

Judgment of Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian

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Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: znanstveni
(dvopredmetni)

Ivan Včev

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Zadar, 2021.



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Zadar, 29. rujna 2021.

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1. Introduction

This work will present the Objective Moral critique of Cormac McCarthy's novel *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*. It will study the values espoused by the novel and consider their overarching effects on society – if the values propagated conform to the Objective Order, the novel will necessarily have a positive social effect; if they do not, the novel will be deemed subversive, i.e., destructive for anyone who reads it. However, since the term “critique” implies either the philosophy of idealism or perspectivism, the right word to use here instead is: judgment. Incidentally, the thematic fulcrum upon which the novel itself rests is the very question of judgment, law, and cosmic justice.

All judgment is an evaluative act informed by a law, done for the sake of the common good. Whether it be judgment as an exertion of legal power over someone, whether it be speculative judgment (i.e., the evaluation of truthfulness of something), whether it be practical judgment (i.e., the evaluation of the best possible action for one to undertake or the evaluation of one's past actions), or whether it be aesthetic judgment (i.e., the evaluation of the quality and didacticism of a work of art) – the same principle applies. The effect of judgment is always the enforcement of certain values – and values, once internalized (by an individual or by a whole group/society), dictate future behaviour patterns (habits). Change the values, change the person. Now, as for the law – it consists of two parts: one is contingent and the other eternal. The first part involves individual, cultural, and historical contingencies; the second part, the eternal part, is the Objective Order. Furthermore, the law and the values are always one and the same.

The same principles that apply to judgment also apply to the creation of art. For art, too, is informed by a law (some also call this: presuppositions, theories, ideologies, beliefs, etc.) and done for the sake of Beauty (and by achieving it, one also brings about the common good, since Beauty and Goodness are inseparable; but more on that later). The effect of any work of art is the enforcement of values which underly that work; and in turn then, these values influence

societal behaviour patterns. Therefore, if the laws that inform a work of art do not conform to the Objective Order, that work is to be called subversive, for it does not bring the common good, but by creating corrupt behaviour patterns, it brings about the dissolution of society.

Therefore, stated concisely: this paper will present an aesthetic judgment of McCarthy's novel, informed by the Objective Order. It will primarily concern itself with the evaluation of the novel's didacticism (i.e., with the law or values found between the lines), while secondarily it will also evaluate the novel's quality, the literary techniques it employs, and the emotional reactions it induces.

The first part of the paper will present the reader with the methodology (sub-chapter 2.1.) which will subsequently be employed to prove the existence of the Objective Order and to show the devastating consequences of its rejection (sub-chapters 2.2., 2.3., and 2.4.). The second part will present the aesthetic theory (chapter 3.), which together with the previous methodology, will inform the final judgment of the novel (chapter 4.). Furthermore, the bulk of the second part – and for that matter, the bulk of the entire paper – will consist of the demonstration of the philosophies (and thus of laws or values) that underly McCarthy's novel. Only after they have been presented, as impartially as possible, the paper will give the final judgment of the novel.

Finally, it bears mentioning that the philosophical underpinning of the novel is an idiosyncratically McCarthian blend of Nietzscheanism and Gnosticism. While this paper will mostly concern itself with the Nietzschean aspect, those readers well versed in Gnostic thought, will be able to clearly see the parallels. And at the very end of this paper, it will be revealed that these two frameworks are only a façade for the propagation of values and beliefs of a very specific religion.

2. Objective Order

The main premise or the main presupposition of this paper can be stated as follows: Subversive art aims at undermining the Moral Order, and by doing so, it enforces the dissolution of society. However, this premise is included in a more universal premise, which states that: The society which rejects the Objective Order will necessarily bring about its own destruction.

2.1. Methodology

The method with which this premise is going to be proven is usually referred to as the “Aristotelian method” or the inductive method – as opposed to the “Baconian method” and later the hypothetico-deductive method, which is the method of modern science. However, it is intellectually dishonest to call the first “Aristotelian”, because it does not belong to Aristotle, nor did he invent it – he is simply the first philosopher (or the first scientist) who managed to codify it. The method itself is universally human, which means that human beings have been using it ever since humanity started to exist and are still using it, albeit “unconsciously”, when they want to understand the reality and then pass that knowledge on to others. It is within our very nature.

Since it is well beyond the scope of this paper to fully explicate the method, it is nonetheless necessary to state few preliminary things about it – mostly because it is widely thought today that humanity has progressed past it. However, that is an impossibility – for it is evident that human nature has not changed since the dawn of human race. The new method¹ constitutes only a part of the old method, and that part eventually got swollen up to madness in its isolation. This is most noticeable in its rejection of formal causes and final causes, as well as in its denial of the power of human reason to know the principles of nature (which themselves

¹ For the sake of brevity, the modern scientific method or the hypothetico-deductive method, from now on, will be termed “new method”; and the Aristotelian or the inductive method will be termed “old method”.

have been reduced only to the principles of efficient causality, that is to say: the Baconian “uniformities of nature”).

First, let us elaborate on the “Aristotelian doctrine” of the four causes. Once again, this is not an invention of Aristotle, nor is this a doctrine in the sense of a particular philosophical system. Just as there are three and only three primary colours (red, yellow, and blue), and just as there are seven and only seven musical tones – so there are four and only four types of answers to the question “why?”, i.e., the four causes. Aristotle is simply the first philosopher who discovered them in totality (that we know of). The causes, just like colours or tones, can be named however one likes, or can be discovered by any one person (any one culture), or can be put into any one system – and all of that will not change that they objectively and universally exist “above and beyond” these things². Causes are not contingent upon any philosophy or any method – all methods and all philosophies are contingent upon them. The causes are as follows:

Now, there are four senses which are most obvious under which all the causes just described may be classed. The components of syllables; the material of manufactured articles; fire, earth, and all such bodies; the parts of a whole; and the premisses of syllogistic conclusion; are causes in the *material* sense. Of these some are causes as substrate: e.g. the parts; and others as *essence*: the whole, and the composition, and the form. The seed and the physician and the contriver and in general that which produces, all these are the source of change or stationariness. The remainder represent the *end* and *good* of the others; for the final cause tends to be the greatest good and *end* of the rest.

(Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1013b)

Let us now state this in more comprehensive terms: 1. *Causa materialis* or material cause is the building-block of anything; be it “matter” in a literal sense, e.g., the wood and leaves of an oak

² It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain “where” are the causes. They simply are. And all potential alien life forms would still have to use the same causes – unless they are in some way incapable of discovering them.

tree, or all the bones, muscles, veins, and nerves of a human hand; be it matter as words, sentences, or paragraphs which express an idea. 2. *Causa formalis* or formal cause is the structure or the design of a particular thing in the sense of its physical shape, but it is also the exemplar in the sense of the ideal quality or shape of something (e.g., this table has the form of the table; but in my mind is the exemplar of the perfect table); more fundamentally, it is the nature, character, or essence of something (e.g., “Human beings are social creatures”); this form or essence is also called the first principle or the first premise or the idea in the everyday sense of the word (e.g., “The universe is infinite”). 3. *Causa efficiens* or efficient cause is the agent or thing that brings something about; it is what we mean in our everyday usage of “causality” or “cause and effect”: X effects Y, therefore X is the cause of change or movement of Y; or X creates Y (e.g., the carpenter is the cause of a table because he creates, produces, the table). 4. *Causa finalis* or final cause is the end goal of an action or the ultimate purpose, the reason for a thing; it is the so-called “telos”. Both the final cause and the efficient cause presuppose the formal cause – because one cannot know the purpose of something or its workings unless one knows its nature (e.g., human beings grow and decay because they are living organisms); and because the statement of a principle of efficient or final causality is itself the material representation of an idea (i.e., the formal cause).

The old method primarily aims at the knowledge of principles, i.e., the essences of things: Truth. It consists of two parts: 1. Understanding of the first principles; 2. Deduction (demonstration by means of logical syllogisms) of further principles from the first. Since the second part is self-explanatory, “we must next inquire how we obtain knowledge of first principles, and what is the faculty that secures this knowledge” (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 99b). First, we shall deal with the “what”, i.e., the faculty:

[T]he soul has two parts, one rational and the other irrational. Let us now similarly divide the rational part, and let it be assumed that there are two rational faculties, one

whereby we contemplate those things whose first principles are invariable, and one whereby we contemplate those things which admit of variation: since, on the assumption that knowledge is based on a likeness or affinity of some sort between subject and object, the parts of the soul adapted to the cognition of objects that are of different kinds must themselves differ in kind. These two rational faculties may be designated the Scientific Faculty and the Calculative Faculty respectively; since calculation is the same as deliberation, and deliberation is never exercised about things that are invariable, so that the Calculative Faculty is a separate part of the rational half of the soul.

(Nicomachean Ethics 1139a)

The Scientific Faculty, in the western philosophical tradition, comes under many names: Common Sense, Mind, Illative Sense, Reason, Vernunft, νοῦς (Nous), Active Intellect, Agent Intellect, or simply: Intuition. This faculty allows us to understand our experience in a higher way. “We abstract universal ideas [invariable principles/essences] by force of the active intellect from the particular conditions” (Aquinas I, q.44, a.3, ad3.).

Let us now explain the “how”. How do human beings, through the use of their faculty of Intuition, grasp the first principles or the essences of things? Through the process of gestalt. By living in the world (of particulars), by acting in the world (of particulars) and by observing the world (of particulars), we come to apprehend the universals or the essences. This is not an active process of analysing, measuring or experimenting, but a process of “active passivity”: by observing the world, our sense-perception retains memories and our accumulated memories constitute our experiences – and all our experiences are constantly being worked on by our mind and body, just as our autonomic nervous system regulates our heart rate below the active/conscious threshold – and all of this finally culminates in the very pleasurable “a-ha!” moment, in an instantaneous apprehension of the principle: the gestalt. Aristotle explains this subconscious processing of experience “just as, when a retreat has occurred in battle, if one

man halts so does another, and then another, until the original position is restored” (*Posterior Analytics* 100a) – and when it is, we get a sudden intuitive flash of understanding. David Lynch calls this process “fishing for ideas”. We cannot actively produce this experience, we cannot invent ideas, we have to wait for them to come to us – e.g., it often happens that when we are frustrated with being unable to solve a problem on which we have been working for hours, we quit, go to take a shower and then – “a-ha!”. Even though we cannot produce ideas at will, we are not merely passive recipients: in order for us to gain insight into principles we have to actively commit – be it a committed work in the field of renaissance studies, birdwatching, or oncology – it does not matter; what is of central importance is that through years and years of experience, one can acquire a wealth of essences, which can then be passed on to next generations and thus humanity as a whole can flourish.

Since the first principles are the basis of all further knowledge, and since it is through Intuition that we grasp the first principles – therefore, Intuition is the basis of all scientific knowledge:

It follows that there can be no scientific knowledge of the first principles; and since nothing can be more infallible than scientific knowledge except intuition, it must be intuition that apprehends the first principles. This is evident [...] because the starting-point of demonstration is not itself demonstration, and so the starting-point of scientific knowledge is not itself scientific knowledge. (*Posterior Analytics* 100b)

Finally, the second half of the rational soul – the Calculative Faculty, or more simply: Rationality – cannot produce knowledge, but can only work upon that which it receives from Intuition. Hence, it is active in: syllogistic demonstration, measuring, comparison, categorization, definition, enumeration, and analysis (e.g., of grammatical properties of a sentence). In the matters of morality, it is with Common Sense that we grasp the moral

principles and with Rationality that we judge particular cases and create laws and policies in the light of said principles.

2.2. Deductive Proof

In order to prove the universal principle from the beginning of this chapter, let us form three simple syllogisms:

Only the acceptance of Objective Order leads to the Good.

The society has rejected the Objective Order.

The society is not heading towards the Good.

The society is not heading towards the Good.

The lack of Good is evil.

The society is heading towards evil.

The society is heading towards evil.

Evil is always destructive.

The society is heading towards destruction.

These conclusions are true if the premises are true. Hence, we must now look into the four premises: “Only the acceptance of Objective Order leads to the Good”, “The society has rejected the Objective Order”, “The lack of Good is evil”, and “Evil is always destructive”.

2.3. First Premise

“Only the acceptance of Objective Order leads to the Good.” This is a kind of tautology, since it is only within the Objective Order that the Good can be found. Hence, one has to recognize, whether consciously or unconsciously, the Objective Moral Order (as part of the Objective Order) so that one can act towards the Good.

Now, what is the Objective Order? On the most fundamental level, it is the recognition that there is Truth. This recognition is the first principle gained through Intuition – no amount of empirical evidence, academic citations, and deductive inference (based on empirical evidence) can prove the existence of Truth, unless one’s mind apprehends the form (the first principle: “There is Truth”). Equally as it cannot be proved, it cannot be gotten rid of. One can posit that there are no facts and that everything is relative – meaning that all knowledge, all morality, and all beauty depends on and stems out of: an individual’s perspective, an individual’s sentiment, given historical conditions / time periods, a culture, race, class, psychological conditions, biological instincts (physiological impulses), usefulness (utility), or evolution (all knowledge and all morality is constantly changing, regressing, progressing), etc. However, if there are no facts, then the only fact is that there are no facts. Also, if there is no truth and everything is relative, then that is the only absolute truth, independent of all the aforementioned variables. Hence, it is evident: there is Truth. Furthermore, Truth cannot change, it cannot evolve – for something to be true, it has to be eternal. If a principle is true in one time period, for one culture, one type of organism, etc., and false in another time, for another culture, and another type of organism – then that principle was never true in the first place: it was just a changeable opinion. This is the law of non-contradiction: something cannot both be and not be in the same place, at the same time, and in the same respect. And Truth has to be the same in every place, at every time, and in every respect – for that is the nature of truth; the same applies for the law of non-contradiction, since otherwise the law would not be true. The

principle “there is Truth”, just as the law of non-contradiction (also a principle grasped by Common Sense), and just as the four causes (the idea of each cause is itself a principle), tells us that reality is self-consistent: there is a stability of human knowledge, for otherwise all knowledge and all science would be impossible.

If there is Truth, then there is necessarily a mind. This is because we say that something is true in so far as it corresponds to a mind or in so far as it can be known by a mind. Therefore, the entire universe is designed or structured by a mind so that, amidst all the change within it, eternal principles (formal causes) can be known by other minds. We shall not delve any further into the nature of this higher mind, for this is not a theological treatise – it will be sufficient to say that this is not the human mind, for if it was, that would mean that the entire reality depends on the human act of knowing, which would lead to absurdities (e.g., parts of reality would disappear if no human would be consciously attending to them, looking at them). Hence, the Judge (and McCarthy through him) is lying: “the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there” (203). But further down the line, he then posits that there actually is a higher mind at work in reality: “For existence has its own order and that no man’s mind can compass” (203). Combined, these two principles lead to even more absurdities: for example, if the human mind has only “categorized” someone as essentially a male, then a whole host of paranormal phenomena or “glitches in the Matrix” would be constantly appearing around him – we would see a man, but since in the “real world” he is actually, let us say, a female kangaroo, then out of nowhere we might see this man nursing and feeding a child inside his thigh. This is actually what the pagans believed – the ancient Greek god Zeus once felt a great headache and asked another god, Hephaestus to split his head in half; and after the deed was done, the goddess Athena came out of it.

If there is Truth, then there is also the Good. Truth is that which is related to the mind/intellect, while the Good is that which is related to the appetite (in the sense of an end that

is desirable to act towards). A thing is said to be true, to the degree in which it corresponds to the idea of it in the mind. A thing is said to be good, to the degree to which it is desirable – and that which is desirable is a kind of perfection (a good or an end already achieved). Since the outside world objectively exists (and if it were an illusion or a simulation, i.e., a lie, human beings could not use Intuition to apprehend the essences of things from the natural world through their sense-perception, because those faculties depend on the truth of the natural world – in that case, Intuition could only be used to form abstractions and we would use the Calculating Faculty to further analyse those abstractions), it is also true: and since Truth is a kind of perfection – both as an idea (because it is realized, because it exists, because it is a perfection achieved) and as a thing that participates on an idea to a certain degree – it is also Good (furthermore, everything that exists already has a degree of perfection because it is physically actualized, it is real / it exists, and is therefore Good).

The Good also has the aspect of the final cause (because it is an end), and every final cause presupposes the formal cause (i.e., Truth). Since the universe is structured in such a way that human mind can grasp Truth, so too can the mind grasp the first principles of morality, i.e., the Objective Moral Order. Let us further elaborate. Since every act has an end, and since there is a degree of desirableness to those ends (and the degree of perfection of each end when achieved) – it is reasonable to conclude that there must be acts which would bring the best ends, the highest Good. Acts and attitudes that achieve the best ends are categorized as moral principles. And if there were no such principles, we would have an infinite regress of ends: “neither can the Final Cause recede to infinity – walking having health for its object, and health happiness, and happiness something else: one thing always being done for the sake of another” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 994a). Furthermore, “the Final Cause of a thing is an *end*, and is such that it does not happen for the sake of something else, but all other things happen for its sake [...] Those who introduce infinity do not realize that they are abolishing the nature of the Good”

(994b). C. S. Lewis calls the Moral Order, “the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are” (18). Values (ends) presuppose axioms (forms/principles). Value is another word for the Good, or more to the point: the highest Good.

Just as with Truth – the Good cannot be (empirically) proved, but neither can we get rid of it. Let us take for example the universal, objective, and eternal moral principle: “Old men should be held venerable and small children delightful.” One could try debunking this principle by stating that it is just an opinion, or just an emotional reaction (an individual’s sentiment), or just a custom of certain cultures, or that this principle might be true for now but we will evolve as a species and thus it will be replaced by a better principle, or that all morality is context-based³ and hence it is impossible to make generalizations such as this. However, what is then the highest Good? Undoubtedly, it is the principle: “Do what thou wilt.” But can the fulfilment of egotistic ends truly lead to the highest Good? Of course not. That one cannot get rid of morality becomes obvious if we take relativism as the only Truth: then someone espousing Objective Morality must be accused of the sin of spreading “moral absolutism”; equally, someone judging a situation or a person/group in accordance with Objective Order must be shamed for being “judgmental” and “prejudiced” or “discriminating” and “intolerant”. This is what has occurred in our world.

The third aspect of the Objective Order is Beauty. Like the True and the Good, it is a property that is found in everything that exists. Specifically, Beauty relates to that which is

³ Morality is context-based in the sense that an individual needs to use his own power of judgment to discern what is the best course of action in any one instance of his life; and this judgment will thus be a recognition of the Objective Moral Order (e.g., old men should be held venerable, but if an old man killed your dog, then obviously another principle needs to be applied). However, morality is not context-based in a sense that human beings cannot apprehend universal moral principles and that we need to enumerate all the best possible actions for all circumstances (like an algorithmic procedure which we would implant in our brain) in order to achieve the “good life”. This context-based philosophy is a type of a naturalist reductionism, which denies the existence of formal causes, final causes and the ability of human judgment – hence, all that one is left with is utilitarianism, i.e., maximization of one’s pleasure (the will to power) through a scientific procedure.

pleasing to the mind and the senses. This trio is interchangeable: we strive for truth because it is good and take pleasure in it because all truth is inherently beautiful; one knows moral principles (the good) because they are true, and all perfection, once achieved, is also beautiful because it has the same form as the good. Furthermore, it is a fact of life that ugliness (in art and architecture and everyday life) has a devastating effect on the human soul: it induces in us the sense that everything is meaningless (lack of Truth) and that life has no purpose (lack of the Good). Roger Scruton summarizes everything said thus far perfectly:

Beauty is an ultimate value – something that we pursue for its own sake, and for the pursuit of which no further reason need be given. Beauty should therefore be compared to truth and goodness, one member of a trio of ultimate values which justify our rational inclinations. Why believe p ? Because it is true. Why want x ? Because it is good. Why look at y ? Because it is beautiful. In some way, philosophers have argued, those answers are on a par: each brings a state of mind into the ambit of reason, by connecting it to something that it is in our nature, as rational beings, to pursue. Someone who asked ‘why believe what is true?’ or ‘why want what is good?’ has failed to understand the nature of reasoning. He doesn’t see that, if we are to justify our beliefs and desires at all, then our reasons must be anchored in the true and the good. (*Beauty 2*)

And Iain McGilchrist drives the point home:

Beauty is not just whatever we agree to call it, nor does it go away if we ignore it. We can’t remake our values at will. There may of course be shifts in art theory, but that is distinct from beauty itself, and we cannot rid ourselves of the value of beauty by a decision in theory. In this, beauty is like [...] goodness. Societies may dispute what is to be considered good, but they cannot do away with the concept. What is more the concept is remarkably stable over time. Exactly what is to be considered good may shift around the edges, but the core remains unchanged. Similarly, exactly what is to be called

beautiful may vary a little over time, but the core concepts of beauty remain, which is why we have no difficulty in appreciating the beauty of mediaeval or ancient art despite the passage of centuries. Art theory can pronounce the death of beauty, but in doing so it revives memories of King Canute. (*The Master and His Emissary* 443)

2.4. Second, Third and Fourth Premise

The premise “The society has rejected the Objective Order” does not need to be empirically proved – in this case, we can hypothetically posit its truthfulness. And in the case of the novel, if the subsequent analysis of the third chapter proves that its content is subversive, it will necessarily follow that it has rejected (and undermined) the Moral Order and will thus have destructive effect on the reader and the society as a whole.

Let us now tackle the premises “The lack of Good is evil” and “Evil is always destructive.” Since everything that exists has a purpose (acts towards an end – and the achievement of which is a kind of perfection) and since evil is the opposite of Good – we can conclude that evil is a privation. Logically speaking, pure evil is equal to nothing⁴. Thus, when someone acts contrary to his nature (against the possible perfection of his being) or when someone acts towards a lower end (lesser Good), he is then committing an evil deed; and since destruction is an act that brings about privation, all evil deeds are destructive. An act toward the lower Good is not evil in the absolute sense of the word (for it does not have to have nothingness for its end; nor can it achieve total nothing), but it is nonetheless right to call it evil. Just as it is right to call someone who does evil deeds, evil – even though, in order to commit such a deed, one needs to exist (and hence to be Good). Finally, evil cannot lead to Good – only

⁴ Some might oppose this line of reasoning by stating that it is impossible for everything to have a purpose (i.e., final cause), because it is self-evident that, e.g., a rock is purposeless: the rock simply is. However, when something “just is”, it is already Good: because existence is a kind of perfection (a realization of an end – in this case, the mere existence of a rock).

the greater act of the Good can undermine the effects of evil. This same logic also applies to ugliness.

All of this becomes obvious when dealing with a concrete example. Thus, if a given society is not structured around achieving the common good, it is then undoubtedly constructed for the benefit of one man (tyranny) or one group (oligarchy) – hence, it is reasonable to say that everyone under this rule is suffering from evil (even the ruling class is suffering an evil which stems from their own choosing of lesser ends, because the accomplishment of those ends, i.e., domination of others, deprived them of the Good inherent in their nature; all humans are social creatures and thus tend to work for the common good – this is self-evident from the feelings of depression and emptiness humans universally feel after living an isolated and egotistic life). That evil is always destructive is obvious from the mentioned example: if one is being exploited for the benefit of his rulers (which is evil), one cannot flourish as a human being. It is a historical fact that the slaves of ancient Egypt or ancient Greece lived much shorter lives than the ruling classes of these periods. Some might oppose all of this by stating that these two principles are an attempt of imposing Augustinian views on to this paper. However, that is not the case. To call evil the lack of good, and to thus state that evil has no existence, is not “Christian ideology” or “Augustin’s philosophical system”. Augustin himself came from the Platonic philosophical tradition which recognized the Objective Order – his conclusion is a strict logical necessity, and if his religion supports it, then it is only a testament to the truthfulness of his religion.

3. Subversion

The purpose of art is Beauty. All art is done for its sake and it is not done for the sake of something else. In the achievement of Beauty, both utility (“form follows function”) and idiosyncratic taste (“l’art pour l’art”) are fulfilled – just as selfishness and altruism become one in the achievement of the Good. The achievement of the highest end brings with itself best possible effects, both for man and for everything that exists: joy, peace, fulfilment and betweenness of all things. The highest Beauty is necessarily also the highest Good and the highest Truth. Therefore, all art is didactic in nature: for it shows us that which is pleasing and desirable in the light of Truth. Simply put, all art builds character – the ultimate aim of which is: virtue. It moulds stable dispositions (habits) of emotion and action in two ways: 1. By teaching the principles of life – both moral principles and truths about the nature of things found in the world; since our beliefs dictate our actions and our actions dictate the kind of man we will become, right beliefs will produce good actions (virtuous character) and corrupt beliefs will produce subversive actions (bad/deficient character). 2. By arousing emotional reactions – this is of special importance with regard to children and young people; since all human beings have an inborn moral conscience, if this disposition is not cultivated from an early age, a man will never develop the proper ability of judgment (both intellectual and instinctual), just as if he never learned to walk. “Plato [...] had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful” (Lewis 16).

Subversive art, on the other hand, does the exact opposite of everything stated above. Its aim is that of a lower Good and hence its effect is wide-spread demoralization. Subversion is also (often) a planned attempt to destroy everything of value in a given location, in order to induce a societal breakdown, after which that society will be restructured and rebuilt from the

inside or conquered from the outside. If just men will not bring order to society, the forces of evil certainly will: an order of slavery and exploitation.

Now that the criteria which will inform the judgment of the novel has been revealed, the analysis can begin. We start with Nietzschean vitalism and how it is related to the overall story world of *Blood Meridian*.

3.1. Teleology of Nature

Vitalism postulates that there is no spiritual world. This world is all that there is. But there is yet a grand design to all of life, a hidden intelligence behind all things. Man is incapable of grasping this Logos due to his inborn cognitive apparatus, which turns the real world into a representation and throughout his life urges him to form fantasy after fantasy about life. All for the purpose of surviving, and more importantly – thriving. Nonetheless, even with his mind deceiving him, man can glimpse into the essence of the world through his own body, since the body is itself a fractal of this grand design. “Applicants for wisdom do what I have done: inquire within” (Heraclitus 80). Thus, the hermit from the second chapter says: “A man’s at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he dont want to (McCarthy, 24)”. Indeed, a certain strength of spirit is needed to step into the abyss of oneself – and those few that manage to return will see the reality of the world: pure will. The real world is not that different from the one of our representation. It is not abstract as some may imagine it, on the contrary, it is immanent and permeated by madness – for us, infinitely vile and demonic. A world as though fashioned by a blind idiot god. Yes, this is the dream of Lovecraft’s Azathoth and nightmarish reality of Richard Sharpe Shaver’s stories. This is the hellscape of *Blood Meridian*.

And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of

force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by “nothingness” as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil”, without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself – do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? – *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides! (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 550)

All of this is being continually paraphrased by McCarthy’s Judge throughout the novel:

The truth about the world, he said, is that anything is possible. Had you not seen it all from birth and thereby bled it of its strangeness it would appear to you for what it is, a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having

neither analogue nor precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tentshow whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a mudded field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning [...] In this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others. (203)

Nietzsche's worldview grew out of the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. And while Schopenhauer condemns the primordial will and wishes to extinguish it, Nietzsche says "yes" to life – instead of pessimistic withdrawal, he affirms life in all of its horrific glory.

What is good? – Whatever augments the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself, in man.

What is evil? – Whatever springs from weakness.

What is happiness? – The feeling that power increases – that resistance is overcome.

Not contentment, but more power; not peace at any price, but war. (*The Antichrist* 20)

Due to his celebration of elan vital, and of the Dionysian dancing-embrace of fate and drunken intoxication with life, Nietzsche is labelled a vitalist. However, we could also label him as a philosopher of "becoming", as opposed to philosophers of "being". One of the great forefathers of this philosophy is the ancient Greek Heraclitus of Ephesus. When philosophizing "being", one is trying to systematize the world according to the inherent rules of his mental apparatus – space, time, and causality. We name things and put them in categories in order to "grasp" them, meaning: use them. And in this grasping, the essential nature is lost. "Some [...] try in vain with empty talk to separate the essences of things and say how each thing truly is" (Heraclitus 1). "I distrust all systematizers and stay out of their way. The will to a system is a lack of integrity" (*Twilight of the Idols* 9). Thus, in order to gain true wisdom, one has to patiently wait, hear, and

smell like a hunter reading the signs of forest and animals – if one’s mind is filled with unnecessary neurotic clutter that pulls him out of his body, he will never be able to understand the big picture, and wisdom is always the big picture; at once, incomplete and mysterious but all-encompassing and pragmatic, like any principle for living a good life, almost all of them which today’s culture has eroded. “People dull their wits with gibberish, and cannot use their ears and eyes” (Heraclitus 4). And true wisdom is always embodied, connected with one’s instincts, and revealed in action, in one’s engagement with the world. “The eye, the ear, the mind in action, these I value⁵” (Heraclitus 13). Likewise, just as other vitalists, Heraclitus posits that there is a cosmic law underlying all things, a unifying design that fractals out into everything that is. “All things follow from the [Logos]” (1). “For wisdom, listen not to me but to the [Logos], and know that all is one” (2). Unlike Nietzsche, who states that the will to power is the universal law, measure, or Logos, out of which everything is its emanation, Heraclitus deems Fire to be that eternal law. “That which always was, and is, and will be everliving fire, the same for all, the cosmos, made neither by god nor man, replenishes in measure as it burns away” (20). For these philosophers, “becoming” is god. And in Heraclitus’ formulation, fire is god. Becoming is just like music, ever-flowing and harmonious, created out of the opposition of notes and silences. “The cosmos works by harmony of tensions, like the lyre and bow” (Heraclitus 56). Therefore, “Air dies giving birth to fire. Fire dies giving birth to air. Water, thus, is born of dying earth, and earth of water” (Heraclitus 25), but “No being, not the sun itself, exceeds due measure, but contending powers set things right” (Heraclitus 29).

Now we are fully equipped to understand all the pretentious stylistic choices of the novel – ominous narration, archaic language, sparse diacritics, and no interiority of characters. With this style, McCarthy is trying to bring the reader right into the essence of reality, into this

⁵ This subject is further expanded upon in the “Introduction” and “Chapter 6 – We, Scholars” of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, both of which stem from Schopenhauer’s essays “On Learning and the Learned” and “On Reading and Books”.

“becoming” which he sees as demonic and insane. It is as if out of every crevice of the novel the old McCarthy jumps out to hammer the reader on the head with his new reformulation of “the world is terrible, there is no God”. Moreover, the “hero’s journey” of the kid is the plunge into the depths of the genus man, into its prehistoric and prelinguistic will to power, out of which the human race and everything created by it has emanated – katabasis in which “the beginning is the end” (Heraclitus 70): the all-consuming will. Here we also find the origin of the Judge. He is the purest emanation of the will, whose predecessors we cannot fully uncover in physics, but in metaphysics. “Whatever his antecedents he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go” (McCarthy 255). The dark becoming of the world is in the wisdom of the Mennonite. “The wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a million years before men were and only men have power to wake it. Hell ain’t half full. Hear me. Ye carry war of a madman’s making onto a foreign land. Ye’ll wake more than the dogs” (38). It is inherent in nature, in land itself.

They rode on and the sun in the east flushed pale streaks of light and then a deeper run of color like blood seeping up in sudden reaches flaring planewise and where the earth drained up into the sky at the edge of creation the top of the sun rose out of nothing like the head of a great red phallus until it cleared the unseen rim and sat squat and pulsing malevolent behind them [...] The mountains on the sudden skyline stark and black and livid like a land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear. (41, 43)

And in multitudes of depictions of endless violence. One of which is the Comanche massacre.

[...] riding 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 bandylegged 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, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals, some of the savages so slathered up with gore they might have rolled in it like dogs and some who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows. (46)

It is almost as if in these moments the Veil of Maya is lifted and man can gaze into the true nature of the world; the madness behind things. Just like in the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico – e.g., *Premonitoire de Guillaume Apollinaire* and *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* – one can almost sense the immanent reality of this dark becoming. Interestingly, in the novel, this is best felt in the violent acts of malice. When Judge falsely accuses Reverend Green. When Judge mocks the naïve squatters. “The squatters in their rags nodded among themselves and were soon reckoning him correct, this man of learning, in all his speculations, and this the Judge encouraged until they were right proselytes of the new order whereupon he laughed at them for fools” (101). When Toadvine and the Kid unnecessarily burned the hotel. “Toadvine was running down the street, waving his fists above his head crazily and laughing. He looked like a great clay voodoo doll made animate and the kid looked like another” (15). This is also the key for understanding the “surrealism” in films of David Lynch – namely *Premonition Following an Evil Deed* (1995) and *Blue Velvet* (1986). It is very instructive to watch *Blue Velvet* back-to-back with *The Last Picture Show* (1971), because they are one and the same film: while Lynch is an oracle blessed with images beyond the world of representation, which he channels onto the filmstrip, Bogdanovich is much more socially adept and presents the same primordial sinister gloom through the subtleties of everyday drama.

From this dark becoming, the human race has evolved. It was there at our inception, waiting for us and moulding us in accord with its elusive and horrifying visage. In the prologue, McCarthy reveals to us that the practice of scalping is more than three hundred thousand years

old. Almost as if trying to tell us that our rise was founded on the unthinkable abomination – an abomination into which the depraved mind of Oscar Kiss Maerth has gazed and thus written in *The Beginning Was the End*: “Human development [...] was set in motion by man’s own sinful interference and produced physical defects dangerous to his existence and an over-sized sick brain, which made his self-destruction appear to be progress” (16). “One ape discovered that eating the fresh brain of one’s own kind increases the sexual impulse. He and his descendants became addicted to brains and hunted for them. It was not until later that they noticed that their intelligence increased as a result. The outcome of this process is *Homo sapiens*” (37). “The fruit of the tree of knowledge which caused cleverness and nakedness is the human brain and nothing else. And the unending succession of skulls left by cannibals proves that this fruit of knowledge was consumed without interruption by the forebears of *Homo sapiens* for a million years” (226).

3.2. Sexual Transmutation

If everything desires power, and this desire is inherently destructive, then how is it possible that the world has not already negated itself? Because McCarthy and Nietzsche hold the pagan belief that the world is eternal: creation and destruction, masculine and feminine, good and evil – all of them inseparable principles, eternally changing and warring with each other; and yet in their highest expression – they are One: light is darkness and darkness is light. *Ignis Natura Renovatur Integra*. Fundamentally: they believe in the law of conservation of energy. And the world is a monster of energy.

“The universe is a boundless sea filled with immaterial cosmic energy which consists of various elements. No creature can live without this cosmic energy. It is life energy itself” (Maerth 103). It came to be known in Hinduism as Prana, the ancient Chinese called it Qi or Chi, and in our modern era, it was rediscovered by Wilhelm Reich as Orgone and by Henri

Bergson as Elan Vital. This energy is sexual energy. Herein lies the key for uncovering the philosophy behind the afore cited descriptions of natural world and acts of violence found in the novel. In *Blood Meridian*, the whole cosmos is one gigantic and never-ending sex act: the masculine sun rising and chasing the feminine moon, the feminine element of earth going downward and the masculine element of air going upward, etc. It is not God's love that holds the world together, but the perpetual generative force of libido. Hence, the essence of humanity is to be found in the loins – not in mind or the heart.

Lust for power. This is the core out of which everything emerges. Hence the doctrine of sublimation. Out of the One come Many:

Chemistry of concepts and sensations. – At almost every point, philosophical problems are once again assuming the same form for their questions as they did two thousand years ago: how can something arise from its opposite, for example something rational from something irrational, something sentient from something dead, logic from illogic, disinterested contemplation from wilful desire, living for others from egoism, truth from error? Metaphysical philosophy has up to now helped itself get past this difficulty by denying that one emerged from the other and assuming that more highly valued things had a miraculous origin, immediately out of the core and essence of the “thing itself.” Historical philosophy, by contrast, which can no longer be thought of as separate from natural science, the youngest of all philosophical methods, has ascertained in individual cases (and this will presumably be its result in every case) that there are no opposites, except in the habitual exaggeration of popular or metaphysical views, and that an error in reasoning lies at the base of such oppositions: according to its explanation, there are, strictly speaking, neither any unegotistical actions nor any completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations, in which the fundamental element appears to have almost evaporated and reveals its presence only to the keenest observation. –

All that we need, and what can be given to us only now, at the present level of the individual sciences, is a *chemistry* of the moral, religious, aesthetic representations and sensations, likewise of all those stimuli that we experience within ourselves amid the wholesale and retail transactions of culture and society, indeed even in solitude: what if this chemistry were to reach the conclusion that in this area, too, the most magnificent colours have been extracted from base, even despised materials? Will many people have the desire to pursue such investigations? Humanity loves to put from its mind questions concerning origins and beginnings: wouldn't we have to be almost dehumanized to find in ourselves traces of the opposite inclination? (*Human, All Too Human I* 15, 16)

This is the basis of Nietzsche's psychology: this is his primary tool in uncovering what is hidden (which ulterior motives lie) in the philosophies of his predecessors and contemporaries. Furthermore, since everything is the evolutionary, alchemical process of converting that which is base into that which is sublime – Nietzsche concludes the primacy of physiology. “Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings – always darker, emptier, and simpler” (*Gay Science* 203). Everything is the body because everything came from the body. And the individual is only the latest creation. Physiology precedes logic.

This knowledge now enables those noble individuals to worship their own will as God: not a pious, but a forceful worship. Asceticism as a tool for channelling and controlling one's own desires – sublimating the good into evil and evil into good – all for the purpose of satisfying even greater desires. Hence, the Judge's constant meditations.

3.3. Overcoming

Moving on, the central metaphor of the novel, indeed its very name “Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West”, is the Nietzschean concept of overcoming. The act of great despising – and we have already seen a glimpse of it in the above-mentioned doctrine of

sublimation. Man, and everything in nature, does not merely strive for survival, but for expansion and conquest – nothing in life wants “just this”, it wants “and this” – the very best, the most moral of men want to impose their will onto all of creation. “And life itself confided this secret to me: ‘Behold’, it said, ‘I am that which must always overcome itself’” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 115). In order to achieve this, “Man must become better and more evil – this I teach. The greatest evil is necessary for the overman’s best” (288).

In order for one to become better, one has to become worse: this is why the epitome of a renaissance man, the Judge, who possesses a multitude of laudable qualities such as intelligence, leadership, persuasiveness, etc. is also a monstrous devouring paedophile. One entails the other. And those that think of themselves as possessing intelligence without cruelty are deceivers – for their will is weak and their intelligence severely limited. Knowledge is power, and absolute knowledge corrupts absolutely. Each and every man possesses this same will, but in unequal measure. Thus, the will manifests itself in different measures, abilities, and qualities. “For men are not equal: thus speaks justice. And what I want, they would have no right to want!” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 126). In life, everything is the question of rank. This is The Great Chain of Being of which Tobin spoke. “The gifts of the Almighty are weighed and parcelled out in a scale peculiar to himself. It’s no fair accountin’ and I don’t doubt but what he’d be the first to admit it and you put the query to him boldface” (McCarthy 106).

Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master. That the weaker should serve the stronger, to that it is persuaded by its own will, which would be master over what is weaker still: this is the one pleasure it does not want to renounce. And as the smaller yields to the greater that it may have pleasure and power over the smallest, thus even the greatest still yields, and for

the sake of power risks life. That is the yielding of the greatest: it is hazard and danger and casting dice⁶ for death. (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 114, 115)

Only the very best of specimens, the noble few have the blood and will to challenge death in order to reach their meridian, the high point and the noon of their life. To transcend one's humanity means walking a tightrope: above shines the light of the overman and below is the redness of the eve, the low point and the sunset. "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" (McCarthy 123).

This quote is directly taken from Oswald Spengler, a child of Goethe and Nietzsche, who stated that when the high point is reached, the decline begins. When a culture reaches its peak, civilization begins: "The transition from Culture to Civilization was accomplished for the Classical world in the 4th [before Christ], for the Western in the 19th Century" (32). In Spengler's view, history is not linear but cyclical. He sees it as an organic process of seasonal changes: birth, development, decline, and death. The subject of world-history are cultures: there were nine of them in total, with the Western or Faustian being the last one. Their life lasts for about thousand years; starts with the generative phase (culture) and ends with the expansive phase (civilization). Civilizations are "the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture" (31), they "are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life" (31). Hence, "for the first time, we are enabled to understand the Romans as the *successors* of the Greeks" (32). The culture-civilization model has masterfully reached its perfection in Spengler; however, its origin is in Nietzsche:

⁶ This is what the Judge is paraphrasing when he is talking about the "last man" in the bar "Yet his complaint that a man's life is no bargain masks the actual case with him. Which is that men will not do as he wishes them to" (269).

There are two types of genius: one which above all begets and wants to beget, and another which prefers being fertilized and giving birth. Just so, there are among peoples of genius those to whom the woman's problem of pregnancy and the secret task of forming, maturing, and perfecting has been allotted – the Greeks, for example, were a people of this type; also the French – and others who must fertilize and become the cause of new orders of life – like the Jews, the Romans, and, asking this in all modesty, the Germans? (*Beyond Good and Evil* 184)

In part, McCarthy's novel is a mockery of Spengler, for it shouts at him: "This is your culture! This is how its peak was reached! Faustians from the very beginning never created, generated, anything – only invented lies and clever techniques for controlling, plundering, and destroying past cultures and themselves. The western world is nothing but a parasitic organism!" It is also a properly Nietzschean rejection of his thesis: the western civilization will not decline, but ascend. By walking the tightrope of the meridian, the vast multitudes will fall and the world will be bathed in blood – but the noble few who rise up the chain will go past the high point and into the light. The apotheosis: birth of the overman. The chosen will overcome their humanity and build the new order of the ages.

3.4. War

One is judged only by his success or failure in transcending. "Fire of all things is the judge and ravisher" (Heraclitus 26). The supreme manifestation of dark becoming in the world of men, is war. It is the coming together of opposites, the ever-flowing bloodshed that unifies conflicting wills. "War, as father of all things, and king, names few to serve as gods, and of the rest makes these men slaves, those free" (Heraclitus 44). Out of the furnace of war, comes social hierarchy. "People arrange themselves according to their degree of force" (Nietzsche, *The Will*

to *Power* 412). “Order of rank as order of power: war and danger the presupposition for a rank to retain the conditions of its existence” (457). McCarthy paraphrases all of this perfectly:

It makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. War endures [...] 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 [...] Men are born for games. Nothing else [...] 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 [...] All games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all [...] What more certain validation of a man’s worth could there be? [...] It is the testing of one’s will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god [or: fire is god; will to power is god; becoming is god]. (206, 207, 208)

This is the world of relativism/perspectivism. But what is relativism? It is nothing other than the recapitulation of the doctrine of rank. “The strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the “truth” one could still barely endure” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 49). Just as Aldous Huxley states: “Knowledge is a function of being” (1). There is no one, ultimate truth; however, some truths are better than others because they stem from a superior intellect – that is, from a superior body/physiology – that is, from the superior and stronger will. The majority thinks that relativism is a free-for-all, that one is allowed to think whatever he wants because all worldviews are equally valid. This is not the case, for in a world dominated by relativism, everyone is very precisely ranked according to the power of their intellect.

3.5. Moral Law

It will undoubtedly surprise some readers to learn that this postmodern nihilistic novel is actually a morality tale. An inverted morality tale. Unlike the tragedies of old that ended with a failed hero's journey in order to pass on a moral lesson – e.g., hero's tragic flaw was his hubris, disrespect of the gods, not trusting his fellow man, etc. – the didacticism of *Blood Meridian* lies in the kid, now a man, not learning to “do what thou wilt”. Just like the Judge said. “No assassin, called the Judge. 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” (246). The Kid failed walking the tightrope and fell into the eve of blood because he did not give in to the primordial will to power within himself. Unlike the Judge, he did not want to follow the “rules of the game” that life itself has set: you either strive to transcend yourself or you become subsumed in the human biomass – you are either expanding or contracting, there is nothing in between. The Kid chose to “live small”, follow Christianity, and, in essence, escape life. Thus, he was punished. Certainly, this is a Satanic message, but it is also based on the Nietzschean concept of master morality.

There are *master morality* and *slave morality* [...] It should be noted immediately that in this first type of morality the opposition of “good” and “bad” means approximately the same as “noble” and “contemptible.” (The opposition of “good” and “evil” has a different origin.) One feels contempt for the cowardly, the anxious, the petty, those intent on narrow utility; also for the suspicious with their unfree glances, those who humble themselves, the doglike people who allow themselves to be maltreated, the begging flatterers, above all the liars [...] The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, “what is harmful to me is harmful in itself”; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is *value-creating*.

Everything it knows as part of itself it honors: such a morality is self-glorification. In the foreground there is the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow: the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not, or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power⁷. The noble human being honors himself as one who is powerful, also as one who has power over himself, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness [...] It is the powerful who *understand* how to honor; this is their art, their realm of invention. The profound reverence for age and tradition – all law rests on this double reverence – the faith and prejudice in favor of ancestors and disfavor of those yet to come [...] It is different with the second type of morality, *slave morality*. Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralize: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition. The slave's eye is not favorable to the virtues of the powerful: he is skeptical and suspicious, *subtly* suspicious, of all the "good" that is honored there – he would like to persuade himself that even their happiness is not genuine. Conversely, those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease existence for those who suffer: here pity, the complaisant and obliging hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness are honored – for here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means for enduring the pressure of existence. Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility. Here is the place for the origin of that famous opposition of "good" and "evil": into evil one's feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According

⁷ This is exactly why we had those bizarre episodes in the novel with Judge and the fool.

to slave morality, those who are “evil” thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are “good” that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the “bad” are felt to be contemptible. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 204, 205, 206, 207)

Unsurprisingly, McCarthy is also paraphrasing this through the Judge. “Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favour of the weak” (207). The very name “Judge” is the synonym for the Nietzschean “Nobleman”, who is a law unto himself. He is the supreme arbiter of all values, his will the measure of all things. “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (McCarthy, 165). The Judge is also often likened to an infant, and this is due to Zarathustra’s three metamorphoses: camel – lion – child (out of which the playful infant is the supreme). Near the end of the novel, the Judge is also talking about Zarathustra’s concept of the last man. “As war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question those honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior’s right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers” (McCarthy 270, 271). And the original that was paraphrased. “Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 17). However, over this large mass of humankind, a Caesar will be born, the master of the earth. The one who has gazed into the horrifying truth of this world, the one who has transcended this nihilism and again affirmed life, the dancing Dionysus, the playful child, the one who now challenges death to rule over all of existence – the redeemer of the human biomass, Judge himself.

And yet there will be one there always who is a true dancer and can you guess who that might be? [...] Only that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance [...] 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. (McCarthy 271)

Nietzsche says the same: “One must have no choice: either on top – or underneath, like a worm, mocked, annihilated, trodden upon. One must oppose tyrants to become a tyrant, i.e., free. It is no small advantage to live under a hundred swords of Damocles: that way one learns to dance, one attains “freedom of movement” (*The Will to Power* 404).

A question constantly keeps coming back to us, a seductive and wicked question perhaps: may it be whispered into the ears of those who have a right to such questionable questions, the strongest souls of today, whose best control is over themselves: is it not time, now that the type of “herd animal” is being evolved more and more in Europe, to make the experiment of a fundamental, artificial and conscious *breeding* of the opposite type and its virtues? And would it not be a kind of goal, redemption, and justification for the democratic movement itself if someone arrived who could make use of it – by finally producing beside its new and sublime development of slavery (– that is what European democracy must become ultimately) a higher kind of dominating and Caesarian spirits who would stand upon it, maintain themselves by it, and elevate themselves through it? To new, hitherto impossible prospects, to their own prospects? To their own tasks? (500, 501)

With amor fati, with the love of the circle, and with the god Dionysus dancing in the affirmation of life, Nietzsche usually ended his books, especially his most famous ones: *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *The Will to Power* (although this one depends on the editor).

McCarthy does the same.

Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die. He bows to the

fiddlers and sashays backwards and throws back his head and laughs deep in his throat and he is a great favorite, the judge. He wafts his hat and the lunar dome of his skull passes palely under the lamps and he swings about and takes possession of one of the fiddles and he pirouettes and makes a pass, two passes, dancing and fiddling at once. His feet are light and nimble. He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in the light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die. (274)

Due to the nihilistic story world and due to the story's progression arc from one depraved act of violence to the next, McCarthy simply had to end it in catastrophe, else the ending would have been inconsistent and "cheap". In Hollywood, this type of ending is known as "fake ending": the seemingly all-is-lost moment in which the antagonist triumphs over the hero – but – all of a sudden, the hero rises to the occasion, defeats the antagonist, saves the girl, and the whole society is changed for the better. Its overuse for commercial purposes has created a tremendous backlash among certain artists and literary critics, who then had the urge to revolt against it; McCarthy included. However, this type of ending, in which a catastrophe is followed by an eucatastrophe, is the form found in the very best of stories.

For it I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with joy that brings tears (which I argued it is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce). And I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back. It perceives [...] that this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made. And I concluded by saying that the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story – and produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like

sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciliated, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love. (Tolkien 115,116)

Due to the law of diminishing returns, the novel had to end in obscurantism – the descriptions of violence have worn out their welcome and lost their effect, hence the final and most terrifying violent act had to be indescribable; and the epilogue, which is the fulfilment of the hermit's prophecy – “Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it” (McCarthy 24) – unreadable.

4. Conclusion

Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West is a subversive attempt at destroying the very idea of judgment and the very idea of the Objective Order. Hence, it is evident that all the novel can effect/create are decadent behaviour patterns (in its readership) that will bring about the dissolution of society.

Let us now elaborate on how the novel does this. Firstly, it espouses an epistemology that denies the ability of our Common Sense to grasp the eternal and objective Truth – and since we cannot truly come to know that which is objective, we cannot know moral principles either – therefore, all judgment now becomes informed, not by the eternal law, but by the contingent parts of the law. All judgment is now the expression of the will of the powerful and all Truth is now the opinion of the powerful. Secondly, it places the reader inside a cosmos in which everything is an expression/outflow of the lust for domination and in which everything is precisely ranked by the degree of power and cunning that it possesses. Thirdly, it teaches the reader that the only way to escape this pandemonium is to “do what thou wilt” – the only way to be free is to be a tyrant. However, that is a lie. There is no freedom outside the moral law. Once outside, man necessarily becomes slave to his natural impulses and henceforth tries to enslave all the rest of humanity. “Only the [Objective Order] provides a common human law of action which can over-arch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery” (Lewis 73).

The novel presents to the reader an inverted Objective Order (Logos) in which good is evil and evil is good, in which all Truth is but a useful fiction for exploiting others and in which the only Good is to do what one pleases. Mercy, love, and charity are unholy principles in this story. And above all: hope. For the novel is so precisely constructed in order to invert all the tenets of Christianity and to welcome the coming of the Antichrist and of the new satanic age.

For Satanism is the religion that McCarthy is actually promoting – a religion based on the inversion of Christianity and on subverting the Objective Order; need not to say: an inherently destructive religion. The novel, although it is well-crafted and aesthetically pleasing, presents so much unjustified gruesomeness and so many lies – not to say that a work of art should be forbidden from showing that, but a work of art must be obliged to redeem such desecration. Repugnantly, the novel wallows in it. The ending, especially, leaves one with a great sense of emptiness. This lack in the reader's heart is nothing else but a recognition that there truly is something beyond nihilism in this world and that we are truly made for something better.

Once subversive art destroys all objective values, we become incapable of judging the Judge. Morality has no weight anymore, only might does. Therefore, we are left with two alternatives: suicide for the weak-willed who cannot endure life in hell or fight for the rank in the hierarchy of demons. *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West* is a sales funnel for the destruction of man. A sales funnel for Satan.

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Summary

Judgment of Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian

This paper will present the Objective Moral critique of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West*. Since Objective Morality cannot be reduced to a system, an ideology, or a philosophy, and since all world religions do not claim it for themselves, but build their beliefs (which come from divine revelations) upon it – we can also state that this paper will present a common-sense critique of the novel. This is because Common Sense or Vernunft or νοῦς (nous) is a faculty with which human beings universally come to know formal causes (eternal Truths) and final causes (objective moral order – i.e., the Good). Therefore, the paper will analyse the novel's major subversive messages, found in its espousal of Nietzschean philosophy, Gnosticism, and inherent in postmodern literary techniques which the novel utilizes – all of which are only a façade for McCarthy's propagation of the religion of Satanism.

Key words: Cormac McCarthy, Blood Meridian, Nietzsche, Satanism, Objective Morality, Common Sense, nous, formal causes, final causes

Sažetak

Presuda Cormac McCarthyjevom Krvavom meridijanu

Ovim će se radom predstaviti objektivna moralna kritika Cormac McCarthyjevog romana *Krvavi meridijan ili Večernja rumen na zapadu*. Pošto objektivni moral nije moguće reducirati na neki sistem, na neku ideologiju, ili na nečiju filozofiju, te pošto ga ni jedna svjetska religija ne uzima za sebe, već izgrađuje svoja vjerovanja (koja dolaze od božanskih otkrivenja) na njemu – možemo također reći da će ovaj rad predstaviti zdravo-razumsku kritiku romana. To je stoga što je zdrav razum iliti Vernunft iliti voũç (nous), sposobnost s kojom ljudska bića univerzalno dolaze do spoznaje formalnih uzroka (vječnih Istina) i finalnih uzroka (objektivnog moralnog poretka – tj. Dobra). Stoga, ovaj će rad analizirati osnovne subverzivne poruke romana, nađene u njegovoj promociji nietzscheanske filozofije, gnosticizma, te inherentne postmodernim književnim tehnikama koje roman koristi – što sve samo čini krinku za McCarthyjevo propagiranje religije sotonizma.

Ključne riječi: Cormac McCarthy, Krvavi meridijan, Nietzsche, sotonizam, objektivni moral, zdrav razum, nous, formalni uzroci, finalni uzroci