near the conclusion of *Blood Meridian*. After their struggle with the Judge in the desert, the kid and Tobin find refuge in San Diego. Instead of going in search of a doctor with Tobin, the kid wanders off, and eventually comes to the coast:

Passing through the salt grass he looked back. The horse had not moved. A ship's light winked in the swells. The colt stood against the horse with its head down and the horse was watching, out there past men's knowing, where the stars are drowning and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and seamless sea. (304)

McCarthy's mention of whales, the only one in *Blood Meridian*, serves as a clear indication that this passage should be read with *Moby-Dick* in mind. The ship McCarthy writes of could very well be the Pequod. The image of the young colt standing next to the horse is also a powerful one in relation to the two works. The horse, which the kid has ridden through the desert, has stood up to the test of time, compared to the younger colt. The horse, in this instance, can be seen as *Moby-Dick*, while the colt, once again smaller in stature, appearing as a compressed horse is *Blood Meridian*. Melville's work has endured for longer than McCarthy's, is a physically longer novel, yet at the conclusion of both their journeys they have come to the same place. Both horses stare out at the open sea, "past men's knowing," acknowledging both work's engagements with the sublime, and also indicating that, since each work deals with human nature, men themselves are past their own knowing. Finally, it is remarkable that the young colt leans on the older horse,

in a final act of recognition on McCarthy's part of the influence *Blood Meridian* has taken from *Moby-Dick*.

Moby-Dick also helps elucidate the perplexing epilogue to *Blood Meridian*, yet Melville's work offers a varying alternative compared to the explanation offered through Chamberlain's work. At one point in *Moby-Dick* Ahab engages the Carpenter in dialogue while the Carpenter crafts a new leg for Ahab. Ahab refers to the blacksmith, working alongside the Carpenter, as Prometheus, and then goes on to explain his choice in words:

That old Greek, Prometheus, who made men, they say, should have been a blacksmith, and animated them with fire; for what's made in fire must properly belong to fire; and so hell's probable...I'll order a complete man after a desirable pattern...Shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards. (512)

McCarthy has utilized the idea of Prometheus in his epilogue with the image of a lone man striking fire out of rock. As was previously stated, each hole in the ground owes its existence to the hole which precedes it, as every book owes its existence to the books which have come before it. If man is animated out of fire, as Ahab wishes, and the holes/novels in *Blood Meridian* are also animated out of fire, the implication is that each novel is instilled with the same life force that a human has. The "desirable pattern" Ahab calls for exists on the desert floor of McCarthy's epilogue, indicating that while completion may not be possible in man, the potential exists in literature. Ahab also calls for a "sky-light" on the top of the head to illuminate the inner-workings of man. McCarthy engages this notion in his epilogue, when he writes that the collectors following his Promethean character are "restrained by a prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality" (337). As Ahab calls for a method of examining the interior of man, McCarthy makes the statement that, for some at least, nothing exists on the inside. This is McCarthy's final act of compression; rejecting Melville's call for an internal examination of man

indicates a need to examine each entity on the surface level alone, because in *Blood Meridian*, everything exists solely on that desert surface.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

At one point in *Moby-Dick*, Melville writes that “whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books” (520). While Melville’s statement may have been true at the time, *Blood Meridian* is the work which has most successfully attempted to capture the “wondrous and fearful” aspects of man. However, the achievement of *Blood Meridian* would not exist in the same capacity as it does without the aid of both Chamberlain and Melville’s works. Throughout this examination, ample evidence has been offered to justify placing both works in contact with *Blood Meridian*. The historical sources offered in *My Confession*, along with the first-hand experience of day-to-day life with Glanton’s gang offered McCarthy an open landscape from which *Blood Meridian* could launch. *Blood Meridian*’s engagement with these two texts goes beyond simple contact; instead, McCarthy’s work is a compression of both texts, finally resulting in a unified whole. *Blood Meridian* acts as a blueprint for both works; by following the same basic patterns and adhering to the same focal points, yet McCarthy chooses not to grapple with the high and low points which make Melville and Chamberlain’s texts so distinct. *Blood Meridian* is truly a blueprint for the synthesis of these texts, because McCarthy has the distinct advantage of viewing these two texts from afar, and in assessing the general landscape of each, his work compresses these texts onto a flat landscape that is resonant of the desert floor on which *Blood Meridian* exists.

As a method of visualization, the revival tent in *Blood Meridian*, full of the reverend’s lengthy sermons and speeches, collapsed, due to Judge Holden’s actions. The same can be said regarding *My Confession*; McCarthy’s text is a literal collapsing of the extended language of

Chamberlain. *Blood Meridian* is that tent, with all the same pieces and structures, merely collapsed and flattened on the earth. The impact of *Moby-Dick* on McCarthy's text is evident from the first page to the epilogue. Reading passages of *Moby Dick* alongside *Blood Meridian* elucidate McCarthy's work, but the relationship between the two works is reciprocal. Just as *Blood Meridian* is aided by *Moby Dick*, McCarthy has also displayed the accomplishment of Melville in *Blood Meridian*. Instead of reading *Blood Meridian* as an expansion, or revision, of *Moby Dick*, perhaps the greatest compliment that can be paid to both works is that McCarthy's novel is the most sufficient homage to *Moby-Dick* that has yet to be written

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