

“YOU DIDNT GIVE ME WORDS” – RELIGIOUS SUBVERSION AND SECULAR
PHILOSOPHY IN CORMAC McCARTHY

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Holden and Chigurh – Terrible Gods of Godlessness.....	8
2.1 “A fact among others” - Judge Holden's Philosophy.....	8
2.2 “You aint nothin” - Holden as Deconstructionist Perspectivism.....	20
2.3 “Model himself after God” - Anton Chigurh as Holden-esque Figure.....	27
Chapter Three: The Kid and Sheriff Bell – False Prophets.....	42
3.1 “She weighed nothing” - Emptiness and the Kid.....	44
3.2 “Preservin nonexistent laws” - Sheriff Bell Versus the Peculiar.....	52
Chapter Four: True Prophets.....	65
4.1 “The village atheist” - White's Despair of Truth in Sunset Limited.....	66
4.2 The Man's Religion in The Road.....	74
4.3 Suttree's Religion About Nothing.....	85
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	97
Bibliography.....	102

Abstract

This project attempts to track and delineate a consistent subversion of religion and faith, as well as a vindication of fundamental principles of secular philosophy in Cormac McCarthy's fiction. I identify three interconnected vehicles of religious subversion and secular philosophy in McCarthy's fiction. There are direct, characterized representations of the secular worldview. These characters explicitly relate a secular, practically Nietzschean philosophy, but are themselves presented as divine figures. There are also "false prophets," characters who express traditional Christian or deistic relationships with morality and reality that are essentially instances of dramatic irony. Finally, there are "true prophets," characters who undertake spiritual journeys that lead to paradoxical moments of epistemological revelation that at once subvert religion, and validate secular principles of the human relationship to reality.

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A personal fault of mine is an inability to express the extent of my appreciation and gratitude with what would seem to me an acceptable or appropriate level of poignancy; this one page does not go against the grain in that respect. All I can do is say, as plainly as possible, that this project would not exist without the help of those mentioned above, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

Chapter One: Introduction

A great deal of work has been done on Cormac McCarthy's work and its relation to religion and spirituality. As McCarthy's work is so complex, the conclusions are incredibly varied. McCarthy's at once ornate but spartan prose provides ample space for interpreting a body of work that trafficks in dense references to religion, morality, existence, and the human condition. McCarthy's fiction, however, is as much defined by those thematic connections as it is defined by his recognizable writing style. By observing McCarthy's work as a cohesive, directed investigation into its identifiable themes, my study separates itself from much of the scholarship in that it does not simply track its *mode* of critique, but rather a consistent *subject* of critique and consistent *outcome*, which is to say my study identifies McCarthy's texts as all fundamentally saying the same thing, via consistent tropes. McCarthy's texts are likely not designed to be directly or clearly didactic, but each can be read as saying the *same thing* while investigating different but related topics. Equipped with the congruent philosophical subtexts of his novels, and the knowledge of the author's personal scientific leanings, we can identify what chorus all these texts echo. I believe that there is a demonstrable critique of religious epistemology throughout his work, and a vindication of a secular epistemology. By examining several of his novels, and tempering my interpretations with the current scholarship on McCarthy, I will attempt to outline McCarthy's centrally binding subversion of religious thought, and the principles of his secular philosophy. By attributing typically religious aesthetics and capabilities to concepts and characters that represent or explicitly relate a secular worldview, McCarthy creates a fictive power of

divinity, all while highlighting divinity's very impossibility. By making the lack of a god godly, McCarthy makes the absence evermore salient, and perhaps even persuasive.

The philosophy that McCarthy's fiction appears to represent is perhaps most visibly similar to that of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Indeed, there are passages of McCarthy that echo Nietzsche precisely, and as such I have used that philosophy as a guide for excavating this body of work. By way of terse introduction, I will briefly outline the elements of Nietzsche's philosophy that McCarthy's fiction (and not simply his characters) validates. Nietzsche attempted to have an epistemology based upon a kind of “scientific thinking” married with “artistic energies and the practical wisdom of life” (*GS* 113) in order to achieve a greater (if not more fruitful) awareness of human existence and reality. Science provides the basis of understanding our infinitesimally small existence as a species, and the knowledge of the limitation of our own perceptions. Practical wisdom should thus repudiate the demonstrably false, the unprovable, and that which enslaves us to a belief in value that exists outside of our minds. The significance and perceived value (both in terms of “worth” and of “mental category”) should be understood as inherently human. As Kathleen Marie Higgins characterizes Nietzschean belief, “meaning in life is our artistic project, not a verdict established by some power outside ourselves”(x). In short, Nietzsche warns against thoughts of divinity, of earnest belief and faith in God, as a “symptom of Western humanity's continued habit of projecting its own power outward” (ix). Instead, by understanding the very limitation of our perspectives, we can approach “truth” and “value” in another way. Richard Schacht succinctly summarizes this point:

Nietzsche thus is concerned to distinguish 'knowledge' from 'perspectives and

affective interpretations' merely as such, and suggests that it is something which can be sought and can in some measure be achieved. It, no less than that which is employed 'in the service' of its attainment, has the character of 'interpretation' – but it is 'interpretation' with a difference. It has an 'objectivity' that is lacking in the cases of various 'perspectives and affective interpretations' it employs and upon which it draws. For when the latter are played off against each other, one ceases to be locked into any one of them; and so it becomes possible to achieve a meta-level perspective, from which vantage point various lower-order interpretations may be superseded in favor of others less narrow and distorting than they. (9-10)

Thus, Nietzsche's variety of secular philosophy is not wholly negative in that it only defines itself by what it rejects, but it also defines itself by its particular use of rational thought, the conclusions of empiricism, and its focus on a self-critical, self-aware epistemology. The secular philosophy McCarthy's fiction appears to construct appears to adopt this attempt at providing some literary ground for this "meta-level perspective," and it subverts religious belief from much the same vantage point.

This is not to say, of course, that McCarthy shares all of Nietzsche's philosophy; he has a remarkably higher evaluation of the religious mindset, despite it being a "lower-order interpretation" for him, as it is for Nietzsche. In a sense, McCarthy finds merit in anything that ameliorates the misery and suffering of existence. He, as he paraphrases the views of the scientists he spends his time with at the Santa Fe Institute, believes it is "really more important to be good than it is to be smart" (Jurgensen n.p.). Even if human goodness is a man-made category, it is one he finds attractive in a variety of forms. But

his fiction, by and large, focuses on the failures of religious epistemologies not to achieve goodness, but rather to be sustainable – largely because of their position as “lower-order interpretations,” philosophies that project their power outward and are without the self-awareness, the “meta-level” perspective that the scientific, atheistic position is capable of achieving. Nietzsche believes these “artistic energies” are tied to this self-awareness; when people know that their beliefs and perceptions, their very realities, are a kind of organically-bound subjective narrative, there is a freedom in interpreting life and the human condition otherwise lost to us.

The first chapter highlights two characters I identify as the most obvious embodiments of McCarthy's religious subversion: Judge Holden of *Blood Meridian* and Anton Chigurh of *No Country For Old Men*. Holden actively and explicitly relates a secular, practically Nietzschean philosophy in *Blood Meridian*, but is himself presented as a divine figure. Anton Chigurh is less explicit in his philosophy, and his fallibility contrasts with Holden's immortality, but he is nevertheless a representation of a similar worldview, one whose bizarre (and I will argue supernatural) nature is central to the novel. I hope to reveal the two characters as practically divine figures who shape their respective fiction not only by their capabilities, but by the very secular, anti-spiritual worldview they represent.

The second chapter will get into what I call the “false prophets” of McCarthy's fiction. I focus on the two most salient examples of this figure: *Blood Meridian's* Kid and Sheriff Bell of *No Country For Old Men*. These characters, in their narratives and their beliefs, are essentially examples of dramatic irony: their very roles and words, when fit into the structure of the novel, subvert their concepts of the divine, traditional or

otherwise. The way their divine beliefs play out, in other words, are a paradoxical divine warrant for a world without divinity.

The third and final chapter will conclude by examining the “true prophets.” These include the titular character of *Suttree*, the man of *The Road*, and the professor of *The Sunset Limited*. They all, in their own way, provide a kind of explanation of the very religious subversion and secular philosophy I identify.

Interpreting McCarthy's work as a *consistent* expression of a secular worldview can thus allow us to approach two avenues of investigation. Firstly, seen in this light, McCarthy's work can be seen as fiction that is engineered to be read philosophically, such as the fictional works of Sartre, Camus, or Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (which, as we shall see, McCarthy echoes often). McCarthy's work is often far more oblique in what philosophical beliefs it is meant to communicate, but this obliqueness, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, aligns perfectly with a philosophy that must see our view of reality as inherently limited. McCarthy is not wholly prescribing a philosophical belief system, nor is he simply writing *from* a belief system; he is *performing* a belief system, and the performance is its own investigation – like a Christian parable or Zen koan – meant to inspire a critical reflection regarding a particular part of human existence, seen through the lens of this philosophy. Indeed, McCarthy appears to use his fiction as a way of further refining and investigating his own philosophy, his own epistemological system: “Things I've written about are no longer of any interest to me, but they were certainly of interest before I wrote about them. So there's something about writing about it that flattens them. You've used them up” (Jurgensen n.p.). Many of his works, as we shall see, express anxieties about a secular reality; if humanity is without a guide for its values, or

even its connection to reality, what does this say about our biological origins, our history, our present miseries, and our future? But McCarthy is also interested in finding a kind of wholeness and joy in his worldview; indeed, the very nature of his work as artistic expression is part of this process.

Secondly, if McCarthy's work is a consistent expression and dramatization of philosophy while being sustainable as complete and engaging fiction without a clear grasp of that very philosophy, it can act as a valuable, instructional meditation on the fundamental questions of human existence. As McCarthy's fiction creates a paradoxical divinity for non-divinity, a theology of non-theological scientific processes and the ineffable aspects of human experience alike, it displays the creativity and intellectually gratifying aspect foundational to Derrida's notion that literature "allows one to *say everything, in every way*" (*Acts* 36). Literature allows a suspension and mutation of abstract concepts in a way that allows us to think about the "essence" of these concepts – like faith and reality – in a new, inventive way. Read this way, McCarthy's work can stand as an example of art as aesthetic critical investigation, as testament to Derrida's claim that literature can act as "'deconstructive' seisms shaking the authority . . . [of] all the associated regimes of essence or truth," and it is in this function that literature crosses with philosophy and metaphysics (48). In effect, McCarthy's fiction is remarkable not only for its artistry and emotional impact, but also for its subtle delineation of a secular understanding of the human condition and experience, and its deft subversion of the philosophical foundations of religious belief – despite an aesthetic appreciation and encyclopedic knowledge of the beliefs themselves. His work is a very personal, artistic exploration of how humanity continues to struggle with matters of faith, reality, and truth.

The result is a fundamentally atheistic, humanistic fiction that despairs at our condition while celebrating it.

Chapter Two

Holden and Chigurh – Terrible Gods of Godlessness

Though McCarthy's fiction presents a distinctly secular worldview, it does not do so at a completely antagonistic expense of religious views, traditions, and associated cultural trends. Indeed, part of what makes McCarthy's subversion of religion and spirituality so effective is that it is knowledgeably couched in religious networks of reference. That *Blood Meridian* can be so effectively read as a Gnostic parable because of very specific references is in fact part of its subversion. To say that McCarthy uses religion against itself would be an almost crass oversimplification, but it is reasonably accurate. Nowhere is this more apparent than the characters of Judge Holden and *No Country For Old Men's* Anton Chigurh. These figures, godlike in capability and representation, use their divinity to not only explicitly speak about their secular worldviews, but also to be actual embodiments of these worldviews. They are gods in McCarthy's godless universes, secular realities made paradoxical deities, literary expressions of a universe comprehensible only by subjective human perspectives, not by external, abstract divine design. Though the characters themselves are quite different, this particular technique operates in similar ways.

2.1 “A fact among others” - Judge Holden's Philosophy

Judge Holden is easily the most complex character in *Blood Meridian*, and as such he offers plenty of material for interpretation. He has been interpreted as everything

from an evil archon of the Gnostic tradition¹ to a dualism-collapsing embodiment, critique, and even satire of Derridean deconstruction.² By and large, however, Judge Holden is viewed as a villain, and for reasons that are apparent. He is not only the agent of despicable acts but a vocal defender of them. Few scholars are willing (or perhaps few have the stomach) to consider or suggest that Judge Holden may be more right than wrong. Judge Holden is a perfect antagonist. But then, our protagonist goes unnamed and is destroyed by the end of the novel. Holden, it appears, is more than simply a terrifying spectre meant to repulse; he is constantly preaching, and McCarthy may in fact be using Holden to teach by example and explicit lesson as much as teach by fear and rejection. My objective is not to excuse Holden's behavioural depravity as a lifestyle that McCarthy evaluates as acceptable. Rather, Holden's depravity expresses the tension, the authorial anxiety, regarding the very worldview the novel presents and even vindicates. The Kid, our pseudo-protagonist, fails to succeed not because *Blood Meridian* is a tragedy where the righteous are snuffed out in a kind of narrative sacrifice for the audience's catharsis. The Kid fails because he is *not enough* like our true protagonist, Judge Holden. My claim, put plainly, is that the novel represents Holden's essentially Nietzschean and deconstructionist philosophy, and that McCarthy is providing an intentionally frightening but nevertheless supportive look (not a satire or even critique) at the cosmos as godless, and human epistemology as necessarily subjective. *Blood Meridian* acknowledges the violence inherent in this human epistemology, but also provides a glimpse at why acknowledging it could amount to a "better" ethical framework. McCarthy, in a very complex and mystifying way, is calling for a Derridean ethical violence, an epistemology

1 See Daugherty

2 See Shaviro and Wallach, respectively.

that requires constant conflict to survive – and at the same time showing that the venue of epistemology is without divine guidance.

I propose that Judge Holden is *Blood Meridian's* protagonist (or at the very least the most central character the narrative revolves around and ends with), and represents the primary vehicle of the novel's anxious worldview of meaningless, godless, subjective human experience. As such, I am obligated to start by pinning the character down, as well as defining his philosophy. Holden's “sermons” and discourses often contain irony and rhetorical evasion which lead to misinterpretation of the character's philosophy and his place in the novel. I use the word “sermon” here because Holden has a deliberately – and misleadingly – religious style in how he relates this philosophy. This comes as little surprise, perhaps, when Holden's views are so similar to those of Nietzsche's perspectivism. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche relates perspectivism through a kind of parable of the prophet Zarathustra. Though his philosophy is explicitly irreligious, he is nevertheless portrayed and speaks as a kind of holy man. Many scholars have already pointed out Holden's religious positioning and read it in various ways, such as Leo Daugherty's interpretation of Holden as an archon of Gnostic tradition. For our purposes it is perhaps enough to note ways both the characters and the narration itself refer to Holden in religious terms. The novel ends with the implication that the Judge is immortal, and his incredible variety of skills, talents, knowledge-bases, and physical abilities are nothing short of superhuman. He becomes a part of the Glanton gang by being their literal saviour from a pursuing enemy (*Blood Meridian* 130-4). The event culminates in Holden providing the gang with gunpowder, with the men, as Tobin the ex-priest member of the scalphunting gang puts it, “circlin past him like communicants” (134). Indeed,

Tobin explicitly refers to Holden in more than one way as a religious figure. He says Glanton entered into “some terrible covenant” (126) with the Judge, and even suggests that Holden may be among “sinners so notorious evil that the fires coughed em up again [. . .] been spewed up from their damnation onto the outer shelves of the world” (130). The prose describes him as “like an icon” (147) and “like some great pale deity” (92), and even when the scalphunters first come upon Holden, as Rick Wallach points out, he is “perched on a lone rock in obscene parody of St. Simon Stylites . . . he shoulders only a bagful of money that reduces a fleeting patristic allegory to an implicit pun on 'simony” (126).

Holden's philosophy as he tells it to the gang, however, is explicitly irreligious and largely in line with Nietzschean perspectivism. At times, Holden's words (though he would be uttering them before Nietzsche wrote, let alone published them) are practically interchangeable with Nietzsche's. Where Nietzsche writes that “the attempt to make moral values dominate over all other values . . . [is] the instinct of the herd against the strong and independent; the instinct of the suffering and underprivileged against the fortunate; the instinct of the mediocre against the exceptional” (*Will to Power* 156), Holden says that “moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak” (*Blood Meridian* 250). Judge Holden, like Nietzsche, identifies moral systems – and indeed, all categorical thought – as inherently man-made. Holden calls man the “suzerain of the earth” (198) who must discover and delineate the entire world in order to control it and enforce his will. Holden's view of the universe and mankind's epistemological place in it is clear: “the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For

existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others” (245). Similarly, Nietzsche says that “in so far as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings” (*Will to Power* 267). For Nietzsche and Holden there are no hidden divine truths, nor is there a spiritual realm to guide us. Holden explicitly says of the universe that “the mystery is that there is no mystery” (252). The truth of the universe is that there is no divine consciousness, no design for human beings or our beliefs waiting for our discovery. Furthermore, Holden states that

The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate. (199)

It is important to note that man's “singling out” of “the thread of order” is the order *he* creates. The emphasis on the *conscious* decision to effect the terms of one's own “fate” is very reminiscent of Zarathustra. We are to choose our own values, our own virtues. Zarathustra implores us to say “That is *my* good, that do I love, thus doth it please me entirely, thus only do *I* desire the good” (*Zarathustra* 38). The individual perspective is the only one possible, and the best course of action is to enforce one's will onto that perspective, like fashioning a narrative.

Even Holden's predilection for war is something that evokes similarities with Nietzsche. Holden posits that murder and war are the most effective means humanity has

of enforcing their chosen meanings, their wills, on the world. He says that a man who takes up the tools of war is “a god himself” (*BM* 250). Zarathustra says “Will is a creator” (97), and Holden thinks that violence and war, the destruction of opposing values and realities, is where will-expression is most explicit and effective. Nietzsche, in *The Will to Power*, appears to agree. He decries the society that “assigns a higher value to peace than to war” as “this judgement is antibiological . . . Life is a consequence of war, society itself a means to war” (33). Indeed, he later goes on to say “the 'ego' subdues and kills: it operates like an organic cell: it is a robber and violent. It wants to regenerate itself – pregnancy. It wants to give birth to its god and see all mankind at his feet.” (*WP* 403). Holden says “War is god” (249), and war, murder, conflict makes man a god because they obliterate competing perspectives. This is why, he explains, he specifically uses the word “suzerain” for man, as a “suzerain rules even where there are other rulers. His authority countermands local judgments” (198). Holden's definition of man as suzerain, then, refers both to humanity's dominance over the natural world, and to the constant interplay and conflict of perspectives, of “authorities.” Our perspectives are constantly in contact with each other, and the simplest, most direct, most culturally effective and historically precedented way of ensuring one perspective's dominance and survival is through the obliteration of competing perspectives. That Holden's philosophy is so close to Nietzsche's can hardly be a coincidence, and judging by the incredible attention to historical detail McCarthy demonstrates³, Holden has certainly not learned his view from any tract of Nietzsche's or his contemporaries. Holden's philosophy is not learned from others, it is lived. Indeed, as we shall see, Holden is representational of the philosophy's

3 For an excellent study of the historical sources of *Blood Meridian*, see Sepich, John Emil.

foundations. He is not Zarathustra; he is, as we shall see, a divine embodiment of a universe where no divinity exists.

This connection to Nietzschean philosophy is more than incidental, however. It provides an understanding of Holden's undeniably divine presentation in the novel. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche confirms “the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science” (104), and Holden's constant note-taking and knowledge of science seem to be what provides him a similar perspective. His interest in the sciences is directly related to his perspectivism, of course, in that he says “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (198). But his empiricism also contains the notion that science gives us the knowledge (just like, as we shall see, it does for Nietzsche) of our own mental fallibility, and that humanity is largely materially insignificant in the universe – that the “smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men's knowing” (198). “Only nature can enslave man” (198), Holden says, and he is referring to both our physical fragility as creatures, as well as our epistemological space. If we take what science tells us at face value, what Nietzsche calls the scientific evidence of our living in “general untruth and mendacity” (*GS* 104), then we are left with nothing – we are mentally unable, enslaved, by our inability to *know* the world. Hence, perspectivism requires an intentional and acknowledged gesture of *creating* meaning and enforcing this meaning as an expression of will, as discussed above. The knowledge science provides us is that our perspectives are always already, as Holden says, “a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue nor precedent” (245), for they are entirely individual experiences of an inscrutably and infinitely complex universe.

The prescription for this position is in, as Sara Spurgeon notes, Holden's acknowledgement of the "immense power of will" (24), which allows us to shape our perspectives through conscious mental choice and action; "anything is possible" in the world, Holden says – here echoing Nietzsche's perspectivist adoption of a phrase he uses often, "Nothing is true, all is permitted" (*Zarathustra* 334). Indeed, the novel foreshadows this important point early on with a nameless old man speaking with the Kid: "A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with . . . when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything" (19). For Nietzsche, art acts as a "good will to appearance" and is one of the ways we can fight off the "nausea and suicide" (*GS* 104) that are the products of the honesty of the scientific worldview. This is perhaps why he so joyfully uses religious framing, like McCarthy, for *Zarathustra* (in a book that relates a decidedly anti-religious philosophy). This religious framing provides a network of reference for a creative expression of will and perspective-shaping. When *Zarathustra* claims that "God is dead!" (*Zarathustra* 6), he does not believe in a truly dead God; Nietzsche is making a multi-layered gesture towards human epistemology (due to our scientific "honesty") having reached a point where it can no longer be sustained by religious principle. *Zarathustra* (and Nietzsche) keeps God in the "narrative" as a personal expression of perspective. Likewise, for all of Holden's talk of God, it is entirely figurative or contradictory. We know that when he says "war is god," or that man, through war, is "a god himself" (249-50), he is not speaking literally but rather of the perspectivist position, illustrated in co-opted religious terms. *Blood Meridian*, in its adoption of religious framing and the contradictory, shifting religious rhetoric of the primary philosopher of the text, integrates the depth of meaning and significance of

religious authority through a violent robbery of its language. If the Nietzschean self “wants to regenerate itself . . . wants to give birth to its god,” then Holden is the birthed god, the self regenerated through a violence of language and action, founded on principles of an irreligious philosophy.

A more careful investigation of Holden's dialogue is necessary to further elucidate my claim about Holden as a representation of larger, abstract forces. Indeed, Holden's dialogue is unlike that of any other character in the text. As such, his wide vocabulary (which he often must explain to his flock, such as the word "sovereign," as discussed above) and complex, literate dialogue appears quite alien to the text. McCarthy's hallmark of writing Southern vernacular is altering the spelling of words (or making them compounds) to reflect the actual delivery of these words. Even Tobin the ex-priest, possibly the most eloquent of the scalphunters after Holden, has the "g"s omitted from his "ing"s. Holden, on the other hand, has speech that looks similar to the prose: precise and deliberate in vocabulary and structure, but often with long, sprawling sentences. Compare, for example, the style and construction of the oft-quoted passage about "optical democracy" (247), with the passage wherein Holden claims "every man is tabernacled" (141)⁴. This is not to say that the Judge's voice is McCarthy's. It could indicate, however, that the book's voice is intended to be Holden's, or vice versa. After all, Wallach points out that the Judge is said to weigh twenty-four stone, which is “equivalent to 336 pounds, practically identical to the novel's page count” (133). As the novel essentially *is* Holden's, which is to say the prose, plot, and literal materiality of the novel are commensurate with Holden's sermons, the text itself is a direct, singular investigation into the truth that exists

4 Both of these passages will be examined later on.

even in this extreme and violent version of the secular philosophy that ties McCarthy's work together.

Even the figures who appear to be intellectually closer to Holden than the band of scalphunters have their words related via narrative summary. Other times, Holden tellingly speaks in languages the other characters have no familiarity with. Trias and Holden "at once fell into conversation in a tongue none other in that room spoke at all" (*Blood Meridian* 169), and Tobin recounts how an old man leading pilgrims "spoke right up in dutch like we were all of us in dutchland and the judge give him right back" (123). Holden is intentionally obfuscatory at times, and that his powers of language exceed those of the scalphunters (in terms of their own language and of others) is an obviously important detail. David Holloway, in *The Late Modernism of Cormac McCarthy*, notes that Holden's power over the scalphunters is "thus sourced in the act of representation, the appropriation of meaning" (25). Peter Josyph points out that Holden is one of the few characters that never spits in the novel, whereas the scalphunter gang does so regularly. Josyph wonders if this represents "a long resistance to, distrust and dislike of, verbal effusion" (174). In this way, a challenge is made; *Blood Meridian* could be "a book of men for whom confusion and contempt could best be vented through the speechless forms of their own spit or the draw of another's blood" (Josyph 174). Josyph does not extend this to a more important resistance, but spitting in this way could represent epistemologies antithetical to Holden's, understandings of the world that reject the foundations of Holden's philosophy.

Several scholars have had similar interpretations of the scalphunters, but what most scholars neglect is a point Holden brings up himself: when it comes to epistemology

or philosophy, if anyone's position is proven outside of language, it is Holden's. Robert Jarrett specifically identifies Tobin, the Kid, and Brown as characters who resist Holden's philosophy (Jarrett 83-6). Every other figure in Glanton's gang appears to be under Holden's thrall. They are the "proselytes of the new order" (*Blood Meridian* 116) of Holden, and as he points out to Tobin, by taking up "the tools of that higher calling" of war, they prove his philosophy, no matter how much they spit. The Judge's philosophy, his control and power, is not limited to the powers of representation – as Holloway suggests (25) – but is vindicated by history, the plot, and the other characters themselves. He does not need Josyph's "verbal effusion" that the scalphunters are so wary of. When Tobin seeks to end a particular debate with Holden, his final words are "Dont ask it," to which the Judge replies "What could I ask of you that you've not already given?" (*Blood Meridian* 251). Indeed, Holden has no essential need of language for his power and control. Holden sermonizes the ability to construct meaning via language, but the foundation of a philosophy of conflict and inherent meaninglessness is not, as Jarrett argues, delivered "within the borders of language" (144). If Holden preaches, it is not to convert, for the gang lives in a world that his philosophy perfectly demonstrates and he as a character perfectly represents. They are converted before they even hear his words. Their "speechless form" of bloodletting is a language of itself. The Judge's philosophy even precedes the character's appearance in the novel, as seen in one of the epigraphs that features a passage of an actual newspaper article detailing a "300,000-year-old fossil skull" that "shows evidence of having been scalped" (1). That the needlessly symbolic and violent act of scalping (which the Judge and his proselytes have a business in) predates the events of the novel by a stretch of deep time in human history says more

than Holden ever does about man's relationship to conflict. The novel provides evidence for his argument before the main text even begins, let alone before the character even appears.

Though Wallach says Holden “drives matters into cul-de-sacs both literal and figurative where he can substitute obliteration by violence for resolution” (132), he is in fact presenting all epistemological states, all narratives of perspective, and indeed all expressions of language, as destructive acts. Holden, however, is a physical representation of this very notion in the novel; hence his epistemological violence, his will expression, is depicted as actual, explicit, physical conflict. Thus, as Holden explains it, war is the most effective mode of creating meaning and sustaining it in the world. As Wallach’s deconstructionist reading of *Blood Meridian* points out, the reader must remember that

inscription . . . is a double-edged process, the other aspect of which is effacement . . . Holden's journal inscriptions elide their subjects, from the birds he kills in order to sketch them, to the piece of antique Spanish armor he draws and crushes (140), to the mesoamerican petroglyph he copies and then scrapes away (173). Answering the question of what he will do with his notes, he declares that he intends “to expunge them from the memory of man.” (132)

Wallach thus reads Holden's “defense of inscription . . . like a satire of deconstruction criticism” (132), yet he fundamentally misses the significance of Holden's philosophy and role in the novel. *Blood Meridian* is not looking for a way out of Holden's view of the human experience: it is an exploration of its veracity, starring a deified figure who

represents its most threatening, anxious, literalized extreme. Holden's calls for violence are nothing but a literary expression, a theatrical demonstration of what is inextricably violent about human epistemology.

2.2 “You aint nothin” - Holden as Deconstructionist Perspectivism

The novel vindicates Holden in many ways, as many of the text's forces provide an extension of his views; the novel also contextualizes Holden's philosophy in a distinctly literary way to broaden its scope. In Steven Shaviro's deconstructionist interpretation of *Blood Meridian*, the Judge is presented as a true villain. Shaviro reads Holden's view of the human experience being defined by war as a grand narrative he is attempting to force in a novel that subtly deconstructs that very belief. Ironically, Shaviro must identify a binary here between “anthropocentric perception” and “a kind of perception before or beyond the human” (153). Shaviro must then read the oft-quoted passage about “optical democracy” – where “all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships” (*Blood Meridian* 247) – and the other separation-dismantling moments the prose is capable of giving us as inherently *oppositional* to Holden's philosophy. Shaviro is right to say that “McCarthy's writing is so intertwined with the surfaces of the earth and the depths of the cosmos that it cannot be disentangled from them” (153), but he makes a major misstep in saying that these entangled notions are antithetical to perspectivism. Indeed, Shaviro reads Holden's belief that “existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others” (*Blood Meridian* 245) as being antithetical to the

Nietzschean position (Shaviro 150) due to his misreading of “order.” The meta-order that Holden is here speaking of is like the historical absolute: the venue of the material universe that science lets us glimpse. The order our minds cannot compass is the deep space and time which dwarfs our tiny perspectives. Holden here is not contradicting Nietzscheism *or* deconstruction: it is an explication of the central reality of both. Our human perspectives are limited and enslaved to context and microcosm.

Holloway, drawing from Shaviro, similarly reads Holden as a villain in a deconstructionist novel because of Holden's central points about war; Holloway calls Holden's philosophy “notions of totality, grand narrative, and determinate meaning” (25). This reading, however, misinterprets the complexities of Holden's (and Nietzsche's) perspectivism. Holden absolutely enforces a grand narrative upon the human race; this narrative is of conflict, but it is a narrative the novel holds up before the Judge ever appears. To find “totality” in Holden's Nietzschean perspectivism is misleading, as Holden's perspectivism is a position based entirely upon the *impossibility* of a perspective of totality, of non-limitation. Holden's preached justifications of violence, all couched in stolen religious rhetoric, inherently recognize their genesis as a *limited* perspective. To say that his philosophy is of “determinate meaning” is nothing short of opposite to perspectivism's central tenets, which derive from an acknowledgement of the “surfaces of the earth and the depths of the cosmos” (which dwarf and de-segregate humanity into the universe) that the deconstructionist book's prose revolves so heavily around. But Holden knows the meaning he “finds” is the meaning he makes; as Kathleen Marie Higgins puts it, in Nietzschean perspectivism, “meaning in life is our artistic project, not a verdict established by some power outside ourselves” (Higgins x), and the Judge makes this

explicit. Wallach, who reads the Judge as wholly villainous and against the deconstructionist prose, takes Holden's trumpeting of science as a belief that it will lead us to finding a grand narrative, an external, universal meaning that is expressed in violence (132). Similarly, Shaviro must take Holden at face-value when he says God “speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things” (153). But it is as soon as the scalphunters “were . . . reckoning him correct” after this very line that the Judge “laughed at them for fools” (116). And thus ends his sermon that day. No meaning is inherent in what science tells us. Meaning must be forged in the void of the deep space and time which science shows us.

This is not to imply that the novel isn't largely deconstructionist in nature, only that Holden is not (as should perhaps be obvious) divorceable from that very deconstruction. Holden in fact works in tandem with it. Shaviro acknowledges this after noting the novel's prose, which moves “easily between the degree zero of 'desert absolute' (295) and the specific articulations of water, mud, sand, sky and mountains . . . [and] observes a fractal symmetry of scale, describing without hierarchical distinction and with the same attentive complexity the most minute phenomena and the most cosmic” (154). For Shaviro, then, Holden's sermons have a similar deconstructionist tendency:

The Judge affirms an ontological parallelism between thing and representation, between 'being' and 'witness': “Whether in my book or not, every man is tabernacled in every other and he in exchange and so on in an endless complexity of being and witness to the uttermost edge of the world” (141). Language no less than the desert floor is a space which comprehends everything, but in which the complex intrication of heterogeneous forces

fatally leads to unwelcome encounters and deadly confrontations. (154-5)

Indeed, the prose echoes the Judge's sermons more than once. It relates how the scalphunters "watched the fire which does contain within it something of men themselves inasmuch as they are less without it and are divided from their origins and are exiles. For each fire is all fires, the first fire and the last ever to be" (*Blood Meridian* 244). This is a very Nietzschean gesture: people, like fire, are cosmically inseparable from one another, the world they inhabit, and the realities they experience.⁵

The deconstruction visible in the prose and in Holden's sermons is also why Holden's religious framing and rhetoric are so important to the novel's central point. When Derrida calls deconstruction a process of "reversing and displacing a conceptual order as well as the non-conceptual order with which it is articulated" ("Signature" 1184), this is precisely what Holden is doing by using the words "God" and "soul" seemingly in earnest. Holden adopts the discourse and conceptual orders of the past in order to use that very structure against itself. It is also what Holden himself *is* in the novel – he is a deity of a universe where no deities exist. He is an external, invincible narrative that tells of a world where all narratives are internal and fragile. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida draws from a metaphor of *bricolage* (a construction) and *bricoleur* (engineer, constructor), where the *bricolages* we use are constructed epistemological trends, like the language, the non-conceptual order, by which we articulate a (usually unconscious) set of cultural norms. Derrida's call for an epistemological "ethical instance of violence" (140) begins with the notion that

⁵ Moments like this are abundantly similar to Nietzsche's parable of the eternal recurrence of the same in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where "whatever can run its course of all things, have already run along that lane" (191), and all eternity is an interconnected whole."

In the best of cases, the discourse of *bricolage* can confess itself, confess in itself its desire and its defeat . . . [T]he most inventive and systematic engineer are surprised and circumvented by a history, a language, etc., a *world* (for “world” means nothing else) from which they must borrow their tools, if only to destroy the former machine (the strop-catapult [*bricole*] seems originally to have been a machine of war or the hunt, constructed to destroy. And who can believe the image of the peaceful *bricoleur*?)
(*Grammatology* 139)

Holden adopts the language of religion, the tools of the world already there, to destroy the former machine. His gesture is deconstructionist in that it uses the power of the former *bricolage* to divest it of that same power. The old man who foreshadows Holden's perspectivism also foreshadows this concept of an epistemological framework that perpetuates itself through language and cultural norms. Immediately after calling man “a creature that can do anything,” he says man can “Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it” (19). The difference is that Holden *does* tend the machine. Explicit in his philosophy, as with Derrida, is the acknowledgement of the *bricolage* as construction, as running itself – which in turn keeps him in control of the machine, rather than controlled by it. Naturally, Holden's use of *bricolage* is not simply a one-way destruction, either. If “the mystery” of the world is that there “is no mystery,” then the emptiness of meaning is simultaneously the source of our powerlessness, and the source of our greatest power. Mysterylessness is mystery. Similarly, Derrida says Kafka's “Before the Law” parable in *The Trial* reveals that the “secret” of the law is “nothingness” (*Acts of Literature* 205). This is how, Derrida

claims, Kafka demonstrates literature's unique ability to suspend an unknowable, a nothing, as something which can be observed and explored. *Blood Meridian*, and Holden specifically, is a similar literary example. If Holden expounds a Nietzschean philosophy, he is not strictly a Zarathustra or an *Übermensch*.⁶ Holden represents the universe that lies underneath Nietzsche's philosophy, an avatar of the space god left behind when he died.

Holden's role *as* deconstruction in the novel is wholly evident in the final confrontation with the Kid, now a man. Though he starts with his usual religious framing - "This night thy soul may be required of thee" (327) – the language reaches a fever pitch in pointing out its own out-of-place quality. It is soon after, however, that Holden says "We are not speaking in mysteries," and proceeds primarily with questions, not statements. He notes that it is "the emptiness and the despair . . . which we take arms against" (329). The violence of fashioning a human narrative is against the very meaninglessness the philosophy of perspectivism is predicated upon, and geared towards understanding and perfecting human experience. "Man seeks his own destiny and no other" (330), he goes on. When the Kid offers a feeble attack with "You aint nothin," the Judge replies honestly: "You speak truer than you know" (331). Holden represents the meaninglessness of the universe, but he is also a literal nothing. There is no Holden in the real world, only the lack of external value he represents. He is not simply controlling

⁶ Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, as described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is the figure of a human who accepts the eternal recurrence of the same, the flux of values, and asserts a powerful expression of the will and a self-aware interpretation of this world (rather than another world, as Christianity does) (Z 44). Holden likely fulfills these criteria, and his persuasive interpretation of violence in human conduct is part of what makes him an *Übermensch*, but his godhood is part of his representation of the universe as the ungraspable depth to seek fulfillment in, rather than his particular interpretation of it.

events with acts of representation (Holloway 26), but rather representative of a void of any other human experience.

When Derrida speaks of the “weakness of *bricolage*” (*Grammatology* 138), he speaks of the inherent violent flaws of human, inextricably language-based epistemology. “The already-there-ness,” the assumption of conceptual orders with the *bricolages* at our disposal, “cannot be undone or re-invented” (139). But *Blood Meridian*, like Derrida, calls for an ethical violence. It is an anxious call, a performance that revels in its most horrifying extreme by performing an epistemological process as a literal reality. It suspends a “nothing” as a deity to be observed, to be made powerful in its powerlessness; it shows obliterating human perspective as actual violence. This is not to say *Blood Meridian* espouses tracking this violence into the world as Holden does. The anxious performance may imply that such a thing is in fact unavoidable. But Holden's portrayal makes clear that when the divide between religious (objective, external-value) epistemology and irreligious (subjective, man-made value) epistemology is blurred, the result is a dominant force vindicated by history and science: man is ethically alone in the universe, and equipped with limited mental machinery in dealing with the position. It is not an outcome McCarthy depicts with optimism, nor is it one he depicts as wholly repugnant. As shall be more clearly seen in the next chapter with the Kid, McCarthy appears to be indicating we must be dangerous *bricoleurs* if we are to have any survivable ethical framework. We must always know that human thought is rife with machines of our own invention, built upon the wreckage of machines we were born into. And we must always be ready and willing to destroy or cannibalize the previous machinery – like religion – with complete awareness as to its caveats and connections.

Holden is a terrifying figure, to be sure. He inhabits a novel where the Derridean violence of *bricolage* is literalized as murder. Here the *bricoleurs* don't stop with destroying machines, they kill other *bricoleurs* – which the Kid fails to do, and is thus destroyed. The Judge may kill, but in the framework of the novel he is the most ethically complete character in that his philosophy is completely self-aware, and has the responsibility of value only to himself and his interpretation. This is perhaps why Holden, a murdering rapist, remains an engaging figure, and a figure who laughs and dances. Perhaps that is because he, like Zarathustra, knows he inhabits a narrative, a dream – weighing around 336 pages.

2.3 “Model himself after God” - Anton Chigurh as Holden-esque Figure

McCarthy's *No Country For Old Men*, written twenty years after *Blood Meridian*, features a character very similar to Judge Holden. Though not as verbose or as explicitly abstract a figure as Holden, Chigurh is a no less terrifying and salient figure. Where Holden is a wholly deified subject that subverts deification itself, Chigurh is a slightly more human representation of the same thing: a universe in which meaning and morality are entirely man-made. Chigurh is alien and mysterious, but he is nevertheless fallible in ways Holden simply is not. Chigurh is injured more than once in the novel, and he is not so clearly defined and consistent in principle as Holden. Certainly, that Holden is himself a supernatural figure creates a provocative subversion of the supernatural itself, but Chigurh, being a more human figure representative of the same thing, is capable of depicting more essential truths about the human experience that are consistent with Holden's perspectivism.

It is important to note that Chigurh is not the protagonist of *No Country*. He is a killer-for-hire working for varied, unnamed interests in the drug trade. The central character of the novel is Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, who attempts to find Chigurh and Chigurh's target, Llewelyn Moss. Moss stumbles upon the site of a drug-deal-gone-bad and takes the leftover money, and Chigurh is hired to kill Moss and retrieve the money. In the process, Chigurh goes renegade but continues to pursue Moss. Though there are sections that exclusively follow Chigurh, it would be impossible to sustain an entire narrative around him. From the very first chapter, Bell speaks of Chigurh as an explicitly religious – and terrifying – figure: “*Somewhere out there is a true and living prophet of destruction and I dont want to confront him. I know he's real. I have seen his work*” (*No Country* 4). Bell later says “He's a ghost” (248). Although Bell is clearly not literal in these moments, he is expressing his overall cultural anxiety about an increasingly immoral world – and Chigurh, for him, is emblematic of that world. That he would call him a “prophet” is important, however, and Bell is quite serious when he says that to face a force like Chigurh, “a man would have to put his soul at hazard” (4). Even those that fear or hate Chigurh (which is every character that knows of him) are in a kind of awe of him. Carson Wells, another hitman hired by Chigurh's former employer to catch the now “loose cannon” (152) Chigurh, is one of the few characters who speaks about Chigurh out of personal experience. When the employer first asks about Chigurh, Wells replies sardonically that “He's bad enough that you called me. He's a psychopathic killer but so what? There's plenty of them around” (141). But when speaking to a hospitalized Llewelyn Moss, Wells becomes sincere:

You cant make a deal with him. Let me say it again. Even if you gave him the

money he'd still kill you. There's no one alive on this planet that's ever had even a cross word with him. They're all dead. These are not good odds. He's a peculiar man. You could even say that he has principles. Principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that. (153)

Thus, even Wells thinks of Chigurh as a transcendent figure, above the culturally-bound, human concerns of the other characters.

The prose, too, treats Chigurh as something more than just a psychopathic killer. When Chigurh kills a stranger with a captive-bolt cattle gun, the text tells us that “He placed his hand on the man's head like a faith healer” (7). When Moss ambushes Chigurh at a motel, he notes a few important things about him. Chigurh's physical description in that encounter is brief: “Blue eyes. Serene. Dark hair. Something about him faintly exotic. Beyond Moss's experience” (112). Moss is not our protagonist, it must again be noted. The book's pontifications on morality and the nature of truth and reality are not explored with Moss, but rather with Sheriff Bell and Chigurh. Naturally, the “transcendent” character of Chigurh and what he represents is well beyond Moss's experience. His exoticism is not so much with his ethnic untraceability, but with his ontological otherness. Indeed, when Sheriff Bell interviews someone who had unwittingly aided an injured Chigurh in fleeing from the scene of a murder, he says that Chigurh “looked like anybody,” but immediately recants: “He didnt look like anybody. I mean there wasnt nothin unusual lookin about him. But he didnt look like anybody you'd want to mess with. When he said somethin you damn sure listened. There was a bone stickin out under the skin on his arm and he didnt pay no more attention to it than nothin” (292). This description is not the only time that Chigurh's physical appearance is

presented as unexceptional, but at the same time ineffably threatening. That he looked like anybody is reneged and modified to him not looking unusual is especially interesting when compared to the fact that this nothing-unusual-anybody paid “no more attention” to his grievous wound than “nothin.” This is similar to Chigurh's description as looking especially calm when he is ambushed by Moss. As if, the text says, “the man didnt even seem to notice. His thoughts seemed elsewhere” (112). Here we have a man that is not unusual but still not to be trifled with because of his *lack* of response. It is not so much that Chigurh isn't paying attention to his wound or the ambush – he clearly is in both cases, as he tends his wound and nearly kills Moss – but that Chigurh is not an *anybody* but a *nobody*. He is *nobody* because he *is* the universe, he *is* what the meta-level perspective is capable of accepting.

Chigurh is most certainly real; he is presented in the text as a very corporeal, fallible entity that has self-contained contact with a number of characters. That said, Chigurh is defined by his very alterity from the other characters and from the framework of the novel, the primary perspective of which is of the very Christian Sheriff Bell. That Chigurh is *no one*, a *no one* who appears unconcerned with things that concern him the most, is in reference to his role as a conscious literary representation of a meaningless universe. He is at once emblematic of *all* human experience, and the universe's depth outside any *one* possible human experience. He pays attention to these things as if they are “nothin” because they, like him and the world, are cosmic accidents of no meaning, no import. Where Sheriff Bell sees massive meaning about the moral texture of the world in everything from escalating violence in the drug trade to “*people on the streets of our Texas towns with green hair and bones in their noses speakin a language they couldnt*

even understand" (295), Chigurh thinks of life-or-death "no more than nothin." Indeed, when Chigurh has Wells cornered, Wells verbally attacks Chigurh on exactly these grounds:

You think you're outside of everything, Wells said. But you're not.

Not everything. No.

You're not outside of death.

It doesn't mean to me what it does to you.

You think I'm afraid to die?

Yes. (177)

Chigurh agrees that he is not outside death, but that death is not the same for him, and the implication is that he does not fear it. Indeed, Chigurh is a *no one* in many ways, but he is not Holden – he is still someone that is not unusual looking, an anybody – and everybody dies. Chigurh has a perspective, and is a symbol of the human condition, but he is not outside of it like Holden is. Hence, Chigurh can die (and nearly does), but the philosophy and condition he represents allows him to view and face death without fear; it is of no more significance cosmically than any other event. Chigurh is not outside death (he is *anybody*), but he thinks outside of the limited human perspective enough to represent the human condition (he is a *no one*) and to contextualize it.

Maggie Bortz, then, is correct in calling Chigurh "so indefinably foreign, so marginally human" ("Carrying the Fire" 35). Bortz correctly notes that Chigurh is representative of the human experience, but gets bogged down in a psychoanalytic reading that omits key moments and traits of the character. Bortz says that "Chigurh serves as a vehicle of unconscious projection for the reader. His sadistic acts and

complete emotional detachment inspire terror . . . [H]e is an irrefutable psychological truth that belongs to our culture. He represents something we should know about ourselves that remains unconscious, like a not yet understood dream” (35). Chigurh is representative of human psychology in a way, but the implications run far deeper than buried impulses or psychoanalytic relationships to societal norms. When Bortz says Chigurh “personifies evil in its human and god-like dimensions,” she must read his peculiar principles as essentially cruel. Chigurh is, as I have argued, at once human and god-like (at least in his abstract, alien nature). But he is a man who chooses his ammunition carefully so as not to “rain glass on people in the street” (200) when he kills the man who hired Carson Wells, and a man, as we shall see, whose peculiar principles engage him in gestures that have nothing to do with his own survival – he is thus not so easily defined as evil (certainly not to the extent Holden could be), no matter how terrifying he may be, and this complicates this easy avenue for rejecting what he represents (as many scholars do with Holden).

As said, however, Bortz correctly identifies Chigurh as a paradoxical single human that represents something beyond the single human perspective (an anybody and a no one), by way of which she references Carl Jung's relationship with physicist Wolfgang Pauli. She notes that the men were “struck by the cogent parallels” of their disciplines, particularly with “the shared observer effect and the subject-object bond” and the conditions “where the distinctions between energy and matter collapse” (30). This connection to quantum mechanics, however, fits into my interpretation of Chigurh because of the former forces, those relating to subjectivity and reality. Earlier I noted Holden's affinity for science and its connection to Nietzschean perspectivism's basis in

the sciences. Science, Nietzsche believed, gave us enough information to know human consciousness is fraught with “general untruth and mendacity” (*GS* 104), hemmed in by an inability to fully transcend its subjective relationship to reality. Quantum mechanics not only intensifies this limitation of subjectivity, but it also adds a kind of philosophical power to subjectivity. The quantum theories of entanglement propose a universe where empirically observable forces are subject not only to the laws of physics, but also to a degree of randomness, and (more importantly) subject to the observer.⁷ To put it plainly, theories of quantum entanglement essentially suggest that matter is directly affected by human measurement and observation. Our subjective consciousness, in a way, affects reality.⁸ Thus, Bortz's interpretation does not reach far enough: Chigurh is human, has a very human connection to reality, and his particular philosophy is along the lines of quantum mechanics – but he is also representative of the subjective power that quantum mechanics and perspectivism share as a central element. Chigurh is not a human representing a society's norms, he is a human representing human consciousness. He is not how we react to reality, he is rather symbolic of our very relationship to reality. He is the inalienable facts of the human experience: its subjectivity, its arbitrariness, and its lack of external meaning. Human comprehension and science can glean the structure of the reality we experience, and we can affect it in powerful ways, but that reality is inherently without external guidance or value.

⁷ Here I am referring to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, which, according to Max Tegmark's 1997 study (“The Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: Many Worlds or Many Words?” *Fortsch.Phys.* 46 (6–8): 855–862), is the most widely accepted in the field.

⁸ For more on quantum theory, entanglement, and subjectivity see Petersen, A., *Quantum Physics and the Philosophical Tradition*, MIT Press, 1968, and Steward, E.G. *Quantum Mechanics: Its Early Development and the Road to Entanglement*, Imperial College Press, 2008.

This symbolic role of Chigurh becomes clearer when his somewhat cryptic dialogue is closely examined. When Chigurh sits Wells down to talk before killing him, he says that he is talking about Wells' "life. In which now everything can be seen at once" (175). Chigurh asks for Wells to examine his own subjective experience. Now that his life will end, and can be viewed in its entirety, would Wells accept the entire life as it was, eternally? Here Chigurh is testing Wells, but not for his own entertainment. Chigurh says "I thought you might want to explain yourself . . . Not to me. To yourself" (175). Chigurh is allowing Wells, before he is killed, to engage Nietzsche's ultimate test of the human will, the test of the *Übermensch*, the Eternal Recurrence of the Same. Chigurh is taunting in tone, but his framing clearly indicates he, like Nietzsche, thinks one must accept the eternity of one's perspective in order to maximize its potential. Chigurh understands his place in the universe – he would pass Nietzsche's test, but he would add that the test means nothing. Wells, like Sheriff Bell, cannot confront this worldview, and speaks more truly than he knows when his rejection is expressed as follows:

Do you have any notion of how goddamned crazy you are?

The nature of this conversation?

The nature of you. (175)

Here he is unwittingly referring to the universe he represents, a universe Wells and Sheriff Bell must believe is "crazy," and "goddamned." Indeed, Wells, like Chigurh, is a man who kills for a living, and thus, Chigurh believes, should have the same outlook he does. The text compares them in a similar way. Chigurh sits, "watching Wells. Watching his last thoughts. He'd seen it all before. So had Wells" (174). But Chigurh says Wells' fatal mistake was this very inability to accept Chigurh and what he represents – and thus

accept his position as a temporary, murdering, subjective mortal:

It's not the same [Wells's view of death], Chigurh said. You've been giving up things for years to get here. I don't think I even understood that. How does a man decide in what order to abandon his life? We're in the same line of work. Up to a point. Did you hold me in such contempt? Why would you do that? How did you let yourself get in this situation? (177-8)

This is what Chigurh is getting at when he first asks “If the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?”(175). If Wells is so similar to Chigurh, why would he not be willing to accept the very truths of human experience Chigurh represents? Chigurh implies, much like Holden does with the Kid, that had he accepted the powerful nature of will, the necessity of the subjective experience, he would not only have had a more honest relationship to reality (or at least one without fear), but he would have not been led to this moment of his own demise. Echoing Holden, Chigurh insinuates that accepting these Nietzschean values would have been the most efficient, effective epistemology, and would have made him a more effectively violent entity.

Chigurh goes on to tell Wells that he engaged in needless, self-compromising violence. This is not, as Bortz reads it, Chigurh as representation of “an archetypal impulse or tendency that has been banished, repressed, 'locked up,' but has now freed itself to act” (34); he says “I was pulled over by a sheriff's deputy . . . and I let him take me into town in handcuffs” (174). He does this, he says, because “I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do” (174-5). Chigurh here is not challenging the power of the human will, but rather challenging the notion that this

creative will makes one a universe unto oneself – and here he splits with Nietzsche (and to a degree, Holden). The will is powerful, and can extricate us from the set orders of the world. Our individual perspectives can even, as in quantum mechanics, dramatically shift the universe we inhabit, but the universe makes no special dispensation for those who do; this is not special to the will of the *Übermensch*, but a necessity of human experience. Before killing Moss's wife, Chigurh says that “Even a nonbeliever might find it useful to model himself after God. Very useful, in fact” (256). Where Nietzsche focuses on the creative, godlike power in understanding a universe where absolute, objective truth cannot be approached, Chigurh points out that this power is inherent to all humans; like Holden, his point is that acknowledging it is simply the most effective mode of achieving what one wants.

Wells is correct, however, in noting that Chigurh does have “principles,” and this might seem odd when he represents a meaningless universe without supernatural guidance, without divine authority for absolute right and wrong. Indeed, that Chigurh continues to hunt Moss and eventually kills his wife well after retrieving the money Moss had taken is all due to his peculiar principles. Two times in the novel, Chigurh decides whether or not to kill someone based on a coin toss, which he forces the potential victim to call. The first time he does it (to a gas station attendant) he explains the symbolic significance of the process as such:

Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldnt even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People dont pay attention. And then one day there's an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It's just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could

that be an instrument of? You see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it? (57)

Here he complicates notions of “instrument” and “agency” – it is all narrative that is man-made – the coin has no agency, but it can be given agency in one perspective or another. It's not about interchangeability, as he points out. It's about the nature of truth and reality. He says that the coin has the year 1958 on it. “It's been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. And I'm here” (56). In the second instance of the coin toss, when told that the “coin didnt have no say,” he says to “look at it my way. I got here the same way the coin did” (258). To look at it *his* way is to look at it with his philosophy. But the coin toss is also part of *his* narrative. That Chigurh is so good at integrating all events into his narrative is what makes him such a serene hitman *and* a good *Übermensch*. He pays attention to the “small things” other people neglect in order to craft his complete narrative. When ambushed by Moss, he “seemed oddly untroubled. As if this were all part of his day” (112). Being in grave danger certainly seems to be something Chigurh would be used to, but the strangeness of the encounter in a novel full of men who react well under pressure communicates something more significant. Anything that takes place in the day is part of *his* day, Chigurh's.

That it is part of his narrative and part of his instruction of the philosophy it is predicated upon is why Chigurh is so strict about this gesture of the coin toss; earlier he says “I cant call it for you. It wouldnt be fair. It wouldnt even be right (56). This is what passes for “right” for Chigurh. As with Nietzsche, “all is permitted,” as Chigurh never

speaks of “wrong,” but of “right” and “not right.” Anything is possible, essentially, but what is “right” is what the individual, what *he* chooses to fit his narrative. What he chooses as right in the coin toss is important, as it is symbolic of the universe's chaotic nature. Momentous events in an individual's life come for no reason, only chance. But Chigurh, not being as much an agent as he is a representation of that very chaos, cannot call it for the victim, otherwise the symbol is compromised. Indeed, when Moss's wife Carla Jean, the victim who loses the coin toss, tells Chigurh he has the power to simply ignore the result of the coin toss, he replies that “You're asking that I make myself vulnerable and that I can never do” (259). Essentially, if he were to call it for the victim, then the coin toss no longer represents the massive framework of a universe where lives are lost, rewarded, or punished to no divine plan but rather to seemingly inconsequential choice and even simple chance. Chigurh explains to Moss's wife that most people – and here we can obviously think of Wells and Bell – cannot accept a man with a philosophy like his: “You can see what a problem that must be for them. How to prevail over that which you refuse to acknowledge the existence of . . . You can say that things could have turned out differently. That they could have been some other way. But what does that mean? They are not some other way. They are this way. You're asking that I second say the world” (260). He means *his* world in the sense of his connection to reality, but also the world *as it is*, which is a context where the individual perspective is the only world we each have.

The prose, in its own way, backs this claim. When Chigurh adds the second notch to the novel's bodycount, for example, the victim is described this way: “blood bubbled and ran down into his eyes carrying with it his slowly uncoupling world visible to see”

(7). When Chigurh kills another man, he stands “Watching the capillaries break up in his eyes. The light receding. Watching his own image degrade in that squandered world” (123). The first man's *world* "uncouples," disintegrates as his perspective dies with him, but the world is "visible" in the blood because it is just that - blood, a human, organic experience, nothing divine, no soul to rise from his corpse. The second man's world is "squandered" in death, and even Chigurh's image, the image of the man's killer, "degrades" in that world as it ends. No significance, only the obliteration of an organic, non-spiritual experience. This is made even more explicit when Chigurh murders Wells, perhaps because it is immediately following his first reasonably clear articulation of his own character: “Chigurh shot him in the face. Everything that Wells had ever known or thought or loved drained slowly down the wall behind him. His mother's face, his First Communion, women he had known. The faces of men as they died on their knees before him. The body of a child dead in a road-side ravine in another country” (178). Here, Wells' brains are literally the sum of his experiences, like life carried in blood above. But more importantly, they are not presented as his memories draining down the wall, but the things themselves; if human observation pulls matter from a state of entanglement, a state of immeasurable, indefinite position, then the death of that human observation here returns that matter to entanglement, to an unobserved, indefinite thing outside human comprehension. When Chigurh says that death does not mean the same thing to him as Wells, Wells thinks he is taunting him about fear. Instead, he is talking about what the human experience (and its necessary end in death) is indicative of.

Though Chigurh is essentially an avatar of our uncaring universe, as said, he too is vulnerable to it: he is nearly killed by a completely unrelated traffic accident, and he is

shot by Moss. He discusses the latter event with Wells. "Getting injured," he says, "changed my perspective. . . . The best way I can put it is that I've sort of caught up with myself" (173). Indeed, prior to being shot, he talks about his philosophy rather cryptically; the gas station attendant who wins the coin toss is left as confused as he is frightened. But after being shot, Chigurh speaks a bit more plainly to his victims. Chigurh offers a discussion and a self-acceptance to Wells, as shown above, but Wells cannot come to grips with Chigurh's message. By the time Chigurh gets to Carla Jean, he explains the world he cannot second say so plainly that when he asks "Do you see," she responds, with no hope of escaping death, "I do. I truly do" (260). Carla Jean is the only other character in the novel that actually acknowledges Chigurh and what he represents – indeed, early when speaking to Chigurh she has what he calls "a loss of faith" in God (256). When he proposes the coin toss to her, she says "God would not want me to do that," and Chigurh responds "Of course he would. You should try to save yourself" (258). This moment is a double movement. Carla Jean has fully lost faith in the Christian God – she does call the coin toss – but she recognizes what Chigurh is insinuating: in this context Chigurh is God. "Of course he would," he says, then instructs with "you should," not "he would want." Chigurh is not a Holden-esque God, however. He is a god in that he is the framework of the universe that he explains to her: choice, chaos, chance, subjective perspective, and insignificant life. He is capable of explaining this to her because of his injury at the hands of Llewelyn. He understands more precisely the universe he represents; he has caught up with *himself*.

Francisco Collado-Rodriguez suggests that with *No Country For Old Men*, McCarthy "discusses the limits and dangers of storytelling and mythmaking to make

sense of our lives: they may be a trap, but we cannot avoid using them. Are they, then, really meaningful?" (52) In my examination of Chigurh and Holden, I have used the word "narrative" in a Nietzschean sense. All human experience is subjective and individual, and Nietzsche prescribes an experience that makes a self-conscious narrative, a story or myth that knows its nature. Chigurh and Holden are extreme, anxious portrayals of this reality, but they are portrayals that are essentially vindicated by their respective texts. In *Blood Meridian* and *No Country For Old Men*, McCarthy appears to be telling us we "cannot avoid using" mythmaking, because in a sense, like entangled particles before they are measured, there is no sense to be made before the myth.

Chapter Three

The Kid and Sheriff Bell – False Prophets

In *Suttree*, the character of the ragpicker paints an interesting picture of God. He protests his faith to Suttree at one point: “I aint no infidel. Dont pay no mind to what they say . . . I always figured they was a God . . . I just never did like him” (147). Later, when he says that “Don't nothin happen” when you die, Suttree reminds him of his previous sentiments:

You told me once you believed in God.

The old man waved his hand. Maybe, he said. I got no reason to think he believes in me. Oh I'd like to see him for a minute if I could.

What would you say to him?

Well, I think I'd just tell him. I'd say: Wait a minute. Wait just one minute before you start in on me. Before you say anything, there's just one thing I'd like to know. And he'll say: What's that? And then I'm goin to ast him: What did you have me in that crapgame down there for anyway? I couldnt put any part of it together.

Suttree smiled. What do you think he'll say?

The ragpicker spat and wiped his mouth. I dont believe he can answer it, he said. I dont believe there is a answer. (257-258)

Thus the God that the ragpicker might believe in is one with no power. When Zarathustra says “God is dead,” it is because man no longer needs God to understand the world. In *Suttree*, the ragpicker holds onto his dead God, and as such must believe that even God

cannot understand the world he has created. That the ragpicker is “no infidel,” and still has his faith, provides him with no answers, no access to understanding his own life, let alone human life in general. But he goes on believing. The moment is simultaneously funny and sad, but more importantly, it subverts faith and religion as they are performed through the tragic character of the ragpicker. This false prophet, this man who claims he is no infidel yet who has no use for his faith, is an example of another technique McCarthy uses to perform and critique religious thought.

Chigurh and Holden, the gods of McCarthy's fiction, are not uncontested characters. Sheriff Bell is certainly given more space in *No Country For Old Men* to explain his beliefs than even Chigurh. Indeed, Bell is essentially trying to defeat Chigurh and what Chigurh represents to him. Holden almost explicitly frames the Kid as his antithesis (albeit as a kind of wayward son) near the end of the novel. Though the Kid is largely silent as a character, and certainly does little in the way of explaining any kind of philosophy, his position “against” Holden is one that is just as abstract as the wide, sweeping meanings Sheriff Bell believes his hunt for Chigurh represents. Bell and the Kid essentially represent prophets of the older, emplaced Christian cultural values and understandings of morality and reality. Both, as such, are fundamentally compromised in their respective narratives. The Kid and Bell do not succeed; their roles as representatives of a worldview are almost sacrificial in nature. Bell does not die, but he, like the Kid, has his beliefs laid bare for the reader and even himself to see, and the revelations are unpleasant – at least for him. Bell retires and goes on deluding himself, despite being equipped with the information he needs to lose his faith, to “wager his soul.” The Kid is raped, murdered, or both. These false prophets are the representatives of worldviews that

are destroyed in McCarthy's fiction. Their use, then, is to have their mysticism play out, only to be destroyed by events set in motion by mystical representations of a non-mystical universe. But these are not McCarthy's only false prophets; they are perhaps only the most identifiable. After delineating the role these figures have when faced with the opposition of the gods of McCarthy's fiction, I will show how they operate in much the same way – as characters subject to a spiritual dramatic irony – even when they are without direct, characterized opposition, such as the blind man and wayward priest in *The Crossing*, and the ragpicker in *Suttree*.

3.1 “She weighed nothing” - Emptiness and the Kid

Shaviro must read Holden as a part of the novel's traumatic re-enactment of “the violent, self-consuming ritual upon which our civilization is founded,” where “We all end up like the Kid, violated and smothered in the shithouse” (157) in order to read *Blood Meridian* as a novel about anxiety, typified by Holden's views and actions. While *Blood Meridian* is certainly an anxious novel, the reason those that pose Holden as complete villain, as star of the anxiety, find the book tragic in its ending is that they cannot reconcile the judge's vindication and victory with what they interpret as the novel's point.⁹ Holden's Zarathustrian laughing, smiling, and dancing (indeed, that such a violent, dark book is often entertaining and even funny) is not *simply* a horrifying look at our inescapable epistemology (and, for that matter, ontology); Holden's playfulness, like Nietzsche's, is the space of possibility that exists in acknowledging the limits of human

⁹ Daugherty, Bell, Wallach, and Holloway also have readings that figure Holden as villain or purely anxiety.

comprehension and the unguided nature of human existence. The Kid, on the other hand, is a figure who – and here, most scholars must read “heroically” – resists Holden's philosophy. The Kid's (presumed) death is certainly not a moment to be celebrated, but it, like every other moment of the novel, is representative of a much larger set of abstract claims.

That the Kid is destroyed at the end – and that the judge will “never die” (*Blood Meridian* 335) – would have to be the final justification of Holden's views. But why does the Kid fail? Certainly, the judge comes to see the Kid as an explicit adversary. “You alone were mutinous” (299), he tells the Kid, and he accuses the Kid of being the one who did not “empty out his heart into the common” (307). The Kid believes Holden is “the one” that did not, but he fundamentally misunderstands the judge. Holden does not have an egalitarian ethic in the worldly sense; being the literary, deified representation that he is, he thinks only in abstracts. The “common” is the egalitarian position of all individual perspectives. Situated in the “historical absolute,” all perspectives are common in their limitation; the historical absolute is not an actual test of verity, but the venue where perspectives necessarily clash, mix, switch, and obliterate. Holden empties his heart into the common with his self-aware fashioning of narrative and meaning; the rest of the gang does so instinctively (as shall be discussed below). The Kid tries to remain outside of this necessary venue of human experience. He misreads the judge and thinks in terms of a kind of charitable doctrine of commonality. That he would think such a thing betrays how lost in the old *bricolage* of the world he is. Holden's sermons have preached a connection to reality that recognizes its singularity, its individuality where the mind functions with destructive *bricolage*. The only way forward is to be epistemologically

violent; to constantly check the machinery of the mind and destroy where necessary.

The other scalphunters live in this way without being conscious that they do so. Vereen Bell rightly points out that the reader “cannot come to terms with McCarthy—and most people won’t—without coming to terms with Brown as a representative figure,” in that the story about Brown cutting down his stolen expensive weapon is a gesture to an epistemology that “seems to know instinctively that the gun is a symbol of an order of being, aesthetic and economic, that his whole existence denies” (117). This is not because, as he suggests, Brown lives an existence where “illusion, and philosophical affectation are pared away” (117) – such a thing isn’t possible in the world of *Blood Meridian* – but rather because he lives a constantly violent lifestyle, he and the other scalphunters are instinctively violent towards cultural epistemological norms as well. Tobin the ex-priest may debate Holden’s heresy, but he nevertheless carries a gun and scalps for money. The gang members likely only think themselves selfish, but this selfishness is at least a step closer to acknowledging the singularity of the individual human experience that Holden preaches.

The Kid, however, misinterprets much of what Holden, and even Tobin, tell him. These misinterpretations lead him to grow into a kind of figure who self-identifies as righteous, a kind of pilgrim who stands for better, universalizing human concepts. He takes his antithetical position to Holden,¹⁰ and his evaluation of Holden is as Tobin tells it: he is a devil. He grows into a man who is “treated with a certain deference as one who

¹⁰ The transformation the Kid takes as an adult does grow over the novel. That the Kid refuses to shoot Holden is the clearest moment of his posture as antithetical to Holden before his adulthood. Rather than confront Holden (or his teachings), the Kid refuses to act, to participate in the world and context of violence Holden is so clearly connected to.

had got onto terms with life beyond what his years could account for” (*Blood Meridian* 312). Indeed, he is often mistaken “for a sort of preacher,” and keeps it as his “custom in that wilderness to stop with any traveler and exchange the news,” despite seeming to “travel with no news at all, as if the doings of the world were too slanderous for him” (312). This role he believes he holds in the world is subtly gutted when he comes upon a woman, and speaks (albeit via the prose’s summary) more than ever before in the novel:

He told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die . . . He reached into the little cove and touched her arm. She moved slightly, her whole body, light and rigid. She weighed nothing. She was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years. (315)

His experience as holy man, transcendent of the world's values, culminates with this: an empty shell, with no meaning, and no response.

That the corpse of the woman the Kid says so much to (and pours so much earnestly believed meaning into, meaning he thinks is inherent and intrinsic to the very nature of his existence) weighs nothing is a small point. Again, it is important not to forget that Holden *is* the book, both in voice (dialogue and prose) and physicality (weight and immortality). The novel gives no weight to human righteousness defined by forces that claim to be non-man-made, or external agency, or meaning thought to be materially

inherent. The weight of the novel is invested in Holden, who makes meaning, and a meaning that must always be self-aware. If the Kid is an adversary to the judge, it is only because the Kid fails to learn this lesson. "I'd have loved you like a son," (*Blood Meridian* 306) Holden says, and indeed, the Kid is given opportunities to become more like Holden. This would not make the novel a tragic tale of lost innocence, for by the end the Kid has no innocence left to lose; indeed, he starts the novel as a violent misfit. Holloway says that the best advice given in the novel is when Tobin tells the Kid not to listen to the judge (25). But if the Kid listened, he would know to use the *bricolage* available to him to fashion a new *bricolage* with which he could epistemologically – and literally, for this work of literature – destroy the previous or competing conceptual orders. The Kid's best chance is to learn from Holden to overpower him, to subsume the judge's will beneath his own. Tobin's calls to not listen are made because he lives the principles of the *bricoleur* instinctively, not in the perfect, self-conscious way the judge does; to put it bluntly, his violence is not as philosophically based as Holden's.

Contrary to what Holloway says, the best advice given in the novel is from that non-peaceful *bricoleur* side of Tobin, the side most like Holden: "Face him down," he tells the Kid. When the Kid doesn't fire upon the judge, Tobin laments, "Ye'll get no such a chance as that again" (297-8). The best advice given in the novel is for the Kid to kill the judge, enter the venue of the historical absolute and be a self-conscious *bricoleur*. If all meaning is a subjective, man-made perspective, and these perspectives are inherently violent (at least in a Derridean sense), do violence, but do so consciously. Instead, the Kid declines, and lives a life defined by older (or at least other) violences of religion and morality thought to be externally commanded. The judge even calls on the Kid to have

this very self-reflective epistemological foundation: “For even if you should have stood your ground, he said, yet what ground was it?” (307). The ground the Kid stands on is of a material world that does not know of (let alone care for) him, and it is only understandable through his own subjective perspective. The corpse of the old woman is an empty shell; he cannot save her any more than anything in the world can be saved in any Christian moralistic sense. The ground he stands on and the corpse he speaks to are both deaf. The world that is too slanderous for the Kid and the righteousness he believes he can stand for in it are creations of his own perspective, but as the Kid does not listen to Holden, they fall into a trap that Nietzsche warns against explicitly. This trap, as Higgins describes from Nietzsche's philosophy, is the “symptom of Western humanity's continued habit of projecting its own power outward” (ix). There is no totality, as previously discussed, with Holden, and the Kid is wrong to believe in the old structures that think there is. The Kid does not kill by the end of the novel, but only because he is lying to himself about the human experience. The truth of the human experience, personified by Holden, does kill – and it kills him.

In the previous chapter, I proposed that the events and prose of the book back the claims (and their implications) that Holden makes. Indeed, the early events of the book, as witnessed by the Kid, provide interesting echoes of exactly the kind of religious subversion and inversion that Holden represents. When Sproule and the Kid come upon a group of scalped dead, the prose makes an interesting allusion: “Dust stanchd the wet and naked heads of the scalped who with the fringe of hair below their wounds and tonsured to the bone now lay like maimed and naked monks” (*Blood Meridian* 54). Not long after, in the very next chapter, they come upon a church full of slaughtered

Christians:

the scalped and naked and partly eaten bodies of some forty souls who'd barricaded themselves in this house of God against the heathen. The savages had hacked holes in the roof and shot them down from above . . . The altars had been hauled down and the tabernacle looted and the great sleeping God of the Mexicans routed from his golden cup . . . The murdered lay in a great pool of their communal blood . . . Sproule turned and looked at the kid as if he'd know his thoughts but the kid just shook his head. (60)

Just as violence is evidence to Holden's claims, the tonsured dead are made monks to Holden's monastic order of violence. The Native Americans who conducted the massacre are called "heathen" and "savages," but their actions are not at all unlike the trade of the Glanton gang that the Kid will soon join. Indeed, the Glanton gang itself is described as a "pack" which is variously "clad in the skins of animals," wearing decorations of human teeth, ears and scalps, all the while riding horses clad in "trappings . . . fashioned out of human skin" (78). The savage nature of the almost "faceless enemy" presentation of Native Americans in the novel is thus matched (if not surpassed) by the group the Kid finds himself with. Indeed, the Glanton gang's apparel helps blur the line (indeed, there appears to be no line at all) between man and savage beast, and a similar thing appears to be happening in the two previous descriptions of scalped dead. There, the line between what is sacred and what is profane is blurred or even erased. The scalped are monks, the Church dead were killed by forces from above, the "sleeping God . . . routed" (60). The difficulty in gauging any kind of civility or humanity is matched by the difficulty deciding what is truly divine and what is not, for in *Blood Meridian*, the only god is

Holden. When faced with the slaughter – and the communal pool of blood, echoing Holden's calls to empty out one's heart into the common – the Kid cannot even match Sproule's conventional disgust. The Kid, who will eventually see himself as part of a world where there is no question about what is divine, and who is righteous, can only shake his head in disbelief at a scene the prose describes in such a way as to challenge the verity of any such notion.

The Kid is a difficult figure to track, naturally, because of how little he speaks. But judging by the way the novel tracks his journey and his response to the events in which he finds himself a (often silent) participant, dramatic irony appears to be the par for his course. The clearest moments, of course, are the dried shell of an old woman he speaks to, and his pithy and unwittingly accurate accusation that Holden “aint nothin,” but the novel offers enough in the way of complications to make any attempt at a completely sympathetic reading of the Kid almost impossible¹¹. This is not to say the Kid is a villain, or even that his death is not a representation of McCarthy's own anxiety regarding Holden's philosophy. Just as Nietzsche was obsessed with tragedy, so too is *Blood Meridian* a tragedy. It is not so in the sense that the righteous die, but in that as incorrect and reprehensible as the Kid himself may be, his views are nevertheless an artistic and positive perspective. When he pours his heart out to a desiccated corpse, we are witnessing a demonstration of his tragic *hamartia*, his fatal flaw: his belief in a moral universe. The Kid, no longer a killer, could be said to not deserve his fate in the outhouse, for he has tried to extricate himself from what he sees as the evil of the world. Paradoxically, in *Blood Meridian*, therein lies his mistake. No one can extricate oneself

¹¹ The kid begins the novel a violent delinquent, and his transformation into adulthood leads only to these moments of ironic self-importance.

from the world, and only if his convictions of morality were self-aware and conscious of their origin as human design would he manage to achieve what the novel bestows upon Holden: the only divinity possible.

3.2 “Preservin nonexistent laws” - Sheriff Bell Versus the Peculiar

The moments of dramatic irony of the kind that I have attempted to identify with the Kid appear prominently and often with Sheriff Bell from *No Country For Old Men*. Bell, a staunch Christian, is clearly troubled in his conscience, his faith, and his notions of country and responsibility. Bell is often reflecting (via dialogue and chapters in italics that are entirely in his voice) on these concepts. Though he largely seems to avoid or dismiss his own fears, he comes back to them often, and how these anxieties overlap betray what he appears to know about human comprehension and existence but refuses to acknowledge. Indeed, Bell serves as the natural antithesis to Chigurh, who represents a meaningless, uncaring universe governed by chance, and human life as governed by nothing but human will. That Bell holds this position of opposition to Chigurh – and indeed, practically explicitly says as much – does not mean that he is simply a representation of it. Unlike the Kid, Bell appears to actually glean what Chigurh represents, and his anxieties even seem to indicate that at some level he supposes Chigurh is *right*. For all his ambivalence, however, *No Country* is more a book about Bell than Chigurh, and thus the religious subversion operates even more in his position as a false prophet than Chigurh's godhood.

Bell is made representational of Christian American values in many ways, despite

his doubt. Indeed, though his doubt comes close to shattering his position as wholly oppositional to Chigurh (and the view Chigurh represents that all moral value is man-made and thus inherently transient), he must essentially hold that those Christian American values are true, divinely designed, and good. These views are the only way he thinks he can understand a world he finds increasingly alien. Bell says that he stopped believing in Satan previously, but by the time of the novel's events, he has changed: "He explains a lot of things that otherwise dont have no explanation. Or not to me they dont" (218). The simplicity of the claim speaks volumes, but even Bell must admit such a religious explanation may only work for him – a subtle reference to his doubt. In a novel that shows a great deal about the laws and severe punishments involved in the drug trade, Bell expresses surprise at how those involved in the drug trade aren't "concerned" about the law, that they "dont even think about the law" (216). This is because Bell must believe that the law of the land, the law his job has sworn him to uphold, is as true, right, and good as to be singular. Just as for Bell there is no "law" except what the official law enforcement of his country ordains, there is no "morality" outside of Christianity. Bell is, to say the least, singular. But his doubt betrays the weakness of his philosophical position. When he asks his wife (who normally is capable of providing scriptural response to his concerns) "if Revelations had anything to say about the shape things was takin" and about what he sees as the cultural decline of America, she responds in the negative (304). But he cannot abandon his faith, and must simply wonder "if that's a good sign or not" (305).

Bell's wife, however, does give a kind of answer. Bell's wife, a character whose dialogue is mostly related to us by the Sheriff, is what Bell wishes to be: doubtless. As

Bell is unable to face Chigurh and the truths he represents, he can only wish he were not so troubled by his own questions and what he observes. Indeed, he says she is the best person he knows (91), and as she's generally right, he should perhaps follow her example and not read the newspaper and keep up with current events (40). The bible-reading wife is doubtless in her faith, perhaps largely due to this wilful ignorance, and that Bell calls her "*a very young woman in a lot of ways*" (305) could in fact be a small reference to her naivety. It is important to note, however, that McCarthy's treatment of the wife in this way does not come off as insulting, of course, and not just because of Bell's ardent affection for her. If Chigurh is an anxious representation of how terrifying an honest epistemology can be, Bell's wife is a respectful representation of how good and desirable (in a societal sense) an incorrect epistemology can be. Bell's position as a doubter who cannot fully abandon his faith and wishes for a doubtless faith like his wife's is illustrated by a small event in the novel as he stands at the guardrail of a bridge: "A westbound semi coming around the long curve of the span downshifted when the lights came into view. The driver leaned from the window as he passed. Dont jump, Sheriff. She aint worth it. Then he was gone . . . Bell smiled. Truth of the matter is, he said, she is" (170). As Bell says in the beginning of the novel, he would be willing to wager his life in defense of vindicating his worldview, but he cannot face a world that denies it. Though both the trucker and Sheriff are joking, it is almost certainly true that Bell still has enough faith to defend the doubtless – and it would not require him to completely abandon his faith, to face Chigurh, to wager his soul.

In one of Bell's monologues, the Sheriff makes a claim that is almost tragic in its irony: "*People anymore you talk about right and wrong they're liable to smile at you. But*

I never had a lot of doubts about things like that. In my thoughts about things like that. I hope I never do” (158-9). The passage comes about halfway through a novel that is full of Bell's anxious ruminations, *particularly* about morality. Bell is a man who has a confused and desperate need to live up to his father's memory, and a man who lives with the guilt of actions in the Second World War that do not fit with the strict code of honour and morality of his Christian values. He contradicts himself often on exactly the matters of right and wrong, and faith. He says that “the good Lord” smiled upon him to give him his wife (91), but later says to his uncle that in old age he expected God to come into his life “in some way. He didnt” (267). He says that his father's unwavering courage and principles make him a “better man” (279) than him, but at the end of the novel he anxiously admits another reality: “*As the world might look at it I suppose I was a better man. Bad as that sounds to say. Bad as that is to say*” (308). If anything, when it comes to principles, to right and wrong, the Bell that we meet in *No Country* is nothing if *not* doubtful or confused. His claim that he hopes never to have such doubts is a wish for a doubtless mind he does not have, and it is related to his wish that he not face Chigurh and thus have to “*put his soul at hazard*” (4). Chigurh represents a reality he cannot face, a reality where right and wrong *are* difficult, fluid concepts without gods or souls to design or guide them. Bell knows what Chigurh is; he knows what the world really is like, but he refuses to accept it. His retirement, like the Kid's refusal to fire upon Holden, is a refusal to accept the truth their novels' respective “gods” represent.

The significance of the book's opening with Bell's claims about facing Chigurh cannot be overstated. The seed of irony in Bell's position is planted immediately, as it sets up a set of metaphors I pointed out in the previous chapter. Two passages of Chigurh's

killings focus on the eyes as symbolic of the human subjective perspective. As the blood runs into one victim's eyes, it is said it carries "his slowly uncoupling world visible to see" (7), and another murder has Chigurh watching "capillaries break up in his [victim's] eyes. The light receding. Watching his own image degrade in that squandered world" (123). Chigurh's philosophy in connection to these images has already been delineated, but the metaphor begins in the first pages, and in Bell's words: *They say the eyes are the windows to the soul. I dont know what them [Chigurh's] eyes was the windows to and I guess I'd as soon not know. But there is another view of the world out there and other eyes to see it and that's where this is goin . . . I walked in front of those eyes once. I wont do it again* (4). The ambivalence regarding the soul through the eyes is interesting enough, but even more interesting is Bell's admission that "there is another view of the world." As the book builds the metaphor of the eyes and the organic, human-based perspective of the world, it seems particularly salient that Bell would characterize what he thinks is "the way things are goin" as being a product of "other eyes" seeing "another view of the world." Chigurh's eyes, being the eyes of the novel's representation of the very nature of subjective human experience itself, is the closest we have in the novel to being a glimpse of the truth, the reality of human experience. Bell's consternation here with eyes and views of the world is precisely what he doesn't want to know about, which is what Chigurh's eyes are windows to; in other words, the reality of human experience is what he will not face, what he wishes to escape from ever being in sight of again.

Bell's acknowledgement of Chigurh and the universe as a venue of man-made value does not stop at what he fears and wishes to avoid, however. Indeed, Bell even seems to identify some of the elements of Chigurh's philosophy in his own life. In the

previous chapter, I discussed Carson Wells' earnest description of Chigurh to Llewelyn Moss. He calls him a “peculiar man” (153) with transcendent principles. Bell uses the word “peculiar” a few times himself; on its own this is an unsurprising element of his dialect and style of dialogue, but in one chapter of his monologues he uses the word three times, and the occurrences are particularly relevant. The first two are used to describe the viewing of a convict's execution:

There was one or two come dressed in black, which I suppose was all right. Some of the men come just in their shirtsleeves and that kindly bothered me. I aint sure I could tell you why . . . When it was over they pulled this curtain around the gas-chamber with him in there settin slumped over and people just got up and filed out. Like out of church or somethin. It just seemed peculiar. Well it was peculiar. I'd have to say it was probably the most unusual day I ever spent. (63)

Just a page later, he uses the word again while he reflects upon being a sheriff:

It's a odd thing when you come to think about it. The opportunities for abuse are just about everywhere. There's no requirements in the Texas State Constitution for bein a sheriff. Not a one. There is no such thing as a county law. You think about a job where you have pretty much the same authority as God and there is no requirements put upon you and you are charged with preservin nonexistent laws and you tell me if that's peculiar or not. Because I say that it is. Does it work? Yes. Ninety percent of the time. It takes very little to govern good people. Very little. And bad people cant be governed at all. Or if they could I never heard of it. (64)

For the first anecdote, Bell is ambivalent. That people would treat the execution like a funeral seems “all right” by him, and thus the men who dress more casually bother him. But it's “peculiar” to him when people file out in silence, as if “out of church.” Clearly it is not the formal, ceremonial, or even respectful nature of the church reference that seems peculiar to him (judging by his acceptance of the funereal requirements of wearing black and not dressing casually), it is the very religious tenor of it. Bell cannot understand why people would treat this event that he cannot consider traditionally religious as if it is, but he cannot bring himself to think of this subversion of his traditional beliefs as inherently negative. If this ambivalence is difficult to interpret, the description of his job with the word “peculiar” is abundantly clear.

What Bell finds “peculiar” about his job is what is so abhorrent to him about Chigurh's philosophy as outlined in the previous chapter. There are no requirements for a human being, by an “act of will,” to forge their own subjective perspective as a kind of moral warrant. In a universe where there is no God to provide a view-from-nowhere to make moral judgements, every person has the authority of God; indeed, as I have tried to establish, Chigurh and Holden are literalized versions of this very Nietzschean point. All “laws” are “nonexistent” in that all values are only as real as the human beings who design, enforce, and live by them. That Bell calls them “peculiar” in an echo of the “peculiar man” Chigurh makes perfect sense. The extent of the dramatic irony he is subject to is palpable, however, when he says that despite all these anxieties he has about this peculiar job, it works. He expresses discomfort for the opportunities of abuse (which Holden and Chigurh are very clearly indicative of) such a system entails, but that even to him, it seems there is little other option. By saying it is the best system available, he is

acknowledging what Holden and Chigurh's philosophies are inherently founded upon: the very limitation of the human mind, and the power of a self-conscious human will as a means of understanding one's own existence.

Bell's admission about part of the reason he became a sheriff is the final gesture to his unwitting congruity with what Chigurh represents:

I've thought about why it was I wanted to be a lawman. There was always some part of me that wanted to be in charge. Pretty much insisted on it. Wanted people to listen to what I had to say. But there was a part of me too that just wanted to pull everybody back in the boat. If I've tried to cultivate anything it's been that. (295)

This confession provides even more light on something Bell mentions in passing much earlier. He had “*campaigned pretty hard*” to get his position, and that though he “*tried to be fair,*” he may have been “*throwin dirt*” to become Sheriff. It is telling that the confession holds obvious reference to Nietzsche's will to power; that he thinks the “good” in him is his desire to save society (get everyone in the boat), and that he should do that by standing against shifting cultural conditions is equally telling. He goes on just after the confession:

These old people I talk to, if you could of told em that there would be people on the streets of our Texas towns with green hair and bones in their noses speakin a language they couldnt even understand, well, they just flat out wouldnt of believed you. But what if you'd of told em it was their own grandchildren? Well, all of that is signs and wonders but it dont tell you how it got that way. And it dont tell you nothin about how it's fixin to get, neither.

Part of it was I always thought I could at least someday put things right and I guess I just dont feel that way no more. I dont know what I do feel like. I feel like them old people I was talkin about . . . I'm bein asked to stand for somethin that I dont have the same belief in it I once did. Asked to believe in something I might not hold with the way I once did. (295-6)

Bell understands that the world is changing, and he even thinks of himself as outdated, no longer applicable to the current culture. That he thinks he cannot stop the change has less to do with his ability, however, and more to do with the fact that he does not even believe it can be done. His belief in a redeemable world being shaken has obvious parallels with loss of Christian faith, and all that is left is a man whose narrative no longer makes sense to himself. Bell does not suffer Chigurh's self-described vanity in thinking one's subjective mind and will can make unreasonable shifts of the conditions (of society, culture, history, and even the physical cosmos itself) we exist in, but as he never saw it as his own narrative, it all simply makes no sense to him. That Bell was a man who wanted to be in charge, be heard, who had a strong Nietzschean will is perhaps what provides him enough insight to quit – and he is not, he admits, quitting while he is ahead: “*I aint ahead by a damn sight. I never will be*” (296). He, like his uncle Ellis, cannot leave the idea of God, and though they must believe God knows “what's happenin,” they have to admit that he cannot “stop” the world from changing (269). Thus Bell, though frightened of the understanding of the universe Chigurh represents, still refuses to face it, even when he abandons his narrative in every sense that leads to action. He is a prophet for a powerless God, and thus is made powerless, but only because he does not acknowledge the parts of himself, his own life, that appear to be evidence of exactly the kind of

worldview Chigurh represents. Instead, Bell thinks that *he* is the problem, that *he* is not worthy of the views and principles he wants to defend.

After telling Uncle Ellis about what he thinks of as his cowardice during the Second World War, Bell betrays his feelings of inadequacy: “I’m not the man of an older time they say I am. I wish I was. I’m a man of this time” (279). Both Bell and his uncle believe that the older generation is a kind of chosen people, true representatives of the true Christian American values, the result of what Francisco Collado-Rodriguez calls the “authorial irony” inherent in their state as men “trapped in the conservative myth of Western expansionism” (Collado-Rodriguez 56). Bell’s father Jack is held as a kind of proof of that myth to both Bell and Ellis. They both agree that Jack would not have retreated as Bell did during the war in the same circumstances, and Bell says that “nobody in this room would believe” that had Jack “been born fifty years later he might of had a different view of things” (279). In this way, neither man will acknowledge the true nature of principles and values as culturally-bound and man-made, thinking that somehow men are either born ready to fit the good Christian values that God desires, or not. Thus Bell’s worry that he is a man of “this time” is part-and-parcel of his inability to face Chigurh, with his doubts. He believes himself not good enough to actually withstand what he thinks is a sudden decline in the world – indeed, he thinks himself part of the generation that is sliding. Even his uncle’s remark that Bell may be a “practice run” (279) invokes the image of figure in a teleology that is past its time of real involvement, an anachronism, rather than simply a man who no longer understands the world he sees because he refuses to wager his soul, to face Chigurh, and see the world with “different eyes,” with secular eyes.

Bell's discussion with his uncle seems to provide insight into McCarthy's choice for the novel's title, and how it relates to the philosophical critique I'm arguing McCarthy's fiction engages in. After telling some stories about how difficult things were in the country long before Bell was around, Bell's uncle says "This country was hard on people. But they never seemed to hold it to account. In a way that seems peculiar. That they didnt . . . This country will kill you in a heartbeat and still people love it" (271). He goes on to say that he too loves the country, but follows by saying "I'm as ignorant as a box of rocks so you sure dont want to go by nothin I'd say" (271). Collado-Rodriguez points out that both men are incapable of consciously recognizing that "some of the stories about his family past are as violent as the ones he witnesses while chasing Chigurh," which he seems to take as "premonitions of the Apocalypse" (56). That the word "peculiar" comes up again in these ironic remarks from Ellis and Bell may not be coincidence. Though the country Bell's uncle describes looks much different from the one the novel is set in, both are hard, cruel places. That his uncle still loves this country that he thinks people should hold accountable for so much misery is, indeed, peculiar. If Chigurh, the peculiar man, represents a world where moral values are a constant flux of subjective human perspectives, when Bell's uncle finds it peculiar that he and others cannot help but love this hard country, he essentially explains the novel's title. Though Bell and his uncle may consciously espouse an interpretation of America as being 'no country for old men,' the peculiar nature of the older generation and the current generation – and any generation – being oblivious to the cultural trends of the country where they live in comparison to any other seems to indicate that 'there is no country for old men.' The peculiarity of Chigurh, the very flux of human value, is what they cannot

grasp, and thus their concept of America as being difficult to grow old in betrays a larger implication. The title is a truncated line from Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium." McCarthy chose not to use the entire line, "That is no country for old men," but instead to remove the first two words to allow for the unspoken truth that permeates the entire chapter with Bell's uncle: there is no country for old men.

In 1931 Yeats described his poem as "about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul," and that a journey to Byzantium "symbolize[s] the search for the spiritual life" (qtd in Jeffares 217). McCarthy uses this symbol in a powerful subversion; if there is no country for old men – as it appears Bell and his uncle relate in their ambivalence but are unable to consciously comprehend or articulate – then there is no destination in this journey. There is no Byzantium, no spiritual wholeness to sail *to*. Bell will sail his entire life, but both he and his uncle must instead look back at the country they metaphorically left in this spiritual search, the country they both think is simply too hard for the "old," and think that problem lay there. Chigurh, the truth Bell will not face, would have the answer: Byzantium does not exist. Every country is like the one you just left, and the only solution is to stay, and get your answers away from the deception of spirituality.

After Bell's father's death, Bell had a dream about him which he recounts at the very end of the novel:

it was like we was both back in older times and I was on horseback goin through the mountains of a night. Goin through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothin. He just rode on past and he had this blanket

*wrapped around him and he had his head down and when he rode past I seen
he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the
horn from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream
I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire
somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that
whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up. (309)*

The image of two riders in “older times,” one being his idolized father, is clear enough in reading Bell. These two men, one of which carries fire, light, are surrounded by cold, snow, and darkness. The death and misery and alienness of the real world press in on the dream with these forces, but his father, representative to Bell of all the good Christian values he so dearly wishes he were worthy of, carries light ahead to make a fire. The safety and warmth that he hopes lie ahead, the promise of a reward for following (albeit lagging behind, in his mind and dream) his father's trail, is the central desire of the dream. The desire, of course, is never realized. Spiritual reward, even any true safety from the cold dark of the uncaring universe, is never seen. He wakes up.

Chapter Four

True Prophets

Holden and Chigurh are the only two “gods” of McCarthy's fiction, and though the “false prophet” figures I have identified in the previous chapter turn up in a number of minor and major characters throughout McCarthy's work, they are not the last of figures McCarthy employs in expressing an authorial secular worldview. The false prophets subvert religion by the dramatic irony they are immersed in, and the gods – violent, anxious portrayals they are – explicitly relate secular philosophies. The gods, however, are not alone in their explicit delineation of a worldview commensurate with McCarthy's oeuvre. Some characters, “true prophets,” give a mortal voice to the religious subversion much as the gods do. The prophets of this chapter are clearly not mouthpieces for McCarthy, nor are any of them wholly correct. They do, however, subscribe and preach about the universe McCarthy appears to endorse. These are not divine representations of a secular universe like Holden or Chigurh; they are mortal men, given the words by their creator, McCarthy, to delineate a worldview. Their words, like the gods of the first chapter, are vindicated in their respective texts, but these prophets are often sacrificial figures, similar to the false prophets. These true prophets are not subject to the same kind of dramatic irony as the false, but they must present their case and be done away with; once their sermons are related to the reader, their voices must be extinguished so that the novel can vindicate or modify their philosophies beyond the words of the characters themselves. The common, secular worldview is hard to bear for these characters – too much for one to bear at all – but they are what McCarthy appears to be anxiously

expressing as truth.

4.1 “The village atheist” - White's Despair of Truth in *Sunset Limited*

McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* features only two characters, who go nameless, and are referred to in the play format by their skin colour: White and Black. Black, a devout Christian, has just stopped White, an atheist university professor, from committing suicide (which he attempted by trying to jump in front of the *Sunset Limited* train). The entirety of the novel is a one-scene discussion between the two men that largely revolves around faith and the value of life. Black attempts to convince White not to reattempt suicide through a variety of arguments, none of which works. The discussion could stand for nearly every McCarthy novel's approach to critiquing a religious mindset. White holds an extreme version of a worldview McCarthy's novels appear to espouse, and he essentially “wins” in a clash of philosophies against a legitimately likeable, kind human being whose worldview, while beautiful and worthwhile, cannot sustain the onslaught. In this way, White is yet another of McCarthy's anxious portrayals of the pitfalls of a self-aware and knowledgeable relationship to reality, and Black is another portrayal of the good that can come from the ultimately less sound religious relationship to reality. That Black is left to weep and simply dedicate himself to a God that will not respond to his calls of “is that okay” (60) while White leaves to attain the death he so desires, is a painful end where neither man has changed their position, but the very performance of their ideas is a critique of the religious position. White may not be as extreme a portrayal of McCarthy's anxieties with the

secular worldview as Chigurh or Holden, but he is no less a vehicle for the vindication of that very worldview.

Both White and Black agree with Ecclesiastes 1:18, or as White puts it, “the more one knows the more unhappy one is likely to be” (47), but they diverge in what that fact teaches. White's philosophy is one of fatalistic nihilism, the Nietzschean perspectivism without the prescription of self-aware narrative to stave off despair. White echoes Holden, Chigurh, and Nietzsche when he says that “If people saw the world for what it truly is. Saw their lives for what they truly are. Without dreams or illusions. I don't believe they could offer the first reason why they should not elect to die as soon as possible” (57). The Yaqui Indian Quijada from *The Crossing* makes a similar remark: “If people knew the story of their lives how many would then elect to live them? People speak about what is in store. But there is nothing in store. The day is made of what has come before. The world itself must be surprised at the shape of that which appears. Perhaps even God” (387). When Quijada here mentions the fractional state of all individual human lives, he envisions a world that even its supposed creator cannot make sense of, echoing the ragpicker from *Suttree*, and Uncle Ellis from *No Country For Old Men*. White explicitly states he does not believe in God (57), however, and thus he must conclude that there was never any sense to be made. He has the answer to the man's query in *The Road*: “the never to be” does not “differ from what never was” (32). Without value and purpose from a God, as none exists, White must see the world as a definitively and wholly black place; the only white available is the opposite: death.

White says that when “you read the history of the world you are reading a saga of bloodshed and greed and folly the import of which is impossible to ignore” (48). The

importance of learning this saga is the understanding of the human condition as miserable. But the solace of a solidarity in that suffering, something White says Black's religion does provide as a "fellowship of pain" (58), can only be "simply reiterative" rather than "actually collective," otherwise "the sheer weight of it would drag the world from the walls of the universe and send it crashing and burning through whatever night it might yet be capable of engendering until it was not even ash" (58). White, like Chigurh and Holden, knows that a human relationship to reality is inherently subjective and bound to the "world" each individual carries; what he adds is that, were a collective consciousness possible, there would be even less reason to go on living – the collective misery and suffering would be catastrophic. Thus, for White's godless universe where we have only a fragile, subjective connection to the universe that batters us all so heavily, the only solace is escape: "Show me a religion that prepares one for death. For nothingness. There's a church I might enter. Yours [Black's] prepares one only for more life. For dreams and illusions and lies" (58). Chigurh and Holden would likely agree with White when he says that the things we believe in are "very frail," and perhaps even that people "become an accomplice in your own annihilation," but they would part where he says "there is nothing you can do about it" (55). White can only wish for an end to experience. Black has no answers for White's final rant, and indeed, White departs, presumably to kill himself.

Earlier in the novel/play, White accuses Black of seeing "everything in black and white," to which Black replies "It is black and white" (45), a moment made poignant by the characters themselves. Black says "You might be surprised about how little time I spend trying to understand the world" and admits his "view of the world is a narrow one"

(45). Black says he need only try to understand not God himself, but what God wants from him (45). Naturally, for White, and for the novels of Cormac McCarthy, what precisely white and black *are* is different depending on the eyes that view them. But the novel's irony in having these characters *be* “black” and “white” is that White, being in this scene, taking part in this discussion, is engaging the world in an equally “black and white” position. Despite White's knowledge and perhaps more philosophically sound position, he too suffers from a limited perspective, an extreme side that fails to fully recognize itself. White correctly sees the universe as a godless, uncaring venue – a position that, as noted, Black in a way unwittingly concedes – but is incapable of seeing any possible position such a view could entail other than desiring death. White wants no illusions, and as life itself is an illusion, he would prefer nothing. But Chigurh, Holden, and indeed Nietzsche would disagree with White over the precise illusory nature of a human connection to reality.

White's position, uttered in phraseology not unlike the exacting delivery of Holden or Chigurh, and his depressing conclusion (of desiring suicide) are another product of an anxious close examination of what perspectivism could lead to.¹² Nietzsche himself in *The Gay Science* mentions “the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now given to us by science,” but praises art for being a “cult of the untrue,” a “counterforce” to the “honesty” (104) that the sciences have given us. Indeed, art as the “good will to appearance” fights off the “nausea and suicide” (104) that are the products

¹² It is certainly not without precedent; noted novelist and admirer of Nietzsche H. P. Lovecraft wrote in his essay on the philosopher that “universal suicide [is the] the most logical thing in the world – we reject it only because of our primitive cowardice and childish fear of the dark. If we were sensible we would seek death – the same blissful blank which we enjoyed before we existed” (85).

of the scientific, “honest” component of the Nietzschean worldview. Nietzsche deals with “the thought of suicide” somewhat flippantly, however, as a “powerful solace: by means of it one gets through many a bad night” (*Beyond Good* 103). In one's life, the notion that it could be ended by a very specific act of will is a “solace.” The aforementioned Quijada from *The Crossing* makes a similar remark when referring to the death of the American Boyd in Mexico, the protagonist's brother: “He is where he is supposed to be. And yet the place he has found is also of his own choosing. That is a piece of luck not to be despised.” (*The Crossing* 387). Quijada is another McCarthy character like Ellis or the ragpicker (or perhaps even Black by at the end of *Sunset Limited*) who imagine a God that cannot understand the world he created, and thus he only believes in God “on godly days” (387). Quijada understands that the “day is made of what has come before” (387); every individual human life has so many events of which the individual has no control over due to its fractional status. The “piece of luck” that Boyd's life, his story, ends where he *willed* is a great one indeed. Nietzsche's prescription for a life that acknowledges this honesty and instead liberates the mind and will as a *creator* (as Holden says, makes man a god) is why suicide remains only an option for him (and, it seems, for McCarthy's philosophy), rather than a necessity as it is for White.

As White is incapable of finding the creative epistemological liberation possible in viewing the universe as a place where all things are temporary and fragile, he limits himself only to the “nausea and suicide” of scientific honesty, rather than the joyful possibilities Nietzsche, Holden, and even Chigurh are capable of finding. The “joy” Holden and Chigurh find is abhorrent, and McCarthy is clearly not espousing suicide any more than he espouses murder. The conclusions of all three (White, Chigurh, and Holden)

simultaneously express McCarthy's anxieties about what truths the very fundamentals of their philosophies reveal, but also to explain the misery, violence, and suicide of the world in a way that reinforces those same fundamentals. Indeed, Black teases White's myopia, albeit as an elitism. Black suggests that White views other people "from a certain height" (49), yet White claims he sees all people as "fellow occupants of the same abyssal pit in which I find myself," and that such a view doesn't make him "special" (49). Nevertheless, as Black points out, White never disagrees with his claims that White's reasons for suicide are "worldly reasons" (51), "more intelligent . . . more elegant" reasons (49) than the average suicidal person's. White claims that his reasons "center around a gradual loss of make-believe . . . a gradual enlightenment as to the nature of reality. Of the world" (51). White clearly believes that he sees the world more truly than others do. Leo Strauss' interpretation of Nietzsche is consistent with this to a point. One of the only "facts" that Nietzsche bears to treat as such is the fact "that human life is utterly meaningless and lacking support, that it lasts only for a minute which is preceded and followed by an infinite time during which the human race was not and will not be" (194). But Black is right to pronounce White's position as a narrow one, and for reasons that Nietzsche, Holden, and Chigurh would note. White elaborates on the core of his reasons, and his presumably better view of human life: "I don't regard my state of mind as some pessimistic view of the world. I regard it as the world itself. Evolution cannot avoid bringing intelligent life ultimately to an awareness of one thing above all else and that is futility" (57). That he believes his view of the world is *the world itself* is, in the principles of the philosophy he appears to hold, self-defeating.

White's belief in the futility of all human endeavour is why he assumes

“minimalizing pain” is the only logical life (52), one that the most logical conclusion to is quick death. As said, Nietzsche certainly would not disagree that all human endeavour is temporary – and from the perspective of any absolute or consistent measure, futile and meaningless. White thinks that his position does not have the “dreams and illusions” (57) that the faithful have, but when he accuses Black's religion of preparing people “only for more life. For dreams and illusions and lies” (58), he unwittingly betrays what Nietzsche and Holden would know to point out: life itself, and any connection to reality, is inherently a kind of illusion. White may now have a better understanding of Nietzsche's “fact” of futility and meaninglessness, but that he thinks life has an absolute *lack* of merit is itself a position formulated from a position of equal ignorance, thought by a man whose life, like every life, is an incalculably small perspective that cannot quite understand its own position. Nietzsche believes that “the will to power,” the ambition to achieve any kind of higher status (in the incredible variety of ways that could be understood), is an observably universal trait in humanity. But Nietzsche must acknowledge that even this interpretation, based on a fundamentally atheistic conception of the universe and the futility of human endeavour like White's, is just that: an interpretation. Unlike White's interpretation, thought of as “the world as it is,” Nietzsche knows and hints that “the doctrine of will to power cannot claim to reveal what is, the fact, the most fundamental fact but is 'only' one interpretation, presumably the best interpretation, among many” (Strauss 191).

White has the “honesty” of the scientific awareness of human insignificance, the “honesty” of a kind of existential futility, and the “honesty” of the incomprehensible nature of the entirety of our cosmic position, but his (quite literally fatal) mistake is in

thinking that pain minimalization (via suicide) is also part of that very “honesty,” rather than an interpretation. He believes suicide the only logical response to what science has made knowable, instead of believing what is knowable in fact allows an ultimate kind of freedom in self-expression, of individual connections to reality, as Nietzsche does. When Holden creates a grand narrative of violence and war for the human race, or Chigurh speaks of exerting one's will, both echo Nietzsche. But Holden understands all life as interpretation and illusion, and Chigurh speaks of the “vanity” in presuming one's interpretation is as irrefutable and as “honest” as the understanding of the very cosmos they represent. What science has made knowable provides new ground to interpret the unknowable whole of the cosmos, existence, and reality, but White fails to acknowledge his interpretation as seeing the world black and white, just as the Christian who argues with him does. He believes he sees the world as it is, and the rest do not; Nietzsche, and the gods of McCarthy's fiction, would refute it as an illusion that differs only in degree.

As White leaves, Black beseeches God: “If you wanted me to help him how come you didnt give me the words? You give em to him. What about me?” (59-60). A true false prophet, Black appears to have been even somewhat convinced by White's arguments, but he cannot think of it in those terms. From Black's perspective, God has given the faithless the knowledge of a universe without him, and the powers of language to articulate it. In short, Black believes that God, the designer and controller of the universe, *the universe itself*, has specifically given the powers of knowledge and speech to the man who offers a philosophy that rejects such design and control. When Black begs an unresponsive God if it is “okay” that he will “keep your word” (60), the moment is tragic; Black must rely on a system of thought that no longer provides him with the guidance he expects from it. But

both Black and White are tragic figures: Black's tragedy is in his inability to see past his God to assuage his despair, White's tragedy in his inability to find *subjective* value in a universe that could afford him purpose, solidarity, and pleasure. White, though a true prophet, is not wholly correct.

As White misses the mark in a way Chigurh and Holden (and, as we shall see, *The Road's* man and Suttree) do not, Black's last lines compose the final subversive gesture of the text. White's character is sacrificed, in suicide, not only to vindicate the principles underlying his philosophy – through the false prophet-esque dramatic irony of Black's final lines – but also to provide a stark, tragic view of his error – through his presumed suicide in light of the myopia that Black correctly identifies. Though McCarthy's fiction does present a rather cynical philosophy, White's philosophy is *too* cynical, and lacks the agency and availability for fulfilling expression that even Holden and Chigurh preach about. That *The Sunset Limited* is an artistic expression of McCarthy's could itself be seen as the most central meta-critique of White's philosophical myopia. For Nietzsche, art is the best tool for thinking of existence as bearable, for it makes existence an “aesthetic phenomenon” (*Gay Science* 104). McCarthy's fiction may be congruent with much of White's views, but it constitutes a project that fights the “nausea and suicide” that Nietzsche identifies, and White cannot escape.

4.2 The Man's Religion in *The Road*

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a novel that is literally apocalyptic, *The Road* quite directly meditates on religion to a degree that McCarthy has only matched with *Blood Meridian*, and surpassed only with *The Sunset Limited* and *Suttree*. Set in America after a

catastrophic annihilative event that's never fully explained¹³, the novel follows two characters, a father and son¹⁴, as they attempt to travel to the coast in an effort to survive. The majority of the novel's point of view follows the man in this wasteland populated by cannibals and other, more benign survivors. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, McCarthy revealed that the novel's creative origin was in imagining “everything being laid waste, and I thought a lot about my little boy” (Oprah.com), and in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, McCarthy admitted that entire passages of dialogue are taken word-for-word from conversations he has had with his son, John Francis McCarthy, to whom the novel is dedicated. It is clear that the novel, and the main characters in it, share deep resonances with the author and his more recent meditations on many of the same topics as his previous work. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that the father is a true prophet of McCarthy's fiction. *The Road*, in fact, represents one of the few relatively positive representations of McCarthy's philosophy, due largely in part to the father's thoughts and actions.

The man does not speak nearly as much about matters of existence or faith as White does, but as the prose restricts itself to his point of view until his death, we see that in his despair at the destroyed world, he has similar views. He actively curses a God he already doubts the existence of: “Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have

¹³ In an interview, McCarthy responded to the direct question of what the disastrous event was, and his response is telling: “A lot of people ask me. I don't have an opinion. At the Santa Fe Institute I'm with scientists of all disciplines, and some of them in geology said it looked like a meteor to them. But it could be anything—volcanic activity or it could be nuclear war. It is not really important. The whole thing now is, what do you do?” (Jurgensen n.p.)

¹⁴ In contrast to my treatment of *Blood Meridian's* “kid,” I will not be capitalizing “the man” or his son.

you a soul? Oh God, he whispered” (11). In a gesture similar to a “god” like Holden representing a godless universe, early on the man questions the very divinity of a concept inalienable from divinity. The man here unwittingly uses the *bricolage* of religion to destroy it. He supposes that if there is a God to beseech, it's worth questioning whether it has a “soul” that it has dispensed to the people who live in agony under his purview. This collapsing of terms or distinctions is reminiscent of *Blood Meridian*, and when the man is said to speak “into a blackness without depth or dimension” (67) – and colourless ash and darkness are the most prevalent images in the prose – it is easy to see McCarthy is again using his prose to align with one character's views. Indeed, the collapsing of terms, distinctions, our *bricolage*, our very epistemological connection to reality, is something the man is very concerned with.

For the man, the near- or soon-to-be extinction of the human race has revealed the very futility of human endeavour White is consumed by: “The frailty of everything revealed at last. Old and troubling issues resolved into nothingness and night. The last instance of a thing takes the class with it. Turns out the light and is gone” (28). This “frailty” that White also spoke of is made even more explicit later:

He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (88)

The very categories, “things one believed to be true,” and comprehensible “entities” of reality are entirely of our creation, and will die out with us – or, the man thinks, even before. He appears to perhaps even blame “godspoke men” for taking the world “with them” with the catastrophic event (32). It is at that exact point he fully confronts human futility with his “Query: How does the never to be differ from what never was?” (32). All principles, even of the “godspoke men” who envision such grand things for humanity are retroactively made liars. Like White, it appears the man has trouble finding value and merit in the “never to be,” which is all things; thus all things may as well be “never was.” But despite the man's despair, he continues to survive, and though his thoughts on the “parsible entities” of reality are a large part of what makes the man a true prophet of McCarthy's fiction, what makes him a particularly salient one is what separates him from White.

The man does not continue living because he ignores the God he curses, or in a defiance of him. That would, at most, appear to make him the very figure White abhors, “the village atheist whose single passion is to revile endlessly that which he denies the existence of in the first place” (58). Much like White, the man believes “all things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain” (54), just as White calls any attempt at solidarity with other people – particularly Black's religion – a fellowship of pain (58). The man's immediately following thought, however, betrays why he continues to struggle for survival: “So, he whispered to the sleeping boy. I have you” (54). He lives for the benefit of his son, whom in moments of danger he must consider killing in order to spare him incredible misery. But as he cannot bear to choose death for the boy outside of this danger, he instead shapes a kind of

religion of his own in order to protect and teach his son. The honesty with which he thinks of this process makes him a vehicle for McCarthy's philosophy.

When a vicious survivor threatens to kill the boy, the man shoots him, getting blood and brains in his son's hair (73-4). After washing the boy, the man reflects on the process: "he sat holding him while he tousled his hair before the fire to dry it. All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (74). The references to "anointing" after a kind of baptismal cleansing, to breathing upon a construction to give it a kind of life, are obvious. That the man explicitly thinks of it as "evoking forms," as putting a *something* in a *nothing* is also clear. The man adopts the *bricolage* of religion so consciously, so aware in its very construction, and he as its *bricoleur*, that it is reminiscent of Holden's sermonizing. For the man, the *bricolage* is an illusion, one that keeps him and his son alive and sane, but one he knows as illusion. Indeed, he is perhaps even more explicit about life as the creation of a narrative, an "aesthetic phenomenon" (*Gay Science* 104), than Holden: "The boy didnt stir. He sat beside him and stroked his pale and tangled hair. Golden chalice, good to house a god. Please dont tell me how the story ends" (75). The boy, so important to him, is his godly golden chalice in the story he has chosen. But the man knows, as Chigurh points out, that the universe – especially with a world as cruel and dangerous as the setting of *The Road* – makes no special warrant for his story. Events beyond his will, beyond his control, will inflict themselves upon his narrative, and as he has little room for optimism, he can only continue on, asking to not be told "how the story ends." Indeed, after waking from a dream, he thinks realistically about his situation and realizes "there is no other dream nor other waking world and there

is no other tale to tell” (32); like Holden and Nietzsche, he knows the world as a tale, a dream. Ultimately it is one fraught with the dangers inherent to an existence over which we have only fractional control.

When asked in a *Wall Street Journal* interview if “the God that you grew up with in church every Sunday is the same God that the man in *The Road* questions and curses,” McCarthy's response was telling: “It may be. I have a great sympathy for the spiritual view of life, and I think that it's meaningful. But am I a spiritual person? I would like to be. Not that I am thinking about some afterlife that I want to go to, but just in terms of being a better person” (Jurgensen). God, religion, spirituality, here, are things McCarthy is pointing out as effective means of instilling and building morality. McCarthy speaks of spirituality in a somewhat utilitarian manner, as it is something he has “sympathy” for, but must only emulate its meaning to try and be a “better person.” During the previously mentioned “ancient anointing,” the man speaks to himself: “This is my child, he said. I wash a dead man's brains out of his hair. That is my job. Then he wrapped him in the blanket and carried him to the fire” (74). His “job” that he here presents as nothing other than something he has taken on for himself, comes up again when he speaks to his child: “My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you” (77). The man invokes God, not because he earnestly believes in the concept, or indeed, for “some afterlife,” but simply to keep his son a good person. The man's wife, before her suicide, foreshadows this very plan of action: “you wont survive for yourself . . . A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body” (57). But the man has the boy,

and thus he needs no ghost, and instead breathes life into the “phantom crumbs” of his rituals, his appointment from God. The boy, when told of his father's divine mission, merely asks “Are we still the good guys,” to which the father assures him they are: “Yes. And we always will be” (77). That they are the “good guys” appears to mean that, unlike many of the other survivors encountered, they are not cannibals, and they do not cravenly exploit others they find. Indeed, McCarthy admitted that “good guys is what *The Road* is about. That's the subject at hand” (Jurgensen). Their nature as “good guys” is more often characterized by father and son as “carrying the fire” (129). The image has no origin explained in the text, but judging by the father's method of raising his child – with narratives of being “good guys,” he with a job from God – it appears to be another construction of the father's that is simply meant to sustain and engage the son.

That the father chooses “fire” as the central image of the moral (perhaps even religious) framework he uses with his son – and it is important to note that “the fire” is not an image the man uses for himself in the prose's point-of-view – is a point that should not be glossed over. McCarthy has spoken of his interest in early humanity,¹⁵ and even noted that his take on a post-apocalyptic setting was informed by conversations with his brother about humanity turning into “little tribes” when so few people are left, and that cannibalism would be a product of a ruined world offering few resources (Jurgensen). This connection of early humanity to the novel's setting could be a relevant clue to understanding the man's use of “fire” as his central metaphor. Anthropologist David Price

¹⁵ In a joint NPR interview featuring Cormac McCarthy, Lawrence Krauss, and Werner Herzog, McCarthy spoke at length and with specific data regarding cave paintings and their relevance to early human activity and culture. (NPR). The final epigraph of *Blood Meridian*, as discussed in the first chapter, also indicates McCarthy's interest in and knowledge of the area.

claims that “at the root of what we call civilization” is the human control of “extrasomatic energy,” and more than even animal domestication, control of fire was “the most important source of extrasomatic energy” in the development of the human race and its collaborative (and destructive) works (304). If the father is using “the fire” as metonym for being “good,” he is using an image that also conjures with it the development of humanity itself. Fire, human goodness, here, is not a quality imbued by God, but is instead the extrasomatic energy that human beings harness together, cooperatively, as the core of “civilized” behaviour. Indeed, the brief moments of reprieve from despair and terror the book allows are often primal scenes of father and son at a fire, little different from early humans. The man and his son still “carry the fire” in that they are essentially cooperative, “good” humans who utilize extrasomatic energy together to survive. The “bad guys” (77), revealed throughout the book as cannibals, are like the “little tribes” McCarthy mentioned, but they go against this symbol of collaborative early human development because they have chosen to survive by exploiting a very somatic energy: the very flesh of others.¹⁶ Naturally they use fire to cook their meat, but it is not the actual use of fire that is relevant here, but rather the choice of symbolic image. John Hillcoat, director of the film adaptation of *The Road*, said McCarthy told him the novel “is about human goodness” (Jurgensen). The “fire” that the man tries to convince his son

¹⁶ Proponents of theories regarding prevalent cannibalism in early humans, like anthropologist Tim White, limit most of their claims largely to non-behaviourally modern humans, rather than the homo sapiens of the Upper Paleolithic who began differentiating themselves from the rest of the human species. Even if early homo sapiens engaged in common cannibalism, an understanding of why the practice took place “requires knowledge not yet available to archaeologists” (White 345). In any case, cannibalism, being a practice that was out of wide practice in behaviourally modern humans (IE homo sapiens of the Upper Paleolithic), still stands as a good antithesis to the metaphor of cooperative human endeavour that “the fire” appears to echo.

they carry is an image of that goodness: a primal quality of cooperation in order to utilize extrasomatic energy in the world for symbiotic safety and nourishment. The “goodness” may be innate in humans via its primal origins, but it is one defined without an abstract morality of gods and dogma; it is defined by the simple, almost animalistic, pack-driven cooperation and ingenuity that has made humanity the dominant species of the planet. This is all perhaps an unconscious choice of a symbol for the man – likely not for McCarthy – but he does consciously use this image for the religion he creates for his child.

When the son asks the dying man if the fire is “real,” the man says it is, and that it is “inside you. It was always there. I can see it” (279). That *he* can see it is all the reality he needs for his dream, his waking world, but the man must convince the son to integrate these teachings like religious dogma to ensure he remains his moral product in a world he is about to leave. Earlier, when his son declines his father's offer to tell him stories, the son says it is because “those stories are not true,” and the father's reply is that “they dont have to be true. They're stories” (268). The son notes that “in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people,” something that clearly upsets the boy, who is always adamant in helping those he thinks are in need. Though the passage sees the boy rejecting more stories, it in fact shows the effectiveness of the father's guidance. His stories of charity and cooperation have cultivated those values in the child, even if they are not true – just as the fire, though not “true” like those stories, the goodness it represents is “real” to the father's story, his waking world, and now real for his son. The son may not even believe them wholesale, or as simplistically as perhaps the man intended, however.

When the man and child argue over the man's treatment of a person who stole their belongings, the man says "You're not the one who has to worry about everything," but the child replies "Yes I am . . . I am the one" (259). It is a stunning moment of the son having far greater awareness than it may often appear; and the boy's probing about his father's poor state (269-70) implies he knows his father is teaching him, preparing him to live without him. His teachings, as we have seen with the "fire" the man insists they carry, are more than just survivalism, and that he thinks himself "the one who has to worry about everything," and that he would say so after what is essentially an ethical debate over the treatment of another survivor makes it appear the boy accepts the teachings about being "good guys" as stories, but ones with great meaning – perhaps not true, but real. Collado-Rodriguez points out that "once the man dies the narrator assumes the boy's perspective to carry on the story, a stylistic shift that might suggest the son has inherited the father's will to survive," and that the end of the novel implies "the boy may eventually start to mythologize about his father" (67). When the man is dying, he tells the boy "If I'm not here you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you . . . You have to make it like talk that you imagine. And you'll hear me" (279). The man here is clearly instructing the boy how to create his own illusion of a continued connection to his father, and the boy does in fact do this. The boy is taken in by another group of survivors, and one of them "would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget" (286). Indeed, Collado-Rodriguez believes this myth-making may allow the boy to "work through his own trauma and set the bases for collective recovery" (67). But the conversation he has with the first survivor of this group he meets reveals a great deal

about exactly how the boy has integrated his father's teachings. Early on, he asks if the stranger is "one of the good guys," and the man replies affirmatively (282). Soon, he asks if they are "carrying the fire" (283), and the confused stranger replies "You're kind of weirded out, aren't you," to which the boy eventually admits to being "just a little" (283). Eventually, the stranger simply agrees, but before the boy is finally willing to go along with this stranger, he asks the most important question that lay behind being good guys and carrying the fire:

Do you have a little boy?

We have a little boy and we have a little girl.

How old is he?

He's about your age. Maybe a little older.

And you didn't eat them.

No.

You don't eat people.

No. We don't eat people.

And I can go with you?

Yes. You can.

Okay then. (284)

He has the story as taught by his father validated; they are good guys that carry the fire. But the boy, realistic enough to realize he's the one that has to worry about everything, is realistic enough to ask about the true ethical standards that lay underneath the mythology.

If *The Road*, as McCarthy says, is about human goodness, then what are we to take from the true prophet's teachings? His son ends up retaining his teachings in what is

a surprisingly optimistic end to a remarkably dark book by a pessimistic author. Indeed, he ends up retaining the teachings more precisely than even the prophet that designed them. Had the boy simply taken the teaching wholesale, believing his father was ordained by God to protect him, and that there is an actual, identifiable kind of “fire” within good people, *The Road* could stand as a comment on the role of religion in early human civilizations as a school of abstract thought that articulates cooperation, and makes it a kind of commandment, or law. But the son, as I have attempted to argue, appears to have some awareness of the atheistic – indeed, perspectivist – origin of the father's tutelage. Moral laws are not absolutes, commanded by any divine authority; they, like the man's religion, are stories crafted by human beings to make sense of the world, to articulate the inherently positive qualities of cooperation, of human communal symbiosis. The son knows these stories are not “true,” but they are “real;” just as McCarthy is “sympathetic” to a spiritual view of the world, and finds it meaningful – but not for the specifics of the teachings themselves (like “an afterlife”), but rather for being a better person. If Nietzsche believed art was a mode of turning life into an “aesthetic phenomenon,” then the stories and mythology the father tells his son were to prepare him for finding his own reason to go on living as a good person. Optimistically, for McCarthy's fiction, the son not only finishes the novel as good a person (if not better) than when it began, he does so with an appreciation *and* a kind of skeptical awareness of the illusion that is his reality.

4.3 Suttree's Religion About Nothing

The titular character of *Suttree* is, as Thomas Young Jr. immediately points out in his astute reading of the novel, capable of providing “a texture of experience that is

considerably more intricate and layered than elsewhere in McCarthy's work, Suttree having been the beneficiary of an affluent upbringing and a college education" (97). *The Sunset Limited's* White may match Suttree's education, but he is in a work made entirely of dialogue, whereas *Suttree's* point-of-view, with such an erudite character's perspective, can put McCarthy's prose to full bore. *Suttree*, both novel and character, are perhaps the most investigative of existence, faith, and reality of all of McCarthy's creations. Suttree, like his true prophet counterparts, appears to begin the novel as already critical of notions of divinity and religion. Borrowing from Robert Jarrett, Holloway calls "Suttree's suspicion of Catholicism, his distaste for the dogmatic fixing (and freezing) of meaning in what are merely 'stories,' 'visions,' 'tales' about the world" part of the novel's self-awareness of "its own constructedness or artifice, its own distance *as* narrative from any mimetic or inherently truth-bearing relationship with the world" (Holloway 12). McCarthy, indeed, goes to great lengths to make the novel commensurate with Suttree's views (in a way even *Blood Meridian* with Holden cannot match). I part from Holloway, however, in that it seems to me the novel itself *is* a kind of meta-gesture to validate the philosophy Suttree ends the novel with. Suttree is McCarthy's truest of prophets, who confronts and articulates the worldview that McCarthy's fiction appears to communicate. *Suttree* is not the vindication via anxiety of the inescapable universe as subjective realities, indeterminate meaning, and godlessness like *Blood Meridian* or *No Country For Old Men*. *Suttree*, despite its tragedies, is the vindication of McCarthy's philosophy via celebration.

That Suttree is a man of lapsed faith is apparent early on. When thinking about his stillborn twin brother, whose memory haunts him for much of the book, Suttree notes he

“used to pray for his soul days past. Believing this ghastly circus reconvened elsewhere for alltime. He in the limbo of the Christless righteous, I in a terrestrial hell” (14). The Suttree we meet in the novel, however, has perhaps come only to believe in the terrestrial hell he inhabits: an earthly setting in the “the cold indifferent dark” of the cosmos (284), but a hell of seemingly infinite information, understandable – or perhaps bearable – only with fantastical terms and possibilities. By now, the kind of techniques McCarthy uses in making the novel essentially critical of determinate meaning and of absolute, external, divine value should be largely familiar, and *Suttree* is no different in using these techniques to help shape a tale commensurate with our true prophet. The deconstructionist gesture of man and the universe he resides as inseparable parts – as seen in *Blood Meridian*'s “optical democracy,” in *The Road*'s depthless dark, and elsewhere – is echoed with both Harrogate and Suttree, in passages Young connects (112): Harrogate finds himself trapped underground, and “dark closed over him so absolute that he became without boundary to himself, as large as all the universe and small as anything that was” (274-5), and during Suttree's journey through Gatlinburg woods, “[h]e scarce could tell where his being ended or the world began nor did he care” (286). Throughout the novel, Suttree is capable of understanding the human condition in an uncaring universe; he thinks of human lives – indeed, human life in general – in much the same terms as White: “Blind moil in the earth's nap cast up in an eyeblink between becoming and done” (129). He even articulates these thoughts in a fashion similar to *The Road*'s man, cursing a God he can no longer truly believe exists¹⁷ – but as Young points out, Suttree often does so in

¹⁷ Though a case could be made that Suttree retains a kind of agnosticism in the novel – challenging the priest that a church is not “God's house” (255) could be read as strictly atheistic or as a spiritualist making an argument about organized religions – but a late

fantastical, imaginative terms that create a kind of fantasy, a mythology, a religion of his own: “What deity in the realms of dementia, what rabid god decocted out of the smoking lobes of hydrophobia could have devised a keeping place for souls so poor as is this flesh. This mawky worm-bent tabernacle” (130). And while the White-esque “understanding of the mathematical certainty of death” (295) contextualized with the “enormity of the universe” (353) compared to the “eyeblick” of human lives do gnaw at him, he *is* able to find himself “filled . . . with a strange sweet woe” (353) at this condition, or even “sudden love” (354) for the terrestrial hell he lives in. It is when Suttree's fantastical, spiritual bent – what Young notes as “the twinning of a discrete physical fact with an involuntary and often alogical or visionary blossoming of that fact” (107) – expresses itself that he finds himself unable to be content with his view of the human condition.

Nowhere is this clash of Suttree's atheistic, foundationally-scientific view of existence and reality – what Young calls “the massive, impersonal process of the world” (102) – against his fantastical, imaginative tendencies more apparent than in the prose's treatment of his dreams, particularly those that feature his dead twin, a “common visitor” (14) of those very dreams. It is said that he “used to wake in terror to find whole congregations of the uninvited attending his bed, protean figures slouched among the room's dark corners in all multiplicity of shapes, gibbons and gargoyles, arachnoids of outrageous size” (149), but as an adult, even in a sleep-, food-, and water-deprived state, he is able to view them with “a half grin of wry doubt” (278). In these moments the

passage that sees Suttree reacting to the death of the ragpicker, his theodicy-debating derelict friend, sees him make the claim that there is “no one to ask” (421) the questions the ragpicker wanted to pose to God. It is the last passage that sees him speak about a god, even in his imaginative/narrative descriptions. The closest he gets is describing “simmering sinners” and “their ragged biblical forms,” but those forms exist in “oblivion,” and they carry “Logos itself” (458).

fantastic, no matter how frightening, is bearable, while the more rational – which he can find “sudden love” or at least “sweet woe” in otherwise – becomes terrifying to him:

Amorphous clots of fear that took the forms of nightshades, hags or dwarfs or seatrolls green and steaming that skulked down out of the coils of his poisoned brain with black candles and slow chant. He smiled to see these familiars. Not dread but only homologues of dread. They bore a dead child in a glass bier. Sinister abscission, did I see with my seed eyes his thin blue shape lifeless in the world before me? Who comes in dreams, mansized at times and how so? Do shades nurture? (80)

The “homologues of dread” he can smile at, but the dead brother brings to mind a terrible thought of what his actual life experience may contain: was his first sight that of the corpse of his brother? He wonders if “shades nurture” to explain the nature of his dreamed brother, a fully-grown reverse twin, and the line of thought betrays just how far his fantastical bent can overshadow his contentedness with a more rationally, critically understood reality when they mix. He screams during another dream, but it is not the flayed man, chest burst open and skull peeled, biting Suttree's hand that is his true terror; it is the sight of his stillborn brother in the background which truly terrifies him, “for his surgeons move about the world even as you and I” (86). Suttree is perfectly capable of understanding, relating to, and even finding joy in the “cold, indifferent dark” of the cosmos, in his small human life, but when he loses himself in his “visionary blossoming,” the real world and the tragedies it contains – which, even for Suttree personally, are many – are too terrible to bear. He chastises Harrogate for being solipsistic enough to think “the world will end just because you're cold” (173), but after a dream mixing his dead brother

and mythological creatures, he thinks of *himself* as figure that does not fit in the universe in any way he can truly understand: “I followed him into the world, me. A breech birth. Hind end fore in common with whales and bats, life forms meant for other mediums than the earth and having no affinity for it” (14). After wandering through a ruin of an abandoned estate house, wondering with his characteristic florid imagination about all the lives and events that have passed through it before its utter dilapidation, Suttree sees an old sign that reads “keep out. Someone must have turned it around because it posted the other way. He went on anyway. He said that he was only passing through” (136). The remark could be a reference to his understanding of life as short and insignificant, but it comes when his exit immediately follows an earnest description of his vision of a dinner party in the house. His short tour through the building is more fantasy than actual description, and it appears, as Young suggests, that in passages such as these Suttree is imprisoned by his imagination, and it compromises his more rational access to the world and allows himself sustainable happiness. He is only “passing through” life, but it is obvious that for much of the book, Suttree wishes he were only “passing through” the world he knows he actually inhabits.

The death of friends, a lover, a son, and a brother are all clear points of trauma – among others – that Suttree must cope with, and this is perhaps why he has such trouble reconciling his views of the human condition with his imagination and his “false adumbration for the world of spirit” that gives him some “peace” (21). Young interprets the novel as Suttree's slow journey to truly “wish to live within and be satisfied with the facticity of the world” (Young 121):

The final pages of the novel . . . conclude things on a decidedly affirmative

note. [Suttree] divests himself 'of the little cloaked godlet and his other amulets in a place where they would not be found in his lifetime' and takes up in their stead 'for talisman the simple human heart within him.' In allegorical terms the novel achieves perfect resolution. The '*hunter with his hounds*' – the familiar death-figure that Suttree frequently imagines on his trail – emerges benignly from the woods as an 'enormous lank hound,' sniffing the spot where Suttree has been standing. (120)

The “resolution,” he says, “remains problematical” because Suttree lacks “real spiritual progress” (119), and the novel's final passages instead see him on a “psychic journey” via his “delirious bout with typhoid fever” (120). It ends, as Young points out, with Suttree feeling a connection with “the first germ of life adrift on the earth's cooling seas, formless macule of plasm trapped in a vapor drop and all creation yet to come” (430), thus reaffirming his more scientifically-based worldview, and, Young claims, showing that his “spiritual hunger, apparent in the novel's rich but adumbrated Christology, can be satisfied by the things of this world” (120). Although Young is right in saying that Suttree gains a confidence in that worldview, I disagree that the novel's resolution is constituted by a rejection of the “literariness of his perceptions . . . the artistic sensibility” (121), of his imagination and tendency to expand his reality with it. This is particularly evident when the “perfect” allegorical resolution of images that Young so deftly tracks above is part of a novel which celebrates Suttree's worldview. That Suttree does away with his former keepsakes is not a rejection of his Nietzschean knack for creating narratives, for making life an “aesthetic phenomenon,” particularly when he is simply replacing it with the “talisman” that is “the simple human heart within him” (468). This should not be read

as strict wordplay, but as a shift in the narrative he has chosen. Suttree leaves behind the tokens of his tragic past, bound to a life he felt was “an artifact of prior races” (129) as a “[r]eprobate scion of doomed Saxon clans” (135), unable to escape the trauma and connections of his family, unable to shed the notion that his (and any) life is too insignificant to do anything worthwhile (like White from *Sunset Limited*). Instead, Suttree chooses his own heart as talisman; he *chooses* to think of his central human organ as something with the same authority and meaning he once felt *compelled* to find in previous artifacts. Indeed, even one of the moments of that spawned this great confidence, his mental connection to the primordial soup comes at the end of what Young calls “the throes of his typhoid delirium” (120), and a meeting with his aunt Alice which also shows a Nietzschean admiration for insanity. Earlier in the novel, during Suttree's delirium in Gatlinburg woods, he is said to see and understand the very scientific “perishability of his flesh” with a “madman's clarity” (287), and when he visits the “madhouse” to see Alice, he notes that “the certified . . . [are] invested with a strange authority, like folks who'd had to do with death some way and had come back, something about them survivors in a realm that all must reckon with soon or late” (431). This quality of the insane, the “authority” of those that are utterly lost in their own narratives and imaginations is brought into stark contrast, however, when the nurse at the desk is said to be reading “the morning paper where the news was madder yet” (431). The world itself, the very “facticity” of the world that Young believes Suttree is meant to find solace in, is madder than even the certifiable. There is no doubt that Young is correct in suggesting Suttree must be confident in his view of an uncaring universe of indeterminate meaning, but he must not do so by sacrificing his artistic sensibility. He must, in fact, deconstruct

the very boundary between them, and be comfortable with both.

Young's misstep in his interpretation accounts for the struggle he has in interpreting a pivotal passage in which Suttree speaks to himself:

[T]he oil lamp lit and his supper eaten he sat in the chair listening to the river . . . an uneasy peace came over him, a strange kind of contentment . . . Tilting back in his chair he framed questions for the quaking ovoid of lamplight on the ceiling to pose to him:

Supposing there be any soul to listen and you died tonight?

They'd listen to my death.

No final word?

Last words are only words.

You can tell me, paradigm of your own sinister genesis construed by a flame in a glass bell.

I'd say I was not unhappy. . . It is not alone in the dark of death that all souls are one soul.

Of what would you repent?

Nothing.

Nothing?

One thing. I spoke with bitterness about my life and I said that I would take my own part against the slander of oblivion and against the monstrous facelessness of it and that I would stand a stone in the very void where all would read my name. Of that vanity I recant all.

Suttree's cameo visage in the black glass watched him across his lamplit

shoulder. He leaned and blew away the flame, his double, the image
overhead. (413-4)

Suttree here finally overcomes his double, the haunting memory of his brother, because he chooses to free himself of it in reconciling his view of the cosmos and reality with his often illusory, imaginative connection to those very things. Suttree chooses to no longer be bitter about his life, both as inheritor to family sins and tragedies, and as an insignificant life for an insignificant species on an insignificant planet in a faceless oblivion. He may or may not stand against the slander of that oblivion, which he here poses as a kind of deity itself, but what is most important is the “vanity” he recants. Young reads this vanity as his “artistic sensibility,” whereas I read it as exactly the same kind of philosophical position that Chigurh uses the concept of ‘vanity’ to articulate: “I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do” (*No Country* 174-5). Chigurh's point, as discussed in the first chapter, is not to question the creative power of the will to shape one's reality— which is great; the man who carries a coin that “travels” to decide who lives and dies is not questioning artistic sensibility. Instead, the vanity Chigurh and Suttree here speak of is the vanity that the universe will make note of or reward those who understand our fragile position in the vast faceless void, the very illusory nature of our individual realities. In finally recanting this vanity, Suttree is able to embrace his artistic sensibility for what it is: a way to see beauty and happiness and goodness and friendship in the world by embracing illusions of importance and significance. So Suttree chooses a narrative to start anew, away from Knoxville, with a talisman that suits his philosophy that “all souls are one” (414), “[a] man is all men”

(422) in the same way that humanity *is* the universe, just as the prose of McCarthy's novel often makes that very deconstruction.

William Prather, in comparing Suttree's empowerment of “consciousness, freedom, and defiance” (Prather 113) with Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* and absurdism, says that Suttree's existentialism suggests “a structure of reality that is ever-flowing . . . sometimes chaotic, sometimes not, but always subject to the random, always menaced by the unforeseeable. Implicit within that existence is his own . . . and his view of it is evidently influenced by an inescapable perception of human finitude, the result of an honest assessment of his own life experience” (112). Similarly, James Giles notes that *Suttree* points out “there is no final, universal answer to, no clear explanation for, the pain and alienation suffered . . . by all human beings. There is only the possibility of existential choice, of confronting the sheer absurdity of death's final decay and alienation should one be strong enough to do so” (92). These Sartrean readings correctly identify the foundation of Suttree's – and apparently the fiction of McCarthy's – philosophy that the life is short, final, and the universe it takes place in is an uncaring void that we can never truly comprehend, our minds being, as Holden puts it, just a fact among others. But *Suttree*'s optimistic ending, which completes several ongoing metaphors throughout the tale, seems to say more than just the necessity of confronting absurdity. The final passage ends the ongoing huntsman metaphor: “Somewhere in the gray wood by the river is the huntsman and in the brooming corn and in the castellated press of cities. His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them” (471). Prather's suggestion that “the huntsman and his hound signify the allurements of escape and the consolations

of death” (113) appears accurate enough, with the addition that “escape” includes illusions that are not self-aware. Suttree, as said, likely will not defend any worldview that does not recognize our place in the oblivion that is the universe, but neither will he brook the vanity of thinking any individual connection to reality is absolute or bereft of illusion. He thinks there is merit to be had in living with one's illusions and doing what we choose is right, as *The Road's* man does, but he is certain we must all know the tenuous hold that gives us to our fragile existence, and that we must maintain the knowledge, aided by science, of the very nature of these illusions as such. To recall a line from the novel before Suttree reaches this enlightened state, a false adumbration of the world of spirit is in fact *better* than a true one, for it knows itself, and can operate and grow organically, and one can fly from the despairs of life, the allure of death, and the delusions of absolute value and meaning.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter 3, Nietzsche notes art as a mode of making existence an aesthetic phenomenon; moral systems are essentially attempting to do the same, by making patterns, narratives, of human action and placing values upon them. This, in a way, exhibits much of how McCarthy's fiction at once vindicates a secular philosophy while fearing it. McCarthy clearly subverts traditional religious epistemologies, but it might seem as though the alternative he presents – a cold, uncaring universe where human existence is bereft of “real” divinity but overloaded with suffering and misery – can easily be read as far less appealing. But McCarthy, as seen, so thoroughly subverts external-value religious epistemology that we must carefully take stock of why he is so intent on performing his secular philosophy. *Blood Meridian* and *No Country For Old Men* have received a larger share of my attention because I believe they both contain two prominent, plot-spanning examples of the tropes I identify in McCarthy's process: the secular universe made god, and the false prophet of the subverted epistemology. I have used all three true prophets of secular philosophy that are protagonists in McCarthy's work, and attempted to study them and their respective texts concisely, as their trope is best understood within the context of the other tropes, given so prominent a place in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country For Old Men*. As noted in the introduction, McCarthy feels his individual works “flatten” the material, and each work I have investigated (though using similar figures) may be summarized with its self-contained object of study in mind.

Blood Meridian, as McCarthy says himself, is about human evil; the novel

explains why human cruelty and violence are part of who we are, an organic species pushed forward by a kind Nietzschean will to power, which is expressed most simply in that cruelty and violence. The grand narrative of violence in human history is unshakeable not because it is an actual narrative we are objectively living, but because it is an observable pattern of a primitive species, one that is – as the novel's prose goes far to show – no different from the very harsh natural setting it takes place in. Holden, the godly representation of a universe that pays no special attention to the human animal, is McCarthy's anxiety over the fact that violence is the most significant pattern of human conduct. *Blood Meridian* powerfully subverts religious epistemologies by sacrificing the Kid, with Holden representing the inescapable “honesty” of McCarthy's philosophy, the meta-level perspective Schacht recognizes in Nietzsche. The novel, then, is a kind of requiem, a sadder, more frightening performance of Zarathustra's claim that “God is dead.” The only optimism the novel could possibly be said to supply is its very nature as artistic expression; Holden *and* McCarthy are calling for self-aware beliefs that are inherently connected to observable physical realities. The novel itself, for all its carnage, is playful, and ends with Holden dancing and singing. The moment is terrifying, but is Nietzschean in its celebration of the fearful position of the human condition. The novel's very totality as an artistic representation of Holden's views could perhaps line up perfectly with the personal outlook McCarthy jokingly explained in an interview: “I'm a pessimist, but there's no reason to be miserable about it” (NPR).

No Country For Old Men is perhaps an even more direct indictment of the unsustainability of traditional religious belief via Sheriff Bell, but more importantly it is McCarthy's investigation of the nature and effect of the transience, the flux of human

value itself. We read our cultural positions differently, but they all contain suffering, and they all see other beliefs and cultural patterns made defunct. Chigurh's repudiation of vanity, his re-assertion of the Nietzschean meta-level perspective is the only thing that passes through the flux of human ideation unscathed.

The Sunset Limited explores the “logical” nature of suicide. As noted in the third chapter, McCarthy is not espousing suicide by making White unchanged in his views and Black troubled; McCarthy, by the very construction of the White/Black text and the way matters are discussed, subtly critiques White's position. White has the meta-level perspective by which to make his interpretation of existence (as minimizing suffering by any means), but he makes the mistake of believing his *interpretation* has the same degree of meta-perspective. White believes his interpretation is universal just as Black does, and thus his obsession with nothing and suicide can be critiqued with his own arguments. McCarthy is sympathetic of both men's views, and thinking back on his reference to the beliefs of the scientists at the Santa Fe Institute, would probably consider Black a “better person” than White – he is objectively more concerned with his fellow sufferers of life – though he is not the smarter man. White is intelligent and his beliefs largely sound, but the outcome is only misery, rather than a perspective which makes life bearable.

The Road, as McCarthy says himself, is about human goodness, and in a way can act as direct response to White's beliefs. The man and his son exist in circumstances far more dire and difficult to bear than White, and yet as the man cannot bear to kill his son, he cannot bear to abandon him, and he cannot bear to have his son fall into equal despair as to desire death – all for no other reason than familial love, perhaps traceable to the very biological drives of propagation – he is determined to survive and make life

something worth living. He sees the human condition as meaningless outside of the human perspective, but nevertheless he presses on. It is telling, then, that in order to share this drive with his son, the man chooses to make a religion of his own. The outcome – and ending of the story – is relatively *positive* for a McCarthy tale. It shows that McCarthy is not as vehemently anti-religious as Nietzsche, and is more interested in finding parallel with religion and the qualities of human life he appears to find so worthwhile; he is, however, saying that only the self-awareness, the meta-level perspective of the fundamentally irreligious and scientific position is one that is truly sustainable. Indeed, the man fashions a religion from the perspective of an atheist, and uses an image that echoes the very organic nature of human cooperation and development, and the son shows he does have a degree of awareness of the very constructed nature of the mythology of his father. The son, however, accepts it as worthwhile *in its construction*, and his “faith” in human cooperation (which his father preaches but is unable to fully practice) is vindicated.

Suttree is perhaps the longest and most sustained exploration of McCarthy's own philosophy. As the book is largely seen as semi-autobiographical, it is perhaps no surprise that it represents the closest examination of making life an artistic phenomenon. Suttree's journey ends with him fully accepting the meta-level perspective, fully accepting that the world is not wholly knowable, and that any spirituality *is* anthropocentric. He understands that one should be aware of these facts for the full freedom to “Fly them,” to outpace the chasing spectres of inevitable death and wilful ignorance. It, like *The Road*, finds optimism not in wholly rejecting *all* that constitutes religious belief, but instead finds it rejecting its basis of epistemology, and extracting the valuable nature of its

“narratives,” which can make people “better.” Suttree and *The Road's* man become comfortable with the limited nature of human comprehension, and realize that a self-aware creative energy can create a worthwhile condition. As Prather puts it, with his new, comfortable perspective, Suttree can embrace “shared human nature, human worth, and potential for solidarity” (113).

The optimism of *The Road* and *Suttree* may only be dimly echoed in McCarthy's other work, but the validation of his secular philosophy and subversion of religious thought ring clearly throughout. The emptiness of our illusory, transient mental categories, the anthropocentric nature of all values should not only be a source of woe. Our values, our human narratives of thought and morality need not be less beautiful or valuable because they aren't absolute, and are inherently tied to our limited biological existences. There is beauty and human solidarity to be found in that emptiness that some fill with God; the goodness we find and create can be as attractive as the depravity is abhorrent. The cruelty and evil of incredible scale and intensity that pervades McCarthy's literature are matched by moments of comparatively miniscule kindness and sentimentality, like the man giving his son a can of Coca-Cola in *The Road*. These moments are not dwarfed by the context of setting, event, or philosophy, they are made ever more significant. When Billy Parham of *The Crossing* reaches the unmarked grave of his brother, McCarthy could very well be writing about the human condition, an existence comprehensible only as the limited organic perception of animals with no cosmic significance, no divine attention: “The desolation of that place was a thing exquisite” (389).

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