

# Analyzing Coming of Age in Cormac McCarthy's Novels

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**Badžim, Domagoj**

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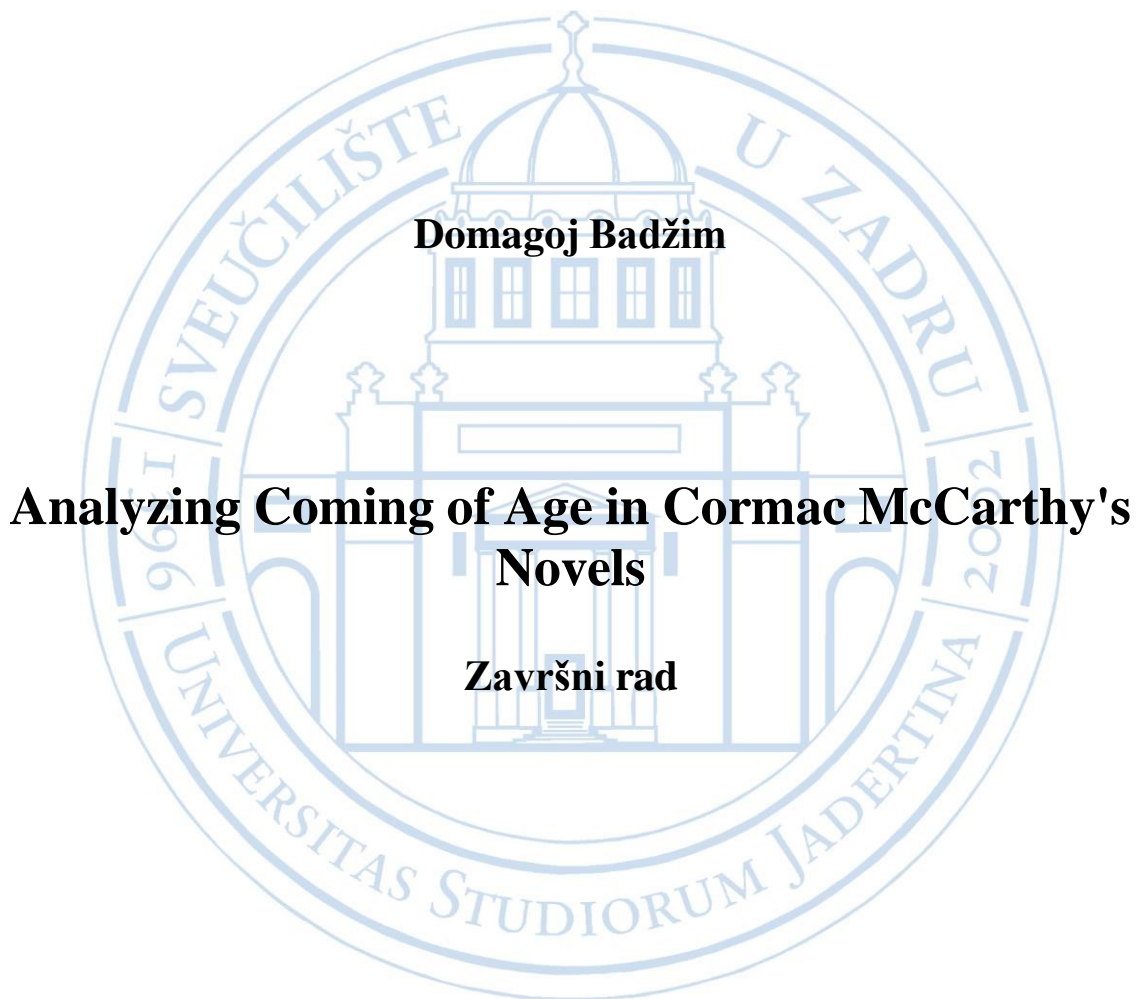


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Sveučilište u Zadru  
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Anglistika



**Domagoj Badžim**

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Završni rad

Student/ica:  
Domagoj Badžim

Mentor/ica:  
Prof. dr. sc. Marko Lukić

Zadar, 2024.



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## Sažetak

### Analiziranje odrastanja u romanima Cormaca McCarthyja

Ovaj rad se fokusira na analiziranje glavnih likova američkog pisca Cormaca McCarthyja na način da se kronološki prati njihov proces odrastanja, takozvani *coming of age*. Iako McCarthyjevi romani koji se koriste za primjere nisu *bildungs* romani za koje je izraz *coming of age* tipičan, radnje su dovoljno složene zahvaljujući ljudskim odnosima i razvoju glavnih likova od početka do kraja romana. Iz tog razloga može se primijeniti ovaj netipičan način analize likova. Nadalje, s obzirom da su koncept muškosti i nasilje prisutni u McCarthyjevim djelovima, likovi će se prvenstveno analizirati kroz Teoriju hegemoničke muškosti od Raewyn Connell, koja u svom radu *Masculinities* izvrsno objašnjava ponašanje muškaraca, o čemu ovisi i kako je građena njegova hijerarhija dominantnosti u društvu. Na tu teoriju će se nadovezati *Frontier Myth* teorija Richarda Slotkina koja služi kako bi dala dodatni kontekst periodima u kojima su radnje odabranih romana smještene. Dok su te dvije teme naizgled nepovezane, vidjet će se način na koji su muškarci kroz povijest Sjedinjenih Američkih Država kontrolirali teritorij, a tako i ljudske odnose, na taj način stvarajući scenarije i situacije koje su promijenile i oblikovale glavne likove romana *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses* i *The Road*.

Ključne riječi: odrastanje, analiza, muškost, nasilje, društvo, roman, odnosi, teorija, ponašanje, povijest, muškarci.

## **Abstract**

### **Analyzing Coming of Age in Cormac McCarthy's Novels**

This work focuses on analyzing the American writer Cormac McCarthy's protagonists. in a way that their process of growing up, so-called *coming of age*, is chronologically examined. Although McCarthy's novels used as examples are not *bildungsroman* novels that the term *coming of age* is typical for, the plots are complex enough thanks to human relations and the protagonists' development from the beginning to the end of the novels. For those reasons, this atypical method of character analysis can be applied. Furthermore, given that the concepts of masculinity and violence are present in McCarthy's works, the characters are primarily going to be analyzed through the theory of hegemonic masculinity by Raewyn Connell, who in her work *Masculinities* perfectly explains male behavior, what it depends on and how its hierarchy of power is constituted in society. This theory will be followed by the Frontier Myth theory by Richard Slotkin, which serves as additional context for the periods in which these selected novels take place. While these two themes are seemingly unrelated, it will be seen how men controlled the territory of The United States of America throughout history, and with that human relations, thus creating scenarios and situations that changed and shaped the protagonists of *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Road*.

Keywords: growing up, analyze, masculinity, violence, society, novel, relations, theory, behavior, history, men.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To understand the concept of masculinity (and femininity), it is important to explain the basics regarding these terms to implement them fully in the analysis of chosen characters. Firstly, the separation of sex and gender must be elaborated on. A prominent figure in this discourse is Judith Butler, and in her most notable work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999.) she uses the concept of gender performativity to explain the notion of gender further. According to the research of West and Zimmerman, sex is determined at birth by a set of biological characteristics that define an individual and these characteristics include genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones; they determine whether an individual is male or female, thus creating a binary division (113). It is important to mention that sex can be viewed outside of the mentioned binary division, but that is more of a topic for medical discourse. On the other hand, gender is not biologically determined, but it can be influenced. It is an abstract socially cultural construct that can be best explained through Butler's idea of performativity which states that gender is presented through a set of behaviors and actions that one does, and more importantly, repeats throughout everyday activities, thus forming one's identity (43). This notion of a continuous effort to present oneself implies that gender is not stable because it relies on repetition: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results." (Butler, 33). Masculinity then would consider all of the attributes, behaviors, and tendencies that are presented in the form of performativity by a part of a society that identifies as male at a given time. According to Wetherell and Edley, men are not completely devoted to a specific form of masculinity all the time (335-56). Instead, they make decisions based on the shifts in culture and society. Therefore, masculinity, as one of the most prominent themes in McCarthy's works, can be viewed from multiple viewpoints as gender changes through periods. Furthermore, the idea of gender can vary between different cultures, societies, and races. For these reasons, depictions of masculinity in the selected novels are presented in various forms, *Blood Meridian* takes place in the 1850s after the Mexican-American War, *All the Pretty Horses* during the 1950s, and *The Road* in a non-specified future after the unknown extinction event.

In her profound academic work *Masculinities*, R.W. Connell never directly defines the concept of masculinity with something as simple as a few sentences. She addresses the complexity

of the very idea by thoroughly examining the history of approaches to defining not only masculinity but gender as a part of one's identity. She mentions the very beginnings that set the foundations for gender studies such as Sigmund Freud's Oedipus Complex theory and explains how relevant they are in contemporary society and its understanding of gender (Connell, 3-44). Antonio Gramsci is an Italian Marxist who first introduced the term hegemony. The idea from his work *Prison Notebooks* (1971.) is that hegemony is a process in which a dominant part of society imposes different rules, behaviors, and tendencies through political, cultural, and social institutions to control the submissive majority (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*). The majority tends to accept these changes because they are presented as something one should strive for to be normalized within a given society. Connell took that a step further by embedding the concept of hegemony in gender studies by coining the term hegemonic masculinity which describes various behaviors, expectations, and ideals imposed by a dominant minority of men on the submissive majority of men. Some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity include having a muscular athletic body, displaying a stoic mindset, showing no emotions that are considered weak, not talking about concerns, having independence, being the head of the family, making more income than a woman, and in some cases homophobia. While not all mentioned characteristics are necessarily negative in specific contexts, they create an unrealistic "ideal" male image that few can reach. That way the dominant minority achieves authority and control over the masses that naively strive to achieve imposed ideals to appear more dominant within a society, especially compared to the female gender.

The goal of this work is to analyze how McCarthy's protagonists develop through the novels as they all share specific characteristics. They all live in dangerous environments, they are surrounded by violence, and they are all in their adolescent years. Furthermore, they are all surrounded by hegemonic examples of masculinity that dictate and shape conditions for all of the aforementioned characteristics. It will be discussed how this depiction of masculinity along with the less dominant ones affects the protagonists and how they develop through their stories.

## 2. BLOOD MERIDIAN

### 2.1. Marlboro Redness in the West

Blood Meridian takes place around the border between Mexico and the USA. The story takes place during the 1850s, after the Mexican-American War and it follows the journey of the Glanton Gang, a ferocious group of scalp hunters. According to John Sepich and Edwin T. Arnold's commentary on Blood Meridian (2021.), the book received mixed criticism after its publication. Many deemed it controversial for its depictions of violence and some perceived it as a postmodernist look at the glorification of Western fiction. However, this novel's biggest achievement is the fact that it is one of the most historically accurate novels ever written. The novel was heavily based on Samuel Chamberlain's memoir, *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue*, Samuel Chamberlain being one of the former members of the Glanton Gang who decided to tell their story; therefore, McCarthy based his work on a thorough research of other historical and academic works as he set out on a journey along the places the Glanton Gang had traveled (Sepich and Arnold, 1). In the novel, the Glanton Gang was composed of various men who created their cult of war. Members of the gang were only men, not bound by ethnicity, religion, status, education, or culture. Their single goal was the brutality and in it, they found their living and themselves. While one may argue that this is not a usual depiction of a cowboy, they would be wrong. American brand Marlboro is the most famous cigarette brand today. According to Katie Connolly's article *Six Ads that Changed the Way You Think*, in 1955, Marlboro started advertising its products by creating the persona of *Marlboro Man*, a clean handsome cowboy, dressed in tidy clothes, with attractive facial and body features. After making commercials where he was smoking slim cigarettes, deemed as feminine cigarettes by society's standards, more men became comfortable smoking slim cigarettes (Connolly, *Six Ads that Changed the Way You Think*). Depictions such as Marlboro Man, and famous Western movie heroes such as those played by Clint Eastwood and John Wayne demonstrate unrealistic depictions of fake standards that were not met in the past. For this reason, *Blood Meridian* brings a revolutionary postmodernist view on society, as Carlson suggests, the word cowboy was used with a negative connotation to describe a person as a drunkard, criminal, and a brute in contrast to today's image of a handsome stoic hero (1-10). Therefore, by referring to gender and its performativity, hegemonic masculinity varied through different periods. During the 1850s, previously mentioned representations did not completely match the standards with the idea of contemporary society's image of hegemonic

masculinity. For example, in that period, attractiveness was not imposed as a characteristic that one must achieve in Western society. A prototypical image of a man would be an untidy bearded man wielding guns or keeping cattle, while today it would be a tidy individual with cut hair, and a clean or groomed beard wearing a suit instead of boots and chaps (Bordin, 30). On the other side domination through violence is an aspect that could be found throughout the whole of history and today, thus proving that while there are variations of hegemonic masculinity, some aspects remain rooted, the most prominent one being the demonstration of power. Mexican city Chihuahua issued bounties on Indian scalps, according to Sepich and Arnold, after the Mexican-American War, there were frequent Indian raids on Mexican villages and cities, so the Mexican authorities started paying scalp hunters for their acts of violence which proved to be more profitable than serving time in the army (6-8). Mexican authorities did not seem to care about the backgrounds of scalp hunters, as the authorities only wanted to suppress the skirmishes of the Comanche and Apache tribes. Thus, various men participated in scalp hunting regardless of their ethnicity, they could be white, African American, Hispanic, or even American Indian. The interesting thing is that the two leading figures in the Glanton Gang such as John Glanton himself and Judge Holden were white, which represents the dominance of white men in the period before the American Civil War.

The title *Evening Redness in the West* signals the end of the stereotypical cowboy era forced into popular culture. *Blood Meridian* manages to depict a historically accurate portrayal of hegemonic masculinity in the USA in the period between the Mexican-American War and the American Civil War instead of showing idealized images that were present in the Frontier Myth, a set of ideals and glorified interpretations of white people expanding to the western parts of the USA that had an enormous effect on American culture and society (Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*). However, the problem lies in romanticizing and wrongly portraying the dark truth that had happened, and only recently have American scholars begun to acknowledge these facts, such as the fact that the "landscape of the West is as much a projection of our most deepseated fears as it is a reflection of our ideals" (Folsom 39, 40). McCarthy's characters in this novel are not divided into those who are morally black or white. There are even a few of those who are ethically gray compared to the realistically depicted majority of villains who choose violence as a response to everything, creating a volatile environment and society, replicating the true image of the American conquest of the West and its dark history that was kept hidden in plain sight. This perfect setting,

along with specific situations throughout the novel will test and define the moral and intrinsic nature of the novel's nameless protagonist the kid.

## **2.2. The Beginning**

A child was born in 1833, his mother died upon birth, and his father, a schoolmaster took to drinking. At only fourteen years old, this child decides to run away from his home, going from north to southwest, and never sees his father or sister again (Sepich and Arnold, 51). The kid is described as an illiterate shabby boy, already drawing attention to McCarthy's subtle narrative. Despite being a schoolmaster, the father never taught his son to read, let alone write. Instead, he cites long-forgotten poets which alludes to the decadence of education in that period and the cold and unforgiving conditions in which the kid was born. Weak-looking he might be, but within the kid was something described as a "taste for mindless violence" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 3) already determining his masculine tendencies. On the other side, his eyes, considered in many tales as the window to the soul, were described as "oddly innocent" (McCarthy, BM, 4) foreshadowing his character development. On his journey to the South, the kid gets in trouble very often by stealing or getting in unarmed or, sometimes, armed fights. After being shot in one of the many conflicts, the kid is taken care of by the tavern keeper's wife. In contrast to male behavior, McCarthy depicts the female gender as more civilized and empathetic in his novel. Out of all the men who were present, a woman was the one to show empathy, an occurrence that will happen again later in the story before the attack on the ferry near the end of the novel. After recovering and making ends meet while traveling, the kid reaches the town of Nacogdoches where he first meets arguably the person who will influence his life the most, Judge Holden.

From the first impressions, Holden can be seen as an intimidating person. Standing over seven feet tall, completely hairless and pale with distinguishable features, and with a charismatic way of talking showing fearlessness and calmness, Holden seems like a being beyond human radiating power around him. In his first appearance, he interrupts a preaching reverend falsely accusing him of trickery and rape which immediately results in chaos and slaughter. Right from his introduction, it can be seen that he is a character who is aware of the world surrounding him, thus embracing it and enjoying it by asserting his power and controlling others all to cause pain and distress. Later on, the kid meets Toadvine, another character who will influence his life. They

meet most randomly, with Toadvine telling the kid to move out of his way, to which the kid reacts by starting a brawl with him. Once again, violence is omnipresent in this world and it is the only thing that is familiar to the kid, the only solution he and many others possess. After being knocked out, the kid and Toadvine wake up in a hotel room where they become friends after all the trouble they went to, this way displaying the absurdity of violence and finding similarities in it. Soon after, the kid is in Bexar, near the border. There he enters a bar and offers his help by sweeping floors in exchange for a drink because he has no money. That encounter results in a fight with a bartender because he declines his drink, and the kid presumably murders him over a drink. So far, the kid purposelessly reflects his surroundings. He pointlessly displays acts of violence in the most absurd ways. One of the questions readers might ask themselves is whether the kid is completely guilty for all that he does throughout the story. Despite all the horrendous things he participates in his life, he is, after all, just a kid born in a cruel world and raised under the guidance of wrong idols at such a young age limiting his experience, thus leaving the choice to the readers to decide for themselves as there is no universal truth. After the incident, the kid meets an army recruiter who wants him to come to fight against Mexicans. The Mexican-American War was over by that time, yet there were still small armies raiding Mexican territories in attempts to “civilize” it. Upon meeting Captain White, the kid is briefed into a vision similar to the dark past of the Frontier Myth introduced by Richard Slotkin, as Captain White explains “And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That's right. Others come in to govern for them” (McCarthy, BM, 36). Captain White serves as an embodiment of toxic American conquering, even his name suggests the idea of usurpations done by white Americans when spreading to the West. He is a perfect character to demonstrate and explain two crucial terms introduced by Connell.

### **2.3. Complicity and Marginalization**

This is where the term “complicit masculinity” can be used to describe mentioned behavior. As previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity presents unrealistic standards that very few men can meet to the fullest. A stoic mind requires an individual to react calmly to the problems he faces within the society that, at the same time, obstacles him and expects him to control, or rather suppress his emotions and urges, and that is only one example of how hard it is to achieve hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, many men fail to meet such imposed expectations, however,

that does not mean they are against them. They tolerate them and support the hegemonic ideology and that kind of masculinity Connell names “complicit masculinity” (Connell, 79). Judge Holden seems to be the only character aware of his true nature, embracing it and utilizing it the best way he can. He is perhaps, the closest to achieving the perfect image of hegemonic masculinity (even though the idea of his masculinity will be explored later on in this research), while the others create freedom through war and violence not realizing they are slaves to it. While Captain White shows domination, he merely imitates what those with more power and authority had started before his futile attempts, a war. As he may strive to accomplish power over others he is unsuccessful in trying to recreate what proved only to be a fraction of the bigger destruction that had already happened, which ultimately leads to his brutal death and mutilation by having his head displayed as a trophy.

The other term, marginalized masculinity is more based on cultural characteristics of men such as race, ethnicity, or social class. It refers to the men who are discriminated against by the hegemonic class. Connell explains it as ethnic subordination in the sense that white men govern how other races are viewed in society (Connell, 81). In the context of the story, Captain White views Mexican people as the other, as lesser beings calling them barbaric and deeming them unable to govern their own country, symbolizing the hunger for power and control of white men who cling to hegemonic ideals. Another instance of this discrimination is when Captain White spots non-white men (as he cannot be precise about their race through the telescope). As soon as he sees a cattle herd he assumes that it was stolen by them, and initiates an attack. Having misjudged the situation, the Captain’s group is attacked by an overwhelming number of Apache warriors and bloodshed ensues. The encounter is described in gory details with blood spewing everywhere and men dying. This situation is a crucial moment for the kid’s character development, as amid the battle, he tries to save a man shot by arrows. Although his attempt was futile because the man died momentarily, this act proves that among all the pointless hatred and raging violence, there is a little bit of sympathy and innocence rooted in the kid. Born in a cruel world, surrounded by pain and suffering, and despite being molded and governed by it, there is little hope and mercy in the kid’s nature, something which will obstacle him later in the story once he becomes a part of the Glanton Gang.

## **2.4. Different in all the Wrong Ways**

The kid joins the Glanton Gang through an act of salvation. After being imprisoned by the Mexican authorities, he stumbles upon Toadvine once again, and the two of them are bailed out of prison in a *deus ex machina* moment by the Glanton Gang that was randomly passing by. The gang is described similarly to the Apache tribe that attacked the kid who was in the company of Captain White previously. They were wearing animal skins, and ripped clothes, they looked untidy and barbaric with an arsenal of all sorts of weapons. They even ornamented themselves with trophies made out of human remains. In this description, McCarthy does not shy away from representing the savage reality, nor does he glorify any group. He shows characters as they are, in a raw and unforgiving manner relevant to the period in which the story is set, that way creating authenticity and giving realistic portrayals. Additionally, the Glanton Gang is not composed of only white people, as there are black, Mexican, and even indigenous members present. Though this may initially make the reader feel respect for the gang, this inclusion does not present positive ideas. The group's diversity exists as a consequence of the group's lack of morals and ideals. Various members were recruited not to spread the ideals of unity and break the racist prejudices and stereotypes that were present before the American Civil War, but because the group had only one goal, collecting scalps. Due to the unforgiving environment, it was not unusual for casualties to occur, so the gang was always recruiting new members regardless of their origins and ideals. The only term that was required was love for violence which explains Indigenous members participating in killing people from other tribes. Still, while they are of different races and ethnicities and travel together, that does not mean that all of the members tolerate each other equally, which is seen in the rivalry between black and white Jacksons. Their ironic names suggest that the only thing different between them is their skin color, yet that seems to be the main and only reason they hate each other which later results in black Jackson decapitating white Jackson. Merely at the beginning of his adventures with the gang, the kid already tasted the horrors that ensue within the group, barely scratching the surface of what is yet to come on their travels.

## **2.5. He Says That He Will Never Die**

Perhaps one of the best-written villains in literature, Judge Holden is the most complex character in this story, and if not the most complex of all the characters from McCarthy's works.



In a world of ignorant men, he is the one who understands his environment the best and exploits it to satisfy his ideals and urges. As previously said, he is the one who represents the hegemonic image of masculinity the best. Possessing a towering body and a sly mind, he demonstrates power both physically and mentally. It appears that the judge often introduces himself to others when they are in peril, either to lend them a hand, like saving the gang from an Apache attack by crafting gunpowder, alluding to the American conquest empowered by technological developments in weaponry, or by riding into the town with the gang to bail out Toadvine and the kid. While being mysterious in a way that nobody knows his origins, he has shown himself to be versed in various skills. He is fluent in a couple of foreign languages and manipulative and eloquent, especially when he cites law and makes deals with others. He knows how to control the others, by encouraging their drives and the others respect him for his combination of power, skills, and knowledge. However, his mysteriousness is what makes him the most respected in the group. Although he portrays all the bad characteristics that a man can possess, along with the good ones, it is difficult to talk about him in the context of masculinity because his mere presence surpasses the one of a mortal man. Every gang member claimed to have seen him somewhere in their lives before joining the gang. He perceives reality as a sort of epic narrative ridden with fate which is reflected through his philosophies and interactions with others, such as with the kid “Look at me. Our animosities were formed and waiting before ever we two met. Yet even so you could have changed it all” (McCarthy, BM, 323). His role in the story can be interpreted in many ways such as being the symbol of humanity’s conquest or the symbol of war, but the most probable one is that he is the embodiment of the devil, as was claimed by the priest he accused at the beginning of the story. His omnipresence seems unnatural, he seems to be invulnerable, and even he admits it “He never sleeps, he says. He says he’ll never die.” (McCarthy, BM, 353). In every one of his interactions, there is an unnerving feeling present, even if the interaction is seemingly natural. One such instance is when he tells a story of the death of a traveler where he gives the impression that he possesses the knowledge of the whole of mankind. During one of the gatherings around the campfire, he tells the story of a traveler who encounters an old man impersonating an Indian robber. After recognizing the man as non-native, he confronts him and scolds him, and out of shame, the old man invites him to dinner. At the dinner, the traveler tells of virtues and good deeds and even gives the old man some money, which inspires the family, but the old man begs for more money which enrages the traveler. The story already has some elements of biblical stories, and the

traveler could even be interpreted as Christ which brings irony to the story because it is being told by the man who might as well be the embodiment of the devil. Later on, the traveler decides to part ways, and the old man decides to accompany him to show him gratitude, however, at the end of their walk, the old man kills the traveler out of spite, and because he does not want to be remembered as he showed himself that night. The judge said to Webster previously when he wanted to draw his portrait, that the power lies in knowledge through documentation, and how one's image is comprised of what others know about him, something which is present in contemporary society as well. The judge finishes his story by telling the others what happened to the old man's son, and the traveler's son. The old man's son ultimately learns the truth about the murder his father had committed, which evokes jealousy in him towards the deceased traveler, causing him to embark on a way of a violent outlaw. The other son is born after the traveler's death, causing him to create an image in his head of a perfect man he will never meet or be near as good as him, thus illustrating a division between men, violent savages killing out of rage and spite, or men who strive to create and replicate from those greater than them, those who lived long ago before them rendering current men incapable of perceiving their real image and ways, standing "broken before a frozen god" (McCarthy, BM, 153). The judge then says that all traces of the old ones are to be judged by those who are to come, presenting the dominance of hegemony to portray something as one deems fit. Despite a pessimistic division of men, the story of the traveler and the old man is another instance where McCarthy shows female acts of mercy and compassion. The old man's wife is shown as a woman dedicated to morale and showing scruple and humbleness. The wife is shown taking flowers to the traveler's grave and later returning his bones to their resting place after her son scatters them in the forest out of anger and jealousy. This portrayal shows how masculinity can be viewed in comparison with femininity and how one coexists with the other. However, it could be argued that this binary opposition renders both sides one-dimensional as seemingly all women are caring and compassionate, while all men are aggressive and deprived of morals which goes against the ideas that have roots as far back as in the research of human psyche conducted by Freud and later Jung, that men can have feminine traits, and women masculine ones (Connell, 9-14).

## 2.6. The Beginning of the End

So far, the protagonist of this story, the kid, has not been mentioned often. He hasn't contributed to the story or his development a lot, but that will soon change. During their usual travels, the gang comes across an Indian settlement, and after waiting for the settlement's warriors to leave, they initiate their arguably most brutal attack. Not a single act of mercy is shown, as nobody is spared. Women and babies are killed in the most vicious ways imaginable, the gang having used cold weapons to save ammunition because women and children would show little resistance. In the aftermath, there are literal rivers of blood, and while the scalps are being harvested, Glanton's main concern is where his dog is. During their travels, Glanton encounters a dog he confidently tames with a piece of meat, claiming that he "can man anything that eats" (McCarthy, BM, 157). Glanton is another influential character in this story. He symbolizes the reality of the Frontier Myth the best. Throughout the story, Glanton and the judge seemingly subtly battle for power. While Glanton is the actual leader who directly organizes the gang with their attacks, recruitments, and approaches to other people, the judge seems to be their spiritual leader who knows how to control the gang according to the nature of the members instead of relying on his status of authority in the gang's hierarchy, thus putting Glanton in the subordinated position without him even knowing, while the rest of the gang is complicit with such organization. What Glanton lacks in wisdom and charisma he compensates with raw power of destruction. He causes fear in readers with his calm and cold demeanor that is often broken with outbursts of aggression because he is not a being that is beyond being human such as the judge, but rather a broken man leading a battle with his demons and, on the surface, losing. Furthermore, his destruction does not come from physical power but from the instruments of war portraying Glanton as a symbol of technological advancement that helped Americans spread to the West. Without weapons, he and his gang are powerless, as proven when the gang was running from an Indian attack before meeting the judge.

In the event of the massacre, there is another instance of the kid showing mercy and compassion when one of the members, McGill, is impaled by a lance. The kid attempts to help him, but Glanton tells him to back off, instantly shooting McGill and scalping him. The gang is composed of vicious killers, who can only justify themselves by participating in acts of war. Through the narrative and thanks to the gradual narrative that slowly reveals the details and secrets,

the reader is always finding out the clues that reveal the true nature of the gang which might as well be more of a cult of war, an organization comprised of people who believe in bloodshed as their ideal, lifestyle and even religion. Glanton kills his companion, and to be precise, the one who rode with the gang for a long time, in a moment because he was useless to them with a wound like that, proving that the gang does not even have mercy for their own, like an organism fighting and ridding itself of any imperfections. Soon after, there is a moment where the kid almost loses his life without knowing, after pulling an arrow out of David Brown's leg. Later, he finds out that David Brown would have killed him had he not pulled out the arrow successfully, as Tobin asks him "Dont you know he'd of took you with him? He'd of took you, boy. Like a bride to the altar" (McCarthy, BM, 171). Ex-priest Tobin is one of the rare characters who shows friendly behavior to the kid. He is a complex and paradoxical character, being a man of faith, even though he is no longer in God's service, and a violent killer who created his approach to faith. He seems to care for the kid, perhaps because he can sense a small light of innocence that lies within the kid, evoking faith in him, contrary to the judge who recognizes that innocence and finds it dangerous and threatening to the gang and their ideals. There is also Toadvine, who acts like the kid's older brother. After their random and brutal encounter, the two of them manage to find common ground and respect for each other as their friendship grows. Perhaps the kid had a slight influence on Toadvine, as he too shows some sort of remorse for the Indian child that the judge murders, by putting a gun to his head and threatening him. Despite not killing the judge, character development is shown in Toadvine, proving that even men as monstrous as the gang members can be pushed to show empathy in the right conditions. His empathy is shown soon again when he comments on the massacre of the Tigua tribe that did not partake in raiding and attacking Mexican villages like the Apache and Comanche tribes. However, once again, that thought alone is not enough, as Toadvine still participates in the culling and scalping. Perhaps he is aware he will surely be killed if he renounces the mindless aggression, or perhaps he cannot go against the true nature that many men possess. The importance of this massacre carries another message. In the aftermath of the attack, it is mentioned how that tragedy will be forgotten in time "The desert wind would salt their ruins and there would be nothing, nor ghost nor scribe, to tell to any pilgrim in his passing how it was that people had lived in this place and in this place died" (McCarthy, BM, 184) With no one to remember the victims except those who barely survived, the justice will never be served to those who did wrong. This just goes to show one of many instances of the brutality of American

conquests that sowed countless victims that were forgotten and practically erased, a characteristic of white male hegemony that was present not only in American history but in global history. This goes even further with the judge's quote: "Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent." (McCarthy, BM, 209). The combination of the judge's thorough documentation and the wrath he and the gang rain upon other lives come to show the power of hegemonic masculinity. A gang led by white men, mostly composed of them, came to Mexico where they wreaked havoc upon innocent Mexican and Indian lives, at first seemingly for money, but later out of sheer thirst for blood, depicting a darker reality of American history through the eyes of those who worshiped war as a divinity, as the judge later suggests. This postmodernist view of the Frontier Myth is closely related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell. A socially dominant group of men distorted the reality that had happened and glorified it through media and culture, as Richard White suggests, history can be shaped through the power of a myth, by people blindly accepting it for granted and shaping their beliefs, thus giving the concept of a myth the power to mold the history of a given society (White, 616).

A turning point in the novel's narrative comes when the readers become aware that the gang isn't killing for money, but for their satisfaction, and this moment marks the turning point of the narrative that surprisingly gets even darker when the gang realizes that it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the Mexican and Indian scalps so, they start pillaging Mexican villages, killing civilians and selling their scalps to their people who are unaware whose scalps they are celebrating. However, Mexican authorities soon find out about this, and a bounty is put on the heads of the gang members. While running away from the authorities, the kid is again trying to help his fellow gang members, and as a result, he is separated from the gang and almost loses his life. While trying to catch up with the gang, he encounters a burning tree in the middle of nowhere with different creatures around it resembling a peaceful unity. This seemingly biblical moment might symbolize the cleansing of the kid at first. All of his previous attempts, although mostly unsuccessful, have separated him from the gang and brought him practically to the image of God. While this may seem like the kid finally started to change for the better, he decides to return to the gang, putting his progress to a halt, for he could have abandoned his current lifestyle, and started a new beginning because the gang has probably marked him as dead upon their separation.

After more blood is spilled on various occasions, the gang decides to make a pact with the Yuma tribe to overtake the ferry while on their journey to California showing how desperate any group can get based on opportunism. During their stay at the ferry, a group of women takes notice of the mentally ill man whom the gang called the idiot. Upon seeing him, the women give a lesson to his brother who exploited him for money, and they gather to bathe, clean, and dress the deranged man showing once again that women in this story are not concerned with warfare and power. They represent enlightenment among brutes and savages. As previously said, Judith Butler argues that gender is something that is based on continuous repetition (Butler, 33). If the violence is repeated by men in the story and mercy and compassion by women, it can be argued that the kid is leading two wars, the literal one, and the one where he combats his ideals by indulging in violent acts, yet showing care where no one from the gang would. This goes to show the instability of gender given that men can show feminine characteristics, and vice versa. At the ferry, the gang breaks the deal with the Yuma tribe, bloodshed ensues, and the gang soon starts taking control of the ferry, robbing and enslaving people in the process. This is the point of Glanton's decadence, he becomes more self-destructive and careless, later even putting the judge in charge of the ferry which ultimately leads to the gang's end. The previously mentioned battle for authority between the judge and Glanton seems to have come to an end, with the judge winning in war for power, proving himself as the most dominant person in the whole story. Potentially disgusted by Glanton's moral downfall, he may have orchestrated an Indian attack on the ferry while Glanton was away, as the judge was the only one prepared when the attack began. The end of the gang is followed by the end of the friendship between the kid and Toadvine when they share their last moments where Toadvine is once again torn between the decisions presented to him, to stay by the kid's side like he initially said he would, or to side with the judge who was out to kill the kid. The rivalry between the two comes to its pinnacle in this part of the story. Previously, the terms hegemony, complicity, and marginalization introduced by Connell were used in the analysis of relations between the characters. The last term in the four types of relations between men introduced by Connell, subordination can be used to describe the dynamic between the judge and the kid. Subordinated masculinity refers to behavior different from hegemonic masculinity, behavior straying away from imposed ideals and expectations, therefore it is often discriminated against and deemed less worthy (Connell, 38). Whoever does not follow the rules imposed by the cult of the war and whoever strays away from violence in the gang is a threat to the judge, so it is no wonder that the kid poses

the biggest threat to him, after displaying kindness multiple times. Throughout the novel, the kid puts himself in an interesting social position. As mentioned he shows subordination through his rare acts of kindness but on the other side, he shows complicit masculinity by enjoying the lifestyle governed by hegemonic violence proving the kid's constant battle with himself which leads to character development despite not changing his intrinsic violent nature which was rooted in him from a young age. After he and Tobin clash with the judge and luckily survive, they are found by the Diegueno tribe and taken care of. Perhaps the kid's kindness being repaid by God gave him another chance to redeem himself. In the end, he is arrested, and in jail the judge visits him, scolding him and accusing him of the gang's downfall. He could have been something of a son to him had he not shown acts of mercy that disgusted the judge. Still, the kid manages to escape, he never sees Tobin again, and he witnesses Toadvine and David Brown being hanged, leading to him being one of the last living gang members. Years pass and he is now an adult being referred to as "the man". Seemingly a man of faith now, violence still resides within him. Upon encountering a kid named Elord, he recognizes the same behavior he had had before leaving his home, showing that time is a flat circle and that some fates are destined to repeat. After threatening him, perhaps as a test to see how far Elord will go, he kills him after Elord attacks him with a rifle, probably hoping he changed something with that death. In his last moments, he encounters the judge again disgusted by the man. The judge exposes his actions with a simple question: "Was it always your idea, he said, that if you did not speak you would not be recognized?" (McCarthy, BM, 345) signifying the man's behavior and criticizing his personal growth in a sense that the man would justify himself by being a better person. Furthermore, this mirrors the American conquest that was glorified for a long time with hegemonic portrayals only to be later recognized for its horrors. Ultimately the judge kills the man proving his power and invulnerability and long-lasting effects on others with the last lines saying "that he will never die" (McCarthy, BM, 353).

### 3. ALL THE PRETTY HORSES

#### 3.1. Decadence from the Beginning

All the Pretty Horses begins in 1949, almost 100 years after the events of the *Blood Meridian*. While there is no proof to decide whether these two novels are set in the same reality or universe, it is quite believable that they are because McCarthy wrote his stories to mirror reality and actual historical periods. Therefore, while some of his stories might not be directly connected, they most likely take place in the same world. For this reason, the three novels that are analyzed in this work will be directly compared in chronological order. *Blood Meridian* is the first one chronologically and, as previously mentioned, it paints a realistic image of the society of that period. Groups of men acted as savages, and raw power was the main characteristic that defined the hegemonic masculinity of that time to the point where brutal warfare and conquest were considered sacred in some circles of men, transcending virtues of morality and reason. A 100 years into the future, the man has taken control of the nature. What was once mysterious and undiscovered has now reached the eyes of humankind. A wild horse that was once running free in the wind is now tamed, harnessed, and controlled with reins by industrialized society. Industrialization has changed not only nature but American society as well. In a section titled *The Male Role*, Connell argues that representations of a certain gender can change through different periods, societies, and cultures (Connell, 21-27). Such is the case in *All the Pretty Horses*, where the end of an era is signaled from the first pages. The death of John Grady Cole's grandpa, one of the last ranchers, signals the end of men who once were. Conquerors and explorers were driven by power and domination and were free thanks to the lack of law. They are substituted by men dependent on new technologies and lifestyles brought by capitalist arrangements. John Grady is portrayed as an idealized cowboy, even at a young age, striving to achieve ideals forgotten by the current society, trying to find a "pre-modern, patriarchal enclave as a sphere in which he may be valued as a laborer and therein recuperate masculinity" (King, 70). However, an important distinction must be made. John Grady does not wish to conform to the realistic version of hegemonic masculinity that was present 100 years ago, which is that he does not wish to participate in the cult of war and its pillages. He seems to be nostalgic for things he hasn't lived through because of the influence of the Frontier Myth. He most likely believes in idealized images of men



from the past that were brought to him through stories from his father and grandfather.<sup>1</sup> He even rides his horse at night because he finds it nostalgic due to the lack of disturbance from society.

Decadence is not only present in society and culture, it is also present on a personal level, which is shown in his family's discord. Parents play a crucial role in a child's development and this kind of upbringing is called joint parenting. According to the Commission on the Family, it is a kind of parenting in which both parents raise a child, and the child bonds with both parents (Commission on the Family, 14). In John Grady's case, his relationship is tainted with both parents. His father, a man who returned from the war seems to be a husk of a man that was demasculinized and even dehumanized by the effects of war. Since he failed to adjust to the lifestyle of warfare he does not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, although there are numerous negative hegemonic standards among men, self-destruction through addictions such as drinking and gambling is not one of them, which further subordinates John's father. There is also the aspect of patriarchy, as John's father fails to maintain his marriage which symbolizes the downfall of patriarchy. While aspects like the death of patriarchy are positive in the bigger picture, the rest of the demasculinized traits provoke John Grady to search for his identity among the Western ideals presented by the Frontier Myth. Disappointed by his parents and the fate of the ranch he grew up on, he decides to leave his old life behind because he doesn't seem to adjust to it and come to terms with reality. Like many characters in coming-of-age works of art, this story starts with friends going on an adventure that will change their lives and make them develop as characters. John Grady takes his friend Lacey Rawlins along, and together with their two horses, they embark on a journey to make their dreams of idealized past reality. Right from the beginning of their adventure, there is a visual contrast between the horses and cars around them alluding to their journey back in time, galloping away from the technological advancements.

At the beginning of their journey, it can be seen how the boys shift between behavior appropriate for their age and stoic mindsets. This is seen from them embarking on a dangerous adventure, constantly joking, and making inconsiderate decisions, while on the other hand, they show independence, and maturity early for their ages and make tactical decisions when they are not inconsiderate. When they meet Blevins, a mysterious kid who has been following them they start suspecting something wrong, finding him suspicious and deciding to shake him off their tails,

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<sup>1</sup> See White, 616 on page 13

however soon after, the three of them can be seen crossing the Mexican border acting and playing like bandits and outlaws with actual firearms.

Blevins is a crucial side character in this story, mostly because he causes the situation that later leads to three boys being caught by the authorities. All three of them attempt to act more mature than they are, but Blevins does this more than John Grady or Rawlins. From the beginning, he tries to present himself as a mysterious person by faking information about himself, inventing stories, and being reticent. On one hand, he resembles a serious and mature person possessing a good horse, and a set of skills like shooting that are kept secret under a cold demeanor. However, all that is contradicted by the fact that he is young and inexperienced with many things and consequentially ridiculed for them, such as falling off a horse or being afraid of lightning. It is difficult to categorize him in the context of Connell's relations between men because while he tries to meet hegemonic standards, he fails to do so putting him both in the category of complicity and subordination which goes to show how unstable and dynamic these relationships are (Connell, 76-81). Additionally, he serves to test the resolve of John Grady and Rawlins and show their true nature, Rawlins being easily irritated and willing to cut ties with him at every opportunity, and John Grady being patient and considerate proving him as a more mature person even at the beginning. This tomfoolery ultimately results in Blevins losing his pistol and horse which leads to John Grady and Rawlins having to steal them back from an unknown man which will later prove that Mexico is not the idealized country they imagined it to be where they can act like bandits and outlaws like they thought they would. Still, John Grady and Rawlins find a group of vaqueros who introduce them to a ranch they become a part of, finally reaching their goal of finding the traditional ranch labor they dreamed about. However, the boys will soon find out that while the new land offers them a rancher lifestyle, the one they could not realize in the USA, that lifestyle does not coexist with the moral foundations they believed were true that cowboys were led by virtues of honesty and justice, proving the fallacy of the myth and their expectations (King, 75).

### **3.2. White Supremacy and Marginalization**

There is a serious social problem that seems to go under the radar in most of the popular culture, and that is portraying white men in a superior and more dominant way than marginalized men (men of non-white races) and women in subtle ways of narrative. *All the Pretty Horses* does

this as well, in some moments it portrays white men as victims of cultural and societal shifts caused by industrialization and marginalized groups gaining more rights than during history. In other moments it criticizes the tendency of white men to cling to power regardless of the historical period. However, it could be argued that it acts as a documentation, a mirror of the period in which a shift in portrayals of masculinity came in Western society. According to Katherine Sugg, through *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy exposes real events that the Frontier Myth and false narratives overshadowed. On the other side, through *All the Pretty Horses*, he demonstrates how that myth manifests itself within society and the individual who accepts it (Sugg, 129). John Grady is then a perfect representative of men who slowly started falling from power, witnessing demasculinization that distances them from traditional ways and views while they are trying to recuperate that power through labor and dominating women (King, 74). At the beginning of the story, John Grady is almost ironically compared to the Comanche tribe that had once long ago undergone societal changes. The first instance of inequality is shown, a perfect example of a hegemonic group of men being compared to the marginalized one. The problem lies in the proportionality of oppression, as White men who are witnessing changes in social and cultural relations are not suffering in the same way as Comanche Indians who had gone through worse scenarios throughout history.

The second case can be noticed when John Grady and Rawlins start working at the ranch. They are two young boys who come to the land they find exotic compared to theirs, and immediately they prove themselves experts in horse taming. If compared, this story suggests that two white American boys who come to a foreign land have more skill and talent than Mexican people who worked on the same ranch far longer. Furthermore, John Grady is later allowed to work with elite horses after proving himself in front of the proprietor. This depicts white men as more talented and skilled compared to marginalized groups, as there is no reason that two boys following their imagined way of horse taming should be better at it than men who probably worked on ranches for longer periods, thus being more experienced.

Lastly, there is a special relationship between men and women in Mexico. So far, relations between hegemonic groups of men and marginalized ones have been discussed. However, *All the Pretty Horses* presents another problematic relation outside of masculine-only relations, which is the dynamic between John Grady and Alejandra, the relationship between a man and a woman. Alejandra is the daughter of Don Hector, the rich owner of the ranch, and from her first appearance,

she is portrayed as something John Grady must obtain. This is where the term introduced by Laura Mulvey male gaze is relevant. According to Mulvey, the male gaze is a phenomenon most widely seen in the film industry, where a woman is shown from a male perspective where her bodily features are highlighted to please the male observer thus objectifying her (11). From their first encounters, Alejandra's physique is described from John Grady's perspective almost presenting her as one of the glorious mares John Grady has to tame. Only after a few encounters where he examines her do they begin their first conversation which marks the beginning of their forbidden relationship that is first noticed by Alejandra's grandaunt Alfonsa.

### **3.3. Female Masculinity**

Mexico is described as a patriarchal country by Alfonsa saying she "grew up in a world of men" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 140). Even from her first introduction, specific details about her past are revealed. She acknowledges that truth is not universal in this world, but rather something that the more dominant part of the society deems to be true. She is the first one to reveal that the truth is merely a dominant part of the discourse, rather than the reality, the reflection of the way a myth is manifested, and something that will be relevant again later in the story during the interrogation of John Grady and Rawlins (Spurgeon, 28). Furthermore, she exposes the patriarchy in the society she is a part of by saying "Here, a woman's reputation is all she has." (McCarthy, APH, 141). Alfonsa acts as a parental figure acting both as a father and a mother. It is mentioned that in her past she had lost her reputation, which is why she is overprotective of Alejandra, and she also lost her fingers in a shooting incident. This loss of reputation and fingers can be interpreted as a partial loss of femininity firstly because of her previous statement about reputation, and secondly, her loss of fingers can be seen as a mark of partaking in something that is deemed by society as a masculine activity, which is shooting. This gives relevance to Butler's theory of gender performativity suggesting that gender is not a category one fills to satisfy society's expectations, but instead, a way of an individual expressing themselves regardless of roles they should conform to while trying to satisfy other's expectations. Alfonsa breaks the notion of binary opposition of genders, but that is not purely dependent on her. While she acts feminine in the sense of acting as Alejandra's other mother, providing care for her, she is seen as having masculine features due to society's standards. It will be later seen how she accepted the society she lives in

and embraced it in an attempt to show a better way to Alejandra who is led by her dreams and impulsiveness just like the boys and Alfonsa herself when she was younger.

### **3.4. Coming to Terms with Reality**

So far John Grady has been portrayed as a prodigy full of ideals that at first seem great, but later, they will prove to be unrealistic. His youth hinders him from understanding the gravity of reality. His mindset makes him think that if he strives to be a falsely stereotypical cowboy who is hard-working, honest, and brave, he will be able to satisfy all his needs: do a job he loves and is good at, and have a romantic partner. However, he will soon discover that reality is completely different from what he imagined it to be. Upon being arrested, they are woken up from their dream of being cowboys on a ranch and introduced to a cruel reality that will test their resolve. Unlike in many other Bildungsroman stories where characters find courage in friendship, perilous events are what will divide John Grady and Rawlins and tarnish their relationship. Once two ambitious friends slowly start to separate due to selfishness, hypocrisy, and accusations.

The interrogation part is crucial in this story due to it offering various symbolisms and underlying themes of the plot. The first allegory is the creation of the myth and the narrative. Rawlins is the first one who is interrogated and during this process, officers attempt to coerce him into telling the false truth, the one that will be used against him. The captain who is interrogating him hears only what he wants to hear and makes his own story that will satisfy him. This is the way a myth is created, by ignoring the truth and creating false narratives that will plant their roots in reality and become a false part of it. The second important thing to mention is that hegemonic masculinity and myth creation coexist almost in the form of symbiosis. It is precisely the dominant part of society that dictates norms and tendencies that the wider group of lower classes must conform to. In this case, there is a person of authority, a police captain, who creates the false truth for his benefit. This leads to the third conclusion and an interesting observation where a group deemed as marginalized in *Blood Meridian* is now in a hegemonic position that goes to show how different historical, cultural, and social contexts shape relations between other men. When John Grady is interrogated it is evident that he still has not changed his way of thinking and his beliefs by objecting to the captain and saying “The truth is what happened. It aint what come out of somebody’s mouth.” (McCarthy, APH, 173).

After that, all three boys are escorted in a truck that comes to a sudden and unexpected halt during their travel. All three of them seem confused, Blevins the most out of them. In the darkest moment of this story, the boys finally come to terms with reality to the fullest. Their dreams remain in that category, as something imagined and unobtainable. Wanting to become something they idealized, they become the victims of somebody else's cruelty. Despite moving to another country and believing they would achieve something perfect in their minds, they soon come to realize that the situation is the same as in the USA. Their innocence is lost when Blevins is led away and killed out of their sight just to please the captain's narrative. The captain falsely accuses the boys and mercilessly executes a child because he was paid to do so. According to the tale, the man whom Blevins had killed had a brother who wanted to take revenge and paid money for it, but due to the unreliability of the captain's narrative and other helpless prisoners such as the old man, it could be argued that the captain strives to achieve a certain type of reputation because it was previously mentioned how important it is in the society. Perhaps by creating false truths about catching vigilantes and bringing them to justice, he gains power, authority, and respect among other men, thus getting closer to reaching hegemonic masculinity ideals.

In prison, they are met with a new hierarchy in which power and violence are fundamental to survival. The boys are forced to battle every day to survive, and day after day they are getting more wounded and weaker. Such atmosphere and environment could be attributed to a thought that this is encouraged by the idea that men are more violent, dominant, and aggressive by nature. However, Connell negates this idea in the chapter *Men's Bodies* where she argues that men are not biologically predetermined to act in a masculine way in society, but rather conditioned by social beliefs to behave in stereotypical ways (Connell, 47). The prison is a perfect place to exhibit this fallacy, as it is a place of straightforward desperation where fabricated reality is taken for granted, and only a few men who stand at the top of the prison's hierarchy like Perez seem to abuse the knowledge of that power. The prison marks a loss of innocence for John Grady. After Rawlins is seriously injured, John Grady becomes the next target of the assassination, and in a bloody duel he emerges victorious but at the cost of taking another life marking him as the very thing he was falsely accused of, a criminal and a murderer.

### **3.5. Returning to All the Pretty Horses**

After having tasted the harsh reality the boys are bailed out of prison by Alfonsa which marks the end of their journey. This is when Rawlins departs from John Grady after tasting the brutality of the place they dreamed of in vain. In this instance, the symbolism behind their relationship has reached its conclusion. John Grady who was fully devoted to fulfilling his dream proves his worth and power in prison, unlike Rawlins who suffered greater injuries. Still, Rawlins did not come off as a weak person. He had his ideal as well, however throughout their journey, he was the one who was skeptical and questioned their plans. Furthermore, when compared to John Grady, he was less talented than him in taming and riding horses. At the end of their journey, Rawlins has come to terms with the harsh reality they were unaware of. On the other hand, John Grady still wants to fulfill at least a part of his dream. He decides to stay in Mexico despite Rawlins leaving him which portrays John Grady as a more dominant and independent person than Rawlins who is in this regard subordinated to him.

Now that Rawlins is gone, Alejandra is the only person he can go to, his last hope of achieving his dream. Upon arriving, he confronts reality again, which has proven to be a common trope in this story. Reality is not shown as something absolute, and the boys seem to uncover it slowly throughout the story through different scenarios. Confrontation with these scenarios breaks their resolve and tests their wits which makes them develop as characters. John Grady develops slowly due to his tendency to cling to his idealized image of honor and morals. For the last time, he refuses to let go of them when speaking to Alfonsa who breaks him down the harsh truth about Mexico and her intentions for Alejandra. It is difficult to decide whether women are portrayed positively or negatively in this story. This is most evident in the moment when John decides to ignore Alfonsa who tells him it is futile to meet again with Alejandra. John Grady treats Alejandra as something he wants to own, almost like a challenge he wants to complete, however instead of the expected ending where two lovers make it despite all obstacles, Alejandra rejects him, thus subverting the commonly seen narrative where the protagonist gets to be in a happy relationship just because he is morally and physically superior than his adversaries so he gets to choose whatever or whoever he wants for himself. On the other hand, while this seems to go against male objectification and male superiority, it is exactly due to the norms imposed by the hegemonic part

of the society that Alejandra rejects John Grady which leads to the double-edged sword situation when talking about how femininity is portrayed.

After losing his friends, his love, and his horse he is left with nothing and decides to retake the only thing he can which is Redbo, his horse, along with two other horses. Horses have a significant role in building identity in many ways. They are almost seen as vehicles used to travel to the destination of adulthood. They are more than animals, they are trustworthy companions in whom the boys confide their trust. Finally, horses are a way of life, the last straw used to cling to the false past. Therefore, it is no wonder John Grady sets his mind on liberating his horses. What is important is the way he approaches the whole situation, in this action he seems to have finally understood the law of aggression and the relativity of truth. He embraces the captain's former narrative and chooses to be the person he denied. By taking the captain captive and getting back three horses John Grady manages to escape with the animals he holds dear in his heart. He is wounded and threatened, yet he shows resolve and dedication proving his courage and strength. Eventually, he is in a situation where he can kill the captain but refuses to become the same type of man, ultimately showing him mercy and exposing the captain's true identity as a coward. In this aspect John Grady is subordinated, where despite all the reasons he had, he chose not to kill the captain, thus refusing the law of blood and revenge that are so prominent among men. Furthermore, he manages to transport all the (pretty) horses without losing a single one, finally accomplishing at least one goal he set his mind to after the prison.

### **3.6. No Country**

When comparing this story to the Blood Meridian, John Grady could be seen as the traveler's son from the judge's story. Just like the son who tries to reach an image he deems perfect that was laid out in his imagination by his virtuous father whom he had never met, John Grady also tries to reach a lifestyle that he considers perfect. In John Grady's instance, while his father is alive at the beginning of the novel, he is not the "father" being referred to. Instead, the idea of the Wild West, along with its ideals and expectations is presented as a father whom John Grady had never met. At the beginning of the story, he is disappointed in his father who mirrors the loss of traditional masculine traits at the turn of the era represented in many men at that time. Furthermore, the loss of his ranch drives John Grady to run away with his friend Rawlins to Mexico which is



falsely represented in their minds almost as a utopia for their standards. Under the influence of the Frontier Myth, they attempt to create their identities as ranchers who prove their worth through hard work. However, reality is not what they expected and consequentially, they are changed by it. The boys find out the truth the hard way by witnessing cruel and soulless acts of violence and killing in a world that is supposed to be more humane than it was a hundred years ago. With their expectations subverted, they are changed under the influence of traumatic experiences. Rawlins comes to his mind and returns to his home before it is not too late and John Grady decides to stubbornly try one more time to achieve his dream while their friend Blevins no longer lives. Rejected by his love interest due to complex and demanding social and cultural systems, John Grady embraces the violence and its power to mold one's narrative willingly and decides to retake the symbol of his maturity and masculinity, his horses. After being given a chance to take revenge he decides to stay true to his former ideals and does the act of mercy, which so far, seems to be the strongest motive and cause for a better change in characters. Upon returning to his homeland he feels like he lost himself in the process. No accomplished goals, loss of property, and ultimately his father's death cause John Grady to feel alienated even after having returned to his former world. At the end of the story, he is no longer an ambitious boy who wishes to become a respectful and brave cowboy, but rather a subordinated broken man questioning his identity and purpose who tries to do a good deed by retelling his story in court and trying to return Blevins's horse to its righteous owner which he fails to do. After saying goodbye to his friend Rawlins, the two of them now distanced and no longer as friendly as they used to be, John Grady sets out wandering on his horse, struck by a sight of Indians alluding to the similarities between them in everything that was taken from both sides, even though one suffered far more than the other in terms of marginalization and oppression.

## 4. THE ROAD

### 4.1. The Death of the Frontier

So far, examining social structures in the previous two stories has been relatively practical, as both stories are set in real historical periods, allowing the approach of historical analysis and critical analysis. The fact that the reader can connect *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses* with concrete historical periods makes it easier for them to comprehend social and cultural aspects that are present in both stories, and consequentially it is easier for the reader to understand the characters along with their drives and motives that correspond, or do not, with societal norms of given periods. *The Road* is a story set in an imagined dystopian future, and at first sight, it seems completely different and unrelated to the previous two stories. However, it is exactly the differences that make this story relevant for analyzing the idea of coming of age in the context of masculinity because *The Road* shows what happens to men when there is no longer a country with a functional society. Frontier Myth is nonexistent for the most part in this story because the territory, as something that can be controlled to gain power, is irrelevant in a ravaged world where basic physical needs are considered a luxury. It is unclear what caused environmental destruction in this story, but it was most likely something that humans did. The narrative of *The Road* heavily relies on its descriptions of the environment, presenting burned and barren landscapes devoid of almost all floral and animal life. In these conditions, there is only a handful of people who manage to survive based on their physical power and survival skills which means that this is the part where the world does a full circle, and men go back to their violent past. Despite that, though it may seem similar, violence in *The Road* and *Blood Meridian* have different purposes that later find common ground. It has been seen that *Blood Meridian* presents violence as something necessary to firstly fulfill material needs because it is monetized, and later to fulfill spiritual needs because it becomes a way of thinking and an essential part of life for many. *The Road* presents violence as a means of staying alive, something that ensures survival, but it is exactly the survival that causes the feeling of power that is responsible for inhumane acts, consequentially creating the hegemonic image of domination, physical power, and brutality, rendering most of the men as vile savages.

If compared to *All the Pretty Horses*, notable similarities and differences can be considered. Both John Grady and the child share a characteristic that they live and suffer in a period that came after the period that they never experienced that is supposed to be better than the current one. As

similar as this may seem, John Grady is a victim of the wrong narrative that describes the past as an ideal period for a person like him and consequentially he tries to revive its ideals and ways. His life comes down to him dedicating all of his time, effort, and talents to try to achieve the lifestyle that was introduced to him through a myth. When he fails to reach the goal he imagined, he becomes disappointed which can be seen at the end of the novel. The child, on the other hand knows of the civilized Earth that existed before he was born, but he is not obsessed with the idea of that world like John Grady. Instead, the child attempts to survive the cruel reality he is living in because he knows there is no running away from it. In this regard, John Grady represents a pessimistic portrayal of unmet expectations and wasted potential while the child represents optimism and perseverance when seemingly all hope is lost.

#### **4.2. Father Who Lit and Carried the Fire**

This story follows a father and a son whose names are never mentioned throughout the story. Although the father is the protagonist in this story, and most of the plot revolves around him a lot will be discussed about him because he is the biggest influence on the child whose character development is to be analyzed even though he is not the main character. In the chapter *Impact of Fathers on Children* from the book *Changing Fathers?*, it is argued that the father's role should be to introduce the child to the outside world, but more as a parent than as a man (McKeown et al., 84-92). Unlike in the previous two stories, the figure of a father in this story is not only positive but powerful in many ways. The father gives himself the task of protecting the child, finding the task even religious, as he considers that the child is the only particle of innocence and connection to God in a cruel world where slaughter and natural destruction rule. Throughout the story parts about his life and psyche are slowly discovered, and the reader learns about the struggles he is challenged with. In a world where all hope is lost, he sees the child as "All that stood between him and death" (McCarthy, *The Road*, 29). He is a man challenged with a sense of mortality because, like many in this setting, he finds death to be a preferable option compared to being raped or eaten by cannibals. Furthermore, he is plagued by dreams of his past that almost seem like he is admitting defeat. Still, protecting the child is the task he lives by, and in the process, like any parent, he suppresses his emotions and weaknesses, and he sacrifices a lot to ensure the child's safety and to lead him on the right moral path. Therefore, he fights his inner demons, tempting memories, and

death's salvation to preserve the only innocent life that might exist, his son's. He finds that task so important that he perceives it as a task given by God "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you." (McCarthy *The Road*, 80).

### **4.3. Marginalization of Femininity**

One problematic aspect of this novel is that the idea of positive masculinity and fatherhood is partly built on the absence of a motherly figure which many critics found controversial. In her work *Postfeminist Fatherhood and the Marginalization of the Mother in Cormac McCarthy's The Road*, Berit Åström argues that the figure of the father is glorified by the mother's absence and incompetence, leading to a critique that the image of the father is positive only because the image of the mother is presented negatively, thus promoting the idea of patriarchy (1-4). The mother is specifically presented negatively due to her philosophy of life in a brutal scenario where she finds death more comforting than to endure excruciating pain in the apocalyptic mundanity which can be made worse with human interactions that will most likely result in rape or cannibalization. For that reason, she commits suicide by cutting herself with an obsidian shard. The problem does not precisely lie in the mother practically euthanizing herself but in the behavior behind the very act. She depicts living such a bleak life with loss of self. She shows no sympathy or regard for her child and in a pessimistic and spiteful manner she provokes her husband by depicting her decision as cheating her husband with death she chooses as a new lover. Some people found this depiction offensive and argued that the mother was written in a bad light only to make the father seem like a more positive and responsible figure (Åström, 18). Lastly, the child's affection seems more directed towards the father. In the morning after the mother ends her life, the child never mourns her and just accepts the fact that his mother killed herself. At the end of the novel when the father dies, the child enters a state of profound mourning that lasts for days, thus depicting the mother as unimportant and irrelevant in the child's life in contrast to the father who is the most important person in his life (Åström, 16). Despite all of that it would be a fallacy to say that the father is a bad figure because of that. Furthermore, it does not mean that if his wife had not died he would not have cared for his child and family in general. Throughout the story, he can often be seen sacrificing his clothes, food, and water just to keep his child safe. Through his acts of love and

sacrifice, he proves he is a loving parent even when gender and parent roles are not taken into consideration.

#### **4.4. Subordination**

The child is a special and very different character compared to the previous two stories. The child is characterized by innocence the most. In a devastated and violent environment, it is almost a nonexistent virtue, yet the child is the embodiment of mercy even from the beginning of the story. This is supported by the research that children with a positive father figure are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, and that fathers have a bigger influence on male children when introducing them to societal norms and expectations (McKeown et al., 86-89). The father finds it a divine duty to care for his child and set him on the right road which he does through the seemingly biblical allegory of carrying the fire and through simplifying morality by dividing people into the good guys and the bad guys, making it easier for the child to understand the world around them. On their journey, they face various obstacles that challenge their morals, and the distinction between the father and the child can be made. While both of them stray far away from hegemonic standards by subordination, the father strays a little less because he understands the grim reality they find themselves in better. The father was alive even before the disastrous event which is commonly referenced throughout the novel. With that, he is more experienced and mature, allowing him to make quick and important decisions, unlike the helpless child who was born into a world of pain. In his task of carrying the fire, he must break his moral beliefs to survive and keep the child safe. Many times throughout the story he lowers himself to the level of other savages by killing because if he does not, he and the child will be those who are killed. In this aspect, the father's aggression enters hegemonic standards even though his motivation is of different perseverance because readers later find out that some people kill other humans to feed off them. Father's moral ambiguity is represented the best in the story's objectively bleakest moment where the two of them come across a house with a basement. Father's resolve is tested in two consecutive moments. When they find mutilated people used as a food source in the basement instead of real food the father takes the child and bolts when he evaluates that saving those people would cause them too much trouble which eventually leads to their deaths. The second situation is when they see the cannibals who live in that house coming towards them. The father does everything in his

power to protect the child, but he is hindered by his health condition which seems to be caused by the effects of the catastrophe that had happened. A parallel is drawn here with the mother where the father contemplates whether death is a better option in such a scenario: "Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock?" (McCarthy *The Road*, 120). The father taught the child how to use a gun to end his life in case there comes a situation that is worse than death such as rape or mutilation. Still, the father finds hope and decides not to give up on life, and stays on the child's side and eventually, they survive the encounter. This is another instance of representing the father as a good parent at the cost of portraying the mother in a bad light, consequentially depicting masculinity as more responsible and powerful in comparison to marginalized femininity.

The child is heavily subordinated to other men who surround him and the father. The father is the main reason for that because his role as a caretaker is to introduce his child to morals despite the society that does not live by them. His experience from the old civilized world is what puts him in between hegemonic standards and subordinated individuals because he often crosses his moral beliefs and puts them at stake to protect the child. It is difficult to precisely define what is hegemonic masculinity in this story because hegemony is an ideal that the society believes it needs to achieve. However, in this story, there is no society to follow ideals imposed by the dominant part of society since there is no society as a functional group in this world, and people, or at least what is left of them mainly strive to survive regardless of laws and rules that were present in the former world. Violence can be viewed as the only everlasting proof of physical power that enables the people to prevail, consequentially returning them to primal settings. Still, hegemonic characteristics can be viewed from the perspective of today's standards. As mentioned in the first pages of this work, one of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is a stoic way of thinking. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a stoic is a person "apparently or professedly indifferent to pleasure or pain" ("Stoic"). The father embodies this way of thinking and behaving very often in the story. In one particular part, he can be seen laying out a tarp on the road and putting his old belongings on it, including a photo of his wife, symbolically leaving his old life behind with determination and with no introspection in his emotions. This can be interpreted as the father coming to terms with reality and accepting the fact that civilization will not come back, and therefore, he must do to survive. Other times he represses his emotions in front of the child, and only when he is asleep does he get the time to let out his emotions, for it is said that "There

were times when he sat watching the boy sleep that he would begin to sob uncontrollably but it wasn't about death." (McCarthy, *The Road*, 137).

#### **4.5. Two different kids**

As previously mentioned, the child is innocent from the novel's beginning. In a world that forces everyone to turn to their dark side to survive, the child subverts social expectations by not conforming to a cruel lifestyle. The child can be compared to the kid from *Blood Meridian* in this regard, as they both have similarities and differences. Both of them are born into a cruel world governed by violence and danger. Both witnessed the most graphic and vilest things imaginable, the kid saw the horrors of slaughtering men, women, and even children, and he participated in monetizing violence by selling scalps for money. The child had to go through similar acts of violence, by seeing mutilated bodies left on the streets as a result of mass panic, and by surviving encounters with looters and cannibals. The difference between the two is that the kid had to fight his learned behavior and the way he was raised to become a better and more merciful person, whereas the child knows mercy from the beginning of his story. The difference is that they had different fatherly influences in their lives, where the kid had a father who was an alcoholic so he had to find another fatherly figure in his life which proved even worse because he was surrounded by people such as the judge Holden, Glanton, Toadvine and the ex-priest Tobin. While they do not directly take on the role of a fatherly figure, they can be seen as men who directly influenced the kid who never had a good parenting figure in his life to guide him. Therefore, his process of character development and building morals is far more complex and more difficult. Furthermore, it lasted longer because he had to become a better person almost completely by himself, the only exception being Tobin who had some morals from his previous life as a priest, as he was the only person in the whole story who showed some sort of kindness towards the kid. On the other hand, the child had a positive father figure from the beginning of the story, a person who protected him at all costs, who sacrificed a lot, and who was ready to kill to protect him instead of killing for the thrill of it. This makes the child almost a divine figure in a hellish world, all thanks to the acts of mercy.

## 4.6. Mercy

It can be argued that the child is not entirely raised by the father to behave as one of the good guys. It can be argued that the child is inherently good and empathetic which can be seen from his interactions with others that mostly go against the father's survival rules and guidelines that keep them safe at the cost of crossing moral boundaries. Already at the beginning, the father finds what is perhaps the last can of coke. He gives it to the child encouraging him to drink it and enjoy what is left of the former civilization, yet the child insists they share it despite the poor conditions where food is almost impossible to come by. While the father defines the term good guys as people who do not engage in cannibalism, this rule does not apply to dogs, so in an instance when the father sees a dog, the child hysterically begs him not to hurt it. He also wants to help other people. At the story's beginning, the duo comes across a burned man. The father claims that "He's been struck by lightning." (McCarthy, *The Road*, 51) perhaps in an attempt to hide the fact that someone mutilated the man. The child is desperate to help the man, but the father convinces him there is nothing they can do. There is a similar encounter at the end of the story where they confront the man who tried to rob them of their belongings. When the father threatens him to return all of their belongings together with his, the child manages to convince the father not to do any harm to the robber which leads to the father returning his belongings and a can of food in case the robber returns. The biggest motivation for this kindness and empathy could be attributed to the fact that the child is suffering from loneliness. While he is not physically alone because he spends all of his time next to his father, he has no one of his age around him which is clearly shown in a part where he claims to have seen a little boy and wants to find him so that they could take him with them thus saving him. However, the actual existence of that little boy is very ambiguous in the novel, and it is never answered whether he was real, or if he was a figment of the child's imagination. At the end of the story, when the father dies, the child encounters a group of people who claim that they want to help him. He asks them if they have a little boy, and when they say they do, it seems to convince him that they are indeed the good guys his father had talked about and he decides to trust them to continue carrying the light.



#### 4.7. New Light

*The Road* follows a strange narrative due to its unnatural plot. The whole narrative follows the journey of the father and the child who travel south following the state roads because due to the environmental disaster, the weather is getting colder with the absence of the sun that is hidden behind the clouds. The story is broken down into unrelated situations that serve to give readers insight into the cruel world, yet there is rarely any correlation between them. This goes in the story's favor because the mundanity and the lack of correlation set a bleak tone that perfectly matches the setting and leaves the readers with a feeling of hopelessness. This novel is more similar in terms of narrative to *Blood Meridian* than *All the Pretty Horses* because BM has a similar type of narrative that consists of encounters and situations that do not necessarily stay relevant towards the end, but rather paint a realistic picture of the society, and historical facts. In this sense, *The Road* focuses more on the world-building elements by describing nature (or what is left of it) rather than realistically depicting social relations. Due to its narrative, *The Road* offers a little less in terms of storytelling than BM that is filled with various characters and APH that has a consecutive and consistent narrative. Because of that, this novel resulted in a shorter entry in this work. Nonetheless, the journey of the two protagonists is relevant in terms of explaining the theory of hegemonic masculinity and relations between men. The child is a symbol of a new generation, a rebirth that will topple down his predecessors. In the beginning, he is a merciful child damaged by the cruelest setting in McCarthy's works. With the help of his father, he must learn how to survive which goes to such extremes as knowing how to commit suicide by shooting himself with a revolver if the necessity arrives. A lot of the time he is unfazed by the violence because it is omnipresent in his reality, and because of this seeming tolerance, at first it seems that the child does not go through any character development, but that is not true. Throughout the story, he learns useful lessons and at the end of the story when he encounters his new family he assesses the situation by asking the unknown man if he is a good guy, if he carries the light, and if he a cannibal, proving that he has learned a lot about the environment he lives in. Furthermore, there have been various instances where the child shows fear and indecisiveness as a result of his youth and innocence, yet in the end when his father dies he shows courage to keep carrying the light in his honor. Like numerous parts of this story, the ending is ambiguous, but it can be interpreted as a light of hope. When the child starts traveling with his new family, faith in God is referenced and there is a last paragraph that describes fish, wildlife that was thought to be extinct, swimming in

the water, signaling that there is hope for the child, and the fact that he is now ready to tackle the world he lives in brings a small spark of comfort in bleak darkness.

## 5. CONCLUSION

With everything previously mentioned it can be concluded that masculinity is a very fragile and ambiguous term due to various complicated relations between men and the complexity of gender as a concept in general. It is thus evident why R. W. Connell named her work masculinities. She mentions and supports claims from different research that forms of masculinities depend on cultural and historical contexts (Connell, 27). That is evident in McCarthy's works through his complex protagonists. The kid develops from complicity with violence to subordination after surviving horrendous events just before the American Civil War. *Blood Meridian* perhaps does the best job of depicting a realistic society of that period, often overshadowed by media glorification. John Grady demonstrates how masculine agenda is rooted in the Frontier Myth. He is a young man whose ambitions become an obsession with nostalgia for something he had never experienced, a hegemonic depiction of life that consequentially leaves him disappointed. His character reflects the social shift in male relations after the Second World War when traditional values started to change leading to the phenomenon of men falling from social power (King, 70). Lastly, the boy is the symbol of change and new generations that have the potential to subvert rooted norms through subordination. In these novels, all three protagonists share one thing which is growing up in complicated situations. Along with interesting side characters who serve as their mentors or enemies (sometimes both) they are changed at the end, and from every story there is a commentary to be discovered and a lesson to be learned.

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