

# Manifest Destiny and American Identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

McCarthy scholarship has predominantly tended to stress the writer's revisionism with regard to his rendering of the myth of the American West in *Blood Meridian* (1985). McCarthy's novel has been mainly hailed as a critique of the violence of manifest destiny. This study aims to delineate aspects of McCarthy's narrative which resist the predominant view of him as a revisionist. In this regard, it addresses the writer's representation of manifest destiny and American identity in this narrative. It is argued that McCarthy's narrative essentially problematizes historiographic representation of the myth of the West not only by denying a valid access to history, but also by calling into doubt the truth claims of such a representation. Furthermore, the writer's visions of violence and evil as universal entities undermine the predominant view of him as a revisionist. Finally, a critical reading of McCarthy's rendering of American identity vis-à-vis Native American identity underscores the marginalization and denigration of Native Americans in the text.

**Keywords:** Manifest Destiny; American Identity; Cormac McCarthy; *Blood Meridian*

## 1. Introduction

As a Western novel, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* or *the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) has been the subject of diverse critical discussions. McCarthy's Western novels, in particular, *Blood Meridian*, have been largely read as

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revisionist or anti-Western texts in terms of their representation of the myth of the American West. Mayne (2001), for example, observes that “McCarthy’s Western work is routinely heralded as ‘revisionist’ for its postmodern ‘anti-Western’ tendencies” (p.4). In the same vein, Stratton (2011) acknowledges that *Blood Meridian* “has often been viewed as a revisionist Western due to McCarthy’s challenge to orthodox historical narratives” (p. 157). As it will be discussed, with respect to *Blood Meridian*, these views have mainly focused on the text’s historical resonance, arguing that the novel is a critique of the violence of manifest destiny.

McCarthy’s narrative also underscores the influence of the Western frontier on the formation of the identity of its characters. The notion of American identity in this narrative can, indeed, be discussed vis-à-vis that of Native American identity. In this study, we will examine the extent to which McCarthy’s text is informed by the revisionist rhetoric. We will begin by a discussion of the notions manifest destiny and American identity and will proceed to delineate the differences between New Western and Old Western perspectives. Finally, we will present a critical reading of *Blood Meridian* with regard to the writer’s historiographic representation, visions of violence and evil, and his treatment of the American identity.

## **2. Concepts and Definitions**

In this study, we have found it necessary to provide introductory theoretical material before engaging in a critical reading of *Blood Meridian*. Manifest destiny is a deep-seated notion in the history of American literature; it has been quite influential in the formation of American identity and the expansionist sentiment of the nation ever since the colonial period. As we will discuss, manifest destiny is connected to the myth of the American West and finds its proper articulation in the Western genre.

### ***2.1. Manifest Destiny***

According to Pratt (1927), one can hardly read a work on the history of the United States in the two decades before the civil war without meeting the phrase manifest destiny, “widely used as a convenient statement of the philosophy of the territorial expansion in that period” (p. 795). As Pratt observes, it was the journalist John L. Sullivan who coined the term manifest destiny. He first used it in an editorial article in *Democratic Review* for July-August, 1845, in reference to what was, then, virtually a closed issue, that is, the annexation of Texas. Upon its second appearance in the *Morning News* of December 27, 1845, Pratt states, it was applied by Sullivan directly as an argument for taking possession of Oregon; following that, it was carried into the debate of the Oregon question in the House of Representatives and proved to be a “convenient summing up of the self-confident nationalist and expansionist sentiment of the time” (p. 798). The phrase manifest destiny was used by journalists

and writers in the 19th century in reference to “the mission of the white Americans to settle and civilize the West” (Gray, 2001, p. 120). During this period, European colonizers moved westward across North America and in a succession of events and treaties embarked on occupying the territory between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. McMillan (1946) defines manifest destiny as “the doctrine of the inevitability of Anglo-Saxon supremacy. A phrase used by those who believed it was the destiny of the United States or of the Anglo-Saxon race to govern the entire Western Hemisphere” (p. 180). Along these lines, Miller (2006) has argued that manifest destiny was exemplified by three basic tenets which characterized the rhetoric of an American continental empire. Firstly, it assumed that the United States had some “unique moral virtues” not possessed by other countries. Secondly, it claimed that the nation had “a mission to redeem the world by spreading republican government and the American way of life” everywhere. Thirdly, manifest destiny had “a messianic dimension” as it assumed “a faith in America’s divinely ordained destiny” (p. 3).

Manifest destiny is not, therefore, simply an act of geographical expansion; it is also a concept with religious resonances. The religious grounds of manifest destiny can be traced back to the colonial period when in his so-called Arbella sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630), the puritan preacher John Winthrop addressing the arriving colonists claimed that “we shall be as a city upon hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us” (cited in Heimert & Delbanco, 1985, p. 91).

From this perspective, America was a nation called to a unique and special destiny by God. This view had deep roots in the religious mentality of many puritan colonizers of America. They had a sense of divine mission ever since their settlement of the east coast of the North American continent. Manifest destiny, as Weinberg (1963) has put it, “expressed a dogma of supreme self-assurance and ambition—that America’s incorporation of all adjacent lands was the virtually inevitable fulfillment of a moral mission delegated to the nation by Providence itself” (pp. 1-2). The European settlers viewed themselves as God’s chosen seed. As Cherry (1998) observes, “the history of the American civil religion is a history of the conviction that the American people are God’s New Israel, his newly chosen people” (p. 19). The sense of destiny is, indeed, a main feature of American identity.

## ***2.2. American Identity***

Discussions of American identity have historically been marked by a good deal of conceptual vagueness and serious misunderstanding (Gleason, 1981, p. 484). The term *American identity*, as Gleason notes, came into use in the years following World War II. Prior to that, people used the phrase American nationality or American

character. All of these terms have an elusive quality and in many cases are simply vague. The implicit question in many contexts where these terms are used is, “[w]hat does it mean to be an American?” (p. 483). As Gleason argues, although this is a straightforward and apparently simple question, it evokes issues of the deepest sort about the values Americans hold as a nation, the goals they should pursue, the loyalties they may legitimately cherish, and the norms of conduct they ought to follow. These issues are controversial because many Americans will disagree about the proper answers to them; they are also inherently challenging in that “they are subtle, complex, and resistant to perspicuous formulation” (p. 484).

There has been a European legacy for American identity from the colonial period. Moreover, its very texture was colored by settlers’ encounter with Native Americans of the land who possessed a radically different culture and identity. As Malhotra (2009) points out, The United States’ “founding cultural capital, with race and Christianity as the strongest components, was brought from Europe;” this functioned as “a starting point for identity building. But the factor that made the critical departure from European culture,” Malhotra remarks, was “America’s geography, inhabited by natives who were very different from Europeans” (p. 172).

In discussing the formation of American identity and its historical and racial dimensions, Ahmed (2010) highlights the dark side of the issue. Delving deep into America’s structure of values, he traces the roots of American identity back to the time of the colonization of America by Europeans in the seventeenth century. As Ahmed observes, color discrimination and segregation have marked American identity with a “legacy of tears, bloodshed, and violence” (p. 29). “Color-created boundaries,” he argues, “gave the WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) a dominant social position over the red (Native Americans), the black (Afro-Americans), and the yellow (Chinese and Japanese) groups” (p. 29). From this point of vantage, he introduces the notion of *predator identity* in relation to that of American identity. Upon the early settlement of the land, Ahmed explains, the more zealous of the puritans claimed that it was given to them by God, and their destiny was to occupy it regardless of who owned it. Gradually, the colonists built new settlements, and began to prey on the native people with impunity. Every kind of depredation was committed in the violence that ensued. Immoral and illegal acts were committed in the name of protecting the natives. “This aggressive impulse,” Ahmed notes, “generated an arrogance that did not encourage self-reflection but made it easy to demonize and destroy the enemy. In short, this marked the birth of a predator identity” (p. 45). Manifest destiny obtains its significance also from the cultural, in particular, the literary, landscape of which it is a primary ingredient. The literary landscape of the notion has to do basically with the myth of the West and is best epitomized in the tradition known as the Western.

### ***2.3. Old Western and New-Revisionist Western Perspectives***

The Western, as an artistic tradition, has played a significant role in creating the cultural values of American society. Most Western novels written in the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century are typically characterized as Old West narratives, much influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. His thesis is regarded as "a fixed point of origin" for the tradition in this regard (McVeigh, 2007, p. 141). In his essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, delivered on July 12, 1893, Turner stated that "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement Westward explain American development" (p. 1). The frontier is a key term in this context. The colonizers of America created frontiers between themselves and Native Americans of the land. These were often the site of violent confrontation between them. In view of Turner (1996), the frontier was more than a physical borderland; it was "the meeting point between [Indian] savagery and [European] civilization" (p. 3). Turner's view typifies the racist prejudice inherent also in the notion of manifest destiny. However, he argued that the frontier had now come to an end: "And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period in American history" (p. 38). Turner highlighted the major role that the frontier played in the creation of the American character or identity. According to Ridge (1991), a major aspect of Turner's thesis and his contribution to the history of the West was his advocate of American exceptionalism, asserting that the American people were a unique nation or race. Another important aspect of Turner's thesis, Ridge remarks, was his claim that "the essence of American identity was not to be found in the New England Puritan mind or in the mentality of the former slaveholding tidewater South but among people on the moving frontier" (p. 10).

The Old "Western--the characteristic story form of the frontier myth--is essentially a tale of progress, a justification of violent conquest and untrammelled development" (Hine & Faragher, 2007, p. 192). However, the myth of the Old West, associated largely with Turner, and its ideological underpinnings such as the belief in manifest destiny came under attack from a number of directions referred to by McVeigh as the "New Western history" (p. 140), especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The New Western History, McVeigh notes, "has a genesis that resonates with the inflections of what might be called the postmodern condition" (p. 141). Following the postmodern critique of grand narratives, the New Western History was revisionist in terms of its values. As McVeigh maintains, the basic values of the myth of American West such as individualism, equality, and democracy were depreciated in the 1960s in the wake of civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. "The New Western History," McVeigh notes, "formalized in the 1980s, revisited the

West and returned with unheard tales from a landscape, not of heroic endeavor, progress and civilization, but racism, oppression and violent conquest” (p. viii).

The New Western History, indeed, “turns the story from a celebration of democracy and progress brought about by white males,” McVeigh argues, “to a tragedy that laments the treatment of the marginalized. In that sense, New Western historians reject the top-down perspective, and seek to offer a history that operates from the bottom up” (p. 144). In the following section, we will address *Blood Meridian* with regard to ideas and notions already discussed.

### **3. Limits of Historiographic Representation in *Blood Meridian***

As discussed, many critics have stressed the revisionist tendency of McCarthy’s Westerns, particularly his *Blood Meridian*. They have argued that McCarthy’s Westerns offer historiographic challenges to nationalistic and idealistic conceptions of American cultural identity in relation to the myth of the West. Along these lines, they have viewed McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* as a critique of the grand narrative of manifest destiny especially in its depiction of the violence with which the West was won. Moos (2002), for example, is of the opinion that “McCarthy unveils the historical repression of the violence of Manifest Destiny and nineteenth-century (if not also twentieth) American racial superiority by cobbling together his fictional nightmare with pieces of verifiable history” (p. 24). Mayne (2001) takes a similar stand on the issue:

The attention to failure and the depiction of graphic brutality (especially in *Blood Meridian*) satisfies the New Western History’s criteria of failure and anti-romance as key components for revising the old, dangerous myths of nationalist progression in the American West. The label of ‘revisionist,’ therefore, appears to sit comfortably with McCarthy’s work. (p. 4)

Similarly, in view of Spurgeon (2005), *Blood Meridian*, is “a counter-memory, a sort of anti-myth of the West” (p. 20); she argues that “by uncovering the most ancient bones underlying these myths [of the West] and using them to construct a new mythic vision of history, McCarthy is deliberately deconstructing the imperialist aims and justifications of the old myths while disrupting assumptions about the ideas and identities they were intended to uphold” (p. 19). A critical analysis of the motif of violence in *Blood Meridian* elucidates the limits of views which have stressed the revisionist tendency of McCarthy’s text in relation to the myth of the West.

As the title of McCarthy’s text explicitly indicates, *Blood Meridian* seeks to portray the frontier violence in a frank and uniquely vivid manner. Kollin (2001)

addresses it as “the most brutal literary treatment of frontier themes in American history” (p. 561). Elaborating on the title of the novel, Bloom (2009) argues that because “McCarthy’s language, like Melville’s and Faulkner’s, frequently is deliberately archaic, the meridian of the title probably means the zenith or noon position of the sun in the sky” (p. 6). The kid, McCarthy’s protagonist, enters a universe in which violence is at its very zenith; in him “broods a taste for mindless violence” (p. 3). Violence is, indeed, part and parcel of this universe. McCarthy depicts a universe in which people “fight with fists, with feet, with bottles or knives. All races, all breeds. Men whose speech sounds like the grunting of apes. Men from lands so far and queer that standing over them where they lie bleeding in the mud he feels mankind itself vindicated” (p. 4). Glanton’s gang of scalp hunters are all bloodthirsty; the narrator describes them in a scene of novel as follows:

A pack of vicious-looking humans mounted on unshod Indian ponies riding half-drunk through the streets, bearded, barbarous, clad in the skins of animals stitched up with thews and armed with weapons of every description, . . . and the trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing scapulars or necklaces of dried and blackened human ears . . . and riding also in the company a number of half-naked savages reeling in the saddle, dangerous, filthy, brutal, the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh. (p. 78)

More than anything else, McCarthy’s text highlights the predator identity of the Glanton Gang. Based on such a representation, a number of critics have argued that McCarthy is a revisionist in his politics of representing manifest destiny; such readings have mainly ignored McCarthy’s treatment of violence as a universal entity. Within the rhetoric of the text, particularly as stressed by Judge Holden, war has been from the very beginning with mankind; it is eternal: “It makes no difference what men think of war,” says the judge, “War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way” (p. 248). “All other trades,” the Judge says, “are contained in that of war . . . . It endures because young men love it and old men love it in them. Those that fought, those that did not” (p. 249). The Judge illustrates the point further by arguing that all games, even those played by children, take their color from war: The child knows that “the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the value of that which is put at hazard” (p. 249). Games of sport, he argues, have winners and losers simultaneously. All games, indeed, “aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all” (p. 249). War, in the words of the Judge, is “the ultimate game because war is at last a

forcing of the unity of existence. *War is god* [emphasis added] (p. 249). The text's treatment of violence is not limited to a singular race. As noted above, violence envelops not only the Kid but also all "races, all breeds" (p. 4).

Revisionist critics have, indeed, ignored the fact that *Blood Meridian* emphasizes not only the predator identity of the Glanton Gang but also that of Native Americans. In this regard, Sepich (2008) refers to the "marked absence of moral hierarchy" (p. 125) throughout the text concerning the motivations of the characters and their acts of violence. "McCarthy gives no distinction between the good guys and the bad guys," Sepich emphasizes, "—there is only sophistic rationalization amid chaos and brutality. Both the Indians and the Anglos inhabit the same level of moral righteousness for McCarthy, and neither group is painted as 'hero' or 'victim'" (p. 125). The narrator describes, for instance, the violence on the part of Comanches who rode into Captain White's army of filibusters and slaughtered them as follows:

[R]iding down the unhorsed Saxons and spearing and clubbing them and leaping from their mounts with knives and running about on the ground with a peculiar bandy-legged trot like creatures driven to alien forms of locomotion and stripping the clothes from the dead and seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads. (p. 54)

Violence, death and destruction are integral to the cosmos of *Blood Meridian*. "All progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage" (p. 146), says Holden in a passage of the novel. This is in harmony with McCarthy's personal worldview. He declared in an interview that "[t]here's no such thing as life without bloodshed . . . I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea" (as cited in Hage, 2010, p. 40). The portrait of violence in McCarthy's narrative is not just a question of what is depicted; his manner of representation of violence is equally important; his vision of violence gives it an aesthetic and sublime dimension. The narrator's description of the Glanton Gang in a scene of the novel is representative of this:

They rode out on the north road as would parties bound for El Paso but before they were even quite out of sight of the city they had turned their tragic mounts to the west and they rode infatuate and half fond toward the red demise of that day, toward the evening lands and the distant pandemonium of the sun. (p. 185)

This sublime passage, Bloom points out, places the reader at "the visionary center of *Blood Meridian*" (p. 6). According to Kollin, this aesthetic representation



of violence “threatens to undermine the critical sensibilities of the novel” (p. 563). “McCarthy’s graphic treatment of Anglo brutality becomes aestheticized to the extent that audiences often experience a strange pleasure in reading these hyper-violent meditations,” he adds (p. 563). Therefore, the universality of violence and its aesthetic rendering pose challenges to revisionist perspectives. McCarthy’s treatment of violence can also be discussed with regard to his view of evil in the novel.

#### **4. *Blood Meridian* and the Universality of Evil**

In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy offers a dark meditation on the nature of evil and its strong presence in the world. The narrator has the hermit tell the Kid:

You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything. Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it. You believe that? (p. 19)

McCarthy’s worldview of evil is best expressed in terms of the character Judge Holden, the very embodiment of evil in the narrative. He has been dubbed “a villain worthy of Shakespeare, Iago-like and demoniac, a theoretician of war everlasting” (Bloom, p. 1). Reverend Green, after being charged by Holden with a variety of crimes, identifies him as the devil: “This is him. The devil. Here he stands,” he says (p. 7). He is a figure of remarkable and uncanny abilities. The ex-priest Tobin describes him as follows:

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. (p. 123)

The Judge aims at manipulating everything in the world and having it under his own control. “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent,” he tells Toadvine (p. 198). Hawkins (2017) sees the Judge as an evil force opposing natural law. He argues that McCarthy’s metaphysics shows “how *Blood Meridian* insists on the reality of natural law grounded in Will, and through Judge Holden’s characterization opposes this law to evil” (p. 8). To the Judge, God “speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things” (p. 116). He is also a scientist. He collects and classifies natural objects, sketches them in his leather ledger book, and records their dimension. He, indeed, aims to become the ruler of the earth. As he says, “[o]nly nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth” (p. 198). McCarthy also draws on Faust legend in his portrait of Holden’s

character. Sepich refers to the encounter between Holden and Glanton on the desert, where Holden provides him with a new powder, and their “secret commerce” or “terrible covenant” (p. 126) as a satanic pact. “Holden’s gift of gunpowder,” Sepich remarks, “has overtones of Mephistopheles’s gifts to Faust and incorporates an entire series of arcane, theological, and historical issues” (p. 121). Holden’s coldness and pride are “flaws in the otherwise magnificent creation that is Satan” (Sepich, p. 122). Elaborating on McCarthy’s philosophy of evil, Hawkins argues that McCarthy insists on the reality of evil “as a force with a positive ontological status that is alive in the world” (pp. 84-85). In McCarthy’s metaphysics, he states, “evil, as an ever-present potentiality human being, may actualize on account of man’s freedom to will” (p. 8). The evil, best epitomized in the character Judge Holden, is an active force in the universe portrayed by McCarthy in *Blood Meridian*. It is a universe in which God as a divine presence less interferes in the affairs of mankind. “If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind,” Holden poses the question, “would he not have done so by now?” (p. 146). No less pessimistic is the novel’s treatment of the condition of mankind in such a universe. Continuing his speech, Holden says:

And is the race of man not more predacious yet? The way of the world is to bloom and to flower and die but in the affairs of men there is no waning and the noon of his expression signals the onset of night. His spirit is exhausted at the peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his darkening and the evening of his day. (pp. 146-147)

In the cosmos of *Blood Meridian* evil has a strong presence. Referring to the conflict between the Judge and the Kid, “as a force against the evil that the judge represents,” (p. 48) Hage concludes that in “McCarthy’s dark worldview, the kind of timeless evil that Judge Holden represents must ultimately triumph” (p. 48). As implied at the end of the novel, the Judge finally rapes and murders the Kid, but the devil he is representative of survives in the world and continues his dance: “And they are dancing, the board floor slamming under the jackboots and the fiddlers grinning hideously over their canted pieces. Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing . . . He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die (p. 335).

McCarthy’s view of evil, as an eternal, pervasive and predominant entity in the universe, its essential ingredient indeed, turns out to be highly problematic for those critics who have underscored the revisionist aspect of his novel. If evil is part and parcel of this universe, we argue, then how one may blame the violence of manifest destiny, described in the text in terms of acts of bloodshed and evil-doing committed by the Glanton Gang?

## 5. American Identity Vis-à-vis Native American Identity

In *Blood Meridian*, the notion of American identity can be best addressed both vis-à-vis the identity of the Kid and that of Native Americans. As in the discussion of Turner's views mentioned, the frontier played a significant role in the formation of American identity; Turner's views had much influence on the myth of the Old West scholarship. A critical analysis of *Blood Meridian* brings into light aspects of McCarthy's text which, in contrast to revisionist readings, reflect the Turnerian view of the history of the West. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy highlights the formative influence of the frontier on the destiny of the Kid in a way much reminiscent of Turnerian philosophy and the myth of the Old West. After the Kid runs away from his birthplace Tennessee, the narrator points out that

only now is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become remote as his destiny and not again in all the world's turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay . . . . He sleeps on the deck, a pilgrim among others. (pp. 4-5)

The Kid's destiny falls under the influence of wild and barbarous terrains. It is the wilderness, the narrator highlights, which shapes the Kid's identity when he is distanced from his origins. This is in harmony with Turner's view about the influence of the frontier on the character of the frontiersman. Such a view once more calls into question the revisionist readings of the novel to the degree that it knows the frontier and its barbarous terrains responsible for atrocities committed by the white race. From the viewpoint of Captain White, the Kid is representative of young America and its opportunities for the nation: "You're young. But I don't misread you. I'm seldom mistaken in a man. I think you mean to make your mark in this world," Captain White says. "Am I wrong?," then, he poses the question. "No sir," says the Kid (p. 37). The Kid also displays characteristics of an American Adam destroyed by the world of experience. The narrator stresses not only his violent nature but also his innocence. His birth during the Leonid meteor showers of 1833, Sepich notes, "inclines the kid to violence, yet with some inherent kindness" (p. 126). As a member of the Glanton Gang, he commits many atrocities against the Native Americans and other victims of the gang and yet he is not represented as violent and bloodthirsty as the Judge. "I know, too, that you've not the heart of a common assassin," the Judge tells the Kid, "And, no partisan either. 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" (p. 299). The Judge accuses the Kid of being sympathetic toward Native Americans or heathens, as the text denigrates them. The kid is not the only victim of frontier's violence. Native Americans are, indeed,

the main victims of the Wild West depicted in the novel. This has led revisionist critics to claim that McCarthy is a revisionist in his politics of manifest destiny. These critics have not focused on the fact that the text emphasizes not only the predator identity of the Glanton Gang but also that of Native Americans. Glanton's multiracial gang includes even some Indians functioning mainly as guides for the gang. In his discussion of the violence committed by the Glanton Gang, Evans (2013) argues that they do not "make very convincing representatives of the Turner thesis: their violence is savage and anarchic, and they are as contemptuous of the institutions of American national authority as they are of the Mexicans they murder and the Indians they hunt" (p. 431). One must add to Evans' comments that the gang's acts of bloodshed were not so much in contradiction to the expansionist goals followed by American policymakers during the nineteenth century. The concept of American identity can be discussed also in relation to that of Indian identity in *Blood Meridian*.

After the slaughter of Captain White's army of filibusters by a group of Native Americans, Sproul, a survivor of the group, asks the Kid, "What kind of Indians was them?" He responds, "I don't know" (p. 56). McCarthy's text, indeed, does not penetrate deep into particulars of Native Americans' identity. It says nothing overt about their customs and traditions. They are often described in plural terms such as Delawares, Yumas, Comanches, and Apaches. The passage describing the murder of a group of Native Americans by the Glanton Gang is a fine example of their portrayal:

When the first dogs barked Glanton roweled his horse forward and they came out of the trees and across the dry scrub . . . where the shapes of the women rising up from their tasks stood flat and rigid in silhouette for a moment before they could quite believe in the reality of that dusty pandemoniac pounding down upon them. They stood dumb, barefoot, clad in the unbleached cotton of the country. They clutched cooking ladles, naked children. At the first fire, a dozen of them crumpled and fell. (p. 174)

The narrator takes an aesthetic distance in describing the violence exercised by the gang on Native Americans. Their destruction is depicted without sentimentality or any sense of pity in the novel. This manner of description has led the literary critic Hage to claim that "there is nothing as transparent as proselytizing or some form of postcolonial activism" in McCarthy's novel (p. 45). Native Americans in this novel are often denigrated as savages. The narrator describes a group of Apaches as follows:

They were Chiricahuas, twenty, twenty-five of them. Even with the sun up it was not above freezing and yet they sat their horses half

naked, naught but boots and breechclouts and the plumed hide helmets they wore, stoneage savages daubed with clay paints in obscure charges, greasy, stinking. (p. 228)

This is again in harmony with Turner's historical narrative of the old West which reduces Native Americans to the level of beasts.

## 6. Conclusion

McCarthy's Western novel *Blood Meridian* offers a glimpse into the manifest destiny of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. It is also an investigation into the conditions fashioning American identity in this period. Revisionist readings of McCarthy's narrative have highlighted the view that the work is a postmodern critique of the grand narrative of manifest destiny and its violence. A critical reading of this narratives has called into question such revisionist-oriented views. It has been argued that *Blood Meridian* essentially problematizes historiographic representation of the myth of the American West not only by questioning a valid access to history but also by calling into doubt the truth claims of such a representation. In harmony with McCarthy's personal view, *Blood Meridian* stresses the universality of violence which finds also an aesthetic dimension. From this vantage point, it has been maintained that these elements diminish the critical orientation of the text with regard to the motif of manifest destiny. In the same vein, McCarthy's stress on the universality of evil and its permanence in the world turns out to be highly problematic. It has been argued that if evil is part and parcel of this universe; then, how one may blame the violence of manifest destiny, rendered in the text mainly in terms of acts of bloodshed and evil-doing committed by the Glanton Gang? Concerning the motif of American identity, firstly, it has been stressed that *Blood Meridian*, contrary to revisionist perspectives, underscores in a Turnerian mode the influence of the frontier on the formation of the destiny of the Kid. Secondly, the text stresses not only the predator identity of Glanton gang but also that of Native Americans. Thirdly, the text does not give a true voice to the identity of Native Americans. Finally, it not only adopts an unsentimental attitude to their sufferings but also, in a Turnerian fashion, denigrates them as savages.

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