

**UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID**  
**FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA**



**TESIS DOCTORAL**

**Men much for themselves: exploring masculinity through  
fatherhood, violence and sexuality in the works of  
Cormac McCarthy**

**Hombres hechos a sí mismos: explorando la masculinidad  
desde la paternidad, la violencia y la sexualidad en la obra  
de Cormac McCarthy**

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

**Juan José Arroyo Paniagua**

DIRIGIDA POR

**Carmen María Méndez García**

Madrid

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**DOCTORADO EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS**



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**MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR CON MENCIÓN  
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**Madrid, 2025**





*Para mi querido Aitor, para que te ayude a convertirte en un buen hombre.*



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## Abstract

This dissertation, titled “Men Much for Themselves: Exploring Masculinity through Fatherhood, Violence, and Sexuality in the Works of Cormac McCarthy,” examines the portrayals and representations of masculinity in adult male characters across various works by Cormac McCarthy. McCarthy is recognized as an author deeply engaged with the theme of masculinity throughout his literary career. The dissertation has three primary aims. First, it investigates which aspects of masculinity McCarthy considers to be fundamental to his male characters. To address this question, I have identified three key elements that McCarthy consistently incorporates in his portrayal of masculinity—elements that scholars also regard as central to the construction of masculinity in adult men, particularly in the American context. These aspects are fatherhood, violence, and sexuality. Second, the dissertation analyzes how McCarthy constructs the masculinity of his characters through these three dimensions. Finally, it explores whether McCarthy critiques or affirms the masculinity of his characters, and in what ways he does so.

To undertake this exploration, the dissertation is organized into three main chapters, each addressing one of the fundamental aspects in the construction of masculinity identified in McCarthy’s male characters. The first chapter, titled “An Exploration of Fatherhood in McCarthy,” focuses on father characters such as Culla Holme and the bearded one from *Outer Dark*, and the man from *The Road*. My central argument is that McCarthy places these father characters in similar worlds and circumstances, yet offers distinct outcomes regarding their masculinity. In *Outer Dark*, McCarthy portrays fathers who embody a more detached, negative, and less nurturing form of fatherhood, reflecting traditional conceptions of masculinity aligned with hegemonic norms. In contrast, *The Road* presents the man as the quintessential sacrificial father, deeply devoted to his son and resonating with twenty-first-century ideals such as “the new father” and “caring masculinities.” To further illustrate this progression from negative to

more positive portrayals of fatherhood in McCarthy's body of work, I also examine father characters in novels published between the two main ones. These novels are *All the Pretty Horses*, *Blood Meridian*, *Child of God*, and *No Country for Old Men*.

The second chapter, titled "An Analysis of Masculinity and Violence," explores how McCarthy presents violence as another fundamental element in the construction of masculinity. The analysis focuses on two key characters: judge Holden from *Blood Meridian* and Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men*. The chapter begins by contextualizing the novels' setting in the American West, highlighting the region's historical association with endemic violence, and the literary genre known as the Western. It also situates violence within the broader framework of masculinity and McCarthy's oeuvre. The violent masculinities of Holden and Chigurh are then analyzed in relation to the natural world around them, as well as in contrast with other male characters. The chapter concludes by exploring how McCarthy critiques and ultimately condemns their violence, portraying both as vulnerable and revealing the inherent flaws in their violent masculinities.

The third and final chapter, titled "Male-Female Relationships, Masculinity, and Sexuality," examines how interactions between male and female characters play a crucial role in shaping masculinity. The chapter is divided into three main sections. First, it explores three instances of harmonious relationships: Culla and Rinthy Holme from *Outer Dark*, and Llewelyn Moss, Carla Jean, and the female hitchhiker from *No Country for Old Men*. Second, it analyzes the tension between masculinity and femininity in the relationships of John Grady Cole's parents in *All the Pretty Horses*, Anton Chigurh and Carla Jean in *No Country for Old Men*, and Renier and Malkina in *The Counselor*. Finally, the chapter investigates paraphilic disorders exhibited by the characters of Lester Ballard in *Child of God* and judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*. These paraphilic disorders include instances of necrophilia and pedophilic disorder, among others.

To explore the three fundamental aspects McCarthy employs in constructing the masculinity of his male characters, I draw on two types of secondary sources. On the one hand, I incorporate various analyses by McCarthy scholars, focusing on both his body of work and on gender studies. On the other hand, I engage with research on masculinity conducted by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists. The inclusion of these sources allows for a more comprehensive examination of the masculinities presented in McCarthy's works. My overall conclusion is that McCarthy was an author deeply engaged with the portrayal of diverse forms of masculinity. Although his depictions are occasionally positive, they primarily serve to illustrate the destructive and dangerous potential of masculinity—both to other male and female characters, the world, and the individuals themselves.



## Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral, titulada “Hombres hechos a sí mismos: Explorando la masculinidad desde la paternidad, la violencia y la sexualidad en la obra de Cormac McCarthy”, examina las representaciones de la masculinidad en personajes adultos masculinos en varias obras de Cormac McCarthy. McCarthy es reconocido como un autor profundamente interesado en el tema de la masculinidad a lo largo de su carrera literaria. Esta tesis doctoral tiene tres objetivos principales. El primero, investigar qué aspectos de la masculinidad son considerados por McCarthy como fundamentales en sus personajes masculinos. Para responder esta pregunta, he identificado tres elementos clave que McCarthy incorpora de forma consistente en su representación de la masculinidad—elementos que otros académicos también reconocen como centrales para la construcción de la masculinidad en hombres adultos, especialmente en el contexto norteamericano—. Estos son la paternidad, la violencia y la sexualidad. El segundo objetivo es analizar cómo McCarthy construye la masculinidad de sus personajes a través de estas tres dimensiones. Finalmente, la tesis explora si McCarthy critica o reafirma la masculinidad de sus personajes y de qué maneras lo hace.

Para llevar todo esto a cabo, la tesis está organizada en tres capítulos, cada uno se centra en un aspecto fundamental de la construcción de la masculinidad en los personajes masculinos de McCarthy. El primer capítulo, titulado “Una exploración de la paternidad en McCarthy”, se centra en los personajes Culla Holme y el barbudo de *La oscuridad exterior*, y en el hombre de *La carretera*. Mi argumentación central es que McCarthy sitúa estos padres en mundos y circunstancias similares, si bien ofreciendo diferentes resultados en lo que respecta a la masculinidad de los personajes. En *La oscuridad exterior*, McCarthy muestra padres que encarnan una paternidad más despegada, negativa y menos afectiva, reflejando así concepciones tradicionales de la masculinidad que se alinean con normas hegemónicas. Por el contrario, *La carretera* presenta al hombre como el ejemplo por excelencia del padre

sacrificado, el cual es devoto de su hijo y refleja ideales del siglo veintiuno como el “nuevo padre” y *caring masculinity*. Para ilustrar esta progresión en la representación de la paternidad de más negativo a más positivo en la obra de McCarthy, también exploro otros padres en novelas publicadas entre las dos objeto de estudio del capítulo. Estas novelas son *Hijo de Dios*, *Meridiano de sangre*, *No es país para viejos* y *Todos los hermosos caballos*.

El segundo capítulo, titulado “Un análisis de la masculinidad y la violencia”, explora cómo McCarthy presenta la violencia como un elemento fundamental en la construcción de la masculinidad. Este análisis se centra en dos personajes clave: el juez Holden de *Meridiano de sangre* y Anton Chigurh de *No es país para viejos*. El capítulo comienza contextualizando las novelas dentro del oeste americano, resaltando la asociación histórica de la región con una violencia endémica, y del género literario conocido como el Western. El capítulo también sitúa la violencia dentro de un marco teórico más amplio en relación con la masculinidad y la obra de McCarthy. Las masculinidades violentas de Holden y Chigurh son después analizadas en relación con el mundo natural que les rodea, así como en contraste con otros personajes masculinos. El capítulo concluye con la exploración de cómo McCarthy critica y, en última instancia, condena la violencia de estos dos personajes, representándolos como vulnerables y revelando los fallos inherentes en sus masculinidades violentas.

El tercer y último capítulo, titulado “Relaciones hombre-mujer, masculinidad y sexualidad”, examina cómo las interacciones entre personajes masculinos y femeninos suponen un rasgo fundamental en el modelado de la masculinidad. El capítulo está dividido en tres secciones principales. Primero, el capítulo explora tres ejemplos de relaciones armoniosas: Culla y Rinthy Holme en *La oscuridad exterior* y Llewelyn Moss, Carla Jean y la joven autostopista en *No es país para viejos*. Segundo, se realiza un análisis de las tensiones entre las relaciones de masculinidad y feminidad en los padres de John Grady Cole en *Todos los hermosos caballos*, Anton Chigurh y Carla Jean en *No es país para viejos* y Reiner y Malkina

en *El consejero*. Finalmente, el capítulo investiga desórdenes parafílicos en los personajes de Lester Ballard en *Hijo de Dios* y el juez Holden en *Meridiano de sangre*. Estos desórdenes parafílicos incluyen necrofilia y desorden pedófilo, entre otros.

Para explorar estos tres aspectos fundamentales que McCarthy utiliza en la construcción de la masculinidad de sus personajes varones recurro a dos tipos de fuentes secundarias. Por un lado, incorporo los análisis de varios estudiosos de la obra de McCarthy, centrados en su obra, así como en estudios de género. Por otro lado, recurro a análisis de la masculinidad realizado por antropólogos, historiadores y sociólogos. La inclusión de estas fuentes permite una examinación más exhaustiva de la masculinidad presente en la obra literaria de McCarthy. Mi análisis concluye que McCarthy era un autor que centraba su obra en la representación de diversas formas de masculinidad. Aunque sus representaciones son ocasionalmente positivas, estas sirven primariamente de ilustración de masculinidades potencialmente violentas y destructivas tanto para otros personajes masculinos y femeninos, como para el mundo que habitan y los propios individuos en sí.



# Introduction

## 1. Discovering Cormac McCarthy

The first time I remember encountering the work of Cormac McCarthy (1933–2023) was through the Spanish translation of *The Road* (2006). I vividly recall being captivated by the harrowing ordeal of that father and son as they traverse a desolate wasteland in search for a warmer place. While the narrative itself was appealing to me, I remember finding McCarthy's distinctive style less convincing. At the time, I was uncertain whether this impression stemmed from the author's original prose or from the translation, as my English was very limited, and I was definitely not proficient enough to take on virtually any text written in English. Six years later, I found myself having moved to Boston, Massachusetts, on what might be described as a quest for self-discovery. Little did I know at the moment I made the decision to move there that both Boston and the experience would change my life forever. I enrolled in the Boston School of Modern Languages—an English school that, regrettably, no longer exists—where I had the opportunity to significantly improve my English. During the almost two years I spent there, I was fortunate to learn from exceptional teachers whose patience and dedication greatly aided my linguistic development.

One of these teachers, who later became a dear friend, was Adam Shenker—a man with a deep passion for literature. Adam not only taught me English but also offered a somewhat introductory course on the art of reading. He would frequently bring short stories to class for us to read and discuss. One day, he brought in the first twenty-five pages of *The Road*. Although I cannot pinpoint the exact reason, reading those pages in English, with Adam's guidance, felt like a breath of fresh air and sparked my newfound interest in McCarthy's work. I remember going to a small bookstore in Roslindale, where I asked the clerk for recommendations on other McCarthy novels suitable for someone learning English. He convinced me to purchase *All the*

*Pretty Horses* (1992), the first installment or volume in the Border Trilogy. As my time in Boston drew to a close, Adam asked me to stay for a few minutes after class on the final day before my graduation. He had a gift for me, a copy of *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West* (1985). He explained that he considered it to be one of the greatest American<sup>1</sup> novels ever written. It was the first time a teacher had ever given me a present, and such a special one that was. This moment marked the beginning of my deep passion for McCarthy's work. While I read and greatly appreciated *Blood Meridian*, I must admit that I struggled to fully understand it, as McCarthy's use of the language is definitely challenging for a non-native English speaker. Nonetheless, one character stood out to me as particularly intriguing: Judge Holden, also known as "the judge," whose complexity captivated me despite my limited language skills.

As previously mentioned, my time in Boston was transformative, and the two years I spent there convinced me to pursue a university degree. In 2014, I enrolled in the English Studies program at Complutense University of Madrid, where I studied until my graduation in 2018. During these four enriching years, I deepened my understanding of the English language and of both British and American literature. Throughout this period, McCarthy remained a constant presence in my academic life. In my senior year, I decided to focus my final paper on his work, marking the beginning of my collaboration with another inspiring mentor, Dr. Carmen Méndez. Dr. Méndez agreed to supervise my paper, which examined representations

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, the terms "American" and "America" are used to refer specifically to both the nationality and the country of the United States of America. I recognize the controversy surrounding these terms, as "America" is technically the name of the continent where the U.S. is located, and thus does not denote a single country. However, both "America" and "American" are commonly employed in films, novels, television series, and political speeches to exclusively refer to the United States. Additionally, as this dissertation will show, scholars often use "American" to describe works produced by U.S. nationals, such as Cormac McCarthy. In relation to the controversy surrounding the term, see Karina Martinez-Carter's article "What Does 'American' Actually Mean?" (2013). Martinez-Carter highlights that in many other countries across the continent, especially "in Latin America and for Latin Americans, the term 'America' means Latin America, and 'American,' Latin American."

of evil in *Blood Meridian* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick, or The Whale* (1851). Her insights were invaluable to the development of my research.

The following academic year, while pursuing a master's degree in North American Studies, I encountered McCarthy's work once again. McCarthy was included in the syllabus for one of the courses in the master's program, "Major Authors and Key Texts of American Literature." I was invited to give a presentation on McCarthy, which I eagerly accepted, and I chose to focus my session on *The Road*. This experience, my first time lecturing, was both exhilarating and affirming. My academic engagement with McCarthy continued as I later wrote my master's thesis, shifting the focus from the theme of evil to representations of masculinity in some of his novels.

Probably due to both the opportunity Dr. Méndez provided and my work on the master's thesis, I was subsequently invited by another professor I had met at my first academic conference to lecture at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. Dr. Katherine Roberts gave me the opportunity to present McCarthy's work in her course on U.S. borders, where I specifically addressed themes from my master's thesis, with an emphasis on the novel *No Country for Old Men* (2005). The undergraduate students in Dr. Roberts's class expressed significant interest in my lecture and later reached out to inquire about my future academic plans. I informed them that I had recently enrolled in a Ph.D. program, with my dissertation topic firmly rooted in the study of Cormac McCarthy's works. Dr. Méndez, once again, graciously agreed to serve as my mentor for this next phase of my academic journey. My fascination with McCarthy's works and his representations of masculinity persists and remains central to my doctoral research.

Cormac McCarthy is a prominent American author, widely recognized among literary scholars and Americanists. His writing career began during his university years, from 1957 to 1960, with the publication of two short stories: "Wake for Susan" (1959) and "A Drowning

Incident” (1960). During this period, he also received the Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing. Later, McCarthy was awarded the Rockefeller Foundation Grant (1966–1968), which enabled him to travel through several European countries, including England, France, Italy, and Spain. He even spent a year residing on the Spanish island of Ibiza,<sup>2</sup> where he began learning Spanish—a language he would later incorporate into some of his novels.

McCarthy’s early career as a writer did not yield commercial success. With his first four novels—*The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979)—, he gained a reputation of being “considered a regional writer” primarily associated with the American South (Brummer 125). As James Brummer elucidates, “McCarthy’s first attempts at short fiction and his first four novels were all set in and around the author’s ‘own little postage stamp of native soil,’” specifically, “the Appalachian region of Eastern Tennessee” (125). Consequently, McCarthy was initially labeled a “Southern writer,” a designation which “connotes a genre as much as it does a region of origination” (Yarbrough 13). These early novels are often referred to as his Appalachian or Tennessee novels.

Although it is widely believed that McCarthy did not gain significant popularity until the 1990s and largely avoided media interviews, a 2022 article published in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* reveals that between 1968 and 1980, McCarthy granted several interviews to local newspapers in the geographical region above described by Brummer. Dianne Luce and Zachary Turpin note in the article that “[a]lthough the sales of his books have been what Random House calls ‘disappointing,’ critically they have done very well” (130). However, this critical success of the Appalachian novels did not translate to widespread popularity among general readers. One potential reason for the commercial underperformance of these novels may lie in their distinctive nature and themes. In one of the interviews compiled by Luce and

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<sup>2</sup> McCarthy revisits, this time from a literary perspective, the island of Ibiza in *The Passenger* (2022)—his penultimate novel. Toward the end of the novel, the protagonist, Robert Western, permanently relocates to the island. This choice may reflect McCarthy’s homage to Ibiza, possibly even weaving into the novel’s narrative some of the author’s own experiences and memories from his time there.

Turpin, McCarthy recounts an anecdote about *Child of God*: “About six months after the book came out, I had gone to New York to talk with my editor, Albert Erskine—who was also Faulkner’s editor). He was introducing me to some people there and they were all giving me these weird looks. One woman came up to me and said, ‘That’s the strangest book I’ve ever read’” (130). The “strangeness” the woman refers to may stem from the fact that McCarthy “writes about people—odd people and sordid human conditions” (125). McCarthy himself affirms that “[t]he odd ones are more interesting” (125). Another McCarthy scholar opines that these four Appalachian novels

reflect the intersectional concerns of race and class in the post-Civil Rights era.

To some degree, each of these novels also explores the encroachment of modernity on a tradition-bound culture, set apart from cosmopolitan concerns by such forces as family, geography, or poverty. Race and ethnicity are rarely in the foreground in these works, but neither are their conflicts imaginable without such markers of identity that are the legacy of American history. (Dudley, “Race and Cultural Difference” 208)

Despite the fact that none of McCarthy’s Appalachian novels achieved bestselling status, he had nonetheless “established himself among a handful of devoted readers as a southern writer with a remarkable gift for language, a writer of dark and violent novels” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 67)—characteristics that would continue to define his work throughout his career.

It may be this legacy of American history, as alluded to by John Dudley, that influenced McCarthy’s decision to shift the primary setting of his fifth novel—published six years after *Suttree*—to another region deeply embedded in American history: the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This regional area in McCarthy’s literary worlds has been explored at length by academics. Cooper elucidates that “[t]he border region specifically plays a significant role in each of McCarthy’s Westerns” (“The Southwest” 26). Moreover, Cooper illustrates this significance by alluding to Luce’s article “Doomed Enterprise at Caborca: The Henry Crabb Expedition of 1857 and McCarthy’s *Unquiet American Boys*,” published in Louise Jillett’s

Even though *Blood Meridian*<sup>4</sup> initially failed to achieve commercial success, it significantly bolstered McCarthy's reputation among critics and academics. Harold Bloom, the renowned scholar and literary critic, asserts in his edited volume *Cormac McCarthy* (2002) that McCarthy "is the worthy disciple both of Melville and of Faulkner. I venture that no other living American novelist, not even Pynchon, has given us a book as strong and memorable as *Blood Meridian*" (1). True to his earlier works, *Blood Meridian* "is a dark novel" (Yaşayan 95), one that Bloom even describes as "the authentic American apocalyptic novel" (*How to Read and Why* 340). In this novel, McCarthy intricately weaves together fictional and historical characters "within a story that describes U.S. imperial expansion as a 'heliotropic plague' tending westward through cycles of death and destruction extending into a future that includes but is not contained by contemporary American reality" (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 80). Perhaps because of the novel's capacity to extend to contemporary America, Bloom asserts that *Blood Meridian* is "more relevant even in 2000 than it was fifteen years ago" (*How to Read and Why* 340). Critics widely agree that McCarthy's first foray into the Western genre<sup>5</sup> is not only "his greatest achievement in that genre" (Cooper "The Southwest" 26), but also "the ultimate Western, not to be surpassed" (Bloom, *Cormac McCarthy* 1). The consensus surrounding *Blood Meridian* is overwhelmingly positive, with the novel being hailed as "a novel of incomparable beauty"

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edited volume *Cormac McCarthy's Borders and Landscapes* (2016). In relation to McCarthy's Westerns, in the article, Luce "argues that in fact they may properly be understood as 'border' literature more than merely Westerns, united as they are by similar themes rooted in that border region: 'the permeability of the Mexican-American border, international border transgressions, intercultural contacts, and American attitudes of exceptionalism, will to empire, and blindness to the sovereignty of other countries' (3–4). These themes that Luce identifies run through each of McCarthy's Southwestern 'border novels'" (Cooper, "The Southwest" 26).

<sup>4</sup> Bent Sørensen offers an intriguing interpretation of the novel's subtitle, *Or the Evening Redness in the West*. Sørensen explains that McCarthy makes use of "other paratextual strategies" in the subtitle, such as "over-determined, generic markers" (19). These strategies and markers not only anchor the novel geographically but also situate it "thematically with its invocation of the *Abendland* of Goethe (the Evening Redness) as the eventual goal of the katabasis (the California coast). The main title's use of the word 'meridian' underlines the notion of horizontal progress along a line drawn on a map, further accentuating the violence of this traversal by painting the meridian the colour of the sunset and of blood" (19).

<sup>5</sup> Cooper notes that *Blood Meridian* "emerged around the time that Westerns were shading toward grittier, more cynical looks at the 'golden era' of westward expansion; published in 1985, the novel arrived between the heyday of Sergio Leone's 'spaghetti Westerns' in the 1960s and 1970s, and more cinematically apocalyptic versions such as *Unforgiven* in 1992" ("The Southwest" 26).

(Frye, “*Blood Meridian* and the Poetics of Violence” 107), a “most notorious novel” (Hillier, “The Judge’s Molar” 76), and a “canonical imaginative achievement, both an American and a universal tragedy of blood” (Bloom, *How to Read and Why* 341). It has also been described as the “first and last book of American history” (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 116), a “masterpiece” and “one of the great novels of American Literature” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 24), and a work that “encompasses all of American literature and absorbs other major American works as a *small* part of its narrative frame [thus making] these works (even *Moby-Dick* [1851]) seem puny and quaint by comparison” (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 85). Despite this extensive praise, McCarthy did not achieve widespread fame among general readers until the 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

It appears McCarthy had found a new literary niche within the Western genre, as evidenced by his subsequent three novels, collectively known as the Border Trilogy—*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). These works further develop themes introduced in *Blood Meridian*. Lydia Cooper notes that through this trilogy, “McCarthy remained physically and aesthetically rooted in the American Southwest, specifically the contested border region of Texas and Mexico” (“The Southwest” 24). Echoing the views of other critics, Sara Spurgeon observes that

it is no coincidence that the action of *All the Pretty Horses* takes place exactly one hundred years after that of *Blood Meridian*. In many ways, *Pretty Horses* is the offspring of that book, an elegy for a romanticized way of life, a code of honor, a mythical world birthed and brutally murdered in *Blood Meridian*—the world of the cowboy. (“Pledged in Blood” 25)

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<sup>6</sup> In this decade, McCarthy also published two plays, *The Stonemason* (1994) and *The Gardener’s Son* (1996). For reasons later explained, these two will not be explored in this dissertation.

However, unlike *Blood Meridian*, the first two volumes of the Border Trilogy can be viewed as coming-of-age novels (Benson 49; Cooper Alarcón 147) that “conjure the narrative arc and force of the bildungsroman,” employing “chivalric, romantic tropes and themes, [offering a] more lyrical prose style, and to the themes of morality and violence present in *Blood Meridian* the trilogy adds a gorgeously rendered yearning for and tantalizing possibility of redemption” (Cooper “The Southwest” 27). Aligning with Cooper’s observations, Russell Hillier even claims that the trilogy represents “McCarthy’s extensive study in the nature of human goodness” (“Like some supplicant to the darkness over them all” 8). These differences between *Blood Meridian* and the Border Trilogy may have contributed to making these latter volumes more accessible to a wider audience.

It is undisputed that *All the Pretty Horses* “would go on to become a best seller (McCarthy’s first best seller, in fact), win the National Book Award, and bring McCarthy widespread attention for the first time” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 24). As a matter of fact, the novel had “seven printings in the first two months of its release” and received “overwhelmingly positive reviews [which] placed McCarthy in the position of one of the nation’s foremost novelists” (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 94). Upon the novel’s publication, McCarthy even agreed to an interview—the first in many years—with Richard Woodward for *The New York Times Magazine*. The success of *All the Pretty Horses* was such that it attracted Hollywood’s attention, leading to a film adaptation directed by Billy Bob Thornton in 2000. This signified the first film adaptation of a McCarthy novel, but it would not be the last. Following the publication of the Border Trilogy, McCarthy’s next two novels, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, were also adapted into films, directed by the Coen brothers in 2007—winner of four Academy Awards, including the Oscar for best picture—and by John Hillcoat in 2009, respectively.

*No Country for Old Men* was McCarthy's first novel published in the twenty-first century, appearing seven years after the release of *Cities of the Plain*, the final volume of the Border Trilogy. Critics have noted that the novel "continues McCarthy's exploration of the trappings and tropes of the Western, walking and talking in ways that place it neatly within the lineage of one of America's most recognizable genres" (Brummer 129). The narrative's primary events remain "rooted in the Texas-Mexico border region" (Cooper, "The Southwest" 27). While the novel contains "elements of the Western," it has also been classified as a "hard-boiled crime novel" (Cant 56) and "a grim, terse thriller" (Cooper, "The Southwest" 31). In contrast to McCarthy's previous works, *No Country for Old Men* "employs a less lyrical, stripped-down prose style" (27), which McCarthy employs to shove "to the forefront the ostensibly 'new' violence born in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the post-Vietnam War United States struggled with its role as a global economic empire, incompatible with the 'city on a hill' imagery of its founding" (31).

In contrast, McCarthy's *The Road*, published a year after *No Country for Old Men*, addresses violence from a post-apocalyptic perspective, depicting a world reduced to ashes in which survival is nearly impossible. The world of *The Road* is one "in which disasters are always happening, a world dominated by nihilism, catastrophe and the struggle for survival" (Grigore 57). In the novel, McCarthy presents "a sacrificial narrative" (Caradec 113) and "a distressing journey for survival in a world dominated by death" (Millán Alba 184; my trans.).<sup>7</sup> While *No Country for Old Men* is set in the same regional area as McCarthy's previous Westerns, in *The Road*, McCarthy "returns to the South. From what we can discern, this is post-apocalyptic Tennessee" (Rambo 100). The novel is characterized by "no intricate plot" (99) and a style that "is pared down, elemental" (Kunsa 58). Beyond these descriptors, *The Road*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "La carretera muestra, en cambio, un angustioso viaje de supervivencia en un mundo dominado por la muerte".

<sup>8</sup> In relation to the popularity of the novel, Adeline Johns-Putra elucidates that a British edition of *The Road* "carries one of the most oft-quoted endorsements of the novel, a statement attributed to the author Andrew O'Hagan. The precise utterance, presumably made by O'Hagan as a regular guest on BBC Radio 4's *Saturday*

has achieved the status of a “seminal novel” (Åström 114), becoming “McCarthy’s most popular (...) novel” (Hardwig 39), and earning him the Pulitzer Prize. Once a “somewhat reclusive novelist” (Brummer 46), McCarthy’s notoriety reached its peak when he was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on June 5, 2007.

The same year that *The Road* was published, McCarthy also released *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* (2006), a play “which takes place in a tenement apartment in ‘a black ghetto’ in contemporary New York City, despite the fact that the train route in the title famously runs from New Orleans to Los Angeles” (Dudley “Race and Cultural Difference” 210). Nicholas Monk contends that *The Sunset Limited* “deals efficiently with McCarthy’s recurrent themes of loss, ennui, attenuated spiritual redemption, existential angst, the crisis of masculinity, and modernity—themes that the play addresses, perhaps, in a less satisfying way than the novels” (114). It is worth mentioning that *The Sunset Limited* has also found its place on stage through theatrical performances, and was even adapted into a film directed by Tommy Lee Jones in 2011. Perhaps following this trend of film adaptations of his works, McCarthy’s next project was his first and only screenplay, *The Counselor* (2013), directed by Ridley Scott. The film received poor reviews, scoring only 34% on *Rotten Tomatoes*.<sup>9</sup> In this screenplay, McCarthy “returns to the southwestern setting of the majority of his work” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 24). This year also saw the film adaptation of *Child of God*, directed by James Franco, which similarly scored negative reviews, with a score of 42% on *Rotten Tomatoes*.

Finally, as if metaphorically closing the circle initiated with his Appalachian novels, McCarthy returned to his familiar setting in his last two novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella*

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Review program, is now lost since the program’s podcasts are archived only as far back as 2010 (‘Podcasts’). In a comparable statement, the British writer and activist George Monbiot praised the novel as ‘the most important environmental book ever written,’ in his regular column in the UK broadsheet the *Guardian* in October 2007, asserting that it ‘will change the way you see the world’” (519–20).

<sup>9</sup> *Rotten Tomatoes* provides metrics based on reviews from both professional critics and general moviegoers. Although the website claims to ensure the objectivity of its ratings, there are no safeguards in place to prevent potential manipulation of the metrics. Despite this, a film’s score on *Rotten Tomatoes* often influences public perception of its quality.

*Maris*, both published in the fall of 2022, just a month apart. Chris Vognar, a literary critic for *The Boston Globe*, describes these final novels as “characteristically bleak and daunting” (N8). It could be argued that all of McCarthy’s works in this century “are constructed overtly as experiments into the behavior of humans confronted by dire circumstances” (Gibbs 62). Vognar further asserts that *The Passenger* “is a stubborn novel that dares you to like it, written with a verse and mastery of language that make it hard not to” (N9). In contrast, *Stella Maris* “reads more like an expansion of ideas explored in *The Passenger* than a book in and of itself. But because this is McCarthy, whose dialogue can be as transcendent as his descriptions, it’s still a welcome postscript” (N9). Vognar’s reflections on McCarthy’s stylistic prowess and thematic concerns resonate with the assessments of numerous literary scholars.

As previously discussed, McCarthy’s literary career has been primarily centered on depicting two geographical regions within the United States, establishing him as “a southern novelist. A western novelist. An author of the grotesque, the perverse, the extreme” (Link 150). This dual geographical focus has become his canon. Critics have often labeled him the “[r]ightful heir to the Southern Gothic tradition,” noting that his “style owes much to Faulkner’s” (Woodward), whilst his work resonates with the influences of “a pantheon of American literature: the baroque language and sentence structure of Faulkner; the terse, laconic dialogue of Hemingway; even the paranoid poetry of DeLillo” (Vognar N9). Prior to his passing, McCarthy was frequently considered unparalleled—“There isn’t anyone remotely like him in contemporary American literature” (Woodward)—and celebrated as “one of the most powerful and talented writers of contemporary American literature—and perhaps the greatest living American writer” (Rudnicki 39). He was often seen as a “genius whose craft belonged in the rarified air above the scrum of mere commerce” (Brummer 99). These accolades were largely attributed to his distinctive style, characterized by “recondite vocabulary, punctuation, portentous rhetoric, use of dialect and concrete sense of the world” (Woodward). His prose,

described as “lambent and elevated” (Monk 111) and “aspir[ing] to the status of poetry” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 67), maintained a consistent style throughout his career. This style can be distilled into several key elements: “a poet’s ear for rhythm and repetition, landscape rendered in exquisite, palpable detail, and cadences and diction bordering at times on the archaic” (Brummer 73). We can just conclude that for many scholars, McCarthy’s work exhibited “a poetic force unsurpassed in all of American fiction” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 76).<sup>10</sup>

One might wonder what themes McCarthy explores in his works. The concise answer is that they “encompass all the various disciplines and interests of humanity” (Woodward), though, this is a broad and general characterization. McCarthy scholar Timothy Parrish clarifies that McCarthy’s body of work “confronts the essential questions that emerge from having been born human, questions of the utmost philosophical and theological importance” (“History and the Problem of Evil” 67). These essential questions are reminiscent of what Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) referred to as “the accursed questions” (*proklyatye voprosy*). For Dostoevsky, these are the ultimate questions of human existence as they probe the nature of man, the existence of God, the problems of evil, the inevitability of death, and the meaning of life. Throughout his career, McCarthy grappled with these profound existential concerns. Described as an author “going against the trends of much of twentieth-century fiction” (Evenson, “Embodying Violence” 140), McCarthy “like Dostoevsky, allows the ideas and philosophies of different modes of inhabiting the world to play themselves out dramatically in

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<sup>10</sup> For readers interested in McCarthy’s narrative style, Alan Noble’s explanation offers valuable insights. Although Noble’s analysis specifically addresses *The Crossing*, much of his commentary could be broadly applicable to McCarthy’s oeuvre. Noble explains: “There are two primary registers to the narrator’s voice which distinguish it. The lower register is used to simply describe the action. Such descriptions tend to be minimalist: sparse, sterile, and empirical, focusing on the details of the action without passing any judgment on them. The use of the conjunction *and* to string together these descriptions also characterizes this register. It allows the narrator a distance from his story and characters by objectification, since each item in the description and each action is relayed with seemingly disinterested precision. The vatic style which marks McCarthy’s work appears in the narrator’s higher register. In this style, the narrator often uses similes that allude to fantastic or alien images to describe mundane scenes” (“Narrative, Being, and the Dialogic Novel” 241).

the form of fully drawn characters with coherent ideologies” (136). It may be due to these different modes of world habitation that, via his diverse characters, McCarthy “is simply trying to define the human by the marginal rather than the central” (Winchell 300). McCarthy is interested in the “stark contrast of an ordered world and the chaos that surrounds” (Mitchell 256) and depicts “even the most hellish landscapes” (Evenson, “Embodying Violence” 136). In the literary worlds he creates, McCarthy is intrigued “by the down and out and the suffering of those existing along the edges of society, intrigued too by those that flutter on the edge of social structures and sometimes stumble off” (136). Additionally, as will be further explored in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, McCarthy frequently incorporates the Bible into his works. Noble observes that “[w]ords, phrases, passages, images, themes, and literary techniques from the Bible all weave their way into the polyphonic discourse of McCarthy’s works, through the mouths of characters, the settings, or the narrators” (“The Bible” 99). These insights are accurate and address two central themes that McCarthy often explores: our capacity (or lack thereof) to understand the world, including its spiritual or transcendent aspects, and how our interpretation of the world influences who we are (99). Furthermore, I contend that McCarthy is primarily interested in exploring masculinity.

McCarthy’s sustained focus on men is well-documented. Brummer notes that “McCarthy has spent nearly all of his time at the institute [The Santa Fe Institute] writing about men. Men lost and wandering in the vast landscapes of America’s West. Men whose default means of communication is more often violent than verbal. Men who fear, fantasize about, and efface women. Men without a country. Men in search of themselves” (9). Furthermore, Brummer describes McCarthy’s treatment of masculinity as “revisionist, interrogative, and celebratory” (67), a characterization I agree with and have explored in my master’s thesis, and will continue to explore in this dissertation. Before delving further into McCarthy’s interest in masculinity and the corpus and scope of this dissertation, it is essential to first outline the

methodological framework on masculinity and masculinity studies that will inform my analysis of his works.

## **2. Approaching Masculinity Studies**

As a man, my interest in exploring masculinity stems from both academic and personal reasons. When I was researching for my master's thesis, my academic understanding of masculinity was still limited and in its early stages. During my second year as a Ph.D. student, I learned that Castilla La Mancha University was launching a new master's program in Masculinity Studies, coordinated by Dr. José María Armengol—arguably Spain's most renowned and respected scholar in the field. I was immediately intrigued, enrolled in the program, and earned certification as a “Specialist in Masculinity.”

What exactly are masculinity studies? What do they encompass? I recall grappling with these questions while preparing for my master's thesis and during the initial stages of my doctoral research. The truth is that the field of masculinity studies owes much of its foundation to feminism. Therefore, to answer these questions adequately, it is essential to first establish some context regarding feminism. Since this dissertation focuses on McCarthy's portrayal of masculinity, the reader will understand that the forthcoming caveat on feminism and masculinity studies will be brief yet comprehensive.

Gender studies scholars have observed that the feminist movement has a history spanning at least two hundred years (Bosch Fiol et al. 28). Feminism is described as “a social and political theory, as well as a diverse and heterogeneous movement, whose fundamental objective is to change the world” (Bacete 227; my trans.).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, feminism is also “a progressive, plural, and pacific movement that fights for the basic principle of equal rights and

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<sup>11</sup> “El feminismo es una teoría social y política, a la vez que un movimiento diverso y heterogéneo, que tiene como objetivo fundamental cambiar el mundo”.

denounces all the strategies aimed at the submission and control of women by patriarchy” (Bosch Fiol et al. 28; my trans.).<sup>12</sup> Finally, feminism is a “trend of thought in permanent evolution advocating for equal rights and opportunities for both sexes. It constitutes a different way of understanding the world, power relations, social structures, and the relationships between sexes” (211; my trans.).<sup>13</sup> Although the first identified wave of feminism emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, often associated with urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics, it is arguably the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s—“following the rise of the women’s movement” (T. Edwards 55)—that began to make the most significant impact in academia. For instance, in the academic field of sociology,

much of this prefeminist writing, done under the influence of functionalism, treated sex roles as complementary and necessary—not as stemming from unequal power relations between women and men. Masculinity and femininity were likewise seen as sex-specific and sex-appropriate personality traits that were expressed behaviorally, rather than as attributions elicited by acts of domination and subordination. (Schrock and Schwalbe 278)

What Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe refer to in the above quote is known as “sex roles,” a concept that will be discussed further. Their comment highlights the increasing recognition of men’s historical domination over women. By the 1970s, both femininity and masculinity were often “identified respectively with positive and negative value judgments” (Ovesey and Person 55). Femininity was equated with failure, while masculinity was linked to success (55). This association of masculinity with success stemmed from its representation of “independence, self-affirmation, risk-taking, social dominance, and aggressiveness” (Gini and

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<sup>12</sup> [El feminismo] “es un movimiento progresista, plural y pacífico, que lucha por el principio básico de la igualdad de derechos y que denuncia todas las maniobras y estrategias destinadas al sometimiento y control de las mujeres por parte del patriarcado”.

<sup>13</sup> “Feminismo: Corriente de pensamiento en permanente evolución por la defensa de la igualdad de derechos y oportunidades entre ambos sexos. Constituye una forma diferente de entender el mundo, las relaciones de poder, las estructuras sociales y las relaciones entre los sexos”.

Pozzoli 586), whereas femininity was viewed as embodying “weakness, submissiveness, inferiority” (Ovesey and Person 55).<sup>14</sup> As a result, women grew increasingly frustrated with being perceived as weak, and the dominance of men came under scrutiny.

During the second wave of feminism, “women’s fundamental right to freedom from men’s violence became a cornerstone of feminist enquiry *per se*” (T. Edwards 55). According to Raewyn Connell, a renowned gender scholar, Western feminism, in its struggle against patriarchy,<sup>15</sup> concentrated on addressing

men’s aggression against women. Women’s shelters spread awareness of domestic violence, and campaigns against rape argued that every man is a potential rapist. Anti-pornography feminism in the 1980s carried this further, seeing men’s sexuality as pervasively violent, and pornography as an attack upon women. The view that it is mainstream masculinity that is violent, not just a deviant group, also spread in feminist peace movements and the environmental movement. (41)

During the 1990s, the third wave of feminism was “clearly influenced by the advent of post-structural theory, particularly as it relate[d] to gender in terms of questions of normativity, performativity and sexuality” (T. Edwards 3). Judith Butler’s revolutionary assertion that gender is a performance that is repeatedly enacted (140)—their ideas on the performativity of gender will be explored in the third chapter of this dissertation—is arguably a cornerstone of this post-structural theory mentioned by Tim Edwards. Scholars have praised the feminist

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that, although Ovesey and Person’s observations were formulated in the 1970s, the notion that “men and women alike still use these stereotypes in evaluating many aspects of behavior, their own as well as that of others” (55) remains relevant today.

<sup>15</sup> In relation to patriarchy, Connell elucidates that around 1970, feminism identified it as “the master pattern in human history” (65). Although Connell acknowledges that this characterization was “overgeneralized,” the idea nonetheless “well captured the power and intractability of a massive structure of social relations: a structure that involved the state, the economy, culture and communications as well as kinship, child-rearing and sexuality” (65). Additionally, another scholar notes that patriarchy “was deeply entrenched in rituals, routines and social practices. Moreover, since men, it was argued, continue to occupy positions of power it was difficult for them to be reflexive about the negative aspects of masculinity” (Beynon 85).

movement for its profound impact, describing it as “the most significant force in raising consciousness about the oppression of women and in particular about the use of power and force by men, the State and state agencies to control women’s bodies” (Morgan and Scott 10). According to David Morgan and Sue Scott, this feminist force has been instrumental in documenting “the control and exploitation of women’s bodies via domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, advertising and pornography, medical interventions, exploitation and harassment at work, etc.” (10).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the feminist movement “has made central a cultural and political analysis and critique of gender and sexuality and has been rightly wary of universalizing claims about gender and of accounts that seem to reduce gender to a single defining or characterizing feature” (Chodorow 70). As mentioned, without feminism, gender and, by extension, masculinity studies might not have developed.

The social pressure exerted by the various waves of feminism inevitably influenced men as well. In the 1970s, feminist critiques of patriarchy “gave a focus to the literature on masculinity that it had never had before. There was now a degree of coherence to the discussion as a whole, a common set of issues, and for many of the authors, a distinct new genre of writing” (Carrigan et al. 564). This emerging field within gender studies became known as masculinity studies. Feminist ideas not only contributed to redefining dominant models of masculinity “but also helped to deconstruct the categories through which the dominant masculine role was sustained” (Valcuende del Río 13; my trans.).<sup>17</sup> Much like feminism, masculinity studies have also evolved through different waves.

The first wave of masculinity studies “saw masculinity as a socially constructed identity into which boys were socialised to become socially acceptable men. This identity was primarily

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<sup>16</sup> Although there are numerous examples of feminism’s achievements, one of the most notable in recent years is the #MeToo movement. This initiative has been pivotal in exposing and denouncing the exploitation and sexual harassment women have faced, particularly in high-profile industries like Hollywood.

<sup>17</sup> “Pero determinados discursos feministas han servido también para deconstruir las categorías a través de las cuales se sustentaba el modelo dominante de masculinidad”.

defined in terms of sex role theory, which argued that the masculinity was simply the consequence, effect or outcome of the male sex role” (T. Edwards 104–05). These early studies in the field were “at pains to point out that the male sex role was also limiting and indeed negative, for men as well as for women” (104). As a matter of fact, the mainstream theoretical proposition of masculinity literature from the 1970s “was that men are oppressed in a fashion comparable to women” (Carrigan et al. 567). The literature of this decade was “concerned [with] the restrictions, disadvantages, and general penalties attached to being a man. ‘Do men need women’s liberation?’ was a common question or point of reference, and the response was resoundingly ‘Yes’—for the benefit of men. This was sometimes so that men too could become complete, authentic human beings” (564). While some men embraced this view positively, the feeling was not fully shared by all the men and reactions

remained divided and in fact became even more split, a fracture that deepened during the 1980s and 1990s and led to the development of various men’s movements, often implicitly and sometimes overtly opposed to the advancement of second-wave feminism, particularly in the United States in the wake of the rise of the mythopoetic and similar men’s movements. (T. Edwards 25)

Perhaps the rise of these men’s movements found their *raison d’être* in the fact that “any attempt to weld men’s studies and feminism is flawed by the very diversity of feminism and indeed feminist projects” (35). Regardless of the ongoing division, during the 1980s, as stated, feminism inspired “the so-called ‘masculinity studies,’ whose main objective is to show how the cultural construction of gender has not only determined women’s behavior, but also that of males” (Carabí and Armengol 8; my trans.).<sup>18</sup> The integration of masculinity studies into gender studies highlighted an often-overlooked aspect, the fact that traditionally, “gender

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<sup>18</sup> “Pero a partir de los años ochenta surgieron, inspirados en el feminismo, los llamados ‘estudios de las masculinidades’, cuyo objetivo principal es mostrar cómo la construcción cultural del género no solamente ha determinado el comportamiento de las mujeres, sino también el de los varones”.

studies have focused on women. Politically, this is logical enough. It is women who have undergone the worst effects of gender discrimination, and so it is women who had to make gender visible as a political category for the first time” (Armengol, “No Country for Old Men?” 1). However, by the late 1980s, gender studies “started to pay increasing attention to men’s lives as well, recognizing that the lives of women are inextricably linked to men’s, and that men can, indeed should, actively participate in the struggle for gender equality” (1). The first step to be taken in this active participation for equality was acknowledging that the oppressor “was taken to be the *male role*. The real self is squashed, strained, or suppressed by the demands of this role” (Carrigan et al. 567). This led to a new perspective within gender studies: the realization that men, like women, could also be victims of dominant masculinities. Thus, the second wave of masculinity studies began to take shape.

In scholarly discourse, the second wave of masculinity studies is widely recognized as being “[h]eavily influenced by developments in feminism during the 1980s” (T. Edwards 106). This wave was “significantly more critical of the male sex role, men’s complaints and indeed any discussion of masculinity as a performance” (106). Alongside the previously mentioned feminist critiques of patriarchy, the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” emerged in the 1980s. In the configuration of the term, Connell explains that “hegemony” refers to “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (77). In the context of masculinity, this leading position hegemony grants implies “that one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted” (77). Thus, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77).<sup>19</sup> Other gender

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<sup>19</sup> For readers curious to learn more about the scholarly evolution of the term “hegemonic masculinity,” as well as “non-hegemonic practices,” Teresa Requena’s article “Negotiating a Masculine Bloc: Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections*” (2013) proves insightful. In the article, Requena explains that these “terms were originally formulated in Connell’s *Gender and Power* and further expanded in Carrigan, Connell, and Lee’s “Towards a

scholars assert that, within contemporary American culture, hegemonic masculinity “serves as the standard upon which the ‘real man’ is defined” (Kupers 716) and represents “the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy” (Demetriou 348). From a sexual perspective, hegemonic masculinity conveys the idea that “women exist as potential sexual objects for men while men are negated as sexual objects for men. Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this” (Donaldson 645).

Moreover, in the years following Connell’s initial use of the term “hegemonic masculinity,” the concept faced criticism due to “the impossibility of finding clear-cut hegemonic or non-hegemonic configurations” (Requena 101).<sup>20</sup> In the article “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” (2005), Connell and Messerschmidt discuss how, from “the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, the concept of hegemonic masculinity thus passed from a conceptual model with a fairly narrow empirical base to a widely used framework for research and debate about men and masculinities” (835). They also emphasize that masculinity should not be solely understood as “a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals” (836). Rather, “[m]asculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (836). Despite these revisions, it remains evident that “hegemonic masculinity refers to a social ascendancy of one group of men over others” (Demetriou 341)—a theme later explored in some McCarthy novels such as *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. The adjustments made to Connell’s original terminology continue to recognize that

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New Sociology of Masculinity” and other texts such as Segal’s “Changing Men: Masculinities in Context” or Cornwall and Lindisfame’s *Dislocating Masculinities: Comparative Ethnographies* of women” (101).

<sup>20</sup> One of the most interesting criticisms of Connell’s hegemonic masculinity can be found in Demetrakis Demetriou’s article “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique” (2001). In the article, Demetriou introduces an alternative term, “masculine bloc,” which “implies a non-reified and non-dualistic understanding of masculine power and practice” (348). For Demetriou, hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized as “a hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy” (348). Demetriou further argues that the hybrid masculine bloc “is made up of both straight and gay, both black and white elements and practices” (348). With the incorporation of these elements and practices, the hybrid nature “makes the hegemonic bloc dynamic and flexible” as well as “capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures” (348).

“[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” (Connell and Messerschmidt 848). Moreover, the inclusion of various masculinities—both hegemonic and non-hegemonic—has led to the development of the third wave of masculinity studies in the twenty-first century.

In relation to this third wave of masculinity studies, Tim Edwards elucidates that it has often

overhauled the entire concept of masculinity and has tended to shift attention away from the practices of masculinity to their theorisation. Much of this theorisation has in turn been informed by the rise of poststructural theory, including some queer theory and, perhaps not coincidentally, it has also refocused attention once again on questions of performativity. (106)

In the early twenty-first century, the third wave of masculinity studies has begun to align with the fourth wave of the feminist movement and some groups of men see the third wave as a period of crisis. Regarding the crisis, bell hooks states that it “is not the crisis of masculinity, it is the crisis of patriarchal masculinity” (32). Feminism, once again, seems to complement masculinity studies and the alignment reflects “a new reality with profound changes that have shaken the very structures of the system” (Bacete 28; my trans.).<sup>21</sup> Feminism has “radically questioned the dominant hegemonic masculinity and the role of men in society” (28; my trans.).<sup>22</sup> In response, masculinity studies have evolved beyond “merely cataloging more masculinities,” to documenting and analyzing “the identity work that males do to claim membership in the dominant gender group, to affirm the social reality of the group, to elicit deference from others, and to maintain privileges vis-à-vis women” (Schrock and Schwalbe

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<sup>21</sup> “La colosal transformación de las mujeres ha generado una nueva realidad con cambios tan profundos que han hecho tambalearse las estructuras mismas del sistema”.

<sup>22</sup> El feminismo ha “venido a cuestionar de forma radical y para siempre la masculinidad hegemónica dominante y el papel de los hombres en la sociedad”.

289). Similarly, like McCarthy's exploration in his works, masculinity studies examine various elements that constitute masculinity, the various ways of being a man, and the broader implications of what masculinity ultimately means. Given this context, a pertinent question arises: What is masculinity?

Scholars in gender studies have grappled with defining masculinity for decades, finding it to be an arduous endeavor due to the lack of consensus on how to approach its definition. Historically, masculinity has often been defined in opposition to femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt 848; Dozier 314; Gabbard 49; Gini and Pozzoli 586; Hutchings 401; Schippers 89). However, this approach offers limited clarity. Some scholars suggest that gender is often oversimplified into categories like "women," "men," "femininity," and "masculinity" (Pearson 1259; Stern and Zalewski 619). Masculinity, as a concept, is understood to be "learned, understood, imported, conveyed, tried to change" (Stern and Zalewski 619). As a result of these processes, it can be concluded that both masculinity and femininity are seen as cultural and social constructions (Kaplan et al. 396; Valcuende del Río 14). Moreover, from a traditional perspective, masculinity has been linked to nature through "a set of qualities associated with a sex" (Valcuende del Río 10; my trans.).<sup>23</sup> Yet, this sexual element of masculinity is also culturally constructed, making it both a social construct and an attitude (Guasch Andreu 117; Vågnes 10; Valcuende del Río 10). Part of the scholarly discourse argues for a singular form of masculinity, defining it as "the approved way of being an adult male in any given society" (Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making* 1). But what does this mean? Which society's standards should be considered authoritative and which societies should look up to them? For me, there is no definitive answer to these questions because we must first understand that masculinity is constantly evolving, and the so-called approved way of being a man is unlikely to remain fixed for long.

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<sup>23</sup> "Tradicionalmente hemos entendido la masculinidad como un conjunto de cualidades asociadas a un sexo".

Given that this dissertation focuses on the works of an American author, it is pertinent to contextualize masculinity within the United States. Michael Kimmel, a distinguished American sociologist, gender studies scholar, and expert in masculinity studies, states that what it means to be a man in contemporary America differs significantly from, for instance, what it meant during the country's foundation in the eighteenth century (“Los estudios de la masculinidad” 17). In the nineteenth century, Darwin's theories of evolution and the ideas of philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche gained prominence. These scientific and philosophical advancements led to the “invalidation of the monotheistic patriarchal God and other theological beliefs” which in turn “refuted collective fantasies of white men's supreme position at the apex of biological and social power hierarchy” (Meladze 94). In other words, Darwin's theory “had the terrifying implication that men, women, and all races of people were of the same bioevolutionary heritage and not separately-created beings as biblically written” (95). This notion suggests a fundamental similarity between men and women. If humans have evolved to the point of becoming what we all know, then masculinity—as well as femininity—is subject to constant evolution and change. However, regardless of the era, Kimmel asserts that in the United States, “proving masculinity appears to be a lifelong project, endless and unrelenting” (*Guyland* 100). He further elucidates that “[m]any of the skills and values that a man will need in the twenty-first century are the same ones that men have always needed—constancy, a sense of purpose, honor, and caring discipline” (93). Kimmel describes masculinity as “a constant test—always up for grabs, always needing to be proved” (51). It is undeniable that historically in the United States, “some forms of masculinity were perceived as hegemonic and indeed oppressive to others that were subordinate so that affluent, white and heterosexual men had a part to play in the oppression of poorer men or those occupying positions across a varied spectrum of ethnicities and sexualities” (T. Edwards 106). In today's parlance, such forms of

masculinity are often referred to as “toxic masculinity” (Bacete 117–18; O. Campbell; Connell and Messerschmidt 840; Kupers 714; Pearson 1257).

In contemporary discussions of masculinity, gender and masculinity scholars often converge on the idea that there is no single dominant masculinity but rather a range of models and ways of being a man (Bacete 109; Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* 10). A proposed solution is to use the term “masculinities”—as well as “femininities”—in order to “recognize the different definitions of masculinity and femininity that we construct. By pluralizing the terms, we acknowledge the fact that masculinity and femininity mean different things to different groups of people at different times” (Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* 10). I concur with this approach, advocating for the concept of multiple masculinities rather than a singular notion or way of being a man. In the context of McCarthy’s works, I prefer to acknowledge the idea that there are various masculinities represented, even though his narratives often highlight a dominant form. This dissertation will focus on examining these varied masculinities, and the following section outlines my approach to analyzing them in McCarthy’s texts.

### **3. Cormac McCarthy and Masculinity**

As stated, although Cormac McCarthy’s literary accomplishments were largely overlooked by general audiences in the first two decades of his career, they garnered significant attention from academics. Scholars such as Edwin Arnold, Vereen Bell, Neil Campbell, Duane Carr, Dianne Luce, Dana Phillips, and Mark Royden Winchell began exploring his works in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, interest in McCarthy has expanded, with notable scholars including John Cant, Lydia Cooper, John Dudley, Brian Evenson, Steven Frye, Russell Hillier, Alan Noble, Timothy Parrish, Sara Spurgeon, and Linda Townley Woodson contributing to the discourse. In Spain, McCarthy’s works have also attracted scholarly attention. For instance, the Spanish journal *La página* dedicated its 87<sup>th</sup> issue to McCarthy,

featuring contributions from scholars such as Manuel Broncano Rodríguez, Francisco Collado Rodríguez, María Magdalena García Lorenzo, José Antonio Gurpegui Palacios, and María Luisa Juárez Hervás, further enriching the academic dialogue about the author. Also, some scholars in Spain have explored the works of McCarthy in their doctoral research, such are the cases of Montserrat Beatriz Morlas Pombo (2003), Sabah Salim Jabbar Jabbar (2021), and Sara Villamarín Freire (2022).

McCarthy's oeuvre has been explored from various angles, including geographical, philosophical, political, religious, and sociological perspectives. These diverse explorations highlight the richness of McCarthy's work and his broad intellectual interest beyond the aforementioned "accursed questions." Throughout his career, McCarthy has been characterized as "a critic of his culture and his times" (Cant 51). I concur with Cant's assessment and view McCarthy as an analytical author whose critique is particularly focused on his male characters and their actions. I also align with Brummer's view that McCarthy's "greatest thematic concern" across his entire corpus is "the question of what it means to be a man in postmodern America" (141). In trying to answer this question, scholars have noted that McCarthy portrays an array of male characters, often depicted as "a host of disenfranchised white male characters, a burgeoning litany of losers, loners, and layabouts" (Brummer 46), who "perceive themselves under attack" (King 72). This perceived attack on their masculinity manifests in various ways. McCarthy sometimes features characters struggling "with a masculine code that they perceived to be vanishing or devolving" (Dudley, "McCarthy's Heroes" 177). At other times, he presents male characters that "are nonetheless haunted by the presence of the feminine in several forms" (178). As Dudley states, the entirety of McCarthy's works "ultimately critiques traditional American masculinity, explaining the always incomplete longing for closure and transcendence that has characterized the mythic search for masculine identity" (176). Brummer also affirms that "the increasingly desperate search for a conception of masculinity that makes

sense of men's lives in the early twenty-first century is also one of the most compelling and complex problems of our time" (9). With regard to this problem, Brummer further elucidates that "McCarthy delves deep into [it], exploring its mythic roots, examining its modern manifestations, and destabilizing many of the bedrock assumptions upon which American men have built an understanding of themselves" (9). These scholarly observations have guided and focused my analysis of McCarthy's works.

Given that McCarthy's oeuvre predominantly explores the masculinity of his characters, this dissertation seeks to address several key questions: What aspects of masculinity does McCarthy consider fundamental to his male characters? How does he construct their masculinity? Does McCarthy praise or criticize the masculinity of his characters, and if so, how? To tackle these questions, it is essential first to outline the corpus of the dissertation. This includes identifying the primary sources—McCarthy's works—and specifying which characters will be subjected to scrutiny. Additionally, the secondary sources will consist of scholarly analyses of McCarthy's works as well as studies on masculinity. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the McCarthy texts under review, it is crucial to first clarify the scope and nature of these secondary sources. Therefore, I will begin by detailing these sources before delving into the primary texts.

Masculinity can be examined from a wide range of perspectives. Masculinity (and femininity) can be constructed and experienced in various ways, for instance through "class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region" (Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* 10). These constructions and experiences Kimmel mentions have led to masculinity being explored across numerous disciplines, such as anthropology, geography, history, medicine, psychology, sociology, literary studies, and film studies. Additionally, masculinity is often explored from an age perspective, as its meaning evolves throughout a man's life ("Los estudios de la masculinidad" 17). In McCarthy's works, male characters span different stages of life—from

childhood and adolescence to adulthood and old age. Given the broad scope of all these life stages, I decided to focus specifically on adult men in their prime—that is, men ranging from twenty to fifty years of age. This age group allows me to focus on specific aspects of masculinity that may be absent in the developing masculinities of younger characters, such as teenagers, or may be changing in elderly ones. Consequently, characters such as John Grady Cole and Bill Parham from the Border Trilogy, the kid from *Blood Meridian*, the boy from *The Road*, and White and Black from *The Sunset Limited* fall outside the scope of this dissertation, although I plan to examine them in my future scholarly work. However, it must be noted that John Grady Cole, the kid, and the boy will be referenced in relation to the analysis of other male characters within their respective novels. Finally, it is important to note that this dissertation will concentrate solely on McCarthy's novels and his plays will not be explored, with the exception of *The Counselor*, for reasons later detailed.

Once I made the decision to focus my study solely on adult male characters in their prime, the next step was to determine which aspects of their masculinity to analyze. As previously mentioned, given that masculinity is a social construction, and since McCarthy's primary male characters are Americans, in the initial years of my doctoral research I wondered whether there were specific aspects of masculinity that McCarthy consistently depicted across his works and that were also recognized by scholars as fundamental to the construction of masculinity in adult men, particularly American men. Through my research into both McCarthy's oeuvre and the broader concept of masculinity, I have identified three key factors of masculinity that are consistently present in McCarthy's body of work and are widely acknowledged by the scholarly community as essential to the construction of many forms of masculinity, both in general and within the context of American culture.

The first of these three fundamental aspects of masculinity in McCarthy's oeuvre is fatherhood, which will be examined in the dissertation's first chapter: "An Exploration of

Fatherhood in McCarthy.” Gender scholars have emphasized that the father is “the one person who has the power to validate [another male’s] manhood or dissolve it in an instant” (Kimmel, *Guyland* 130). Spanish anthropologist Ritxar Bacete highlights the profound impact of fatherhood, stating that “men’s participation in the daily caring for others has a lasting influence in the lives of the girls, boys, women, and men, as well as a permanent impact in the world that surrounds them” (140; my trans.).<sup>24</sup> Scholars have also explored fatherhood through the lens of the traditional male role as the provider, a responsibility often linked to men in general and fathers in particular, encapsulated in the so-called three Ps: protection, provision, and potency (Gilmore, “Culturas de la masculinidad” 34). In McCarthy’s works, the portrayal of the father, whether as a primary or secondary character, remains a persistent and significant theme.

Therefore, the first chapter of this dissertation will focus on the portrayal of the father character. The analysis will center primarily on two novels, *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. While these novels are distinct from one another—with the former depicting a plausible world and the latter set in a postapocalyptic setting—, I argue that McCarthy demonstrates an evolution in the masculinity of the father character. Beginning with the characters of Culla Holme and the bearded one in *Outer Dark* and culminating with the man in *The Road*, McCarthy presents a transformation from a masculinity that is cruel, ruthless, and detached to one that is nurturing, affectionate, sacrificial, and caring. Although the masculinity of these three characters has been explored by scholars individually, a comparative analysis of them, as far as I know, has yet to be undertaken.

To explore this evolution of the masculinity of the father character, the chapter will be divided into two sections: “From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: Common Elements in Father Characters” and “From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: From Failed to Successful Paternities.” The

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<sup>24</sup> “la participación de los hombres en el cuidado diario de otros tiene una influencia duradera en las vidas de las niñas, los niños, las mujeres y los hombres, así como un impacto permanente en el mundo que los rodea”.

first section will examine the common elements in McCarthy's construction of father characters across both novels. This first section will be further divided into three subsections, addressing the absence of language, dreams, and protection respectively in the two novels. The analytical approach in these subsections will mirror that of the entire dissertation, incorporating scholarly readings of these novels alongside anthropological, sociological, and psychological analyses of masculinity to study how McCarthy constructs the masculinity of his characters. In this particular analysis of *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, I will utilize theories such as the psychological infusion of language, dream and religious analyses, scholarly discussions on the role of men as protectors, and contemporary terms like "the new father" and "caring masculinities," which have recently gained prominence in the scholarly discourse on gender and masculinity.

Finally, within these two sections of the analysis of *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, I will also incorporate two additional sections that address other portrayals of father characters in novels published chronologically between the two main works explored in the chapter: *All the Pretty Horses*, *Blood Meridian*, *Child of God*, and *No Country for Old Men*. Although McCarthy's last two novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, incorporate numerous allusions to both Robert and Alicia Western's father, I have chosen not to incorporate them in the analysis because they do not fit the stated chronological timeline of novels published between *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. The first of these two subsections—"Blood Meridian, Child of God, and All the Pretty Horses: Fathers Who Fail Their Children"—will examine three representations of failed paternities: the absent, the suicidal, and the broken father. The absent father will be explored through the character of the kid's father in *Blood Meridian*; the suicidal father will be analyzed through Lester Ballard's father in *Child of God*; and the broken father will be depicted in John Grady Cole's father in *All the Pretty Horses*.

The second of the two in-between sections—“The Burden of the Father’s Masculinity: The Case of Sheriff Bell”—will explore how the masculinity of the father can become a burden for the son, as illustrated by the relationship between Sheriff Ed Tom Bell and his father Jack in *No Country for Old Men*. Although Sheriff Bell does not strictly fit the standard of a man in his prime, I have chosen to incorporate his relationship with his father due to its significant impact on him and because Bell recalls a past time of his youth. Additionally, as the first chapter will demonstrate, McCarthy employs certain attributes in both Jack and Sheriff Bell that are also used in the construction of other father characters, such as the man in *The Road*.

The primary purpose of incorporating the analysis of these four novels into these two sections between the main analysis of *Outer Dark* and *The Road* is to provide further evidence and reinforce my argument that McCarthy’s oeuvre has transitioned from depictions of failed paternities to those that are more caring and successful. The analysis will reveal that McCarthy’s portrayals of father characters have gradually evolved, aligning with constructions of masculinity that resonate more with twenty-first-century standards. This evolution culminates in what I consider the most refined version of the character in McCarthy’s entire oeuvre: the man in *The Road*.

The second of the three fundamental aspects of masculinity in McCarthy’s body of work is the relationship between masculinity and violence, which will be explored in the dissertation’s second chapter: “An Analysis of Masculinity and Violence.” Scholars often concur that men are predisposed to violence. Octavio Salazar Benítez argues that in Western countries, the cultural construction of masculinity has been fundamentally based on violence (40). Tim Edwards further elucidates that violence can be viewed as “one means of negating femininity,” thereby establishing “a connection between violence with masculinity” (61). Within this framework, some “men’s attitudes and behaviors [are] related to action and aggression;” as a consequence, men “are especially likely to define manhood in terms of

action” (Bosson and Vandello 83). In the context of the United States, key hallmarks of masculinity include “[p]hysical strength, self-control, aggression, and competitiveness” (Cole and Saxton 610). Moreover, violence often accompanies the domination of others. In studying men and their masculinities, scholars from sociology, anthropology, and history have focused on the production and representation of masculine dominion, its perpetuation and hegemony, and the creation and visibility of non-hegemonic masculinities (Bonino Méndez, “La masculinidad tradicional”). In McCarthy’s works, violence is both “persistent” and “timeless” (Ellis 86), manifesting in various forms across his oeuvre. However, the two most violent characters ever conceived by McCarthy are, in my view, judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* and Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*.

Parrish argues that *Blood Meridian* “clearly establishes a correlation between the necessity of violence and the building of civilization” (“History and the Problem of Evil” 72). At the apex of this correlation stands judge Holden. Since the novel’s publication, the judge has captivated scholarly attention and has been described as “the most frightening figure in all of American literature” (Bloom, *Cormac McCarthy* 1), “the most haunting character in all of American literature” (Cusher 223), and “the most violent character in American literature” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 71). Beyond these qualifications, judge Holden is far from a mere brute. McCarthy crafts him as “the novel’s most educated and experienced observer, its most fascinating and complex character” (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 77), as well as “the most learned and civilized” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 71), and “the most sophisticated speaker in *Blood Meridian*, an orator possessed of seemingly preternatural powers of rhetoric” (Cusher 223). Given these attributes, the construction of judge Holden’s masculinity in relation to violence is particularly compelling and warrants close examination.

Similar to judge Holden, Anton Chigurh has also drawn significant scholarly attention as one of the most enigmatic and chilling figures in *No Country for Old Men*. Chigurh has been

described as “an intriguing twenty-first-century depiction of the ultimate Western villain persona” (Covell 96), as the “ultimate badass [and] a modern personification of pure evil” (Riegler 23), as the novel’s “most conspicuous conflation of determinism and fatalism” (Gibbs 64), and as “a force and a presence that goes well beyond the banality of an ordinary paid assassin or bounty hunter. Like Death itself, he is larger than life, not merely a stereotype, but an allegorical abstraction” (Welsh 74). Scholars have explored and compared Holden and Chigurh, whether separately or together, acknowledging both as “allegorical figures” of death (Cant 56). Moreover, Scott Covell elucidates that Chigurh “shares many of the judge’s characteristics” (103), even “subscrib[ing] to the judge’s religiosity of war, though 140 years later” (104). It can be argued that through Holden and Chigurh, “McCarthy recalls both the traumatic violence of the American West and its place within American narratives of manhood and collective memory” (Yaşayan 95). Recognizing this connection between the two characters, the aim of the chapter is twofold: first to explore how McCarthy constructs the masculinities of Holden and Chigurh through violence; second, to determine whether McCarthy ultimately praises or condemns the violent masculinities these characters embody.

To accomplish this exploration, given that both characters are situated within a similar geographical context, the first three sections of the chapter—“The Great West and the Western,” “Violence as an Inherent Part of Masculinity,” and “Violence, an Overarching Theme in McCarthy’s Oeuvre: Bloodshed, Life, and Masculinity”—will provide the reader with essential background on the Great West and the Western genre, followed by an examination of violence and masculinity, and then an overview of violence in McCarthy’s work. With this contextual foundation in place, the subsequent three sections of the chapter—“Masculinity and Nature: The Natural World as a Testing Ground for Masculinity,” “Man vs. Man: The Ultimate Way to Test a Man’s Violent Masculinity,” and “McCarthy’s Way of Defeating Invincible Masculinities”—will focus on analyzing the construction of masculinity

through violence in judge Holden and Anton Chigurh. This exploration will be conducted in three distinct ways.

Firstly, considering the idea that many “elements of human nature [are] more directly tied to the natural world itself,” then men and masculinity can be examined “through interaction[s] with the natural world” (Link 154). In both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy delves into the relationship “between humans, especially Anglo Americans, and the natural world” (Spurgeon, “Sacred Hunter” 75), primarily through the characters of Holden and Chigurh. In the section “Masculinity and Nature: The Natural World as a Testing Ground for Masculinity,” this relationship will be explored through their roles as hunters, juxtaposed with other characters in the novels, namely the kid in *Blood Meridian* and Llewelyn Moss, Sheriff Bell, and Carson Wells in *No Country for Old Men*. After analyzing these characters in their roles as hunters, the section will highlight how Holden asserts his supremacy over nature, one that no other character in *Blood Meridian* can match. The chapter’s penultimate section—“Man vs. Man: The Ultimate Way to Test a Man’s Violent Masculinity”—will focus on the dominion of violence that both Holden and Chigurh exhibit in their confrontations with other male characters in their respective novels. In exploring this dominion through violence, I will identify common elements McCarthy employs in the construction of their masculinity, such as fire, God, war, and games. To conclude, after exploring these shared elements that underscore Holden and Chigurh’s dominion, the chapter’s last section—“McCarthy’s Way of Defeating Invincible Masculinities”—will investigate how McCarthy reveals the flaws in the masculinities of the two characters. My analysis will come to the conclusion that McCarthy critiques these violent masculinities by ultimately rendering them vincible.

Having explored the construction of masculinity through fatherhood and violence in the first two chapters of the dissertation, the third chapter, titled “Male-Female Relationships,

Masculinity, and Sexuality,” will address the final fundamental aspects of masculinity in McCarthy’s body of work: the relationship between male and female characters, masculinity, and sexuality. As previously stated, “when we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming configurations of gender practice” (Connell 72). Within these configurations, especially in traditionally male-dominated societies like the United States, “the position of women is devalued and status accrues to men solely by virtue of the fact that they are men” (Ovesey and Person 55). This traditional positioning and status of masculinity and femininity has often led to gender dynamics where men are perceived as strong and women as weak. In other words, in the context of the relationality of masculinity and femininity, this relationship is typically observed as both

complementary and hierarchical. As identified in the vast empirical literature on masculinities, hegemonic masculinity can include physical strength, the ability to use interpersonal violence in the face of conflict, and authority. These characteristics guarantee men’s *legitimate* dominance over women only when they are symbolically paired with a complementary and inferior quality attached to femininity. To complement these characteristics in a way that subordinates femininity to masculinity, femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance. (Schippers 91)

However, this traditional vision appears to be shifting nowadays, albeit slowly. As Kimmel observes, the scholarly community has increasingly advocated for “explor[ing] the differences *among* men and *among* women, because, as it turns out, these are often more decisive than the differences between women and men” (*The Gendered Society* 9). In line with this perspective, Connell and Messerschmidt argue that “research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities” (848). While these ideas and approaches offer a promising direction for the

scholarly study of masculinity and femininity, it remains true that “men define themselves primordially through their relationships with women” (Gabbard 49; my trans.).<sup>25</sup> More concretely, this definition, which “is shared by all masculinity discourses,” hinges in the traditional understanding that men “are not feminine” (Hutchings 401). In other words, for many men, masculinity “does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’” (Connell 68)—a notion echoed by various scholars, including Tim Edwards (61), Schippers (90), Schrock and Schwalbe (279), and Valcuende del Río (18), to mention only some. Therefore, considering that “women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities<sup>26</sup>—as mothers; as schoolmates; as girlfriends, sexual partners, and wives” (Connell and Messerschmidt 848)—, this third chapter aims to explore how McCarthy utilizes the relationships between male and female characters to construct masculinity.

Although McCarthy’s works are predominantly male-centered, Brummer affirms that his oeuvre also examines “some of the new challenges and opportunities women faced as American life transitioned in the post war era” (64). McCarthy’s male characters have been characterized as “suspicious of the social gains of women” (Benson 25) and his novels often display “an unmistakable ambivalence about women, even an outright misogyny” (Sullivan, “Boys Will Be Boys” 168), reflecting “contemporary American anxieties concerning the role of women and men, anxieties given voice by the rise of second-wave feminism in the U.S.” (Brummer 45). Therefore, considering these observations, exploring how McCarthy’s male characters interact with female characters offers valuable insights into the construction of masculinities.

In the chapter, my analysis will be initially divided into two first sections exploring male and female characters. First, I will examine what can be termed positive male-female

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<sup>25</sup> “los hombres se definen a sí mismos primordialmente a través de sus relaciones con las mujeres”.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the “processes constructing masculinity” mentioned by Connell and Messerschmidt fail to acknowledge other forms of masculinity, such as homosexual, queer, or traditionally seen as less masculine identities.

relationships or interactions in McCarthy's works. This first section, titled "As Perfect Male-Female Relationships or Interactions as Can Be in McCarthy" and itself divided into three subsections, will explore the incestuous relationship between Culla and Rinthy Holmen in *Outer Dark*,<sup>27</sup> as well as the dynamics between Llewellyn Moss, Carla Jean, and the female hitchhiker in *No Country for Old Men*. The second section—titled "Masculinities vs. New Femininities" and also divided into three subsections—will focus on negative interactions, where the femininity of female characters challenges and even surpasses the masculinity of male characters. This section covers three novels. Firstly, I will analyze the relationship between John Grady Cole's parents in *All the Pretty Horses* from the perspective of the father as a broken man. Secondly, I will explore how Carla Jean undermines Anton Chigurh's masculinity in *No Country for Old Men*. Thirdly, considering that men's dominance over women relies on the assumption that "femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance" (Schippers 91), I will examine how McCarthy crafts, in the character of Malkina, a woman who uses her sexuality and intellect to outmaneuver Reiner and other male characters in *The Counselor*.

The third section of the chapter—titled "Paraphilic Disorders and Masculinity"—will focus on the analysis of paraphilic disorders and masculinity as depicted by McCarthy, particularly in relation to female characters, although not exclusively. The section will be divided into two main subsections. The first subsection—"The Case of Lester Ballard"—will begin with an exploration of Lester Ballard in *Child of God*. I will start by contextualizing Ballard's masculinity within the novel and by drawing parallels with attributes used by McCarthy in the construction of the masculinity of judge Holden and Anton Chigurh—such as violence and hunting skills. However, the primary focus will be on Ballard's abandonment by

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<sup>27</sup> Both *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris* indicate that siblings Robert and Alicia Western were in love with each other. However, the narratives provide limited exploration of this claim, as both characters are reluctant to provide a detailed elaboration when questioned about their relationship. Due to this lack of development, I find the incestuous relationship between Culla and Rinthy to be more insightful for analysis in the dissertation.

his parents as well as on his paraphilic disorders, which include voyeuristic disorder and necrophilia. The analysis will further examine the aforementioned connection between nature and femininity, as well as nature and masculinity. In this context, I will explore how masculinity, understood as a totality and a matter of the male body (Garaizabal 189; Rohlinger 62), relates to the symbolism of the penis and the phallus in both Ballard, in *Child of God*, and judge Holden, in *Blood Meridian*.

Finally, the second of the main subsections—“Judge Holden: An Analysis of Pedophilic Disorder”—will delve into the judge’s sexuality from two angles. First, I will analyze Holden as a pedophile. Second, I will explore the relationship between judge Holden and the kid in terms of a failed instance of *paidierastia*, a social practice from ancient Greek society. The aim of this section, akin to the previous chapter, is twofold: to investigate how McCarthy utilizes female characters, sexuality, and their interactions with male characters to construct masculinity, and to assess how he critiques these negative aspects of masculinity.

#### **4. Formatting Guidelines and Clarifications for the Dissertation**

To conclude this introductory chapter, I will explain several formatting decisions that I have made and will consistently apply throughout the dissertation. In his extensive career, McCarthy has frequently composed dialogues featuring spelling mistakes, including the omission of the letter “g” in gerunds and the absence of the apostrophe in auxiliary verbs when conjugated in the negative form (e.g., “dont”). While the reasons for this phenomenon are manifold, some may stem from McCarthy’s predisposition to realistically portray characters’ “vernacular of Appalachia and the West” (Monk 111), their pronunciation and ways of expressing themselves, which are often influenced by their social class, status in society, and background. It is important to note that every dialogue cited in this doctoral dissertation has been transcribed precisely as McCarthy wrote it in his works. This fidelity extends to character

titles, such as those for judge Holden and Reverend Green in *Blood Meridian*, or Sheriff Ed Tom Bell in *No Country for Old Men*. When referring to the characters, I will adhere to McCarthy's usage, for instance employing a lowercase "j" for the judge, "k" for the kid, and a capital "R" for the Reverend, "S" for Sheriff Bell, to mention just a few.

Moreover, any ellipses found in the original text in the novels will be preserved and not altered. Conversely, to distinguish them from the original, any ellipses introduced by me in the entirety of this dissertation will be enclosed in parenthesis to explicitly indicate it as my addition. Similarly, any emphasis added by me, indicated by a word or words in italics, will be clearly noted in the in-text citation. Therefore, any italicized words not marked as my emphasis are from the original text. This meticulous approach ensures the accurate representation of McCarthy's linguistic choices throughout the entirety of the dissertation. However, it must be noted that to enhance reader comprehension, I have chosen not to employ the original italics in transcribing passages entirely in italics from both *Outer Dark* and *No Country for Old Men*. This decision aims to eliminate potential distractions posed by the inclusion of original italics in the transcriptions in instances where they are not used for emphasis.

Finally, I find it essential to address certain stylistic decisions regarding the guidelines specified in the ninth edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style guide. According to the ninth edition, block quotations should be indented only from the left margin; however, I have chosen to indent both the left and right margins. This additional formatting decision intends to enhance readability of the block quotations throughout the dissertation. Additionally, the ninth edition emphasizes conciseness in long parenthetical citations, advising that those titles be shortened, if possible, to the first noun phrase. While I have adhered to this guideline for long titles in journal articles and other works, I have opted not to apply it to titles of McCarthy's novels, as such abbreviations might detract from clarity and familiarity. In cases where a title in quotation marks begins with a quotation, I have followed the MLA's

recommendation to use the opening quotation as the short form while retaining a single quotation mark within the double quotation marks. For long titles that conclude the first part with a question mark, I have applied the MLA's recommendation to retain only the portion preceding the question mark, omitting any subtitle that follows.



## Chapter One: An Exploration of Fatherhood in McCarthy

This first chapter explores what can be argued is the primary masculine relationship a McCarthy male character builds in his life: the father and son relationship. Granted, McCarthy does not always provide a father character or father figure to a protagonist or character of importance—this is the case with Anton Chigurh and Llewelyn Moss, just to mention two examples. However, when McCarthy does provide a father character—regardless of how brief the father’s presence is in the story—I find that his influence, for better or worse, helps to shape the son’s masculinity, let alone his own. This doctoral dissertation’s exploration, however, will be from the perspective of the father, given that my focus is on adult characters. Nevertheless, on occasions, the child’s perspective must not be avoided nor underestimated, since how the father’s masculinity influences (to a higher or lesser degree) the formation of the child’s is of utmost importance and interesting as well.

Masculinity and fatherhood are closely related. Connell states that masculinity “is the social elaboration of the biological function of fatherhood” (52). Moreover, other perspectives on the matter explain that “fathers, whether absent or present, offer identity models which reference what it is to be a man and which will have lifelong and profound effects, especially in the construction of the identities and vital expectations of both their daughters and their sons” (Bacete 140; my trans.).<sup>28</sup> Even if the connection between masculinity and fatherhood is evident to, for instance, anthropologists and sociologists, literary scholars have argued that in American literature, a majority of “canonical authors appear to avoid dealing with the issue of fatherhood, which thus remains largely absent” (Armengol, “Where Are Fathers in American Literature?” 211).

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<sup>28</sup> “Los padres, por ausencia o presencia, aportan modelos identitarios de referencia sobre qué es ser un hombre que producirán efectos profundos y que perdurarán toda la vida, sobre todo en la construcción de las identidades y expectativas vitales tanto de sus hijas como de sus hijos”.

McCarthy scholars have already stated how important the character of the father is. Cant explains that the theme of fatherhood in McCarthy's oeuvre is "insistent" (48). Furthermore, Cant categorizes McCarthy as an "accomplished and self-aware writer" who is "obviously well versed in the various theories that inform analysis of literary texts" (48). Therefore, regarding the consistency of the portrayal of the father character, for Cant, "it seems inconceivable that [McCarthy] should have structured his work in this consistent manner without having some specifically literary purpose" (48)—as we will see throughout this dissertation, McCarthy's literary purposes are manifold, exceeding those analyzed here. Furthermore, Robert Jarret claims that from McCarthy's early works (i.e., the Appalachian novels) to the nineteen-nineties and early two-thousand novels (i.e., the Mexican-American border novels), his "fiction enacts the death, absence, or denial of the father" (*Cormac McCarthy* 21). Regardless of said enactments, McCarthy scholars concur about the prominence of father-and-son relationships in McCarthy's works (Vågnes 21).

As stated, father-and-son relationships have been present since McCarthy's first published novel in the mid-1960s, *The Orchard Keeper*, which deals with the character of John Wesley Rattner and his promise to avenge the death of his father, Kenneth. In the novel, Mildred, John Wesley's mother, is the one forcing her son to make such a promise: "You goin to hunt him out. When you're old enough. Goin to find the man that took away your daddy" (72). It is noticeable that the revenge instruction ought to take place under a particular condition, since John Wesley, due to his young age, is believed by Mildred to be incapable of fulfilling said promise at present. In other words, revenge is for men, not for children. A crying John Wesley asks how he should do it, and Mildred responds:

Your daddy'd of knowed how. He was a Godfearin man if he never took much to church meetin ... The Lord'll show you, boy. He will not forsake them what believe. Pray and the way will be made known to ye. He ... You *swear* it, boy.

His arm was growing numb with pain ... could feel her tremble through the  
clutched hand ... I swear, he said.

You won't never forgit.

No.

Never long as you live.

Long as I live.

Yes, she said.

Long as I...

I won't forgit neither, she said, tightening once more on his arm for a moment,  
leaning her huge face at him. And, she hissed, he won't forgit neither.

I live...

He never forgot. (72)

It is worthy of note that Mildred, in the world of the novel, not only commands her son from the position of authority a mother enjoys in the absence of the father, but she also reinforces said command attributing to it a religious dimension with the inclusion of God—that is, the ultimate father; a God who will bless the son's revenge by way of providence. Moreover, if Kenneth was a God-fearing man, and Mildred's command carries a divine connotation, John Wesley ought to be fearful of not fulfilling his promise. This passage serves as a first introduction to how McCarthy brews violence from a character's young age and from his relationship, however indirect, with his father.

In McCarthy's first approach to representations of fatherhood and father characters, Luce argues that, in *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy suggests that "before a boy can become a man, his father must be cut down to size. If the father's morality masks his fallibility rather than revealing it, the child is doomed to remain a child in the shadow of an icon, never to inherit the mantle of manhood" ("They Aint the Thing" 122). Conversely, Cant argues that John

Wesley “grows up indifferent to the fate of his absent father,” whose killer is Marion Snyder, a character who acts as John Wesley’s “paternal surrogate” (47). Snyder assumes this role because he knows how important it is, in the world they live in, to have a father figure who can serve as a protector. In a telling passage, Snyder and John Wesley are talking about how Legwater, an agent of the law, had threatened to arrest the young boy. Snyder explains: “He [Legwater] knowed you didn’t have no daddy, nobody to take up for you in the first place is the reason he figured he could jump on you” (McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper* 170). In the world of *The Orchard Keeper*, and in virtually all the worlds in McCarthy’s novels, a boy being raised without a father is a potential target of bullying and exploitation.

Following the publication of *The Orchard Keeper*, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, came *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*. However, given that these are two novels explored in this dissertation concerning the father-and-son relationship, let us briefly explore said relationship in *Suttree*, McCarthy’s fourth novel, published at the end of the 1970s, in which the father character has also been studied by scholars. Erik Myren Vågnes argues that it is *Suttree* which “takes on” the most “critical a view of fathers” in McCarthy’s works and further comments that protagonist Cornelius Suttree’s father is “an authoritative figure as well as a symbol of an oppressive and conformist society” (21). The case of Suttree’s father is interesting because he is the first father character in McCarthy’s oeuvre who is a well-educated man coming from a Southern aristocratic family. Suttree’s father married a housekeeper—Grace, Suttree’s mother—, an action which in the eyes of the Southern society of the time is seen as marrying down, and as such, somewhat emasculating. Nevertheless, Vågnes argues that Suttree’s father “stands for the old patriarchal structures of society which subdue women as well as the marginalized of Knoxville” (21). In other words, Suttree’s father is one of the numerous representations of hegemonic masculinity found in McCarthy. In this case, hegemonic masculinity is represented by Suttree’s father as “a conservative value system characterized by

responsibility, financial gain, and a reverence for law and order” (Owens-Murphy 169). In conclusion, Suttree does not agree with what his father represents, nor does he embrace it.

In the course of this doctoral dissertation, I will explore McCarthy’s numerous representations of hegemonic masculinity and study if these representations are offered as a critique of said masculinity. While I am not the first scholar to undertake this exploration, my analysis of the term is conducted in relation to fatherhood, violence, and even sexuality—explorations that have been mostly neglected in scholarly work on McCarthy’s texts. Concerning Suttree’s father, Vågnes argues that the propagation of hegemonic masculinity “is a way of rescuing the son from alternative lifestyles, and by appealing to the concept of manhood, it presents a powerful strategy to guarantee obedience and a straight middle-class lifestyle” (23). Moreover, *Suttree*’s portrayal of hegemonic masculinity and the subsequent rhetoric of both masculinity and gender associated with it “plays on the psychological fear of gender transgression and the taboo of homosexuality; by failing to adhere to the norms, one’s sexuality as well as masculinity is called into question” (23). In McCarthy, Vågnes’s explanation of this failing to adhere to the norms applies to various other characters, e.g., Lester Ballard, John Grady Cole, the kid, and Reiner, to mention but a few. This questioning of the characters’ masculinity will be explored at length during this doctoral dissertation.

Having provided a brief introduction to how important the father is in filial relationships in McCarthy since his debut as a published author, this chapter explores what I consider to be the beginning of a change in how McCarthy portrays the father-son relationship. Said change starts with the depictions of father characters in his second novel, *Outer Dark*, and culminates in *The Road*. The chapter thus examines the transition in the portrayals of father characters from *Outer Dark* to *The Road*. To do so, I begin by analyzing common elements McCarthy employs in the portrayal of the masculinity of fathers in both novels, such as fatherhood and the absence of language, fatherhood and dreams, and the father character as a protector.

After exploring these common elements, I will then turn to other works published between these two novels—i.e., *Child of God* (in the 1970s), *Blood Meridian* (in the 1980s), *All the Pretty Horses* (in the 1990s), and *No Country for Old Men* (in the 2000s). The purpose of studying these other novels is to show other father characters such as the suicidal father or the broken father—characters that do not necessarily appear in *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, but that nonetheless offer interesting insights into the evolution of father characters in McCarthy. Moreover, in relation to *No Country for Old Men*, I want to analyze an interesting passage related to Sheriff Bell and his father. This passage illustrates how the masculinity of the father is vital for the construction of both the masculinity of the son and some of his moral values.

The analysis of these other father characters shows not only McCarthy's interest in exploring various representations of the father and his effect on his son, but, as stated, also aims to trace the evolution of McCarthy's portrayal of the father character. This evolution moves from a mostly imperfect sense of fatherhood in his characters (one which aligns with traditional models), to McCarthy's most perfected version of what a father character and his masculinity and values ought to be. To accomplish this, the analysis circles back to the characters in *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. As will be explored, the father in *The Road* is a perfected version that aligns with concepts such as “the new father”—Offer and Kaplan (2021)—and “caring masculinities”—Elliott (2016). However, before commencing with the analysis of these texts, I want to provide a summary of *Outer Dark* and *The Road* to underscore the most fundamental aspects of both works essential for understanding my study in the following pages.

*Outer Dark* tells the story of Culla and Rinthy Holme, two siblings who have committed incest. At the novel's start, Rinthy is pregnant with her brother's baby. The Holmes live in very precarious conditions, isolated from society in a cabin in the woods. When Rinthy gives birth to a male child, a “chap” as she calls him, Culla takes the baby and abandons him in the woods, making Rinthy believe that the baby died. However, the child is found by a tinker who takes

care of him for a while before giving it to a woman who would nurse him. Eventually, Rinthy finds the truth about her son's fate and searches for him while Culla searches for Rinthy. From the moment when Rinthy finds out the truth of what happened, the siblings never run into each other in the course of the novel, about a year after the baby's birth. Parallel to the Holmes's story in *Outer Dark*, there is a group of three men, led by "the bearded one" (McCarthy 3), who also roam the woods scavenging and killing. At the end of the novel, it is Culla who runs again into these men, who have killed the tinker and have the child with them. After an exchange between Culla and the bearded one, in which Culla tries to convince the bearded one to give the child back to Rinthy, the bearded one kills the child and feeds him to one of his men, while Culla watches. They part ways and leave Culla unharmed. Later, Rinthy finds the remains of her son. The novel concludes shortly after that, with each character going their separate ways. Even though *Outer Dark* and *The Road* were written several decades apart, McCarthy highlights certain similarities between both novels; these shared elements are later explored in the remaining pages of this chapter.

*The Road* tells the story of two characters—referred to by McCarthy merely as the man (also known as Papa) and the boy—, a father and a son who roam a postapocalyptic landscape in search of a warmer environment, which the man believes is southwards. Father and son survive on the little food they find in a world burned to ashes and populated only by human survivors, some of whom are cannibals, rapists, and murderers. The story follows these two characters and their struggle to survive while the father tries to teach his son as much as possible about survival and how to be a good person in such a hostile world. Moreover, the man's teachings can be seen as a means of preserving masculinity. These teachings, which are repeated constantly throughout the course of the story, are basically reduced to two main notions: the idea that he and the boy are "the good guys" (77), and that they are the carriers of

“the fire” (McCarthy, *The Road* 83). *The Road* is, without a doubt, McCarthy’s ultimate novel on the themes of fatherhood, and father and child relationship.

## **1. From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: Common Elements in Father Characters**

Having reacquainted the reader with the main characters and events in both novels, I want to start the comparison between *Outer Dark* and *The Road* by analyzing how McCarthy introduces the father characters. I want to deal with Culla and the bearded one first, as they are the two fathers in *Outer Dark*—Culla being a father in the biological sense, while the bearded one serves as a father figure to the other two men (referred to as Harman and the mute one) in his group. Jarrett argues that McCarthy depicts this gang of three “as an almost archetypical family, with its members bound together tightly. The bearded outlaw functions as father and leader, Harman’s oldest son, and the nameless mentally retarded mute as dependent baby” (*Cormac McCarthy* 17). The importance of these two father characters is such that McCarthy’s narration focuses on the bearded one on the opening page of the book, while shifting to Culla on the closing page. The bearded one’s passages, all of them one page long, are arranged in a way that serves to divide the novel into unnumbered chapters. McCarthy uses italics for these passages, similar to the technique used in the thirteen chapters of *No Country for Old Men*. In this case, McCarthy uses the soliloquies of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell to dive into the mind of Bell, “where he confronts himself past and present” (Cremean 25). In *Outer Dark*, the italicized passages offer a similar journey into the mind and actions of the bearded one, albeit with considerably less information and intensity compared to Sheriff Bell’s soliloquies.

McCarthy’s decision to start the novel with the bearded one is telling and important for an analysis of masculinity and fatherhood. After a description of how they make camp, prepare dinner, and get ready to spend the night, the novel provides the following description of the bearded one’s “family” routine:

They were about with the first light, the bearded one rising and kicking out the other two and still with no word among them rekindling the fire and setting their battered pannikins about it, squatting on their haunches, eating again wordlessly with beltknives, until the bearded one rose and stood spraddlelegged before the fire and closed the other two in a foul white plume of smoke out of and through which they fought suddenly and unannounced and mute and as suddenly ceased, picking up their ragged duffel and moving west along the river once again.

(*Outer Dark* 3)

The scene is reminiscent of a typical family waking up. In this case, the father gets the children ready for the day, feeds them breakfast, and they are ready to go. McCarthy's description of the scene resembles some of the descriptions given in similar scenes in *The Road*, where the nameless father wakes up next to his son in a devastated world. The man's introduction in the novel is described as follows: "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him" (3). Another similar passage to the one in *Outer Dark* is: "They squatted in the road and ate cold rice and cold beans that they'd cooked days ago. Already beginning to ferment. No place to make a fire that would not be seen. They slept huddled together in the rank quilts in the dark and the cold. He held the boy close to him" (*The Road* 29). Granted, the behavior of both paternal figures toward their children is different. The man in *The Road* is careful and gentle, while the bearded one in *Outer Dark* is blunter. Although there will be more instances later on, we can see this first comparison between the two father characters as demonstrating how the man in *The Road* utilizes one of the "main characteristics of caring masculinities," that is, "rejecting domination" (J. Lee and S. Lee 49). Conversely, the bearded one, as we will see, remains closer to "traditional masculine norms, especially those that are synonymous with domination or violence" (49). In the case of *The Road*, McCarthy does show how gentle the boy's father is with his son, since he is just a

child, while, on the other hand, in *Outer Dark*, McCarthy seems to point out that a father becomes rougher when his “children” are older. In other words, tougher manners can be applied to raising and taking care of children as they grow into adults. These tougher manners are applied also in desperate situations, as can be seen in plenty of instances in *The Road*, when the father does not stand for ceremony when it comes to alerting the child of imminent danger.

The above comparison, although brief, is merely a sample of how *Outer Dark* and *The Road* can be contrasted. I contend that *Outer Dark*, in fact, has more similarities with *The Road* than initially meets the eye. Some of these similarities have to do with theme, events, and, to the matter at hand, fatherhood. *Outer Dark* serves as a first attempt by McCarthy to tackle the theme of fatherhood, introducing a series of attributes in the creation of both these father characters (i.e., Culla Holme and the bearded one) and their masculinity—attributes which can be analyzed from a masculine perspective and that McCarthy also makes use of in the creation of other father characters later in his career. On the one hand, McCarthy sometimes builds on previous constructions, offering new dimensions to the masculinity of the character(s). Other times, he criticizes or praises the characters’ masculinity. Either way, I believe that these various constructions of the father character culminate in McCarthy’s most perfected version of the character: the man in *The Road*. In other words, unlike *The Orchard Keeper* or *Suttree*—where, it must be noted, the theme of fatherhood is also addressed—, *Outer Dark* and *The Road* happen to have more thematic similarities and are richer in their comparison of fatherhood in the father characters (i.e., Culla, the bearded one, and the man, respectively).

Therefore, this chapter analyzes the two novels from this perspective and compares them with other fatherly portrayals that McCarthy wrote, chronologically speaking, between *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. The goal is to see what elements of these father characters are constituents of fatherhood and masculinity, and thus are understood by McCarthy as fundamental. Moreover, through the differences in father character portrayals, I aim to analyze

how McCarthy has evolved from a more traditional and rougher masculinity (more in the line of the hegemonic masculinity of the 1960s and 1970s) to an early twenty-first-century model of masculinity, concerning fatherhood, which is more nurturing and caring. In other words, if it is understood that “[o]verall, caring masculinities introduce relational and caregiving qualities to traditional masculine identities, yielding new meanings for men who adopt caring masculinities” (J. Lee and S. Lee 49), my main aim with the analysis of all of these father characters is to explore how McCarthy yields new meanings for his most perfected version of the father in *The Road*.

### 1.1. FATHERHOOD AND THE ABSENCE OF LANGUAGE

To begin, let us revisit the previously mentioned quote in which McCarthy describes the morning routine of the bearded one and his family in *Outer Dark*. In this passage, it is noticeable that the bearded one’s morning rituals are carried out in silence—“still with no word among them”—and their combat of the smoke without any sound: “Mute” (3). Later in the novel, the bearded one kills an old man by stabbing him in the stomach while Harman and the mute one observe “in consubstantial monstrosity, a grim triune that watched wordless, affable” (129). The absence of language is again a prominent characteristic of this family, especially in instances of violence. As can be seen from this depiction of the bearded one’s family, McCarthy already establishes a trend which he will continue to use throughout his career, that is, the portrayal of men “whose default means of communication is more often violent than verbal” (Brummer 9). Moreover, McCarthy’s use of the word “triune” imparts a religious connotation to the family, suggesting either “a demonic inversion of the Holy Trinity” (Evenson, “Embodying Violence” 141) or the Three Wise Men. As will be explored, McCarthy’s utilization of religious-associated terms often critiques the characters in question. It is essential to note that McCarthy’s interest in incorporating biblical parables, similes, allusions, etc., into

his works makes finding religious connotations in his texts a deliberate choice. As a matter of fact, Noble asserts that “McCarthy’s oeuvre represents the work of an author with a rich knowledge of the Bible and a fascination with its cultural influence, its literary qualities, and methods of interpreting it. He is interested in the Bible as a text with a particular history, weightiness, style, and influence in the West” (“The Bible” 98–99). The masculinity of male characters—including, of course, father figures—is among the various methods of interpreting biblical allusions in McCarthy’s work. As such, McCarthy’s interest in using the Bible and religious connotations is likewise evident in his exploration of fatherhood in the man and the boy in *The Road*.

In *Outer Dark*, Culla, like the bearded one, shows little interest in using language with his newborn. Culla does not speak to the child, not even when cleaning him after birth, or when he abandons him in the woods, or when they are reunited at novel’s end in the presence of the bearded one’s family. Culla discusses his son with Rinthy and the bearded one, but there is no direct verbal address from him to the child. Zuzana Buráková explains that the lack of language in McCarthy’s characters “means that the reader is denied the opportunity of making judgments about the characters and their motivations” (180). Jay Ellis notes that in the composition of his male characters, “McCarthy avoids direct psychology, and his characters live at the opposite end of the conscious-self-conscious spectrum from those characters of, for instance, Henry James” (86). While I understand Buráková and Ellis’s affirmations, the absence of language does not hinder the construction of male characters’ masculinity throughout McCarthy’s oeuvre.

As a matter of fact, absence of language is also a notable feature for the man in *The Road*, a feature that, according to the text, contributes to shaping a perfect childhood day for him. The narrator in *The Road* explains that when the man was a child, he used to spend time with his uncle, who would take him fishing on a rowboat. After describing what the uncle and

nephew did together on the boat on a lake, the narrator mentions that “[n]either of them had spoken a word. This was the perfect day of his childhood. This the day to shape the days upon” (McCarthy 13). The narration in *The Road* does not provide further information about the relationship between the man and his uncle. It is unclear whether their relationship was close, or if this uncle was a putative father for the man.<sup>29</sup> Independently of how close they were, it is evident from the narration that said day has been remembered fondly by the man, even in the absence of language, or perhaps because of it. The enjoyment of their time together, along with fishing—a masculine activity portrayed by some North American writers such as Ernest Hemingway<sup>30</sup>—, is enough of a bond for them. Concerning this scene, it has been argued that the man and his uncle “are working together in a common task; the uncle is sharing his knowledge with the man, and the man is learning from his uncle” (Wielenberg 12). Such teaching and learning offer them a connection and “the point of it all is love” (12). Thus, in *The Road*, McCarthy provides key pieces of information that are absent in *Outer Dark*, and help us understand how strong the infant-caretaker relationship can be—a relationship that Culla does not value much in relation to his child, making his son of little importance to him. Finally, Erik Wielenberg’s above statement can also be applied to the bearded one’s family and the aforementioned killing of the old man. As explained, the killing is perpetrated by the family in unison and in the absence of language. Therefore, drawing from Wielenberg’s analysis of the fishing passage in *The Road*, it can be argued that the bearded one shows a strong connection with his children in their communal act of killing, even if this connection and relationship are of a more primal and homicidal nature than the one in *The Road*.

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<sup>29</sup> McCarthy has explored the dynamics of uncle and nephew relationships in various works. In this dissertation, particular attention will be given to the portrayal of the relationship between Sheriff Bell and Uncle Ellis in *No Country for Old Men*.

<sup>30</sup> Armengol has delved into the significance of fishing and hunting in numerous works by Hemingway. Armengol elucidates that in Hemingway’s writings published during the 1920s and 1930s: “[H]unting and fishing tak[e] center stage as tests of manhood throughout many of these early fictions” (“Performing Manhood through Animal Killings?” 840).

Another plausible explanation for the profound personal meaning of the day for the man in *The Road*—even in the absence of oral language—may be found in psychological studies that indicate that “personal meaning begins in the infant-caregiver relation” (Chodorow 58).

This means that there can be

from the beginning nonverbal, preverbal, nonlinguistic, or prelinguistic aspects of meaning—aspects of meaning that go unambiguously and emphatically beyond language. Such a view again accords with our clinical experience that language and cognitions are always infused with emotion and unconscious fantasy. Analysts describe how this psychological infusing of perception and experience, created both from within and from the uniqueness of the caretaker-child matrix, arises well before language, so that language itself develops in and gains meaning from this idiosyncratic emotional and fantasy context. (58)

In *The Road*, given that the story commences in media res, the reader lacks detailed information about the boy’s early years. Consequently, Chodorow’s explanation of the psychological infusion of perception and experience preceding language is not provided by McCarthy in the case of the man and the boy, although it is inferred. Regarding the bearded one in *Outer Dark*, McCarthy adheres to his characteristic style by not offering extensive background information about him and the other two men. However, given that the mute one seems to suffer from some kind of mental impairment, his relationship with the father figure (i.e., the bearded one) echoes Chodorow’s notion of infusing perception and experience. In their case, this occurs in a violent and primitive sense. The violent and primitive nature of the relationship between the bearded one and his family—characters who have been qualified as “Neanderthal-type cannibals” (Carr 10)—stems from their nomadic lifestyle in the woods, where hunting, assumed to be a primary source of food, becomes a silent activity fostering family bonding. This is exemplified in the

silent slaughter and subsequent consumption of Culla's child by the mute one at the end of the novel.

Furthermore, Culla denies his child, as well as himself, any form of personal meaning in their relationship, since he "abandons his new-born son [to his death] in the forest" (Cant 47), and, later, to the whims of the bearded one. Considering all of this, it can be concluded that the paternal relationships portrayed in *Outer Dark* involving the lack of language are primal. As argued, these paternal relationships establish a kind of primitive and even animalistic connection between father and son. Conversely, *The Road* offers a much more humane, complex, and sentimental<sup>31</sup> portrayal of parenthood, even in the numerous cases where communication between the man and the boy is reduced to mere "okays," "yeses," and "I knows." This suggests that the connection between the man and boy often transcends their use of language, and they only need a few words to understand each other and discern their feelings.

Let us return now to Chodorow's aforementioned explanation of a psychological infusion of perception and experience. In contrast to what McCarthy presents in *Outer Dark*, *The Road* includes instances where the child cannot comprehend what his father is doing or saying. The man's actions on these occasions are related to a time before the cataclysmic event—that is, before the world the boy knows, perceives, and experiences came into being. In other words, the world in which the father grew up and modeled his masculinity is a bygone one the boy can only perceive through remaining artifacts, most of which he cannot fully comprehend. The post-cataclysm child, lacking access to the necessary resources such as toys, cannot learn about the world in the way an ordinary extradiegetic child would. The man reflects on this when he contemplates that "to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet

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<sup>31</sup> Regarding sentimentality in McCarthy's works, Ellis explicates that it "usually remains at the convincing level of buried sentiment" (86). Moreover, Ellis asserts that sentimentality manifests in the relation "between the son and the father (and this has been usually so deeply buried, yet so acrimonious, as to seem like anything but sentiment)" (86).

that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect” (McCarthy, *The Road* 153–54). Within the context of the postapocalyptic world of *The Road*, Woodson argues about the connection between the father’s world and the son’s. Woodson states, “The country surrounding the journey of the man and boy is filled with signifiers with no existing referents: the shopping cart without the goods to be purchased, the flute the man makes for the boy that has no meaning for him in a world without music, the library with swollen, unreadable books” (“McCarthy’s Heroes and the Will to Truth” 22). An illustrative example of Woodson’s conclusion and my appreciation that the boy cannot, at times, understand his father’s actions can be found when the man and the boy, in one of their searches for scraps and food, find a telephone. It is at this moment when the man “picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father’s house in that long ago” (McCarthy, *The Road* 7). Interestingly, the man dials his father’s phone number, attempting to reconnect with the paternal figure, perhaps seeking advice. What is even more interesting is that the man, aware that the phone would not work, still endeavors to use a communication device—and just like with his uncle in the fishing memory scene, silence is all he gets. The boy, not comprehending what his father is doing, simply asks him: “What are you doing?” (7). The father might feel nostalgic about the times when he used to fish in silence with his uncle or perhaps about the old times spent in that house. The man may decide to use his father’s phone as an attempt to remember his father through the silent void the phone provides, since, in *The Road*, language is not entirely necessary to create a strong bond between father and son.

As explored in this section of the chapter, the absence of language is a fundamental aspect in McCarthy’s construction of the masculinity of the father character, as observed in both *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. For some of the father characters and father figures explored in this section, the lack of language becomes a means to establish strong connections with other father figures or with their children. It seems that for the characters here explored, bonds

established through actions are often more potent than those formed through the use of language. Even Culla Holme, who ultimately rejects his child, leans toward actions rather than language. Nevertheless, the lack of language is merely one aspect McCarthy employs in constructing the masculinity of these father characters. In the following section, I will explore how McCarthy also utilizes dreams in relation to masculinity and father characters.

## 1.2. FATHERHOOD AND DREAMS

The use of dreams in relation to father characters in both *Outer Dark* and *The Road* can be seen as cautionary tales for the characters. These cautionary tales, as we will see, are interpreted by these father characters in various ways. To begin with, let us return now to the introduction of the bearded one and his family in *Outer Dark*, since it offers some interesting comparison as to how Culla is introduced in the novel. The narration informs the reader that the three men are walking “strung out in silhouette against the sun and then dropping under the crest of the hill into a fold of blue shadow with light touching them about the head in spurious sanctity until they had gone on for such a time as saw the sun down altogether and they moved in shadow altogether which suited them very well” (McCarthy 3). Conversely, Culla’s introduction is via a dream he has. Psychoanalysts have studied dreams because their study “provides another route into understanding cultural psyches” (Chodorow 181). In other words, the ideas, fears, tensions, etc., shared by a community can often appear in oneiric spaces. These dream situations and realities are not to be ignored, nor their research neglected. As will be seen later in this dissertation, McCarthy makes use of dreams to help explain and understand the masculinity of the characters as well as to offer, in the present case, some understanding of the characters’ role as fathers. McCarthy’s use of dreams, in this case for these father characters, hints at a way these characters have of dealing with their anxieties and fears, often related to both fatherhood and masculinity.

In the case of Culla, at the novel's start, Rinthy wakes him up because he is "hollerin" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 5) in the middle of the night. Culla's hollering is the result of a dream and, after he wakes up, the narration explains it. In his dream, a prophet is surrounded by a "delegation of human ruin who attended him with blind eyes upturned and puckered stumps and leprous sores" (5) gathered in the middle of a square. There is an eclipse during which "all these souls would be cured of their afflictions" (5). In these initial descriptions of the bearded one and Culla, it is interesting to note that the narration uses religious terminology to describe the light that surrounds the bearded one's family. Said light gives them the appearance of "spurious sanctity," in addition to the fact that Culla dreams of a prophet. Moreover, the bearded one's family enjoys being surrounded by shadows and Culla's dream has an eclipse casting shadows over the prophet and the followers, Culla included. In relation to McCarthy's use of religious symbolism, Noble explains that McCarthy has two "favorite themes," one of which is "our ability (or inability) to know the world, including the transcendent or spiritual" ("The Bible" 99). This symbolism used in *Outer Dark* is an instance of foreshadowing indicating that the father-character portrayals in the novel will be dark, not in accordance with stereotypes or more positive ones found, for instance, in *The Road*. In other words, the father characters in *Outer Dark* are aligned with traditional masculinities, whilst those in *The Road* are closer to caring masculinities.

On the other hand, the second of McCarthy's favorite themes listed by Noble has to do with "the way in which our interpretation of the world shapes us" ("The Bible" 99). The religious symbolism employed by McCarthy in *Outer Dark*—and most of his works, for that matter—, especially in relation to the characters of Culla and the bearded one's family, is to emphasize how apart these characters are from any form of sanctity or religiosity. The world of *Outer Dark*, as virtually any world in his oeuvre, may be initially crafted by McCarthy with religious connections and connotations in mind. However, these worlds turn into cautionary

tales that often warn about how the lack of religious beliefs as well as misinterpretations of religious tales can bring about dangerous characters—often male ones—as well as hell-like scenarios. It must be noted that in his frequent use of religious symbolism in his works, McCarthy more concretely utilizes Christian symbolism.<sup>32</sup> Besides the above explanation regarding McCarthy’s use of religious symbolism as a warning or cautionary tale, I believe McCarthy employs it too with a didactic purpose, which is used in a twofold manner. Firstly, to help those readers already acquainted with Christian religion terminology to understand his frequent allegorical intentions in the text. Secondly, to help those readers not familiarized with religious contents to follow both the story and McCarthy’s meaning via the symbolism employed. For instance, the sun in the Bible often serves as a metaphor for God, and also for His son, Jesus Christ—e.g., Eph. 5.14, John 8.12, Matt. 4.16, to mention just a few. Therefore, the fact that, in these introductions of the bearded one and Culla, the sun is either setting or being blocked in an eclipse (as we will see in the following paragraph) foreshadows the fate of Culla’s son, whose death can be seen as a sacrifice and his blood and flesh nurture the bearded one’s son (i.e., the mute one) in a Christlike fashion. Hence, if Jesus Christ dies in order to save humanity from sin, the death of the child frees Culla from his guilt and the sin of incest.

Continuing with Culla’s dream, we are told then that Culla:

was caught up among the supplicants and when they had been blessed and the sun begun to blacken he did push forward and hold up his hand and call out. Me, he cried. Can I be cured? The prophet looked down as if surprised to see him there amidst such pariahs. The sun paused. He said: Yes, I think perhaps you will

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<sup>32</sup> It has been argued that *Outer Dark* is framed “with a particular discourse from the Gospel of Matthew, and the novel explores that discourse by embodying it—which is precisely what parables do” (Noble, “The Bible” 105). Within this interpretation of the novel as a biblical parable, Noble explains that Culla and Rinthy “embody two different ways of responding to sin” (105), namely, through damnation (Culla) and through receiving grace (Rinthy).

be cured. Then the sun buckled and dark fell like a shout. (McCarthy, *Outer Dark*

5)

At this point in the novel, the reader has not yet been informed that Culla and Rinthy are, in fact, siblings, and that they are expecting a child. Hence, Culla's question to the dream's prophet—"Can I be cured?"—forces the reader to wonder what ailment harries Culla. What torments Culla is, in fact, no ailment, but the knowledge that Rinthy is pregnant with his child, combined with his impending paternity. Ann Fisher-Wirth suggests that Culla's despair in the dream is so "extreme" that he suffers "a change of ontological status between the incestuous coupling and his son's birth" (129). Therefore, in his despair, Culla implores "a Christ-figure" for a healing that is "spiritual," and stems "from the primal sin of incest" (Noble, "The Bible" 103). Culla knows that such healing can only be achieved through the death of his son. However, Culla cannot directly bring himself to do it, hence his decision to abandon the child to a slow death—either by hypothermia or by thirst—in the middle of the woods.

Jonathan Elmore and Rick Elmore argue that Culla's dream and his fear of his paternity being discovered are "often read as the motivating force of *Outer Dark*; this fear leads him to abandon his child and flee his home" (120). I concur with this reading; incest is not what troubles Culla nor Rinthy. One may wonder if Culla tried to dissuade Rinthy from having the baby when they first learned of her pregnancy. The narration does not provide an answer; we can only speculate about what Culla felt during the months Rinthy was pregnant. Culla should have had ample time to contemplate his impending paternity and the changes it would bring to their lives. It may be the case that Culla has been struggling and having nightmares for months, but there is also the possibility, as scholars argue, that the aforementioned nightmare is the last straw—a nightmare that triggers his actions for the rest of the novel. The dream concludes with the sun disappearing and not returning. It is stated that Culla then "grew fearful. Voices were being raised against him. He was caught up in the crowd and the stink of their rags filled his

nostrils. They grew seething and more mutinous and he tried to hide among them but they knew him even in that pit of hopeless dark and fell upon him with howls of outrage” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 6). The message Culla receives from the prophet’s words and the crowd’s actions is that his paternity is a disgrace to the community and something to be forbidden, hidden, and dealt with. The only way out, the only way of dealing with it Culla finds, is to leave the child for dead and to lie to Rinthy about it. Jonathan Elmore and Rick Elmore also argue that Culla’s encounter with the blind man at the end of the novel (a scene which will later be analyzed) helps to assure that “it was not Culla’s sin of incest that caused the preacher’s departure, as the crowd was ignorant of his ailment and the preacher was, in all likelihood, a false prophet” (120). Therefore, in relation to Culla’s dream, they conclude that Culla “is not to blame for the failure of the community to be cured, a fact that suggests his incest, the act that motivates the action of the novel and its seeming nihilism, was not the community destroying sin that it first appeared to be” (120). Whether Culla is to blame for the failure of the dream’s community to be cured or not, the truth for Culla is that it is his paternity which troubles him and which triggers his actions in the course of the novel, not the dream per se. The dream, in Culla’s psyche, is merely an oneiric representation of the terror he feels prior to the changes the child will bring about after his birth; that is, Culla’s entire world will collapse.

Similarly, the opening pages of *The Road* delve into the man’s experience of sleeping, dreaming, and waking up in a dark world. McCarthy’s description of how the days become “more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world” (3) echoes the eclipse in Culla’s dream. The man also experiences a dream from which he awakens. In this dream, the man envisions his child leading him “by the hand” (3) as they traverse a cave. Much like Culla’s dream, this vision is disturbing in its own right: the narration explains that the two are like “pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast” (McCarthy, *The Road* 3). The man and the boy

then wander until they encounter a room with a “black and ancient lake. And on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stares into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders” (3–4). They observe the creature and its translucent body; the creature gazes at them, moans, and eventually vanishes. No communication occurs between the man, the child, and the creature, so, unlike Culla’s dream, we cannot interpret this dream as a clear warning from the creature to the man, although the possibility cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, the atmosphere McCarthy describes in the man’s dream is not a pleasant one either.

In these two dreams, it seems that McCarthy is conveying the idea that fatherhood is something to be feared or, at the very least, approached with caution. Fatherhood in these dreams is depicted as a fear looming in dark settings, pressured by a community, and hidden in the depths. This fear manifests in various forms: that of a prophet offering some twisted hope of salvation from a fatherhood that does not conform to societal rules, and that of a monster serving as a potential looming warning for the father to be watchful and to protect his child, whom he must keep close at all times, lest the creatures of the deep take them. In the comparison between traditional masculinities and caring masculinities, the creature in the man’s dream can also represent how observant traditional masculinities are of newer ones, such as caring masculinities.

Furthermore, the man, in a way, appreciates having such a dream. A few pages later, the narration informs the reader that the man believes that “the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril” (McCarthy, *The Road* 18). For the man, the dream world must mirror the real world, and his dreams serve as a useful reminder of his duty as a father. In a way, virtually all the fatherhood-related dreams depicted in McCarthy’s oeuvre involve some form of peril surrounding the father or the father’s child. The man has pleasant dreams in which he was “walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky

was aching blue” (18). However, these dreams have the potential to become a trap for him as a parent and he has learnt to “[mistrust] all of that” and to “wake himself from just such siren worlds” (18). For the man, fatherhood in the world of *The Road* is a serious matter requiring the ultimate commitment—that is, facing the reality of the world in which they roam, instead of dwelling on past realities and utopias. Unrealistic imaginings are poisonous thoughts for the father, as they can negatively impact his role as a father and hinder his efforts to teach the boy about masculinity. In other words, if the man allows oneiric fantasies to take over, he risks losing touch with the reality of the world he and the boy traverse, thus endangering his child in the perils of the road. If not approached seriously and if one indulges in fantasizing about beautiful dream worlds, these dangers can be transformed into a “call of languor and of death” (18).

Dreams in *Outer Dark* and *The Road* also function to remind both Culla and the man of how they have failed the mothers of their respective sons, as well as the consequences their actions either will bring or have brought about. In *Outer Dark*, another instance associated with a dream occurs: in this case, Rinthy is sleeping whilst Culla observes her, and what he witnesses affects him deeply. The narration states that Rinthy “stirred heavily in her sleep, moaning” (McCarthy 27). By the description provided, it can be inferred that Rinthy is having a nightmare, perhaps a prophetic nightmare similar to the one Culla had concerning their incest. She might also be dreaming about Culla abandoning their child. Regardless of Rinthy’s dream’s content, the sight of her dreaming in such a distressing manner proves to be too much for Culla. The narration explains that when Culla “could stay no longer he went out again and walked on the road” (27). It is noteworthy that Culla, like the man in *The Road* after waking up, decides to walk away from the sight of his struggling sister in order to traverse a road—a sight that undoubtedly reminds him of the aforementioned initial prophetic dream and of his abandonment of their child. Moreover, the road Culla walks on is one that, much like the one

in *The Road*, will initially bring threats and eventually death. Culla grapples with Rinthy's oneiric suffering, and he does so up to a point where he "could not decide what to do. He sat on a stone by the side of the road and with a dead stick drew outlandish symbols in the dust" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 27). Culla's guilt overwhelms him at this point, and he resorts to isolation and drawing symbols that are foreign to him, symbolizing how his recent fatherhood is a new territory he is not comfortable exploring.

Furthermore, Culla's abandonment of his child is also linked to a dream passage. After returning to the cabin, making dinner for him and Rinthy, and going to sleep, Culla sees "again the birthstunned face, the swamp trees in a dark bower above the pale and naked flesh and the black blood seeping from the navel" (27). Culla's vision is of his child in the peril into which he has placed him—a helpless child lying in the middle of the woods waiting for either death or a miracle. This description of Culla's son and the impending death that awaits the child not only foreshadows his destiny in the novel, but also serves as a reminder of a scene, which will be later analyzed, in *The Road* that illustrates the nature of the perilous world into which children are born—a world where children become a source of food for cannibals.

Along with the previously mentioned dream, the man in *The Road* dreams about his wife. Similar to Culla and Rinthy at the beginning of *Outer Dark*, the mother in the man's dream "was sick and he [the man] cared for her" (McCarthy, *The Road* 32). The man feels that this dream carries "the look of sacrifice" (32) and thus reveals to him what he could have done to save her from dying alone. In other words, the dream shows him how he could have acted as a protector and caretaker. The man's oneiric fantasy is deceptive and represents one of the aforementioned siren worlds he fears so much. The man acknowledges that he failed his wife as a protector (as will be explored later) since he "did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark" (32). By recognizing this, the man exercises control over his dream fantasies—i.e., oneiric distractions that, if succumbed to, would make him lose track of the real

world and his duty as a father to his son. He keeps them at bay, understanding that “there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell” (32). In other words, there is no point in dreaming and caring about someone who is no longer with them, especially in a world full of dangers where he is needed by his son. Those dreams only serve him as a reminder of his failure as the man of the family, as a husband, and as the father who allowed his son to lose his mother.

Similar to Culla’s behavior toward the sleeping Rinty, the man in *The Road* also observes his son while he sleeps. On one occasion, the sight of the boy sleeping brings him to tears, a reaction aligning with the second characteristic of caring masculinities, as the man can be seen as a father who “emphasiz[es] affective, relational, emotional, and interdependent qualities of care” (J. Lee and S. Lee 49). Although the man is uncertain about what caused his reaction, he believes that it is “about beauty or about goodness. Things that he’d no longer any way to think about at all” (McCarthy, *The Road* 129–30). In contrast to the fear Culla feels when observing Rinty having a nightmare, the man’s thoughts and feelings when looking at his sleeping child are positive. Even in slumber, he sees in the boy the reason to continue, the justification for why fatherhood is worthwhile. The boy serves him as a reminder of all the good things in the world that were once present and are now lost, except that, in the man’s understanding, these things have found a haven in the child.

However, as argued before, the man has learnt never to surrender to either pleasant or unpleasant dreams, even if his son appears in them. In another dream, the man sees the boy “laid upon a coolingboard and woke in horror” (McCarthy, *The Road* 130). The man experiences this dream at a moment when he is “beginning to think that death [is] finally upon them and that they should find some place to hide where they would not be found” (129). This feeling of imminent death may trigger such a dream. However, the narration explains that what the man “could bear in the waking world he could not by night and he sat awake for fear the

dream would return” (130). The observation made by the narrative is interesting, though it may be an instance of unreliable narration because, if understood from the passage that what the man can bear in the waking world of *The Road* is the sight of his child dead, then said affirmation contrasts (as explored later) with the constant fear the man has of having to kill his child if the “bad guys” find and corner them. This hypothetical scenario is what the man fears the most. Therefore, another interpretation arises, one in which this dream must be related to masculinity. In this sense, even in his dreams, the man fears that his teachings of both carrying the fire and being the “good guys” may die with the boy. After all, every teaching is generally done with the expectation that the person receiving it will eventually pass it on to others, hopefully the next generation. Therefore, the man’s teachings regarding masculinity harbor the hope and the expectation that they will not die with his son.

Finally, the man has another dream at a point in the story when he and his son are spending a few days in the protection of a bunker they stumble upon. In the dream, the man is visited “by creatures of a kind he’d never seen before. They did not speak” (McCarthy, *The Road* 153). Once again, the lack of language is noticeable, even in oneiric worlds. The man has the feeling that these creatures are merely observing them. The narration states that the man tries to remember the dream but fails and thinks that the dream may be another warning, in this case, a warning about his incapability to “enkindle in the heart of the child what was ashes in his own” (154). As seen, the man struggles constantly, both in the waking world and the oneiric one, with the pressure of completing his duty as a father to instill a somewhat obsolete sense of masculinity in his son. This he does through the “good guys” and the carrying the fire philosophical tenets—that is, the “good guys” and the carriers of the fire are two principles on which the father’s belief of masculinity is based. The dreams serve as a reminder of the job he has to do. Moreover, the man points out that dreams are also useful, firstly, in teaching new life lessons, and, secondly, in serving as a warning about various dangers represented in oneiric

worlds. The man explains to his son: “When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant give up. I wont let you” (189). In other words, past and future utopian worlds are deceitful and can destroy the ideals of masculinity the man teaches and the boy learns. Derived from the man’s comment, one of these ideals is that masculinity needs to be tied to suffering. It is not that masculinity cannot ever be linked to a feeling of happiness, since the man uses the word “again,” implying that there are times in which one can be happy. However, in the case of *The Road*, constant happiness is unattainable because there is no real world where this is possible, only in the fantasy worlds of dreams. Thus, the man implies that masculinity is very down to earth, and since the world they inhabit contains a lot of suffering, the masculinity of the “good guys” and of the carriers of the fire has to be shaped accordingly. Furthermore, the man’s explanation can be extrapolated to other dreams in McCarthy’s novels which also explore the relationship between father and son and teachings of masculinity.

One of these dreams is used at the conclusion of *No Country for Old Men*—a novel published a year before *The Road*. As mentioned earlier, in one of the numerous soliloquies that divide *No Country for Old Men* into chapters, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, an agent of the law who retires at the novel’s conclusion, explains that he had two dreams featuring him and his father, Jack. Bell does not explain much about the first dream, but he does elaborate on the second. Bell explains that the dream felt like he and his father were “both back in older times and I [Bell] 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” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 309). The scenario depicted in Bell’s dream portrays another natural and potentially dangerous environment, one not so distant from the natural worlds depicted in both *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. Bell explains that he is riding alone until Jack “rode past me and kept on going. Never said nothin. He just rode on past” (309). Once again, the previously mentioned trademark

of silence, even in oneiric scenarios, between father and son is present too in *No Country for Old Men*. David Cremean considers that this dream is “heavily archetypal and highly mystical” (25). In the dream, Bell’s father is “carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 309). Bell explains that the fire allows him to see the horn and that it is “[a]bout the color of the moon” (309). Cant reads the horn as a phallic symbol which “stands in this case for life, continuity, and civilization” (51). Regardless of the symbolism, Bell finds comfort in the sight of his father illuminating the way with the fire and states that he “knew that he [Jack] 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” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 309). The symbolism of the father as the carrier of the fire used by McCarthy in Bell’s dream can be associated with masculinity and teachings regarding masculinity imparted by the father to the boy in *The Road*. In comparing *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, Marie-Reine Pugh has argued that it is “[n]ostalgia and memory” that lead Sheriff Bell and the man to “their final vision of carrying the fire: Bell realizes that the fire was given to him and that he must keep it safe, and the father realizes that, if he is to stay true to the ethic of carrying the fire, he must give it to his son” (48). As will be explored, I argue that the fire<sup>33</sup> in both cases, and in McCarthy’s works in general, can be interpreted as a symbol of masculinity worthy of being passed on from father to son because it symbolizes a marker of masculinity that endures and lights the way even in the direst scenarios and situations, or perhaps because of them. Thus, in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, the use McCarthy makes of a father carrying fire in a dream and the man’s principle of their having to carry the fire serve to bond the worlds of both novels’ “last vestiges of unconditional” (Johns-putra 530) paternal love. Moreover, Bell’s comforting sight of his father, Jack, in such a dark

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<sup>33</sup> Should the reader overlook an analysis of fire and the myth of Prometheus at this point, rest assured that such analysis will be conducted later in the dissertation.

and cold environment imbues in him a sense of protection and of trust. As long as his father is nearby, Bell feels protected. Fatherly protection, as explored in the next section, is in fact another masculine characteristic that McCarthy employs in his works. Finally, as is often the case in his oeuvre, McCarthy's utilization of these traits associated with masculinity, such as protection and trust, serves as a means of conveying criticism, as I will explore in the next subsection.

### 1.3. FATHERHOOD AND PROTECTION

The actions of Culla Holme in *Outer Dark* and the man in *The Road* after waking from the novels' introductory dreams exhibit some similarities. Both characters express concern for their safety, the well-being of their companions, and the environment surrounding them. In *The Road*, the man awakens, leaves the sleeping boy, and "walk[s] out to the road and squat[s] and studie[s] the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless" (McCarthy 4). Conversely, Culla, upon hearing the "tinker's shoddy carillon," rises and goes to the cabin's door "to see what new evil this might be" (*Outer Dark* 6). It is mentioned that Culla rapidly desires to "wave away whoever by chance or obscure purpose should visit so remote a place" (6). This behavior, seeking privacy and avoiding interaction with others, mirrors that of the man in *The Road* when encountering strangers on their journey. The man and the boy typically hide on such occasions, consistently preferring this approach over engaging in conversation with strangers. This cautious behavior is a recurring theme in *The Road*, the only exceptions, which are found dispersed throughout the novel, would be the cannibal who grabs the child (in the first third of the novel), the elderly blind man Ely (halfway through the story), and the thief who steals their things (in the third part)—the first and the third encounters are in fact forced upon the man and the boy. Cautious behavior is one of the fundamental lessons the man seeks to impart to the

boy. In the world of the novel, being cautious is portrayed as a crucial factor in determining whether one lives or dies.

The encounter with the cannibal in *The Road* is noteworthy for its resemblance to the reactions of both Culla and the man when faced with danger. In the case of the latter, we are told, “Something woke him. He turned on his side and lay listening. He raised his head slowly, the pistol in his hand. He looked down at the boy and when he looked back toward the road the first of them were already coming into view” (McCarthy 60). In both the scene of the tinker’s approach in *Outer Dark* and the appearance of the cannibals in *The Road*, caution is evident in the characters’ responses, albeit manifested in different ways due to the differing nature of the threats they face. Culla does not fear for his or Rinthy’s life with the approach of the tinker, while the man understands the threat the cannibals pose. On the one hand, Culla approaches the tinker with “wild arms like one fending back a curse” (*Outer Dark* 6) and warns him not to approach further due to a sickness, explaining it as an “[o]ld fevery chill of some kind,” and advising that it is “[b]est not to come round” (7). On the other hand, the man’s encounter with the stray cannibal is stealthier, as the cannibal stumbles upon their hiding place.

Despite these differences, the primary point of contrast lies in how they protect their paternity. Culla is resolute in concealing the fact that Rinthy is pregnant with his child. When she asks him to fetch a “midnight woman used to catch them babies,” Culla refuses, stating that “[s]he’d tell” (*Outer Dark* 10). From this dialogue, it is inferred that their incestuous relationship is not the issue or secret Culla fears others would reveal; instead, it is his being the father. Neither Culla nor Rinthy considers, at any point, lying about the child’s father. Perhaps, if pressed, they could argue that the infant’s father abandoned Rinthy, leaving Culla responsible for the care of both Rinthy and the child, ensuring that she would not be left alone. However, this scenario is never considered, perhaps because it would emasculate Culla, implying his failure to impregnate a woman. In society’s eyes, he would also be raising another man’s child.

That scenario would, for instance, align Culla with the protagonist of *Child of God*, Lester Ballard, in the sense that “the displaced and disrespected man is the anti-heroic protagonist” (Luce, “Ballard Rising in *Outer Dark*” 93). As Culla never chooses such an option, it can be concluded that both he and Rinthy are content with their incestuous relationship. The only problem, from Culla’s perspective, is that his becoming a father is the proof of an incestuous union, something society would disapprove of, even in the remote cabin where they reside. Therefore, to protect his relationship with Rinthy, Culla lies to her about the child, falsely claiming that the child has died, hoping that she will not inquire further. However, he fails.

Conversely, the man in *The Road* is driven to protect both his wife and the boy at all costs. Unlike Culla, the emphasis on protection holds greater significance for the man. It constitutes a self-imposed duty he regards as divine: “My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you” (McCarthy, *The Road* 77). McCarthy’s narrative does not explicitly confirm God’s participation in such an appointment. Nevertheless, the man perceives it as such. Alan Gibbs argues that the man’s declaration renders him a hypocrite, as his “self-appointed duty of care apparently involves defying the biblical commandment not to kill” (71). As previously mentioned, McCarthy often incorporates biblical and Christian references into his works. *The Road* is arguably the novel in which McCarthy most extensively infuses religious symbolism. It is essential to note that Christianity is inherently patriarchal, with God in the Old Testament described as the father of all creation. Hence, a patriarchal lineage is already established in the Bible and adopted by the man in *The Road*. Given this perspective, it is only logical that the man holds his role and duty as a father and protector in high esteem. Ergo, through the man’s expressions of protection toward his son, McCarthy, in *The Road*, appears to elevate fatherhood to a pivotal role hitherto largely absent in his works. McCarthy seems to contemplate the following question through his portrayal of the man: Can a father assume the role of the ultimate protector if he is unwilling,

even in the most desperate of circumstances, to harm those who threaten his children? McCarthy's answer is a resounding "no." Additionally, Gibbs argues that "the man's protective mission derives, according to his perspective, from the necessities of circumstance. He acts as he does based on what he perceives to be determining forces" (71). Gibbs concludes that the man's perception of his duty manifests as an "all-consuming protectiveness" (71). Consequently, the man's survival is solely dedicated to safeguarding his son, ensuring his well-being, and imparting as much as possible about the masculine principles of the "good guys," preparing him for a future without the man's presence.

Continuing the analysis of the characters as protectors, both Culla and the man exhibit masculine characteristics in their performances of the role of the protector that are reminiscent of traits identified by scholars studying heterosexual men and often involving violent behavior. In one such study, participants

discuss their sense of responsibility as the man in a relationship or family, to protect and defend their girlfriends/wives and children. They believe that if they were not to do so, they would not be fulfilling their role as the "man of the family." In these situations, the choice is again described as either to fight or to lose manhood. In addition, this expectation implies that their female partners require and/or appreciate this physical protection and that it confirms the men's masculinity in these women's eyes. (Dagirmanjian et al. 16–17)

While McCarthy includes some of the aforementioned traits (i.e., protectors and defenders) in Culla and the man, it is noteworthy that McCarthy never presents them as exemplars of the aforementioned role as the man of the family.

Similarly, McCarthy does not portray the community-appointed protector, Sheriff Bell, in *No Country for Old Men* as a competent one. In a conversation with Carla Jean, Bell explains, "The people of Terrell County hired me to look after em. That's my job. I get paid to be the

first one hurt. Killed, for that matter” (133). Notably, God did not appoint Sheriff Bell for this role. Unlike the man in *The Road*, Bell’s duty as the protector of his community is an earthly, man-made assignment, and he understands it as such. Perhaps due to the absence of a divine commandment, Bell fails to protect both Moss and Carla Jean, and is unable to stop Chigurh. The juxtaposition of McCarthy’s portrayal of Sheriff Bell, an agent of the law chosen by the community as the protector, with the character of the man in *The Road*, who believes God appointed him, is intriguing. Through Sheriff Bell’s failure, McCarthy seems to devalue the significance of community-appointed protectors in favor of those who perceive their duty as divine, such as the man. In other words, McCarthy suggests that socially and politically assigned duties, like being a sheriff, would never supersede those self-imposed by men, regardless of divine intervention. Throughout his career, the man in *The Road*, flawed as he may be, emerges as McCarthy’s most accomplished father-protector, while Culla in *Outer Dark* is arguably the least accomplished. Thus, there appears to be a transition in McCarthy’s literature toward a refinement of fatherhood, as argued above.

The understanding the man in *The Road* possesses regarding fatherly protection as a divine task is absent in Culla, even though Culla’s failure does not prevent him from acting as a protector in some instances. I have explored Culla’s jealousy of his and Rinthy’s privacy during the approach of the tinker. Additionally, we learn that Culla walks four miles to the store once a week to acquire “such few things as they needed. Cornmeal and coaloil. And candy for her” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 6). In this passage, we observe that, even in their precarious situation preceding Rinthy’s delivery, the Holmes do not require much. Having each other, a modest supply of food, candy for Rinthy, and an isolated cabin suffices for them.<sup>34</sup> However, Culla’s constant fear of his paternity being discovered is evident, for example, in his reluctance

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<sup>34</sup> The third chapter of this dissertation will offer an analysis of the relationship between Culla and Rinthy as a couple. Within this chapter, various instances of Culla’s tenderness toward Rinthy, such as the gesture of bringing her candy, will be explored.

to build a fire at night to warm the cabin. At times, both Culla and the man in *The Road* refuse to build a fire to protect their fatherhood, although their reasons for doing so differ significantly.

Let us now revisit the previously quoted passage concerning the “man of the family” and female perceptions of masculinity expressed by Faedra Backus Dagirmanjian and colleagues. It must be noted that this notion of the man of the family, together with how females perceive masculinity, is challenged in McCarthy’s oeuvre in general, and in *Outer Dark* and *The Road* in particular. Even if Rinthy and the mother in *The Road* initially felt protected and safe with Culla and the man, the birth of their children alters their perspective. The birth scene in *Outer Dark* is arguably one of the two instances in which Culla behaves somewhat like a protective father and partner. The narration explains that Culla returns to the cabin after a walk and finds Rinthy on the floor, initially believing her to be dead until Rinthy convulses and screams. Culla helps her back to the bed and witnesses that the baby’s

head had broken through in a pumping welter of blood. He knelt in the bed with one knee, holding her. With his own hand he brought it free, the scrawny body trailing the cord in anneloid writhing down the bloodslimed covers, a beetcolored creature that looked to him like a skinned squirrel. He pinched the mucus from its face with his fingers. (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 14)

Although Culla’s initial reaction is not that of a proud father observing his newborn, he does care enough about the baby to do what is necessary to help it breathe. The narration then explains:

When he picked it up it squalled. He took up the cord like a hank of strange yarn and severed it with the handless claspknife he carried and tied it off at both ends. A deep gloom had settled in the cabin. His arms were stained with gore to the elbows. He fetched down some towels of washsoftened sacking and wet one in

the waterbucket. He wiped the child and wrapped it in a dry towel. It had not stopped wailing. (14)

Notably, the narration uses the pronoun “it” to refer to the newborn, depriving the infant of gendered human qualities. This pronoun strategy conveys Culla’s detachment from his son, a detachment further solidified by the fact that the child remains nameless. Furthermore, Culla’s bloodstained arms and his washing the blood off his son resemble a passage in *The Road* after the man has killed the aforementioned cannibal, showing one of the few instances of tenderness Culla grants his child.

In *The Road*, the encounter with the cannibal concludes with the man shooting him in the head and rescuing the boy. Father and son flee, reaching a safe place with water where the man proceeds to wash the boy clean. He states, “I wash a dead man’s brains out of his hair. That is my job,” and the narration adds, “Then he wrapped him in the blanket and carried him to the fire” (McCarthy 74). These passages reveal the tenderness of both fathers toward their children, even if briefly expressed in Culla’s case. However, the sense of duty implied by the man’s parenthood appears to be absent in Culla. Culla tells Rinthy that their child is a “chap” and describes the baby as “puny” (*Outer Dark* 14), an observation with which Rinthy disagrees. Eventually, Culla takes the baby away and abandons him in “a stand of cottonwoods where the ground held moss” (16). He covers the baby with a towel and walks away “without looking back” (16). These two depictions of fatherhood and masculinity contrast in similar situations. Both the man and Culla understand the vulnerability of their children without them. The man is a protector whose sole motivation “is to keep his son alive” (Alter 123), while Culla denies his son in favor of what he believes is a life with Rinthy. In *The Road*, McCarthy corrects the absence of caring masculinity in *Outer Dark*.

In *The Road*, the brief appearance of the child’s mother has been labeled by scholars as “superfluous” (Åström 114) and the character as “a failed mother” (Stark 82). Berit Åström

argues that McCarthy portrays a mother who fails both in the traditional sense and as a “‘new’ mother. She is a non-entity with no relevance to the lives of her husband and son” (114). Cooper contends that the mother lacks pity and emotional connection to the boy because “she has been poisoned by the internal and external death of her world” (“Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative” 178). Analogous to his critique of fatherhood in his oeuvre, in *The Road*, McCarthy extends criticism to motherhood.

This critique of motherhood is evident in McCarthy’s portrayal of both the boy’s mother and other mother characters in *The Road*. For instance, a particularly distressing instance of failed motherhood—similar to Culla’s failed fatherhood—occurs when the man and the boy make camp and spot three men and a woman in the distance coming down the road. The man notes that the woman “was pregnant,” and the group eventually “crossed the bridge and continued on down the road and vanished one by one into the waiting darkness” (McCarthy, *The Road* 195). Later, the man and the boy discover smoke “rising out of the woods ahead” (196). Upon investigation, they smell “something cooking” (198). Eventually, they find the group gone, having left behind what has been cooking. The boy is terrified by the sight: “What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (198). The narration implies a case of paedophagy, categorized by scholars as “the most extreme and visceral opposite of parental care” (Johns-Putra 530). In *The Road*, it can be deduced that after giving birth, the mother—and possibly even the father—may have participated in, or at least allowed, the cannibalistic consumption of the newborn. It appears that in the world of *The Road*, motherhood and fatherhood are mortally dangerous to the child. The man in *The Road* and the family the boy finds after the passing of the man are the only exceptions the narration provides to parental kindness and care for children. With these characters, *The Road* seems to be making use of new concepts related to parenthood.

In relation to fatherhood and the role of the father as a protector, we can consider here a relatively new term that has emerged in scholarly dialogue in the early twenty-first century, a term McCarthy appears to incorporate in *The Road* through his depiction of the man's actions toward the boy. The concept of "the new father" has been associated with "[o]ne of the most important trends in family life in the last three decades" (Offer and Kaplan 987). This trend corresponds to the "increasing participation of men in the domestic sphere, especially childcare" (987). Moreover, the new father is presented as a masculine model, differing from traditional models of fatherhood predominant in Western cultures after World War II, which "embodies the most optimistic version of what is stated in modern discourses about the masculine change. This model presents a male who conserving the masculine authority can emotionally join his children, dedicate himself to them, and possesses all the abilities necessary for their attention" (Bonino Méndez, "Los varones hacia la paridad" 27; my trans.).<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the new father aims to distance himself from hegemonic models of masculinity and fatherhood and is characterized by active involvement in, among other things, the raising of and caring for children (Bacete 144). However, as others have argued, the new father "has not translated into gender equality, as women still provide most of the day-to-day care for families" (Randles 519). Therefore, this false sense of "egalitarian parenting" in relation to gender seems to be "fundamentally rooted in the devaluation of 'mothering' and care deemed feminine. This explains how a key aspect of gender inequality—the durability of gendered parenting arrangements—is reproduced despite a growing cultural emphasis on fathers' nurturance" (520). Regarding the concept of the new father and the mother character in *The Road*, Åström has stated that the new fatherhood the novel portrays is "predicated on the elision of mothers" (114). Therefore, in Åström's opinion, "McCarthy and his critics present a

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<sup>35</sup> "Otro modelo [camino masculino hacia el cambio] es el del *Nuevo Padre* que encarna lo más optimista que se enuncia en los discursos modernos sobre el cambio masculino. Este modelo presenta a un varón que conservando la autoridad masculina puede ligarse emocionalmente a sus hij@s, dedicarse a ell@s, poseyendo por ello todas las habilidades necesarias para su atención".

futuristic world in which the only parent who is needed is the father. The mother is thus effectively written out of the family” (114). While I understand Åström’s claim, I do not entirely concur with her statement since McCarthy grants some redemption to mother characters in *The Road* when the boy is found by a family at the end. As previously mentioned, the world depicted in *The Road* is particularly harsh and cruel to children. In these dire conditions, McCarthy appears to redefine the concept of a new mother through the character of this family’s mother, who is portrayed as a loving woman both to the boy and to her own children. Hannah Stark explains that this family’s mother “is positioned as a good mother not only for staying alive but also, the text explicitly tells us, for not eating her children” (82). Moreover, the family’s mother “provides immediate maternal care through enfolding [the boy] in her arms. She also talks to him about God, positioning her within the familiar trope of woman as bastion of moral order within the domestic sphere” (82). Furthermore, this mother understands how important the man’s teachings of masculinity have been to the boy and accepts and respects the need the boy has to talk to his dead father: “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. The woman said that was all right” (McCarthy, *The Road* 286). Allen Josephs considers this mother to be

a new and this time caring mother, the mother that does not exist for the long list of road warriors that inhabit all of McCarthy’s novels, the mother absent or defective in every single one of them, including most especially this one, and not just goodness but warm caring affectionate understanding maternal goodness—quite the opposite of the mother who abandoned the boy—the only such maternal goodness, all one short paragraph of it, in virtually all of McCarthy’s work. (140)

Whether the reader agrees with Josephs’s conclusion or not, I think the boy’s mother provides a very interesting insight into masculinity; more specifically, how little she needs the protection of the man, a topic I will delve into further in the following paragraphs.

Let us revisit the previously mentioned quote concerning the role of the man in the family and the female perception of masculinity, as expressed by Dagirmanjian and colleagues. The men interviewed in the study comprehend that their duty as heterosexual family leaders is to serve as protectors, fighters even. They acknowledge that any failure in this duty would result in the forfeiture of their manhood. Moreover, these men recognize that adopting such a mindset helps to affirm their masculinity in the eyes of their female partner. In *The Road*, during the last conversation between the man and the boy's mother, he extends a final offer in an attempt to dissuade her from leaving them and resorting to suicide: "I'll do anything" (McCarthy 56). She asks, "Such as what?" and adds, "You cant protect us. You say you would die for us but what good is that? I'd take him with me if it werent for you. You know I would. It's the right thing to do" (56). While the narrative does not explicitly state it, an argument can be made that the mother is experiencing depression. Experts explain that depression "[a]s an interpersonal condition, (...) influences how individuals interact with one another and the quality of personal relationships. Depressed parents may be emotionally unavailable and less interactive as parents because of common issues associated with depression, such as low self-esteem, hopelessness, and pessimism" (Shafer et al. 51). Nell Sullivan concludes that the mother is a "lethal mother" and that the man is the only one capable of protecting the boy ("The Good Guys" 91). As evident from the passage, the mother holds the belief that in the devastated world they inhabit, the role of a man as a protector is, in her view, futile. She refuses to accept the man's sacrifice to ensure their survival, deeming it insignificant as it would not guarantee them a prolonged life. In the mother's assessment, the impact of the man's offered sacrifice would only be temporary—thus rendering it inconsequential—because, as she explains, "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it. You'd rather wait for it

to happen” (McCarthy, *The Road* 56). The fear of succumbing to such a painful death is too much for her. She prefers to kill herself instead of seeing her son raped, butchered, and eaten.

Furthermore, the mother no longer perceives the man as the protector he once embodied, especially during the time when they still had three remaining bullets in the revolver. The presence of those three bullets signified to her the potential to spare themselves from a gruesome death when the inevitable moment arrived. In her perspective, the man’s adherence to the traditional male role, as outlined in the study by Dagirmanjian and colleagues, has faltered. She believes the man lacks the ultimate strength expected of a male protector, i.e., the strength to make the difficult decision of ending the lives of his loved ones for their own well-being, and then enduring a solitary existence, eventually succumbing to the agonizing physical and psychological hardships pervasive in the world depicted in *The Road*. In this grim context, the man’s demise might resemble that of the unfortunate individuals encountered by him and the boy in a basement, where captives await the gruesome fate of having their limbs severed and consumed by cannibals. Caradec contends that the mother’s perspective implies that she “situates her duty as a parent in the courage to take her own son’s life” (120). As a matter of fact, the man struggles throughout the novel with this idea in such a way that Åström has qualified it as an “agonized rejection of the idea” (120). The man, talking to himself, states:

Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesnt fire? It has to fire. What if it doesnt fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? Can there be? Hold him in your arms. Just so. The soul is quick. Pull him toward you. Kiss him. Quickly.  
(McCarthy, *The Road* 114)

A profound sense of distress permeates this passage. The man is haunted by the fear that the gun may fail to discharge—a somewhat illogical concern since the weapon functioned when

the man dispensed with the cannibal. Should the gun malfunction, the man would be compelled to end his son's life with his bare hands. The distinction between these two methods of killing is substantial; the firearm offers a quicker and potentially less painful demise, whereas using a blunt object like a rock may necessitate multiple strikes to the head for efficacy. Additionally, the man contemplates the implausibility of maintaining his role as a loving and protective father while harboring the internal, undiscovered "strength" required for the unthinkable task of taking his son's life if circumstances demand it.

In the end, the mother chooses what she considers to be a "new lover," i.e., death, who, in her estimation, can "give me [her] what you [the man] cannot" (McCarthy, *The Road* 57). It is crucial to acknowledge that, through her comment, the mother appears to challenge the man's masculinity, seeking outside the family household what her husband seemingly cannot provide. Consequently, her remark becomes an emasculating one for the man, as it implies a consideration of his perceived inadequacy in strength or manliness to undertake what she deems necessary. In this context, the mother may yearn for the man to embody a more "traditional masculinit[y] that endorse[s] emotional stoicisms" (J. Lee and S. Lee 49), rather than one more aligned with caring masculinities. In essence, the mother may desire the man's masculinity to conform more closely to patriarchal culture, one that, as hooks argues in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004), necessitates males to "deny, suppress, and if all goes well, shut down their emotional awareness and their capacity to feel" (41). However, the man finds himself unable to adhere to such expectations. For the mother, death represents liberation from the suffering and struggle of living in *The Road's* new world, as I have argued. In the novel's post-apocalyptic setting, parenting takes on a different meaning for her compared to the man. McCarthy portrays the man in alignment with the concept of "the new father" as mentioned earlier, a father who is "expected to be both physically and emotionally available and responsive to his children and to take responsibility for their well-being and welfare" (Offer

and Kaplan 988). In conclusion, parenting for the man does not entail the surrender to death the mother yearns for. The man's approach to parenting in *The Road* coincides with findings from certain studies on men and fatherhood: according to interviews conducted by experts, men in these studies "find meaning in fathering," and they do so to the extent that these men "chose to reject suicide and bravely face their situation, it was for their children and grandchildren—not their wives" (Apesoa-Varano et al. 167).<sup>36</sup> Much like the men in this study, the man in *The Road* opts to reject suicide and makes the choice to endure for the sake of his son. The man in *The Road* and the men in this study "are emphasizing fatherhood as a marker of their personal masculine status" (168). This parallel underscores the resonance of the novel's portrayal with real-world experiences and emphasizes the significance of the father-son relationship in the face of adversity.

In contrast to the mother, the man perceives fatherhood as a sacred duty ordained by the ultimate father—God—, a responsibility that must be upheld even in the absence of hope. This sacred interpretation of his role as a father enables the man to endure in a world devoid of expectations for humanity's survival and assists him in moments of self-doubt. Whether one views this duty as divine in nature or not, the man utilizes it to make sense of his masculinity as a father. In other words, the man contemplates: what would be the purpose of passing down the essence and significance of masculinity to future generations if masculinity and fatherhood were not divinely appointed? Moreover, the man actively undertakes the task of preserving fatherhood and masculinity through his teachings to his son throughout the novel. The man can be interpreted as embodying yet another type of father figure—the "mentor" or "teacher father." In this role, the father views his son "as a student or protégé, someone through whom various teachings symbolically facilitate the acquisition of masculinity" (Bonino Méndez, "The

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<sup>36</sup> Ester Carolina Apesoa-Varano and colleagues (2018) explain that their research involved interviews with seventy-seven men, all of whom were either fathers or grandfathers. These men were Latino or white non-Hispanic residents of the U.S., with an average age of 60 years.

New Fatherhoods” 174; my trans.).<sup>37</sup> As previously elucidated, the man’s teachings center on two fundamental yet crucial ideas of masculinity that the man aims to instill in the boy: that they are the “good guys” and that they are “carrying the fire.” The philosophy of the “good guys” underscores the humane nature found in some men within this post-apocalyptic scenario. Conversely, the “cannibalistic post-apocalyptic denizens in *The Road*” are used to put an “emphasis on the animal nature of humankind” (Link 154). Being the “good guys” not only signifies the rejection of cannibalism as a survival method on their journey, but also embodies the idea that, as the man explains, they “keep trying. They don’t give up” (McCarthy, *The Road* 137). The persisting effort of the “good guys” is directed toward maintaining their humanity; in other words, resisting the urge to succumb to animalistic behavior.

Two primary conclusions can be drawn from these passages. Firstly, concerning the language employed by the man, he consistently utilizes the pronoun “we” when referring to the “good guys” and their mission to “carry the fire.” As Chodorow elucidates, the “experiences of language” help to “create a global sense of we-ness or being together with the infant” (59). In this context, the use of the pronoun “we” can be interpreted as another manifestation of the caring masculinity exhibited by the man, since one of the characteristics of caring masculinity is the rejection of domination. If it is understood that “domination leads to inequality in a relationship, caring masculinities argues for an absence of domination to ensure the presence of equality” (J. Lee and S. Lee 49). Consequently, through the consistent use of the pronoun “we,” the man fosters a sense of inclusion for his son in a form of masculinity distinct from others practiced by characters traversing the same road.

By extension, the absence of the pronoun “we” in similar situations in *Outer Dark* suggests that Culla and the bearded one’s masculinities are not caring. They differ from the

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<sup>37</sup> “Padre maestro o mentor, sobre todo de su hijo, ya no lo ve como rival o heredero, sino como alumno o protegido, a quien por diferentes vías iniciáticas permite simbólicamente la adquisición de la masculinidad”.

nurturing masculinity advocated by the man in *The Road*. Other people who do not carry the fire cannot be “good guys” and cannot be like the man and the boy. Ergo, the cannibals in *The Road* or the boy’s mother after abandoning the family unity cannot be referred to using the pronoun “we.” According to the man’s perspective, once the mother chooses to succumb to death, she ceases to try, opting not to belong to the “good guys” anymore. The notion that one can carry the fire—i.e., embody masculine values and transmit them to their child—is not explored by McCarthy outside the realm of the man and the boy. Even when the boy poses the question to the stranger at the novel’s end, it is directed at a man, not a woman. In conclusion, McCarthy appears to primarily associate the concept of the “good guys” and the ideology of “carrying the fire” with an exclusively masculine domain in *The Road*.

In the context of *Outer Dark*, an argument could be posited that, to some extent, the bearded one resembles the man in *The Road*. This resemblance is noted in the bearded one’s usage of the pronoun “we” during his final confrontation with Culla. An illustration of the bearded one’s use of “we” when referring to himself and his “family” can be found in statements such as: “We ain’t hard to find” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 233), or when Culla inquires about the bearded one’s identity, the response is: “Now. We’ve heard that before, ain’t we?” (234). The similarity between the man in *The Road* and the bearded one in *Outer Dark* lies in their use of the pronoun “we,” suggesting a unity between the respective father figures and their “children.” Even though the pronoun “we” conveys a degree of concern from the bearded one toward his “family,” it is less indicative of the caring masculinity demonstrated by the man in *The Road*. Furthermore, the bearded one states that he “like[s] to keep a good fire. A man never knows what all might chance along” (232). It is important to note that the fire referred to by the bearded one is not the ethical fire whose preservation is essential to the “good guys” masculinity emphasized in the man’s teachings to the boy. Instead, the fire serves as a tangible source of warmth for his family during the cold night and lacks the deeper

philosophical associations of the man's "fire" tenet. Nevertheless, the bearded one's comment is interesting as, in an interpretation of fire as a symbol of masculinity, it acknowledges the influential role masculinity can play. This power is manifested in its ability to attract other men to the pursuit of essential needs, including protection.

Revisiting the use of the pronoun "we" and the principles of the "good guys" and "carriers of the fire" espoused by the man in *The Road*, a poignant moment unfolds at the novel's conclusion. After the man has passed away and the boy encounters the stranger, the boy's immediate query revolves around whether the stranger is carrying the fire. It is not surprising that the boy is quick to inquire about the fire, as it symbolizes the masculine bond shared with his father. In the world of *The Road*, fire, as Johns-Putra contends, represents one of the "last vestiges of unconditional (and, one must bear in mind, exclusive) parental love and the shelter it brings" (530). In response to the boy's inquiry, the stranger affirms, "Yeah. We are" (McCarthy, *The Road* 284). While the stranger's response appears to be more pragmatic, likely pertaining to their ability to start a fire, and lacks the philosophical depth attributed to "carrying the fire" by the man, it nonetheless brings contentment to the boy. Subsequently, the boy poses additional questions, and the stranger consistently responds using "we." The boy, satisfied with these answers, chooses to join the stranger and his family. It is precisely the stranger's utilization of "we" and the profound meaning the term holds for the boy that instills trust in this new family of "good guys." Furthermore, as posited, in the world depicted in *The Road*, "the good guys may be bereft of nation and profession, but they do have jobs—to love and protect children" (Sullivan, "The Good Guys" 98).

The second significant conclusion drawn from the man's teachings on masculinity is his association of the "good guys" and "carrying the fire" philosophical principles with survival and resilience in a world devoid of hope for a "normal" life, i.e., one that would resemble the pre-cataclysmic setting the man remembers. In *The Road*, the narration asserts that the world

will “not be made right again” (McCarthy 287). This grim reality serves as a testament to the man’s profound commitment to preserving fatherhood and masculinity. The question may arise as to why the man does not choose the easier and quicker path of taking the mother’s suicidal route, particularly considering his deteriorating health from what appears to be a pulmonary illness. This condition worsens throughout the narrative. In the novel’s conclusion, as the father lies dying, the boy seeks permission to commit suicide to avoid being left behind. Despite the boy’s pleas, the father adamantly denies his son’s request. The boy states: “I want to be with you” (278). The man’s refusal to permit the boy’s suicide can be succinctly explained as “the child was his warrant” (5). In this context, an obsolete meaning of the term “warrant,” referring to a protector or defender, clarifies that the boy must be safeguarded at all costs. The narration in *The Road* underscores that the boy must survive to perpetuate the philosophies of the “good guys” and the “carriers of the fire” imparted by his father. These teachings are absent in *Outer Dark*, where Culla and the bearded one fail to exhibit the level of fatherly commitment embraced by the man in *The Road*.

## **2. *Blood Meridian, Child of God, and All the Pretty Horses: Fathers Who Fail Their Children***

In preparation for the concluding section of my analysis focused on the three primary father characters in *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, it is imperative, as mentioned, to first examine alternative representations of fathers in McCarthy’s works. This exploration will shed light on the evolution of McCarthy’s portrayal of fathers across various characters, ultimately leading to what could be considered the closest approximation to a perfect father figure in McCarthy’s corpus—embodied by the man in *The Road*. Spanning three distinct centuries, McCarthy’s

literary narratives unfold in the nineteenth,<sup>38</sup> twentieth,<sup>39</sup> and twenty-first centuries.<sup>40</sup> This chronological traversal enables a comprehensive understanding of how McCarthy's conceptualization of fatherhood undergoes nuanced transformations over time.

## 2.1. THE ABSENT FATHER: THE KID'S FATHER

In a historical context, the nineteenth century holds significant importance for the United States. While my objective is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of this era, it is essential to elucidate the prevailing perspective on the role of fathers during this time, contributing to a deeper comprehension of McCarthy's portrayals of paternal figures. According to historian Anthony Rotundo, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the advent of industrialization and the necessity for middle-class men to work outside the home resulted in a shift where "fathers readily yielded their traditional role in shaping the character of their sons" (26). During this period, fathers primarily assumed the role of breadwinners and retained their position as the "head of the household," concurrently performing roles such as the "chief disciplinarian" and educator (26). Furthermore, the father "was expected to prepare his son in a practical sense for entry into the world" (26). McCarthy's representations of nineteenth-century fathers, however, deviate from this established historical norm.

In McCarthy's inaugural venture into the Western genre, the character known as the kid—arguably the central figure in *Blood Meridian*—experienced only a fleeting period of childhood with his father. Though the narrative provides scant information about the kid's father and their relationship, an analysis of these details becomes significant in elucidating

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<sup>38</sup> Even though the kid "is born in 1833" (Carson 25), most of the events portrayed in *Blood Meridian* take place in the decade of the 1840s. Ron McFarland states that the events narrated in *Outer Dark* "apparently take place during the nineteenth century, but just what part of that century is intended we never know" (450).

<sup>39</sup> This century is when we find McCarthy placing the bulk of his works with *Child of God*, *No Country for Old Men*, *Suttree*, *The Border Trilogy*, *The Gardener's Son*, *The Orchard Keeper*, *The Passenger*, *The Stonemason*, and *Stella Maris*.

<sup>40</sup> In this case, we find here *The Counselor* and *The Sunset Limited*. Even though it is not stated when *The Road* takes place, an argument can be made for the story taking place in the twenty-first century, based on the remnants of the pre-cataclysmic world described by the narration.

some of the kid's early choices in the novel. The narration of *Blood Meridian* begins by introducing the reader to the kid's ancestors, who "are known for hewers of wood and drawers of water" (McCarthy 3). A brief examination of these two professions proves insightful. Both roles necessitate physical strength and, given the mid-nineteenth-century setting of the novel, it is reasonable to infer that McCarthy is alluding to the kid's male ancestors, as women would likely have been excluded from such occupations. The mention of some being "drawers of water" is interesting, as it can be interpreted as another biblical reference, where water holds symbolic significance.<sup>41</sup> In Luke 22.10, Jesus Christ remarks: "And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in" (*The Bible*). McCarthy might be suggesting a divine dimension to the kid's ancestry or portraying them as figures worthy of followers, perhaps into uncharted territories in the North America of the novel's world. I would be inclined to the latter interpretation, which aligns with the critical view that *Blood Meridian* serves as McCarthy's way to "clearly undermine the celebratory mythic conceptions of westward expansion" (Frye, "*Blood Meridian* and the Poetics of Violence" 110). An illustrative example of this undermining lies in the professions of the kid's ancestors, which defy traditional heroic norms associated with businessmen or colonialists. McCarthy deliberately strips the kid's lineage of conventional heroism, presenting instead "provisional, incomplete, or even monstrously perverse versions of heroism" (Dudley, "McCarthy's Heroes" 177) through his characters. This subversion is also evident in the characterization of the kid's father, who diverges from the ancestral professions. The narration reveals, "in truth his father has been a schoolmaster"

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<sup>41</sup> Water serves as a metaphor for the law in Prov. 13.14, where it is stated, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." Additionally, it symbolizes knowledge in Prov. 16.22, expressing, "Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly." Jesus Christ, in John 4.14, draws a comparison between Himself and a fountain of water: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Numerous instances associate water with positive connotations. Nevertheless, water can also be linked with negative connotations, such as the wrath of God, as depicted in Ps. 88.16–18: "Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (*The Bible*).

(McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3). McCarthy employs a turn of phrase frequently used in the Bible when referring to the kid's father, i.e., in truth.<sup>42</sup> Its usage could be interpreted as a warning signaling a father ill-suited for the perilous and violent world depicted in *Blood Meridian*—a world embraced by the kid. The kid's father has another ostensibly masculine profession in the world of *Blood Meridian*, since teaching appears to be reserved for men.<sup>43</sup> It is plausible to assume that, as a professional educator and father, the kid's father would be adept at equipping his son to face the challenges of the world, aligning with the prevailing expectations of fathers during that era. Rotundo explains that, at the time, a father “was expected to prepare his son in a practical sense for entry into the world. A father, for instance, was in charge of his son's education” (26). However, the kid's father deviates from this expected paternal duty. The narrative remains silent on the reasons behind the father's apparent lack of interest in his son's education and upbringing—a behavior that perhaps aligns more closely with the character of Culla and his relationship with the “chap,” rather than with the kid's father. While *Blood Meridian* does not explicitly explore the father's motivations for his lack of interest, the narrative's omission of details regarding his choices invites readers to infer a connection between his disengagement and the circumstances surrounding the kid's mother.

The demise of the kid's mother emerges as a potential catalyst for the father's indifference and sheds light on his current state. The narrative explains about the father: “He lies in drink, he quotes from poets whose names are now lost. The boy crouches by the fire and

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<sup>42</sup> The term “truth” in the Bible is frequently linked to Jesus Christ, as is made evident in various passages. John 14.6, for instance, declares: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (*The Bible*). Considering McCarthy's frequent incorporation of biblical references in his works and his profound command of the English language, it becomes apparent that his choice of the word “truth” is not arbitrary. McCarthy, as a narrator, may adopt a preaching tone in the opening lines of the novel. This tone could be interpreted as a forewarning regarding the unfolding events in the narrative. Alternatively, it suggests that even from an educated individual—someone dedicated to imparting knowledge and truth to students—, a violent offspring can emerge.

<sup>43</sup> For a comprehensive examination of women serving as educators and teachers in nineteenth-century North America, a valuable resource is the insightful analysis provided by Keith Melder (1972). Melder explains that between 1830 and 1860, the educational reform movement advocated for women teachers, thus incorporating “thousands of young women who entered what was then a new profession, school teaching” (19). Their inclusion and efforts “made possible a comprehensive system of public schools” (19).

watches him” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3). Despite the father’s literacy, this skill offers little solace to his son, who, by contrast, “can neither read nor write” (3), skills often associated with having received a formal education. The kid’s father, a man who “lies in drunken stupor” (Cant 47), fails his son by neglecting him—a neglect which drives the kid “into the Western wilderness” (47). As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that the kid has not made any progress in what could be considered life education, as opposed to formal education, that is not predominantly centered around violence. By the novel’s conclusion, his intellectual growth remains stunted: “He had a bible that he’d found at the mining camps and he carried this book with him no word of which could he read. In his dark and frugal clothes some took him for a sort of preacher but he was no witness to them, neither of things at hand nor things to come, he least of any man” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 325). The ambiguity surrounding the reasons for carrying the Bible allows for speculation. On one hand, the narrative does not explicitly mention the kid’s father having any interest in the Bible. Therefore, it is revealing that the kid has the book with him, which does not connect him with his failed father-teacher but perhaps aligns more closely with some of Holden’s teachings. On the other hand, the kid carrying a Bible suggests that he may recognize its significance to others and wield it as a potential conversational bridge. The passage hints at a perception of the kid as a quasi-preacher, yet his preaching revolves not around spiritual matters, but, rather, the visceral violence he has witnessed and participated in. The Bible, in this context, may serve the kid as a poignant reminder of man’s inherent proclivity for violence and brutality—a theme further explored in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Finally, the kid’s father withholds crucial information from his son concerning the kid’s mother and siblings, creating a significant void in the kid’s understanding of his familial roots. The absence of details about his mother’s name, coupled with the revelation that the mother died during childbirth, contributes to the kid’s upbringing in ignorance of his own origins. The

narrative somberly notes that the kid “has a sister in this world that he will not see again” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3). If, as Rotundo explains, father-son relationships in the nineteenth century “presented a complex picture” in which the father “was the first man a boy knew, was the ultimate source of material comforts, made decisions that controlled a boy’s life, and was a boy’s predominant role model as a man” (27), then McCarthy’s portrayal of the kid’s father emerges as one of failure and, perhaps, even pain. The father’s descent into alcoholism, possibly triggered by the wife’s death, might have contributed to the daughter abandoning the household. Regardless, in McCarthy’s inaugural venture into the Western genre, he presents a negative rendition of the father character. The father’s failure manifests in the kid’s decision to leave both his father and the family home at the age of fourteen. Ultimately, the kid seeks answers on how to shape masculinity, turning to violence as, in his appreciation, the most optimal means of defining it. McCarthy, through this exploration, accentuates the profound impact of familial dynamics on the trajectory of the kid’s life and his ensuing journey into a world marked by brutality and self-discovery.

In the harsh world depicted in *Blood Meridian*, the apparent indifference of the kid’s father toward childrearing aligns with the bleak perspective later articulated by judge Holden. When questioned about the proper way to raise a child, the judge responds with a grim assertion that children, at a young age, “should be put in a pit with wild dogs. They should be set to puzzle out from their proper clues the one of three doors that does not harbor wild lions. They should be made to run naked in the desert until...” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 153).<sup>44</sup> Believing that the judge is not taking the question seriously, Tobin, interrupting Holden, states, “The question was put in all earnestness,” to which Holden responds, “And the answer” (153). Judge Holden’s response suggests a belief in a brutal initiation into the world as a means of shaping masculinity. This perspective resonates with the choices made by the kid’s father, who

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<sup>44</sup> As noted in the introduction, the ellipsis in the quoted text is retained from the original.

allows his son to leave the family home and navigate a world dominated by violent masculinities, echoing the survival-centric ethos depicted in *Blood Meridian*.

Finally, given *Blood Meridian*'s nineteenth-century setting, McCarthy's works set in the twentieth century offer additional perspectives on fatherhood. Rotundo's observation that, "the trend toward absence of the father grew" (27) as the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth century finds resonance in McCarthy's literary explorations. During this period of transition, childrearing manuals primarily targeted mothers, which implied not a decrease of the power of the father, but that "its form may have changed and begun to operate *in a less direct way*, via the authority of the mother" (Hearn, *Men in the Public Eye* 109). Armengol coincides with the observations of historians and states that in the mid-twentieth century "American literary texts, fathers tend to remain absent and distant figures as well" ("Where Are Fathers in American Literature?" 213). In relation to paternal absence, I want to explore two representations McCarthy provides of fathers in this shifting landscape. I intend to delve into the fathers of Lester Ballard in *Child of God* and John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses*, both situated in a period, the mid-twentieth century, characterized by evolving societal dynamics and changing paradigms of fatherhood.

## 2.2. THE SUICIDAL FATHER: LESTER BALLARD'S FATHER

To begin with, the portrayal of Lester Ballard's father in *Child of God* is scant, relegated to sporadic comments made by secondary characters, such as townspeople. Nevertheless, we can gauge his influence on Ballard in relation to his absence rather than his presence in the story.<sup>45</sup> Evenson notes that, in *Child of God*, the numerous instances where townspeople are interviewed "offer ample speculation for why Ballard is the way he is, without either they or

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<sup>45</sup> It must be noted that Ballard will be explored later in the dissertation in much more detail, since this section is only concerned with his father.

the book arriving at much of a conclusion” (“McCarthy and the Uses of Philosophy” 60). This tendency toward speculation extends to Ballard’s father. Evenson’s conclusion reflects a fundamental characteristic of McCarthy’s oeuvre: the deliberate absence of conclusive explanations for the characters’ actions and plot developments. McCarthy, it seems, is more interested in depicting the consequences arising from characters’ choices than in providing neatly tied resolutions. This echoes a recurring theme in McCarthy’s works, where he describes the characters’ actions without providing the reader with “the relief of resolution,” since it “is neither offered nor sought” (Jenkins 29). McCarthy eschews judgment of the characters’ actions; in the majority of the instances, these “descriptions tend to be minimalist: sparse, sterile, and empirical, focusing on the details of the action without passing any judgment on them” (Noble, “Narrative, Being, and the Dialogic Novel” 241). It seems that no moral stance is imposed by the author and there is room left for interpretation. McCarthy’s literature thus assumes the quality of a documentary on human, particularly male, behavior.

In McCarthy’s third novel, a type of father character emerges, a motif that had made earlier appearances in his works but takes on a different dimension. As discussed earlier in this chapter, McCarthy’s debut novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, features a deceased father and a narrative of revenge. Similarly, *Child of God* also introduces a deceased father, but in this instance, the father’s demise does not stem from a violent confrontation culminating in murder. McCarthy, in this brief exploration, introduces another facet of paternal absence: that caused by suicide. This nuanced portrayal of fatherly death adds depth to McCarthy’s exploration of fatherhood, delving into the complexities of familial relationships and the diverse ways in which fathers meet their end in his literary landscapes.

Lester Ballard’s childhood, akin to that of the kid in *Blood Meridian*, is marked by a lack of parental presence, contributing to a common trope in “most of McCarthy’s protagonists,” and that is “not only [that they are] orphaned, but [they] also remain desperately

unformed, incapable of anything beyond a child-like level of moral development” (Dudley, “McCarthy’s Heroes” 181). In the initial chapter of *Child of God*, it is revealed that Ballard’s mother abandoned him and his father, running away from the family home without disclosing her destination or the identity of her companion: “I don’t know where to nor who with” (McCarthy 22). The townspeople’s commentary implies a deterioration in the relationship between Ballard’s parents, suggesting that the mother’s departure may have stemmed from a romantic involvement with another man, prompting her to choose elopement over staying with her family. This familial rupture could have been a devastating blow to Ballard’s father and a betrayal of the marital bond. Moreover, the mother’s departure, especially if associated with romantic involvement elsewhere, might have been deeply emasculating for Ballard’s father, invoking feelings of inadequacy and shame. Ballard’s father may have felt that he was not man enough for his wife, and she preferred another man who would satisfy her more than her husband. It is plausible to argue that this complex mix of emotional turmoil and perceived failure led Ballard’s father to take his own life and, therefore, “leaving his young son bereft of emotional and material patrimony” (Cant 47). Offering insights into the community’s perception of this tragedy, the aftermath of the suicide of Ballard’s father is explained by the townspeople in the following way:

Me and Cecil Edwards was the ones cut him down. He come in the store and told it like you’d tell it was rainin out. We went up there and walked in the barn and I see his feet hangin. We just cut him down, let him fall in the floor. Just like cutting down meat. He stood there and watched, never said nothin. He was about nine or ten year old at the time. The old man’s eyes was run out on stems like a crawfish and his tongue blacker’n a chow dog’s. I wisht if a man wanted to hang hissself he’d do it with poison or somethin so folks wouldn’t have to see such a thing as that. (McCarthy, *Child of God* 22)

In this passage, McCarthy provides an initial glimpse into Ballard's seemingly emotionless demeanor, particularly in response to the discovery of his father's lifeless body suspended by a rope, a stark and blunt image conveyed through McCarthy's narration. Ballard's coldness, or detachment, becomes a recurring trait throughout the novel, manifested in various instances, as will be further explored. The way Ballard discusses his father's death in a nonchalant manner in the quotation above, akin to casually remarking about the weather, underscores this emotional numbness. Also, upon finding his father's corpse, Ballard remains motionless as others cut down the lifeless body. While shock might explain this initial reaction, it appears unusual for a young child not to display any visible signs of distress, especially considering the impact of the gruesome scene on the character narrating the episode. However, Ballard's lack of tears and apparent emotional coldness do not necessarily imply a lack of love for his father. In fact, the narrator explicitly states that Ballard "never was right after his daddy killed himself" (22). The multifaceted exploration of Ballard's reaction to his father's death becomes a lens through which McCarthy engages with broader societal discussions on fatherhood and its implications. Kimmel has pointed out that the "question of men's responsibility also surfaces in the debates about fatherlessness" (*The Gendered Society* 155). Kimmel explains that academics and sociologists, "commentators" as he terms them, "have noticed that fathers are not around, having left their children either through divorce or cavalier indifference" (155), or in the case of Ballard's father, through suicide. Furthermore, Kimmel explains that scholarly works

such as David Blankenhorn's *Fatherless America* or David Popenoe's *Life Without Father* have blamed absent fathers for causing myriad social problems, ranging from juvenile and delinquency to crime and violence to unemployment. We read, for example, that 70 percent of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. This bodes especially ill for young boys, because

without a father, we are told, these young boys will grow up without a secure foundation in manhood. (155)

Moreover, Kimmel explains that psychologists such as Frank Pittman, linguists such as Robert Bly,<sup>46</sup> or family researchers such as David Popenoe highlight the potential risks associated with young boys growing up without a father or father figure.<sup>47</sup> These risks extend to concerns about fatherless boys being more prone to criminal behavior, and these experts<sup>48</sup> argue that the presence of a mother alone may not suffice the boy's upbringing; a male figure for bonding is deemed crucial. Kimmel goes on to explain that the absence of a father in a young boy's life "has consequences for both the fathers and the boys, creating in one moment two sets of unattached and unconstrained males roaming around the streets" (155). These scholarly conclusions resonate with the portrayal of Ballard's masculinity and behavior in the novel. Unfortunately, *Child of God* does not provide additional details to probe more deeply into the dynamics of the relationship between Ballard and his father. The destruction of Ballard's family, especially his father's suicide, appears to be a profound tragedy that leaves lasting scars on Ballard, shaping his personality and behavior throughout his life. This traumatic event, in

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Bly is a controversial poet, translator, activist, and a prominent figure in the mythopoetic men's movement, which gained momentum during the 1980s and 1990s. Bly's most famous and controversial work is *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1992). The mythopoetic men's movement presented "the paradox of some of society's seemingly most powerful members' complaining about their victimage" (E. Mechling and J. Mechling 97). The movement was also seen by feminist critics "as something more sinister, as part of the backlash against women, their social movements, and their putative accomplishments" (97). However, Elizabeth Mechling and Jay Mechling argue that these visions misread the movement and claim that the movement was "the latest in a line of 'New Class social movements' arising since World War II" (98). Furthermore, they explain that "[t]his relatively privileged 'knowledge class' paradoxically has felt the need to form social movements aimed at revitalizing the culture they inhabit, changing some fundamental values in the very social order that is the source of their privilege" (98). In relation to Bly's *Iron John*, the mythopoetic men's movement, and Cormac McCarthy, Sullivan argues that "McCarthy may not have read these popular texts, but he is certainly familiar with their arguments, particularly the complaint about the raw deal fathers received in the twentieth-century United States" ("The Good Guys" 82).

<sup>47</sup> Studies conducted in the twenty-first century exploring the negative impact of father absence on youth behavior are abundant. For instance: Rebellon (2002); McLanahan and colleagues (2013); and TenEyck and colleagues (2023). It is important to note that there is no consensus among scholars regarding the specific effects of father absence.

<sup>48</sup> The reader should recognize that the experts mentioned above were disseminating their ideas concurrently with McCarthy publishing many of his works at the end of the twentieth century. Consequently, while some of the concepts proposed by these experts may be considered outdated, it is crucial to acknowledge them. These ideas could have potentially influenced McCarthy's writing and portrayal of father characters, albeit indirectly.

hindsight, may be seen as the catalyst for the emergence of a psychopathic personality, ultimately developing into more sinister and murderous behaviors as Ballard matures into a young man. A comprehensive exploration of the character of Lester Ballard will be undertaken in the third chapter of this dissertation, shedding further light on his masculinity.

In summary, the father-son relationships depicted in *Blood Meridian* and *Child of God* come to an end when the boys are still very young and immature, precisely at a critical stage when the presence of a solid masculine model is traditionally considered crucial for shaping a boy's masculinity. What the kid and Ballard share in terms of their masculinity is the eventual choice of a life marked by violence—whether by engaging in terrible violent acts (the kid inhabits a territory in a perpetual state of conflict) or by committing merciless killings (as seen in Ballard's case). Aligning with conclusions drawn by experts about the challenges faced by boys raised without fathers, McCarthy seems to convey through these characters that in the absence of a father figure, a boy can easily lose his way. Moreover, within McCarthy's narrative worlds, it appears that a coping mechanism for dealing with the absence of a father and constructing a masculine identity is through violence. This commonality between the kid and Ballard is evident when the narrative states about the kid that “in him broods already a taste for mindless violence” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 3). The townspeople's observation in *Child of God*, asserting that Ballard was not the same after the death of his father, suggests that the kid's taste for mindless violence might also lie dormant in Ballard at the start of the novel. It can be concluded that McCarthy implies that, in his fictional worlds, the absence of a father figure for boys like these “leads to an insecure male identity, which in turn leads to poor adjustment” (Pleck 88) and “deviant behavior” (P. Amato 1032). It is not a far-fetched statement, since scholars have identified—even in the first two decades of the twenty-first century—existing evidence pointing at father absence, compounded with other circumstances, still being associated with problem behaviors, delinquency, and aggression (Boothroyd and

Cross 4; Flouri and Buchanan 64–65), a pattern evident in both the kid and Ballard. McCarthy’s exploration of the impact of fatherlessness on these characters serves as a reflection on broader societal concerns surrounding the role of fathers in shaping the trajectories of their sons’ lives.

### 2.3. THE BROKEN FATHER: JOHN GRADY COLE’S FATHER

In Cormac McCarthy’s literary canon, *All the Pretty Horses* is the first novel to provide a detailed albeit concise depiction of a father-son relationship. Despite John Grady Cole being arguably the protagonist not only of this novel but also of the Border Trilogy’s third installment, *Cities of the Plain*, McCarthy devotes the initial pages of *All the Pretty Horses* to illustrate the dynamics within John Grady Cole’s family, with particular emphasis on his relationship with his father.

In the opening pages of the novel, the narrative gradually reveals the disintegration of John Grady’s family. It commences with the death of his maternal grandfather, making him the “first man to die” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 6) in the family house since its construction in 1872. Moreover, the grandfather “was the oldest of eight boys and the only one to live past the age of twenty-five” (7). The narrative explains that the grandfather’s brothers “were drowned, shot, kicked by horses. They perished in fires. They seemed to fear only dying in bed” (7). John Grady’s ancestors, as portrayed, lived and died in a perilous world, epitomizing qualities of traditional manliness—tough, fearless, and resilient. At the funeral, John Grady, when approaching his grandfather’s corpse, notices an unsettling detail about the man’s remains and comments, “You never combed your hair that way in your life” (3). Meg King suggests that in *All the Pretty Horses*, “McCarthy imagines that the cowboy must forcefully resist that which would obliterate him and his way of life” (74). John Grady’s remark about his grandfather’s hair reflects this resistance to changes in cowboy masculinity. It is a comment that encapsulates the idea that a dead man is unrecognizable due to a seemingly inconsequential

alteration in his appearance. John Grady perceives that the way his grandfather's hair has been combed for the funeral does not align with the man's usual style or the customary grooming of a cowboy. This observation implies that the chosen hairstyle is not characteristic of a cowboy's masculinity—a daring and robust individual who has endured and triumphed over adversity. It contrasts with what John Grady envisions as more typical of men from urban business settings or those he deems more effeminate, further emphasizing the clash between the enduring cowboy identity and external influences attempting to reshape it.<sup>49</sup>

To continue, we have the case of John Grady's father, who, once again, remains nameless in the story. Akin to the man in *The Road*, the narration states that the physique of John Grady's father resembles “a sheetiron bear in a shooting-gallery only slower, thinner, more agonized” (15) and is later described as being “[s]o thin and frail, lost in his clothes” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 23). Moreover, much like the man in *The Road*, John Grady's father appears to be afflicted by a pulmonary illness, and from the outset, the fate of both father characters seems predetermined. During their final horseback ride together, John Grady and his father share a significant silence (23), mirroring the taciturn nature observed in McCarthy's father-son relationship depictions already considered. Interestingly, within the novel, silence is respected and acknowledged by secondary characters, exemplified by a driver who praises John Grady, stating that not talking much is “a good trait to have” (19). The silence exhibited by the father characters in *All the Pretty Horses*, *Outer Dark*, and *The Road* aligns with a recurrent masculinity trait often associated with the Western genre—the strong silent type. In Westerns, this archetype is typically portrayed as a “man of few words who speaks with his fists and

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<sup>49</sup> Arguably the most famous short story by Annie Proulx, “Brokeback Mountain,” was published in the print edition of *The New Yorker* on October 6, 1997, and was later adapted into a motion picture directed by Ang Lee in 2005. Proulx's short story deals with changing dynamics in cowboy masculinity as the narrative follows two young cowboys, Jack Twist and Ennis del Mar, who, after spending a summer herding sheep on Brokeback Mountain, begin a romantic relationship that spans two decades. It is notable that McCarthy's and Proulx's respective stories, published five years apart, both question a somewhat monolithic cowboy identity. Proulx's short story can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/10/13/brokeback-mountain>

guns,” as a “strong armed man who keeps his thoughts and feelings largely to himself,” and as someone who exercises “emotional self-control, with the assumption that the male in fact has nothing he needs to contain” (Sharrett 166). While the portrayals of John Grady’s father, Culla Holme, the bearded one, and the man in *The Road* all resemble some characteristics of the strong silent type, McCarthy deviates from some of these qualities. For instance, of all these characters, the bearded one best aligns with the strong silent type, as he fits the standards of violence expected from the character type and controls and hides his emotions. Culla Holme, though lacking the level of violence exercised by the bearded one, as will later be further explored, also shows some emotional self-control in relation to “the chap.” Conversely, as stated, the man in *The Road* and John Grady’s father are portrayed as men lacking a strong physique. Although they are no strangers to violence, John Grady’s father is never shown as a violent or armed man, and the man in *The Road* employs violence solely in the most extreme situations. Additionally, neither of these two characters shies away from sharing their feelings and have brief conversations with their children that deal with their emotions and feelings. As argued, this recurring theme of silence underscores the complexity of the father-son dynamic in McCarthy’s works, suggesting an unspoken understanding that transcends verbal exchanges.

In contrast to characters like Culla Holme, the bearded one, Lester Ballard’s father, and the kid’s father—individuals found in novels preceding *All the Pretty Horses*—, John Grady’s father possesses a military background. The narration provides just enough details to convey that the father is a war veteran, evidenced by his possession of a Third Infantry Zippo lighter and his mentioning of being in Goshee—referenced in the novel to be a World War II POW camp.<sup>50</sup> His wartime experiences during World War II have left an indelible mark on him. In a

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<sup>50</sup> McFarland has observed an error made by McCarthy regarding the father’s lighter. McFarland states that the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which is assumed to be the father’s unit, “was never deployed to the Pacific, but served with distinction throughout Europe in WW2” (435). Moreover, McFarland locates the POW camp in Japan (436). Nevertheless, McCarthy’s historical imprecision does not negate the meanings associated with the father’s military formation and its practice in the World War II theater of war.

poignant conversation with his son, the father states that the last verbal exchange he had with John Grady's mother "was in San Diego California in nineteen forty-two" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 12). This reference to their last conversation is made in a metaphorical sense, as we can infer that John Grady's parents had more conversations after the war, particularly during the time they spent together at the ranch between his return and her departure for good. Thus, this comment signifies the transformative impact of the war on the father: "It aint her fault. I aint the same I was. I'd like to think I am. But I aint" (12). John Grady attempts to console his father by asserting that he remains the same man he used to be: "You are inside. Inside you are" (12). This poignant moment reflects a crucial lesson passed down from John Grady's grandfather which he finds his father ought not to forget: "He never give up," John Grady affirms about his grandfather, adding: "He was the one told me not to" (12-13). John Grady's words of encouragement aim to remind his father that he still serves as a worthy model of masculinity for his son, challenging internal struggles brought on by the war. The mother, however, seems less optimistic. From the father and son's conversations, John Wegner concludes that John Grady's father "returns from war a broken dying man" (53). It must be noted that war has—until relatively recently—often been seen as an activity and a context traditionally masculine. War, as will be explored further in the next chapter of this doctoral dissertation, was often used by men to measure a man's worth and masculinity. However, through the portrayal of John Grady's father as a war veteran incapable of resuming his prewar life and, by extension, his manhood and worth as a man, McCarthy unveils the devastating impact of war on a man's ability to function back in civilian society and uphold traditional notions of masculinity.

Moreover, the narrative reveals that John Grady's father possesses firsthand experience in the life of a cowboy, having tended to his in-law's family ranch. These details offered by the narrative serve to illuminate the father's aspirations of embodying the quintessential American

cowboy—an archetype associated with the highest echelons of masculinity in rural America. Spurgeon notes that the cowboy figure “personifies America’s most cherished myths—combining ideas of American exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, rugged individualism, frontier democracy, communion with and conquest of the natural world, and the righteous triumph of the white race” (“Pledged in Blood” 25). However, in the world of the novel, these myths Spurgeon associates with the cowboy eventually lead to an ideal of masculinity which is embodied by white men who fail “to achieve conventional manliness, associated with physical labor and dominance over women” (King 74). The father’s familiarity with and immersion in the cowboy lifestyle suggests a conscious pursuit of this idealized masculinity. Spurgeon’s observation that the figure of the cowboy symbolizes the triumph of the white race aligns with the father’s admiration for his father-in-law, given that the father confesses to John Grady that he “thought the world of that old man” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 12). Thus, it is plausible to think that the father molded his concept of cowboy masculinity based on the example set by his father-in-law. This ideal of masculinity is what John Grady has seen in and learned from both his grandfather and father, even if these men do not embody it anymore and have been defeated by the changing times.

Later in the novel, John Grady comes to the realization that “the father he knew was all the father he would ever know” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 204). In other words, for John Grady, his father will always be the soldier who fought in World War II, the cowboy who worked the family ranch, and the man who instilled masculine values in him. As Arnold contends, John Grady’s father and grandfather “have imparted to the boy a way of living, an attitude toward the world, which sustains him in the trials he undergoes” (50). These trials Arnold mentions unfold at a hacienda in Mexico, where John Grady travels in search of a type of masculinity he perceives as no longer attainable in the United States. Brummer concludes that the masculinity represented by John Grady’s father and grandfather is an “archaic” one

and “is John Grady’s true inheritance; his grandfather’s passing and funeral (the novel’s opening scenes) also signal the passing of the ranch and, as will become apparent, an entire way of life” (47). This archaic masculinity is grounded in the understanding that the American cowboy had no place in the post-World War II America of “industrialization and feminist social changes” (Benson xviii).<sup>51</sup> The feminist social change Benson mentions is symbolized by McCarthy through the character of the mother, who becomes the final element in the destruction of John Grady’s family.

Even though I will analyze the relationship between John Grady’s parents further in the third chapter of this doctoral dissertation, I consider it necessary to offer a brief analysis of the mother character in relation to her son. In the aforementioned conversation between John Grady and his father, the boy informs his father that the mother has moved to San Antonio. The father acknowledges this fact and his son asks, “What do you aim to do?” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 8). The father responds, “She can go where she wants to” (8). Later, in another conversation between John Grady and the father about the mother, the former asks the latter: “What do you think I should do?” (12). The father states that there is not much he can do, and John Grady begs him to talk to his mother. The father responds, “I caint talk to her” (12). Contrary to the father and mother in *The Road*, John Grady’s father never attempts to prevent the mother from pursuing her aspirations because, as has been stated, he feels that he is not the man he used to be and, as such, he understands that she does not need to stay with him, a lesser man than the one she married. As argued, in *The Road*, the mother leaves because she does not feel her husband can protect them anymore. In *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady’s

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<sup>51</sup> While this chapter focuses on father characters, and John Grady is not a subject of study in this dissertation because he is a teenager, Benson’s conclusion regarding the masculinity portrayed by McCarthy in *All the Pretty Horses* is interesting. Benson states: “In Mexico, [John Grady Cole] initially finds a country less developed and consequently less threatening to his manhood. Eventually, he and Rawlins experience a culture of deadly Mexican hypermasculinity that dwarfs their own. John Grady fails to actualize his cowboy fantasy but proves heroic in exposing the danger and destructiveness of the fantasy. He abolishes viable notions of the modern cowboy as a positive figure and thereby erases himself. Like the disappearing figure of the mythic cowboy, at the end of the novel he vanishes into the countryside a failure. But unlike the mythical boy, he assumes the role of heroic failure because his narrative contributes to the relinquishment of a destructive male myth” (xviii).

mother leaves because the kind of man John Grady's father is now is not what she expects in a man. John Grady's mother, unlike the mother in *The Road*, is not leaving them in order to die, but to pursue her dream of becoming an actress. Thus, John Grady's mother leaves behind, after the passing of her father and the subsequent sale of the family ranch, any type of connection with the cowboy masculinity she has always known in order to make a living in the big city and to pursue a dream career which offers her liberty.

Additionally, in his inability to fully comprehend his mother's motivations, John Grady recurs to legal counsel about the possibility of stopping his mother from selling the family ranch, thus underscoring the generational and cultural gap between them. The lawyer, whose response provides a broader societal perspective, explains to him: "Son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven. She dont want to live out here, that's all. If it was a payin proposition that'd be one thing. But it aint" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 17). With her father dead, John Grady's mother is free to abandon "an outmoded form of labor and its associated culture" (King 74); that is, she abandons a way of life she associates with patriarchy and the model of masculinity John Grady is desperately trying to preserve.

The interpretations by McCarthy scholars regarding John Grady's mother offer insightful perspectives on the characters' motivations and John Grady's perception of her actions. Daniel Cooper Alarcón argues that John Grady's mother "seems to have very little interest in mothering him" (147). Additionally, Benson argues that John Grady sees his mother's departure as a clear indication that she "has begun an affair with a strange man" (37). John Grady, thus, "seems to disavow any notion that his mother may have a right to her own life. He apparently never considers that his mother has a right to follow her dreams of acting and perhaps remarrying or finding love" (37). In other words, the archaic masculinity represented by John Grady's father and grandfather—that of the cowboy—is juxtaposed with

evolving societal changes, including industrialization and feminist movements, which challenge traditional gender roles. In addressing this societal changes, it has been noted that the post-World War II baby boom era “witnessed a celebration of the trustworthy ‘boysitter’ and the can-do father who could change diapers while climbing the corporate ladder of success and suggested that a male touch was just what young children and a household needed” (Willett 276).<sup>52</sup> However, neither John Grady’s grandfather nor his father seems to conform to this type of father figure, which aligns more with an urban model of fatherhood and diverges from the rural man and cowboy masculinity that John Grady has witnessed since birth. John Grady, as the heir of the decayed cowboy masculinity “forcefully resist[s] that which would obliterate him and his way of life” (King 74). In short, McCarthy highlights the mother character as the embodiment of this social change, as she leaves the family to pursue her own dreams of becoming an actress and seeking independence, an embodiment of a change John Grady neither accepts nor understands. Her departure signifies the passing of the ranch and of the cowboy way of life, further emphasizing the diminishing relevance of the cowboy archetype in the post-World War II era *All the Pretty Horses* depicts.

Ultimately, McCarthy portrays John Grady’s mother as another mother willing to leave her family, seemingly indifferent to the emotional repercussions on those left behind. In the case of *All the Pretty Horses*, the mother prioritizes her own happiness and personal growth as a woman, over that of her son’s. The depictions of these maternal figures who abandon their families in *All the Pretty Horses*, *Child of God*, and *The Road* may contrast the “expectations of [some, although definitely not all] readers and critics: in order to be a ‘good mother,’ a woman should place her child’s physical and emotional well-being before her own needs. In

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<sup>52</sup> About the role of fathers in the raising of children in the post-World War II era, Julie A. Willett further explains, “By the 1960s and 1970s and against the backdrop of economic decline, cultural anxieties ranging from the war in Vietnam to absent fathers meant a new and important role for men in early childhood education, whose masculinity was again needed to make things right. But the embrace of the male caregiver seemed particularly short-lived, especially as it became clear that men in childcare seemed to be challenging as much as reinforcing traditional gender roles” (276).

effect, she should live for the child” (Åström 115). These mothers differ from characters like Rinthy in *Outer Dark*, as they refuse to “fulfil such expectations. Interestingly, this challenge to normative constructions of motherhood is represented as wholly negative within the novel[s]. Moreover, it is frequently interpreted as such by literary scholars” (115). Comparatively, in these three novels, while the mother character appears “to have been absent from the boy’s life even before she left physically,” the father is granted a position of importance in the life of his son, that of “a constant presence even after his death” (122–23). Given that McCarthy is an author mostly concerned with masculinity and his male characters, the apparent neglect of the mother character seems to be a constant in his career. Åström’s conclusion about fathers being a constant presence in McCarthy is right. Sheriff Bell in *No Country for Old Men*, a character who is analyzed next, is an example of it.

### **3. The Burden of the Father’s Masculinity: The Case of Sheriff Bell**

The Greeks, as pioneers of modern Western philosophical thought, attributed great significance to the role of the father in the development of the child, particularly in shaping the child’s masculinity. Greek philosopher Aristotle delved into the intricacies of the father and son relationship in his work. Rémi Brague elucidates that Aristotle’s philosophy conceptualized the human male in the following manner:

As for Greece, it was Aristotle who expressed the thought the best. “Man engenders man,” he says about twenty times. One time, however, we read the developed formulation which the other ones abridge. “Man engenders man, *with the sun.*” By that he understands that a concrete human being, not the Platonic idea of humanity, engenders another concrete human being. But it is precisely because it is a matter of concrete individuals that one must recall, at the horizon of every generation, the presence of the sun which causes seeds to germinate and

returns the season for mating. In short, man becomes man against the background of realities of which he does not dispose. To name them, the Greeks found the key philosophical term “nature” (*physis*). This is why Aristotle observes that politics does not produce human beings, but receives them from nature. (214)

In Aristotle’s philosophical framework, man engenders man with the assistance of nature. Aristotle espouses the view that a woman cannot “raise” a man, reflecting an archaic and patriarchal perspective. Elisabeth Badinter explicates that Aristotle’s conclusion means that “it was man—the male—who transmitted to the child the principle of humanity” (67). Her explanation draws a connection between the principle of humanity and “the development of the male gender” (67). In contemporary times, the rejection of the natural and divine interventions, often present in religious doctrines for creating a man, is evident. Brague states, “For modernity, it is man who engenders man, and in order to do so he has need neither of the sun nor of the nature it symbolizes, nor of the God of the covenant” (215). Interestingly enough, McCarthy offers an alternative to Aristotle’s antiquate notion, one more aligned with contemporary times, by adapting poet William Wordsworth’s famous line “The Child is the father of the Man,” from the poem “My Heart Leaps Up” (1802).<sup>53</sup> In the opening of *Blood Meridian*, the narration, referring to the character of the kid, states, “All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man” (McCarthy 3). Both Wordsworth and McCarthy reverse Aristotle’s stance, asserting that it is the child who engenders man and, by extension, the father. This perspective can also be interpreted from a religious standpoint, aligning with the understanding that Jesus Christ, as God’s son, is the father of men, the source of religious wisdom, truth, and Christian philosophical thought. McCarthy, knowing that he “frequently

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<sup>53</sup> “My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky: / So was it when my life began; / So is it now I am a man; / So be it when I shall grow old, / Or let me die! / The Child is father of the Man; / And I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety.” (Wordsworth 417–18)

makes use of biblical allusions” (Noble, “The Bible” 100), may have been influenced by such religious ideologies. On another level, the passage’s assertion, “All history present in that visage,” suggests that existing conceptions of man—derived from the male figures of the family unity, i.e., fathers and grandfathers—can coexist simultaneously in the figure of the child. This results in the child embodying characteristics akin to the father.

Andrew Tolson explains, “Manhood is a perpetual future, a vision of inheritance, an emptiness waiting to be filled” (23).<sup>54</sup> McCarthy’s above citation from *Blood Meridian* illustrates this concept of “inheritance” and the fulfillment of emptiness, depicting the son as the result, the product of history in the present. Tolson argues that the “father’s ‘presence’ seems to contain a promise of fulfilment—an affirmation of masculine power—and this feeling is mysterious, generated out of a ‘patriarchal bond’ between father and son” (23). In other words, if the child has a father figure he can admire, he will derive his first masculine identification from his father, who, in turn, is the product of previously existing masculine identities (Pleck 55). This is known as the theory of identification: in traditional families, the boy starts by depending on the father (and the mother) for the necessities of life, which “becomes a psychological dependence. Family life is ‘normalized’—it structures the only world a young child knows” (Tolson 23). If the son is psychologically dependent on the father, it is safe to assume that he will also inherit at least some of the father’s ideologies and moral attributes. This idea is exemplified by Sheriff Bell in one of his numerous soliloquies: “My daddy always told me to just do the best you knew how and tell the truth. He said there was nothin to set a man’s mind at ease like wakin up in the morning and not havin to decide who you were. And if you done somethin wrong just stand up and say you done it and say you’re

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<sup>54</sup> Despite the potentially outdated nature of Tolson’s statement, I have chosen to incorporate it into my analysis. This decision stems from the recognition that Tolson’s perspective reflects a prevailing understanding of manhood during the period when McCarthy was actively working on the composition of *Blood Meridian*. Hence, I deem it important not to overlook this analysis and the texts produced in the later decades of the twentieth century, as they provide valuable context. This approach is consistent and will be applied to other instances throughout the dissertation.

sorry and get on with it” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 249). As is seen in the passage, Sheriff Bell’s moral principles were shaped by his father’s words and example. Though again a man who “didn’t say a lot” (249), Sheriff Bell’s father gave him a code to live by—a moral compass to navigate life as a man. Sheriff Bell does not disclose in the above passage if he was a grown man when he received his father’s stated advice, although we can infer that the advice was received during infancy because it is during early childhood when boys start molding their personalities based on the lessons taught by their parents. As Tolson explains, a “boy’s identification with his father is the foundation for all his subsequent experience. As he grows up, the ambivalent structure of his masculine identification becomes a quest for resolution, and a boy develops a compulsive need for recognition and reward” (25). However, the development of a compulsive need for recognition and reward from the father can become a double-edged sword, traumatizing the child, even in adulthood. In *No Country for Old Men*, this trauma manifests in the form of failure, as Sheriff Bell feels he has fallen short in upholding his father’s code of masculinity.

Close to the end of *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy illustrates how attempting to adhere to a father’s masculine moral code and self-righteousness can be a burden for the child, even as an adult. In the scene, Sheriff Bell visits a relative of his, Uncle Ellis. The two men share coffee, sit together, and engage in conversation on various topics. There comes a moment when Sheriff Bell, troubled by something significant he has not shared even with his wife, opens up about the story of being awarded the Bronze Star for fighting the Nazis during World War II. Sheriff Bell feels undeserving of the commemoration. He recounts to Uncle Ellis how, after regaining consciousness following an explosion that destroyed the walls of the building where he and the men of his company sought shelter, he fired rounds at the enemy lines. However, he fled the scene at nightfall, leaving the rest of his men behind, uncertain if any of them were still alive. When Uncle Ellis asks what would have happened had he not escaped,

Sheriff Bell responds, “They’d of come up in the dark and lobbed grenades in on me. Or maybe gone back up in the woods and called in another round” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 276). Sheriff Bell believes his survival chances would have been zero had he stayed, justifying his choice to flee. After sharing his story, Uncle Ellis remarks, “I think I know where this is goin” (278). What Sheriff Bell seeks confirmation on is what his father, Jack, would have done in a similar predicament. Both men tacitly acknowledge the answer: “He’d of set there till hell froze over and then stayed a while on the ice” (279). Jack, unlike Sheriff Bell, would not have abandoned his men to save himself and would have willingly died with them without a second thought. Sheriff Bell’s comparison between himself and his father suggests that he “has been playing a role, a ready-made caricature of masculinity inherited as a cultural birthright—an amalgam of myths and memories, of desires and denials, of potentiality and impotence” (Brummer 151). Jack, unconsciously, burdened his son with expectations regarding manliness and comparative valor that Sheriff Bell still contemplates almost forty years after the war. Uncle Ellis poses the logical question: “Do you think that makes him a better man than you?” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 279). It is crucial to note that he does not ask if Jack was a better person. Sheriff Bell responds, “Yessir. I do” (279). Jack’s unimpeachable manliness is so deeply ingrained in Sheriff Bell’s memory that even Uncle Ellis cannot sway Bell’s opinion. When Uncle Ellis attempts consolation, saying, “But then I might say that he lived in different times. Had Jack of been born fifty years later he might have had a different view of things,” Sheriff Bell remains steadfast, “You might. But nobody in this room would believe it” (279). The only solace Sheriff Bell finds in failing to live up to his father’s moral integrity and manliness is by reassuring himself: “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). This passage indicates that the ideal of masculinity Jack embodied does not align with the one his son ultimately represents. Although Uncle Ellis’s comments reaffirm what Sheriff Bell believes his father Jack would have done in a similar

predicament, and the narrative uses these comments to support Sheriff Bell's conclusions about his father's masculinity, we cannot ignore the fact that memories can be distorted. One possible result of this distortion is the idealization of Jack's masculinity in the eyes of his son. However, this scenario is never confirmed by the narrative and does not negate the fact that Jack's masculinity, whether idealized or not, is used by Sheriff Bell as a benchmark for his own masculinity.

While Sheriff Bell scrutinizes his own masculinity through the lens of his memory of his father, his masculinity, for better or for worse, aligns with that of his own generation. McCarthy seems to be pointing toward a conclusion with the character of Sheriff Bell that coincides with the understanding of a majority of experts on masculinity, that "masculinity is understood as a historically contingent social construction;" and, as such, we must take "into consideration changing cultural discourses" (Kaplan et al. 396). The thesis McCarthy appears to address in *No Country for Old Men* is that masculinities evolve, sometimes without men realizing it. Jack's idea of masculinity resides in the group—dying with his men—, whilst Sheriff Bell's masculinity does not, at least not entirely, as he chooses to save his own life instead of the lives of his brothers in arms. It is a choice he would later repeat when he disregards the idea of facing Chigurh and decides to retire instead. The conclusion one can draw from this pattern is that the limit for Sheriff Bell is death. However, for Jack, death seems to be a worthy sacrifice. Nevertheless, Sheriff Bell admits that he owes Jack "more than I would of thought" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 308). In comparing his world with Jack's, Sheriff Bell states: "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. That has got to of been hard to live with" (308). Although Sheriff Bell's words are not explicitly referencing it, I find heroism in relation to masculinity to be what he is ultimately talking about. Jack's masculinity was formed and based on "the frontier heroes and cowboys and rangers of the American Western" (Brummer 151). With the

character of Sheriff Bell, an elderly man who is a sheriff in the 1980s, McCarthy seems to be saying that the ideal of heroism Jack represented and Bell holds in high regard has changed. Bell's opinion is about how men are considered by society depending on the times and the circumstances. His heroism differs from that of his father, and also differs from the masculinities which are to come, represented in Chigurh, as will be explored in the following chapter.

In summary, the examination carried out—in these last two sections of this chapter—of father characters in McCarthy's works published between *Outer Dark* and *The Road* reveals a consistent portrayal of fatherhood throughout his oeuvre. From absent fathers to those who set exceptionally high standards for their offsprings, McCarthy, even if done briefly in some instances, dedicates space in his stories to the inclusion of a father character. This inclusion serves to enhance our understanding of the masculinity of the son and sheds light on some of the decisions they make in life. It is now time to resume the analysis of the masculinity of the father characters in *Outer Dark* and *The Road* to observe how McCarthy's depiction of the character has evolved from a failed paternity—in *Outer Dark*—to a successful one—in *The Road*.

#### **4. From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: From Failed to Successful Paternities**

Having explored various other types of fathers McCarthy portrays in the works situated chronologically between *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, it is now time to conclude the analysis of how McCarthy transitions from an imperfect sense of fatherhood—in the characters of Culla Holme and the bearded one in *Outer Dark*—to the most perfected version of a father character in the man in *The Road*. To do so, this final section is divided into two subsections, each dedicated to one of these novels.

#### 4.1. CULLA AND THE BEARDED ONE: A “GHASTLY PARODY OF PATERNALISM”

Culla Holme and the bearded one encounter each other twice in *Outer Dark*, with both instances occurring in the final third of the story. Some of their verbal exchanges and situations are centered around fatherhood and their roles as fathers. Before their first encounter, the narration explains that Culla boards a ferry to cross a river. As the ferry sets sail, the ferry gains speed and is “in high wind and water was blowing over the deck. The river was breaking violently on the canted flank of the boat” (McCarthy 164). Eventually, the ferryman loses control of the ship and, together with another passenger and a horse, goes overboard. Culla becomes the sole survivor. Adrift, the ferry eventually reaches the shore, where Culla distinguishes three silhouettes and a bonfire. Approaching them, he discovers they are the three members of the group led by the bearded one. Culla, soaking wet, asks permission to approach the fire to warm himself and dry his clothes. The bearded one welcomes him and offers him meat—through the characters’ exchange, the notion that it is human flesh might be inferred, serving as an instance of foreshadowing that anticipates what will happen to Culla’s child. The passage goes as follows:

Holme chewed. I don’t believe I evet et no meat of this kind, he said.

I ain’t sure I ever did either, the man said.

He stopped. You ain’t et none of this? he said.

The man didn’t answer for a minute. Then he said: They’s different kinds. (172)

This inference implies that in the world of *Outer Dark*, as well as in *The Road*, cannibalism is very much present. Moreover, McCarthy portrays cannibalism as the ultimate taboo in Western societies, representing it in instances of societal marginalization in *Outer Dark* and societal destruction in *The Road*.

After some time, the bearded one inquires Culla about Culla's name, and Culla provides it. The bearded one, pointing at the mute one, states, "That'n ain't got a name" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 174). Although Culla expresses a desire to know the bearded one's name, the bearded one does not disclose it. Nameless characters in McCarthy, as has been explored in this chapter, are abundant, especially in father-son relationships. In *Outer Dark*, the decision for the two sons—the "chap" and the "mute one"—to remain nameless is made by Culla and the bearded one, the father figures. Regarding the mute one, the bearded one explains: "He wanted me to give him one but I wouldn't do it. He don't need nary" (174). It might seem surprising that, as the patriarchal father figure he is, the bearded one refuses to name his surrogate son, thus not aligning himself with Adam, who, in Genesis, is tasked with naming all the animals in the garden. In contrast, as we will observe, the boy in *The Road* does embody the Adam-like quality of naming.

One plausible interpretation for the bearded one's refusal to name the mute one could be attributed to the latter's perceived mental impairment, as argued earlier. Thus, the bearded one may feel a constant need to care for the mute one, ensuring that he is never left alone, as the bearded one may believe that assigning a name grants some independence: "I got Harmon to look after him if they do fight. I keep studying him. He's close, but I keep at it" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 177–78). Additionally, the mute one may indeed be mute and, in the bearded one's view, a name is unnecessary since the mute one cannot respond verbally. From the bearded one's perspective, the mute one is not defined as a man by his name but as someone belonging to the bearded one, obedient to his commands. This dynamic resembles an animal-master relationship, where the mute one lacks individuality by himself. His identity and masculinity (or lack thereof) are derived solely from his association with the trio ruled by the bearded one.

On the other hand, the bearded one's explanation is interesting as his reasoning mirrors that of Culla's at the beginning of the novel. As previously elucidated, from the moment the

child is born, Culla progressively endeavors to convince Rinthy that the child's chances of survival are nil. Following Culla's abandonment of the child in the woods, Rinthy inquires about the child's resting place, believing that they, as parents, ought to name their supposedly deceased child. However, Culla disagrees: "You don't name things dead" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 31). Hillier has argued that Culla's "hard-heartedness toward his son and his refusal to name or acknowledge his chap illustrate a deficient parental love that disavows paternal responsibility" ("Her Eyes Were Huge and Hungered" 5). For Culla, emotional detachment from his child and from his actions is facilitated if the child remains nameless. Echoing the bearded one, who asserts, "Some things is best not named" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 175), in *Outer Dark*, a nameless child allows the father to maintain a lukewarm disposition toward the child. Consequently, the father can remain emotionally distant and never truly develop genuine affection for the offspring. The bearded one elucidates: "if you cain't name something you cain't claim it. You cain't talk about it even" (177). Much like the bearded one, Culla's patriarchal concept of fatherhood relies on the power of choosing not to name the child, thereby stripping the child of any human identity. In their analysis of Culla as a father who refuses to name his child, Jonathan Elmore and Rick Elmore argue the following:

Culla's refusal to give his son a name does not entail that he did not, ultimately, name him. The fact that Culla could see the child as the very embodiment of his "own heart's dread," that he could fear it enough to abandon it in the woods shows that he did, from the beginning, name the child; he christened him Incest, Sin, Monster. What this discussion of naming makes clear is that Culla named his child as surely as any parent, marking the child as something unclean and unholy, something to be feared and rejected, an act that led to the child's monstrous transformation. (125)

While I concur with Jonathan Elmore and Rick Elmore's assertion that Culla fears and rejects his child not because the child is a newborn, but because of the child's association with Culla's paternity, I diverge in my agreement with their conclusion that Culla would name the child "incest," "sin," or "monster." As men embodying a specific type of masculinity, both Culla and the bearded one prioritize their sense of authority over their role as parents and their inclination to name others, resulting in their children remaining nameless. Culla's child is never truly wanted or loved, nor is he integrated into a family unit. In contrast, the mute one is permitted to be part of the bearded one's family group and is offered protection, albeit in a relationship resembling that of a work animal and its master.

Culla erroneously believes that his authority as a man and his decision not to name their "chap" ought to be sufficient explanation for Rinthy. After all, previous instances of Culla exercising masculine authority have ended with Rinthy accepting his decisions; however, in this case, he is mistaken. The crucial difference lies in the fact that previous instances of Culla's masculine authority were over Rinthy herself, whereas in this case, it concerns their "chap." Rinthy may concede that Culla has the authority to decide for and rule over her, but she vehemently opposes such an arrangement when it comes to her child. Despite Hillier's argument that Rinthy's "inexhaustible mother love is a self-consuming obsession" ("Her Eyes Were Huge and Hungered" 1), Rinthy exhibits a sense of care for the child that is not only absent in Culla but also in other mother characters represented by McCarthy and explored in this chapter. Unlike Culla, Rinthy "always acts as though the child is a part of their home" (J. Elmore and R. Elmore 127). Even in death, she refuses to let her newborn be forgotten and bids the child farewell, as will be further examined in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Culla and the bearded one's second and final encounter delves into father-related themes. When Culla finds the bearded one's trio again, they have Culla's child with them and have killed the tinker. As Culla looks at his son, he notices something amiss. The narration

describes the “chap” as follows: “it had a healed burn all down one side of it and the skin was papery and wrinkled like an old man’s. It was naked and half coated with dust so that it seemed lightly furred and when it turned to look up at him he saw one eyeless and angry red socket like a stokehole to a brain in flames. He looked away” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 231–32). Culla enquires about the child’s missing eye, but the bearded one explains that he has no idea what happened. This is the only time Culla shows any concern regarding his son, though it may be more out of curiosity than genuine concern. In the ensuing conversation, Culla repeats twice that he has no interest in the child: “It ain’t nothin to me” (233). Some scholars argue that fatherhood can be contradictory, and one of the causes for this lies in ambiguities related to masculinity. Norma Fuller explains that, from an anthropological perspective, ambiguities in relation to paternity “are derived from the fact that males may not recognize the children they engender. In this way, there is a connection between a great idealization of paternity with ample opportunities to refuse to accept any filiation with the children conceived outside of stable unions” (126; my trans.).<sup>55</sup> This may be the case for Culla. His denial of the child leads the bearded one to make the correct deduction when he concludes that the child is the result of Culla and Rinthy’s incestuous relationship: “I figure you got this thing here in her belly your own self” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 233). Additionally, the bearded one assumes that Culla gave the child to the tinker, thus shifting the responsibility of the child’s fate to another man. Culla corrects him: “I never laid nothin off on no tinker” (233). In other words, Culla’s comment allows the bearded one to infer what the reader already knows, that Culla abandoned the child.

Despite Culla’s attempts to persuade the bearded one to return the child to Rinthy, the reality is that the child’s abandonment, namelessness, and Culla’s complete lack of emotion toward him seal the child’s fate. Jarrett explains that “Culla extends his own life by paying his

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<sup>55</sup> “Las ambigüedades de la paternidad se derivan del hecho de que los varones pueden no reconocer a los hijos que engendran. De este modo, coexiste una gran idealización de la paternidad con amplias oportunidades para rehusar aceptar la filiación de los hijos concebidos fuera de uniones estables”.

son's" ("Genre, Voice, and Ethos" 68), a behavior that contrasts with the actions of the man in *The Road*. Culla never attempts to barter his life for his son's, nor does he make any effort to reclaim the child from the bearded one's possession. In this final encounter, Culla fails to embrace his paternity and neglects to seek the best for his child. Hence, he falls short as a father in the ultimate test. The bearded one, passing judgment from the perspective of masculinity, asserts that Culla "ain't no different from the rest. From any man borned and raised and have his own and die" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 235). According to the bearded one, Culla is not a special man and, most importantly, not a proper father. In my opinion, the only action that could have demonstrated Culla's uniqueness, distinguishing him from the other men mentioned by the bearded one, would have been his acknowledgment of his actions and an attempt to save the child.

However, I contend that the bearded one offers Culla a final chance at redemption as a father; unfortunately, Culla once again falls short. The bearded one asks Culla if the child has a name. Culla responds, "No. I don't reckon. I don't know" (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 236). Through this answer—and considering the previously explained significance the bearded one gives to acts of naming—the bearded one realizes that Culla has no claim whatsoever over the child. Consequently, the bearded one decides to seal the child's fate by "enact[ing] another ghastly parody of paternalism" (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 17). The bearded one slashes the child's throat and, as a "patriarchal father, 'provid[es]' for the infantile needs of the mute" (17). Similar to the cannibalism of newborns in *The Road*, Culla and Rinthy's child becomes nourishment for another family. Fatherhood in *Outer Dark* does not make room for caring masculinities, such as the one embodied by the man in *The Road*. In *Outer Dark*, the narration states that the mute one "knelt forward. He was drooling and making little whimpering noises in his throat. He knelt with his hands outstretched and his nostrils rippled delicately. The man handed him the child and he seized it up, looked once at Holme with witless eyes, and buried

his moaning face in its throat” (McCarthy 236). Jarrett argues that the child serves as “both meal and a sacrificial offering” (*Cormac McCarthy* 17). Fisher-Wirth suggests that the child is “the mute’s reverse image: pure outcast, pure victim, equally unspeaking, bereft of the Mother yet forever not called forth into the protection of the Father” (135). Furthermore, Jarrett concludes that the bearded one uses this killing as “the punishment for Culla and Rinthy’s incest” (*Cormac McCarthy* 17). While some McCarthy scholars argue that incest is the primary issue in Culla and Rinthy’s relationship, as previously argued, my contention is that it is Culla’s paternity—that is, his role as a father—that troubles the character most. In relation to the mother in *The Road* admitting that she would kill the boy if the man allowed her to do so, Caradec contends that “the defining feature of a parent of the wasteland is not the capacity to give life, but the capacity to give death” (120). I do not concur with Caradec’s conclusion because, to me, the defining feature of a parent McCarthy wants to convey with the man in *The Road*—that is, a father in the wasteland—, is the capacity to show the child the value of life and how worth it life is. Nonetheless, I believe that Caradec’s statement on parenthood, at least regarding fathers, in other wastelands can apply to the world of *Outer Dark*—a world whose portrayal in the novel is not so different from the one in *The Road*. The bearded one’s execution of the “chap” and Culla’s unwillingness to prevent the killing of his son do fit Caradec’s statement on parenthood.

Finally, the gruesome scene depicting the killing of Culla and Rinthy’s child in *Outer Dark* finds a potential explanation in the words of judge Holden from *Blood Meridian*. Holden, in a conversation with Tobin, articulates: “Wolves cull themselves, man. What other creature could? And is the race of man not more predacious yet?” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 153). The climatic confrontation between the two fathers and their children in *Outer Dark* indeed unveils the capacity to cull and the predatory nature embedded in the masculinity of the bearded one. Culla and Rinthy’s child becomes the tragic victim, paying the price for the sins of his

father, namely Culla's indecisiveness in confronting the impending reality and allowing the birth of a child he never desired. With the understanding that Culla has failed in his duty as a father in the wasteland of *Outer Dark*, even in the twisted and patriarchal conception the bearded one has of fatherhood, the culling of Culla's child is deemed as a corrective measure to right a perceived wrong. The act is presented as a solution, where the life of one child (Culla and Rinthy's offspring) ultimately sustains another (the mute one). As is stated by the prophet in Culla's dream, the bearded one seemingly *cures* Culla by liberating him from the burdens of a fatherhood he never wholeheartedly embraced. In contrast, in *The Road*, McCarthy creates a father character who, despite being offered the opportunity to free himself from the burden of raising a child in a hopeless world, chooses to embrace fatherhood and protect his child against all odds.

#### 4.2. THE MAN: THE TRIUMPH OF CARING MASCULINITY

Building upon the analysis of Culla and the bearded one's interactions, the final section of this chapter delves into comparable instances of namelessness and interactions with elderly men which also occur in *The Road*. I will consider how the man and the boy respond to these situations, focusing especially on the man's masculinity and his perception of his paternal duties.

Commencing with the theme of namelessness in *The Road*, McCarthy takes an approach reminiscent of *Outer Dark*, albeit with distinct nuances. While the narrative consistently employs "the man" and "the boy" to denote the father and son, it has been previously mentioned that the boy refers to his father as "Papa." In *The Road*, this nomenclature is regarded as "an affectionate term" that "highlights the deep, intimate nature of the pair's relationship" (Kunsa 67). Moreover, in relation to the father-son bond created by the characters, the choice of referring to the man as "Papa" instead of "father," as Ashley Kunsa argues, "reaffirms the boy's

ability to name that bond” (67). Thus, unlike the bearded one and Culla, who—as previously discussed—would not behave in an Adam-like fashion and would leave their children unnamed, the boy does indeed possess a “burgeoning ability to name—to say simply and directly what a thing is and, like Adam, to make it so” (67). Moreover, through the boy’s actions at the father’s death, the reader learns that the boy knew his father’s name. When the man dies, the boy holds the man’s “cold hand” and says his father’s “name over and over again” (McCarthy, *The Road* 281); conversely, the father never says the name of his son. Both names are, thus, details not disclosed to the reader. We do not have here a similar case of namelessness as we saw in *Outer Dark*. My argument is that for the man in *The Road*, the name of the boy would never trump what the boy is to him: “my child” (74). In other words, unlike the bearded one’s assertion in *Outer Dark* that the mute one does not require a name, the man in *The Road* not only bestows the title “my child” upon the boy, but also recognizes their given titles in reinforcing their enduring connection—a bond absent in the paternal relationships in *Outer Dark*. In essence, the names themselves—Papa and my child—serve as the cornerstone of the profound relationship between father and son and motivate them to endure in the world of *The Road*. Thomas Schaub states that the characters’ namelessness helps to “invite the reader to think of the son as *of* the father, the son imbued with the father’s values, living on after the father dies, praying to his father” (159). Schaub’s conclusion resonates with the earlier analysis of McCarthy and Wordsworth’s inversion of Aristotle’s stance. In essence, what McCarthy briefly articulates in *Blood Meridian*, he fully develops in *The Road*. As Adam Parkes explains, “The child is father of McCarthy’s man not because he will become a man but because he plays the role of his own father, as if to suggest that such terms as *child* and *man* do no more than designate roles that are available to the same character; either role, in other words, could be said to father the other” (104). Consequently, in *The Road*, the father and son relationship can transcend death—so can the man’s teachings regarding masculinity as seen in the philosophies

of the “carriers of the fire” and the “good guys.” In other words, the man achieves a rare success in his parental mission, no other father character in McCarthy’s works attains the same level of success as the man in *The Road*.

In examining the comparative behaviors of Culla in *Outer Dark* and the man in *The Road* toward elderly men, a distinctive parallel emerges. Notably, both characters engage with elderly individuals, but a crucial deviation lies in the presence of a companion for the man—the boy—, who significantly influences the decision-making process. The concluding section of *Outer Dark* ends with Culla years after the death of the child. The narration reveals Culla’s encounter with a blind old man, portrayed as “ragged and serene” (McCarthy 239). The two of them talk and the blind man asks Culla if he needs anything. Culla, not understanding the question, asks the old man what he sells. The old man responds: “I ain’t sellin nothin. I’m at the Lord’s work. He don’t need your money” (240). Culla then asks the old man if he is a preacher and the old man says: “No. No preacher. What is they to preach? It’s all plain enough. Word and flesh. I don’t hold much with preachin” (240). Their conversation continues for a while and they part ways. Culla continues walking and eventually the road leads him to a swamp. What Culla witnesses in the swamp is described as follows: “Before him stretched a spectral waste out of which reared only the naked trees in attitudes of agony and dimly hominoid like figures in a landscape of the damned. A faintly smoking garden of the dead that tended away to the earth’s curve” (242). Except for the swamp’s vegetation, the description of the desolate natural setting of *Outer Dark* is reminiscent of the environmental descriptions in *The Road*. Culla returns the way he came and sees the old man walking toward him. Neither of them talk, and the blind man continues toward the swamp: “Holme watched him out of sight. He wondered where the blind man was going and did he know how the road ended. Someone should tell a blind man before setting him out that way” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 242). That someone is not Culla: he would prefer to let the blind old man travel a dangerous road—one

which could potentially kill him by drowning—rather than to warn him or care for him. While Culla remains reticent and indifferent to the old man’s potential perilous journey, the man and the boy in *The Road* navigate a similar scenario, underlining a thematic continuity across McCarthy’s works. This juxtaposition unveils the recurrent motif of human interaction and ethical choices within the desolate landscapes of McCarthy’s fiction.

In their journey along the desolate road, the man and the boy also encounter an elderly blind man who identifies himself as Ely.<sup>56</sup> Initially, the man exhibits caution, suspecting Ely as a potential decoy employed by “the bad guys” to ensnare unsuspecting road walkers. However, Ely, traveling alone, dispels the initial apprehension. The boy, feeling pity for the old man, implores his father to extend hospitality to Ely, advocating for him to spend the night and share their limited food resources. The man, pointing out that it would only be for one night, reluctantly agrees. A parallel can be drawn between the man’s decision here and that of Culla in *Outer Dark*, where both characters choose not to aid elderly blind men. Caradec contends that the man “would not have spared any food were it not for his child” and that “[s]paring a tin can is a way to maintain the ‘good guys’ narrative at a relatively low cost and avoid social unrest on the part of the son” (124); conversely, Culla’s aid would not imply the sparing of any resources. While acknowledging Caradec’s interpretation, a nuanced analysis suggests that McCarthy’s narrative trajectory in *The Road* diverges from Culla’s actions in *Outer Dark*. The scene with Ely serves as McCarthy’s means of illustrating the generational evolution of the man’s masculinity principles within the father-son dynamic, portraying the student (the boy) as surpassing the master (his father) in embodying the principles of the “good

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<sup>56</sup> McCarthy utilizes the character of Ely as another biblical reference in *The Road*. In the Bible, Eli is mentioned in 1 Sam. 4.15, which states: “Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.” In *The Road*, Ely’s blindness is described in the narration: “Grayblue eyes half buried in the thin and sooty creases of a skin” (McCarthy 163). While in the Bible, Eli is portrayed as a judge of Israel and a devoted priest, associated with the ark of the covenant alongside his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, Ely in *The Road* does not express interest in forming any covenant with the man and the boy. Moreover, the narrative does not mention him having any children. This divergence highlights McCarthy’s creative reinterpretation of biblical motifs in his narrative.

guys” and “carriers of the fire.” In other words, as previously elucidated, the child finally becomes the father of the man. This claim merits further exploration in the subsequent discussion.

The man, the boy, and Ely establish a temporary camp for the night, engaging in a conversation over their shared meal. As they discuss Ely’s survival in the harsh world they inhabit, Ely attributes his longevity to the unexpected generosity of people, stating, “People give you things” (McCarthy, *The Road* 170). The man, skeptical of such benevolence, retorts with a blunt, “No they dont” (170), drawing on his extensive firsthand experience of a world marked by scarcity and cruelty. Ely counters the man’s skepticism, asserting, “You did,” prompting a correction from the man: “No I didnt. The boy did” (170). The man probes further, questioning Ely’s reasons for accepting their invitation to join them. Ely’s response, “When I saw that boy I thought that I had died” (172), introduces a poignant revelation about the boy’s impact. The man, contemplating whether the boy might be perceived as an angel, receives an uncertain answer from Ely, who expresses astonishment at encountering a child again: “I never thought to see a child again. I didnt know that would happen” (172). While the narrative hints at Ely having been a witness to the same type of atrocities that the man and the boy have encountered on their journey, the figurative nature of Ely’s statement becomes evident, suggesting not merely a reunion with any child, but specifically a compassionate and caring one like the boy, fostered by a devoted father in the midst of their desolate journey.

Mirroring the earlier exchange between Culla and the blind old man in *Outer Dark*, the conversation between the man and Ely in *The Road* delves into religious territory. Ely contends that there “is no God and we are his prophets” (McCarthy 170). The man, contemplating the boy’s significance, queries Ely with a provocative proposition: “What if I said that he’s a god?” (172). While the primary focus of this dissertation does not center on a religious analysis of the

boy's character,<sup>57</sup> the father's inquiry to Ely warrants scrutiny. Ely responds, "So I hope that's not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it's not true. Things will be better when everyone's gone" (172). For Ely, if the last remaining thing in the world is a god, that would mean that said god has failed since everything the god created has perished. However, Ely's perspective fails to grasp the intricacies of the man's role, the imparted principles of masculinity to the boy, and, more importantly, the boy's own embodiment of masculinity. Ely struggles to comprehend the philosophical tenets of the "carriers of the fire" and the "good guys," even when he directly benefits from them. This deficiency in understanding becomes apparent in Ely's reluctance to acknowledge and express gratitude to the boy for the altruistic actions undertaken on his behalf. The man tells Ely: "You should thank him you know," and adds "I wouldn't have given you anything." Ely responds: "Maybe I should and maybe I shouldn't" (173). Furthermore, having admitted that he would not have shared his food with the boy, Ely asks the man: "Why did he do it?" (173). The man explains that the answer is beyond Ely's comprehension and adds that he himself is not sure he understands it either.

The father's initial inability to comprehend the boy's caring actions stems from his limited perspective, centered exclusively on the parental care toward his son. Essentially, the man's decision to persevere in a world devoid of hope for a habitable future, evident in his choice not to succumb with his wife, is grounded in the value he places on his son's life. This valuation extends beyond mere survival to encompass the preservation of the masculinity teachings and philosophical ideas imparted by the father. What the boy provides for Ely exemplifies the practical application of these teachings on caring masculinity, a dimension the father might not have realized had it not been for his son. In other words, "in the new world of

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<sup>57</sup> Religious analysis of *The Road* is abundant in scholarly literature. For readers interested in delving deeper into this aspect, here is a brief list of texts worth exploring: Cooper ("Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative" 2019); Josephs (2014); Kollin (2011); Millán Alba (2014); Phillips ("He Ought Not Have Done It" 2011); Rambo (2008); Schaub (2009); Wielenberg (2010).

*The Road*, the son teaches his father (instead of the father teaching his son) how to treat others” (Luttrull 24). The boy, contrary to his father’s initial stance, extends this ethos of care to others, deeming the act of offering a can of food to Ely as significant as the man’s decision to endure in the world. This manifestation of kindness and care persists even in the face of Ely’s inevitable demise and the absence of hope for salvation, as later exemplified in a similar encounter with a robber.<sup>58</sup> Thus, what the boy’s mother and Ely fail to understand is that the caring ethos initially established by the father in his relationship with his son, and later embraced by the boy in his interactions with other survivors, becomes a defining trait of masculinity in the world of *The Road*—a quality perceived by the father and, more prominently, the boy as “absolutely necessary and life preserving [sic]” (Elliott 253). In the novel’s concluding moments, as the man faces his demise, he finally grasps what eluded him during the encounter with Ely. Addressing his son, he acknowledges the boy as “the best guy. You always were,” and, in their final exchange, reassures him of his inherent possession of the fire, stating, “It’s inside you. It was always there. I can see it” (McCarthy, *The Road* 279). It is at this moment that the man “embraces a broader charity, one that he seems to have learned from the boy” (Luttrull 24). Fortunately, the boy, now bereft of his father, encounters kindred fire carriers in the stranger and his family, offering a semblance of hope amid the desolation.

It is imperative to highlight the inaccuracy of Caradec’s earlier conclusion regarding parental features in the wasteland depicted in *The Road*. As stated earlier, Caradec mentions that parenthood in *The Road* is the ability to give death—so as to save the child from a fate worse than death—instead of life to a child (120). Contrary to the claims that the boy’s parents

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<sup>58</sup> Later in the novel, a man pilfers the belongings of the man and the boy. Determined to recover their belongings, they pursue the thief, locate him, and reclaim their possessions. The man compels the thief to strip completely and surrender his clothes. Despite the boy’s plea to return the stolen clothing, the man persists in leaving the thief naked on the road. Eventually, they leave the thief’s clothing on the road with the hope that he will find them. This episode exemplifies the boy embodying his father’s teachings on caring masculinity through the prism of the good guys’ philosophical ideology. The boy’s actions extend the father’s lessons for the benefit of others, specifically men.

did not provide him with life, it is evident that both the mother and the father played a crucial role in his existence. While the mother, in her desperation, believed that the best course of action was to commit suicide, the father's rejection of this proposal underscores the defining feature of his paternal masculinity. This masculinity not only demands the preservation of the boy's life, but also involves imparting profound philosophical ideas regarding masculinity. As the narrative unfolds, particularly toward the conclusion, the father's perspective is validated, "proving to be more than mere self-delusion" (Luttrull 24). The boy, having internalized his father's teachings, demonstrates a capacity for kindness that surpasses the man's understanding at times. This capacity is exemplified through acts of caring in which the boy endeavors to extend the lives of others, including Ely and the robber. In essence, the boy takes the parental feature of life-giving and elevates it, enhancing it through his embodiment of caring masculinity.

We have finally arrived at the main conclusion of this chapter's exploration of masculinity and fatherhood in McCarthy. The characters of the man and the boy in *The Road*, along with the man's teachings of masculinity, serve as McCarthy's literary representation of caring masculinity. Sociologist Karla Elliott provides a fitting framework, explaining that "caring masculinities can be seen as masculine identities that exclude domination and embrace the affective, relational, emotional, and interdependent qualities of care" (252). As has been explored in this chapter, caring masculinities reject domination, a feature considered to be a "characteristic so integral to traditional hegemonic masculinity," and to embrace "values of care [which] have been traditionally, though not accurately, associated solely with women" (252). Additionally, men's involvement in "care work helps [them] develop caring forms of masculinities and nurturing identities" (J. Lee and S. Lee 49) akin to those depicted in McCarthy's narrative. Elliott further explains that in caring masculinities, the value of competence

does not mean “mastery” over one’s family or of a skill, but rather “ability” to care, in this case for children. “Respect” is coupled with “love” here, not with “fear” of the patriarch’s authority. The “responsibility” is for looking after a young life rather than for bringing home a family wage. “Pride” is taken in caring for a child, rather than the men being “too proud” to do care work. (253)

Competence, respect, responsibility, and pride emerge as central caring values, as demonstrated in this initial chapter, closely associated with the man in *The Road* and, by extension, the boy. Guided by his father’s exemplary behavior and teachings encompassing caring masculinity, epitomized in the philosophical ideas of the “good guys” and “carriers of the fire,” the boy evolves into the quintessence of caring masculinity. In stark contrast to Culla’s interactions with his son and the blind old man, the boy exhibits an innate incapacity to disregard the well-being of others and refrain from extending assistance. The encounters with Ely and the robber underscore the boy’s masculine altruism, as he willingly provides material aid to those in need. Unlike Culla, who is willing to sacrifice his child’s well-being, the boy in *The Road* nourishes and clothes others, guided by a profound sense of care and kindness informed by the masculine values instilled in him by his father.

In summary, McCarthy’s portrayal of father characters undergoes a discernible evolution. Beginning with Culla’s “forsaking of his child [being] a form of reprobate parental dereliction” (Hillier, ““Her Eyes Were Huge and Hungered”” 1) and extending to the presence of various absent fathers in McCarthy’s body of work—including the kid, Ballard, and John Grady’s fathers—, there is a noticeable shift from depictions of paternal cruelty toward representations of fatherly care and kindness. This evolution finds its most notable embodiment in the character of the man in *The Road*. Scholars argue that this novel marks “a return to and redemption of the failed fathers” (Sullivan, “The Good Guys” 85) within McCarthy’s oeuvre. The depictions of male characters concerning caring masculinity, fatherhood, and the lessons

children derive from fathers—as seen in characters like Sheriff Bell and the man in *The Road*—align with the changing dynamics of twenty-first-century heterosexual families. In line with McCarthy’s characteristic moral complexity, even the positive behaviors of paternal characters in works such as *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* are inherently flawed. For instance, Sheriff Bell fails to protect Moss and Carla Jean and is outmatched by Chigurh. Similarly, the man in *The Road* falls short in cultivating a caring masculinity that extends beyond his immediate family unit, contrasting with the more expansive approach demonstrated by his son. In conclusion, McCarthy presents paternal masculinity as imperfect but capable of improvement—an approach aligned with his broader interest in depicting male characters as complex, not necessarily fully rational and coherent, influential in the lives of others, and occasionally loving. McCarthy refrains from embellishing the behaviors of his father characters for likeability, instead allowing their portrayals to align with the harsh and perilous worlds they inhabit. While these worlds are often characterized by violence, McCarthy employs this element as a crucial testing ground for his male characters to measure and refine their masculinity against others and even nature, thereby contributing to the intricate exploration of some of his most violent characters in the subsequent chapter.



## Chapter Two: An Analysis of Masculinity and Violence

The United States, a vast nation comprising fifty states and a population exceeding three hundred million,<sup>59</sup> exhibits diverse masculinities influenced by factors such as location (urban or rural), regional distinctions (north, south, east, or west), city size, education, and profession. Notably, Cormac McCarthy, as an author, has displayed a tendency to minimize the significance of large urban areas like New York, Chicago, Boston, or Los Angeles in his works. Even when situating a story in a metropolis, as in the case of *The Sunset Limited*, set in New York, McCarthy often confines the plot events to a limited space, a room for example. McCarthy's novels, as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, fall primarily into two categories: the Appalachian Novels (including *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, and *Suttree*) and the borderland novels (comprising *Blood Meridian*, the Border Trilogy, and *No Country for Old Men*). While some may argue for a third category encompassing novels like *The Road*, *The Sunset Limited*, *The Passenger*, and *Stella Maris*, it is essential to recognize the diverse nature of these works. The challenge in labelling this third category arises due to the varied settings, from a postapocalyptic world to intimate two-character conversations in a room, and narratives spanning Tennessee, South America, the Gulf of Mexico, and Spain.

Regardless of the genre (novel, play, filmscript), McCarthy is renowned for, among other elements, the pervasive levels of violence depicted in nearly every work. This second chapter aims to delve into arguably the two most violent principal characters portrayed in McCarthy's entire body of work: judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*, and Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*. Building upon the exploration of the close relationship between paternity

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<sup>59</sup> This data has been derived from the population census conducted by the United States Census Bureau in 2020, the most recent, with the next scheduled for 2030. The census covers the resident population of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The information can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/dec/2020-apportionment-data.html>

and masculinity in the first chapter, this second chapter explores the intricate connection McCarthy establishes between masculinity and violence. Within this framework, it is posited that, while violence is present in various forms in all McCarthy works, *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* can arguably be defined as his most violent creations. Furthermore, within these narratives, judge Holden and Anton Chigurh emerge as paramount figures, epitomizing masculinity in tandem with their visceral and brutal acts of violence.

To comprehensively explore the relationship between the violence and masculinity embodied by the characters of judge Holden and Anton Chigurh, a contextual foundation is laid out in the initial pages of this chapter. Beginning with a focus on a specific region of the United States—the Great West<sup>60</sup>—, the analysis subsequently shifts toward explaining the genre synonymous with this geographic backdrop, known as the Western. This contextual exploration is then expanded to encompass elucidations on the multifaceted concept of violence. It delves into general terms and subsequently hones in on McCarthy's works, intending to provide the reader with a nuanced understanding of the thematic terrain. These preliminary explanations are designed to facilitate a more cohesive comprehension of the ensuing reasoning and analysis presented in the chapter.

## 1. The Great West and the Western

Cormac McCarthy strategically positions judge Holden<sup>61</sup> and Anton Chigurh in a shared geographical context, despite a temporal disparity of over a century: the events of *Blood*

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<sup>60</sup> For readers interested in delving deeper into the history of the Great West, David Lavender's *The Great West* (1965) offers extensive insight. Lavender meticulously traces the region's development from the eighteenth century onwards, chronicling the westward expansion of the original thirteen colonies and the settlements established by countries such as Spain and France. Lavender argues that by the mid-eighteenth century, "a voracious land hunger filled the frontier" (8), driving frontier settlers, described as "perpetual movers" (10), until they eventually reached the Pacific Ocean through determined perseverance.

<sup>61</sup> The character of judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* draws inspiration from a real-life figure and historical records. For readers eager to delve deeper into the origins of this enigmatic character, Michael Lynn Crews's article "The San Marcos Archives: *Blood Meridian* and the West" provides valuable insight. Crews reveals that "McCarthy learned of him [judge Holden] from Chamberlain, but his voice is the voice of, among many, Nietzsche, Heraclitus, and, as the note on the Hyatt pad shows, Ruskin in an uncharacteristic mode" (294).

*Meridian* unfold in the mid-nineteenth century, while *No Country for Old Men* is set in 1980. Both narratives are situated in the diegetic American Southwest. This region, as outlined by Frederic Jackson Turner in his influential text *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1894),<sup>62</sup> holds a pivotal role in the American historical narrative. As Turner claims: “American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West” (1). Turner contends that the “true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West” (2). Historically, the westward expansion from the initial thirteen colonies defined America’s growth, and up until the late nineteenth century, the Great West represented the ultimate frontier. Unlike Europe, where frontiers could be qualified as “a fortified boundary line running through dense populations,” Turner emphasizes the Great West’s unique quality as “the hither edge of free land” (3). This frontier was a somewhat virginal land (previously traversed by Spanish explorers, among others) awaiting to be thoroughly explored, and it existed as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (3). For Turner, the east coast, with its European influence, did not adequately represent the essence of America and what it meant to be an American. Instead, the American West—the frontier—symbolized the “line of most rapid and effective Americanization” (3). How is this so-called Americanization accomplished? In Turner’s opinion, the Great West’s “wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin” (3). Based on this explanation of the Great West, it can be concluded that “at the frontier the environment is

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<sup>62</sup> Turner’s work stands as a cornerstone in shaping the mythical perception of the American West. However, contemporary scholarship has scrutinized and dismissed many of Turner’s ideas as outdated. Kevin Jon Ferlund, for instance, argues that Turner’s “sectional thesis was not a transition from frontier to region, to the blind alleys of American southern or western history. On the contrary, Turner’s sectionalism was a framework for writing an international history in which the ‘unity and continuity’ of Europe and the United States could be explored; in which ‘local history’ could indeed be read as part of ‘world history’” (362). Despite criticism of Turner’s portrayal of the frontier as “unqualifiedly ordinary” (372), McCarthy draws upon its symbolic significance in works such as *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*.

at first too strong for the man” (4). Considering Turner’s portrayal of the Great West, it becomes evident, given these severe conditions, why McCarthy selects this location for his two most violent male characters, Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh. As a matter of fact, *Blood Meridian*—and *No Country for Old Men* I may add—has been seen as “an attempt to reopen the closed dialogues about the West and to explore its myths in a unique way” (N. Campbell 56). Some McCarthy scholars note that the mythification of the territory which encompasses the Great West holds the United States’s “dominant cultural narrative of masculinity, stories about people and places that had contributed more than anything else to our understanding of what it means to be a man in America” (Brummer 153). This understanding of masculinity and manhood continues to evolve, even into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Since Turner’s era, the popular conception of the Great West has continued to captivate the imaginations of many. Notably, the Great West encompasses the border dividing Mexico and the United States—an aspect that holds political significance and has recurrently featured in political discourse. One particularly infamous and relatively recent example is President Trump, who, under the banner of his “Make America Great Again” campaign slogan, pledged to construct a wall along the border of the two nations. Cooper has characterized the American West as the region in the United States that

most closely aligns with the metaphysical identity of the nation itself. It is a perpetually liminal borderland, a politically, ethnically, and geographically complicated region – the last true “frontier” in the continental United States, and the region that remains the most politically and ideologically fraught site for contested definitions of American identity. (“The Southwest” 25)

Moreover, the original ideology rooted in religion known as Manifest Destiny played a pivotal role in motivating Europeans to traverse the Atlantic Ocean and establish themselves in the New World. This ideology retained its significance, albeit repurposed for political motives and

legislative frameworks, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Parrish posits that “Manifest Destiny is the name that nineteenth-century Americans created to pay tribute to the unstoppable ‘progress’ of a superior technology sanctioned by a superior god” (*Civil War to the Apocalypse* 90). This inexorable progress manifested in various forms, including the expansion of the railroad, the establishment of settlements and cities, the pursuit of gold, and the displacement and massacre of Native American tribes. From the ideology linked to Manifest Destiny arose the “settlement of the North American continent,” a process which “occurred rapidly and unsentimentally, engaging more in the erasure of culture than the creation of it, and only retrospectively can the mythic history of the West be imagined and told” (Holmberg 143–44). It is precisely in this context where *Blood Meridian* is located, since the novel “can clearly be read as a sustained rebuttal of the notion of Manifest Destiny and of the mythology of the nineteenth-century Frontier with which the United States has long justified its brutal crushing of the native American peoples” (Cornwell 9). Moreover, “*Blood Meridian* certainly interrogates the radical anthropocentrism that fuels the idea of Manifest Destiny” (Carson 20), an anthropocentrism both centered in male characters, particularly judge Holden, and interrogated via brutal displays of male violence—as seen also in *No Country for Old Men* in the character of Chigurh.

The myth of Manifest Destiny contributed to the construction, development, and establishment of American masculinity. Some scholars have argued that the “American hypermasculine rural man sprang from the myth of manifest destiny, which suggested Americans had a divine right to all lands west of the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean” (Benson xii). The American Southwest, in particular, emerged as the locus for various manifestations of American masculinities. While the east was perceived as retaining close ties with Europe, the American Southwest provided “the perfect physical and geographic tableau on which to sketch the narratives of men who wander in search of meaning, or redemption, or in denial of

those very qualities” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 32). In addition to Manifest Destiny, American masculinities were influenced by myths emanating from the Western literary genre. Whether in literature, motion pictures, or television shows, the Western genre used the Great West as the primary backdrop for male characters to develop and define their masculinity. The Western, as a genre, is characterized as “the ultimate venue for the display of male power” (Peebles 125). The allure of the Great West for American men lies in its offerings: “an abiding nostalgia for a romanticized past; a burgeoning and suspicious revisionist sensibility; and deep-seated anxieties regarding a place to call home” (Brummer 2). Brummer argues that McCarthy engages with these themes in *Blood Meridian*, and, I would contend, also in *No Country for Old Men*, thus delving into the complex interplay of historical ideologies, myths, and the construction of American masculinity within the evocative backdrop of the American Southwest.

The Great West beckoned men with promises that the east could not fulfill. Brummer posits that American men “have always found European masculinity, Eastern masculinity, suspect . . . too elitist, too effeminate, too loquacious” (153). Therefore, to embody the archetype of a “real man”—in other words, “a regular guy, macho, a man of action”—, the American man needed to turn his gaze “Westward” (153). The allure of the west, and by extension Westerns, as Brummer elaborates, lies in its capacity to allow American men to “find their ideals and shed their disappointments, to rush into the future and run away from the past, to fulfill hopes they could only vaguely comprehend and repress fears they would rather leave behind” (11). The Western genre offered an aspirational image against which the American man could measure himself, given that “Western novels demonstrate the degree to which American masculinity has been defined by a specific set of cultural myths and models” (6). Within the Western genre, two paramount aspects emerge: first, for the main character “to be a man,” and second, for the main character “to be successful” (Peek 211). Moreover, the notion

of ideal masculinity represented by male characters in Westerns “matters only to the extent that it supports the other two, which may be not at all” (211). In other words, the capacity for triumph (both in battle and morally speaking) ultimately defines the Western hero (Peebles 126). In Westerns, the male characters are “made of variously tough stuff. They get the job done and they do it with flair, to such a degree that their stories often have the qualities of myth and epic. They are fun to watch, but perhaps more difficult to imitate” (126). While McCarthy’s Westerns possess an epic quality, the reading experience may not be categorized as “fun,” even if humor is evident in certain dialogues and situations. Humor, being subjective, varies among readers. McCarthy’s Western heroes seldom emerge victorious in certain situations, and their triumph is never realized in the great scheme of things.

Some scholars contend that Chigurh “achieves a heroic stature as the only character to survive the brutal hunt for the missing money” (Buráková 177). Buráková asserts that, through Chigurh, “McCarthy suggests a redefinition of heroism,” which is accomplished by “increasing the level of violence and offering unsettling or perverse versions of masculinity” (177). While I acknowledge Buráková’s perspective and its applicability to *No Country for Old Men*, I maintain that McCarthy, through Chigurh, portrays a character who embodies a more rational, logical, and focus-driven type of man rather than a hero. Chigurh’s perceived superiority in masculinity within the novel stems from his unwavering commitment to a unique cause based on his personal moral code and his resistance to being swayed by sentiments or emotions. While this portrayal of a man may prove more effective in certain contexts, it lacks a crucial element present in the masculinities of Sheriff Bell and Llewelyn Moss: humanity and compassion. Although these qualities may render these two characters vulnerable, McCarthy’s decision to both open and close the novel with Sheriff Bell suggests a predilection for their brand of masculinity over Chigurh’s. Sheriff Bell and Moss’s humanity and compassion, even if they lead to suffering, serve as defining features that distinguish them from Chigurh’s cold

and unyielding demeanor. McCarthy's structural choice in the novel's narrative arc underscores the significance of these qualities in shaping his perspective on masculinity within the story.

In the context of masculinity, Tim Edwards delineates that Westerns, along with other genres such as epics, war, horror, and action movies, typically revolve around three central themes. Aligning with Peek and Peebles's interpretations, the first theme has to do with the genre's exploration of "various forms of heroism, in turn premised on ritualised notions of self-sacrifice" (T. Edwards 125). The second theme centers on the male body, depicted as "a critical site of both spectacle and (repressed) homoeroticism" (125). In this aspect, the male body often invites readings through the lens of queerness, considering that queerness in McCarthy's Westerns "is at once a vanishing remnant of the spaces of frontier, and an impediment to their survival—integral to the culture of cowboying, anathema to the very idea of it" (Jenkins 40). Lastly, Tim Edwards's third theme pertains to violence, which is "often conceived as a form of endurance within the wider formation of a successful masculine identity" (125). McCarthy delves into these three central themes in his Westerns, with notable emphasis in the Border Trilogy, particularly in the character of John Grady Cole, where various forms of heroism are explored. Spurgeon argues that McCarthy employs "the trope of the historic frontier and the landscape of the Southwest within the genre of the Western to interrogate the consequences of our acceptance of the archetypal Western hero myths" ("Sacred Hunter" 76). Continuing with Tim Edwards's themes, the exploration of the male body is evident in the trilogy, with McCarthy paying specific attention to this aspect in his descriptions of judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*, a focus that this chapter will later scrutinize. The third theme, violence, captures McCarthy's interest across all his novels, with particular emphasis on his Westerns.

Some scholars assert that McCarthy in his Westerns, but most particularly in *Blood Meridian*, engages in an exploration of American men's "compulsion to look westward and its

complex motivations” (Brummer 2). Furthermore, McCarthy’s foray into American Westerns is seen as a deliberate choice to craft a “literary text that seizes on the genre and employs it to his own ends: to stand metonymically for the United States as a whole, and in so doing to plumb the depths of the ‘heart of darkness’ of the American political enterprise” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 26). Some argue that *Blood Meridian* hurls readers into a “howling void of a wilderness whose only purity rests in unadulterated violence, un-tempered by ritual, and in the ‘neuter austerity’ of the desert landscape” (Watson 52). As argued in the introduction of this dissertation, *Blood Meridian* is McCarthy’s first incursion into the Western genre and is hailed as his greatest achievement characterized by its “visceral, archaic, brutal, and hauntingly beautiful prose” (Cooper, “The Southwest” 26). In contrast, *No Country for Old Men* is not as lyrical and the story unfolds against the backdrop of “the beginning of the War on Drugs” (27).<sup>63</sup> Despite the stylistic differences between *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy, in the latter, is noted for bringing “to the forefront the ostensibly ‘new’ violence born in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the post-Vietnam War United States struggled with its role as a global economic empire, incompatible with the ‘city on a hill’ imagery of its founding” (31). In conclusion to this succinct, yet crucial overview of both the Great West and the Western genre, and their connection to McCarthy, the perspective presented by Cooper—a distinguished McCarthy scholar—holds merit. Cooper contends that

McCarthy’s Westerns take place in the same borderland, from the mid-nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries. Each narrative is driven by acts of violence, reflective of the violence in United States’ history, and in human

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<sup>63</sup> The allusion made by Cooper to the War on Drugs in the 1980s encompasses policies such as the Comprehensive Crime Control Act, which was signed into law by President Reagan in 1984. Experts argue that the “current War on Drugs began in earnest in 1981. Under the direction of former Attorney General William French Smith, every U.S. Attorney established, in 1981, a law enforcement coordinating committee to assess the drug problem and undertake a federal, state, and local effort against drugs” (Marquart et al. 529). The Texas-Mexican border, the setting for much of the events in *No Country for Old Men*, served “as an important overland and air route for cocaine, heroin, and marijuana” (530). This juxtaposition of various masculinities during this era, embodied by law enforcement agents, drug dealers of different provenances, and U.S. citizens, may have served to inspire McCarthy for the events depicted in the novel.

nature—violence against the self, the Other, and the natural world that imbues both landscape and narrative with a yearning for redemption. That yearning becomes at times an almost sacramental narrative attention to the capacity for human beings to form community, to save each other, and to create meaning in the very chaos of a world on fire. (“The Southwest” 27)

In the Western genre, writers often depict male characters in a manner aligning with the notion that “much of what it took to ‘be a man’ involved the often violent assertion of white male privilege and dominance—over women, ethnic and sexual minorities (male or female), over animals, and over the land” (Peterson 75–76). This definition closely corresponds with the concept of hegemonic masculinity. McCarthy’s portrayal of characters like judge Holden and Anton Chigurh appears to conform to this pattern of asserting privilege and dominance through the use of violence. At a surface level, one might argue that McCarthy is presenting a depiction of “the supermale who for a long time has been the idol of the crowds” (Badinter 130). This supermale aligns with the stereotypical image of the American cowboy, a figure many generations of men have aspired to emulate. This archetype is described as “a sexual animal with women; a creature who meets his male counterparts only in competition, war, or sports. In short, the toughest of the tough, ‘emotionally mutilated,’ more suited to dying than to marrying and mothering” (130). However, judge Holden and Chigurh do not fully conform to all these aspects. While McCarthy occasionally employs stereotypical imagery and behaviors associated with certain aspects of this definition, I contend that McCarthy’s intention is never to laud such masculinity. In fact, the masculinity of these characters serves as a vehicle for McCarthy to illustrate the dangers posed by such extreme forms of masculinity in the worlds they inhabit. In other words, *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* function as McCarthy’s cautionary tales regarding excessively violent masculinities. Before delving into

the analysis of the masculinity of these characters, it is essential to first explore, in broader terms, the theme of violence and its connection with masculinity in general.

## 2. Violence as an Inherent Part of Masculinity

Defining violence is a complex endeavor due to its intrinsic nature and the variations in definitions that may arise depending on factors such as country, society, and traditions. I aim to approach violence from a broad, societal perspective and then narrow the focus to the United States within the geographical context of the American Southwest, ultimately delving into the literary realms crafted by McCarthy. It must be acknowledged that the ensuing definitions and perspectives on violence are consistently discussed with masculinity in consideration. It is important to note that other definitions and approaches to violence exist and are conceivable, even though they may not be explored in this dissertation.

To commence, eminent Spanish psychiatrist Luis Bonino Méndez, drawing conclusions from a 2004 report by the Swedish government,<sup>64</sup> asserts that violence is “a global problem, maybe the biggest one, that is manifested in all levels of society” (*Hombres y violencia de género* 27; my trans.).<sup>65</sup> Bonino Méndez highlights two intriguing aspects of global violence. Firstly, he notes that a significant portion of violence in society “is directed toward people who are selected for being genetically subordinates (women or men who are ‘lesser men’), and the majority of said violence is enforced by men against women, children, and other men” (28; my trans.).<sup>66</sup> Secondly, based on the Swedish report, the psychiatrist argues that “men’s violence

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<sup>64</sup> Bonino Méndez explains that the report was commissioned by the Ministry of Democracy, Integration, and Gender Equality of the Swedish government and authored by esteemed academics in the field of men and masculinities studies, including Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Kauffman, and Kimmel. The report’s thirteen primary points outline the rationale and methods for engaging men in combating gender violence, underscoring the crucial need to ensure men comprehend the issue at hand. The findings of the report can be generalized to encompass violence within western societies.

<sup>65</sup> “La violencia es un problema global, quizás el mayor, que se manifiesta en todos los niveles de la sociedad”.

<sup>66</sup> “las personas a las que se dirige están seleccionadas por ser genéticamente subordinadas (mujeres u hombres ‘poco hombres’), y la mayoría de esa violencia es violencia de los hombres hacia las mujeres, la niñez, y otros hombres”.

continues to be socially cultivated and promoted, and men are socialized to execute it, although they are not predestined to it” (28; my trans.).<sup>67</sup> The three assertions derived from the report by Bonino Méndez serve to establish a connection between men and violence at a global societal level—a conclusion that seems difficult to dispute given humanity’s violent history. Another scholar contends that “there is not necessarily any unilateral or one-dimensional connection of violence with *men*” (T. Edwards 49). However, Tim Edwards clarifies that this does not negate the existence of “no such connection (...) between violence and men more widely and or indeed violence and *masculinity*” (50). In other words, the connection between violence and men is intricate and requires a deeper examination. Nonetheless, one may question: what is violence?

Violence has been characterized as a “persistent, complex and intricate phenomenon not only to understand, but also to study and prevent” (F. Amato 187). One plausible reason as to why violence eludes an easy definition may stem from the fact that violence is not “a uniform phenomenon,” because it is “multi-dimensional, dynamic and open to interpretation” (T. Edwards 49). These inherent qualities of violence present further obstacles, given that “questions of context and perception are of profound significance in deciding what constitutes violence and, moreover, how it is handled” (49). In other words, the perception of violence varies across nations, societies, and individuals because violence “is known to have multiple causes” (Connell 258). Nonetheless, scholars have endeavored to formulate general definitions of violence.

Sociologists Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin present three possibilities for understanding violence. Firstly, they suggest that violence is “often equated with *physical violence*, or certain kinds of violence that are seen as ‘serious’” (17). Secondly, they propose expanding the context

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<sup>67</sup> “La violencia de los hombres sigue siendo cultivada y promovida socialmente, y los hombres son socializados para ejercerla, aunque no predestinados a ella”.

of violence to include harassment<sup>68</sup> and bullying<sup>69</sup> (17–18). Thirdly, violence can be broadly conceptualized as violation. In this perspective, violence is defined as “those structures, actions, events and experiences that violate and cause violation or are considered as violating. They are usually, but not necessarily, performed by a violator or violators upon the violated” (18). Within this violence-violation contextualization, Hearn and Parkin suggest that violence may extend beyond physical violence, harassment, or bullying. In this framework, violence encompasses “intimidation, interrogation, surveillance, persecution, subjugation, discrimination and exclusion that lead to experiences of violation” (18). In summary, for Hearn and Parkin, violence and violation are “*social phenomena*” (18) found within organizations. In the organizational context, as portrayed by McCarthy in *Blood Meridian* (with the companies led by, first, Captain White and, later, by John Joel Glanton) and *No Country for Old Men* (with the drug cartel Chigurh works for), forms of violence as violation include “verbal, emotional, psychological, cognitive, representational and visual attacks, threats and degradation; enactment of psychological harm; physical assaults; use of weapons and other objects; destruction of property; rape; and murder” (Hearn and Parkin 18). It is worth noting that other scholars do not associate violence with violation, but define violence as “aggression that has extreme harm as its goal (e.g., death)” (Anderson and Bushman 29). These scholars emphasize that while “[a]ll violence is aggression,” there are however “many instances of aggression [which] are not violent” (29). A common point of agreement among scholars is the assertion that violence—whether as violation, aggression, or other forms—is predominantly perpetrated by men (e.g., Bourdieu 69–70; T. Edwards 44; Salazar Benítez 40).

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<sup>68</sup> Harassment is defined by Hearn and Parkin as: “unwanted, persistent physical or verbal behaviour of a sexual/racial nature” (17).

<sup>69</sup> Bullying is defined by Hearn and Parkin as an “exposure repeatedly and over time to negative actions from one or more persons such that victims have difficulties defending themselves, as well as physical violence” (17–18). Moreover, bullying includes “isolation (people refusing to listen to you, people refusing to talk to you), slander (gossip behind your back, spreading false and groundless information), negative glances and gestures, laughing, sneering” (18).

Kimmel succinctly asserted: “Men are overwhelmingly more violent than women” (*The Gendered Society* 315); he is not alone in making such a claim. According to Tim Edwards, the strong connection between violence and masculinity lies in the belief that violence is inherent in men’s nature, suggesting that “violence is a direct outcome of [men’s] maleness or in short [men’s] biology” (50). However, not everyone subscribes to this viewpoint. As mentioned in the introduction, Connell, a sociologist credited with the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, contends that, above all, “masculinity cannot be interpreted as a fixed propensity to violence” (258).<sup>70</sup> Connell’s perspective does not negate a connection between masculinity and violence. Rather, Connell argues that, at a personal level, masculine violence occurs because the connection between masculinity and violence is also global: “European/American masculinities were deeply implicated in the world-wide violence through which European/American culture became dominant” (186). This assertion undoubtedly refers to centuries of European overseas colonization and various wars involving European countries and the United States throughout the twentieth century and beyond. In addition, Connell’s statement aligns directly with McCarthy’s portrayal of the Great West in *Blood Meridian*. Consequently, Connell concludes that violence “is a part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection” (84). The domination referred to by Connell is vividly represented and enacted in characters like judge Holden and Anton Chigurh. Although the judge may hold a different perspective, my conclusion, as will be explored, is that McCarthy ultimately portrays the perfectly violent masculinities of these two characters as imperfect.

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<sup>70</sup> Bacete concurs with Connell’s statement. Bacete states, “Insisto y no me cansaré de hacerlo: la violencia no es ni natural ni biológica ni inherente ni consustancial al hecho humano, como lo demuestra la hiperrepresentación masculina en los actos violentos y también el hecho incontestable de que solo algunos hombres la ejercen (menos del 10%) y no lo hacen siempre ni en todo lugar. Por tanto, la violencia es profundamente tecnológica, cultural, relacional, y requiere de modelos rígidos, estereotipados, así como de cientos de miles de estímulos tóxicos en cada biografía masculina para lograr desconectarnos de algo que sí que es profundamente natural y biológico: la empatía, la capacidad de amar y la compasión” (245).

As argued by experts, violence appears to be an enduring aspect of men's masculinity, particularly in the United States. The pervasiveness of violence is so deeply woven into the nation's fabric that some sociologists assert, "Virtually every male in America understands something about violence. We know how it works, we know how to use it, and we know that if we are perceived as weak or unmanly, it will be used against us. Each of us cuts his own deal with it" (Kimmel, *Guyland* 56). From adolescence onward, young men who lack alternative cultural mechanisms to perceive themselves as men have often "assumed violence as the way to become men" ("Masculinidades globales" 68; my trans.).<sup>71</sup> Kimmel characterizes violence, spanning from early childhood to old age, as "the most obdurate, intractable behavioral gender difference" (*The Gendered Society* 315). Furthermore, he contends that violence "has been part of the meaning of masculinity, part of the way males have measured, demonstrated, and proven their identity" ("Masculinidades globales" 68; my trans.).<sup>72</sup> For many men, male violence serves as "a way to prove successful masculinity" (*The Gendered Society* 316). Anthropologists might categorize this violence—from early childhood and through adolescence into adulthood—and the men who engage in it as "the socializing and successful result of toxic ideas about being a man" (Bacete 273; my trans.).<sup>73</sup> According to Bacete, this constitutes the precise definition of a devoted adherent to the patriarchy. "Patriarchy" and "machismo" are terms that recurrently come to the forefront in discussions about violence. McCarthy's narratives are replete with patriarchal and violent societies and groups.

Violence can be constructed from various perspectives and justifications by those who enact it, regardless of how incorrect those constructions may be. Some experts argue that these constructions, perspectives, and justifications require both narrative and social permission

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<sup>71</sup> "Sin otro mecanismo cultural por el que los jóvenes puedan llegar a verse como hombres, han asumido la violencia como en el camino para hacerse hombres".

<sup>72</sup> "La violencia ha sido parte del significado de la masculinidad, parte de la forma en que los varones han medido, demostrado y probado su identidad".

<sup>73</sup> "Es decir, el resultado socializador exitoso de las ideas tóxicas de ser hombre, donde la preparación para el ejercicio de la violencia en los varones empieza muy temprano".

(Bacete 108). One construction of violence that men employ is from the perspective that violence can be restorative, particularly in relation to their masculinity. For instance, Kimmel explains that in adolescence, “male violence is so restorative that it’s even been prescribed by generations of dads to enable their boys to stand up for themselves” (*Guyland* 56). The use of violence as a means to restore what has been perceived as lost is not limited to childhood and adolescence, it continues into adulthood. This is not surprising, as the presumed restorative capacity of violence is seen by some men in various ways. Violence can be seen as something heroic (Salazar Benítez 41), as a “rich set of privileges and forms of power” (Kaufman 2), as both “a result and a means to an end” (2), as dominance (Bacete 247; Connell and Messerschmidt 840; Hearn, “From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men” 51), as a means of negating femininity (T. Edwards 61), as a way to reclaim damaged masculinity (Kimmel, “Los estudios de la masculinidad” 21), as a way to “establish and maintain male power” (Dagirmanjian et al. 3), as intrasexual competition—i.e., men limiting other men’s access to mates (Ainsworth and Maner 820)—, and many others. Additionally, terms such as “honor” and “virility” serve men to justify the use of violence when their masculinity is perceived to have been threatened or endangered (Beynon 82; Bourdieu 69–70).

Finally, the connection between men and violence may not be inherently irredeemable. Some experts argue that men are not born violent but rather learn it through cultural patterns (Bacete 256). Consequently, education becomes a crucial factor, although not the sole one. As mentioned earlier, the evident link between patriarchy, and by extension patriarchal societies, and male violence has been observed. Researchers have noted that gender equality is also pivotal in diminishing violence among men. Achieving this requires a balance in parental roles within the household: “High gender equality in the childhood home, defined as the mother and father having an equal say, is associated with lower violence” (Holter 61). It becomes apparent that violence can be reduced both in society at large and in men specifically. Women and

education can play active roles in assisting men to decrease their use of violence, particularly in defining and constructing their masculinity—provided that men are receptive to such assistance.

### **3. Violence, an Overarching Theme in McCarthy's Oeuvre: Bloodshed, Life, and Masculinity**

In the exploration of McCarthy's oeuvre, a recurring and central theme aligning with the portrayal of masculinity in his characters is the pervasive presence of violence. Since the beginning of his career, McCarthy earned recognition by critics and readers alike as "a writer of dark and violent novels whose work had often been compared with that of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor" (Parrish, "History and the Problem of Evil" 67). While critics acknowledge other consistent elements in McCarthy's body of work, such as his poetic use of language, detailed descriptions, focus on dysfunctional families, and male-populated narratives, it has been argued that there is nothing "so persistent in all McCarthy's books as the idea that violence is timeless" (Ellis 86). The spectrum of violence in McCarthy's novels spans from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, manifested by both male and occasionally female characters. Instances of violence are not confined to adult men but are also wielded by child and teenage characters like John Grady Cole, the kid, and Billy Parham. Critiques of McCarthy's Appalachian novels highlight that violence "becomes a desperate attempt to uphold some kind of self-worth but also serves as a point of identification and solidification of manhood" (Vågnes 48–49). This observation, although made in relation to *Suttree*, resonates across *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, and *Child of God*. The trend of violence persists in McCarthy's borderland novels, including *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*, and *No Country for Old Men*. Cooper's interpretation underscores violence as a driving force in these Westerns, reflecting both the historical violence of the United States

and the innate violence of human nature. While I endorse Cooper's notion of a redemptive element in McCarthy's use of violence ("The Southwest" 27), as seen in characters like the man in *The Road* or John Grady Cole, especially in *Cities of the Plain*, I contend that McCarthy predominantly employs violence as a cautionary device. The stark and appalling depictions of violence in his novels serve to evoke a strong emotional response from the reader, emphasizing the inherent dangers associated with such behaviors.

Readers of McCarthy may question the origins of his profound fascination with violence and his decision to portray it in such vivid detail. While any answer can only be speculative, McCarthy, in the aforementioned notable 1992 interview with *The New York Times Magazine* after the remarkable first big bestseller success of his career, the publication of *All the Pretty Horses*, provided a succinct insight into his perspective: "There's no such thing as life without bloodshed" (Woodward.) This statement encapsulates McCarthy's fundamental rationale for incorporating violence into his works—life, as he perceives it, is intrinsically intertwined with the concept of bloodshed. Moreover, given McCarthy's propensity for predominantly male-centered narratives, masculinity and violence emerge as overarching and enduring themes, representing what Mitchell aptly describes as McCarthy's "career-long preoccupations" (249). In the interview, McCarthy expands on his assertion, cautioning against the dangerous idea that the human species can be perfected for a harmonious existence: "I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom. Your desire that it be that way will enslave you and make your life vacuous" (Woodward). McCarthy's perspective is grounded in the acceptance of the inherent violence within the human condition. To him, obliviousness or rejection of this reality only leads to suffering and emptiness. It seems that McCarthy advocates for acknowledging the existence of violence, considering it an integral part of the human heart,

and navigating life with this understanding. Regarded as an author who “can now join the ranks of the philosophers of war” (Crews 288), McCarthy employs the characters of judge Holden and Anton Chigurh as profound analyses of the dangers inherent in embracing violence to its extreme. The vast expanse of the American Southwest, geographically speaking, provides these characters with “a testing-ground” (N. Campbell 57) where their violent masculinity can manifest fully. The terrifying aspect lies in the plausible realism of the violent situations depicted in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. Judge Holden and Chigurh stand as McCarthy’s cautionary examples of the perilous consequences when a man fully embraces and embodies violence. While the poetic portrayal of violent masculinities in McCarthy’s worlds may be fascinating,<sup>74</sup> it is crucial to recognize that, in every sense of the word, these destructive manifestations lead to utter ruin.

After dedicating the initial pages of this chapter to providing the reader with essential context on the Great West, the Western genre, and the theme of violence, the focus now shifts to an in-depth analysis of the violent masculinities embodied by judge Holden and Anton Chigurh. To achieve this, it becomes imperative to juxtapose the masculinity of these two characters with that of other male figures of significance in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. Initially, their masculinity will be scrutinized in relation to nature, emphasizing their roles as hunters and comparing their hunting skills with those of other characters in the respective novels. Subsequently, a comprehensive examination of judge Holden’s relationship with nature is indispensable. Finally, the construction of the violent masculinities of Holden and Chigurh necessitates exploration in the context of three central themes in McCarthy’s works: God, war, and games. These thematic approaches—man as a hunter, the relationship to

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<sup>74</sup> McCarthy’s literary works have been characterized as “loosely realist” (Monk 111). McCarthy’s realism, however, “produces fabulous worlds concurrently strange and familiar. The quest-narratives and Bildungsroman that emerge as a result are populated by a magnified parade of heroes, grotesques, and avengers, set against an array of vividly realized landscapes. Such narratives generate a powerful sense of a ‘real’ yet mythologized America about to be defamiliarized utterly by its imminent passage into history” (111).

and dominion over nature, and the intersections of God, war, and games—are strategically employed by McCarthy in both characters, contributing to the portrayal of a type of violent masculinity that holds sway in the fictional worlds of the two novels.

#### **4. Masculinity and Nature: The Natural World as a Testing Ground for Masculinity**

From the beginning of recorded history, nature has held a significant role in shaping cultural and artistic expressions. The conceptualization of nature can vary across different societies. In Western cultures, there has often been an association of nature with the feminine, as reflected in phrases like “mother nature.” The woman-nature construct has endured for centuries in cultural products such as literature. It has been explained that in American and European societies, there exists a symbolic division where “the earth and all the water in it is considered to be feminine, and by extension, it belongs to women. In the West, the sky belongs to men, and the earth to women” (Bly 42). Another explanation that illustrates this connection between woman and nature argues that there is the “assumption that woman *is woman by nature*; there is nothing to do in order to *menstruate*. In this way, it is *nature* the one who explains why woman is *feminine*” (Valcuende del Río 10; my trans.).<sup>75</sup> A more comprehensive exploration of the traditionally attributed connection between nature and the feminine will be undertaken in the third chapter of this dissertation. For the current focus on men and violence in this second chapter, it is sufficient to acknowledge the historically prevalent association between nature and the feminine.

Nature, in addition to its association with the feminine, has also been characterized as “a mythological referent that serves to legitimize anything, predisposing man toward mobility,

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<sup>75</sup> “se asume que la mujer *es mujer por naturaleza*; no es preciso hacer nada más que *tener la menstruación*. De esta forma es *la naturaleza* la que explica por qué una mujer es *femenina*”.

toward action” (Valcuende del Río 12; my trans.).<sup>76</sup> Acting as a testing ground for man, nature aids in shaping what is commonly referred to as “his nature.” Within the construct man-nature, this testing ground demands that a man “needs to demonstrate that he is a true man; action against passivity, strength versus weakness, firmness against pusillanimity” (12; my trans.).<sup>77</sup> Literature in English has frequently explored man’s relationship with nature,<sup>78</sup> notably within the Western genre, but also in other prominent twentieth-century American authors. As mentioned earlier, McCarthy is often compared to authors such as William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor; Ernest Hemingway can be added to the list as well. Hemingway, like McCarthy, focused on male-centered stories and was particularly interested in portraying a version of himself as a white male hunter: “Hemingway’s work seems primarily concerned with celebrating himself as a white male hunter” (Armengol, “Performing Manhood through Animal Killings?” 837).<sup>79</sup> Although McCarthy does not share Hemingway’s concern, he is deeply intrigued by portraying hunting scenes and nature in his work. The relationship between man and nature holds paramount importance for McCarthy as, in his view, “[t]he world of men and the world of nature are not really separated” (Spurgeon, “Pledged in Blood” 37). Natural landscapes in McCarthy’s works often pose threats to the characters, a theme explored in the

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<sup>76</sup> “La ‘naturaleza’, ese referente mítico que sirve para legitimar cualquier cosa, predispone al hombre a la movilidad, a la acción”.

<sup>77</sup> “donde el hombre debe demostrar que es un verdadero hombre; acción frente a pasividad, fuerza versus debilidad, firmeza contra pusilanimidad”.

<sup>78</sup> Here are some examples that help to illustrate the importance of man and nature in English literature. Arguably the most well-known example is Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a novel which narrates the survival of the protagonist on an island for twenty-eight years after a shipwreck. William Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798) is a poem that reflects on the spiritual connection between man and the natural world. Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) explores the wild and untamed landscape of the Yorkshire moors, mirroring the passionate and tumultuous relationships of the characters. With regard to American literature, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) is a remarkable essay in which he narrates his experiences in nature over a period of two years. Finally, John Muir’s *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911) chronicles the author’s experiences during his exploration of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California, showing a spiritual connection between man and nature.

<sup>79</sup> For readers seeking further exploration of the intersection between Hemingway’s literary themes and the culture of hunting, Armengol offers valuable insights. Armengol’s research, such as his 2020 article “Performing Manhood Through Animal Killings?,” delves into nuanced connections between hunting practices and the construction of masculinity. Additionally, Armengol’s 2014 book *Masculinities in Black and White: Manliness and Whiteness in (African) American Literature* provides a broader examination of masculinities in literature, including their portrayal in hunting contexts within American literary traditions.

preceding chapter of this doctoral dissertation—such as the shipwreck passage in *Outer Dark* or the stark world traversed by the man and the boy in *The Road*.

In the context of the two novels under scrutiny in this chapter, some scholars have characterized the natural landscape of *Blood Meridian* as “one that lacks nurturing sustenance (it is certainly not a garden), it is filled with a variety of environmental dangers, and generally it can be seen as a desolate waste” (Braune 8–9). Conversely, in *No Country for Old Men*, the U.S.-Mexican border area—situated “somewhere in the plains of West Texas and the deserts of New Mexico” (Reigler 23)—depicts “the sparse desert landscape and minimalist geography of western Texas” (McFarland 433) and is portrayed as a “lawless world that is slowly but inexorably disintegrating” (Reigler 23). Neither natural setting seems appealing for habitation, particularly given McCarthy’s portrayal of nature as “often brutal and almost always without mercy for humans” (Spurgeon, “Sacred Hunter” 80). In the eyes of McCarthy’s male characters, one might ponder what better validation of masculinity a man could seek than what these environments offer. If the men in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* cannot test their masculinity in such a natural and hostile milieu, where else might they find a most suitable challenge?

If nature serves as a testing ground for masculinity, one of the most effective ways for a man to evaluate his masculinity in nature is through hunting. McCarthy’s works precisely explore this nature-masculinity connection, a link not so distant from the one historically established between humans and the natural world in virtually every society. It makes sense that men historically tested their masculinity through hunting, given their traditional role in Western cultures as providers who hunt and fish for their families and communities. These skills were commonly passed down from one generation to the next, but some men were also autodidacts, learning and perfecting these skills in isolation. Nature serves as a fundamental teacher for man, given that “in a man the *educative* process must take over from nature”

(Badinter 68). Historically, hunting has redefined the relationship between humans and nature, especially the male's connection to the natural world. Experts have explained that hunting "changed man's relationship to other animals and his view of what is natural. The human notion that it is normal for animals to flee, the whole concept of animals being wild, is the result of man's habit of hunting" (Washburn and Lancaster 299). Also, violent activities such as "hunting, fishing, fighting and games of war" (300) are often a source of interest for boys—perhaps due to its emphasis in their education over that of girls—as they develop specific skill sets. In some cases, the "skills for killing and the pleasures of killing are normally developed in play, and the patterns of play prepare the children for their adult roles" (300). McCarthy seems aware of this claim, as will be explored in this chapter through the perspectives of judge Holden and Anton Chigurh, who argue in favor of games or even use them to justify themselves and their actions.

The activity of hunting has been extensively examined by experts, with some defining it as "the master behavior pattern of the human species" (Laughlin 304). William Laughlin argues that hunting has played a crucial role in human evolution, given that hunting is "the organizing activity which integrated the morphological, physiological, genetic, and intellectual aspects of the individual human organisms and of the population who compose our single species" (304). Moreover, hunting implies action and an active process that "puts motion and direction into the diagram of man's morphology, technology, social organization, and ecological relations. Hunting involves goals and motivations for which intricate inhibition systems have been developed" (304). Hunting has also contributed to increasing human intellect. Many inventions were created out of a need to find more effective ways to hunt prey. Laughlin explains that hunting "placed a premium upon inventiveness, upon problem solving, and has imposed a real penalty for failure to solve the problem" (304). Remarkably, these aspects align with the dynamics depicted in *No Country for Old Men*, particularly within the

characters of Chigurh and Moss, as will be explored. Due to all these qualities of hunting, in Laughlin's opinion, the contributions of hunting toward the advancement of the human species have proven to be plentiful (304). For individuals, especially men in McCarthy's narratives, hunting transcends a mere activity, it becomes "a way of life" (304). The hunter's way of life is vividly portrayed through the principal male characters in both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, worlds mostly populated by male characters where female ones are relegated to secondary roles at most.

In this context, my exclusive reference to men is in line with McCarthy's portrayal, as he does not attribute these capacities to the few female characters in *No Country for Old Men*. Some scholars have observed that historically, hunting "is described as a male activity from which females are excluded" (Linton 37; my trans.),<sup>80</sup> a perspective inherently patriarchal and discriminatory. Linton contends that a theory neglecting half of the human species is inherently unbalanced (37), a sentiment with which I concur. It is essential to acknowledge that females have demonstrated success as hunters in both the human and animal realms.<sup>81</sup>

Returning now to hunting and men, nature, often perceived as a stern instructor, deems only those men who venture into its realms to test themselves as, especially in patriarchal societies, deserving of the label "real" men. In *XY, on Masculine Identity* (1995), Badinter explores "[f]our imperatives of masculinity in the form of popular slogans" (130). Originating from Deborah S. David and Robert Brannon's *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role* (1976), these imperatives become a focal point in Badinter's analysis of masculinity. As per David and Brannon's original definition, they identify "a small number of basic themes

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<sup>80</sup> [La caza] "es descrita como una actividad masculina de la que están excluidas las hembras".

<sup>81</sup> In both mythological and historical contexts, examples abound of hunters challenging traditional gender roles. Artemis, the revered Greek goddess of the hunt, embodies the prowess and independence associated with female hunters, defying gender norms of her time. Similarly, Osa Johnson made history in 1930 by reportedly becoming the first woman to obtain a professional hunter's license in Africa, breaking barriers and demonstrating women's capabilities in traditionally male-dominated domains. Moreover, in the animal kingdom, lionesses and hyenas often outshine their male counterparts as skilled hunters.

which pervade and ultimately define the male sex role” (12). These basic themes, or in Badinter’s terms, imperatives, exhibit “subparts and complexities and at some points they overlap, but the following four themes seem to comprise the core requirements of the role” (David and Brannon 12). The four masculine themes/imperatives are termed as follows:

- 1) No Sissy Stuff: The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
- 2) The Big Wheel: Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.
- 3) The Sturdy Oak: A manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance.
- 4) Give ’Em Hell!: The aura of aggression, violence, and daring. (12)

The third imperative underscores a man’s necessity to cultivate self-reliance, a crucial skill for survival in nature. All of the male characters scrutinized in this dissertation exhibit distinct abilities that align with the themes of men and nature or, more specifically, men *in* the natural environment.

#### 4.1. ANTON CHIGURH: MAN AS A HUNTER

To commence the analysis of the male characters in this second chapter, let us explore *No Country for Old Men*. To dissect Chigurh’s violent masculinity—one not anchored “in traditional values and common sense” (Cole and Saxton 607)—, it is essential to juxtapose it with the masculinity exhibited by other significant male characters in the novel, namely, Llewelyn Moss, Sheriff Bell, and Carson Wells. McCarthy strategically chooses Moss, often perceived as the novel’s hero, to be the initial character from the aforementioned list depicted in isolation within nature. The novel provides a vivid description of Moss in his inaugural appearance:

Moss sat with the heels of his boots dug into the volcanic gravel of the ridge and glassed the desert below him with a pair of twelve power german binoculars. His

hat pushed back on his head. Elbows propped on his knees. The rifle strapped over his shoulder with a harnessleather sling was a heavy-barreled .270 on a '98 Mauser action with a laminated stock of maple and walnut. It carried a Unertl telescopic sight of the same power as the binoculars. The antelope were a little under a mile away. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 8)

From this passage, we gather that Moss embodies the role of a hunter. His equipment, including binoculars and a rifle with a telescopic sight, along with his attire—boots and a hat for sun protection—coupled with his careful posture, crouching to avoid detection by antelope, all affirm his identity as a hunter. This role “associates him with a natural code that is tied to the earth” (Johns 139), emphasizing his connection to the environment. Furthermore, McCarthy portrays Moss as an adept hunter, a fact reinforced by the tooth of a boar he carries around his neck as a trophy from a previous kill (*No Country for Old Men* 9). These nuanced details contribute to shaping the reader’s perception of Moss. Some scholars assert that Moss, in his expertise as a hunter, “represents a law of domination at the expense of others” (Johns 140), primarily over animals in the novel’s context. However, this domination does not extend to Chigurh, who represents a distinct and more formidable type of dominant hunter.

In the novel’s opening scene, Moss skillfully exhibits his hunting expertise. He knows that his scent will not be picked up by his prey, betraying his position, because “there was no wind” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 9). Moss strategically positions himself with the sun at his back, ensuring that the antelope “couldnt very well have seen light reflected off the glass of the scope” (9), a detail that could alert the animals to his presence. Moss not only gauges the proximity he can maintain without arousing suspicion, but he also “knew the exact drop of the bullet in hundred yard increments. It was the distance that was uncertain” (9). As an experienced hunter, Moss faces the dilemma of whether to risk getting closer, potentially

alarming the prey, or take the shot from his current position. Ultimately, he fires the shot, but his miss results in the animal being wounded rather than killed.

Later, Moss discovers three vehicles on a floodplain, surrounded by dead bodies. After carefully examining the scene, he finds more casualties inside the trucks, with one survivor pleading for a gulp of water. Uncovering parcels with “a loose brown powder” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 13), Moss deduces that it is a drug transaction gone awry and realizes that “there had to be a last man standing. And it wasn't the cuate in the Bronco begging for water” (15). It is at this moment that he puts into practice his qualities as a good hunter: knowing how to scan the terrain and follow a trail. Experts have explained the importance of a good hunter's ability to scan terrain, since scanning “includes the collection of information on where to hunt” (Laughlin 307). Moreover, good hunters capable of scanning the terrain successfully “reflect sophisticated knowledge concerning the behavior of animals, environmental conditions, and other commitments of the hunter to patterns” (307–08). Moss, drawing on his understanding of human, particularly male, behavior (one later mimicked by himself, namely fleeing the scene with a satchel full of money) tracks the blood spatters left by the fleeing man. The blood spatters not only indicate the direction the man went in, but also, judging by the increasing amounts of blood that Moss finds, he is able to come to the conclusion that the fleeing man is bleeding in such a way that he “aint goin far (...). You may think you are. But you aint” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 15). Irony unfolds as Moss locates the dead man, retrieves the satchel, and, though not explicitly stated, may believe that he can go far, unaware at that moment that a more adept hunter will go after him.

Like Moss, both Sheriff Bell and Anton Chigurh possess certain hunting expertise. When Sheriff Bell accompanies Deputy Wendell to investigate the aftermath of the drug massacre, he demonstrates his ability to scan the terrain:

Bell pointed at the ground from time to time. You can tell the day tracks from the night ones, he said. They were drivin out here with no lights. See there how crooked the track is? Like you can just see far enough ahead to duck the brush in front of you. Or you might leave some paint on a rock like that right yonder.

In a sandwash he got down and walked up and back and then looked away toward the south. It's the same tire tread comin back as was goin down. Made about the same time. You can see the sipes real clear. Which way they're a goin.

They's two or more trips each way, I'd say. (70–71)

In the passage, although Sheriff Bell is not engaged in hunting animals, his approach to reading the tracks left by the trucks is remarkably similar to how a hunter would scan animal tracks. Furthermore, both Moss and Sheriff Bell share the ability to draw similar conclusions when interpreting tracks on the land. This specific kind of man not only connects with nature, but also comprehends the nature of his fellow men. Moss, Bell, and later Chigurh reach a consensus regarding the existence of a last man standing who escaped the shooting with a case full of money. These characters eventually find the body of this last man, and demonstrate unique skills acquired through close interaction with the natural world and hunting techniques, enabling them to rationalize observations in nature and apply them effectively. Thus, it can be argued that “reason is sovereign and the source of knowledge. It is because reason is a universal faculty that it can yield us objective and impartial knowledge. It is the task of reason to discern the laws that govern the empirical world of nature” (Seidler 23). Furthermore, Moss, Bell, and Chigurh exhibit the ability to distinguish one man's tracks from another's, showcasing their successful hunting skills, given that a good hunter frequently gets “information from other hunters. He must first find what animals are in the territory and the actual tracks” (Laughlin 308). Similar to animal hunting, where the “presence of one animal may signal the presence of another so that the hunter is encouraged to continue with this inspection even if he has not

actually sighted the animal he wants” (308), Moss, Bell, and Chigurh inspect the territory until they find what they seek: the money in Moss’s case or evidence to continue the pursuit for Bell and Chigurh. This hunting-tracking pattern is employed prominently by Chigurh and, to a lesser extent, by Bell throughout much of the novel. Finally, it is important to note that not all male characters in the novel share this knowledge of nature or exhibit proficiency in the hunting techniques demonstrated by Moss, Sheriff Bell, and Chigurh; thus, those male characters fall short in their understanding of the nature of men. For instance, Deputy Wendell is less certain about the available evidence than Sheriff Bell, often seeking the latter’s opinion on several occasions.<sup>82</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Anton Chigurh showcases his hunting prowess later in the novel while pursuing Moss. The narrative reveals that the case carries a transponder enabling Chigurh to track Moss’s movements. At one point, Chigurh detects a strong signal, halts the car, and shifts to the passenger seat. As he adjusts the transponder’s dial to verify the signal reception, the following occurs:

The headlights picked up some kind of a large bird sitting on the aluminum  
bridgerail up ahead and Chigurh pushed the button to let the window down. Cool  
air coming in off the lake. He took the pistol from beside the box and cocked and  
leveled it out the window, resting the barrel on the rearview mirror. The pistol  
had been fitted with a silencer sweated onto the end of the barrel. The silencer  
was made out of brass mapp-gas burners fitted into a hairspray can and the whole  
thing stuffed with fiberglass roofing insulation and painted flat black. He fired  
just as the bird crouched and spread its wings.

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<sup>82</sup> Here are some examples. When exploring the ground for tire treads, Wendell asks Bell, “What do you reckon it is we’re fixin to find down here?” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 71). Later, reconstructing the scene of the shootout based on his observations, Bell explains that two men were shot between the eyes. Wendell asks: “The othern didnt have a gun?” (73). Finally, Wendell asks Bell his opinion about one of the drivers: “So where do you reckon the driver got to?” (74).

It flared wildly in the lights, very white, turning and lifting away into the darkness. The shot had hit the rail and caromed off into the night and the rail hummed dully in the slipstream and ceased. Chigurh laid the pistol in the seat and put the window back up again. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 98–99)

As evident, Chigurh not only hunts Moss for absconding with the drug dealers' money, but also seizes the opportunity to randomly target an animal. Covell has characterized Chigurh's action in the passage as a "sudden drive-by annihilation of the crow on the bridge" (103). Moreover, the passage suggests that Chigurh possesses the skill to fashion a silencer for his gun from commonplace objects. Hence, in this instance, Chigurh exhibits the qualities of a man adept in nature, one who exerts dominion over it. Chigurh utilizes his reasoning and available objects resourcefully to secure an advantage in killing. In doing so, he demonstrates ingenuity, a traditionally distinctly masculine trait aligning with the skills of a hunter. Laughlin explains that hunting "played the dominant role in transforming a bipedal ape into a tool-using and tool-making man" (318). Chigurh, in essence, embodies the tool-using and tool-making man who wholeheartedly embraces hunting and its role in establishing his supremacy over others.

In stark contrast to Chigurh's ruthless attempt to kill the bird, Sheriff Bell's attitude toward animals is diametrically opposed. While driving to the town of Sonora to gather information about two men killed by Chigurh, Sheriff Bell notices a bird lying on the asphalt. The scene is narrated as follows:

Driving out 90 toward the turnoff at Dryden he came across a hawk dead in the road. He saw the feathers move in the wind. He pulled over and got out and walked back and squatted on his bootheels and looked at it. He raised one wing and let it fall again. Cold yellow eye dead to the blue vault above them.

It was a big redtail. He picked it up by one wingtip and carried it to the bar ditch and laid it in the grass. They would hunt the blacktop, sitting in the high

powerpoles and watching the highway in both directions for miles. Any small thing that might venture to cross. Closing on their prey against the sun. Shadowless. Lost in the concentration of the hunter. He wouldn't have the trucks running over it. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 44–45)

Sheriff Bell exhibits profound respect for the deceased bird, going so far as to interrupt his journey to ensure the creature's body is moved to a safe location away from the road. This gesture of respect aligns with the behavior of a hunter who values and honors their prey. It might also be interpreted as a hunter-to-hunter acknowledgment, since this is a bird of prey—an equal in the hunting world. Sheriff Bell extends this sense of respect beyond animals; he personally identifies Moss's body at the motel where the latter has been killed and tells the other police officers that he will take on the responsibility of informing Moss's wife of his demise (240). This reflects an obligation to pay respects to the spouse of a fellow hunter. Moss's death deeply impacts Sheriff Bell, and while attempting to console him, the Culberson County sheriff highlights the inevitability of the fatal outcome. Sheriff Bell's response encapsulates the hunter's mentality, acknowledging the inevitability of death but always hoping for a different outcome: "No. (...) But you always like to think there is" (240). Sheriff Bell and Llewelyn Moss embody the archetype of hunters who engage in the sport but with respect for their prey. In contrast, Chigurh's approach lacks any reverence for the animals he hunts or the men he kills. Chigurh kills indiscriminately, devoid of any moral qualms. Cant observes that, for Chigurh "humans, birds, and animals are equals" (55), emphasizing his distinct and unorthodox perspective on killing. In essence, Chigurh kills "because he must do so, because that is the reason of his life" (Boever 140). Despite sharing the role of hunters, the masculinity displayed by Chigurh diverges significantly from that of Sheriff Bell and Moss, particularly in its ruthless and indiscriminate nature.

When given the opportunity, Chigurh plans his killings meticulously, akin to a skilled hunter. Let us examine one of the initial instances in which Chigurh pinpoints Moss's location at a motel using the transponder. Chigurh drives to the motel and ensures from the car that the signal he receives from the transponder emanates from one of the rooms. Upon checking in, he proceeds to his room, equipped with his tools. For this human hunt, Chigurh arms himself with a different weapon from the one used on the bird: "The shotgun was a twelve gauge Remington automatic with a plastic military stock and a parkerized finish. It was fitted with a shopmade silencer fully a foot long and big around as a beer can" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 103). In a similar fashion to the aforementioned scanning technique a hunter would employ, Chigurh's reconnaissance of the motel, as if it were a natural habitat where he has located his quarry, is notable. The narrative details Chigurh's methodical approach: after identifying the room emitting the signal, he returns to his own room, illuminates it for visibility, assesses its layout, and prepares for the hunt: "He took the measure of the room and looked to see where everything was. He measured where the light switches were. Then he stood in the room taking it all in once again" (103). As can be observed from the passage, Chigurh, knowing that the rooms look alike, thoroughly familiarizes himself with his surroundings to gain an advantage over his target. In contrast, neither Moss nor Wells, the characters attempting to hunt Chigurh, demonstrate such meticulous planning and preparation. While Moss may improvise some form of strategy when faced with imminent danger, it does not rival the methodical approach of Chigurh. Chigurh's anticipation and preparation for the hunt are unparalleled.

Indeed, Chigurh's meticulous preparation prior to the violent encounter at the motel proves effective. Moreover, the narration underscores Chigurh's remarkable skill and speed in dispatching his targets. Upon kicking open the room's door, a "Mexican in a green guayabera had sat up on the bed and was reaching for a small machinegun beside him. Chigurh shot him three times so fast it sounded like one long gunshot and left most of the upper part of him

spread across the headboard and the wall behind it” (103). Subsequently, Chigurh eliminates another man concealed in the bathroom. A similar strategy is employed in Chigurh’s confrontation with Carson Wells: anticipating Wells’s return to the hotel, Chigurh lies in wait, ensuring Wells, who does not suspect he is being hunted, meets his demise. Carla Jean, lacking any hunting prowess or associated abilities, faces a fate akin to Wells’s by the novel’s conclusion, as will be explored in the subsequent chapter of this dissertation.

Moss emerges as the sole character capable of resisting Chigurh’s pursuit, and notably, he is the only one to survive a direct confrontation with him, albeit severely injured. Moss is acutely aware of the peril he faces by appropriating the money, understanding the grave consequences it entails. This awareness is evident in a conversation between Deputy Wendell and Sheriff Bell concerning Moss’s predicament. Wendell inquires, “You think this boy has got any notion of the sorts of sons of bitches that are huntin him?”, to which Sheriff Bell responds, “I dont know. He ought to. He seen the same things I seen and it made a impression on me” (94). While Sheriff Bell may not anticipate Chigurh’s specific pursuit of Moss, both he and Moss comprehend the severity of the situation, recognizing the imminent threat posed by a very dangerous adversary. Although it can be argued that Moss initially “refuses to acknowledge the moral seriousness of both his actions and perspective” (Griffis 544), his apprehensions are validated when Chigurh eliminates the aforementioned Mexicans in the first motel where he is hiding, prompting him to retrieve the money and flee.

Moss eventually seeks refuge at the Hotel Eagle, where he grapples with the mystery of how Chigurh and the Mexicans managed to track him down. He reflects: “There is no goddamn way” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 107), thus conveying his perplexity at how he could be located. Upon inspecting the case and the various stacks of bills, he discovers the sending unit and realizes the precariousness of his situation. Moss “thought about a lot of things but the thing that stayed with him was that at some point he was going to have to quit

running on luck” (108). In other words, Moss acknowledges that his survival thus far has been largely contingent on luck rather than his hunting skills, understanding that in *No Country for Old Men* “[t]he ultimate hunter, of course, is Anton Chigurh” (Brummer 149). As a seasoned hunter and man of action, Moss apprehends the inevitability of a confrontation with Chigurh, so he prepares for the encounter, although with little time and only after he has confirmed, in the previous motel, that he is being hunted by “a figure of an unnamable terror against which one is ultimately incapable of protecting oneself” (Boever 139). Perhaps due to this feeling of vulnerability, the encounter unsettles Moss deeply. This unease prompts him to take precautions upon checking into the hotel, instructing the clerk: “There’s somebody lookin for me. All I’m askin you to do is to call me if anybody checks in. By anybody I mean any swingin dick. Can you do that?” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 109). Moss’s request accentuates his perception of men—only “any swingin dick,” that is, only a ruthless and dominating type of man—as potential threats to both his safety and masculinity, whilst women, by omission, are deemed non-threatening to his masculinity.

As established in the first chapter of this doctoral dissertation, McCarthy frequently incorporates biblical allusions into his narratives. In this instance, McCarthy utilizes a reference to the Bible to prefigure the impending confrontation between Moss and Chigurh. The narrative notes that Moss awakens in his hotel room at “four thirty-seven” (109). When this time reference is converted to a biblical chapter and verse, it corresponds to John 4.37, which reads: “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.” John 4.38 further elucidates the previous passage’s meaning: “I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours” (*The Bible*). These passages can be interpreted in the context of the novel as Moss reaping the profits (money) of others’ labor, his actions unwittingly sowing the seeds of dire consequences. Chigurh, embodying the reaper figure, is depicted as coming to exact Moss’s life as payment. Contemplating his actions in the

solitude of his hotel room, Moss experiences a moment of introspection, pondering “what have you done. What have you failed to do” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 110). These reflections suggest Moss’s apprehension about confronting Chigurh and whether his own masculine identity as a hunter is comparable to Chigurh’s. Subsequently, when Chigurh enters the room, Moss manages to surprise him and commands him to disarm. Chigurh initially complies and raises his hands in apparent surrender. When Moss approaches him, Chigurh “didn’t even look at him. He seemed oddly untroubled. As if this were all part of his day” (112). Moss studies the ostensibly beaten Chigurh, and the narrative informs that he is “[b]eyond Moss’s experience” (112). In other words, Chigurh is a type of man unfamiliar to Moss; conversely, Chigurh’s impassiveness when being held at gunpoint indicates not only familiarity with the situation, but also a sense of superiority and lack of fear. As it is usually stated, one fears what one cannot understand. Said fear appears to be present in Moss but absent in Chigurh. Ergo, Chigurh does understand the kind of hunter Moss is.

Scholars have characterized Moss as a man who “has demonstrated his opportunism as well as his caution” (Peebles 127), as a humanitarian (Hwang 359), as someone “driven by impulse” (Gibbs 63), among other descriptors. In contrast, Chigurh has been depicted as “undoubtedly a psychopathic killer” (Buráková 177), as “indomitable, all-seeing, and entirely without humor or sexuality” (Cant 55), as “utterly mysterious” (Welsh 74), among other attributes. Despite Moss being “the only one in the novel who fights Chigurh on [seemingly] equal terms” (Hwang 359), his critical error is sparing Chigurh’s life. Even when Moss acknowledges that “he’d already taken more chances [with regard to Chigurh] than he had coming” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 112), he refrains from executing him.<sup>83</sup> In stark contrast, Chigurh, without hesitation, mere moments later, opens fire on Moss. Although Moss

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<sup>83</sup> As will be explored, in *Blood Meridian*, the kid, like Moss, is presented with opportunities to kill judge Holden, but fails.

survives the encounter, sustaining severe injuries alongside Chigurh and finding himself in a hospital in Mexico, Chigurh ultimately emerges victorious. Chigurh not only survives the hotel confrontation but also tracks Moss to the hospital, where he threatens to harm him and his wife, Carla Jean, unless Moss brings him the money. Moss's failure to fatally wound Chigurh echoes his incapacity to kill the antelope at the novel's outset. Moreover, resembling the conduct of a hunter who spares, for instance, a lion when it no longer poses a threat, Moss opts to spare Chigurh when having the upper hand. However, Chigurh does not reciprocate this mercy. Unlike Moss, Chigurh perceives the hunt as incomplete without the kill.

To conclude this section on hunters in *No Country for Old Men*, a final scene in the novel underscores the connection between masculinity and hunting. Carson Wells—hired to locate Chigurh and, by extension, Moss and the money—engages in a conversation with his unnamed boss.<sup>84</sup> His boss wishes him luck in his quest: “Good hunting, as we used to say. Once upon a time. In the long ago” (142). This quotation reinforces the idea that, in the world of the novel, only those men capable of employing hunting techniques stand a chance against another skilled hunter, exemplified by Chigurh. Moreover, the quote evokes a sense of nostalgia for a bygone era, when such skills were highly esteemed by society, and masculinity was often demonstrated through activities like hunting. However, these hunters are now at risk of extinction, as there exist masculinities in the world of the novel, such as Chigurh's, which represent an exacerbated and even professionalized version of traditional forms. This exacerbated and professionalized masculinity embodied by Chigurh is characterized by power, emotional detachment, and a disregard for conventional rules and honor codes observed by hunters of the long ago. It appears that the traditional masculinity embodied by Sheriff Bell

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<sup>84</sup> It is worth noting that Chigurh kills this unnamed boss and the narrative, once again, makes reference to bird hunting in the description of the scene. The narration states, “Chigurh stepped into the doorway and shot him in the throat with a load of number ten shot. The size collectors use to take bird specimens” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 199).

and Moss is shaped by outdated notions of honor and empathy. In essence, the world of *No Country for Old Men* is inhospitable to old-fashioned hunters.

#### 4.2. JUDGE HOLDEN: THE SUPREMACY OF MAN IN NATURE

After examining the connection McCarthy establishes between hunting and masculinity in the main characters of *No Country for Old Men*, it is pertinent to delve into the portrayal of the natural world and the character of judge Holden, two elements that represent “[o]ne of the many complex relationships Cormac McCarthy explores in *Blood Meridian*” (Spurgeon, “Sacred Hunter” 75). Indeed, *Blood Meridian* depicts various hunting scenes, particularly those involving men hunting other men.<sup>85</sup> At times, the kid is both a witness and a participant in these hunts, whilst on other occasions, he is merely a listener, regaled with tales of Holden’s extraordinary exploits. Tobin, also known as the “expriest” and a member of John Joel Ganton’s Gang, enlightens the kid about the judge’s remarkable abilities and dexterity. Tobin remarks, “Mayhaps he [Holden] aint to your liking, fair enough. But the man’s a hand at anything. I’ve never seen him turn to a task but what he didnt prove clever at it” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 128–29). Expanding on this, Tobin adds, “He can cut a trail, shoot a rifle, ride a horse, track a deer” (129). Beyond hunting, Holden displays a myriad of talents, surpassing the other members of Ganton’s Gang. In essence, judge Holden “is [a] multitalented” (Covell 101) individual whose skills find their niche in the vast expanse of the Great West depicted in

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<sup>85</sup> One illustrative passage of said man-hunting-man scene can be found in McCarthy’s vivid and visceral depiction of the slaughter of Captain White’s company by a group of Comanches at the end of chapter IV. It is a gruesome scene, witnessed by the kid, which—after a chase—includes descriptions of carnage carried out by the Comanche group. The narrative paints a harrowing picture of the chaos and savagery unleashed during the attack including instances of the Comanches “riding down the unhorsed Saxons and spearing and clubbing them” and “seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals, some of the savages so slathered up with gore they might have rolled in it like dogs and some who fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows” (*Blood Meridian* 56). McCarthy’s use of descriptive language creates a sense of horror and barbarity, leaving a lasting impression on the reader. This passage serves as a valid example of McCarthy’s ability to evoke intense emotions and convey the harsh realities of life on the frontier.

*Blood Meridian*, a geographical location where the judge finds himself uniquely comfortable in nature.

McCarthy dedicates a significant portion of *Blood Meridian* to portraying judge Holden, delving into his behavior, philosophies, sexual inclinations, and other characteristics. The judge exerts a dominating presence throughout the narrative, driven primarily by his pursuit of dominion, as will be explored further. One notable aspect that McCarthy emphasizes about the judge is his physical appearance. Traditionally, the male body has served as an instrument of dominion and a means of asserting masculinity over others. As scholars elucidate, the “domination of men over other men, over women and over children (and indeed over animals and nature) are expressed in bodily terms, directly as well as indirectly” (Morgan 75). McCarthy makes use of these bodily terms when describing judge Holden. Initially, readers learn that the judge is “an enormous man,” standing “close on to seven feet in height” (*Blood Meridian* 6). This initial description alone places Holden above most men in stature. Furthermore, he weighs “twenty-four stone” (135), equivalent to over 150 kilograms, further underscoring his imposing physical presence. Later, after the kid joins Glanton’s Gang, Holden is described in this way: “Foremost among them, outsized and childlike with his naked face, rode the judge” (83). Scholars have noted that bodies, in this case male bodies, “are involved more actively, more intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed. Bodies participate in social action by delineating courses of social conduct—the body is a participant in generating social practice” (Connell and Messerschmidt 851). Through Holden’s towering stature and prominent riding position among the men, the narrative establishes his dominance over others; the judge literally and figuratively stands above his male peers and outpaces them when it comes to masculinity. Also, through his position in Glanton’s Gang, Holden delineates the course of the company’s men’s social conduct, even trumping the orders of John Joel Glanton at times. Furthermore, the male bodies comprising the riding

company led by the judge contribute to the generation of social practices mentioned by Connell and Messerschmidt, often resulting in death and mayhem wherever the company traverses.

Regarding his body, judge Holden is depicted as finding comfort in sitting in states of partial or complete nakedness<sup>86</sup> next to a fire at night: “The judge sat upwind from the fire naked to the waist, himself like some great pale deity” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 97). One plausible explanation for the judge’s penchant for nudity in the natural environment resonates with traditional associations between sunlight and masculinity. As elucidated by George Mosse, “Sun, light, and unspoiled nature were supposed to steel the body and to give it health and strength” (96), characteristics that align with the world of *Blood Meridian*, largely one of unspoiled nature. Furthermore, Holden’s enjoyment of nudity appears to be contagious, as other men also shed their clothes in his presence: “By now many of Glanton’s men were naked and lurching about and the judge soon had them dancing while he fiddled on a crude instrument he’d commandeered” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 250). Some readers may interpret this behavior as indicative of aspects of homosociality,<sup>87</sup> defined as “the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex” (Lipman-Blumen 16). It is important to distinguish homosociality from homosexuality, as the former “does not necessarily involve (although it may under certain circumstances) an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex” (16). Glanton’s men indeed display, although not always, a strong affinity for each other’s company, particularly in the presence of the judge, although such interactions do not always imply erotic undertones.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Two similar examples that illustrate judge Holden’s nakedness (one of them including fire) are: “Someone had reported the judge naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelations of lightning, striding the perimeter up there and declaiming in the old epic mode” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 124); and: “The judge looked about him. He was sat before the fire naked save for his breeches and his hands rested palm down upon his knees. His eyes were empty slots. None among the company harbored any notion as to what this attitude implied, yet so like an icon was he in his sitting that they grew cautious and spoke with circumspection among themselves as if they would not waken something that had better been left sleeping” (153).

<sup>87</sup> A further analysis of how the term “homosociality” applies to McCarthy’s novels will be explored in the third chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>88</sup> Although the third chapter of this dissertation will deal with judge Holden’s sexuality, for those readers interested in an exploration of homosexual relationships in *Blood Meridian*, see Patrick Shaw’s analysis. In the

McCarthy's portrayal of judge Holden's body in *Blood Meridian* resonates with artistic representations in European and North American contexts from the nineteenth (the period when the novel is set) and twentieth centuries. In many of these depictions, "nudity rarely referred to the Greek example; it referred nearly always to nature" (Mosse 95). This period, including the "so-called turn-of-the-century rediscovery of the human body, (...) was part of the search for the genuine as opposed to the artificiality of modern life, for unspoiled nature embattled against modernity" (95). Mosse further elucidates that for various artists, the naked male body "was supposed to be one beautiful object among others, such as meadows, gardens, the sea, or the rising sun. The male body still exemplified harmony and virility, not framed by symbols of the genuine and the eternal" (97). Furthermore, another crucial aspect in "the construction of modern masculinity" is "physiognomy" (25–26), as male physiognomy indicated the connection between the physical and the spiritual, "the linkage of body and soul, of morality and bodily structure" (26). In the case of the male body, the apparent "uniformity in valuing a muscular body, masculinity, and a 'natural' setting seem to aim towards the existence of a hegemonic canon of beauty which crosses genders and sexualities" (Enguix 174; my trans.).<sup>89</sup> Enguix's explanation underscores a reality that has been persistent in Western cultures for centuries, extending even into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Following Mosse's analysis, it can be inferred that the male body "becomes the prominent signifier of manliness with its corresponding moral attributes of strong willpower, moral fortitude, and martial nobility" (Requena 103). Additionally, a harmonious body was regarded as the "standard of manly beauty" wherein "every part of the body must fit into place. Mankind must seek its perfection through beauty" (Mosse 59). This is significant because the opposite—lack of

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article, Shaw contends that many of the novel's violent events introduce "male-to-male sexual assault to the androcentric, super-masculine frontier culture of *Blood Meridian*" (106), and states that "McCarthy intends to stress the male-to-male nature of the judge's sexuality, to inculcate it into his personality, and to announce it as a key to other textual cruxes" (110).

<sup>89</sup> "La uniformidad en valorar el cuerpo musculoso, la masculinidad y una puesta en escena 'natural' parecen apuntar hacia la existencia de un canon de belleza hegemónico que atraviesa los géneros y las sexualidades".

harmony, randomness—would be the antithesis of beauty, i.e., ugliness (59). Finally, for these American and European artists, ugliness was represented and “symbolized by the outsider. His bodily structure differed in every detail from that of the ideal type” (59). Given his bodily description, judge Holden can be interpreted, throughout the novel, as an outsider who does not entirely assimilate among the other men in Glanton’s Gang. Other characteristics that set Holden apart from the company’s men include the fact that he is “loquacious (...) and an intellectual with a great store of both practical and arcane information” (Phillips, “History and the Ugly Facts” 441), as well as being proficient in multiple languages (such as Spanish, Dutch, and German). Finally, Holden’s philosophical musings on war and nature are often incomprehensible to many of Glanton’s men.

Nevertheless, Holden’s body arguably represents the most striking difference between himself and the other men of Glanton’s Gang. The judge takes pleasure in his physique and does not hesitate to display it. Yet, there are some peculiarities about it. In his initial appearance in the text, we learn that he “was bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 6). As the novel progresses, the narration further describes the judge as having small hands and small feet. Some scholars argue that Holden’s hands and feet appear “childlike, or rather fetal” (Guillemin 242). It is evident that judge Holden does not conform to the standards of conventional manly beauty<sup>90</sup> that Mosse refers to, given his lack of proportion and absence of facial hair typically associated with virility. In fact, the narration describes Holden as “the vast abhorrence of the judge” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 254).<sup>91</sup> McCarthy’s choice of words for the judge’s physical

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<sup>90</sup> There are other descriptions of diverging from conventional standards of manly beauty in McCarthy’s body of work, such as Lester Ballard in *Child of God*, a character later explored in this dissertation. McCarthy portrays Ballard as “small, unclean, unshaven” (5). Moreover, the narrative explains that the shadow his body projects is “veering dark and mutant over the cupped stone walls” and he “sat there soaking his feet and gibbering, a sound not quite crying that echoed from the walls of the grotto like the muttering of a band of sympathetic apes” (150). These details illustrate a stark departure from the traditional image of masculinity, highlighting Ballard’s aberrant physical and behavioral traits.

<sup>91</sup> For those interested in visual representations of judge Holden and other characters from *Blood Meridian*, Craig Warren’s “Drawing a Blank: Illustrating ‘The Kid’ in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*” (2020) offers

description is intriguing and may perplex the reader. One might expect a more Herculean figure, especially considering that judge Holden is the most accomplished violent man in *Blood Meridian*. Nevertheless, his repulsive physicality seems to align with the heinous deeds of which Holden is capable, as will be delved into later.

In *No Country for Old Men*, on the other hand, McCarthy's descriptions of Chigurh's physique are less detailed compared to those of the judge and are certainly less judgmental than the descriptions provided earlier. Besides occasionally mentioning what Chigurh wears, the narration offers little more about his appearance than the following: "Blue eyes. Serene. Dark hair. Something about him faintly exotic. Beyond Moss's experience" (112). Chigurh's description serves to create a vague mental image of the character for the reader. However, it is precisely the last sentence that illustrates Moss's—and by extension the reader's—bewilderment regarding Chigurh's appearance. Chigurh being beyond Moss's experience negates the possibility of categorizing him within a specific racial or ethnic group, as he "exists outside of society and is of indeterminate origin and purpose" (Woodson, "'You are the battleground'" 6).<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, unlike Holden, Chigurh's body lacks distinguishing features that would make him stand out among the other characters in the novel—at least in the same manner as Holden's body.

Studies have revealed the ideal association between a man's body size and the capacities attributed to it.<sup>93</sup> Connell explains that when masculinity is constructed through what a man's

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valuable insights. In this article, Warren discusses the efforts of professional artist Jarrod Owen, who "sometimes employs his talents to contemplate, visually, those works of literature that have made an impression on him" (9). Warren highlights Owen's creation of "head-and-shoulder portraits" (9) based on McCarthy's descriptions of key leading characters, resulting in "Owen's triptych of Louis Toadvine, the kid, and Judge Holden" (10).

<sup>92</sup> In the film adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*, Spanish actor Javier Bardem plays the character of Chigurh. Bardem's depiction differs in some notable ways from the character described in McCarthy's novel. Unlike the novel's portrayal, Bardem's Chigurh does not have the blue eyes emphasized in the book. Additionally, Bardem's Chigurh sports a distinctive haircut, a detail not described by McCarthy. This deviation has become particularly notable and somewhat infamous among viewers. Moreover, the film version of Chigurh diverges from the novel's characterization. In the novel, Chigurh is depicted as an "everyman" figure, whose physical appearance often goes unnoticed, whilst the film adaptation opts for a more visually striking interpretation of the character.

<sup>93</sup> The importance of the male physique was examined in a study among young boys, revealing a strong association between the ideal of a larger body and physical performance. The study's researchers came to the following

body is capable of doing, then said “bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained – for instance, as a result of physical disability” (54). In contexts like *Blood Meridian*, depicting hegemonic masculinity and male dominance, the male body—“a body that is whole, that is without any disability”—helps to build “notions of toughness, aggressiveness, physical dominance” (Requena 103). In accord with Connell’s assertion of bodily performance in men, it could be argued that “the warrior is more hegemonic than the wimp. While there is clearly value in arguing for a hierarchy, rather than a simple plurality, of masculinities, the relationships between hegemony, embodiment and gender are by no means straightforward” (Morgan 82). McCarthy seems to concur with Morgan’s claim regarding the lack of straightforwardness, evident in his portrayal of judge Holden, whose physical appearance is not a hindrance to his masculinity; in fact, the judge usually attracts the gaze of others. An example of this can be seen in chapter XIII, when Glanton’s men arrive in Chihuahua and are received as heroes. Everyone in the town wants to see these men. Since the governor of Chihuahua has organized a dinner in their honor, Glanton’s men proceed to the public baths to wash themselves. During the public baths’ scene, it is noted that neither men nor women “could take their eyes from the judge who had disrobed last of all” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 174). Through judge Holden, McCarthy implies that masculinity and manliness can be valid both in an “ugly” body (i.e., a body not in accordance with standards of beauty) and in a “beautiful” body. Furthermore, an ugly male body can be timeless, as evidenced by judge Holden, who is the only character to survive *Blood Meridian* and, in the last chapter of the novel, after three decades, he is described as “little changed or none in all these years” (338). The judge’s manliness endures in his body—its aesthetic appeal notwithstanding—and he continues to display it whenever he deems it necessary, as shown in

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conclusion: “If one was bigger, one could run faster, swim better, play football better, and all manner of other physical pursuits. Associated with the notion of physical competence was independence. If these boys were bigger, they stated they would not have to rely as much on adults to help them out or ask for their help as often as they do” (Birbeck and Drummond 244).

the last scene of the novel, where he is at a bar among other men and women who are drinking and dancing and “[t]owering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing” (348).

#### 4.3. JUDGE HOLDEN AND HIS USE OF AND RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE: A WORLD “PLEASING EVEN TO HIM ALONE”

The relationship judge Holden establishes between himself and the natural world goes beyond his readiness to display his body both in nature and among other characters in the novel. Holden’s rather unconventional—by traditional standards—yet impressively powerful physique, combined with his immense intellect, serves him in asserting dominance both in the natural world and among men, including those in Glanton’s Gang. Though it can be argued that “man and nature are on equal standing in *Blood Meridian*, and that reflection of this equality implies sorrow over the vanity of human efforts” (Guillemin 257), McCarthy allows judge Holden to disrupt this equilibrium.

As previously mentioned, domination, “a characteristic so integral to traditional hegemonic masculinity” (Elliott 252), is ultimately what judge Holden seeks, granting him total control over everything he sets his mind to. Connell has explored potential issues arising from the dominance of a particular type of masculinity. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity “embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy” (77). This strategy unfolds as follows: when a new group emerges to challenge an older one, signaling “conditions for the defence of patriarchy change,” these new groups “may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony” (77). Thus, hegemony is “a historically mobile relation” (77). Additionally, Connell underscores that recognizing diversity in masculinity alone is insufficient; it is imperative to acknowledge “the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on” (37). The judge, portrayed as “the narrative’s most

dominating figure” (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 101), embodies these practices; as does Chigurh. Holden understands that to effectively establish dominance among the men in Glanton’s Gang and other men he encounters, he must first demonstrate dominance over nature; by succeeding in this endeavor, he can strive for the ultimate position of dominance, akin to that of God. In the world of *Blood Meridian*, violence and carnage are routine, acquainting virtually every man with violence or making him a full participant. In contrast, in *No Country for Old Men*, though the main male characters are men of violence—that is, men who understand that they live in a violent world and are familiar with violence even if they do not actively practice it—, they are not prepared for the new violent practices Chigurh brings to their shared setting. Drawing from Connell’s explanation of hegemony and the interplay between masculinities, the introduction of the masculinities of Holden and Chigurh serves to disrupt currently accepted strategies in the worlds of the two novels (i.e., Connell’s “old solutions”) in favor of newly constructed hegemonies. The initial hegemonies presented in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* to the reader are the old solutions. These hegemonies embodied by characters such as Glanton’s men, the Mexicans who hire the Gang, Sheriff Bell, Moss, and Wells, are challenged and eventually dominated by the new hegemonies of judge Holden and Chigurh, positions secured through the execution of violent acts unmatched by any other character in the novels.

Judge Holden’s relationship with nature oscillates between harmony and destruction, yet he remains unparalleled in his capability to understand and dominate nature. In *Blood Meridian*, Holden exploits nature to his advantage in the direst and most desperate situations, showcasing a mastery no one else can match. One illustrative instance occurs in chapter X, where Tobin recounts Holden’s pivotal role in saving the company. Tobin explains that coming from Little Colorado they “didn’t have a pound of powder in the company” because they had “[s]hot it up all at the savages” (McCarthy 130–31). Tobin explains that they found the judge

sitting “on a rock in the middle of the greatest desert you’d ever want to see. Just perched on this rock like a man waitin for a coach” (131). By this time, only fourteen men of the original thirty-eight had survived. After considering whether to allow Holden to join them or not, Glanton finally gives the judge a horse and they all ride off together. Glanton informs Holden that they are being pursued by “half of all Apacheria” (132) and the judge has them ride toward some mountains. Unbeknownst to Glanton’s men, Holden’s chosen direction toward the mountains offers the best chance of survival. This seemingly mundane decision marks a shift in the hegemony governing Glanton and his men. In other words, the inexplicable appearance of the judge in the middle of the desert,<sup>94</sup> his calm demeanor in the face of such a predicament, and his riding “side by side” (132) with Glanton, all help to quickly solidify Holden’s dominant position in the company of men. Holden’s innate and immediate dominance affects even Glanton, who, at the end of Tobin’s story, “was watchin the judge and he seemed to have had his wits stole” (139).

After a prolonged pursuit, Tobin explains that the company had been surrounded by “Apache indians” (134). Eventually, Glanton’s men, guided by Holden, find themselves climbing a volcano. Two men leave the company at night and are later found dead, skinned, and hanging from a tree. Outnumbered and outgunned, Glanton’s men seem to be at the mercy of their pursuers. However, the judge, not being a destructor of nature in this instance but assuming his position of dominion, utilizes his knowledge of the environment to their advantage. Demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness, Holden extracts two pounds of

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<sup>94</sup> Tobin remarks to the kid the enigmatic nature of the judge, noting that he “didnt even have a canteen. It was like ... You couldnt tell where he’d come from” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 132). Similarly, both Holden and Chigurh leave those they encounter puzzled about their origins. To other characters, Chigurh and Holden embody a sense of mystery and mystique. Scholars have observed that Holden’s “origins are indeed mystical” (Dorson 111), and that Chigurh is “so equivocal that he is inscrutable and indecipherable to readers and characters alike” (Hwang 361).

brimstone from the volcano rocks to produce gunpowder.<sup>95</sup> Tobin recounts to the kid how the judge adeptly handles the process. Tobin explains:

[Holden] took the wallets and went to a cupped place in the rock and dumped out the charcoal and the nitre and stirred them about with his hand and poured the sulphur in.

I didnt know but what we'd be required to bleed into it like freemasons but it was not so. He worked it up dry with his hands and all the while the savages down there on the plain drawin nigh to us and when I turned back the judge was standin, the great hairless oaf, and he'd took out his pizzle and he was pissin into the mixture, pissin with a great vengeance and one hand aloft and he cried out for us to do likewise. (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 138)

Using the gunpowder produced from the mixture, the judge arms himself, shoots a number of rounds into the crater of the volcano, and approaches the pursuing natives, claiming to have killed his comrades and pleading for mercy. In a sudden, deadly display of his prowess, Holden “had the pistols stuck in his belt at the back and he drew them one in each hand and he is as eitherhanded as a spider, he can write with both hands at a time and I’ve seen him to do it, and he commenced to kill indians” (140). Glanton and the remaining men join Holden in the onslaught until “there was fifty-eight of them lay slaughtered among the gravels” (141). This harrowing scene solidifies Holden’s dominance over nature and underscores his position as a figure of power and control within the narrative, highlighting his enigmatic and formidable presence. Had it not been for the judge, none of his companions would have survived the attack as none had Holden’s knowledge of chemistry—i.e., a rational and dominating use of natural

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<sup>95</sup> For readers curious about the inspiration behind McCarthy’s volcano scene, John Emil Sepich’s 1993 article offers valuable knowledge. Sepich explains that, in Tobin’s story, McCarthy “apparently incorporates information derived from folk sources gathered in a ‘Powder, Flint, and Balls’ article [written by Carl Darden] in *Foxfire* 5” (548). Sepich further elaborates how Darden serves “as McCarthy’s primary source” (548) for the descriptions of how judge Holden produces gunpowder from the mixture.

elements. Judge Holden is peerless. Though his companions are also violent men and men of violence, Holden's superior violent masculinity is unmatched in his capacity for violence by any of the other characters in the scene. In the world of *Blood Meridian*, Holden's mastery extends even to the manipulation of natural elements to produce deadly compounds, suggesting that violence is inherent not only in man's nature, but also in the very fabric of the natural world.

Some scholars argue that in this first encounter between Holden and Glanton's men, Holden "gives them their life and their power to kill others" (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 103). By aligning themselves with Holden, the company taps into a new level of savagery, constructing a new masculinity rooted on greater violence. Holden, acting as a hegemonic figure, guards and guides them, enabling their exploits in violence. Parrish explains that without "the organizing agency of the judge, though, they more quickly become other killers' victims, blood for others' communion" (103). This is exemplified by the fate of the two men who leave Holden's protection, venturing out on their own and meeting a grim demise. Whilst Glanton's men embody a type of masculinity defined by violence, it pales in comparison to Holden's, which is characterized by a profound understanding of natural elements and dominion over nature. Holden's rational and dominating masculinity grants him a unique connection to the natural world, a connection that eludes the other male characters in the novel. As evidenced in the volcano scene, Glanton's men are mystified by Holden's actions, unable to comprehend his mastery until they witness its effects firsthand. Thus, while Glanton's men possess a form of masculinity centered on violence, it falls short of the profound connection to nature embodied by Holden.

On the other hand, Holden's dominion over nature often manifests in destructive ways. Physical violence, a common recurrence in the novel, typically requires a certain level of strength. Throughout history, the connection between a man's physical prowess (though there

are of course other types of strength) and his status as a man are deeply entrenched—a theme echoed in *Blood Meridian*. This association between masculinity and physical strength is not a recent development, “as many scholars have pointed out, the idea of masculinity has been—and still is—intricately connected with men’s physical strength” (Carrasco Carrasco 28). In short, strength has traditionally been considered one of the hallmarks of any dominant masculinity (Cole and Saxton 610). As Lynne Segal explains, defenders of what some call “the contemporary guardians of true manhood still believe that living one’s life as a man involves toughness, struggle and conquest” (104). These traits are pervasive throughout the world depicted in *Blood Meridian*. Chapter XV offers a striking illustration of judge Holden’s masculinity in relation to nature—specifically, his toughness and his ability to assert dominance over the natural world. In this scene, the judge enlists the assistance of another man to kill a horse for food to sustain the group. The kid rises to help him:

Together they led the animal off a little ways and the kid held the woven reata while the judge took up a round rock weighing perhaps a hundred pounds and crushed the horse’s skull with a single blow. Blood shot out of its ears and it slammed to the ground so hard that one of its forelegs broke under it with a dull snap. (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 229)

The uncanny physical strength exhibited by the judge is multifaceted. On the one hand, not only he is able to lift a rock weighing nearly fifty kilograms, but he raises it to a height sufficient to strike the horse’s skull with crushing force. On the other hand, the impact of the blow is so forceful that it not only kills the animal instantly, but also breaks one of the horse’s legs upon its collapse to the ground.

However, Holden’s physical prowess is not always necessary for the destruction of natural elements. In chapter XIV, Holden purchases a pair of puppies from a boy. Immediately after the transaction, the judge “crossed upon the stone bridge and he looked down into the

swollen waters and raised the dogs and pitched them in” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 201). The seeming indifference toward this action of gratuitously hurling two innocent creatures to their death is manifested by the fact that the judge “continued on across the bridge” (201). There is simply no other man in *Blood Meridian* who can compete with the judge’s physical strength or ruthless disposition toward both nature and fellow humans. Despite Holden’s assertion that he is “a simple man” (297), his actions reveal complexity far beyond that of his male counterparts in the novel.

Throughout *Blood Meridian*, it is noted that the judge carries a book with him, which he uses to annotate, draw, and collect samples from the natural world—anything that piques his interest. For instance, in the volcano scene mentioned earlier, Tobin recounts how the judge “had been up all the night by what the videttes said. Watchin the bats. He would go up the side of the mountain and make notes in a little book and then he would come back down. Could not have been more cheerful” (133). Holden also sketches many of the men he encounters, a task that some find unsettling, as seen in the character of Webster, who, addressing Holden, states: “But dont draw me (...). For I dont want in your book” (147). After years of meticulous study and examination, the judge, who delves into both human and natural history, undoubtedly possesses a deeper understanding of nature than the other male characters in the novel. Some scholars argue that for Holden, “history is the most powerful form of dominion because it seems to order the world” (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 104). In this understanding, the remnants Holden gathers of historical events serve him to establish a chronology in both human history and behavior. However, Holden’s exploration of the artifacts also extends to nature. Consequently, through his study of history—the supposed ordering of the world Parrish argues—and the knowledge he has acquired, Holden arrives at the following profound realization: “These anonymous creatures, he said, may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men’s knowing.

Only nature can enslave man” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 207). Holden’s conclusion from his study of various artifacts is that, regardless of their chronology in the history of the world—a chronology that seems random for the unexperienced observer—these creatures (humans included) pose a potentially dangerous threat to humanity. If, as Parrish argues, there is nothing ordering the world, if any ordering is artificial (Pitts 21), if everything is just a random set of events one can at times put together through observation of history, then the only remaining lesson that can be extracted from observing history—that is, from what Holden sketches in his book—is that violence binds it all. In the world of *Blood Meridian*, and in *No Country for Old Men*, violence “is the world’s only sustained, permanent, form of expression. History, however, is the form by which humans displace this knowledge into something that we can claim to control. History is inevitably created as a consequence of destruction” (Parrish, *Civil War to the Apocalypse* 104). I would add to Parrish’s explanation that, in the worlds of these novels, violence sustains and perpetuates the dominant masculinities embodied by the characters of Holden and Chigurh, serving as the ultimate expression of their dominance, order, and control.

Furthermore, since he understands that only nature has the capacity to enslave men, and since he wants dominion over all things, Holden describes himself as the legitimate “suzerain of the earth,” or “a special kind of keeper.”<sup>96</sup> The judge asserts, “A suzerain rules even where there are other rulers. His authority countermands local judgements” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 207). In other words, given his authority, this declaration signifies Holden’s ambition to exert authority over men and women. Moreover, Holden extends said ruling to include nature. During one of the many moments of reprieve by the fire illustrated by the narrative, Toadvine observes the judge engrossed in sketching in his book and questions his motives. It

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<sup>96</sup> The term “suzerain” denotes “a sovereign or state having some control over another state that is internally autonomous” (Oxford English Dictionary, *suzerain*, *n.*, *sense a.*). It also refers to a feudal overlord. Judge Holden’s use of “suzerain” suggests his desire to establish a feudal-like dominance over all elements of creation, including both nature and humanity. In employing this term, Holden implies his intention to reign supreme over all others, asserting control and authority over them.

is then that Holden reveals his intent to rule over nature, proclaiming, “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (207). Not every man feels entitled to make such bold claims about the natural world. Holden’s claim illustrates his belief in his entitlement to dictate the fate of all he surveys “by controlling the signifiers through which the world is understood” (Carson 21). He further asserts, “In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 207). Holden’s destructive tendencies extend to both human-made and natural elements, as he destroys everything he collects after documenting it in his book. These destructive actions allow him “to claim sovereign power, as there can be no autonomous existence outside of his words to challenge his power” (Dorson 113). In other words, if all the evidence that could contradict Holden’s claim—that is, Holden’s rewriting of history—is destroyed as soon as he is done with it, what man would be able to gather enough evidence to contradict Holden’s rhetoric? In essence, Holden’s endeavor to establish dominion extends beyond the realm of human affairs, shaping an everlasting authority that pervades the world of the novel.

Holden’s relentless pursuit of control over everything in existence extends even to entities beyond his current awareness or difficult to manage, such as birds. He articulates his disdain for the freedom of birds, viewing it as a personal affront: “The freedom of birds is an insult to me. I’d have them all in zoos” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 208). Holden’s proposed solution to this perceived affront reflects his inclination toward either destruction or confinement, stripping away the autonomy of the uncontrollable. This inclination reveals marked sadistic and destructive tendencies in Holden’s character. On the one hand, his sadism is evident given that for the sadistic character, “everything living is to be controllable; living beings become things. Or, still more accurately, living beings are transformed into living, quivering, pulsating objects of control” (Fromm 291). On the other hand, Holden exhibits destructive tendencies, as evidenced by his inclination to eliminate or destroy anything that

defies his authority. Fromm notes that the destroyer's essential trait is the necessity "to do away with a person, to eliminate him, to destroy life itself" (291). In Holden's worldview and his self-appointed role as the epitome of masculine dominion, he seeks "the sensation of controlling and choking life" (291), relishing the sensation of exerting dominance over all existence.

Similarly, albeit with a less grandiose ambition than Holden's, Chigurh also exhibits a relentless drive to exert control over his surroundings, determining the fates of individuals or entities, as demonstrated in the aforementioned bird scene. Another telling instance of Chigurh's dominion is his assertion: "I have no enemies. I dont permit such a thing" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 253)—a bravado Cant qualifies as Chigurh "not boasting" (55). Chigurh's declaration of having no enemies stems from his methodical elimination of anyone who opposes him. Like Holden, he eradicates potential adversaries through acts of violence, establishing a realm of dominance where his authority remains unchallenged. Through their ruthless application of violence against both nature and other individuals, both characters forge a brand of masculinity that reigns supreme, unencumbered by equals or rivals in the worlds they inhabit.

Within *Blood Meridian*, Judge Holden expresses various perspectives on God, one of which is closely intertwined with nature. In chapter IX, while Glanton's Gang rests at a compound, the judge sets off to explore. Upon his return, he gathers assorted objects and proceeds to examine them: "he purported to read news of the earth's origins, holding an extemporary lecture in geology to a small gathering who nodded and spat. A few would quote him scripture to confound his ordering up of eons out of the ancient chaos and other apostate supposings" (McCarthy 122). Despite some spectators affirming that the truth resides in the written word (namely the Bible) in an attempt to refute his interpretations of the earth's origins, Holden challenges their beliefs by asserting that God communicates not only through the

written texts but also through the very elements of nature. As he holds up a rock, he asserts, “He speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things” (122). Spurgeon contends that Holden “manipulates the power and mystery of the natural world and its association with the sacred through his scientific knowledge, which gives him the ability to penetrate that mystery and therefore disrupt the assumptions of the other characters about the place of humans within the world” (“Sacred Hunter” 79). The narrative confirms this disruption as Holden’s statement persuades “the squatters,” who nod in affirmation, “reckoning him correct” and a “man of learning” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 122). While the source of Holden’s education remains unclear, leaning perhaps toward autodidacticism—based on experience, observation, and his determination to study the world, “look[ing] for the universal by examining the particular” (Pitts 13)—rather than formal schooling, his profound understanding of nature places him closer to God than any other male character who merely contemplates God from the written word instead of finding evidence of Him in nature. Moreover, the judge’s understanding of nature aligns him with new ideologies emerging during the nineteenth century. During this period, Darwin’s theories and other scientific advancements “were being transmitted to increasingly broader segments of the U.S. population” (Meladze 93). These discoveries, akin to the observations and annotations made by Holden, challenged “polytheistic and monotheistic canons regarding the natural order wherein all species—including man—were held to have been created in immutable forms by God/gods” (93). Holden’s perspective thus positions him as a character who interprets divinity not solely through written scripture but through the tangible manifestations of nature, echoing the intellectual currents of his time.

Furthermore, examining Holden’s relationship with nature through a religious lens reveals his aspiration to assume the role of God’s suzerain on Earth, countermanding God’s authority over creation. Holden asserts that the 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” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 208). This declaration underscores Holden’s endeavor to assert dominance over nature through violence. While he may not have been present at the tapestry’s beginning—i.e., the moment of creation—, Holden seeks to be present at its end—i.e., during creation’s destruction—, symbolizing his attempt to assert authority over the natural order. His propensity for violent behavior toward both nature and humanity aligns with certain interpretations in which some men understand that violence “is restorative, a means to reclaim the power that he believes is rightfully his” (Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* 336). Parrish further elucidates that Holden’s power “resides in his ability to create death, or the semblance of nothingness, from life” (“History and the Problem of Evil” 76). It makes sense that the judge proceeds in this way since violence can be seen as a fundamental part of men’s maintenance of their “power over the entire planet” (T. Edwards 58). This affirmation is corroborated by Holden’s actions, such as destroying his collected specimens after documenting them in his book, a destruction that needs to be carried out “in the presence of witnesses” (Hillier, “The Judge’s Molar” 77) so they can bear witness to his feat, i.e., solidifying his authority and prowess.

In relation to Holden’s suzerainty, Benjamin West posits that Holden’s authority is flawed as it is one “built upon the knowledge and mastery of the material world rather than of the inner world of the divine spirit” (141). While this observation holds merit, Holden’s aspirations do not align with conventional religious ideals; instead, he seeks to become the suzerain of the natural world, which he perceives as within his control as a man. Despite any belief in God—which will be further examined—Holden wants to be a suzerain because he is “most interested in knowledge as mastery, as subjugation” (141). Utilizing his book, sketches, and annotations, Holden “seeks to possess whatever power makes knowledge possible” (Parrish, “History and the Problem of Evil” 75). His pursuit of knowledge is inherently

solipsistic, centered on personal dominance rather than a quest for spiritual enlightenment. Additionally, Holden offers alternative interpretations of God that are in accordance with his and Chigurh's construction of masculinity, eventually leading to the ultimate test of masculinity in the worlds of *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*: that of man versus man.

## **5. Man vs. Man: The Ultimate Way to Test a Man's Violent Masculinity**

### 5.1. FIRE AND VIOLENCE

Cormac McCarthy's body of work often features fire as a recurring and significant motif. In the initial chapter of this dissertation, fire was examined in the context of masculinity and the dynamics between father and son figures. This analysis primarily focused on the positive symbolism of fire—specifically, how McCarthy employs it to illuminate the constructive aspects of masculinity exemplified by characters such as the man in *The Road* and Sheriff Bell's father in *No Country for Old Men*. However, this chapter aims to delve into additional associations McCarthy establishes between fire and masculinity. To initiate this exploration, let us consider the following passage:

The flames sawed in the wind and the embers paled and deepened and paled and deepened like the bloodbeat of some living thing eviscerate upon the ground before them and they 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. (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 255)

The figure of Prometheus, originating from Greek mythology and commonly attributed to Hesiod,<sup>97</sup> is renowned for various feats, including the act of stealing fire from the gods to bestow upon humanity. Fire, as an element and symbol, carries positive connotations for survival, providing illumination in darkness and serving as a source of warmth. Myths like that of Prometheus reinforce these notions, associating fire with wisdom and knowledge traditionally reserved for the divine. Thus, Prometheus's gift is emblematic of humanity's acquisition of the wisdom that had hitherto been solely reserved for the gods. In the cited passage from *Blood Meridian*, wherein members of Glanton's Gang gather around to observe a bonfire, McCarthy likely alludes to Prometheus and his legendary act. Here, fire can be seen as a representation of "intrinsically *human* facult[ies]" (Carson 25), symbolizing knowledge and wisdom, intrinsic components of traditional male roles and masculinity. This symbolism is also evident in McCarthy's earlier work, *The Orchard Keeper*, where fire is portrayed as integral to human history—more concretely, the history of men. In one scene, characters John Wesley and Boog are taking shelter and the narrative states: "Boog came up dragging a load of dead limbs and presently they had a fire going in the center of the big room. This here is the way the cave-men used to do, Boog said" (148). In this passage, John Wesley and Boog acknowledge the primal significance of fire for illumination and warmth, reminiscent of ancient practices that have endured through time. McCarthy's incorporation of fire into his portrayal of masculinity underscores its enduring role in the survival and identity of humanity.

In addition to its positive attributes as a source of warmth and illumination, fire possesses the capacity for destruction, serving as a formidable weapon. The generation of fire invariably entails the destruction or alteration of preceding elements, as it necessitates a violent chemical reaction. Therefore, fire inherently embodies violence. In the excerpt from *Blood*

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<sup>97</sup> The story of Prometheus in its English version can be found, for instance, on pages 45 to 53 of: Hesiod. *Theogony, Works and Days Testimonia*, edited and translated by Glenn W. Most, Harvard University Press, 2006.

*Meridian* previously discussed, where fire is depicted as containing an essence of men themselves, it follows that if fire is an indispensable element of men and is inherently violent, then men are inherently predisposed to violence by the same logic. This notion aligns with scholarly observations indicating that “men engage in eight times as much violence as women” (Beynon 81). There are other scholars who go further, contending that “much of what is bad in the world, from genocide to terrorism, and including interpersonal violence, is essentially the product of men and some of their masculinities” (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 353).

Violence in Western societies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is often viewed as a failure of democratic processes, signaling a breakdown in the ability to engage in reasoned dialogue. Yet, violence has been deeply entrenched in the history of the United States since its inception, frequently wielded by pilgrims, colonizers, explorers, and others to further their own interests. Regrettably, violence remains a pervasive issue in contemporary American society. This reality underscores a profound connection between violence and masculinity. As Carrasco Carrasco notes, a “persistent cultural icon of masculinity along history has been that of a dominant aggressive and violent white man” (40).<sup>98</sup> Modern analyses of violence in men invariably lead to condemnations of these violent forms of masculinity, as elucidated in the subsequent passage:

There is something misguided about a theoretical position which asserts that there is something “wrong,” “defective” or “inadequate” in masculinity itself, thereby leaving no space for men to change their experience as men. A rationalist construction of masculinity, whereby men see themselves as having to prove their masculinity constantly against some kind of ideal, is given a new form when men are attempting to squeeze themselves into a new mould, even one provided by feminism, of what “a man is to be like.” This continues in a new

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<sup>98</sup> Examples of these white men include slaveowners, conquistadors, white supremacists, among others.

form an old Protestant tradition that says that men are unacceptable as they are, that men's natures are somehow evil. This fosters a notion that men can only be acceptable if they forsake their masculinity. (Seidler 114)

While engaging in a debate concerning whether contemporary American men ought to abandon traditional notions of masculinity for societal acceptance exceeds the scope of this dissertation, I aim to delve into the concept that there exists an inherent inclination toward evil within the nature of men. I believe that McCarthy undertakes an exploration of this idea of evil and its correlation with violence through the principal characters analyzed in the novels under examination.

## 5.2. GOD, WAR, GAMES, AND MASCULINITY

Judge Holden attributes men's propensity for violence directly to God. Previously, I explored Holden's belief that God communicates through natural elements—namely stones, trees, and bones. I posited that Holden meticulously studies and documents nature in his book to assert control over its entirety. However, alternative interpretations of Holden's actions are also conceivable.

One interpretation posits that Holden's meticulous collection of natural specimens serves as a means to study the works of God. Parrish argues that Holden is “compiling evidence of His power and mystery. On a deeper level, the judge is communing with God and uncovering the deity within himself” (“The Killer Wears the Halo” 75). Through this process, the judge forms his ultimate opinion on God, boldly asserting, “War is god” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 261). However, it is worth noting that this declaration is not original to Holden but originates from Heraclitus, as noted by Frye: “War is the father of us all and out [sic] king. War discloses who is godlike and who is but a man, who is a slave and who is a free man” (“*Blood Meridian*

and the Poetics of Violence” 107).<sup>99</sup> Scholars argue that Holden’s assertion about God and war underscores its significance as “the epitome of violence” (Guillemin 249) and is both an assertion “on the violent nature of ‘man’” and on “the fundamental law of the violence of nature itself” (Wood 87–88). Moreover, for Holden, “[w]ar endures” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 259). Holden’s belief in the primacy of war is rooted in the idea that it predates man, rendering war impossible to be man’s invention because man did not come before God. Holden further explains, “War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him” (259). Through this assertion, Holden thus “presents an ideology which both decenters man and makes him subject to a greater force” (Wood 88). Holden’s ideology shifts the focus away from man and “repositions man as the expression par excellence of that force” (88) when he reasons that God made war the “ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 259). Judge Holden’s conception of war “evokes a blood-drenched world dominated by a principle of physical force” (Cornwell 10), and thus contends that it is only natural for men to be violent, and, by extension, mankind (not humankind) is war’s *raison d’être* and vice versa. Holden speaks in absolutes,<sup>100</sup> offering no other possibility and—in his own understanding and intention—rendering his reasoning correct. Interestingly, Holden’s reasoning is not far-fetched when compared to existing scholarship on war and gender. For some scholars, “masculinity is crucial to the ways in which war gains its meaning and legitimacy in social life” (Hutchings 390–91). Moreover, scholars such as Frank Barrett (2001), Jean Bethke Elshtain (1987), and Cynthia Enloe (2000)

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<sup>99</sup> The English translation provided by Brooks Haxton differs in some of the wording used by Frye. Haxton translates the passage in the following way:

“War, as father / of all things, and king, / names few / to serve as gods, / and of the rest makes / these men slaves, / those free” (Heraclitus 29).

Here is also the original in Greek:

“Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι πάντων / δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε / τοὺς δὲ ἄνθρωπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε / τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους” (28).

<sup>100</sup> Anton Chigurh also asserts himself in similarly absolute terms, stating, “I dont have some way to put it. That’s the way it is” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 55). This declaration by both Holden and Chigurh highlights their unwavering confidence in their beliefs and perspectives. They exhibit an egocentric attitude, believing that their version of reality is the only valid one—a mindset that extends to their understanding of masculinity.

have argued that the relation between masculinity and war is “mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing, with masculinity acting as an enabling condition of war, and vice versa” (Hutchings 391). Thus, men’s participation in war contributes to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity, stabilizing its dominance in society.

As previously discussed, the concept of hegemonic masculinity “refers to the most honored and normative way of being a man at a specific historical moment” (Requena 101). For characters like Holden and Chigurh—whose representations of masculinity will be further explored in the subsequent paragraph—, this esteemed and normative method for being a man manifests through their adherence to the ethos of war. By embracing war as the pinnacle of masculinity, they establish a hegemonic masculinity that allows them to constitute “a dominant, more socially central form of masculinity that guarantees the dominant position of [Holden and Chigurh] over other forms of non-hegemonic masculinities as well as the subordination of women” (101).<sup>101</sup> For Holden<sup>102</sup> and Chigurh, their construction of masculinity from an understanding of war as the highest achievable expression of masculinity results in “a focus on both masculinity and war as *outcomes*, rather than *processes*, as fixed and reified, rather than flexible and shifting” (Hutchings 394). Said fixation and reification of their masculinity is evidenced by Holden’s previously discussed assertion that he is “a simple man” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 297); and by Chigurh’s declaration to Carla Jean: “You’re asking that I make myself vulnerable and that I can never do. I have only one way to live. It doesnt allow for special cases” (*No Country for Old Men* 259). Both characters perceive their masculinity as unassailable, viewing any display of vulnerability as a concession to potential rivals. Chigurh unequivocally rejects such vulnerability in a conversation with the owner of the stolen money

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<sup>101</sup> An examination of hegemonic masculinity in relation to female characters in McCarthy’s works will be conducted in the third chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>102</sup> In connection to judge Holden and warfare, Covell has interpreted the judge as possibly being “if not the Devil himself, then a ‘devil’ summoned up from hell’s realm to carry on what he feels is the destiny and true talent of men: to kill each other” (101).

when he returns the satchel stolen by Moss. The money's owner, worried that some other would come for the money Chigurh retrieved, asks him how he is so sure no one else will come. Chigurh asserts control over any potential challengers by proclaiming, "I'm in charge of who is coming and who is not," and adds that he "is an expert in a difficult field. As someone who is completely reliable and completely honest" (251–52). Chigurh's unwavering confidence is exemplified in his encounter with Carson Wells—a scene later analyzed—where he deftly eliminates any chance of violent confrontation, thereby reinforcing his dominance in the realm of masculinity.

Returning to judge Holden's lecture on war and masculinity, one might argue that as an intelligent being, man could reject war and seek alternative means to assert and vindicate himself and his masculinity. However, the judge vehemently denies this possibility. Holden, who has been defined as "a priest of war, whose faith relies on universal truth in violence and death" (Kim 171), asserts that war endures "because young men love it and old men love it in them. Those that fought, those that did not" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). In McCarthy's portrayal, male characters in *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* are consistently depicted as men of war. *Blood Meridian* presents a world perpetually engulfed in conflict, despite being set in the period between the Mexican-American War<sup>103</sup> and the Civil War. Conversely, *No Country for Old Men*, set in 1980, features characters who participated in World War II (Sheriff Bell) and Vietnam<sup>104</sup> (Moss and Wells) (Brummer 148), with Chigurh

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<sup>103</sup> Scholars have analyzed the wars the United States fought during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their connection with masculinity. An interesting conclusion drawn from this analysis is: "From a group theory viewpoint, the change-exhausted and emotionally regressive nineteenth century U.S. population had an overwhelming need for delegated enemies, containers of collective psychic toxins. The genocide that the U.S. group perpetrated against Native Americans, for example, and the wars it waged against Mexicans (Mexican-American War, 1846-1848) and Spanish (Spanish-American War, 1898) were symptomatic of the nation's need to restore its sense of masculine potency through sacrificial rebirth rituals/mass murder of out-groups" (Meladze 95–96).

<sup>104</sup> Analyses of masculinity in relation to the Vietnam war have also been conducted by experts. Here is a sample of what has been argued: "Viewed through the lenses of psychoanalytic and group theory, the U.S. group's need to stave off the spread of Communism was rooted in maternal engulfment anxieties. The United States was experiencing immense sociocultural and economic growth that was reconfiguring the collective symbolizations of life, death and rebirth. The increase of social freedoms was mobilizing castrating/punitive maternal alters. At

having a background “apparently, in the Special Forces” (Jarrett, “Genre, Voice, and Ethos” 68). Holden’s assertion regarding the enduring appeal of war across generations of men may appear logical under the premise that “[w]ar, because it is a test of a person’s will—his willingness either to be annihilated or to annihilate someone else—is the only condition that justifies his right to exist and impose order upon chaos. War, in other words, is the only genuine human edification, the only game in town” (Rudnicki 41). Rudnicki’s use of the term “game” in association with war seems on point. Similarly, judge Holden himself employs the concept of games to underscore the interconnectedness he perceives between God, war, and men.

In a conversation about war with some of Glanton’s men, Holden articulates his perspective on games, asserting, “Men are born for games. Nothing else. Every child knows that play is nobler than work” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). Judge Holden’s declaration resonates with historical observations regarding games and boys in the nineteenth century. As Rotundo notes, “A favorite subject in these improvised games was warfare. Sometimes, the young combatants took on the roles of the knights they read about in books, while during the Civil War they played the soldiers of their own time” (36). Rotundo’s analysis offers insight into the motivations behind the kid’s decision to join the company of violent men in *Blood Meridian*. It suggests that, as an adolescent, the kid perceives war as a game, wherein games of war<sup>105</sup> serve as a test of man’s masculinity. According to Holden’s perspective, men

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an unconscious level, militarization and wars of containment, preventive and pre-emptive actions were masculinity and immortality projects that assuaged the shared fear of growth” (Meladze 100–01).

<sup>105</sup> Regarding games of war among children in the nineteenth century, Rotundo also explains: “The most popular variant of these war games seemed to be the struggle between settlers and Indians. In this case, the boys were often inspired by the stories of people they knew or by the local folklore about ancestral generations. One revealing aspect of these games involved the choosing of sides. By race and sometimes by ancestry, the boys were kin to the settlers. Yet there is no indication that any stigma attached to playing an Indian. Indeed, the boys relished the role of the Indian—assumed by them all to be more barbarous and aggressive—as much as they did the role of the settler. These settler-and-Indian games allowed boys to enter and imagine roles that were played by real adult males. Such imitative play was a vital part of boy culture, and there were a number of other popular activities that allowed even closer copying of adult men. Some towns, for instance, had junior militia companies just like the ones for grown-ups, and they often staged mock battles” (36). Here Rotundo highlights how boys in the nineteenth century engaged in games of war, particularly those simulating conflicts between settlers and Native Americans. The passage reveals a fascination with the perceived aggression and barbarity associated with that role, ultimately providing boys with a means to imagine and mimic adult male roles in society. The kid in *Blood Meridian* needs no imagination, as he actively participates in these games of war throughout the novel.

participating in such games are ultimately wagering their masculinity, whether consciously or not. He elaborates that any man who engages in games “knows too that the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the value of that which is put at hazard” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). For Holden, masculinity and dominance over others represent what any man puts at risk when engaging in such games. This philosophy seems to be mirrored in Chigurh’s actions in *No Country for Old Men*.

In a striking display of menacing masculinity within the context of a game-like interaction, Chigurh’s behavior at a gas station along a desolate Texas highway in chapter II of *No Country for Old Men* exemplifies this dynamic. Following the routine of filling up his tank and making a phone call, Chigurh proceeds to the counter to pay. The proprietor, as described by the narrative, engages Chigurh in small talk, inquiring about the weather and his place of origin. Chigurh’s response underscores his menacing demeanor:

And what business is it of yours where I’m from, friendo?

I didnt mean nothin by it.

You didnt mean nothing by it.

I was just pasin the time of day.

I guess that passes for manners in your cracker view of things.

Well sir, I apologized. If you dont want to accept my apology I dont know

what else I can do for you. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 52)

Jarret opines that Chigurh “interprets the proprietor’s small talk as either a threat or as the imposition of a false equality” (“Genre, Voice, and Ethos” 65). Regardless of the interpretation, Chigurh’s reaction is disdainful, considering another man’s attempt at polite amiability as a “cracker view of things.” The term “cracker” used by Chigurh carries a dual connotation: it can refer to a “contemptuous name given in southern States of North America to the ‘poor whites’” (Oxford English Dictionary, *cracker*, *n.*, *sense 4.a*), as well as signify a “boaster, braggart;

hence, a liar” (*sense 2*). Chigurh likely intends both meanings, seeing the proprietor as both a poor white man (i.e., socially inferior), as well as flawed and vulnerable, a man who “lies” about being a real man. Either way, despite the proprietor’s attempts to defuse the situation with apologies and trying to steer the conversation away from Chigurh, the tension escalates with each interaction, with the proprietor’s inquiries and comments aimed at hastening Chigurh’s departure: “Will there be anything else?” and “Well I need to see about closin” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 53).

Earlier I mentioned the four imperatives of masculinity, one of them being “Give ’em hell.” Badinter elucidates that this imperative “insists on a man’s obligation to be stronger than others, even violent, if necessary. He must put on a display of boldness, even aggressivity, and show that he is ready to run all risks, even when reason and fear would suggest that he should not” (130). Both Chigurh and Holden exemplify this imperative, albeit in their own thwarted interpretations. Amidst their exchange, the proprietor confronts Chigurh with a bold remark: “You seem to have a lot of questions (...). For somebody that dont want to say where it is they’re from” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 55). Initially regarding the proprietor as sociably inferior and questioning his authenticity as a man, Chigurh perceives the proprietor’s final comment as a challenge to his masculinity and audacity. This prompts Chigurh to resort to a game of chance to test the man’s mettle and masculinity. Chigurh asks the proprietor: “What’s the most you ever saw lost on a coin toss?” (55). After the proprietor responds that he does not know, “Chigurh took a twenty-five cent piece from his pocket and flipped it spinning into the bluish glare of the fluorescent lights overhead. He caught it and slapped it onto the back of his forearm just above the bloody wrappings. Call it, he said” (55). Chigurh resorts to the coin, a game of chance, “as a stay against male vulnerability” (Jarraway 55). Judge Holden explains that “[g]ames of chance require a wager to have meaning at all” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). Engaging in a coin toss, Chigurh compels the proprietor to wager, effectively

placing the man's life, as Holden articulates, in the balance, underscoring the high stakes inherent in such games of chance.<sup>106</sup>

Unaware of the impending peril, the proprietor unwittingly faces a life-or-death predicament. Yet, for Chigurh, the stakes transcend mere survival; akin to judge Holden, he passes judgment over those he deems unworthy—men he perceives as lacking in masculinity. As Kimmel posits, men's violence “may be instrumental—designed to accomplish some goal—or expressive of emotion” (*The Gendered Society* 322). In Chigurh's case, his recourse to violence through the coin toss embodies elements of both. On one hand, the decision to employ a coin toss reflects Chigurh's exasperation with the protracted exchange with the proprietor. Faced with excessive dialogue, Chigurh resorts to the coin, a decisive action born from his growing impatience. The instrumental aspect of this act lies in its function as a means to extricate himself from the situation following his judgment of the proprietor, ensuring no witnesses remain—a tactic reminiscent of his previous encounters, such as with the owner of the car he commandeered.

It is plausible to speculate on what renders the proprietor insufficiently masculine in Chigurh's eyes. One interpretation could revolve around Chigurh's perception of the American ideal of the self-made man. When the proprietor attributes ownership of the store to his father-in-law, stating, “This was my wife's father's place,” Chigurh retorts, “You married into it” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 54). This suggests that not only did the proprietor inherit

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<sup>106</sup> Judge Holden also employs coins in contexts of life and death, imbuing them with magical connotations to underscore his arguments. In a previously mentioned scene, Holden demonstrates his sleight of hand to the boy selling puppies, making a coin vanish: “The judge made a fist and opened it. The coin was gone. He wove his fingers in the empty air and reached behind the boy's ear and took the coin and handed it to him” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 201). Similarly, in a conversation with Brown in chapter XVII, Holden conjures a gold coin, manipulating it with seemingly supernatural control: Holden “swung his hand and the coin winked overhead in the firelight. It must have been fastened to some subtle lead, horsehair perhaps, for it circled the fire and returned to the judge and he caught it in his hand and smiled” (257). These instances highlight the theme of chance prevalent throughout *Blood Meridian*, with scholars noting that chance “is everywhere in McCarthy's *terra damnata*” (Braune 4). Moreover, Braune argues that Holden's gold-coin trick is possible because “chance allows for aberrations of Newtonian physics” (4). Finally, chance is so important in both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* as to allow “the emergence of beings like the judge and Chigurh. Chance is related not only to chaos theory and vibrant matter but also to games and war” (4).

the business from another man, but he did so through a woman—a circumstance Chigurh views as emasculating. This perceived lack of self-determination and independence may contribute to Chigurh's judgment of the proprietor's masculinity. Subsequently, by subjecting the proprietor to the coin toss, Chigurh offers him a chance to redeem himself, albeit under duress. Nonetheless, the decision to coerce the proprietor into participating in a high-stakes game of chance underscores Chigurh's propensity for violence and dominance.

Chigurh's interaction with the proprietor could also be interpreted as an attempt to impart a lesson about masculinity. Through his use of the coin, Chigurh suggests, "Anything can be an instrument ... Small things. Things you wouldn't even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don't pay attention. And then one day there's an accounting. And after that nothing is the same" (57). The lesson suggests that seemingly insignificant things can wield great power and significance, often unnoticed until they demand attention. This serves as a metaphor for masculinity and how men may take it for granted by not paying attention to these seemingly small elements that conform a man's masculinity until it is unexpectedly challenged. It seems that Chigurh "represents the willingness to be the [ultimate] instrument" (Woodson, "'You are the battleground'" 11) used to challenge other masculinities. Whether or not Chigurh intends to convey this message, his actions and words are undeniably menacing. As Whitehead explains, "the constant threat of violence is (...) an aggression, a form of violation of human dignity" (36), rendering the above scene chilling. Perhaps after this encounter, the proprietor will better understand that "to recognize the extent and range of men's violences is to face the depressing and disturbing realization that men's propensity for cruelty and violence is probably the biggest cause of misery in the world" (36). Men like Chigurh bring misery rather than happiness to others.

Similarly to Chigurh, judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* gives other men hell without an apparent motive. While both Holden and Chigurh often engage in playful conversations that

jeopardize lives, their approaches differ in similar situations. An example of this situational resemblance to Chigurh and the proprietor's conversation can be seen in Holden's first appearance in the novel. In the scene, Reverend Green is preaching while Holden enters the "nomadic house of God" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 6) the reverend and the members of the congregation are in. The narration explains that Holden: "pushed his way forward as far as the crateboard pulpit where the reverend stood and there he turned to address the reverend's congregation" (7). Holden publicly accuses Reverend Green of being an illiterate man, wanted by the law, a child molester, and an impostor "devoid of the least qualification to the office he has usurped" (7). Despite Reverend Green's denial of these accusations and claims of Holden being the devil incarnate, the situation escalates to gunfire and mayhem. Eventually, the kid, a witness to the scene, manages to escape and finds shelter in a bar, but Holden is already there. When questioned about his history with the reverend, Holden states, "I never laid eyes on the man before today. Never even heard of him" (9). Given Holden's confession, Parkes has labeled the judge as "an imposter" (107). Judge Holden<sup>107</sup> acts as an agent of chaos, a man who gives other men hell seemingly for his own amusement. Whether an innocent man is accused of a crime, lives, or dies, is of no concern to Holden; he can do whatever he pleases to whomever he pleases. Employing terminology used by Badinter, it can be concluded that giving other men hell is just a game of sport for Holden.

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<sup>107</sup> Parkes offers a compelling analysis of judge Holden and Reverend Green's dynamic, a reading that also extends to the rest of the characters and *Blood Meridian* itself: "But Holden's confession does not necessarily acquit the Reverend Green of the charge of fraud. No figure is immune to such allegations because in this work the concept of character is represented as inherently theatrical. To be Judge Holden is to play the role of Judge Holden. The difference between the judge and the reverend is not the difference between true man and false; nor is it the difference between a character who plays a role and a character who knows he is playing a role. The difference between them is a matter of theatrical range: the judge simply has more roles at his disposal. Because there are no original selves to which we can refer, every character in *Blood Meridian* is, in a sense, an imposter. The more important point, however, is that McCarthy renders the term *character* null and void by subverting the difference between true and false identities" (107). Parkes thus suggests that judge Holden and Reverend Green embody theatricality and are not immune to allegations of fraud. Parkes posits that in *Blood Meridian*, the concept of character is inherently performative, with each character playing a role without a fixed "true" identity. Hence, the distinction between genuine and false identities becomes blurred, rendering the notion of character obsolete and highlighting the pervasive theme of theatricality throughout the novel.

Returning now to *No Country for Old Men*, virtually any man who confronts Chigurh faces two options to defend his worth as a (flawed) man: agree to participate in a coin toss or engage in a battle to the death. While I have delved into Chigurh's use of games of chance, let us now explore the other type of games mentioned by judge Holden: games of sport. According to Holden, games of sport "involve the skill and strength of the opponents and the humiliation of defeat and the pride of victory are in themselves sufficient stake because they inhere in the worth of the principals and define them" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). For both Holden and Chigurh, games of sport, given their inherent nature, seem to be the ultimate test of a man's masculinity. In these contexts, two opponents or teams battle it out, and if as Holden elucidates, "trial of chance or trial of worth all games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all" (260), then masculinity is that which ultimately swallows up the participants. Men who engage in battle with Holden and Chigurh are attempting to test their masculinity against that of these characters, yet they all ultimately fail.

Chigurh perceives the competition between masculinities as a game of sport, a concept he puts into practice numerous times throughout the novel. One early instance of this occurs at the outset of the narrative when Chigurh has been arrested—the cause is so far unknown, a fact which gives the character an aura of mystery in that initial stage in the text. Based on some of his actions which include the following scene, Cooper qualifies Chigurh as "animalistic, capable of nearly superhuman feats; he wreaks havoc on the world wherever he goes" ("He's a Psychopathic Killer, but So What?" 51). Chigurh is taken to a police station, handcuffed, and is in the custody of a deputy. While the deputy is on the phone talking to the sheriff and affirming that he has "got it covered," Chigurh "squatted and scooted his manacled hands beneath him to the back of his knees. In the same motion he sat and rocked backward and passed the chain under his feet and then stood instantly and effortlessly" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 5). Chigurh then strangles the deputy with the handcuffs' chain. This

display of cunning and boldness underscores Chigurh's readiness to take extreme risks to achieve his objectives. Furthermore, Chigurh's actions exemplify Whitehead's assertion that some masculinities "are not necessarily benign, but are directly implicated in those practices of men that are oppressive, destructive and violent" (35). While Chigurh's attack on the deputy can be rationalized as a means to escape captivity, the circumstances leading up to his arrest raise intriguing questions.

When Chigurh confronts Carson Wells, he explains why he had ended up in police custody. Chigurh states:

When I went down on the border I stopped in a cafe in this town and there were some men in there drinking beer and one of them kept looking back at me. I didnt pay any attention to him. I ordered my dinner and ate. But when I walked up to the counter to pay the check I had to go past them and they were all grinning and he said something that was hard to ignore. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 174)

The reader is left to speculate as to what was said to Chigurh, although one can assume that it was either a racist or homophobic insult, or one attempting to ridicule Chigurh's masculinity. Chigurh then explains that he did nothing about it but signal the man to go outside. Finally, Chigurh, the man, and the man's friends meet outside the café and Chigurh kills the man, to the astonishment of the other men who "didnt know what had happened. They didnt know that he was dead" (174). Chigurh is then arrested and taken into police custody, resulting in the aforementioned scene with the deputy. Chigurh's explanation as to why he did what he did at the café is interesting. Chigurh explains to Wells: "I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible" (174–75). Chigurh's use of the word "extricate" reveals a deeper longing within him, a desire to break free from the confines of societal norms. I think Chigurh

experiments with his need to assert his violent masculinity in a way that will make him understood and respected by other men, particularly his peers in the world of violence. Chigurh elaborates, “Most people dont believe that there can be such a person” (260). However, the only way Chigurh finds to extricate himself by an act of will is through the death of others, especially those he feels deserve it. Despite his efforts, Chigurh realizes that others, even those immersed in violence like Wells, cannot comprehend the true nature of his being and admits that such an act of extrication “was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do” (175). Wells’s incredulous response to the extrication comment highlights the extent of Chigurh’s isolation and alienation from society. Wells states, “Do you have any notion of how goddamned crazy you are?” and clarifies that it is not the nature of the conversation they are having but the “nature of you [i.e., Chigurh]” (175). Chigurh concludes that the act of extrication cannot be performed by an act of will, not even via the use of violence, because the mere intention of doing it reveals a weakness and vulnerability. As stated earlier in the conversation between Chigurh and Carla Jean, he does not allow himself to be vulnerable. If in games of sport, as Holden states, what prevails is the skill of one participant over another, Chigurh cannot appear to be weak in front of others and clemency is not afforded. The only alternative at extrication Chigurh finds against those who do not engage him in a game of sport is, as he explains to Carla Jean, “[a] coin toss perhaps” (259)—in other words, a game of chance.

Another instance in *No Country for Old Men* that illustrates Chigurh’s assertion of menacing masculinity in the context of games occurs during his conversation with Carson Wells. It is noteworthy, however, that during Moss’s convalescence from his injuries sustained in the hotel shootout with Chigurh, Wells visits him at the hospital. Moss and Wells engage in a dialogue concerning Chigurh, and the former initiates the exchange by stating:

What about that guy that come to the hotel.

We can talk about him.

Talk then.

I can make him go away.

I can do that myself.

I dont think so.

You're entitled to your opinions. (148)

Here we observe both Wells and Moss expressing confidence in their ability to defeat Chigurh without assistance. Wells casts doubt on Moss's chances of surviving another encounter with the hitman.<sup>108</sup> However, Wells himself fails to outmaneuver Chigurh, as the latter ultimately kills him at the hotel where he is residing. Employing a tactic reminiscent of Chigurh's interrogation of the gas station proprietor, Chigurh engages Wells in a conversation designed to compel him to acknowledge defeat and accept that he has been overpowered by a better man. Chigurh poses a poignant question to Wells: "If the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?" (175). In essence, Chigurh challenges the validity of Wells's masculinity principles, suggesting that if they have resulted in his current predicament, they may not be as righteous as Wells believes them to be.

As a matter of fact, the exchange between Chigurh and Wells echoes judge Holden's philosophical view on men's inherent violence, framing their confrontation as a test of masculinity. For Holden, men's combat is innate, leading them to a moment of reckoning where their worth as men is determined by the outcome. For Holden, when men combat each other, all that has happened to them, everything they have learned, and everything they are, serves to bring them "to this moment which will tell if he is to die at that man's hand or that man at his" (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 260). This situation is seen in the confrontation between Chigurh

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<sup>108</sup> As will be explored in the subsequent chapter of this dissertation, in the case of Moss, Chigurh does not kill him; instead, he is later killed by Mexican men in a motel. McCarthy chooses to provide only a glimpse of Moss's death through dialogue between Sheriff Bell and the police officers on the scene. Thus, in *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy decides not to satisfy the reader's curiosity in revealing which man, Moss or Chigurh, would have succeeded in killing the other in a second encounter. My belief is that Chigurh would have ultimately prevailed, supported by his reputation as "The invincible Mr Chigurh" (140).

and Wells in *No Country for Old Men*, when Wells asks, “You think I’d trade places with you?” and Chigurh responds, “Yes. I do. I’m here and you are there. In a few minutes I will still be here” (175). Chigurh’s assertion that his and Wells’s situation reflects the quality of their respective masculinities aligns with Holden’s belief in the ultimate validation of a man’s worth through such confrontations. Holden poses the following question: “What more certain validation of a man’s worth could there be?” and he elaborates his argumentation further: “This enhancement of the game to its ultimate state admits no argument concerning the notion of fate. The selection of one man over another is a preference absolute and irrevocable and it is a dull man indeed who could reckon so profound a decision without agency or significance either one” (*Blood Meridian* 260). In other words, destiny and fate play no part in this struggle of masculinity, war, and men’s violence because these are intrinsic parts of being a man in both a traditional sense and a hegemonic masculinity one; once this is understood, it is only natural that men test each other, both in the worlds of the novels and in the real one, because “being a man is an endless struggle that lasts an entire lifetime. Man wages war perpetually against himself in order never to yield to the weakness and passivity that are always lying in wait for him” (Badinter 129). Badinter’s statement aligns with the conclusion of Chigurh and Wells’s conversation where Wells orders Chigurh to kill him and the latter responds, “It’s not good, Carson. You need to compose yourself. If you don’t respect me what must you think of yourself? Look at where you are” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 177). Chigurh’s questioning of Wells’s self-respect highlights the existential stakes of their interaction, challenging Wells to confront his perceived failure as a man. In reference to this conversation, Brummer argues that “Chigurh takes perverse pleasure in confronting his victims with their own mortality, forcing them to reckon with their own sick desires, to backtrack into the shadowy regions of their own complicity, and to come to some more honest evaluation of themselves (of their souls) before he sends them into eternity” (137). While Brummer’s interpretation has merit, I argue that

Chigurh's interrogation of Wells serves a different purpose: to force Wells to confront his failure as a man: "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?" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 177–78). Chigurh's perplexity stems from his inability to comprehend why a man of violence such as Wells—who understands the nature of games of sport and war—would acquiesce to a lesser position. In other words, how can a man decide to bring the violent masculinity he once embraced down to a lower level than that of his opponents? The reason for this discrepancy in perception resides in the fact that neither Wells, Moss, nor Bell are equipped (or want to be equipped in the case of the latter) with the requisite violent masculinity to challenge Chigurh's effectively. Despite arguments to the contrary regarding Moss's capabilities, his eventual avoidance of further confrontation with Chigurh after returning to U.S. territory following his release from the Mexican hospital underscores this inadequacy. Even if Moss dies protecting the hitchhiker girl—a scene further explored in the third chapter of this dissertation—he is gunned down by the kind of men Chigurh can slaughter with ease. Finally, Chigurh's assertion of leading "a simple life" (177) mirrors Judge Holden's self-perception, both embodying complex and formidable ideals of masculinity. Their lives, far from simple, are marked by astuteness, ruthlessness, resourcefulness, and an unsettling capacity for evil, their exposure to extreme violence serving as a testament to the depths of their depravity.

Turning back to *Blood Meridian* and Judge Holden, I have previously examined how the Judge embodies the masculinity imperative "Give 'em hell." However, another lens through which to analyze Judge Holden is the "Big Wheel" imperative. About this imperative, Badinter offers the following explanation: "the real male is *a big wheel* (a bigshot, an important person). He must be superior to others. Masculinity is measured by success, power, and the admiration

he wins” (130). The judge is admired by some, such as Tobin, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, Holden wields significant power, both physically and through his given title as judge, which grants him authority over others. Moreover, he embodies the essence of a “Big Wheel” through his seemingly invincible nature, surviving harrowing situations such as the aforementioned volcano scene. Remarkably, like Chigurh, Holden appears impervious to death, despite numerous opportunities for male characters to dispatch him.

In Chapter XII of *Blood Meridian*, we encounter a first instance of someone having the opportunity to kill judge Holden. In the scene, Glanton’s men have taken an Apache boy with them and the boy has accompanied them for some time. One morning, Holden and the boy are seen together: “the judge was dandling it on one knee while the men saddled their horses. Toadvine saw him with the child as he passed with his saddle but when he came back ten minutes later leading his horse the child was dead and the judge had scalped it. Toadvine put the muzzle of his pistol against the great dome of the judge’s head” (McCarthy 170). In this tense moment, Holden remains stoic, unfazed by Toadvine’s threat, and issues a chilling ultimatum: “You either shoot or take that away. Do it now” (171). Faced with this decision, Toadvine opts to remove the pistol, likely realizing that any attempt to kill the judge could result in his own demise.

The kid, too, is presented with an opportunity to end judge Holden’s life but fails to seize it. Following the carnage resulting in the death of John Joel Glanton and most of the company’s men, Toadvine and the kid flee the scene. Uncertain of the judge’s fate, they encounter Tobin the next day; armed with only one gun and scant ammunition, they are pursued by the Yumas. They end up in a desertscape when they see that “[c]rossing the dry pan toward them from the east was a large figure attended by a smaller” (293). It is the judge. Engaging in dialogue, Holden negotiates the purchase of Toadvine’s hat to shield himself from the scorching sun. The narrative’s use of language emphasizes the connection between Holden

and games, since the judge puts “forward the coins agreed upon, advancing them with the back of his hand forward like a croupier” (296). Even in such dire situation, the language used by the narration helps the reader to infer the control Holden has as a man of war, of violence, and as a participant in games of sport. Eventually, Tobin begs the kid to kill Holden: “You’ll get no second chance lad. Do it. He is naked. He is unarmed. God’s blood, do you think you’ll best him any other way? Do it, lad. Do it for the love of God. Do it or I swear your life is forfeit” (298). The kid hesitates, allowing Holden to remain unscathed as they depart, leaving him there in the barren landscape. Days later, separated from Toadvine, the kid and Tobin run into the judge again. Tobin, injured and resigned to his fate, implores the kid to abandon him to the mercy of nature or Holden’s judgment. Refusing to heed Tobin’s advice, the kid states about Holden: “He aint nothin. You told me so yourself (...). That it was a naked fact and the judge was a man like all men.” Tobin contends the kid’s sentiment: “Face him down then (...). Face him down if he is so” (309). Though the kid attempts to lower Holden down to the category of an ordinary man, Tobin knows best. The two of them see Holden appear and vanish several times on the horizon with Brown’s rifles in tow. Though presented with an additional opportunity to eliminate Holden, the kid refrains again. Holden, knowing that the kid and Tobin are nearby, starts talking, addressing the kid:

I’ve passed before your gunsight twice this hour and will pass a third time. Why not show yourself?

No assassin, called the judge. And no partisan either. There’s a flawed place in the fabric of your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen. (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 311–12)

In these words, judge Holden implies that the kid’s masculinity falls short, as the kid demonstrates mercy toward Holden, a trait incongruous with the violent masculinity Holden

epitomizes. The kid's reluctance to shoot Holden suggests a deficiency in his own masculinity compared to Holden's—i.e., the kid is not as violent as Holden. This notion persists into the novel's final chapter, where the now grown-up kid—here referred to as “the man”—refrains from attempting to kill the judge during their last encounter in a bar. Despite the passage of time and the kid's assumed maturity, the judge still perceives shortcomings in the kid's masculinity. Ultimately, in a chilling conclusion, the judge brutally murders the kid in a manner too gruesome for even McCarthy to depict.<sup>109</sup>

I believe that the best explanation as to why judge Holden is the perfect embodiment of the imperatives of masculinity “Give 'em hell” and the “Big Wheel” can be found when the kid undergoes a surgical procedure to extract an arrow lodged in his leg. McCarthy vividly portrays the kid's dreams and ravings about the judge:

The fool was no longer there but another man and this other man he could never see in his entirety but he seemed an artisan and a worker in metal. The judge enshadowed him where he crouched at his trade but he was a coldforger who worked with hammer and die, perhaps under some indictment and an exile from men's fires, hammering out like his own conjectural destiny all through the night of his becoming some coinage for a dawn that would not be. It is this false moneyer with his gravers and burins who seeks favor with the judge and he is at contriving from cold slag brute in the crucible a face that will pass, an image that will render this residual specie current in the markets where men barter. Of this is the judge judge and the night does not end. (*Blood Meridian* 322–23)

As can be observed, the passage portrays the judge as exerting control over this other man (he appears to be a blacksmith) because the judge “enshadowed him,” symbolizing his influence.

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<sup>109</sup> The scene depicting the murder of the kid will be subjected to deeper analysis in the next chapter of this dissertation.

The blacksmith, seemingly working “under some indictment,” seeks Holden’s approval, implying that the judge holds power over him. The term “coinage” carries dual meanings, referring not only to physical currency, but also to the creation of new concepts or ideals. Here, the judge oversees the creation of this “coinage,” shaping the masculinity that will be embraced by other men: “this residual specie current in the markets where men barter.” This dream passage parallels the aforementioned myth of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, with the judge controlling the metaphorical forge. Consequently, the judge’s masculinity is potent, enduring, and dark, echoing the endless night described in the passage. Moreover, the connection between the judge’s masculinity and immortality “stems from his violent transgressions. In them we discover that origin and end constitute an eternal cycle, and the judge is the ultimate embodiment of their endless dance” (Masters 36). Holden’s masculinity and immortality are implied, as he is depicted as perpetually dancing<sup>110</sup> and declaring that he will never perish: “He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 349). Therefore, McCarthy suggests that whilst Holden’s masculinity and violence are distinct and powerful, the judge is essential for other (inferior) masculinities to exist, given the fact that “it is the judge’s responsibility to oversee the production of the false currency” (Mundik 86) used by the rest of men. Holden’s masculinity serves as a standard against which others measure their own masculinity, with those deemed imperfect or flawed by Holden’s standards being produced as such. In this way, the judge extends his dominance over all aspects of existence, including nature and other men.

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<sup>110</sup> The analysis of judge Holden’s relationship with dancing and its connection to masculinity will be addressed in the following chapter of this dissertation. Given that one section of that chapter delves into judge Holden’s masculinity as a teacher, I have deemed more appropriate to explore the association between masculinity and dance in that context, particularly as Holden employs the dance as a metaphor for masculinity in his teachings to the kid.

## 6. McCarthy's Way of Defeating Invincible Masculinities

In this chapter, I have delved into the portrayal of violent masculinities embodied by judge Holden and Anton Chigurh. Through an examination of McCarthy's narrative construction, it becomes evident that these two characters epitomize traditional masculine qualities associated with strength, dominance, and aggression. Their personas are crafted around themes of hunting, dominion over nature, and engagement in warfare and games of chance and sport. In my analysis, I have stated that, within McCarthy's literary universe, Holden and Chigurh stand out as the most extreme embodiments of violent masculinity, surpassing all the novels' other characters in their ferocity and dominance. Even Sheriff Bell concedes, in conversation with other policemen, to Chigurh's overwhelming force, admitting that they have been outmatched: "I think we been outgeneraled" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 245).

I previously posited that McCarthy crafts the violent masculinities of Holden and Chigurh to serve as cautionary examples, warning against the dangers of proliferation of similar masculinities within society, particularly in the United States. Despite the allure some may find in aspiring to emulate characters like judge Holden or Chigurh, McCarthy cautions against such fantasies. The cautionary tone is evident in McCarthy's decision to render the seemingly invincible masculinities of Holden and Chigurh imperfect. Chigurh's victory, for instance, despite surviving numerous violent encounters and, unbeknownst to him, effectively forcing Sheriff Bell into retirement, is not complete because he is not immune to harm. Chigurh sustains injuries on two occasions throughout the novel, which makes him "at least *somewhat* human" (Covell 103), firstly by Moss and secondly by the random car accident he has after the murder of Carla Jean. By making the invincible Chigurh *vincible*, McCarthy's implicit moral lesson is clear: even a most violently accomplished masculinity cannot exist unchecked in the world. *No Country for Old Men* illustrates the idea that other violent masculinities, such as

Moss or Wells, will inevitably challenge and fight dominant masculinities like Chigurh's. Moreover, should these other violent masculinities fail in their challenge, as they in fact do in the novel, McCarthy introduces chance (in this case, in the form of a car accident) as an unavoidable factor to contend with. The previously discussed pivotal coin-toss scene exemplifies this, as Chigurh asserts control over life and death through the toss of a coin. Chigurh's reasoning is that the proprietor of the gas station has been putting everything up—everything he has and has had into that decisive moment in which it is to decide whether he dies or not at Chigurh's hands. Chigurh explains that the coin has “been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. And I'm here. And I've got my hand over it. And it's either heads or tails. And you have to say. Call it” (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 56). Chigurh's audacious assertion could indeed be interpreted as a manifestation of his godlike self-perception. However, this perception is swiftly challenged by the subsequent random accident he suffers. Applying Chigurh's own coin-toss logic, the accident becomes the inevitable consequence of his putting everything up into that moment—that is, every decision and action he has made leading up to the crash. Much like the inevitability of the coin's outcome, the collision becomes Chigurh's unavoidable moment of reckoning. An omnipotent deity would not be subject to such earthly tribulations—such as the one represented by two cars crashing—, since they would transcend mortal limitations. Chigurh's experience of this moment serves as a stark reminder of his own fallibility and mortality, dispelling any illusions of godlike status. While both Chigurh and the proprietor survive these moments of reckoning of their masculinities, their sense of self is severely injured and irrevocably altered. I contend that Chigurh, and likely the proprietor as well, emerge from these experiences with their masculinity severely wounded and transformed. Ultimately, McCarthy's message in *No Country for Old Men* suggests that even the most determined efforts to cultivate a violently

perfect sense of masculinity will inevitably encounter resistance from other men (better men I may add) and the capricious whims of chance.

On the other hand, judge Holden's perfectly violent masculinity undergoes a different form of imperfection compared to Chigurh's. As previously mentioned, Holden stands as the sole character in *Blood Meridian* to outlast the tumultuous and violent events of the narrative. By the novel's conclusion, Holden remains unscathed, ostensibly in robust health, violent, and continues to exert his dominance over the other men in his midst:

He was sitting at one of the tables. He wore a round hat with a narrow brim and he was among every kind of man, herder and bullwhacker and drover and freighter and miner and hunter and soldier and pedlar and gambler and drifter and drunkard and thief and he was among the dregs of the earth in beggary a thousand years and he was among the scapegrace scions of eastern dynasties and in all that motley assemblage he sat by them and yet alone as if he were some other sort of man entire. (McCarthy 338)

While McCarthy underscores Holden's exceptionalism among men in this passage, and although he chooses to conclude the novel with the judge, there remains one final page—the epilogue—after the main events of the novel. The epilogue reads:

In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground. He uses an implement with two handles and he chucks it into the hole and he enkindles the stone in the hole with his steel hole by hole striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there. On the plain behind him are the wanderers in search of bones and those who do not search and they move haltingly in the light like mechanisms whose movements are monitored with escapement and pallet so that they appear restrained by a prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality and they cross in their

progress one by one that track of holes that runs to the rim of the visible ground and which seems less the pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality as if each round and perfect hole owed its existence to the one before it there on that prairie upon which are the bones and the gatherers of bones and those who do not gather. He strikes fire in the hole and draws out his steel. Then they all move on again. (351)

As evident, McCarthy once again draws a connection between men, masculinity, fire, knowledge, God, and the myth of Prometheus. Viewed in relation to *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, McCarthy's inclusion of this unknown man in the epilogue—after Holden—can be interpreted as a type of masculinity distinct from Holden's and one that precedes others to come. In essence, *No Country for Old Men*, as analyzed in the first chapter of this dissertation, commences with Sheriff Bell and culminates with his dream of his father, Jack, carrying fire, followed by Bell himself. In this case, as mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, the sight of Jack guiding him in the dark “provides Bell with the means to revivify hope in humanity's capacity to create” (Cooper, “He's a Psychopathic Killer, but So What?” 57). As explored in the first chapter of this dissertation, the symbolism of fire also permeates *The Road*. These two post-*Blood Meridian* uses of fire, which in the preceding chapter were interpreted as symbols of good and caring masculinities, may be viewed as masculinities inherited from the man in the epilogue rather than from Holden. This approach by McCarthy serves to delegitimize Holden's notion of enduring superiority in masculinity. West, offering a gnostic perspective on Holden, posits that the judge “is only deceptively God-like, that beneath the surface of his powerful physical exterior, his coy dialogue, his triumphant violence, Judge Holden is not transcendent” (141). This notion of Holden's lack of transcendence from a gnostic viewpoint is also applicable to an understanding of his masculinity. By denying Holden the last word in the novel, McCarthy introduces imperfections in Holden's masculinity, and,

as a consequence, “the judge’s gaze is short-sighted and (...) his power is incomplete” (Brown 74). Essentially, whilst the judge may entertain thoughts of eternal life and perpetual dancing, McCarthy confines Holden’s dominion, his suzerainty, to the main events of *Blood Meridian*, excluding the epilogue and the world to come. Consequently, with the optimistic message conveyed by the epilogue—one of progress and the triumph of civilization and technological advancements—McCarthy seems to suggest that war, violence, and perfectly violent masculinities are not everlasting. While they may hold sway for a time, even an extended period (as in the case of the judge’s masculinity), other benevolent and caring masculinities will emerge victorious over those who are evil, even in post-apocalyptic worlds such as that depicted in *The Road*.

Finally, the epilogue serves as a way of cleaning the slate. The man in the epilogue symbolizes a return to Prometheus-like origins where fire is struck from rocks and nature itself, contributing to the advancement of civilization. It seems that the man in the epilogue, akin to Prometheus, seeks to transcend the violent masculinities depicted in *Blood Meridian*’s Great West, aspiring toward positive evolution. If Holden’s assertion rings true, with God indeed speaking to men through nature, the epilogue’s man discovers new revelations of the divine in the natural world. Moreover, McCarthy suggests that men shape their masculinity through fire and its symbolism, implying that new forms of masculinity are on the horizon. In following McCarthy’s oeuvre, it seems that these emerging masculinities appear, in general, to be notably nobler, embodied in characters such as John Grady Cole, Billy Parham, Sheriff Bell, Llewelyn Moss, and, particularly, the man and the boy in *The Road*. As a matter of fact, as detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the boy in *The Road* serves as the prime exemplar of this transformation. In sum, against all indication to the contrary and even after the prevailing violence of the masculinities portrayed, both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*

culminate on a hopeful note, indicating that men and masculinity can evolve toward more caring and less violent expressions of masculinity, even in interpersonal relationships.

## Chapter Three: Male-Female Relationships, Masculinity, and Sexuality

Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey. (Anzaldúa 20)

After delving into the significance McCarthy attributes to masculinity concerning fatherhood and violence in the preceding two chapters, the focus now shifts to examining the masculinity of McCarthy's male characters from an alternate perspective. This third chapter delves into the masculinity of male characters within the context of their relationships with both male and female characters, and how sexuality intertwines with the formation of their identities. Armengol contends that the representation of sex and sexuality in North American literature has been relatively scarce. One explanation for this scarcity can be attributed to the inherent nature of the "so-called American Experience itself. From its discovery, America was defined as a virginal land" (*Richard Ford and the Fiction* 85). This notion of purity and virginity, of an immaculate state, often associated with young women, has persisted since the United States's inception as a country. Moreover, sexuality, particularly in the United States, has frequently been intertwined with power dynamics. This thematic association, therefore, tends to appear

as metaphors that link women's bodies to land/territory and nation (i.e., the idea of a "mother country" or "virgin territory"). The equation of land or territory with the female body has long had roots in the gendering of the nation as female (the site where citizens are reproduced). Within these cycles of representations,

geographic and ideological spaces, such as the nation-state are feminized and women's bodies take on the symbolic role of land, territory, and nation, becoming sites through which colonial power can exert itself. (Reimer 429)

It is essential to highlight that within this depiction of the virginal United States, there exist "lonely frontiersmen, who prefer male comradeship and violent adventure to the world of women and sexuality" (Armengol, *Richard Ford and the Fiction* 85). Many men favored homosocial relationships over those involving women, reserving interactions with women primarily for romantic and/or sexual encounters. However, while homosociality provided men with various avenues for relating to one another and affirming their masculinity, it is crucial to acknowledge that "not to be sexually driven can call into question a man's masculinity" (*Masculinities in Black and White* 97–98). Armengol explains that men, particularly white men, consequently sought to evade such social scrutiny of their masculinity by "insur[ing] both their whiteness and masculinity by channeling their sexual desire into heterosexual marriage and reproduction" (98). Cormac McCarthy's oeuvre, although composed centuries after the colonization of North America, aligns with Armengol's perspective, particularly evident in *Blood Meridian*. Moreover, in examining various American authors, Armengol has noted that some writers depicting male characters imply in their narratives that if "sexuality derives from masculinity, then it follows that rethinking the normative heterosexual order will entail rethinking the normative ideals of masculinity, too" (114). I contend that McCarthy similarly engages in this discourse throughout his body of work. Granted, while McCarthy's exploration of masculine and feminine sexuality may not be as prominent a focus as his examination of violence, masculinity in relation to sexuality has been addressed in his works since his earliest novel.

An illustrative example of the aforementioned assertion can be found in McCarthy's first published novel in mid-1960s, *The Orchard Keeper*. At the beginning of the novel, Sylder

and his friend June are talking about their sexual experiences and about the sex they have had with girls:

It was near daylight when they started back from Knoxville, a pale cold graying to the east.

Where'd you take her? Sylder asked.

June reached for the cigarettes riding in the visor. Goddamn she's ugly, he said. You know what she told me?

What's that, said Sylder, grinning.

That I was the nicest boy ever needled her. *Needled*, for God's sake.

Where at?

Huh?

Where'd you take her. You come down from the church but I never heard you come up. Where'd you go?

Ah. Up in the backhouse.

Backhouse?

Shithouse then.

Sylder was looking at him in amazed incredulity, acceptance and belief momentarily suspended, unable to picture it yet. He had one more question: Standing up?

Naw, well ... she sort of sat down and leant back and I ... she ... But that was beyond his powers of description, let alone Sylder's imagination.

You mean to say you—Sylder paused for a moment trying to get the facts in summary—you screwed her in a nigger shithouse sittin on the...

Well Goddamnit at least I never took her in no Goddamn church, June broke on.

The coupe wobbled to a halt at the side of the road and Sylder collapsed against the door epileptic with laughter. After a while he stopped and said: Was she the one that...

Yes, Goddamn you, she was the one.

Whooooee! Sylder screamed and rolled out of the door where he lay in the wet morning grass shaking soundlessly. (22–23)

As evident from the passage, Sylder and June engage in a discussion about the latter's sexual encounter. The passage also suggests that June lost his virginity to this woman, thereby affirming his masculinity in the eyes of Sylder as a man capable of successful intercourse and sexual performance. Kimmel would categorize Sylder and June's conversation and behavior as a quintessential "guyland" exchange. Kimmel elucidates that guyland

is the world in which young men live. It is both a stage of life, a liminal undefined time span between adolescence and adulthood that can often stretch for a decade or more, and a place, or, rather, a bunch of places where guys gather to be guys with each other, unhassled by the demands of parents, girlfriends, jobs, kids, and the other nuisances of adult life. (*Guyland* 4)

Certainly, McCarthy's male characters cannot always neatly fit into or align with such terminology. However, John Grady Cole from *All the Pretty Horses* and John Wesley Rattner from *The Orchard Keeper* can be seen as exceptions as these two characters do exhibit some of the characteristics associated with guyland as discussed above, along with others explored by Kimmel.<sup>111</sup> However, since this dissertation focuses on adult male characters, I will specifically delve into McCarthy's portrayals of masculinity, sexuality, and the limited interactions between male and female characters, as depicted in the characters of Culla Holme

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<sup>111</sup> Examples include loneliness, confusion, "trying to come to terms with a world they themselves barely understand," or "test[ing] themselves in fantasy worlds and in drinking contests, enduring humiliation and pain at the hands of others" (Kimmel, *Guyland* 7).

(*Outer Dark*), Lester Ballard (*Child of God*), judge Holden (*Blood Meridian*), John Grady's father (*All the Pretty Horses*), Llewelyn Moss and Anton Chigurh (both from *No Country for Old Men*), and the Counselor and Reiner (from *The Counselor*). It is important to note that whilst some of these male characters will be examined in relation to female characters, not all of these interactions are necessarily sexual in nature. Nonetheless, they do offer insights into constructions of masculinity. For instance, some relationships of a sexual nature can be observed in the dynamics between characters such as Culla and Rinthy Holme, Moss and Carla Jean, the Counselor and Laura, and Reiner and Malkina, while nonsexual interactions are depicted between Moss and the hitchhiker girl, and Chigurh and Carla Jean. Despite assertions that “[w]omen in McCarthy’s texts have an extraordinarily high rate of attrition” (Sullivan, “The Good Guys” 81), excluding the analysis of these female characters<sup>112</sup> would unduly restrict the scope of my examination, even though my inquiry is in fact constrained by the limited representations McCarthy offers in the works under scrutiny and in his oeuvre in general.

Moreover, since McCarthy’s exploration of the sexuality of his male characters has not been a consistent theme throughout his works, employing a chronological division similar to the one utilized in the first chapter of this dissertation for the analysis of father characters would not be suitable for examining portrayals of male sexuality. Therefore, I propose to commence by examining what I perceive as depictions of relationships or interactions in which male characters appear at ease, before progressing to those where male characters encounter challenges to their masculinity from the femininity of their female counterparts. It is crucial for the reader to grasp that in McCarthy’s narratives, the demarcation between these relationships

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<sup>112</sup> Should readers seek further exploration of female characters in McCarthy’s works, Olivia Carr Edenfield’s book chapter titled “Ernest Hemingway” (2014) provides valuable insights. In this chapter, Edenfield elucidates how McCarthy employs women to instill peace and tranquility following men’s violence in *Blood Meridian*.

is often blurred. Consequently, there are instances where both types of interactions coexist within a single character or work.

Lastly, after the examination of the most conventional portrayals of male-female interactions in McCarthy, the chapter proceeds to delve into the masculinities of Lester Ballard and Judge Holden within the context of sexual depictions that deviate from normative expectations, “beliefs, behaviors, and identities” (Worthen 15) in the worlds of the novels. These portrayals encompass instances of murder involving both male and female characters, homosexual relationships, pedophilic disorder, and necrophilia.

## **1. As Perfect Male-Female Relationships or Interactions as Can Be in McCarthy**

### 1.1. CULLA AND RINTHY HOLME: AN INCESTUOUS RELATIONSHIP

Let us begin with what is chronologically the earliest portrayal of a seemingly content couple in McCarthy’s career, at least within the initial pages of *Outer Dark*, namely Culla and Rinty Holme. Despite McCarthy’s reputation for having few female characters in his works, this scarcity does not entail that he is incapable of writing remarkable female characters. Rinty has been recognized as “one of McCarthy’s most important characters, for with Rinty’s story *Outer Dark* attempts to enter, and to represent from within, the story of the abjected ‘feminine’ . Only in *Outer Dark* does McCarthy create a female-focused narrative” (Fisher-Wirth 132). Another McCarthy scholar characterizes Culla and Rinty’s relationship as one sustained by “tenuous family bonds” (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 16). Complicated as these bonds may be, as explained in the first chapter of this doctoral dissertation, the disintegration of Culla and Rinty’s relationship is not due to a lack of love for each other or their incestuous relationship. Instead, it is linked to the birth of their child. Therefore, I disagree with Jarrett’s characterization of the bonds as “tenuous.”

While McCarthy may not be primarily focused on depicting romance, he has not overlooked it in his career.<sup>113</sup> There are instances in which both Culla and Rinthy express their reliance on each other, hinting at the love they share. In the first chapter of the dissertation, I discussed how Culla defends their home from strangers, such as the tinker. In that scene, Culla claims Rinthy is sick in order to deter the tinker from approaching further. When asked about how many people are there, Culla replies succinctly: “My sister. Ain’t nobody here ceptin me and her” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 7). Culla’s brief response, coupled with instances where he cares for Rinthy before and after she gives birth—such as building a fire to keep her warm (11–12; 25), making their bed comfortable (12), buying her candy (6), giving her water to drink, cooking for her, and feeding her (25)—demonstrates the love and affection he holds for her. Culla’s words and actions suggest that he desires only Rinthy’s company, a sentiment later affirmed by his abandonment of and subsequent lies about their child. Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Culla appears apprehensive about their incestuous relationship being discovered by others. It “is not their incest that drives the brother and sister apart” (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 16), but rather its consequence—a new member in their relationship with whom Culla will have to share Rinthy’s affection—that drives them apart. Additionally, as Fisher-Wirth correctly observes, “in the world of *Outer Dark*, with its cannibals, killers, and buggers, it seems unlikely that an ordinary act of incest would shock a midwife or a community much, anyway” (129). At the novel’s conclusion, Culla seems to have come to terms with the possibility of their incestuous relationship being exposed without significant societal repercussions. However, Culla’s moment of despair occurs when Rinthy discovers the truth while they search for where he claims to have buried the child’s body. Rinthy digs and finds nothing but dirt and roots. Upon realizing her realization, Culla reacts

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<sup>113</sup> Arguably, the most illustrative examples of McCarthy’s exploration of romance would be found in *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cities of the Plain*, both of which depict an enamored John Grady Cole.

with desperation: “Now you done it. Now you really went and done it. And her own face still bland and impervious in such wonder he mistook for accusation, silent and inarguable female invective, until he rose and fled, bearing his clenched hands above him threatful, supplicant, to the mute and windy heavens” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 33). Culla fails to comprehend Rinthy’s resolve as a mother, as he only desires to be with her above all else. However, this sentiment is not shared by Rinthy.

In his final encounter with the bearded one, Culla repeatedly rejects his son—this scene marks Culla’s moment of reckoning. However, Culla’s ultimate attempt to try to save the child’s life is centered on Rinthy: “My sister would take him, he said. That chap. We could find her and she’d take him” (236). In this desperate plea to convince the bearded one to spare the child, Culla seems to recognize and even value Rinthy’s love for their child, an affection he himself could never fully embrace. Furthermore, I interpret Culla’s final plea as an indication that he prioritizes Rinthy’s happiness over his own, as he likely realizes that their relationship cannot be salvaged—a sentiment supported by the narrative, as the siblings never reunite.

Rinthy’s love for Culla transcends a typical sibling bond, as she perceives their relationship as akin to a marriage. In a revealing exchange with a lawyer, Rinthy seeks information about the whereabouts of the town’s doctor. When asked if she is married, Rinthy replies, “No,” before adding, “I mean I ain’t now. I was but I ain’t now” (150). Furthermore, in a conversation with the doctor, Rinthy asserts that she “wasn’t ashamed” (McCarthy, *Outer Dark* 156) of her incestuous relationship with Culla. Despite viewing her relationship with Culla as a marriage, Rinthy cannot forgive his betrayal, particularly his abandonment of their child. Above all, Rinthy identifies as a mother, and her sole mission throughout the novel is “to locate her lost child and regain her identity as mother” (Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy* 98).

Given the prevalence of parental (often maternal) abandonment in McCarthy's body of work,<sup>114</sup> one might question why Rinthy is so driven to find her child, even before uncovering the truth about Culla's deception. Rinthy's unwavering parental commitment distinguishes her from other female characters in McCarthy's oeuvre. Additionally, biological factors play a role in understanding human behavior, though they do not account for all aspects as other factors, such as education and socialization, they also shape behavior. From a biological standpoint, experts have explained that women

invest a precious egg (compared with the millions of sperm that men can produce every day) and then invest nine months of gestation, which is costly to the body. At birth, then, women have greater parental investment than men do, and it is to the advantage of the person with the greater investment to care for the offspring, making sure that they survive to adulthood. Herein lies the evolutionary explanation for women's greater involvement in child care, which in turn may have enormous repercussions in other domains. (Hyde 376)

In portraying Rinthy, McCarthy appears to depict the biological instinct of a mother to preserve the life of her child and, consequently, her motherhood. However, it is important not to overlook how Rinthy embodies some of McCarthy's most caring and unselfish characters. These qualities align with a perceptive interpretation of Rinthy as presented in scholarly studies of McCarthy: "McCarthy tucks Rinthy into the final pages of *Outer Dark* as a figure of possibility, the possibility of a new humanity and new human community, one no longer guided by rules that would exclude a healthy child" (J. Elmore and R. Elmore 129–30). Rinthy introduces much-needed values to the male-dominated world of *Outer Dark*, values such as compassion and care that McCarthy associates with female characters. Similarly, in *No*

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<sup>114</sup> Examples include Lester Ballard in *Child of God*, John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses*, and the boy in *The Road*.

*Country for Old Men*, McCarthy positions Carla Jean in a confrontation with Chigurh at the novel's end, presenting her as another female figure representing the potential for a new humanity within the story's world. As will be examined, Carla Jean's humanity suggests that the appeals of a virtuous woman have the potential to challenge the moral foundations of a dominant violent masculinity.

## 1.2. LLEWELYN MOSS AND CARLA JEAN: AN EXAMPLE OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE IN MCCARTHY

Let us start the analysis of *No Country for Old Men* by exploring Llewelyn Moss. Despite his greedy actions leading to both his downfall and his wife's demise, Moss is often perceived as a heroic figure and does not exhibit cruelty in his interactions with women. In dissecting Moss's character, my primary focus will be on the two main relationships he forms with female characters: Carla Jean and the young female hitchhiker he encounters after his hospital recovery in Mexico. It is worth noting that McCarthy does not extensively dwell on these two relationships throughout the novel. However, the depth of insight provided by McCarthy warrants thorough examination.

As previously elucidated, upon discovering the last man standing in the botched drug deal, Moss seizes the satchel containing the money. He gets back home and conceals some of the weapons he salvaged from the scene of the massacre under the trailer where he and Carla Jean reside, yet he does not hide the satchel. Upon completion of this task, he enters the trailer to find Carla Jean "sprawled across the sofa watching TV and drinking a Coke. She didn't even look up" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 20). Criticizing Moss for his late return, Carla Jean remarks that it is three in the morning and inquires about the contents of the satchel. Moss bluntly replies, "It's full of money" (20). Understandably skeptical, Carla Jean doubts his assertion, as it is not commonplace for Moss to return from hunting with a satchel containing

over two million dollars. Additionally, Moss carries with him a pistol he retrieved from the massacre.

In acknowledging Moss's love for his wife and his attempts to protect her, it is important to recognize that his communication with Carla Jean is not always tender and affectionate—as is the case, for example, when he tries to calm her down when she is scared before he sends her to her mother's home. As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Moss is ultimately a man of violence. McCarthy's men of violence, while occasionally capable of tenderness, exist within perilous and unforgiving realms where such qualities are often met with harsh repercussions from other violent masculinities. When Carla Jean begins questioning him about the origin of the pistol, Moss responds curtly, stating, "You dont need to know everything" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 21). Despite her insistence and expressed preference to remain uninformed, Carla Jean persists in her inquiries. It is at this juncture that Moss retorts, "You keep runnin that mouth and I'm going to take you back there and screw you" (22). McCarthy seems to suggest a potential double entendre with the word "screw." While in slang it means "[t]o have sexual intercourse with" (Oxford English Dictionary, *screw*, v., *sense II.7.a*)—which is likely the intended meaning Moss conveys—, it is important to note that screw also means "[t]o spoil, ruin, mess up. Also: to cause emotional or psychological harm to (a person); to disturb" (6.b). Recognizing that straightforward responses will not deter Carla Jean's inquiries, Moss resorts to the threat of sexual aggression. Ken Plummer explains that "[c]ertain themes consistently reappear in feminist discussions of male sexuality, and accounts of male sexuality as prone to violence, pressure, coercion, and objectification abound" (182). Plummer further elaborates by arguing that for some feminist perspectives, "sexuality is almost defined as male; for others, it is seen as a major device through which men maintain their positions of power and keep women under a constant state of threat" (182). In this case, Moss asserts his dominance over his wife by threatening to silence

her through the prospect of sex. Although the scene carries a light tone and suggests playful interaction between the characters, Moss's demeanor serves as a stark illustration of how certain "men seek to control and restrict the fantasied power of women and avoid or eliminate situations in which they are potentially subordinate to women. These psychological needs are reflected in negative attitudes toward women" (Pleck 108). Through his behavior and responses to Carla Jean's inquiry, Moss exerts control by carefully regulating the information he divulges to his wife, thereby refusing to place himself in a subordinate position and making her "an obedient and subservient wife" (Johns 139). Similarly, as readers may recall from the first chapter of this dissertation, in *Outer Dark*, Culla Holme declines to answer Rinthy's questions, such as her questions about their infant son in the opening pages of the novel.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I briefly examined some instances of mother-child relationships in McCarthy's works. Although mother characters are largely absent from the main events of *No Country for Old Men* (except for Sheriff Bell's wife, Loretta, who was once a mother), there is an interesting and brief interaction concerning Moss and his mother that warrants exploration. In a key scene previously outlined in this dissertation, Moss wakes up in the middle of the night and decides to go fetch water for the man he found inside a truck. Carla Jean also wakes up and questions his actions. Moss responds, "I'm fixin to go do something dumbern hell but I'm goin anyways. If I dont come back tell Mother I love her" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 24). However, Carla Jean informs him that she cannot fulfill his request, stating, "Your mother's dead Llewelyn." To this, Moss replies, "Well I'll tell her myself then" (24). This brief exchange underscores the significance of Moss's mother in his life, as evidenced by his desire to convey his love for her. Two interpretations emerge from this passage. Firstly, it reflects Moss's embodiment of a man of violence, implying that he may face death and therefore wishes to communicate his feelings to her mother personally. Alternatively, it suggests that Moss—metaphorically speaking—may have momentarily

forgotten his mother's passing, indicating his reluctance to let go of her memory. Moreover, later in the novel, Moss tells Carla Jean: "My mama didnt raise no ignorant children" (65). While this statement could be construed as cliché or archetypical, it also hints at the possibility that Moss's mother dedicated herself to raising her children, and her efforts were successful as none of them turned out ignorant. In contrast to other McCarthy male characters who are men of violence and lost their mothers, such as the already mentioned poignant example of Lester Ballard—which will be further explored later—, Moss does not display aggressivity toward women. This comparison suggests that having a mother exerted a positive influence on Moss, unlike the case of Ballard.

After his return to the scene of the massacre, during which Moss is spotted, he quickly realizes that he is in danger and anticipates that someone will come looking for him. As seen in preceding chapters of this dissertation, Moss embodies attributes typically associated with the role of the protector in McCarthy's male characters. In an act of care and concern, Moss sends Carla Jean away to her grandmother in Odessa. Through his actions, Moss demonstrates the caring aspect of his masculinity, a facet he may struggle to express verbally. Carla Jean complies with his instructions. Eventually, Sheriff Bell pays her a visit, hoping to glean information about Moss's whereabouts. However, Carla Jean admits that she is unaware of her husband's location.

In this conversation, McCarthy illustrates one of the rare instances of marital devotion in his oeuvre. When Sheriff Bell explains to Carla Jean that Moss's pursuers will not quit, she responds affirmatively: "He wont either. He never has" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 127). It seems that for Carla Jean, one of the most valued attributes of Moss's masculinity is his unwavering determination—a characteristic McCarthy also bestows upon certain male characters in the novel, such as Chigurh. Carla Jean holds this quality in high esteem; she expresses her admiration for Moss's determination asserting, "[h]e's who he is and he always

will be. That's why I married him" (127). Moreover, Carla Jean implies that their marriage is pragmatic, based on dialogue and problem solving: "We dont have problems. When we have problems we fix em" (127). Carla Jean's appreciation for her husband and their marriage occasionally echoes Rinthy Holme's appreciation for Culla and their relationship in *Outer Dark*. However, unlike Rinthy, Carla Jean's devotion to Moss is unwavering: "I'd die and live in hell forever fore I'd turn snitch on Llewelyn" (131). Carla Jean and Rinthy are arguably two of McCarthy's strongest female characters, despite their limited appearances in the novels compared to their male counterparts. Notably, both Carla Jean and Rinthy share similarities beyond their surface differences, as they are both resilient women navigating perilous, male-dominated worlds.

### 1.3. LLEWELYN MOSS AND THE FEMALE HITCHHIKER: A HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY CAPABLE OF KINDNESS

Let us now focus on Llewelyn Moss and delve into some of his interactions with the female hitchhiker. After his release from the Mexican hospital, Moss returns to U.S. territory. There, he purchases a "1978 Ford pickup with four wheel drive and a 460 engine" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 210). Moss later encounters a teenage hitchhiker and decides to stop for her. The narrative indicates that she is either fifteen or sixteen years old. Moss engages her in conversation, inquiring about her age and inviting her to drive. The hitchhiker lies about her age, claiming to be older than she actually is, but Moss is not deceived. He questions her: "What are you doin out here? Dont you know it's dangerous to hitchhike?" (211). Moss's inquiry touches upon the issue of male dominance over females, a control often justified under the guise of protecting women in a dangerous world where it is deemed unsafe for them to travel alone without the companionship of a man or a group. Such justification is frequently employed within hegemonic masculinities.

Later in the novel, Moss and the girl stop at a diner to eat. During their conversation, it becomes apparent how much Moss enjoys the playful banter he shares with her. She notices Moss's difficulty in walking and asks if he is hurt. Moss responds, "Maybe it's just a old war injury" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 219). However, the girl, not satisfied with his explanation, presses him to reveal the truth about his condition. Moss, echoing his earlier interactions with his wife, dismisses her inquiry, stating that she does not need to know. When she persists, he retorts, "I dont want you getting all excited on me" (220). Moss's response reinforces the regressive notion that a woman can only feel sexually aroused in the presence of what Moss perceives as "bad boys" (220). His behavior toward the female hitchhiker mirrors his domineering attitude toward Carla Jean on the night he finds the money.

Similar to his treatment of Carla Jean, Moss does not shy away from hinting at the possibility of using violence against the girl if the situation demands it. After they finish eating, they return to the truck, and Moss requests the keys from the girl. She jokingly suggests, "I could of just slipped off like I was goin to the ladies room and took your truck and left you settin there" (223). Moss dismisses her suggestion, stating that such a scenario could never occur. Intrigued, the girl prompts Moss to explain:

Dont be ignorant all your life. In the first place I could see all the way to the front door and out the parkin lot clear to the truck. In the second place even if I was dumb-ass enough to set my back to the door I'd of just called a cab and run you down and pulled you over and beat the shit out of you and left you layin there.  
(223–24)

Moss's response renders the girl speechless. Despite Moss later admitting that he would not have resorted to violence, his implicit threat achieves its intended effect: the girl perceives him as a tough, macho figure—a perception that seems to please Moss. Later, at a motel where they stop to rest, the girl attempts to flirt with him once more, but he remains indifferent to her

advances. They share a few beers. The girl, still eager to flirt with Moss, says to him: “There’s a lot of good salesmen around and you might buy somethin yet.” However, Moss rejects her offer: “Well darlin you’re just a little late. Cause I done bought. And I think I’ll stick with what I got” (235). Moss’s last line of dialogue in the novel is a significant one, as it confirms both his love for and preference to be with Carla Jean over having sex with a young girl.

As previously noted, McCarthy does not directly narrate Moss’s death. However, he provides certain details that attentive readers can analyze to hypothesize about the events leading up to Moss’s demise. As discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Sheriff Bell travels to the town of Van Horn, where the motel in which Moss and the girl are staying is located. Upon his arrival, some Culberson Country policemen are already present. A witness to the scene informs the Culberson County police, who then relay the information to Sheriff Bell, explaining:

He says the Mexican started it. Says he drug the woman out of her room and the other man come out with a gun but when he seen the Mexican had a gun pointed at the woman’s head he laid his own piece down. And whenever he done that the Mexican shoved the woman away and shot her and then turned and shot him. He was standin in front of 117, right yonder. Shot em with a goddamned machinegun. Accordin to this witness the old boy fell down the steps and then he picked up his gun again and shot the Mexican. Which I dont see how he done it. He was shot all to pieces. You can see the blood on the walkway yonder. We had a real good response time. About seven minutes, I think. The girl was just shot dead. (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 237–38)

This explanation indicates that Moss dies while attempting to save the girl’s life. Dennis Cutchins presents an insightful interpretation of the above passage in the novel. Cutchins argues that Moss “exercises agency throughout the novel” (160), thereby controlling his own

fate. Additionally, Cutchins suggests that Moss's decision to "put down his gun obviously plays a role in his death," since he "relinquishes his control of the situation in order to save the girl" (160). This contrasts with the deaths of other male characters explored in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, such as Lester Ballard, the kid, Carson Wells, Reiner, and Westray, who often meet their ends due to their own flaws or missteps. Moss's demise occurs "because the assassin takes advantage of his humanity, his concern for others, his *charity*, if you will" (160). Finally, it must be noted that "Moss's kindness toward the young hitchhiker, his willingness to sacrifice himself for her, and his ultimate faithfulness to Carla Jean" (Cutchins 162) can be viewed as elements that transform Moss, particularly in his final moments, into a "provisional" (Dudley, "McCarthy's Heroes" 177) hero who exemplifies a different form of sacrifice. While Carla Jean's murder can be interpreted as a sacrifice resulting from others' wrongdoings, Moss's death can be seen as an act of protection, where he sacrifices himself for the sake of others. Both sacrifices are undeniably heroic in their own right; however, as Dudley explains, McCarthy's heroes in general, and more concretely in *No Country for Old Men*, "might be more accurately understood as inherently flawed or dangerously inadequate" (177). By depicting his heroes in this manner, inadequate male characters serve McCarthy to "represent an incomprehensibly violent world and force the reader to re-evaluate their traditional conceptions of heroism and masculinity" (Buráková 175). Moreover, McCarthy's portrayal of masculinity aims to critique its inherent violence, which disproportionately impacts women in his novels. Throughout the works analyzed in this section of the chapter, female characters are depicted as bearing the brunt of men's violent actions, highlighting the devastating and unjust consequences of masculine violence on women.

## 2. Masculinities vs. New Femininities

Having explored the few instances in which McCarthy portrays somewhat harmonious relationships and interactions between male and female characters, it is time now in this section of the chapter to explore those instances where the female characters surpass their male counterparts. The three relationships or interactions under scrutiny differ in their portrayal of both the male and female characters involved. I will commence in a chronological order by delving into a relationship briefly examined in the first chapter of this doctoral dissertation, that of John Grady Cole's parents in *All the Pretty Horses*, to explore the father's portrayal as a broken man. Subsequently, the analysis shifts to Anton Chigurh and Carla Jean in *No Country for Old Men*, elucidating how she achieves a minor victory in her interaction with him. Finally, I scrutinize the characters of Malkina and Reiner in *The Counselor*, focusing on how Malkina utilizes her sexuality and intellect to outmaneuver the men around her.

### 2.1. JOHN GRADY'S FATHER AS THE BROKEN MAN

In the first chapter of this doctoral dissertation, I scrutinized the relationship between John Grady Cole and his father as depicted by McCarthy in the opening pages of *All the Pretty Horses*. Within that chapter, my analysis of these two male characters fell under the category of "Fathers Who Fail Their Children," with John Grady's father being referred to as "The Broken Father." Furthermore, in that initial chapter, I delved into some of the conversations between John Grady and his father, which provided insight into the father's masculinity and his explanations regarding John Grady's mother. It is now imperative to further explore what else John Grady's father mentions about the mother, as these conversations between father and son contribute to a deeper analysis of the father's masculinity.

In the conversation between John Grady and his father which takes place in a café over coffee, the father explains to his son the dysfunctional nature of his marriage to his wife: "Your

mother and me never agreed on a whole lot. She liked horses. I thought that was enough. That's how dumb I was. She was young and I thought she'd outgrow some of the notions she had but she didn't. Maybe they were just notions to me" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 24). As the father explains, it appears that the only shared interest between the mother and him was their love of horses. Despite his belief that this shared interest would suffice to sustain a romantic relationship, John Grady's father suggests that for the mother, life on a ranch was not the kind of life she dreamt of having. Even as a young adult, John Grady's mother harbored other interests and dreams that her husband never fully appreciated or gave enough importance to.

As previously mentioned in the dissertation, John Grady's father served in World War II, and he claims to have returned a changed man from that experience. He explains to his son that the reason for his transformation "wasn't just the war. We were married ten years before the war come along" (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 25). This statement suggests that their relationship, their marriage, was already strained before he left for the war. John Grady's father further reveals: "She left out of here. She was gone from the time you were six months old till you were about three. I know you know somethin about that and it was a mistake not to of told you. We separated. She was in California" (25). The father's confession not only acknowledges his partial responsibility for the failure of their marriage but also indicates that the mother was already seeking a new life outside the ranch, in this case, in California, in line with her own personality and needs. Moreover, the father finally admits to his son: "She come back because of you, not me. I guess that's what I wanted to say" (25). Although John Grady perceives his mother's second departure as abandonment, the father feels compelled to make his son understand that the mother did care, albeit in her own way, about her son. Scholars of McCarthy's work have overlooked this conversation between father and son, asserting that the mother "seems to have very little interest in mothering [John Grady]" (Cooper Alarcón 147). However, based on John Grady's father's words, it can be argued that the mother did care

enough, at least for a time—arguably the most crucial time in a child’s upbringing, namely childhood—, to return to a life she was discontent with simply because her son was there and needed her.

Moreover, in their café conversation, John Grady’s father acknowledges the importance of his wife to him, both before and after the war. He explains: “When I was in Goshee I’d talk to her by the hour. I made her out to be like somebody who could do anything. I’d tell her about some of the other old boys that I didnt think was goin to make it and I’d ask her to look after them and to pray for them” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 25). In this statement by the father, McCarthy portrays the character of the mother as a savior, a helper of men. It would not be unreasonable to state that the father perceives the mother as a version of the Virgin Mary. John Grady’s mother possesses the power to be heard by her husband—who in turn extends that power to his fellow soldiers—and to heal his psychological postwar traumas and wounds. The mother, thus, aligns with Edenfield’s observation that “[f]emale characters in McCarthy often act as spiritual guides to broken men” (63). In fact, the father emphasizes the mother’s role as an intercessor twice: “I wouldnt be here if it wasnt for her,” and, “But if it hadnt of been for her I wouldnt of made it. No way in this world. I never told that to nobody. She dont even know it” (McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* 25). John Grady does not respond to his father’s confession. Neither the father nor the narration provides more information about the mother. Finally, John Grady sees her prior to his journey to Mexico, though there is no conversation between mother and son. Not even John Grady’s father’s words elicit a positive effect on John Grady regarding his mother.

However, John Grady pays his mother a visit at the theater where she works. He purchases a ticket to the show and watches it, but refrains from approaching his mother afterward. The next day, he proceeds to the Menger Hotel, where his mother is staying. Eventually, he spots her coming “through the lobby about nine oclock” (McCarthy, *All the*

*Pretty Horses* 22). However, his mother is not alone: “She was on the arm of a man in a suit and a topcoat and they went out the door and got into a cab” (22). Once again, John Grady refrains from approaching her. Eventually, he goes to the hotel’s clerk and inquires: “Have you got a Mrs Cole registered?” (22). The clerk informs him that he does not. Hence, John Grady’s mother remains a woman moving forward, both in her personal life and her professional and cultural pursuits. Benson has noted that John Grady’s decision to leave for Mexico is partly motivated by a desire for revenge stemming from his mother’s treatment of him: “His action, leaving the United States, in his mind speaks louder than anything he might say” (33). This elucidates why he refrains from speaking to his mother whilst observing her depart with another man. Enthralled by the cowboy masculinity embodied by his grandfather and father, John Grady resolves to leave his country—a nation in demand of new forms of masculinity more aligned with the changing times of the post-World War II era—in pursuit of new territories where traditional masculinity is still revered. In the novel, Mexico represents that country for John Grady.

## 2.2. ANTON CHIGURH AND CARLA JEAN: HOW A FEMALE CHARACTER MAKES A MOST-VIOLENT MASCULINITY VULNERABLE

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, I contended that McCarthy portrays the perfectly violent masculinities of judge Holden and Anton Chigurh as ultimately vulnerable. In the case of Chigurh, McCarthy illustrates this imperfection in three key ways. Firstly, through his gunfight with Moss, wherein Moss manages to wound Chigurh. Secondly, in Chigurh’s final conversation in the novel with Carla Jean. Thirdly, through the car accident he experiences during his last appearance in the novel, an event that renders him vincible. Now, it is time to explore how Chigurh’s violent masculinity falters in his conversation with Carla Jean.

Upon returning home after her mother's funeral, Carla Jean discovers Chigurh "sitting at the little desk waiting for her" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 254). She informs Chigurh that she does not have the money—thus implying that she does not understand his presence—and states, "You've got no cause to hurt me" (255). This declaration implies that Chigurh's intention to murder Carla Jean does not serve "any practical purpose" (Cutchins 167). Chigurh rationalizes his presence by explaining that he made a promise to Moss that he would kill her if Moss failed to deliver the money. Chigurh explains: "Your husband, you may be distressed to learn, had the opportunity to remove you from harm's way and he chose not to do so. He was given that option and his answer was no. Otherwise I would not be here now" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 256). As argued, Moss's fatal error was his belief that his own violent masculinity could confront another man's, especially one even more formidable than his own. This overconfidence not only seals his own fate but also leads to both Carla Jean's and the young female hitchhiker's demise. In the scene, the reader witnesses Carla Jean's agency emerge. Once "portrayed as an obedient and subservient wife," Carla Jean "becomes a woman at odds not only with her husband, Llewelyn, but also with Anton Chigurh" (Johns 139). A poignant example of Erin Johns's affirmation is evident when Carla Jean questions the veracity of Chigurh's earlier assertion: "My husband wanted to kill me?" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 256). Perhaps because he senses Carla Jean's confusion, Chigurh adopts a somewhat different demeanor toward her, despite the fact that her accusation and plea are similar to those made by Carson Wells before his demise. Carla Jean states: "I knowed you was crazy when I seen you settin there" and "You dont have to do this" (257). Unlike he did with Wells, Chigurh attempts to offer consolation to Carla Jean stating, "None of this was your fault" and "You didnt do anything. It was bad luck" (257).<sup>115</sup> Unlike his

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<sup>115</sup> McCarthy scholars have explored Chigurh's character from various philosophical perspectives, with Gibbs offering a particularly critical analysis. About Chigurh, Gibbs states: "He thereby again speciously conflates determinism (as fatalism) with existentialism. During this scene although Chigurh accepts his role—conceived as largely passive—in the events, the situation overall is alleged to have originated in Carla Jean's choices. This is a

interactions with Wells or Moss, whose masculinity and choices he critiques harshly, Chigurh is less severe in his judgment of women, such as Carla Jean, than he is with some of the men whose moments of reckoning he so much enjoys. This may be because Chigurh recognizes that the masculinity of men like Moss and Wells conforms to one of the many configurations of hegemonic masculinity as elucidated by sociological researchers like Connell and Messerschmidt (840). This context of “a model of hegemonic masculinity”—embodied in Moss and Wells, both men with military backgrounds as mentioned in the previous chapter of this dissertation—“provides the ground of judgment” (Hutchings 400) for men in general and, in the case of *No Country for Old Men*, for Chigurh.

Chigurh’s judgment of other masculinities, whether conforming to hegemonic norms or not, typically results in the same sentence: death. However, in accordance with the workings of hegemonic masculinity, Chigurh extends a chance at redemption to those masculinities (and femininities) he deems to be “subordinate or marginalized models” (Demetriou 346)—such as the proprietor of the filling station and Carla Jean. While some may assume that Chigurh would not bother with individuals he considers inferior, the interactions with the proprietor and Carla Jean suggest otherwise. It could be argued that Chigurh simply relishes killing people. While there may be some truth to this, I posit that Chigurh derives pleasure not so much from the act of killing itself but from the sense of superiority he feels when comparing himself to others. Even though Chigurh later asserts to Carla Jean that he can never make himself vulnerable (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 259), his display of a thwarted sense of kindness toward her represents a moment of vulnerability for his masculinity, and thus, a small victory for Carla Jean. It is perhaps this fleeting vulnerability exhibited toward Carla Jean before her murder that

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judgment whose harshness is only exacerbated when one considers that it is actually her husband’s choices that are predominantly responsible for her predicament. Through these fallacious pronouncements, the killer uses faux-deterministic arguments as an ideological tool to abnegate responsibility and deny his own agency. By interpreting a deterministic universe as a fatalistic one, Chigurh neatly places himself in a position entirely free of moral responsibility, thus sidestepping conventional western moral perspectives which would condemn his acts as evil” (66).

distracts Chigurh while driving. Indeed, McCarthy juxtaposes Carla Jean's death with Chigurh's car accident (260). In the world of *No Country for Old Men*, a perfectly violent masculinity like Chigurh's cannot afford even a moment of mercy. Chigurh swiftly learns the repercussions of displaying even the briefest hint of kindness for a violent masculinity of his caliber.

Carla Jean exhibits an incredible strength that none of the other male characters who confront Chigurh demonstrate. When Chigurh's coin reveals tails, thus sealing her fate, she boldly declares: "The coin didnt have no say. It was just you" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 258). Carla Jean's assertion is accurate, though Chigurh, characterized as "a cold psychopathic killer who relies on the system of fate" (Johns 139), fails to acknowledge it. It was indeed Chigurh who initially threatened Moss with Carla Jean's murder. While Moss rejected Chigurh's offer, Chigurh was the one who made the choice to present the deal in the first place. As Gibbs argues, Chigurh's "fallacious pronouncements" serve "as an ideological tool to abnegate responsibility and deny his own agency" (66), a contradiction that undermines his reasoning when Chigurh insists: "I had no say in the matter. Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 259). Brummer elucidates that "Chigurh takes perverse pleasure in confronting his victims with their own mortality, forcing them to reckon with their own sick desires, to backtrack into the shadowy regions of their own complicity, and to come to some more honest evaluation of themselves (of their souls) before he sends them into eternity" (137). However, Chigurh's logic is flawed because, on one hand, he did have a say in the matter when he threatened Moss. Conversely, Carla Jean had no say whatsoever—aside from choosing to marry Moss—, and yet she suffers the consequences of men's actions. Therefore, she is justified in absolving Chigurh's coin of any responsibility. Chigurh asserts, "I got here the same way the coin did" (McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* 158). While the

coin may have arrived with him in the same manner, it did not request to be used. That was Chigurh's choice. In the end, Chigurh is a torturer who, in this moment of reckoning, wants Carla Jean to "have a final glimpse of hope in the world to lift [her] heart before the shroud drops, the darkness" (259). Perhaps not surprisingly, in this scene between Carla Jean and Chigurh, McCarthy appears to pay homage to Flannery O'Connor's famous short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953).<sup>116</sup>

The homage in question is tied to one of the possible interpretations of O'Connor's story, one imbued with religious connotations. O'Connor, like McCarthy, often incorporates religious symbolism into her works. Toward the end of O'Connor's story, the grandmother addresses the Misfit: "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" (29). With these words, the grandmother shows compassion and kindness toward the Misfit in a Christ-like manner. The figure of Christ, extended through the institution of the Church, is traditionally seen to be a haven for those in need. This is echoed in the Last Judgement, as depicted in the New Testament. In Matt. 25.40, Jesus proclaims: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (*The Bible*). Essentially, Christ teaches that aiding others is tantamount to aiding Jesus Himself. In O'Connor's story, the grandmother's act of mercy and compassion toward a man who has murdered her entire family, embracing the Misfit as one of her own children, ultimately gets her killed. The Misfit, a man of violence and a violent man much like Chigurh, cannot understand the grandmother's gesture of kindness. In *No Country for Old Men*, after Chigurh has finished explaining his distorted moral and philosophical beliefs, he asks Carla Jean if she comprehends. Carla Jean responds, "I do. I truly do" (McCarthy 260). While Jesus

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<sup>116</sup> "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" narrates the journey of a family comprising the grandmother, her son, her daughter-in-law, and her three grandchildren, as they embark on a road trip to Florida. Their excursion takes a tragic turn when they suffer a car accident and subsequently encounter three fugitive men led by the Misfit, who have escaped from prison. The grandmother, having read about the Misfit in the newspapers, recognizes him, and, ultimately, the Misfit orders the execution of the entire family, with the grandmother being the last to meet her demise.

in the aforementioned New Testament passage uses “verily,” Carla Jean employs the adverb “truly” in her reply to Chigurh. The likeness of both adverbs is obvious, suggesting that McCarthy likely intended to depict Carla Jean in her final moments as a Christ-like figure—an innocent individual sacrificed for the sins of others. Therefore, akin to O’Connor’s grandmother, Carla Jean’s last words to Chigurh signify an act of compassion and kindness as she endeavors to understand and even accept Chigurh’s thwarted justification of his masculinity. Gender studies scholars have explained that within homosocial groups, men, in reference to other men, “could understand the intensity and importance of competition, whereas women seemed less accepting and less understanding” (Bird 128). Considering this assertion, it must be emphasized that no other male character in *No Country for Old Men*, as explored in the preceding chapter, comprehends Chigurh’s masculinity. Consequently, Carla Jean’s understanding of Chigurh represents an exceptional quality beyond the reach of other male characters. Finally, as is the case for O’Connor’s grandmother, Chigurh ends Carla Jean’s life. Leaving Chigurh’s motivations for killing Carla Jean aside, he perhaps harbors a similar sentiment toward her as the Misfit does toward the grandmother. Following the grandmother’s murder, the Misfit remarks: “She would have been a good woman (...) if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (O’Connor 29). Regardless of both characters’ perspectives, O’Connor and McCarthy portray the grandmother and Carla Jean as female characters capable of forgiveness and compassion toward violent masculinities that have only inflicted suffering upon them.

### 2.3. MALKINA AND REINER: THE SUPREMACY OF FEMININITIES IN MCCARTHY

Let us delve now into the characters in *The Counselor*. It could be argued that *The Counselor* stands out as McCarthy’s most sexual work. In addition to McCarthy’s customary trademarks—such as violence, philosophical dialogues, and a southwestern setting—the script

features frequent depictions of sex and explores the sexuality of both male and female characters, in this case predominantly heterosexual encounters (although some homosexual interactions in other works are later explored in the dissertation). At the beginning of *The Counselor*, McCarthy presents an intimate scene between the Counselor and his lover, Laura, in the Counselor's condominium bedroom. Both the Counselor and Laura are depicted as highly sexual, as evident from their initial dialogue, which occurs while they are in bed. The Counselor remarks, "Tell me something sexy. Words are everything to a man" (4). He then asks Laura what she desires him to do to her, to which she responds:

LAURA. I want you to touch me.

COUNSELOR. You want me to touch you where.

LAURA. I want you to touch me down there. (5)

The scene continues in similar terms, with the Counselor urging Laura to be more explicit in her descriptions of how she wants to be touched. McCarthy scholar Jacob Agner, echoing the sentiments expressed by the character Reiner, has remarked that *The Counselor* is riddled with "sex scenes 'too gynecological to be sexy'" (204). In *The Counselor*, I believe that McCarthy's objective is not to portray sexy scenes, but to focus on how the character of Malkina uses sex to her advantage. Although the Counselor and Laura are portrayed as highly sexual in this opening scene, it is Malkina who surpasses them all in that aspect and others.

In her first introduction in the script, McCarthy already hints at Malkina's<sup>117</sup> seductive and sexual nature by describing her in the following way:

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<sup>117</sup> Agner has analyzed and provided a very interesting explanation regarding the name Malkina. Here is the explanation in question: "Malkina's name has more etymological interest. The prefix 'mal-', meaning 'ill' or 'wrong' in Latin and 'bad' in French, combined with the secondary noun form of 'kin', meaning 'crack, chink, or slit', 'a chasm or fissure in the earth', or 'a chap or crack in the skin', leads to a sexually suggestive conclusion (*OED* II.1a). Malkina's 'bad slit' is exactly what Reiner finds 'hallucinatory' and Westray 'shared' in his 'taste for exotic women' (93, 56). The bolito's circular, serrated gear in the film also evokes the iconography of the 'vagina dentata', figuring Malkina into a 'man-eater'" (217).

A very attractive woman—Malkina—is sitting croslegged in the luggage rack on top of the Escalade. She is wearing a black western hat with a flat or porkpie crown and a braided leather chin strap. A white shirt with a leather vest and a pair of whipcord riding pants with expensive leather boots. Her long black hair is pinned back and she is leaning forward with her elbows on her knees looking through a pair of expensive binoculars. (*The Counselor* 11)

The description of Malkina portrays her as an elegant woman, impeccably dressed even in the setting of the high desert where the scene takes place. It is later revealed that she comes from Argentina, a fact that adds to her exotic allure, especially considering that the bulk of the story unfolds in U.S. territory. Malkina's description thus evokes the attractiveness of a foreigner, in this case from a South American country. The script further reveals Malkina's eccentricities, such as her ownership of two cheetahs as pets and how much she enjoys watching them hunt jackrabbits. Later, Malkina is described to be "riding out across the grasslands at almost a full gallop on a good Arabian horse. English saddle. She turns the horse and looks behind her and bends low over the horse's neck and urges the horse on. The two cheetahs pass her and disappear in the dust" (13). From the passage, it can be inferred that Malkina, much like many of McCarthy's male characters, is depicted as a woman who feels a deep connection to nature; she is a hunter who revels in the company of other predatory animals. For her, the hunt "is always sexual. But grace. Freedom. The hunter has a purity of heart that exists nowhere else. I think he is not defined so much by what he has come to be as by all that he has escaped being. You can make no distinction between what he is and what he does. And what he does is kill" (183). In Malkina's interpretation, a hunter is fundamentally a killer. Given her identity as a hunter, many of Malkina's actions and decisions throughout the story ultimately result, directly or indirectly, in the deaths of several main characters, including Laura, Reiner, and Westray.

In fact, perhaps due to his recognition of Malkina's predatory nature, Reiner—Malkina's lover—harbors reservations about her. In a conversation between him and the Counselor, Reiner expresses his concerns:

REINER. I dont know what she knows. I dont want to know.

COUNSELOR. You dont trust her.

REINER. Jesus, Counselor. She's a woman. (McCarthy, *The Counselor* 30)

Reiner's remark, its overt misogyny notwithstanding, unmistakably reveals his distrust of Malkina. However, he hastens to qualify his statement: "Yeah, well. I dont mean it to sound that cold. I just mean that where men are concerned they've got their own agenda. I always liked smart women. But it's been an expensive hobby" (30). Reiner's comment hints at a notable shift in McCarthy's portrayal of male characters, their attitudes toward women, and, ultimately, how McCarthy depicts women. None of the male characters examined in this dissertation explicitly mentions how women have placed them in certain situations, presumably even hazardous ones. Although Reiner does not delve further into his comment, it can be inferred that his "hobby," as he terms it—a pursuit that appears to treat women as objects of a collection—has proven too costly for him, not solely in a financial sense. In fact, Malkina undoubtedly falls into the category of smart women. In the script, Malkina emerges as the most astute character, surpassing even the men. Moreover, while other women may have cost Reiner money, Malkina will ultimately cost him both his fortune and his life.

Even though Reiner believes he understands women and their sexuality, the truth is that Malkina perplexes him like no other woman ever has. It is widely recognized that sexuality is "a recognized form of power, and the 'double standard' of sexual behavior for males and females systematically has taught women at an early age to repress this power, to repress even their awareness of their own desire to express their sexuality" (Lipman-Blumen 24). In light of the progress in feminism and women's fight for their rights, it has been argued that the

“feminist movement has encouraged the development and expression of female sexuality as a form of power. This call for the growth of a significant form of female power is patently feared and serves as one of the major bases of objection to the feminist movement by the male world” (25). McCarthy utilizes Malkina to align with this perspective, portraying her as a character who represses nothing and embodies the power of a modern woman in the twenty-first century. The most striking example of Malkina’s unrestrained sexuality and dominance is recounted by Reiner. In what can arguably be described as one of the most bizarre sex scenes ever written by McCarthy, Reiner explains to the Counselor what Malkina once did to one of his cars. The scene is so disturbing for Reiner that he wishes he could “forget about Malkina fucking [his] car” (*The Counselor* 90). Perplexed, the Counselor asks Reiner to elaborate:

REINER. You remember the 328 I had.

COUNSELOR. Sure. Nice car.

REINER. Very nice car. Not a V-12 but a better car than the 308. Which was an embarrassment for a Ferrari. Westray had one and he said that it wouldnt pull a greasy string out of a cat’s ass. His metaphor. Is that a metaphor? Anyway, this was a while back. Not that long. We’d been getting it on for a while and we came back one night—we were staying up at Cloudcroft. Mostly for that great stretch of road between Cloudcroft and Ruidoso. And we drove out on the golf course and parked and we’re sitting there talking and for no particular reason that I could see she lifts herself up and slides off her knickers and hands them to me and gets out of the car. I asked her what she was doing and she says: I’m going to fuck your car. Jesus. She tells me to leave the door open. Turns out she wants the domelight on. So she goes around and climbs up on the hood of the Ferrari and pulls her dress up around her waist and spreads herself across

the windshield in front of me with no panties on. And she's had this Brazilian wax job. And she begins to rub herself on the glass. Dont even think I'm making this up. You cant make this up. I mean, she was a dancer, right? In Argentina? She danced at the opera thing down there. I've seen the clippings. And she does this full split and starts rubbing herself up and down on the glass and she's lying on the roof of the car and she leans down over the side to see if I'm watching. Like, no, I'm sitting there reading my e-mail. And she gestures at me to crank down the window and she leans in and kisses me. Upside down. and then she tells me that she's going to come. And I thought, well, I'm losing my fucking mind. That's what's happening here. It was like one of those catfish things. One of those bottom feeders you see going up the side of the aquarium. Sucking its way up the glass? It was just. I dont know. It was just... Hallucinatory. You see a thing like that, it changes you. (91–93)

One of the reasons why the scene is so potent and simultaneously so traumatizing for Reiner lies in the symbolism employed by McCarthy. When the Counselor asks Reiner, “Do you think she knew the kind of effect this might have on a guy?,” Reiner responds, “Jesus, Counselor. Are you kidding? She knows everything” (94). As Agner notes, Malkina “knows how to transfix male spectators with a slathering of visual pleasure” (217). The impact on a man that the Counselor refers to is deeply intertwined with what the car symbolizes.

Cars have long been emblematic of men's pursuit, often associated with notions of freedom, power, and social status, particularly within the United States. One prevailing stereotype, especially evident during the infamous midlife crisis, is the tendency for men to seek solace in the purchase of a sportscar similar to Reiner's, symbolizing a desire to recapture

a lost youth. However, beyond mere materialism, cars carry other connotations; they serve as markers of competitiveness and even sexual potency.<sup>118</sup> In this context, Malkina's choice to masturbate using Reiner's car challenges traditional gender roles and expectations as it can be seen as a symbol of female sexual liberation. Malkina has been seen "as a figure unabashed about the savage desires that drive her" (Mitchell 256). Moreover, some critics classify *The Counselor* (both McCarthy's script and Ridley Scott's film) "as neo-noir," and in this categorization, Malkina can be seen "as a femme fatale,"<sup>119</sup> but this misogynist archetype, I would suggest, is much too reductive" (Agner 216). I concur with Agner's statement. Malkina seems to compensate for all the other female characters portrayed in McCarthy's career. As explored in this chapter, these women are often depicted as powerless in the presence of men, subjected to sexual assault, lacking respect, or even meeting tragic ends. However, McCarthy presents Malkina as a woman emblematic of the twenty-first century, an individual who freely embraces and explores her sexuality, possesses drive, and embodies characteristics traditionally associated with men and masculinity, not only within western society, but also within McCarthy's oeuvre. Malkina fearlessly navigates interactions with powerful men such as Reiner, the Counselor, and the leaders of the Mexican cartels, relying on her intelligence to

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<sup>118</sup> For readers interested in exploring the symbolism of cars in Western culture, particularly in North American society, Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr's edited volume *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (2002) provides valuable insight. In a chapter contributed by Karal Ann Marling, the significance of cars is underscored, emphasizing that "Americans were willing, indeed eager, to spend huge amounts of money on objects that were symbols of their desires, reflections of themselves, expressions of their fantasies" (358).

<sup>119</sup> It must be acknowledged that the femme fatale is a fictional archetype commonly utilized in literature, but mostly in classic film noir. Described as "an ongoing pattern and creative tool of gender critique and redefinition," the femme fatale "recurs throughout culture as a provocative figure of disruption, a means of questioning gender norms and cultural hierarchies" (Grossman 12). In relation to the femme fatale, psychologists have explained that men and women show differences "in the psychological significance or meaning of certain behaviors across gender" (Forouzan and Cooke 768). For instance, according to research, "with regard to behavioral expression, manipulative women were reported to be more likely to be flirtatious, whereas men were more likely to engage in conning behavior. Also, in females, impulsivity and conduct disorder were characterized by running away, self-harming behavior, manipulation, and complicity in committing crimes (essentially theft and fraud), whereas in males it was more likely to be characterized by violent behaviors. This is consistent with the empirical literature" (768). Malkina adheres to some of these characteristics. Conversely, behaviors typically associated with men align with characters such as Anton Chigurh.

outmaneuver them. In essence, Malkina emerges as “the most powerful and ambiguous female character in McCarthy’s oeuvre” (Agner 216).

McCarthy utilizes Malkina’s power and ambiguity to craft her as a woman capable of instilling fear in men, a sentiment explicitly acknowledged by Reiner himself in a conversation with the Counselor. Reiner states, “Yeah. Probably. Yeah. Sometimes she scares the shit out of me” (*The Counselor* 95), thus illustrating Malkina’s ability to unsettle even those within her inner circle. It can be argued that Malkina’s act of having sex with his car may be perceived by Reiner as an act of aggression—a theme already explored in this dissertation in relation to male aggression. Although it has been argued that female aggression has traditionally been depicted as “an anomalous violation of the feminine gender role” (A. Campbell), experts in the field of aggression and violence have explained that “[w]omen’s aggression is sensitive to the same environmental and social factors as men’s” (Cross and A. Campbell 219). Building on previously explored forms of aggression in this dissertation, scholars have cataloged different types of aggression, with some being considered as “direct means of aggression (physical as well as verbal)” while other forms of aggression are “indirect means, such as backbiting and manipulation of the social structure of the class, in order to inflict mental pain on their enemies. Indirect aggression is a type of behaviour in which the perpetrator attempts to inflict pain in such a manner that he or she makes it seem as though there has been no intention to hurt at all” (Björkqvist et al. 118). Malkina’s tactics, characterized by subtlety and manipulation, align more closely with the latter category. Unlike the overt displays of male aggression depicted in the McCarthy’s novels here explored, Malkina operates in the shadows and is “more business-savvy than the counselor’s circle. That is, she knows how to more efficiently operate in the decentralized web of global commerce” (Agner 218), leveraging her skills in digital networks and computer programming to assert her dominance.

A final illustrative example highlighting Malkina's supremacy over the male characters in *The Counselor* transpires following Reiner's demise. Westray, a close associate of Reiner's and purported former lover of Malkina, fearing for his life, flees to an undisclosed location, cryptically referred to as "world city" (McCarthy 166). Malkina, undeterred by his escape, orchestrates his assassination to get his bag. Upon receiving the bag from the hired assassin, Malkina then meets with Lee, described merely as "a twenty-five-year-old Chinese American" (167). The two of them engage in a strategic discussion about accessing Westray and Reiner's accounts and they organize "a cyber-hit on Westray's offshore savings" (Agner 205). Exhibiting her mastery of digital networks, Malkina confidently asserts her ability to obtain vital data: "I'll have everything by tomorrow that there is to get. What we don't have we'll just have to figure out. I've got the routing numbers and the account numbers. I've got the source code but we'll have to have a compiler to translate everything into machine-readable code. It's all doable" (McCarthy, *The Counselor* 169). Later in the conversation, Malkina "speaks knowingly of cryptic malware programs such as Trojan Horses, Zrizbis, and Torigs, as if she plans to infect online networks while she works her way into different global economies" (Agner 218). Agner posits that the "infernal vision of manifest destiny seen in *Blood Meridian* may be exactly what Malkina sees on a more digital plane" (218). Through Malkina, McCarthy portrays a woman who navigates her world with shrewdness and strategic acumen, contrasting sharply with the male characters in *The Counselor*, who often find themselves outmaneuvered. McCarthy's exploration of evolving gender dynamics is evident in Malkina's character, representing a departure from traditional depictions of femininity and masculinity. It seems that in the latter part of his career—in works such as *No Country for Old Men*, *The Road*, and *The Counselor*—, McCarthy delves into the shifting paradigms of masculinity and femininity, showcasing characters like Anton Chigurh and Malkina who embody traits of assertiveness, intelligence, and the ability to exploit their advantages—whether sexual or violent—for

personal gain. These portrayals instill fear in male counterparts, who are either confronted with unmatched violence—in the case of Chigurh—or outmaneuvered by sheer intellect—in the case of Malkina. Through these characters, McCarthy underscores the emergence of new models of masculinity and femininity in contemporary society, challenging traditional notions of gender and power dynamics.

### **3. Paraphilic Disorders and Masculinity**

Having thus analyzed various instances of “good” (functional) and “bad” (dysfunctional) relationships and/or interactions between male and female characters in McCarthy, it is time now to explore some of the paraphilic disorders portrayed by McCarthy. In this case, I will analyze the characters of Lester Ballard, in *Child of God*, and Judge Holden, in *Blood Meridian*, as these two characters are to be understood as the ones better aligning with paraphilic disorders. The American Psychiatric Association explains that some paraphilic disorders “primarily concern the individual’s erotic targets” (American Psychiatric Association 685). These paraphilic disorders “include intense or preferential sexual interest in children, corpses, or amputees (as a class), as well as intense or preferential interest in nonhuman animals, such as horses or dogs, or in inanimate objects, such as shoes or articles made of rubber” (685). Both Ballard and Holden demonstrate these sexual interests and preferences in their respective novels. As we will see, Ballard’s paraphilic disorders involve instances of necrophilia, as well as voyeuristic, fetishistic, and transvestic disorders, whilst Holden engages mostly in pedophilic disorder.

#### **3.1. THE CASE OF LESTER BALLARD**

The masculinity of Lester Ballard, the protagonist of *Child of God*, warrants extensive analysis, which exceeds the scope of this dissertation. Even though Ballard has been briefly

introduced in the first two chapters, it is now imperative to delve deeper into an analysis of his masculinity, with a particular focus on his sexuality. It must be noted that Ballard's sexuality is primarily marked by a prominent paraphilic disorder, namely necrophilia. However, in order to offer the reader a comprehensive understanding of Ballard as a character and masculinity as a central theme in the novel, it is essential to first explore specific episodes from his life. By providing this background information on the character, the reader will be equipped with the necessary context to effectively analyze Ballard's paraphilic disorder in subsequent sections.

Let us begin by exploring how Lester Ballard is first introduced and described. The narrative of *Child of God* commences with the depiction of a group of people approaching an "aged clapboard house that stood in blue shade under the wall of the mountain. Beyond it stood a barn" (McCarthy 5), signaling Ballard's residence. This setting resonates with the isolation experienced by Culla and Rinthy Holme in *Outer Dark*, the preceding novel in McCarthy's oeuvre. Such parallels extend to the concept of *locus amoenus*, suggesting that both Culla and Ballard find solace in their seclusion before pivotal events disrupt their tranquility. In the case of Ballard, in these opening pages of the novel, the narrative reveals that "Ballard's land [is] being auctioned off by the county for back taxes" (Yarbrough 21). The narrative then introduces Ballard: "To watch these things issuing from the otherwise mute pastoral morning is a man at the barn door. He is small, unclean, unshaven. He moves in the dry chaff among the dust and slats of sunlight with a constrained truculence. Saxon and Celtic bloods. A child of God much like yourself perhaps" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 5–6). The passage shows how McCarthy situates Ballard within a Christian context by showing "the remains of a certain spirituality, an inverted, voiced Christian theodicy" (Bartlett 13). The use of the term "pastoral" not only conveys the rural setting, but also implies a thematic connection to spiritual guidance. Moreover, McCarthy's use of "pastoral" as an adjective to complement the noun "morning" conveys the idea that there is in the scene a new beginning, since the notion of "morning" can

represent the possibility of hope as light is brought into the world to overcome darkness. According to Christian traditions, this light is God and His son, Jesus Christ. However, the adjective “mute” preceding “pastoral morning” hints at the notion that this daybreak in the countryside includes in its cosmology a God that, contrary to Genesis, will not speak in order to bless the land. This juxtaposition underscores Ballard’s ordinariness within the divine scheme, devoid of any special favor or blessing. According to Andrew Bartlett, Ballard “is the ironic child of God, a walking threat and insult to human innocence” (13). Ballard lacks all sense of religious spirituality and has not received God’s blessing—perhaps because his “knowledge of God is next to nothing” (13)—as God remains mute during His daily apparition over the land.

Another interesting aspect of the passage is Ballard’s dwelling in a barn, reminiscent of the birthplace of Jesus Christ. However, unlike the biblical narrative where visitors bring gifts to the newborn, those approaching Ballard’s residence come to auction off his property. The passage’s concluding sentence of Ballard’s introduction—“A child of God much like yourself perhaps”—, qualified as “the novel’s most haunting line” (Franks 84),<sup>120</sup> suggests his ordinary humanity, devoid of any divine distinction. In other words, Ballard is nothing but an ordinary human being, another sinner in the land of God and “not wholly separate from his compatriots” (84). McCarthy’s deliberate invocation of religious imagery, juxtaposed with Ballard’s ordinariness, subverts initial expectations, highlighting the absence of divine favor or distinction in the novel’s characters and readers alike, and portraying Ballard as “a fellow outcast sheltering some semblance of the divine spark from a cruel and unforgiving cosmos” (West 137). McCarthy’s claim that Ballard is an ordinary child of God may be difficult to understand for “anyone who might happen to read this novel”—men in this case—, readers

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<sup>120</sup> Franks argues that the line is haunting because it “suggests that Ballard is not wholly separate from his compatriots or, more troublingly, anyone who might happen to read this novel” (84).

who can feel “time and again repulsed by [Ballard]” and would want to differentiate themselves from the reality “and the complexity of what he represents” (Franks 84). The narration’s statement does not allow for such consolation, as “Ballard, as a child of God, is in some ways indistinguishable from all who encounter him” (84), implying that his despicable actions throughout the novel—as will be later examined—could be replicated by ordinary men and their masculinities, thus not being the result of monstrous or deviant masculinities.

In this attempt to assert dominance over the auctioneer and those gathered to bid on his property, Ballard displays a futile show of strength. Despite his efforts, Ballard’s confrontation with the auctioneer, identified as C B, ends in failure. After demanding that C B depart, Ballard confronts him with a rifle. When questioned by the auctioneer about his intentions, Ballard responds:

I done told ye. I want you to get your goddamn ass off my property. And take these fools with ye.

Watch your mouth, Lester. They’s ladies present.

I don’t give a fuck who’s present.

It ain’t your property.

The hell it ain’t.

You done been locked up once over this. I guess you want to go again.

The high sheriff is standin right over yonder.

I don’t give a good goddamn where the high sheriff is at. I want you sons of bitches off of my goddamned property. You hear? (McCarthy, *Child of God*

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As evidenced by the dialogue, Ballard not only brandishes a rifle—which is menacing enough to the majority of characters present—, but also employs aggressive language while threatening the auctioneer. Ballard remains resolute even when reminded by the auctioneer of his previous

run-ins with the law over similar situations. These elements in Ballard's demeanor and conduct in the passage serve to assert his strength and aggression, signaling to the auctioneer, the sheriff, and the onlookers that he is prepared to resort to violence if need be, even at the risk of returning to jail. However, Ballard's attempt to display a violent type of masculinity fails to intimidate the auctioneer, who defiantly states: "You want to shoot me, Lester, you can shoot me where I'm at. I ain't going nowhere for you" (9). Moreover, it is later revealed that Ballard is assaulted by a man named Buster, resulting in severe injuries, as he "laid there and he was bleedin at the ears ... They took him on in the county car and C B went on with the auction like nothin never had happent" (10). Despite Ballard's efforts to project a menacing and strong masculinity, he only manages to instill a certain level of fear among those present. In reference to Ballard's threat and behavior in the previous passage, it is noted that: "it caused some folks not to bid that otherwise would of, which may have been what Lester set out at, I don't know" (10). Nevertheless, Ballard ultimately loses his home.

As Luce has remarked, the loss of home emerges as a recurring motif in McCarthy's early works: "In all three of McCarthy's first novels or their drafts, the loss of a farm conjoined with the loss of a woman creates an existential upheaval" ("Ballard Rising in *Outer Dark*" 97), a theme revisited in later works such as *All the Pretty Horses*, *Blood Meridian*, and *The Road*. This loss of home and land is "[o]ne of the many ways in which Ballard is dehumanized in the text" (Yarbrough 21). Moreover, the actions of various characters throughout the novel—including the auctioneer, the sheriff, and Buster, who collectively aim to deprive Ballard of a home—make "the community [be] biased against [Ballard]. One could argue that the community's treatment of Ballard actually determines his criminal behavior" (Owens-Murphy 168).<sup>121</sup> Owens-Murphy further suggests that "the forces of modernity, including the rise of big

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<sup>121</sup> Some of the novel's unnamed characters have been referred to as "chorus narrators" (Franks 87), since the narrator often incorporates their perspectives to elucidate events as witnessed by them. Travis Franks provides an insightful analysis of these chorus narrators, suggesting that "[a]ssociating themselves with Ballard's acts of murder and necrophilia would compel the choric narrators to openly acknowledge their culture's potential for

government (indicated by the strict enforcement of property taxes) and the destruction of the wilderness (indicated by Ballard's disappearing timber lot), render Ballard, with his primordial skills and value system, a grotesque oddity in contemporary culture" (168). Similar to other characters in McCarthy's oeuvre—such as John Grady Cole, Sheriff Bell, or even the man in *The Road*—, Ballard finds himself existing in a world indifferent to the model of masculinity he represents, thereby embodying another outdated masculinity ill-suited for, what appears to be for him, an alien world.

Another instance where Ballard's masculinity is perceived as inadequate by other men occurs during his stint in Sevier County jail for over a week. Ballard finds himself in proximity to a neighbor in another cell, a Black man named John, and the two of them start conversing. Ballard hastily assumes that John is a fugitive (McCarthy, *Child of God* 51), a prejudiced conclusion with racist undertones. It is evident that Ballard regards John as inferior, particularly in terms of masculinity, perhaps influenced by the historical association of one of his ancestors with the White Caps.<sup>122</sup> Subsequently, Ballard queries John about the reason for his imprisonment, to which the latter responds, "I cut a motherfucker's head off with a pocketknife" (51). John's use of profanity coupled with the implication of violence in his language suggests that anyone he deems a "motherfucker" is at risk of facing lethal consequences. Furthermore, the act of decapitating another man with a pocketknife is

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extreme violence, thereby forcing them to share in the culpability of Ballard's transgressions by examining how their ostracizing him enabled his crimes" (87). Moreover, Franks argues that the chorus narrators are not entirely truthful in their accounts, selectively omitting pertinent details. This selective omission allows them and other members of Ballard's community to "frame a way of talking about Lester that allows them to avert talking about themselves and their complicity in his wretchedness" (88).

<sup>122</sup> The term "White Cap" has occasionally been associated with the Ku Klux Klan, a North American white supremacist hate group originating in the 1860s following the American Civil War, which initially targeted African Americans with violence. The White Caps have been characterized as "a group which initially assaulted women who broke sexual mores but which grew into a secret society that inflicted violence on innocent community members for various moral, political, and personal reasons" (Owens-Murphy 168). Ballard's grandfather, Leland, is described as being "by God White Cap" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 77). Further insight into Ballard's family history is provided by one of the chorus narrators, who describes the White Caps as "a bunch of lowlife thieves and cowards and murderers. The only thing they ever done was to whip women and rob old people of their savins. Pensioners and widows. And murder people in their beds at night" (156).

undeniably violent and requires a significant degree of brutality. After John has explained his crime, “Ballard waited to be asked his own crime but he wasn’t asked” (51), though he eventually divulges it unprompted. The passage underscores Ballard’s expectation of acknowledgment and validation of his masculinity. However, John’s apparent disinterest in Ballard’s reason for imprisonment serves as a slight to Ballard, who perceives himself as superior to John. This lack of recognition of Ballard’s masculinity by John echoes other instances elsewhere in the novel where Ballard’s masculinity is tested against that of other men.

I want to conclude this introduction to the masculinity of Ballard by focusing on one of his final attempts to assert his strength and violence. Ballard encounters a young couple nestled inside a truck in the concluding chapter of the novel, where they lay “in each other’s arms” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 141). Illuminating them with his flashlight, the girl notices that he is armed, and Ballard demands to see their driver’s license, feigning the authority of a police officer. However, despite his efforts to masquerade as a police officer, the boy remains unconvinced, asserting, “You ain’t the law,” prompting Ballard to retort, “I’ll be the judge of that” (141). When Ballard’s pretense fails, he dismisses the boy’s assertion, insinuating that the boy lacks the authority to dictate Ballard’s identity. As the girl protests that they were not engaged in any wrongdoing, the following happens:

You was fixin to screw, wasn’t ye? He watched their faces.

You better watch your mouth, the boy said.

You want to make me?

You put down that riffle and I will.

Any time you feel froggy, jump, said Ballard.

The boy reached to the dashboard and turned on the ignition and began to crank the engine.

Quit it, said Ballard.

The engine did not start. The boy had raised his hand as if he would bat at the rafflebarrel when Ballard shot him through the neck. (141–42)

Ballard's initial aggressive questioning, marked by offensive language, is met with immediate resistance as the boy challenges Ballard to watch his language. The motive behind the boy's response—whether to protect the girl or to challenge Ballard's masculinity—remains ambiguous. Ballard refuses to change his demeanor and instead challenges the boy to a physical confrontation. However, the boy recognizes Ballard's advantage due to being armed and refrains from engaging in it. Drawing from terminology previously discussed in this dissertation, these three instances exemplify Ballard's "Give 'em hell" masculinity, which consistently fails to intimidate other men—the auctioneer, the prisoner, and now the boy. Ballard's frustration may offer insight into his subsequent violent treatment of women—a behavior that is unequivocally reprehensible.

The preceding pages have provided an introductory exploration into the character of Lester Ballard via the examination of various instances of McCarthy's portrayal of the character. *Child of God* is often characterized as "a novel in which brutality is commonplace" (Monk 112). Even though McCarthy makes use of characteristics commonly associated with the construction of masculinity in his characters, Ballard is rendered by the narrative as both "abused and abusive" (112). The narrative elucidates how Ballard is subjected to abuse by his Tennessee community, a factor that Monk argues contributes to making him "a character we can understand, even if his deeds mean we cannot sympathize with him" (112). In the first chapter of the novel, McCarthy progressively makes readers "learn of [Ballard's] displacement from his family farm and subsequent harassment by Sheriff Fate Turner which lead him to become further isolated and estranged from his community by seeking refuge in the mountains of Sevier County, Tennessee" (Franks 76). Having come to an understanding of the primary plot event leading to Ballard's isolation from the community—the eviction from his home—as

well as the disregard for Ballard's masculinity by other male characters, it is now pertinent to analyze Ballard's subsequent violent behavior toward women and his paraphilic disorders. This analysis aims to illustrate how McCarthy utilizes Ballard's masculinity to depict the potential negative consequences of isolating and ostracizing certain individuals from communities, with the analysis never justifying nor promoting such behaviors.

### 3.1.1. TRAUMAS OF ABANDONMENT AND PARENTAL ABSENCE

It is crucial to acknowledge that McCarthy wrote *Child of God* during the late 1960s and early 1970s, suggesting that the narrative is situated within this timeframe. Therefore, in these subsequent sections of the analysis of Lester Ballard, I find it imperative to consider various theories prevalent during McCarthy's composition of the novel. While some of these theories may appear outdated to a contemporary reader, they should not be disregarded, as McCarthy seems to have been influenced by them in both his composition of the novel and his portrayal of Ballard's masculinity.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I explained that Ballard's mother deserted him during his early childhood. A chorus narrator indicates uncertainty regarding the whereabouts of Ballard's mother and the circumstances surrounding her departure, implying the possibility that she may have not been alone. This abandonment of her family is posited as a contributing factor to Ballard's father's suicide. It can be inferred that Ballard's mother may have been unfaithful and, thus, Ballard's time with her was brief. Scholarly literature examining the mother-son relationship has asserted the importance of maternal presence in the lives of sons, particularly throughout their formative years. Kimmel suggests that "[m]others need to remain present in the lives of their sons—throughout their teens and twenties" (*Guyland* 274). Clinical studies, such as those examined by psychoanalyst Simona Argentieri, reveal parallels between Ballard's situation and the absence of a maternal bond. For instance, Argentieri discusses a

patient, referred to as Claudio, who “lacked the physiological experience of primal narcissism and of being seen as beautiful and perfect by a mother, long before his problems of sexual gender definition” (9). Given the narrative of *Child of God*, which portrays Ballard’s mother abandoning him at a tender age, it can be argued that Ballard also missed out on the psychological nurturing described by Argentieri in her patient’s case.

Conversely, some expert conclusions suggest that when the mother remains present throughout a boy’s upbringing, the female-male “difference between mother and son may be a major contributing factor to men’s greater gender and sexual insecurities and indulgence in transvestism and the ‘perversions’ generally” (Ryan 58–59).<sup>123</sup> It remains speculative whether Ballard would have exhibited different behavior toward women had his mother not abandoned him; however, the text suggests that he harbors resentment toward his mother, which may drive much of his violent conduct toward women. If it is understood that “a man carries with him the psychological residue of the fear of his mother he had as a child” (Pleck 108), then Ballard’s psychological residue regarding his mother is that of an unwanted and unloved child—a trope, as explored in the initial chapter of the dissertation, common enough in McCarthy’s oeuvre. Moreover, in accordance with prevailing ideas of the 1970s, one could argue that for Ballard, the “image of the mother contaminates all subsequent female objects” (Ovesey and Person 69). Ballard might be interpreted as a man seeking revenge on his mother, consistent with Joseph

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<sup>123</sup> Since the 1980s, even the American Psychiatric Association, in its widely recognized *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), has replaced the term “perversion” with “the politically correct but ambiguous ‘paraphilia’” (Argentieri 3). While contemporary scholarly literature generally avoids using the term “perversion” when discussing transvestic disorder, opting instead for terms like “gender dysphoria” or even “the comprehensive term of ‘transgender’ that moves the accent from sexual drive to gender identity” (34), experts such as Simona Argentieri and Colette Chiland contend that transvestic disorder should still be considered a form of perversion from a theoretical framework (Argentieri 11). Moreover, various scholars at the end of the twentieth century and even in the twenty-first still associate the term “perversion” with paraphilic disorders. For instance, Igor Kon, exploring the topic of sexual deviations, among others, “singled out exhibitionism, sadism, masochism, fetishism, transvestism, and pedophilia as the most common paraphilias, and noticed that all perversions are united by common features” (Shydelko et al. 34). Finally, regarding what is categorized as “deviant sexual phenomena,” experts have crafted a list of nine paraphilic disorder categories, which includes some of the paraphilic disorders exhibited by Ballard in the novel, such as fetishistic, transvestic with fetishism, and voyeuristic disorders (Costrachevici and Delcea 57).

Pleck's notion of psychological residue. This revenge manifests through Ballard's actions of killing and abusing the women he encounters. This interpretation may offer insight—albeit not a justification—into some of Ballard's paraphilic disorders and his violent sexual behavior toward the novel's female characters.

Moreover, as examined in the initial chapter of this dissertation, Ballard's father may also bear responsibility for his son's behavior toward women. Regardless of the cause of Ballard's father's suicide, both his parents remain absent from his life. Therefore, we can categorize Ballard as a man who is a product of a "broken home." Cesar Rebellon elucidates that a broken home consists "of a family in which at least one biological parent is missing" (104); however, it is important to note that not all single-parent families are considered broken homes. Expanding upon my previous argumentation concerning the character of the father, it is important to note that some scholars have been categorical when asserting that "father absence is aggression" (Boothroyd and Cross 4), a sentiment echoed in scholarly discourse well into the first two decades of the twenty-first century.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, studies conducted during the period when McCarthy was writing and publishing *Child of God* indicate that "father absence has continued to be associated with aggression, delinquency and problem behaviours across later decades" and has been associated with "higher levels of assault and homicide" (4–5). Furthermore, concerning the concept of a broken home, "numerous criminological theories are capable of explaining the relationship between broken homes and delinquency" (Rebellon 103). Father absence can manifest as physical aggression in boys, given that physical aggression "is a strongly sexually dimorphic trait, with differences appearing before 2 years of age and continuing into adulthood" (Boothroyd and Cross 4). In relation to father absence and aggression, scholars have investigated the "status-envy theory of sex identity acquisition"

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<sup>124</sup> It must be acknowledged that there are exceptions, and father absence does not always result in aggression or a broken home.

(Broude 105). Proponents of this theory “have also stipulated a connection between father-absence and extremes in masculine behavior” (105). Gwen Broude further explains that the child associates females, typically the mother, with the “control [of] valued resources” (105). Therefore, according to this perspective, “it is not father-absence itself, but rather the hypothetical consequences of father-absence for a child’s view of what statuses should be envied and emulated, that account for later hypermasculine outcomes” (105). During the composition of *Child of God*, McCarthy may have depicted the hypermasculine outcomes mentioned by Broude, as evident in Ballard’s character even during his adolescence. In line with previous analyses of similar hypermasculinities, McCarthy portrays it as flawed.

In the absence of a father figure, a boy may seek other masculine role models from whom he can learn, and these lessons can shape his development of masculinity. Central to North American ideology is the notion of the self-made man, defined as an individual who, through diligence, ambition, and a strong sense of duty, attains success on his own.<sup>125</sup> A self-made man needs an environment in which he can demonstrate his worth to others, a feat that cannot be done in isolation. As Kimmel explains, it is often through work that a man proves himself (*Manhood in America* 26). In the absence of a father, a man’s worth is established in

the eyes of other men. From the early nineteenth century until the present day, most of men’s relentless efforts to prove their manhood contain this core element of homosociality. From fathers and boyhood friends to our teachers, coworkers, and bosses, it is the evaluative eyes of other men that are always upon us,

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<sup>125</sup> Scholars such as John George Cawelti (1960), Jose María Armengol (“Rereading American Masculinities” 2006), and Alejandro de la Cruz Tapiador (2022) have explored the figure of the self-made man and self-made manhood. Rotundo explains that the term “had begun to grow in the late eighteenth century” where “a man took his identity and his social status from his own achievements” (3). One of the first and most well-known examples of the self-made man is Benjamin Franklin as can be seen in the introduction of *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1916), edited by Frank Woodworth Pine. Another example is Frederick Douglass, who also wrote an essay titled “Self-Made Men,” which can be found in *Frederick Douglass in Brooklyn* (2017), edited by Theodore Hamm.

watching, judging. It was in this regime of scrutiny that such men were tested.

(26)

The scrutiny within homosocial contexts is inherently linked to expectations of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. Scholars in masculinity studies argue that, in relation to sociality and the self-conceptualization of masculinity, “homosocial interaction, among heterosexual men, contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting meanings associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals while suppressing meanings associated with nonhegemonic masculinity identities” (Bird 121). Sharon Bird delves into the relationship between “individual masculinity and gender norms in small group interactions to capture subtle mechanisms of control” (121). Her findings suggest that when “personal conflicts with ideal masculinity are suppressed both in the homosocial group and by individual men, the cultural imposition of hegemonic masculinity goes uncontested” (121). Ballard’s individual masculinity embodies the mechanisms of control outlined by Bird; he recognizes the imperative to assert his manliness under the scrutiny of others, often resorting to violence during his boyhood years.<sup>126</sup> Although McCarthy does not provide an exhaustive account of Ballard’s upbringing, the glimpses offered in the novel suffice for the purposes of this analysis.

Experts argue that the critical years of a man’s boyhood are often nostalgically remembered both “as daring exploits, and dramatic confrontations” (Tolson 23). It is during these early years that a boy begins to construct his understanding of masculinity. Tolson explains that “because of the form in which this masculinity appears, because of the specific ways in which masculine feelings are structured, a boy begins to feel ambivalent about his masculinity, and begins to feel the need to ‘prove himself’” (23). Alongside familial influences, the combination of school and peer interaction “make up the primary context of masculine

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<sup>126</sup> It must be noted that the kid in *Blood Meridian* exhibits behavior similar to Ballard’s. Raised without a mother and neglected by his father, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the kid engages in similar acts of violence. At the age of fourteen, he partakes in barroom brawls, using these confrontations to test, validate, and assert his masculinity in the eyes of adult men.

‘socialization’” (22), shaping behaviors that align with societal approval. It is also worth noting that society presumes the boy will command a “‘masculine presence’ [which] is shaped by a systematic process of ‘gender-identification’” (22). However, the concept of masculine presence is subject to change over time and societal shifts. While McCarthy’s portrayal of a masculine presence in his oeuvre often aligns with Badinter’s masculine imperatives—as discussed in the previous chapter—, Ballard’s masculinity also exhibits qualities traditionally associated with female socialization, notably through transvestic disorder, a topic that will be explored later.

In patriarchal societies, the imperative for a boy to embody the archetype of a “real man” is paramount. Badinter explains that a “masculine identity is *acquired* at the price of great difficulties” (67). Ballard employs one of the “methods” outlined by Badinter—the method of peer confrontation (67)—which inevitably subjects a boy’s masculinity to three forms of scrutiny. Firstly, the victorious boy, having defeated a rival, reassures his own manliness. Secondly, the defeat of the vanquished boy validates the superior masculine attributes of his competitor. Thirdly, the masculinity of the victorious boy may also be affirmed by an audience, should one be present during the confrontation. Badinter articulates this notion by stating: “Masculinity is won at the end of a combat (against oneself) that often involves physical or psychic pain” (68). Although Badinter refers to an internal combat, in Ballard’s case, the combat is external. Nevertheless, Ballard’s external combat can also be seen as internal, as his self-perception of his masculinity is what is truly important. Moreover, it has been explained that “[t]hree of the shared meanings that are perpetuated via male homosociality are emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women” (Bird 122). In the first chapter, I explored Ballard’s emotional detachment upon encountering his father’s corpse following suicide. Although Ballard was a young boy when the suicide happened, he may have internalized the belief that, according to traditional understandings of masculinity, to “express

feelings is to reveal vulnerabilities and weaknesses; to withhold such expressions is to maintain control” (122). From the lens of traditional masculinity, Ballard might have deemed his father an inadequate model of masculinity, given his father’s succumbing to feelings of betrayal following the mother’s abandonment. By exhibiting no reaction to his father’s death, Ballard may perceive himself as tougher than his father.

Moreover, similar to the kid in *Blood Meridian*, Ballard might discover that competing against other boys offers him insights into asserting his masculinity in the absence of paternal guidance. Bird explains that competition “facilitates hierarchy in relationships, whereas cooperation suggests symmetry of relationships” (122). Ballard leverages the inherent competition of a typical ballgame to engage other boys, thereby attempting to reassess his masculinity through their perceptions. In the following example, a former schoolmate of Ballard recounts a violent altercation between Ballard and another boy called Finney:

[Finney] lost a softball down off the road that rolled down into this field about ... it was way off down in a bunch of briars and stuff and he told this boy, this Finney boy, told him to go and get it. Finney boy was some bit younger’n him. Told him, said: Go get that softball. Finney boy wouldn’t do it. Lester walked up to him and said: You better go get that ball. Finney boy said he wasn’t about to do it and Lester told him one more time, said: You don’t get off down in there and get me that ball I’m goin to bust you in the mouth. That Finney boy was scared but he faced up to him, told him he hadn’t thowed it off down in there. Well, he was standin there, the way you will. Ballard could of let it go. He seen the boy wasn’t goin to do what he ast him. He just stood there a minute and then he punched him in the face. Blood flew out of the Finney boy’s nose and he set down in the road. Just for a minute and then he got up. Somebody give him a kerchief and he put it to his nose. It was all swoll up and bleedin. The Finney

boy just looked at Lester Ballard and went on up the road. I felt, I felt ... I don't know what it was. We just felt real bad. I never liked Lester Ballard from that day. I never liked him much before that. He never done nothin to me. (McCarthy, *Child of God* 18–19)

In this passage, Ballard engages in a power dynamic with other young boys. When the ball they are playing with is lost, Ballard instructs Finney, a younger boy, to retrieve it, rather than asking an older or similarly aged peer. This choice suggests that Ballard perceives himself to have authority over Finney due to the latter's younger age. Despite Ballard's repeated commands, Finney refuses to comply, even in the face of verbal aggression and threats from Ballard. While Finney is intimidated by Ballard's demeanor, his refusal to yield challenges Ballard's authority and masculinity. It is common among youths to test their own masculinity by asserting dominance among others. The urge to assert authority transcends age boundaries and manifests even in childhood interactions. Finney's resistance prompts Ballard to resort to violence, culminating in him punching Finney in the face. However, this display of aggressiveness fails to garner the respect Ballard seeks, as Finney still refuses to retrieve the ball, and the chorus narrator expresses disdain for Ballard's actions. The concluding remark—"He never done nothin to me"—underscores the general aversion toward Ballard, irrespective of whether he has used violence against them. Ballard's aggressive, disrespectful, and uncivilized behavior alienates him from his peers, resulting in his isolation from society and retreat into the natural world. Ballard exhibits "a limited inner life," expressing himself primarily "through interaction with the natural world rather than through inner reflection" (Link 154). This connection between Ballard's persona and sexuality and the natural world is further explored in the subsequent section.

### 3.1.2. AN ANALYSIS OF BALLARD'S PARAPHILIC DISORDERS

In the second chapter of this doctoral dissertation, I delved into the relationship between nature and masculinity and posited that, historically, nature has been predominantly associated with the feminine.<sup>127</sup> Reflecting prevalent notions from the 1970s regarding the association between nature and women, most of the women encountered by Lester Ballard throughout the narrative are depicted in close proximity to nature. These encounters often depict the women in a state of undress or partial nudity. Furthermore, Ballard frequently makes use of nature as both a setting for his crimes and a means to conceal evidence of them. Additionally, Ballard's paraphilic disorders are intricately intertwined with the natural world, as many of his crimes occur within natural settings. Toward the conclusion of the novel, he finds refuge in a cave following the destruction of his home in a fire.

Let us embark on an exploration of "male sexuality" within a broader context, a concept that often "assumes heterosexuality as the 'norm'" (Whitehead 163). Ballard's performance of his sexuality is decidedly heterosexual, as he exhibits no overt sexual interest in men. However, male sexuality, like its female counterpart, is not without controversy. One such controversy has to do with the following supposition: if male sexuality is "inherent and to be assumed in the male species, [then] we tread the path towards establishing the related myth of male sexual prowess as an insatiable urge, one that compels men to act out fantasies of domination over women and others" (163). This assertion holds true in Ballard's case, as he grapples with an "insatiable urge" and acts out fantasies of domination over women. Susan Edwards has explained that "[w]ithin all essentialist accounts, male sexuality is considered instinctual, not

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<sup>127</sup> Judith Butler has voiced criticism against the association between nature and the feminine, labelling it as misogynistic. Judith Butler is not alone in this critique. Judith Butler's on-point criticism revolves around the notion that "reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject. As in that misogynistic dialectic, materiality and meaning are mutually exclusive terms. The sexual politics that construct and maintain this distinction are effectively concealed by the discursive production of a nature and, indeed, a natural sex that postures as the unquestioned foundation of culture" (37).

social, nor learned” (94). Proponents of this perspective contend that “rape, sexual assault and the use of prostitute women by men is exoneratable [sic] since men have no rational choice nor free will. Such a construction of male sexuality mitigates not only rape, but child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual conduct” (94). Ballard and judge Holden, as we will later see, align with this assertion. While Ballard may succumb to primal impulses, judge Holden appears to exert complete control over himself and his decisions. Moreover, as explored in the preceding chapter, Susan Edwards’s explanation resonates with Holden’s perspective on men and war, wherein war is described as an inherent and inescapable aspect of masculinity. Notions of irrationality and lack of volition have frequently been involved in scholarly discourse to rationalize men’s behavior, including their most reprehensible actions, although many of these explanations have been proven incorrect. For instance, in *The Gendered Society*, Kimmel explores instances where men’s rape of women has been excused or justified. Kimmel explains that sociobiologists and evolutionists have portrayed rape as “a reproductive adaptation by men who otherwise couldn’t get a date,” suggesting that “men who rape are fulfilling their genetic drive to reproduce in the only way they know how” (25). Biologists have similarly sought to wrongly explain rape as “the evolutionary mating strategy of losers, males who cannot otherwise get a date. Rape is an alternative to romance; if you can’t always have what you want, you take what you need” (25). Kimmel, refutes these outrageous assertions by rightfully concluding: “Using theories of selfish genes or evolutionary imperatives to explain human behavior cannot take us very far” (27).<sup>128</sup>

A crucial element for many males in defining and identifying their sexuality is a part of their sexual reproductive organs, namely the penis. The significance of the penis for many males lies in their understanding that it “suggests not only a physical actuality and sexual

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<sup>128</sup> For readers interested in sociological studies on rape and sexual assault, see Chapter 12 of Meredith Worthen’s *Sexual Deviance and Society* (2021).

potential, but, as phallus, symbolizes (the inevitability of) male power and dominance” (Whitehead 162). This association between the penis/phallus and power and dominance has been discussed by various scholars, including Buchbinder (131), T. Edwards (62), Morgan (76), Ovesey and Person (55–56), Sabuco i Cantó and Valcuende del Río (146), and Valcuende del Río (14–15), among others. The phallus is perceived by these men to exude power among males, reinforcing their understanding of male sexuality as an “‘overpowering instinct’ barely controllable, and irreducibly sustained and necessarily validated by the centrality and functionalism of the gender order” (Whitehead 162). Moreover, the penis/phallus is often the source of “pathological disturbances in gender role identity” (Ovesey and Person 55), wherein some men struggle to perceive themselves as real men if their penis fails to perform. Many factors are considered when these pathological disturbances manifest. For instance, “[p]hallic size, integrity, and ability to function are repeatedly invoked as symbols for masculine assertion. Success or failure, as the case may be, are measured in terms of phallic power or phallic weakness” (55–56). Finally, anthropologists have further explained that the phallus is “the embodiment of the male status, to which men accede, and in which certain rights inhere—among them, the right to a woman. It is an expression of the transmission of male dominance” (Rubin 192).

Phallic symbolism permeates *Child of God* and is associated with the character of Ballard. In his first appearance in the novel, when the auctioneer and townspeople arrive at his property, Ballard is depicted carrying a rifle. This association between the rifle and the phallus is evident as the rifle, like the penis, serves as a symbol of power and authority wielded by the bearer. Moreover, it can be used to inflict pain and, in Ballard’s case, is employed to gain criminal access to women. Plummer describes the penis as “an enormously *potent* symbol,” akin to “a gun to conquer the world” (179). Later, while having a drink and a raw potato with an old man, Ballard notices a girl he knows who “used to sit with her legs propped so that you

could see her drawers” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 29). Apparently, she “had a different colored pair of drawers for every day of the week and black ones on Saturday” (29). Upon approaching her, the girl “pursed her lips at him and winked and then threw back her head and laughed wildly. Ballard grinned, tapping the rafflebarrel against the side of his leg” (29). Ballard’s immediate response when he becomes aroused is to touch the rifle/phallus, which symbolically serves as an extension of his penis and is thus integral to his sense of masculinity. The girl perceives this, as evidenced by her reaction when, after addressing Ballard’s desire to see her breasts, she turns around, bends over to pick up a piece of cloth, and tells him: “Just make your peter hard” (30).

Another instance highlighting the connection between the penis/phallus and the rifle in the novel occurs when Ballard is walking on a road at night, and his rifle is described as “hanging in his hand as if it were a thing he could not get shut of” (40). This portrayal emphasizes the significance of the relationship between Ballard and his rifle, which appears to be both central to his identity and beyond his immediate control, as he later uses it to perpetrate violent acts against some of the female characters who arouse him. Moreover, this depiction serves as foreshadowing for the crimes that Ballard commits throughout the novel, crimes in which his rifle plays a pivotal role. McCarthy’s portrayal of the rifle in this context aligns with the notion that male sexuality has traditionally been viewed as “uncontrollable” and “penis centered [sic]” (Plummer 178). Ballard’s behavior seems to reflect this understanding, as explained by Plummer. To conclude with an illustration of this analogy, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the penis in a boy’s development, particularly in the realm of sexuality.<sup>129</sup> For many male children, their encounters with sexuality often involve experiences of arousal and masturbation. McCarthy subtly underscores this correlation by revealing that Ballard “had that rifle from when he was just almost a boy” (*Child of God* 55). This detail

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<sup>129</sup> By “boy,” in this context, I am referring to someone who was assigned male at birth.

suggests a profound connection between Ballard's acquisition of the rifle—a phallus-like weapon—and his nascent exploration of masculinity and sexual identity.

Ballard's sexually aggressive drives and his violent behavior toward women can be analyzed in relation to a spectrum encompassing his less harmful and most violent behaviors. As the novel progresses, Ballard's aggressiveness and boldness, particularly in terms of the risks he takes, intensify. This escalation is observable from the outset of the novel, as depicted when Ballard encounters a couple engaging in sexual activity in a car in the first chapter and sees that the parked car “began to rock gently” (20). Upon approaching it, he listens and observes “[a] pair of white legs sprawled embracing a shade, a dark incubus that humped in a dream of slaverous lust” (20). Ballard is shocked by the fact that a white girl is having sex with a Black man and employs the derogatory term “N-word” to refer to him.<sup>130</sup> This action once again underscores Ballard's racism, possibly driven by fears influenced by stereotypes associated with the perceived superior sexual potency of Black males. Nevertheless, the scene excites Ballard, and he unbuttons his pants and “spen[ds] himself on the fender” (21) while watching the couple have sex until he is eventually discovered, hastening his departure from the scene. It is unsurprising that Ballard is aroused by what he is witnessing, as “[v]isual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused” (Freud 22), a principle that retains validity and is still employed in contemporary scholarly literature, as evidenced by Bara Kolenc (2022) and Austin Svedjan (2021), among others.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, in contemporary psychoanalysis, Freud's concept of “drive” is still utilized,

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<sup>130</sup> The N-word refers to “nigger,” a racial slur in American English. For readers curious about the history of the term and its various usages since its inception, see Randal Kennedy's article “Who Can Say ‘Nigger’? And Other Considerations” (1999–2000).

<sup>131</sup> Academics in the field of psychoanalysis, such as Argentieri, have acknowledged that literature on paraphilic disorders produced since the post-Freudian era “is infinite, although it is not always easy to understand how much the new authors owe to Freud's primary statements” (3). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that while “scholars in contemporary psychoanalytic, neuropsychological and other schools within the behavioral sciences reject most of Freud's pioneering work” (Meladze 89), some of his theories have “not been entirely discarded by contemporary psychoanalysts and psychohistorians” (91). Hence, in this dissertation, recognizing the enduring influence of Freud's theories in the field, I deem them a valuable resource that should not be neglected, particularly in the analysis of certain paraphilic disorders discussed herein.

referring to “primal elements of the mind: what we are dealing with is the first psychic montage which gives shape to part of the floating libido, thereby opening up a path to libidinal excitation” (Denis 764). Ballard’s arousal upon witnessing the couple engaging in sexual activity directly points to one of his paraphilic disorders, namely voyeuristic disorder. Voyeuristic disorder is also known as “scopophilia” and is defined as becoming sexually aroused by observing unsuspecting individuals in stages of undress or engaging in sexual activities (American Psychiatric Association 686; Popa and Delcea 64; Thomas et al. 2151).

There are other occasions during which Ballard’s voyeuristic disorder tendencies are evident. A first instance of Ballard’s scopophilia can be observed in the “peter” incident detailed above where Ballard states his desire to see the girl’s breasts and claims to know specific details about her undergarments. Another instance of scopophilia occurs when “one cold morning on the Frog Mountain turnaround he found a lady sleeping under the trees in a white gown” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 40). After confirming that she is not dead—by throwing a couple of small rocks at her legs to check, upon which she moves slightly—Ballard approaches her. As he draws near, the narration states that Ballard “could see her heavy breasts sprawled under the thin stuff on her nightdress and he could see the dark thatch of hair under her belly. He knelt and touched her” (40). In this passage, we witness Ballard’s display of voyeuristic disorder behavior, as many of these paraphilic disorders here explored are often considered a “male disorder” predominantly diagnosed in males rather than females (Eusei and Delcea 67; Thomas et al. 2151; Whitehead 25). This affirmation explains why voyeuristic disorder “can be defined as a compulsive desire to observe women partially or completely nude without the consent of the females” (Geer et al. 385). Indeed, *Child of God* seems to reinforce these observations as McCarthy only assigns these paraphilic disorders to male characters. Moreover, Ballard’s voyeuristic contemplation of the woman inevitably arouses him, as indicated when the narration mentions that “Ballard had risen and stood above her with the

rifle” (41). We can interpret Ballard’s “rising” both literally, as him getting to his feet, and figuratively, suggesting that his penis is erect. The woman senses danger and grabs a rock, threatening Ballard with it. She then throws it at him and attempts to escape. In response, Ballard snatches her gown, tearing it and leaving her naked. He “folded the garment under his arm and stepped back. Then he turned and went on down the road” (42). Ballard decides not to pursue the woman, settling for a piece of her clothing. This marks the first instance of many in which Ballard collects objects from the female characters he assaults and/or murders. This collection of female-associated objects correlates with a paraphilic disorder known as “fetishistic disorder” which “involves the persistent and repetitive use of or dependence on nonliving objects” (American Psychiatric Association 701). Moreover, the most common “fetish objects include female undergarments, male or female footwear, rubber articles, leather clothing, or other wearing apparel. Highly eroticized body parts associated with fetishistic disorder include feet, toes, and hair” (701). Regarding fetishistic disorder, the substitution of a sexual object is performed through the acquisition of “some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces and preferably to that person’s sexuality (e.g. a piece of clothing or underlinen)” (Freud 19). Moreover, fetishists, being almost exclusively men, “may use the desired article for sexual gratification” (Eusei and Delcea 67). Contemporary experts on paraphilic disorders still find merit in Freud’s assertions, explaining that fetishistic disorder “can be understood both in terms of castration anxiety, when an inanimate object is invested with restorative powers (Freud) or a transitional object that gives men the reassurance of the integrity of his genital area (Greenacre)” (Dragu and Delcea 18). Moreover, contemporary writings on fetishistic disorder “enlarge the spectrum of fetishist phenomena and view it as controlling anxiety by investing objects with magical powers. The anxiety that these objects help to calm is not necessarily an early childhood anxiety as Freud mentioned but it can be linked to the Ego need of finding another object to calm the inner

anxiety” (18). The narrative in *Child of God*, it must be noted, does not offer any further insight into the type of anxiety Ballard is attempting to alleviate with his fetishistic behavior.

Later in the novel, the woman reappears. She has gone to the police to accuse Ballard of rape, resulting in his arrest and transportation to the police station. Ballard maintains his innocence, asserting that he did nothing wrong and claiming that his accuser “ain’t nothin but a goddamned old whore” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 49). As observed, Ballard employs aggressive and derogatory language when referring to women. Describing his accuser as a “goddamned old whore” may be his desperate attempt to appear rational to the other men present at the station. In other words, according to Ballard’s stated defense, it would be illogical for a young man—such as Ballard himself—to seek non-consensual sex with a woman like his accuser. Victor Seidler explains that, in traditional views of masculinity, men are the ones

who can act freely while women are supposed to be tied to emotions and feelings.

This enables men to use their power in relation to women when they devalue what women are saying by saying that ‘they are rational while women are merely emotional’ ... men have learned to use their supposed rationality in enforcing the subordination of women. (28)

As depicted in the passage and in alignment with Seidler’s analysis, Ballard utilizes his male power to devalue both his accuser and her allegations. In response to Ballard’s derogatory remark, the female character strikes him on the mouth, initiating a physical altercation. Ballard attempts to choke her, prompting her to retaliate by hitting him with her “knee up into his groin” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 50). Even in the presence of police officers, Ballard decides to resort to violence against the woman. In self-defense, she targets Ballard’s groin, a physical site associated with the phallus and symbolically representing men’s perceived dominance over women, as argued. Ballard’s behavior may be linked to the notion proposed by Roberta Lynn Sinclair that “male physical and sexual violence against women is very much a function of

men's deep-rooted concern with 'presenting an image of themselves as men within their social networks'" (qtd. in DeKeseredy and Schwartz 357–58). In this instance, Ballard attempts to portray himself as tough and violent. However, his efforts are thwarted when the police officers present intervene and separate him from the woman. Ballard expresses his frustration by cursing them until "he was almost crying" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 50). The scene at the police station marks one of two occasions in which Ballard cries, a reaction traditionally perceived as non-masculine. The other instance occurs when he observes a valley from atop a boulder (161). While the narration does not clearly state the reason for Ballard's crying, it can be interpreted that the view of the natural world he is observing triggers this reaction. If so, his crying would again be perceived as non-masculine. It is noted that Ballard did not cry when his mother left nor when his father committed suicide. There may be several reasons why Ballard cries during the police station assault, including the following explanations. On one hand, if, as experts have elucidated, voyeuristic disorder "maintains the concept of violation of a woman's intimacy but this time it is a secret aggressive triumph on the feminine sex" (Dragu and Delcea 18), Ballard's voyeuristic behavior with this woman fails to assert such triumph. On the other hand, a woman has struck him and accused him of a crime he believes he did not commit. He may feel that he has failed to assert his masculinity in the presence of other men. These factors could contribute to Ballard's perception that his masculinity has been compromised, aligning with his own sociopathy and potentially explaining his crying.

Furthermore, it is not until after the police station assault that Ballard begins to murder women; hence, there is a noticeable shift in Ballard's attitude toward the female characters in the novel following his assault on his accuser. West has argued that Ballard is "born into a world that continually seems to find new ways of enshrouding him in darkness, pain, and suffering" (136–37). While West's interpretation may appear overly sympathetic toward Ballard, he is nonetheless accurate in his assessment of the world depicted by McCarthy in

*Child of God*. Drawing on Pleck's conclusions, Ballard adopts a "male role [which] may be characterized as aggressive; achievement oriented, and emotionally inexpressive" (10), henceforth defining himself by these three characteristics. In fact, the novel lacks any scenes in which Ballard engages in consensual sex with a female character, suggesting that he may feel insecure in his masculinity. In scholarly analyses of masculinity, particularly from the perspective of social sciences, the "idea that insecurity in sex role identity among males is a source of crime and violence is a venerable one" (96). Ballard's behavior appears to align with this contention. Indeed, at this juncture in the plot, Ballard transitions to a life of violent crime, primarily targeting women, especially—but not exclusively—those characters he perceives as threatening to his criminalized concept of masculine identity.

The most apparent example of how Ballard perceives his female victims as threatening to his notion of masculinity can be found in the novel's second chapter, where Ballard is in the company of a young female character and her child. While in the house of the female character, Ballard stares aggressively at the young woman, referred to as a "girl" by the narrative. Ballard even "narrowed his eyes cunningly" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 110), perhaps indicating his arousal and foreshadowing aggressive intentions. He proceeds to inquire if the child is hers—a question which implies that the girl is at least of a pubescent age—and about the child's biological father. In response, she tells him to stop and threatens to "tell Daddy on [him]" (111). Ballard dismisses her concerns, claiming he was merely teasing, and adds: "I guess you too young to know when a man's teasin ye" (111). Whether he is in fact teasing her or not—though it is evident to the reader that he is not—the fact remains that "staring, joking, or even looking may constitute psychological violence or intimidation" (T. Edwards 45), especially so, I would argue, when directed at underage individuals. In response to Ballard's comment, the girl asserts, "You ain't even a man. You're just a crazy thing," to which Ballard retorts, "I might be more than you think" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 111). In this instance, the girl bluntly informs

Ballard that he does not fit her conception of a man, while Ballard's response indicates that his perceived masculinity is beyond her comprehension. Ultimately, she falls victim to his homicidal impulses. Ballard's language grows bolder and more aggressive; he demands to see her breasts, but she refuses and orders him to leave. Although Ballard complies, he departs the house to retrieve the rifle he left outside, returning to observe her from a window, where "[h]e could see the back of her head above the sofa. He watched her for a while and then he raised the rifle and cocked it and laid the sights on her head. He had just done this when suddenly she rose from the sofa and turned facing the window. Ballard fired" (112). Once more, Ballard derives scopophilic pleasure from observing female characters whilst in contact with his rifle. This pleasure can be understood in relation to a sense of power, considering that "it isn't just the gaze that's important. It's also the social and power relations that the gazer and the gazed at exist within" (Jackson 49). At this point in the novel, Ballard's masculinity, manifested through his criminal expressions of sexuality, has evolved into a form of sadism, "present in the manner of death" (Pettigrew 476), probably derived from a "desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object" (Freud 23), thus resulting in "sexual interest in the physical or psychological suffering of another individual" (American Psychiatric Association 696). Concerning Ballard's criminal sexual behavior, akin to real cases studied by experts, Ballard "reveals his insecurity in his sex role identity by phenomena such as delinquency, violence, and hostility toward women" (Pleck 4). However, there is more to consider. Ballard exhibits pronounced fetishistic tendencies, and, furthermore, unsatisfied with his actions, he also engages in acts of necrophilia.

In order to analyze Ballard's necrophilia, I will solely explore his actions with the first female character he uses in this manner. However, it is worth noting that there are additional female characters in the novel who are murdered by Ballard and whose corpses are exploited

for sexual acts, although in later instances, McCarthy does not provide the same detailed description as offered in the scene analyzed below.

At the beginning of the novel's second chapter, Ballard is returning home from hunting squirrels. As he walks, he comes across a parked car with the engine running and cannot see into the interior. Approaching the vehicle, he peers through the window and notices that the "front seat was empty but in the back were two people half naked sprawled together. A bare thigh. An arm upflung. A hairy pair of buttocks. Ballard had kept on walking. Then he stopped. A pair of eyes staring with lidless fixity" (McCarthy, *Child of God* 82). Although Ballard initially walks away from the vehicle, he eventually returns and peers into the interior, where he notices that "[o]ut of the disarray of clothes and the contorted limbs another's eyes watched sightlessly from a bland white face. It was a young girl" (82). Ballard taps on the glass of the car window with his fingers to see if either of the two occupants reacts in any way, but they do not. Eventually, he "opened the car door, his rifle at the ready" (82). Once again, as observed, McCarthy uses the rifle/phallus motif to indicate Ballard's sexual arousal. The text implies that the young couple discovered by Ballard died accidentally from inhaling the car's exhaust. When Ballard moves the body of the male character away from his partner, he—in another instance of scopophilia—studies the female character's corpse and "could see one of the girl's breasts. Her blouse was open and her brassiere was pushed up around her neck. Ballard stared for a long time. Finally he reached across the dead man's back and touched the breast. It was soft and cool. He stroked the full brown nipple with the ball of his thumb" (83). Scopophilic acts, as evidenced in the scene, are instrumental to the criminal acts constituting Ballard's sexuality. During his inspection of the female corpse, he does not rush, taking his time to observe the deceased body, seemingly unconcerned with the possibility of being discovered in the company of the car's two corpses. McCarthy emphasizes that Ballard "was still holding the rifle" (83) when he decides to pull the male body aside, separating the corpses. Once he does

so, “he could see the girl better now. He reached and stroked her other breast. He did this for a while” (83). Even though the girl is dead and cannot, as a result, suffer during his assault, Ballard is nonetheless enacting what appears to be a distortion of behaviors that can be associated with the preparation for consensual sex acts. Dragging the deceased man’s remains away from the girl, Ballard leaves the car to inspect his surroundings, making certain that there is nobody around. Still holding his rifle, he, returning to the car, “picked the girl’s panties up from the floor and sniffed at them and put them in his pocket” (84). Moreover, the passage presents another instance of Ballard’s fetishistic disorder manifested during the perpetration of violent acts. Scholarly literature has asserted that fetishistic disorder is a perversion predominantly observed in males (Chazaud 77; Eusei and Delcea 67; Shydelko et al. 35), wherein the sexual object fulfils a “fetishistic condition—such as the possession of some particular hair-colouring or clothing” (Freud 19). Ballard’s behavior aligns with real-life cases, wherein offenders charged with necrophilic tendencies “kept souvenirs, such as their victims’ underwear or jewelry” (Stein et al. 445). In the case of Ballard, his actions correspond to what is termed in scholarly literature as “situational perversions, where sexual satisfaction of a deviant nature can be obtained without an object of admiration or attraction, but through objects, situations, etc.” (Shydelko et al. 37).<sup>132</sup> In Ballard’s case, it is the deceased girl’s undergarments that come to represent the fetishized object. Moreover, he, in despoiling the corpse, also takes “lipstick and rouge” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 86).

Ballard seems to suffer from two types of fetishistic disorder described by James Geer and colleagues:

Fetishism is characterized by intense preoccupation with certain objects as additional means of sexual arousal or as substitutes for normal sexual activity.

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<sup>132</sup> It must be noted that situational perversions encompass paraphilic disorders such as transvestic, fetishistic, and voyeuristic disorders—disorders exhibited by Ballard—among others (Shydelko et al. 37).

Usually fetishism has been divided into two major types. The first type of fetish involves a limited portion of the body, such as the breasts, buttocks, feet, or hair; this preoccupation is sometimes called partialism. The second type of fetish is characterized by an obsession for an inanimate object, usually some article of clothing such as shoes, boots, lingerie, gloves, or clothing made of a particular material such as rubber, leather, or fur. (386)

The two-corpse car scene in *Child of God* continues as Ballard then takes a last look, now from the interior of the car, and listens to make sure no one is coming:

Kneeling there between the girl's legs he undid his buckle and lowered his trousers.

A crazed gymnast laboring over a cold corpse. He poured into that waxen ear everything he'd ever thought of saying to a woman. Who could say she did not hear him? When he'd finished he raised up and looked out again. The windows were fogged. He took the hem of the girl's skirt with which to wipe himself. (McCarthy 84)

The reader is not informed of what Ballard says to the deceased girl. However, we can assume that it is, consistent with his previous behavior, unpleasant—a conclusion supported by the content of the statement later made by him to the corpse. It has been argued that from this scene onwards, Ballard's "descent into deviance escalates dramatically" (Franks 76), an escalation that transitions, as observed from the passage, from voyeuristic and fetishistic disorders to necrophilia.

As stated, McCarthy does not explain why Ballard only enjoys sex with dead women. No doubt, Ballard's necrophilia is closely linked to his insecurities regarding sex and women. He is clumsy in his conversations with the novel's female characters and incompetent in courtship. In the few instances where he attempts conversation with a female character, he is

either rejected, struck, or accused of not being man enough. Granted, his violent behavior can also be interpreted as revenge against women, justified in Ballard's mind by the way they have treated him. Perhaps Ballard believes he is punishing women for his mother's abandonment, although there is no explicit reference to this belief in the text of the novel. Nevertheless, scholars such as Dudley have pointed in this direction, explaining that Ballard's necrophilia stems from "dark impulses embedded in human consciousness and unleashed in response to personal loss and a sense of uncontrollable and inevitable change" ("Race and Cultural Difference" 213). Undeniably, "men's violence against women, including sexual violence, [is] a form of men's power over women in either asserting or maintaining dominance" (T. Edwards 56). Finally, when analyzing the above passage, Dudley concludes that Ballard's "accidental encounter with [the girl's] dead body unleashes his dark and murderous urges" ("McCarthy's Heroes" 180). Henceforth, Ballard unleashes an ill sense of dominance, primarily toward women.

Ballard is only able to derive a sense of power over women in his interactions with female characters who can no longer defend themselves because they are dead. Nevertheless, Ballard displays what can be interpreted as a contorted notion of "tenderness" toward some of the deceased female characters with whom he commits sex acts. An example of the same is the car's despoiled female corpse—although the ostensible "tenderness" extended to the corpse itself is solely motivated by Ballard's need to satisfy his specific paraphilic disorder.

After completing the sex act perpetrated on the body of the girl in the car, Ballard decides to transport her to his home and positions the body on a mattress next to his fireplace. He collects wood to light a fire, seemingly hoping to create a romantic atmosphere despite the grisly nature of the scene he is setting. He then directs his attention to the remains of the female character:

He took off all her clothes and looked at her, inspecting her body carefully, as if he would see how she were made. He went outside and looked in through the window at her lying naked before the fire. When he came back in he unbuckled his trousers and stepped out of them and laid next to her. He pulled the blanket over them. (McCarthy, *Child of God* 87)

In this passage, Ballard's interaction with the denuded corpse, within the context of his psychopathic imaginings, appears "tender." Mimicking the actions of a patient lover, Ballard takes his time exploring the character's corpse. He then covers himself and his victim with a blanket, perhaps out of concern for the corpse being cold. Moreover, to illustrate Ballard's problematic displays of apparent tenderness in his interaction with the corpse, it is noteworthy that he secures the body in his attic before going shopping to purchase new clothes, specifically a dress and undergarments. Upon his return home, Ballard has supper, retrieves the body from the attic, and positions it close to the fireplace to warm the already stiff, cold remains. The narration states:

It was past midnight before she was limber enough to undress. She lay there naked on the mattress with her shallow breasts pooled in the light like wax flowers. Ballard began to dress her in her new clothes.

He sat and brushed her hair with the dimestore brush he'd bought. He undid the top of the lipstick and screwed it out and began to paint her lips.

He would arrange her in different positions and go out and peer in the window at her. After a while he just sat holding her, his hands feeling her body under the new clothes. He undressed her very slowly, talking to her. Then he pulled off his trousers and lay next to her. He spread her loose thighs. You been wantin it, he told her. (McCarthy, *Child of God* 97–98)

As can be clearly observed in this passage, Ballard hopes to decorate the corpse—the purchased dress, lipstick, and hairbrush all confirm this. One may wonder why Ballard goes through so much preparation and trouble with the girl’s body. Experts have explained that “the necrophile may not have known the corpse as a living person, but it can then become, in death, the person that he wants it to be. The corpse can be his ‘mate,’ his un-rejecting and intimate partner who he can incorporate and invite into his private fantasy life” (Pettigrew 476). In the case of Ballard, the girl’s corpse can act as a partner. Moreover, Ballard’s behavior concurs with that of offenders accused of necrophilia, who, in some cases, kill and then employ their victims’ corpses for sexual gratification, acts performed “immediately after death up to several days later” (475). Moreover, Pettigrew remarks that sexual gratification, similar to the one Ballard experiences through the violation of the girl’s body, is not solely reserved for ordinary sexual activities such as penetration.<sup>133</sup> Pettigrew, illustrating the real case of one of these offenders, explains:

gratification also came from washing, bathing, dressing and undressing the bodies of his victims, and using them in role play activities. All victims were bathed and dressed as a ritual and the corpses were treated, in that respect, with care and affection. For days after death, he would talk ‘with them,’ watch television with them and, in such respects, treat them as sentient. (475)

McCarthy’s portrayal of Ballard as a necrophile, as can be seen, is not far removed from the behaviors of real-life perpetrators and their paraphilic disorders.

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<sup>133</sup> Contemporary studies on necrophilia illustrate that some of Ballard’s actions resemble behaviors exhibited by necrophiles. For instance: “Specific acts and fantasies of necrophiles evolved from a sexual arousal caused by contact with corpses, in activities such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, biting, fondling or suckling of the breasts, hugging or sleeping with the bodies, manipulation of the corpse’s genitals, decapitation, mutilation of only the sexual organs, drinking the corpse’s blood (vampirism), washing the body, preserving the body or body parts, and insertion of foreign objects into the orifices, or sometimes, just masturbation fantasies involving dead bodies, as well as other less ‘dainty acts’” (Vasudevan et al. 13).

When the corpse has, to Ballard's mind, been made ready, he again takes his time in the satisfaction of his voyeuristic disorder tendencies. In contrast with the apparent tenderness he has so far displayed, what Ballard says to the corpse—"You been wantin it"—is both shocking and in keeping with his aggressive attitude toward women. The fact is that "women do not ask for it, want it or lead men into it in any way" (T. Edwards 56); therefore, Ballard's comment serves as another violation of the girl's integrity, even if she is dead. Nevertheless, the comment seems appropriate in the context of Ballard's criminal expressions of masculinity and does not deviate from the abnormal norms of his behavior or "the sexuality of most male human beings [which] contains an element of *aggressiveness*—a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing" (Freud 23–24). Furthermore, since the deceased female character did not (as she could not and would not) consent to the sexualized behaviors he perpetrates, Ballard's actions can be classified as rape. Building on the aforementioned explorations on rape in this chapter, Badinter argues that rape "implies a hatred of the other" (140). Moreover, drawing her conclusions from other experts' opinions, Badinter states that "rape is first of all the consequence of a failure of male identification and an excessive repression of one's femininity" (140). According to this statement, Ballard's actions could be classified as a reaction to his own repressed femininity. This is especially interesting, as the notion of repressed femininity aligns with another paraphilic disorder practiced by Ballard: transvestic disorder.

Jacques Chazaud<sup>134</sup> has argued that transvestic disorder—dressing in clothing associated with the opposite sex—can evoke theatricality and is "a 'disguised' representation

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<sup>134</sup> Chazaud's assertions concerning male and female sexuality are problematic in content and narrow in scope. Subsequent advances in the field have contradicted many of Chazaud's arguments since the publication of the referenced work. Despite these shortcomings, I have opted to include some of Chazaud's "findings" in my analysis. While acknowledging the problematic nature of his work, it is worth noting that Chazaud's work was published during the same decade in which McCarthy published *Child of God*. This suggests not the validity of Chazaud's arguments but rather the significance of his inaccuracies in reflecting the sexual politics prevalent

of the duality of the sexes, negated and suggested at the same time in the farce” (87; my trans.).<sup>135</sup> Building on Chazaud’s assertion, Kimmel has argued that “[t]ransvestites and cross-dressers reveal the artifice of gender. Gender is a performance” (*The Gendered Society* 119). It is important to note that Kimmel is not the first to make the connection between gender and performance. Arguably, the most famous example of this connection is attributed to Judith Butler. In their now canonical text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler states: “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (140). Given that Judith Butler’s claim was not published until the early 1990s, McCarthy, two decades earlier with *Child of God*, may have hinted at a similar conception of gender, more particularly, gender trouble, where the binary view of sex, gender, and sexuality is disrupted.<sup>136</sup> Sullivan points out that McCarthy “depicted gender trouble with *Child of God*’s Lester Ballard, whose adoption of feminine styles is also associated with dead women, but Lester displays the feminine superficially by cross-dressing in his female victims’ clothing and hair” (“Boys Will Be Boys” 170).

The narrative introduces Ballard’s transvestic disorder in the following way: “He’d long been wearing the underclothes of his female victims but now he took to appearing in their

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during the period in which McCarthy crafted the character of Lester Ballard. The fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) specifies that transvestic disorder “applies to individuals whose cross-dressing or thoughts of cross-dressing are always or often accompanied by sexual excitement (Criterion A) and who are emotionally distressed by this pattern or feel it impairs social or interpersonal functioning (Criterion B)” (American Psychiatric Association 703). Additionally, the DSM-5 notes that cross-dressing “may involve only one or two articles of clothing (e.g., for men, it may pertain only to women’s undergarments), or it may involve dressing completely in the inner and outer garments of the other sex and (in men) may include the use of women’s wigs and make-up” (703). This revised definition of transvestic disorder corresponds to McCarthy’s depiction of Ballard’s character.

<sup>135</sup> “El transvestismo evoca una práctica teatral. (...) el transvestismo supone una burla o un engaño: representación ‘disfrazada’ de la dualidad de sexos, negada y sugerida al mismo tiempo en la farsa”.

<sup>136</sup> It is noteworthy that Sullivan identifies another instance of gender trouble in McCarthy’s *Border Trilogy*. Sullivan explains: “While the feminine itself may be omnipresent, the ‘gender trouble’ in the *Border Trilogy* is that biological males—‘boys’—ultimately perform both gender roles to create a closed system of desire that effectively makes women unnecessary” (“Boys Will Be Boys” 170).

outwear as well. A gothic doll in illfit clothes, its carmine mouth floating detached and bright in the white landscape” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 132). Furthermore, Ballard feels comfortable wearing women’s clothing; this is the attire he chooses during his one attempt to murder a male character. Granted, Ballard has murdered men before, but in those cases, he did so because said characters were companions of female characters, Ballard’s true targets. Therefore, Ballard’s aforementioned use of transvestic disorder is the only case in which he attempts to kill a man who is neither accompanied by a female character nor preventing Ballard’s criminal access to a female character. McCarthy notes that the male character whom Ballard attempts to murder is John Greer, the man who bought Ballard’s home during the novel’s opening eviction scene. Greer is, at the time of the attempted murder, digging a hole in the ground to be used as a septic tank. It is while he is digging that Ballard “in frightwig and skirts stepped from behind the pumphouse and raised the rifle and cocked the hammer silently, holding back the trigger and easing it into the notch as hunters do” (163). Ballard fails to kill Greer; instead, the two confront each other, and Ballard ends up losing one of his arms in the struggle. Ballard’s aggressive behavior when dressed in female clothing aligns with beliefs regarding transvestic disorder during the 1970s: “Transvestites are hyperaggressive and hypercompetitive, and engage in endless struggles for power with other men” (Person and Ovesey 307). Greer, who is acquainted with Ballard, does not immediately identify his attacker due to Ballard’s altered appearance. We are told that, even though Greer is seriously wounded, “he wobbled from the doorway with the shotgun and down the steps to examine this thing he’d shot. At the foot of the steps he picked up what appeared to be a wig and saw that it was fashioned whole from a dried human scalp” (McCarthy, *Child of God* 164). During the attempted murder, Ballard not only wears female clothing, likely taken from his female victims, but also adorns himself with body parts removed from said victims.

At the time McCarthy published *Child of God*, the paraphilic disorder of male transvestic disorder was associated with the absence of a mother or maternal figure. In research conducted on transvestic disorder, scholars “have viewed the compulsion to cross-dress primarily as an attempt to undo separation, thus allaying separation anxiety” (Person and Ovesey 313). This anxiety surrounding separation may also extend to include castration anxiety. It has been pointed out that

[c]utting-edge, radical, original, contemporary thinkers claim that we are hardwired to organize experience along the lines of gender-inflected universal fantasies like primal scene, castration anxiety, and the Oedipus complex<sup>137</sup>—fantasies that to the cultural or clinical observer are clearly culturally and individually specific, perhaps widespread but clearly not universal. (Chodorow 100)

The concept of castration anxiety originates from Freud, whose seminal findings “wedded experiences of intense anxiety to the reality threat or the fantasy of cut genitals” and “claimed it as a universal mental phenomenon encountered in both males and females” (Balsam 12). In actuality, Rosemary Balsam maintains that “the statement about Freud’s originality and

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<sup>137</sup> For more information on the Oedipus complex, also known as the Oedipal crisis, see Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” (1975). In this work, Rubin provides an explanation of the Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis in relation to the term and the mother. Furthermore, Kimmel explains that the “resolution of the Oedipal crisis is vital—the boy learns to desire sex with women and to identify as a man. This is crucial in Freudian theory: *The boy achieves gender identity and sexual orientation at the same moment in time*. During the Oedipal stage, the boy desires sexual union with his mother, but he also realizes that he is in competition with his father for her affections. With his sexual desire for his mother thwarted by his father, the little boy sexualizes his fear of the father, believing that if he were to compete sexually with his father, his father would castrate him. The boy’s ego resolves this state of terror of castration by transferring the boy’s identification from mother to father, so that, symbolically, he can have sexual access to his mother. Thus the boy must break the identification with his mother, repudiate her, and identify with his father. This is a great shock—the mother has been the source of warmth and love and is the object of his desire; the father has been a more distant source of authoritarian power and is the source of the boy’s terror. But by identifying with the father the little boy ceases being “feminine” (identified with the mother) and becomes masculine, as he simultaneously becomes heterosexual, symbolically capable of sexual relations with mother-like substitutes” (*The Gendered Society* 79). In Ballard’s case, with both parents absent from his life, it is uncertain to what extent the Oedipal crisis unfolds. However, *Child of God* implies that Ballard never experienced his mother as a source of warmth and love, as Kimmel explains, presumably due to her absence. Consequently, Ballard may have rejected his mother and, by extension, women in general.

creativity in thinking about the role of the body in the formation of the psyche still stands” (12). Moreover, Balsam elucidates that the “notion of castration anxiety in males was for Freud, and it still is, an impression developed about a natural desire on a child’s behalf to defend his healthy body. The boy is terrified and enraged at the idea of having his penis or his testicles attacked” (13). It has also been explained that

[i]n its role as organizer of mental life, the castration complex sometimes fails, either because it has not been sufficiently developed to be effective, or because it is apparently overwhelmed. In such cases the subject finds himself grappling directly with instinctual disintegration and exposed to the ravages of the destructive instincts. In psychotic functioning, castration anxiety, so far from playing a structuring role, itself constitutes a terror operating in the same mode as archaic fears of dismemberment. (Cournut)

As previously mentioned, *Child of God* refrains from providing any explicit insight into Ballard’s psyche that would definitively guide an analysis of the character in a singular direction. However, Ballard’s interactions with female characters, as well as his assault on Greer, could be interpreted not solely as manifestations of his paraphilic disorders, but also as repercussions of traumas such as his father’s suicide, his mother’s abandonment, and his expulsion from his home and community. These diverse circumstances may have also contributed to Ballard experiencing annihilation anxiety, which encompasses, among others, “fears of being overwhelmed, destroyed, [and] abandoned” (Hurvich). As discussed in this chapter, these fears resonate with those experienced by Ballard.

However, Ballard’s attempt to murder another man whilst dressed in female attire proves unsuccessful, even if he does display hunting skills reminiscent of those examined in relation to characters like Llewelyn Moss or Anton Chigurh in the preceding chapter of this dissertation. I contend that McCarthy, given the outcome of Ballard’s attempted murder,

condemns the protagonist's departure from traditional masculinity, specifically Ballard's adoption of transvestic disorder and necrophilia. In other words, Ballard fails both as a "masculine" hunter and as a criminal due to his utilization of female clothing. Despite the haphazard nature of his previous crimes, Ballard manages to evade capture following his serial killing of women. However, his apparent immunity to detection crumbles when he tries to murder a male character while dressed as a woman. By blending what, in McCarthy's narrative world, are considered traditional masculine and feminine attires, Ballard sustains injuries and is swiftly apprehended following his assault on Greer. Upon recovering from his wounds, Ballard leads the police to his hideout, a network of "caves beneath the hills and farmland of Appalachia" (Monk 112), where the remains of several female victims are discovered. It is noteworthy that after being evicted from his home and losing subsequent refuges, Ballard establishes a dwelling in a cave where he arranges the predominantly female corpses. West suggests that Ballard's "cave becomes the ultimate sign of his alienation from his fellow humans" (137). While I concur with West, it is important to recognize that Ballard's cave dwelling represents a return to nature, perhaps even a search for refuge and safety. Ergo, Ballard's choice to conceal the bodies of his female victims in a cavernous, natural environment once again underscores the connection between nature and the feminine within the text. Regarding Ballard's cave, nature, and the feminine, Cooper asserts that "the association of caves with the maternal womb is made explicit, and what is birthed from these caves is pure horror" ("McCarthy, Tennessee" 47). Cooper's connection between the cave and a maternal womb, symbolizing Ballard's mother, can be interpreted metaphorically as Ballard's attempt to reunite with his absent mother by bringing the bodies of his female victims to the symbolic space. This comparison between the maternal womb and the cave serves as the location where Ballard presents to his mother a tangible representation (the corpses of his female victims) of the harm inflicted upon him through her abandonment, leaving him in a society that never

embraced him. Ballard's retaliation against his mother is enacted through the murder of women and the subsequent relocation of their bodies to the cave.

In concluding the analysis of Lester Ballard, it is necessary to examine the narration following his admission to a state hospital, where he ultimately succumbs to pneumonia. The narrative reveals that Ballard's body

was shipped to the state medical school at Memphis. There in a basement room he was preserved with formalin and wheeled forth to take his place with other deceased persons newly arrived. He was laid out on a slab and flayed, eviscerated, dissected. His head was sawed open and the brains removed. His muscles were stripped from his bones. His heart was taken out. His entrails were hauled forth and delineated and the four young students who bent over him like those haruspices of old perhaps saw monsters worse to come in their configurations. At the end of three months when the class was closed Ballard was scraped from the table into a plastic bag and taken with others of his kind to a cemetery outside the city and there interred. A minister from the school read a simple service. (McCarthy, *Child of God* 183–84)

Franks has stated that the novel's "disquieting ending denies readers a full sense of closure and situates Ballard in an oddly sympathetic role of victimizer and victimized" (77). In light of McCarthy's apparent punishment of Ballard's masculinity and its departure from traditional sexual norms—namely, his engagement in necrophilia as well as in transvestic and voyeuristic disorders—it is crucial to consider the grisly specificity with which McCarthy details the fate of Ballard's dismembered body. Conversely, McCarthy provides comparatively scant details concerning the remains of the kid in *Blood Meridian* and Llewelyn Moss in *No Country for Old Men* following their murders. This intentional dearth of detail regarding the bodies of the kid and Moss may reflect McCarthy's subdued narrative respect toward characters who, within

the gender constructs established by these novels, adhere to the prescribed norms governing masculine conduct. In contrast, Ballard subverts the novel's strictures regarding sexuality through practices that include both necrophilia and behaviors classified as non-normative within the narrow sexual politics of the text's world. In essence, I argue that Ballard's actions are considered improper in relation to the traditional sexual roles and practices ascribed to male characters by McCarthy's narrative. Considering that in society in general, "violating sex roles leads to social condemnation" (Pleck 9), in the case of *Child of God*, said violation also leads to a vivid and crude depiction of the dissection and disposal of Ballard's corpse.

### 3.2. JUDGE HOLDEN: AN ANALYSIS OF PEDOPHILIC DISORDER

The last male character whose masculinity will be examined here in relation to paraphilic disorders is judge Holden. Considering that certain aspects of how McCarthy constructs the judge's masculinity were explored in the second chapter of this dissertation, this chapter will concentrate on analyzing Holden's paraphilic disorder, namely, pedophilic disorder. Therefore, the analysis presented in this chapter will be more concise than the examination conducted in the previous chapter, as the reader is already acquainted with judge Holden and many of his actions. This section will specifically focus on analyzing Holden's pedophilic sexual tendencies as well as an examination of his *paiderastia* in relation to the character of the kid.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I referenced Yoojin Grace Kim's characterization of Holden as "a priest of war" (171). While that chapter explored Holden's understanding and formation of masculinity in the context of war, this chapter aims to spotlight Holden as a priest-like figure. This association holds the potential for linking some of Holden's behaviors to pedophilic disorder, drawing parallels with cases of pedophilic disorder among Catholic priests. Additionally, in the previous chapter, I analyzed Holden's accusation against

Reverend Green, a preacher, for sexually abusing an eleven-year-old girl. It is ironic that Holden would level such accusation against Reverend Green, considering he himself engages in similar paraphiliac and criminal behavior.<sup>138</sup> As readers may recall, Reverend Green attempts to defend himself from Holden's hideous accusation by branding the judge as the devil incarnate. Scholars have noted how pedophile priests were often depicted in popular cartoons—appearing in newspapers, for instance—during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as monstrous figures, often depicted as enormous and with devilish features.<sup>139</sup> Many of McCarthy's descriptions of the judge in *Blood Meridian* (as explored in the second chapter) resemble this monstrous depiction of the pedophile priest.<sup>140</sup> Building on my analysis of Holden and Reverend Green's interaction, I previously posited that McCarthy presents Holden as an agent of chaos, a man who relishes in others' suffering, thus showing sadistic tendencies. This interpretation can be further expanded upon. Given Holden's belief that God is war and his role as a preacher of war, his attempt to remove a servant of God from his post seems logical and in accordance with his violent masculinity. Holden tarnishes Reverend Green's reputation by associating him with a sin his congregation would find unforgivable: the abuse and rape of a minor. Holden's conduct aligns with historical accounts of pedophile priests, leveraging his position—standing in front of the congregation, together with his choice of words—to organize a campaign which, as historians explain has happened in real cases, “aims to stir up public

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<sup>138</sup> It is later disclosed by Holden that his accusation was a fabrication and that he had never seen nor heard of the reverend before their confrontation.

<sup>139</sup> For further insight into the portrayal of the pedophile priest, see Vázquez García's article “El nacimiento del cura pederasta en la España de la Restauración: Género, sexualidad, clase, edad y nacionalidad (1880–1912)” (2020). Vázquez García's explanation elucidates how the pedophile priest was depicted, as seen in newspaper articles. While Vázquez García's research primarily centers on Spain before the Civil War, comparable cartoon illustrations have also surfaced in US media, such as David Horsey's opinion piece titled “Sex Abuse Scandal Is a Blemish on the Powerful Catholic Clergy” (2013).

<sup>140</sup> In the context of pedophilic disorder during the period when McCarthy was developing various drafts of *Blood Meridian*, Julie Willett has noted the following: “By the late 1970s, homosexuality and pedophilia became a focal point for the hate sermons and political backlash that so tragically inspired anti-gay legislation and attitudes sweeping the nation” (283). McCarthy may have decided to incorporate his own critique of those convoluted times into the character of judge Holden, as Holden's pedophilic disorder is both heterosexual and homosexual.

indignation against the corruptors of children's innocence" (Vázquez García 111; my trans.).<sup>141</sup> This manipulation of the religious congregation's emotions against Reverend Green contrasts with the lack of similar public condemnation directed toward Holden himself throughout *Blood Meridian*, despite his actions leading some men to their breaking points, such as in the case of the murder and scalping of the Apache child.

Throughout *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy provides readers with instances in relation to the judge's sexual practices. In a conversation between Tobin and the kid regarding the judge, the former explains: "When we found him him and the Delaware was settin in the creek stark naked and they appeared at first to be drunk but on what none could surmise" (134). Tobin's explanation serves to allude to the nature of Holden's sexual appetites. Moreover, in chapter XII, following a confrontation with Apache men, the company—i.e., Glanton's Gang—is riding south and "[t]he judge rode at the head of the column bearing on the saddle before him a strange dark child covered with ash" (167). This passage suggests what Tobin initially hinted at: "the judge habitually practices child abuse" (Guillemin 246). One cannot, for example, overlook the criminality of the judge's interaction with the aforementioned "strange dark child"—an interaction explored in this dissertation's second chapter. The judge shows no regard for the life of the captured child, and once done with him, the child is murdered. Given that the judge does not intend to protect the child he murders, it can be inferred that his interest in children is of a different sort, acquiring children so as to sexually abuse them.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> "una campaña específica dirigida a suscitar la indignación pública contra los corruptores de la inocencia infantil".

<sup>142</sup> *Blood Meridian* is not the only novel in which McCarthy explores pedophilic disorder. *The Road* also includes a brief instance of it. In one scene, the man and the boy are hiding, observing a group of people passing by on the road. The narration describes: "They passed two hundred feet away, the ground shuddering lightly. Tramping. Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. All passed on" (92). McCarthy's use of the term "catamites" suggests that these boys are the objects of sexual exploitation by their captors. The reader may recall that in *The Road*, the boy's mother fears that she and her son will get caught, raped, and then killed.

Scholarly definitions of pedophilic disorder often share similarities with slight variations and connotations. Pedophilic disorder has been defined as a contact of a sexual nature between “an adult and a child who are *not* legal or blood relatives” (Geer et al. 411). However, this definition seems limited, as instances of pedophilic disorder do occur between legal and blood relatives. Another definition of pedophilic disorder is: “A person has pedophilia if and only if he has relatively frequent and intense pedophilic desires” (Kershner 1), although Kershner does not specify what “frequent” and “intense” mean. In scholarly work on pedophilic disorder, there appears to be a consensus affirming that the vast majority of individuals who engage in pedophilic disorder acts are males (Geer et al. 411; Kershner 1; Reaves 1). Moreover, it has been argued that “if the child is female, we speak of *heterosexual pedophilia*, and if the child is male, we speak of *homosexual pedophilia*. These terms apply only to the sex of the child” (Geer et al. 411), but there are also instances in clinical analysis of individuals sexually attracted to both males and females (American Psychiatric Association 698). The judge engages in both types of pedophilic disorder. Moreover, he aligns with further definitions of those who engage in pedophilic disorder activities, as a pedophile “needs to have acted on these sexual urges” (Heron et al. 1022) and “has frequent and intense desires to have sex with individuals who are or appear to be in a pre-pubescent stage” (Kershner 2). This type of pedophilic disorder is known as the “Exclusive Type” (American Psychiatric Association 697). Although McCarthy delves into judge Holden’s sexual desires toward pre-pubescent males and females, the reader never learns what Holden’s thoughts are regarding his pedophilic disorder. It is important to note that Holden also aligns with the type of pedophilic disorder known as “Nonexclusive Type,” that is, men who are also “attracted to adults” (697), as his final interaction with the kid shows—a scene later explored.

*Blood Meridian* includes several instances of Holden’s pedophilic disorder crimes. One of the first can be found in chapter IX. It is nighttime and the narration states that the judge has

been reported “naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelations of lightning, striding the perimeter up there” (McCarthy 124). The next morning, a boy is found: “He was lying face down naked in one of the cubicles. Scattered about on the clay were great numbers of old bones. As if he like others before him had stumbled upon a place where something inimical lived” (125). Indeed, something inimical does inhabit the premises: judge Holden. Moreover, the narration implies that this boy is not Holden’s first victim, as indicated by the numerous bones left behind, which can be seen as evidence of Holden’s predatory acts. Another example of Holden’s crimes includes “a girl flung over a wall with superhuman strength after her violation” (Guillemin 246).

In Chapter XIX, the narration finally provides the reader with clear confirmation of the judge’s pedophilic disorder. During an attack on the company in which gang leader John Joel Glanton is killed, men “entered the judge’s quarters [and] they found the idiot and a girl of perhaps twelve years cowering naked in the floor. Behind them also naked stood the judge” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 286). After the judge kills the intruders, he escapes with “[t]he idiot, who reached just to his waist, stuck close to his side, and together they entered the wood at the base of the hill and disappeared from sight” (287). It is noteworthy that McCarthy’s narration provides limited details regarding the identity of “the idiot.” However, since the narration in the above quote clearly explains that the other minor in the room is a “girl,” the reader can infer that the lack of explicit reference to the “the idiot’s” sex serves to identify him as a male. Also, his given title conveys the idea that he suffers from some form of mental impairment, which Holden likely exploits. Additionally, given that “the idiot” only reaches Holden’s waist in height, it suggests “the idiot” is a boy, although the narration never explicitly confirms this. While McCarthy’s narrative does not explicitly describe what the judge does to the girl and “the idiot,” it is reasonable to assume that some form of abuse occurs. The judge

exhibits behavior consistent with a class of pedophilic disorder behavior known as the “*fixated type*,” as described by Geer and colleagues:

Since adolescence, these men have been exclusively interested in children as sex objects. They cannot identify with an adult sexual role, and have never been able to establish mature sexual relationships with peers during their adolescent, young adult, or adult years. Their sexual behavior is primarily directed at fondling, exposure, and masturbation rather than intercourse. (414)<sup>143</sup>

In the narrative in *Blood Meridian*, Holden’s actions with his sexual victims are never explicitly detailed, leaving it ambiguous regarding whether he prefers masturbation over intercourse. However, an instance of fondling can be inferred before the killing of the Apache child, as the judge is seen “dandling” the child prior to the killing (McCarthy 170). Furthermore, among the sexual behaviors identified by Geer and colleagues, the most prevalent in Holden’s acts is the exposure of his body, as explored in the second chapter. With the frequent exposure of his body, it can be understood that Holden engages in another type of paraphilic disorder, namely exhibitionistic disorder, which involves individuals “exposing their genitals to unsuspecting persons” (American Psychiatric Association 689). As stated, Holden does not shy away from exhibiting his body, as evidenced in scenes such as the public bath or the conclusion of the novel, where he dances naked at the bar after killing the kid.

Some readers of *Blood Meridian* may interpret judge Holden’s masculinity and sexuality as indicative of a form of insanity. As a matter of fact, Brown, a member of Glanton’s Gang, draws attention to the judge’s alleged insanity, stating: “You’re crazy Holden. Crazy at last” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 261). Despite the clear moral repugnance of many of the acts attributed to the judge, whether they are sexual in nature or not, he himself would likely

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<sup>143</sup> For more information about this type of pedophilic disorder behavior, see explanations given by Cohen and colleagues (1969); J. H. Fitch (1962); and Groth and Birnbaum (1979).

disagree, given his stated code of morals. Holden affirms that moral views “can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test” (261). Moreover, for the judge:

Man’s vanity may well approach the infinite in capacity but his knowledge remains imperfect and however much he comes to value his judgements ultimately he must submit them before a higher court. Here there can be no special pleading. Here are considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right rendered void and without warrant and here are the views of the litigants despised. (261)

According to judge Holden’s explanation, actions within the world of the novel cannot be unequivocally deemed morally correct or incorrect by the reader. This stems from the judge’s assertion that the characters within the narrative, including the reader I may add, lack the authority to discern right from wrong comprehensively. According to Holden, human actors are incapable of forming a complete moral perspective because they do not possess the overarching ethical framework required to understand the worlds in which they operate. Instead, Holden contends that ethical judgments made by humans are insufficient, as we (the novel’s characters as well as the reader) will ultimately be subject to judgment by a higher authority—God. In this heavenly court, the social norms guiding human behavior hold no sway. I posit that judge Holden utilizes this ethical explanation to justify and validate his own actions, including acts of pedophilic disorder and serial murder. As argued in the second chapter of this dissertation, Holden views himself as a suzerain, wielding authority that countermands the moral judgment of others, including, of course, those of the reader. This positioning allows Holden to dismiss external ethical assessments and assert his own moral autonomy.

If we accept the premise that through “our sexualities we are expected to find ourselves and our place in the world” (Weeks 3), then a notable departure from this norm is evident in

the character of the judge. Despite the ethical repugnance of the world he inhabits, the judge is elevated above his male counterparts and allowed to endure. Another interpretation of McCarthy's portrayal of the judge is that despite his criminal sexuality, it is integral to his world, thereby forcing society to accommodate him either by joining him—as the members of Glanton's Gang do—or by succumbing to him. Regardless of the interpretation, McCarthy unequivocally associates masculine sexuality with violence. He aligns with Freud's assertion that the "sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness*—a desire to subjugate" (23). McCarthy's characters, including Culla Holme, Lester Ballard, judge Holden, and Malkina, exhibit the aggressive behavior and/or desire for dominance identified by Freud in their criminal interactions. Finally, as evidenced in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's male characters conform to Plummer's observations regarding male sexuality. Plummer contends that certain men, particularly "men who are driven to seek sex in all its diversities (...) are the assertors, the insertors, and the predators" (178). I argue that these attributes render McCarthy's male characters such as judge Holden both captivating and deserving of further analysis.

### 3.2.1. JUDGE HOLDEN AND THE KID: A FAILED CASE OF *PAIDERASTIA*

The relationship between the kid and judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* is undeniably complex. From the moment the kid flees his home never to return, he encounters men from diverse backgrounds, many of whom are affiliated with various paramilitary organizations, until eventually joining Glanton's Gang. Despite the limited direct interactions between the kid and judge Holden throughout the novel, it is reasonable to assume that the kid is present for the majority of Holden's didactic monologues or learns of them through other channels, such as Tobin. Consequently, the judge assumes a role akin to that of a mentor, not only to the kid but also to the other men within the narrative.

As previously mentioned, McCarthy's narration characterizes judge Holden as a "man of learning, in all his speculations" (*Blood Meridian* 122), a sentiment many members of Glanton's Gang concur with. Moreover, the judge's considerable academic prowess is evident in various instances throughout the novel. He demonstrates an ability to deliver "extemporary lecture[s] in geology" (122) and to provide "a laborious introduction in spanish" (88). Additionally, Holden, for the edification of townspeople and Glanton Gang members, adduces

references to the children of Ham, the lost tribes of Israelites, certain passages from the Greek poets, anthropological speculations as to the propagation of the races in their dispersion and isolation through the agency of geological cataclysm and an assessment of racial traits with respect to climatic and geographical influences. (88–89)

Furthermore, the judge, after showing a pistol to some men the gang encounters, can explain "its workings with great patience" (89). Finally, although there are additional examples of the judge being described as a teacher or mentor, it is important to note that men, including those in Glanton's Gang, often witness the judge "declaiming in the old epic mode" (124). This portrayal not only emphasizes his commanding presence, but also serves to associate him with the classics and, by extension, Greek Antiquity.

In relation to Greek Antiquity, scholars have examined the concept of *paiderastia*, a specific type of relationship between two men: a mentor—an adult known as the *erastes*—and his pupil, termed the *eromenos*, who is "a youth" (Dover 98). The *erastes* assumes a dominant role within this relationship (Iriarte Asarta 234), belonging to a small elite group of males considered superior to their male counterparts (List Reyes 178). Conversely, the *eromenos*, typically a male student, adopts the role of the dominated (Iriarte Asarta 234). *Paiderastia* scholars assert that the nature of this relationship primarily serves a pedagogic purpose (234). It must be pointed out that "an ordinary *erastes* will wish his *eromenos* to be unmanly" (Dover

80); thus, the erastes guides the eromenos into adulthood through teachings and mentorship. While sexual contact between the erastes and the eromenos was permitted, Greek society expressly forbade the erastes from seeking sexual pleasure from the relationship (Iriarte Asarta 234). The origins of paiderastia remain debated among experts, Eric Bethe (1907) and K. J. Dover (1978) respectively suggest a connection to military rites aimed at facilitating the transition from adolescence to adulthood within the context of strict military instruction (Iriarte Asarta 235). Notably, in certain regions of Greece, like Sparta, “paiderastic behaviour” was viewed as beneficial to society due to its “usefulness as a training-stage for the battlefield, in particular after the general change to hoplite tactics in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC” (Smit 110). The relationship between judge Holden and the kid can be analyzed through the framework of the erastes-eromenos concept. As detailed in the second chapter, the judge’s violent teachings, ideologies on parenting, and philosophies of war closely mirror Spartan utilization of paiderastia. Finally, it can be argued that “McCarthy intends to stress the male-to-male nature of the judge’s sexuality, to inculcate it into his personality, and to announce it as a key to other textual cruxes” (Shaw 110). That crux, Holden would argue, is masculinity.

Throughout *Blood Meridian*, the war-oriented teachings of judge Holden, coupled with the violent actions of Glanton’s Gang, function as a form of training for the kid, akin to what Daan Smit terms “a training-stage for the battlefield.” This instruction serves to impart upon the kid the value of violence in shaping a man’s masculinity within the world of *Blood Meridian*. The narrative states that the kid is fourteen years old and he remains in an adolescent state for the majority of the novel, with the exception of the final chapter where he is referred to as “the man.” Unlike Holden and the other members of Glanton’s Gang, the kid has not fully transitioned into adulthood, thereby not conforming to the societal norms dictating manhood within the novel’s world. This concurs with the notion that, as mentioned earlier, in a paiderastic relationship, the erastes would seek an eromenos who is unmanly because “physical

toughness means independence of spirit, and that would be fatal to the erastes” (Dover 80). In other words, the eromenos’ physical toughness would signify a threat to the erastes’ authority. Conversely, in *Blood Meridian*, the kid fails as Holden’s eromenos by disregarding the judge’s teachings and refusing to heed advice about Holden from others, such as Tobin. Despite Tobin’s suggestion to “[l]ook around you” and to “[s]tudy the judge,” the kid dismisses it by merely replying: “I done studied him” (McCarthy 128), thus indicating his failure to fully embrace the role of eromenos under Holden’s mentorship.

The manliness of the kid undergoes a series of tests during repeated confrontations with judge Holden. As explored in the second chapter, instances arise where characters, including the kid, have opportunities to kill Holden, yet they all fail to do so. As the kid’s erastes, recognizing the kid’s incapacity for such an act, Holden remarks, “I know too that you’ve not the heart of a common assassin” (311). These words, in conjunction with earlier interactions, serve to underscore Holden’s perception of the kid’s lack of fully developed masculinity and comprehension of Holden’s teachings on violent masculinity and the virtues of war. The fact that the kid fails to embody the eromenos role according to Holden’s standards of masculinity and violence deeply affects the judge. This sentiment is noticeable during a later encounter, where, following the desert scene in which the kid could have killed Holden, the two meet again in a prison where the kid is being held. During their conversation, Holden tells the kid:

Dont be afraid, he said. I’ll speak softly. It’s not for the world’s ears but for yours only. Let me see you. Dont you know that I’d have loved you like a son?

He reached through the bars. Come here, he said. Let me touch you.

The kid stood with his back to the wall.

Come here if you’re not afraid, whispered the judge.

I aint afraid of you. (319)

Holden's longing for physical contact with the kid—a desire satisfied through the kid's murder in the novel's final chapter—and the kid's subsequent refusal highlight a significant aspect of their relationship. Furthermore, in the prison scene, Holden seizes the opportunity to impart a new lesson to the kid regarding his perceived shortcomings in masculinity, stemming from the kid's failure to heed Holden's teachings on war and masculinity. The kid is proven a failure to meet Holden's standards. In this context, Holden asserts:

You came forward, he said, to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgement on your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgements of history and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprise. Hear me, man. I spoke in the desert for you and you only and you turned a deaf ear to me. If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay. (319)

Decades after their prison conversation, in the novel's final chapter, the kid encounters Holden once again at a bar. The judge approaches him and states that they two are “[t]he last of the true. The last of the true. I'd say they're all gone under now saving me and thee. Would you not?” (340). Despite the passage of time, Holden remains convinced of the kid's flawed masculinity, expressing disappointment in his failure to meet expectations. Holden states, “I recognized you when I first saw you and yet you were a disappointment to me. Then and now. Even so at the last I find you here with me” (341). Nevertheless, the judge acknowledges their enduring connection, asserting his continued role as erastes. During their conversation, Holden talks about the virtues of dance, which he considers essential to the construction of masculinity and intricately linked to violence and war. Lamenting society's increasing detachment from these values, particularly the kid's apparent reluctance to embrace them, which he sees as crucial to the formation of true masculinity, Holden explains:

I tell you this. As war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question those honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior's right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers. And yet there will be one there always who is a true dancer and can you guess who that might be? (344–45)

Although the kid demonstrates bravery by asserting that Holden “aint nothin” (345), the reality is that within the world of *Blood Meridian*, Holden holds a significant position as the epitome of the true dancer of war and violent masculinity to which he alludes. In contrast, the kid, despite his participation in numerous atrocities, does not embody this ideal. Moreover, as an eromenos, he has failed to fulfill his role in adhering to his erastes' teachings. The kid cannot dance because, as Holden explains, “[o]nly that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance” (345). The judge does not merely lecture about the dance, he also enforces it, confirming the bellicose cogency of his dance philosophy with his violent example. Recognizing his own failure as erastes, Holden imparts his final teaching to the kid: “This night thy soul may be required of thee” (341). Following their final conversation, Holden allows the kid to depart from his company.

Eventually the kid, after lingering at the bar for some time, ventures to the “jakes,” where the judge murders him in a horrifying manner. The narrative states, “The judge was seated upon the closet. He was naked and he rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him” (347). In a novel characterized by its detailed descriptions of violence, scholarly work on McCarthy has explored the particularly harrowing nature of the kid's death. Shaw contends, “McCarthy makes us imagine the details. Even in a text otherwise replete with the rhetoric of carnage, such acts [the judge's killing of the kid] are horrible beyond words” (109). The kid's body is later

found by a man who, perplexed by the brutal image he is witnessing, merely exclaims, “Good God almighty” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 348). When another man asks him about what he has seen, the man cannot answer. The sight of Holden, partially or fully unclothed during the encounter, has led Shaw to suggest that his violent assault on the kid may have included elements of sexual violence:

The text convincingly supports the hypothesis that the kid’s death is not the crucial issue and that the judge’s essential motivation is to assault the kid sexually. Significant economic, social, and psychoerotic motifs in the narrative are clarified as a result of an act which for the kid is a fate worse than death.

(103)

Therefore, it can be concluded that McCarthy, through the characters of judge Holden and the kid, pushes the boundaries of paiderastia and the erastes-eromenos relationship to a violent extreme, even when the kid has aged beyond the typical eromenos stage. Viewed within the context of Holden’s teachings in *Blood Meridian*, it becomes evident that no other fate awaited the kid but a violent death at the hands of the judge.

Finally, the kid’s murder can be seen in relation to the phallus. Earlier, I discussed McCarthy’s emphasis on symbols associated with the phallus, citing Lester Ballard’s rifle as one example. In the narration, Holden’s rifle is portrayed as follows: “He had with him that selfsame rifle you see with him now, all mounted in german silver and the name that he’d given it set with silver wire under the checkpiece in latin: *Et In Arcadia Ego*. A reference to the lethal in it. Common enough for a man to name his gun” (McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 131). Holden’s rifle contains “an inscription from the classics” (131), a detail that again links him to Greek Antiquity and which means: “Even in Arcadia there am I [Death]” (Daugherty 126). Others<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Josef Benson provides another interesting reading of the inscription in Holden’s rifle. Benson states: “*Et in Arcadia Ego* references how the great American democratic experiment has always relied and will always rely on death and bloodshed. The judge’s inscription mocks the idea of America as a Garden of Eden and positions him as a living contradiction to the master narrative of manifest destiny” (4).

see the inscription as “a memento mori motif in itself—[which] more or less sums up everything the judge stands for” (Guillemin 248), which, in the world of *Blood Meridian*, means that “death is also always there, incarnated in the Judge’s weapon, which never misses” (Bloom, *How to Read and Why* 347). Therefore, given McCarthy’s use of rifles as symbols of the phallus, and the association of Holden’s rifle with death, one might extend this symbolism to suggest that Holden’s penis is also portrayed as another deathly weapon. Although the judge does not use his rifle to kill the kid, the fact that he is naked in the “jakes” when the kid opens the door has led many to infer that Holden “arguably rapes and kills the kid, destroying him like the other children and sub-men in the novel” (Benson 3). Päderastia scholars such as Dover explain that many men belonging to “human societies at many times and in many regions” were subjected to “homosexual anal violation as a way of reminding them of their subordinate status” (105). In conclusion, the kid represents someone whom the judge would have regarded with paternal affection, akin to his own son, and to whom Holden dedicated years teaching lessons on masculinity within the harsh world of *Blood Meridian*. However, contrary to Holden’s expectations, the kid fails to fulfill the role of a good eromenos. Consequently, the judge, leveraging their paiderastic relationship, subjects the kid, now a man, to a final, fatal lesson on masculinity: death inflicted by the ultimate symbol of dominance, Holden’s phallus, wielded by the last true dancer of war and masculinity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This third chapter has explored various relationships and interactions between male and female characters while also examining how McCarthy portrays the sexualities of the male characters in relation to masculinity. As stated, despite initial impressions that McCarthy’s focus lies elsewhere, such as the aspects of masculinity explored in the preceding chapters, the limited portrayals of female characters analyzed here indeed hold significance and contribute

to our understanding of McCarthy's thematic interest. Calasanti asserts that certain feminist scholars "theorize gender relations as forces that shape both social organizations and identities that emerge as men and women interact with one another" (S306), a perspective that aligns with McCarthy's approach. If it is understood that "[g]ender relations are dynamic" (S306), in his portrayal of them, McCarthy presents a range of representations, both positive and negative, none of which are necessarily exemplary. However, I argue that this ambiguity is intentional on McCarthy's part. Building upon the discussion in the previous chapters, I maintain that McCarthy is primarily concerned with documenting specific facets of human (largely male) behavior to critique and potentially caution against them. Even if gender relations are "power relations [which] privilege men—giv[ing] them an unearned advantage—while they disadvantage women" (S306), most of McCarthy's portrayals rarely depict these men as unequivocally privileged, particularly by the narrative's conclusion. Even in instances where relationships between characters like Llewelyn Moss and both Carla Jean and the hitchhiker girl, and Culla and Rinthy Holme, exhibit relatively positive traits, these male characters do not emerge victorious—nor the female ones, for that matter—in the traditional sense.

While Culla and Moss profess love for their respective partners, their behavior often exudes a pervasive sense of dominance—some readers might even interpret it as veering into harassment—casting a shadow over Rinthy and Carla Jean. Scholars have observed that in performances of some "manhood acts that involve displays of heterosexual appetite and prowess," women often "become props that men use to affirm a heterosexual identity" (Schrock and Schwalbe 288). McCarthy echoes this affirmation through his portrayal of characters like Culla Holme, Llewelyn Moss, the Counselor, and Reyner. As discussed in this chapter, these characters employ violence, sexual prowess—whether expressed in a romantic context, as seen with the Counselor and Laura, or in a more authoritarian manner, exemplified by Moss and Carla Jean—, and language—as demonstrated by Moss and Reiner—to assert

their masculinity, whether in the presence of women or when referring to them. As argued, Culla and Rinthy initially appear content in their life together at the outset of the novel. However, the arrival of their child alters the dynamics of their relationship. Culla, ill-prepared to navigate this new reality, desires to maintain exclusive possession of Rinthy, viewing their child as a potential threat to their incestuous bond and exclusive attention toward each other.

In exploring McCarthy's depictions of interactions and relationships between male and female characters, we find instances of conflict reflected in the dynamics between John Grady Cole's parents in *All the Pretty Horses*, Carla Jean and Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, and Malkina and Reiner in *The Counselor*. Perhaps acknowledging the significant shifts brought by various feminist movements in Western societies, particularly in North America during the latter half of the twentieth century and into the early decades of the twenty-first, McCarthy presents female characters who are capable and assertive. John Grady's mother and Malkina are depicted as women who possess a clear sense of purpose and refuse to conform to the notion that their lives must be dictated by men. McCarthy portrays John Grady's mother as emblematic of the societal changes experienced by some women in North America following World War II; she emerges as both a figure who supports men to some extent and a woman determined to challenge the masculine norms she has endured and navigated throughout her life. McCarthy portrays her as prioritizing the pursuit of her own dreams and career aspirations over conforming to traditional expectations of femininity and submission to hegemonic masculinity and male dominance. This portrayal of the mother character in *All the Pretty Horses* is further exemplified in the character of Malkina in *The Counselor*. With Malkina, McCarthy presents a woman emblematic of the twenty-first century: ambitious, intelligent, adept in business and technology, and sexually empowered. She outwits the male characters, steadfastly pursuing her desires with unwavering determination. Her actions even leave psychological scars on Reiner, who, when questioned about what he has learned from women,

ruefully responds, “About half of it I’d like to forget” (McCarthy, *The Counselor* 89). In short, sociological studies suggest that the portrayal of John Grady’s mother and Malkina align with conclusions drawn from analogous real-life scenarios. The traits attributed to these two female characters by McCarthy can be interpreted to “constitute a refusal to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination” (Schippers 95). In essence, these two female characters “constitute a refusal to embody the *relationship between masculinity and femininity* demanded by gender hegemony” (95). This notion is succinctly encapsulated by Brummer’s assertion regarding John Grady’s perception of women within the novel’s context. Brummer suggests that “[a]s far as women are concerned,” John Grady’s “only certainty [is] built on the knowledge that inevitably and mysteriously women quit their men, abandon them” (52). Finally, the minimal interaction between Carla Jean and Chigurh underscores how “[f]or women, the costs of masculinity include violence and aggression directed toward women” (Elliott 247). Carla Jean endures such violence from both Moss—who, in his belief that he could confront Chigurh, rejects Chigurh’s offer to spare Carla Jean in exchange for the money and his life—and Chigurh himself. Despite engaging in the same philosophical discussions about the meaning of life endured by other characters in the novel, Carla Jean emerges as the only one capable of grasping Chigurh’s moral and philosophical stance. In this regard, she exhibits a humanity that surpasses that of her executioner.

Lester Ballard in *Child of God* and Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* serve as two extreme examples McCarthy employs to illustrate violent masculinities in relation to masculinity, sexuality, and, mostly, female characters. In the case of Ballard, McCarthy initiates the novel by portraying him as an outcast rejected by his community, thus forcing him to live in isolation amidst natural surroundings. Moreover, as discussed in the dissertation, Ballard is orphaned following the departure of his mother and the suicide of his father. While the character of Ballard and his masculinity could be examined through various lenses, my

analysis has centered on his violent and murderous sexuality as a means of seeking revenge against his mother. By intertwining the traditional association between the feminine and the natural world with Ballard's paraphilic disorders, McCarthy presents Ballard as a serial killer predominantly targeting women. Ballard uses his victims to establish a twisted connection with his mother—a connection that culminates, as posited by certain McCarthy scholars, in Ballard collecting the corpses of his victims in a cave. Ultimately, McCarthy offers readers a detailed depiction of Ballard's demise and the fate of his body. I contend that, unlike other male characters examined in the dissertation, McCarthy's emphasis on providing a meticulous account of Ballard's fate serves as a condemnation of such violent masculinity and perhaps even some of the character's actions and paraphilic disorders.

To conclude, Judge Holden emerges once more as a character who employs sexuality as another defining element of his masculinity. In this context, Holden is examined from two perspectives: as a pedophile priest and as an ineffective mentor. By portraying Holden as a "priest of war," McCarthy not only implicates him as a pedophile who abuses and murders children as he pleases, but also as someone who even accuses priests of the same crimes committed by Holden himself. Consequently, McCarthy constructs the judge as a figure that aligns with portrayals of pedophilic priests depicted in various forms of media and popular culture. On the other hand, the chapter delves into the dynamic between Holden and the kid, casting them as *erastes* and *eromenos*, respectively, in a *paiderastic* relationship reminiscent of Ancient Greece. Holden assumes the role of *erastes*, imparting lessons on masculinity, warfare, and violence to his *eromenos*. However, the kid rejects his mentor's guidance and fails to adopt Holden's version of masculinity as a model to emulate. Just as explored in the preceding chapter, McCarthy depicts the masculinity of the judge as imperfect by presenting him as an unsuccessful mentor to the kid. Acknowledging his shortcomings as *erastes*, the judge foresees no fate for the kid other than a gruesome death at his hands. In line with the arguments put

forth by certain scholars who assert that the kid meets his demise after being raped by Holden, I contend that McCarthy portrays here a pederastic relationship taken to its most sexual and deadly extreme.

## **Conclusion: Masculinity, a Career-long Exploration**

Within scholarly discourse, there seems to be a consensus around the idea that “masculinity is a social construct” (T. Edwards 103). At the apex of constructions of masculinities is hegemonic masculinity, which is “often viewed as the idealized form of masculinity in any given time and geographic location. Today, in the United States, the idealized man is [still] typically characterized as having power and authority, as being strong, independent, and stoic, among other traits” (Miehls 57). While Cormac McCarthy’s male characters are frequently imbued with these qualities, this dissertation has thoroughly explored the various constructions of masculinity in his works. As outlined in the introduction, this study aimed to address three main questions. The first sought to identify any fundamental aspects of masculinity that McCarthy consistently incorporates in his portrayal of male characters. Through this dissertation, I have identified fatherhood, violence, and sexuality as three pivotal aspects that McCarthy repeatedly uses to construct masculinity throughout his oeuvre. These aspects align with findings from gender and masculinity studies, particularly in anthropology and sociology, which emphasize the significance of these elements in the formation and definition of masculinity. Each chapter of this dissertation has explored how McCarthy constructs the masculinity of his characters through these focal points.

It has been argued that in the twenty-first century, the “[i]nterest in fatherhood has probably never been greater” (Dermott 8). In McCarthy’s works, as this dissertation has analyzed in the first chapter, fatherhood and masculinity are intricately linked. Since his debut novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy has consistently portrayed fathers, using fatherhood as a defining characteristic in shaping a character’s masculinity. This aspect significantly influences many of the decisions his male characters make throughout the narrative. Additionally, the figure of the father—whether a primary character, as in *The Road*, or a secondary one—consistently plays a significant role, either positively or negatively, in the

construction of the son's masculinity. The first chapter—"An Exploration of Fatherhood in McCarthy"—has explored the evolution of McCarthy's portrayal of fatherhood, with a particular focus on the novels *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. In these works, McCarthy constructs the masculinity of the father characters using similar thematic elements but achieves different outcomes. Reflecting the idea that "masculinity is seen to vary from time to time and place to place and, more importantly, to have the capacity to change and develop towards more positive ends" (T. Edwards 104), McCarthy's use of these elements in both novels indicates a transition from a more traditional, detached model of fatherhood to a more caring and involved expression of fatherly masculinity.

Within the dissertation's first chapter, the section titled "From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: Common Elements in Father Characters" examined how the construction of masculinity has evolved in the father characters of *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. I have analyzed how McCarthy utilizes the absence of language, dreams, and the sense of protection in the portrayal of Culla Holme and the bearded one in *Outer Dark*, and the man in *The Road*. McCarthy places greater emphasis on the father-son relationship as it is expressed through actions rather than words. Although the absence of language is a common feature among the father figures in both novels, the intimate bond between the man and the boy in *The Road* enables them to understand each other on a deeper, more intrinsic level.

The second aspect explored in that section of the first chapter concerned the relationship between fatherhood and dreams. In *Outer Dark* and *The Road*, McCarthy uses dreams primarily as a means of cautioning the father characters. The dreams of Culla Holme, for instance, reflect his anxieties and fears surrounding fatherhood. As argued in the chapter, Culla's distress is not rooted in his incestuous relationship with Rinthy but rather in its consequence—Rinthy's pregnancy and the birth of the "chap." Culla's dream about the prophet reveals this fear, ultimately leading him to forsake his paternity by abandoning his newborn child. Similarly, in

*The Road*, the man's dreams mirror his anxiety and fears concerning his role as a father and his relationship with the boy. However, unlike Culla's dreams, the man's dreams depict scenarios of danger that threaten both him and his son. Moreover, in the dreams of both Culla and the man, McCarthy incorporates elements that highlight how they have failed the mothers of their sons. My conclusion regarding these dreams is that McCarthy uses them to underscore the gravity of fatherhood, suggesting that it should neither be taken lightly nor assumed as a given. Furthermore, while Culla shirks his paternal responsibilities, the man in *The Road* views fatherhood as the ultimate commitment—one that must be upheld even in a desolate world devoid of hope for the future. These dreams also introduce the third aspect of the father's masculinity: protection. The sense of a father's protective role is evident in the man in *The Road* and in Jack, Sheriff Bell's father in *No Country for Old Men*.

The final aspect in the construction of masculinity in the father characters of *Outer Dark* and *The Road* explored in the first section of the chapter is protection. Culla's sense of protection is not directed toward his child but rather toward Rinthy. Culla deceives her about the child's fate, claiming the infant is dead, in an attempt to preserve their relationship from being altered by the arrival of their son. In contrast, the man in *The Road* develops a protective instinct that encompasses both his son and his wife. The man perceives his role as a father as divinely ordained, a belief that elevates the concept of fatherhood in *The Road* to a level unprecedented in McCarthy's works. Through this understanding, the man embodies two key principles of masculinity that he seeks to impart to the boy: being the "good guys" and "carrying the fire." These philosophical tenets emphasize the vital importance of caring masculinities in an otherwise bleak and desolate world. Concepts such as "the new father" and "caring masculinities" align closely with the values the man strives to teach his son.

In illustrating the progression toward the man in *The Road* as the most fully realized father character in McCarthy's body of work, the first chapter also examined, in two subsequent

sections, the portrayals of father characters in novels published chronologically between *Outer Dark* and *The Road*—namely, *All the Pretty Horses*, *Blood Meridian*, *Child of God*, and *No Country for Old Men*. In the first of these two sections, titled “*Blood Meridian, Child of God, and All the Pretty Horses: Fathers Who Fail Their Children*,” the first two of these novels feature various instances of absent fathers. My analysis began with the father of the kid in *Blood Meridian*, a character situated in the nineteenth century. The kid’s father is depicted as a man who is indifferent to his son, seemingly unfit for the violent world he inhabits, and as an alcoholic who lost his wife during childbirth and whose children ultimately abandon him. The kid’s departure highlights his father’s inability to impart masculine values, leading the kid to seek out alternative masculine role models in the brutal world of *Blood Meridian*.

I then turned to Lester Ballard’s father in *Child of God*, another absent father, this time due to suicide. Although the narrative does not explicitly provide the reason, my interpretation suggested that the father may have taken his own life as a result of feeling emasculated by his wife’s elopement. The theme of paternal absence in this section was further analyzed through insights from family researchers, linguists, sociologists, and psychologists, who emphasize how influential parental absence can be in a child’s development. In the case of both the kid and Ballard, the absence of a father figure contributes to the emergence of violent and murderous behaviors, leading to the construction of violent masculinities.

The other two portrayals of father characters explored in the second and third sections of the chapter—the third one titled “The Burden of the Father’s Masculinity: The Case of Sheriff Bell”—are John Grady Cole’s father in *All the Pretty Horses* and Sheriff Bell’s father, Jack, in *No Country for Old Men*. Both fathers have military backgrounds, which McCarthy uses to explore the impact of war on masculinity. In the subsection “The Broken Father: John Grady Cole’s Father,” I explored how John Grady’s father is depicted as a man so deeply traumatized by war that he is unable to reintegrate into civilian life or embody the traditional

notions of masculinity associated with the cowboy. Additionally, *All the Pretty Horses* presents another case of parental absence, this time concerning John Grady's mother. Unlike *The Road*, where the mother's departure is linked to a protective instinct, John Grady's mother leaves because she perceives her husband as failing to meet her expectations of masculinity. To her, he embodies an outdated cowboy masculinity that is incompatible with the feminist ideas emerging in 1950s America. In contrast, Sheriff Bell's father in *No Country for Old Men* is portrayed as a man whose strong sense of masculinity profoundly influences his son. Bell's moral code and principles are largely shaped by those of his father. However, Jack's model of masculinity becomes a burden for Bell, who struggles to live up to it. Ultimately, Sheriff Bell finds solace in acknowledging that the times have changed and that his sense of masculinity cannot be the same as his father's. Jack's masculinity is rooted in codes deeply embedded in a sense of honor, duty, and sacrifice; codes that differ from those of Bell. Through the portrayal of Bell and his father, McCarthy illustrates the evolution of masculinity over time in *No Country for Old Men*.

The first chapter's closing section, "From *Outer Dark* to *The Road*: From Failed to Successful Paternities," concludes the analysis of father characters in *Outer Dark* and *The Road*. For this part of the exploration of these novels, my final focus was on the theme of child naming. In *Outer Dark*, Culla and the bearded one refuse to name their children, referred to them by the narration as "the chap" and "the mute one," respectively. For Culla, this refusal symbolizes a denial of his paternity, while the bearded one's refusal stems from viewing their relationship as akin to that of a master and animal. The novel ultimately resolves Culla's unwanted paternity through the sacrifice of the child, with the "chap" being cannibalized by "the mute one." In this context, an unwanted child becomes nourishment for a wanted one.

Conversely, *The Road* presents similar themes of child cannibalism and how parents deny their children and their parental duties, yet McCarthy portrays the man as a character

fundamentally opposed to Culla and the bearded one. The man in *The Road* never denies his son; instead, he fully embraces fatherhood, even when the boy's mother chooses suicide over parenting. Although neither father nor son is given a proper name in the narrative, their bond is so profound that their chosen names—"Papa" and "my child"—reflect the strength of their relationship. These names serve as the foundation of their deep connection and provide the motivation for their perseverance in the bleak world of *The Road*.

Furthermore, the man's success in parenting is evident in the philosophical principles he imparts to his son: being the "good guys" and "carrying the fire." The boy not only internalizes these principles but also surpasses his father by extending them to others, such as the elderly wanderer Ely. In doing so, the boy surpasses both his father and Culla Holme, since neither of them would have deliberately helped an elderly man. The man and the boy in *The Road* thus emerge as McCarthy's representations of caring masculinity, illustrating the evolution of the masculinity of the father character toward more nurturing expressions of masculinity, even in violent and hopeless worlds.

The dissertation's second chapter, "An Analysis of Masculinity and Violence," examined the violent characters of Judge Holden, from *Blood Meridian*, and Anton Chigurh, from *No Country for Old Men*. If "males can construct and present themselves as men in various ways" (Schrock and Schwalbe 284), then these characters stand out as the most violent figures McCarthy has ever depicted. It is important to note that the analysis of their violence was conducted in relation to other male characters within the novels. As elucidated in the chapter, to explore the violent masculinity of these characters, in the first section, "The Great West and the Western," I began by providing a contextual background related to the geographical setting of both novels—the American West. Historically, the Great West represented the ultimate frontier in American history, a place where men could test their masculinity, often through dominance and violence, and where religious connotations were

intertwined with the idea of Manifest Destiny. This setting also gave rise to the Western as a literary genre, which predominantly portrays men in violent scenarios—a genre that serves as the backdrop for both *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. Although violence appears to be an inherent characteristic of both this geographical location and its associated literary genre, my analysis also delves into the broader notion that violence is an intrinsic aspect of traditional conceptions of masculinity, particularly within the context of the United States.

Given the inherent connection between masculinity and violence, McCarthy's oeuvre is replete with explorations of violent masculinities. My contention is that McCarthy does not depict violent men to glorify such masculinity but rather to condemn it, using these portrayals as cautionary devices. Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh emerge as stark warnings of the perilous consequences when a man fully embraces and embodies violence. In my analysis, the chapter's fourth section, "Masculinity and Nature: The Natural World as a Testing Ground for Masculinity," began by exploring how Holden and Chigurh test their violent masculinity in relation to the natural world. McCarthy constructs the worlds of *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men* as environments where nature is menacing and unforgiving. These natural settings serve as ideal testing grounds for violent masculinities, particularly for hunters—roles that Holden and Chigurh undoubtedly assume. My exploration of these characters as hunters began with *No Country for Old Men*. The novel presents its three main male characters—Chigurh, Moss, and Sheriff Bell—as expert hunters. While Moss and Bell engage with nature in a manner that reflects respect and harmony, treating hunting as a skill that involves a deep understanding of the prey, Chigurh is depicted as a hunter who kills animals purely for the sake of killing, extending this behavior to his interactions with other humans. Chigurh's approach to killing mirrors that of a meticulous hunter: he carefully prepares, studies the terrain and environment, and employs the right tools for the job. His level of ingenuity in this regard is unparalleled in the novel, as evidenced by his ability to fashion gun accessories from ordinary

objects. In the subsection “Anton Chigurh: Man as a Hunter,” I concluded that McCarthy portrays Chigurh as an exaggerated and professionalized version of traditional masculinity. This heightened form of masculinity, embodied by Chigurh, is marked by power, emotional detachment, and a disregard for conventional rules and honor codes traditionally observed by hunters of the past.

In the subsequent subsection titled “Judge Holden: The Supremacy of Man in Nature,” my exploration then shifted to judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*, where McCarthy portrays the character as the embodiment of man’s supremacy over nature. I argued that judge Holden’s supremacy is rooted in two primary factors: his physical presence and comfort in displaying it within both natural and social environments, and his dominion over nature and other men, which he justifies through his self-appointed role as a suzerain. Holden leverages these two factors to assert absolute and unrivaled control over both the natural world and the men within it. His pursuit of dominion is inextricably linked to destruction, as he annihilates nature, humans, and historical relics alike. Holden’s self-conception as a suzerain aligns him with that of God, yet his actions reveal a profound disregard for creation; instead of preserving history, he seeks to erase it, and instead of honoring God’s creation, he destroys it.

For both Holden and Chigurh, violence is the fundamental force that binds the world together and defines what it means to be a “real” man, thereby legitimizing their masculinities and actions, thus “claiming to membership in the privileged gender group” (Schrock and Schwalbe 284). In the chapter’s fifth section, “Man vs. Man: The Ultimate Way to Test a Man’s Violent Masculinity,” their violent masculinity was examined in contrast to other male characters within the novels. To explore how Holden and Chigurh’s violent masculinities stand against those of other men, I analyzed various elements, including McCarthy’s use of fire, God, war, and games. For Holden and Chigurh, war represents the highest attainable expression of masculinity, and games are closely linked to war, serving as another arena in which they assert

their dominance over other men. In this context, I applied the concept of the imperative of masculinity discussed by Badinter, specifically the notion of “Give ’em hell,” to illustrate how Holden and Chigurh use it to assert their dominance over their fellow male characters in relation to war, games, and masculinity. My analysis focused on two key scenes. The first is Chigurh’s use of a coin toss to determine whether the proprietor of the filling station deserves to live or die. The second involved Holden, who embodies the “Give ’em hell” imperative at the outset of *Blood Meridian* when he falsely accuses Reverend Green of pedophilic disorder—a baseless claim that Holden later admits he fabricated. These scenes underscore the characters’ manipulation of violence and games as tools to establish and reinforce their authority and masculinity.

My exploration of fire, God, war, games, and masculinity in the characters of Holden and Chigurh ultimately led to the conclusion that both characters frame their philosophical view on men’s inherent violence within the belief that violent confrontations serve as the ultimate test of masculinity. This perspective is vividly illustrated in McCarthy’s depiction of the violent encounters between Chigurh, Moss, and Wells, as well as between judge Holden and some members of Glanton’s Gang, including the kid. However, my final conclusion regarding Holden and Chigurh’s violent masculinities revealed that McCarthy intentionally portrays their seemingly invincible masculinities as ultimately vincible. In doing so, McCarthy does not glorify but rather condemns their expressions of masculinity. I argued that McCarthy’s ultimate message is that, whilst some men may find the violent masculinities of Holden and Chigurh enticing, such extreme levels of violence and dominion are both traumatic and unattainable, and they will inevitably face resistance—from other men (e.g., Moss, Wells, the kid) and from the unpredictable forces of chance, as exemplified in *No Country for Old Men*. In the case of judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy subverts Holden’s masculinity by introducing an epilogue that signals the emergence of new masculinities. Drawing a parallel

between the fire in the epilogue's man, Sheriff Bell's concluding dream of his father, and the philosophical tenet of "carrying the fire" in the man in *The Road*, I contended that McCarthy endorses the values of these caring masculinities, thereby delegitimizing Holden's notion of enduring superiority in masculinity and compensating for those masculinities who are "unwilling to enact the hegemonic ideal" (Schrock and Schwalbe 284). McCarthy confines Holden's dominion and suzerainty to the central events of *Blood Meridian*, excluding them from the epilogue and the future world it suggests.

The dissertation's third chapter, "Male-Female Relationships, Masculinity, and Sexuality," dealt with the final focal point through which McCarthy constructs the masculinity of his characters and which involves the dynamics between men and women, as well as the portrayal of sexuality. It has been argued that certain aspects of masculinity and manhood acts "often entail the sexualization of women as a way to signify heterosexuality, to demarcate gender boundaries, and to challenge women's authority" (Schrock and Schwalbe 285). I believe that McCarthy engages with this idea throughout his body of work. To analyze the relationship between men, women, and sexuality, the third chapter was organized into three main sections: first, the depiction of harmonious relationships, insofar as they exist in McCarthy's works; second, the confrontation between masculinities and femininities; and third, an exploration of paraphilic disorders.

The first section, "As Perfect Male-Female Relationships or Interactions as Can Be in McCarthy," examined the characters of Culla and Rinthy Holme from *Outer Dark*, alongside Llewelyn Moss, Carla Jean, and the female hitchhiker from *No Country for Old Men*. The incestuous relationship between siblings Culla and Rinthy appears reciprocal and harmonious until the birth of their child disrupts this dynamic. As discussed in the chapter, the arrival of the child destabilizes their relationship, leading Culla to reject and abandon the infant to die. When Rinthy discovers her brother's deception, their relationship is irreparably altered, leading

to their permanent separation. Despite this division, McCarthy offers glimpses of the enduring love they still hold for each other, a love that can never be fully restored. Through Culla and Rinthy, McCarthy contrasts two opposing poles of parental commitment and romantic love. Culla is depicted as a man who desires only to maintain his relationship with Rinthy, while Rinthy emerges as a strong woman who, despite her deep love for her brother, prioritizes her child. The child becomes a symbol of her lack of regret for the incestuous relationship. For Culla, however, the child signifies the loss of Rinthy's exclusive affection, which had been solely his before the birth.

My analysis of Llewelyn Moss in *No Country for Old Men* centered on his interactions with his wife Carla Jean and the female hitchhiker. Although Moss is characterized as a man of violence, his interactions with both female characters reveal a capacity for tenderness, particularly toward Carla Jean. Moss's masculinity encompasses a protective role, which was discussed in the first chapter in relation to father characters. His protective nature underscores a caring aspect of his character, especially in his dealings with female characters. This caring nature is demonstrated in two key instances: when Moss sends Carla Jean away to prevent her from being targeted by his pursuers, and when he allows the hitchhiker to accompany him and ultimately dies whilst protecting her. Additionally, Moss exhibits fidelity to his wife by rejecting the hitchhiker's flirtatious advances and refusing to have sexual intercourse with her. My overarching conclusion in this first section of the chapter was that McCarthy uses his portrayal of masculinity to critique its inherent violence, which disproportionately affects women in the novels. The female characters analyzed in this section endure the severe impacts of men's violent actions, underscoring the profound and unjust repercussions of masculine violence on women.

The chapter's second section, "Masculinities vs. New Femininities," examined instances where the female characters surpass their male counterparts, focusing on *All the*

*Pretty Horses*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *The Counselor*. In *All the Pretty Horses*, my analysis delved further into the relationship between John Grady Cole's parents. In the novel, the father is depicted as a broken man profoundly affected by his experiences in war, struggling to move past the trauma and loss of his wife. Although he acknowledges the crucial role his wife played in maintaining his mental stability and well-being, he confesses to John Grady that he returned from the war a changed man, unable to sustain their marriage. The mother, in contrast, is portrayed as a figure aligned with the societal shifts of the 1950s, particularly the second wave of feminism. She represents a desire for intellectual and personal fulfillment beyond the constraints of ranch life, highlighting her adaptation to the evolving social landscape.

The analysis of *No Country for Old Men* in that section of the chapter focused on the characters of Carla Jean and Anton Chigurh. That subsection examined one of the three ways in which McCarthy reveals the vulnerability in Chigurh's masculinity—his interaction with Carla Jean. While Chigurh consistently critiques and undermines the masculinity of the male characters he confronts, this critique is notably absent in his conversation with Carla Jean. Her moral triumph over Chigurh stems from two key aspects. First, Chigurh's momentary display of a thwarted sense of kindness toward her exposes a rare vulnerability in his otherwise unyielding masculinity. Second, Carla Jean's final words to Chigurh, marked by compassion and a willingness to understand his distorted justification of his actions, represent a profound contrast to the responses of the male characters Chigurh has confronted. This moment of compassion highlights the unique challenge Carla Jean poses to Chigurh, as she offers something he has never encountered in his interactions with men.

Lastly, the second section of the chapter culminated with an exploration centered on the characters of Malkina and Reiner in *The Counselor*. Malkina emerges as arguably the most sexually assertive and business-savvy female character in McCarthy's oeuvre. McCarthy

portrays Malkina as a woman who can unsettle men and make them question their own masculinity. She is a character who represses nothing, embodying the power and autonomy of a modern woman in the twenty-first century. This is particularly evident in my analysis of the scene when Malkina masturbates using Reiner's car. The scene highlights her as a symbol of the contemporary era—an individual who confidently embraces and explores her sexuality, possesses ambition, and exhibits traits traditionally associated with men and masculinity, both in western society and within McCarthy's narrative universe.

The third section of the dissertation's last chapter, "Paraphilic Disorders and Masculinity," delved into the portrayals of paraphilic disorders and masculinity in *Child of God* and *Blood Meridian*. The focus was on the characters Lester Ballard and Judge Holden. I began with a general analysis of Ballard, examining his introduction in the novel, his loss of home, his orphanhood, and how his masculinity is perceived as inadequate by both male and female characters, despite his attempts to project strength and a violent demeanor. I then explored Ballard's paraphilic disorders, including his abuse and murder of female characters. In analyzing Ballard's paraphilic disorders, I argued that McCarthy connects Ballard's sexuality with the symbolism of the phallus as a tool for exerting power, dominance, and violence over women. Ballard's paraphilic disorders include voyeuristic, fetishistic, and transvestic disorders. His sexuality becomes criminalized when he murders women and has sex with the corpses. My analysis of Ballard's sexuality led to the conclusion that McCarthy condemns the character's masculinity. Ballard subverts the novel's norms regarding sexuality through practices such as necrophilia and other behaviors classified as non-normative within the narrow sexual politics of the text's world. Ultimately, I argued that Ballard's actions are portrayed as deviant in relation to the traditional sexual roles and practices assigned to male characters in McCarthy's narrative.

Judge Holden's sexuality was, in this last section, explored in relation to his pedophilic disorder tendencies and his relationship with the kid in *Blood Meridian*, a relationship analyzed from the point of view of the Greek practice of paiderastia. Drawing from Kim's characterization of the judge as a priest of war, my analysis drew a connection between Holden's pedophilic disorder and cases of this disorder among Catholic priests. I then explored the murderous tendencies of Holden toward the children he sexually abuses. I argued that McCarthy, through violent characters such as judge Holden, explicitly links masculine sexuality with violence. The exploration of the paiderastic relationship between judge Holden and the kid centered on the former's mentor-like role in the novel, particularly in relation to the kid. Their paiderastic relationship was framed within the classical erastes-eromenos dynamic, with Holden positioned as the erastes and the kid as the eromenos. I interpreted their paiderastic relationship as a critique, as McCarthy portrays Holden's attempt to mold the kid into a violent man and a man of violence—comparable to himself—as ultimately a failure. As a result, while Holden perceives the kid's masculinity as flawed and ill-suited to the violent world of *Blood Meridian*, he fails in his role as the kid's erastes. By raping and murdering the kid, the judge brings their paiderastic relationship to a violent conclusion, thereby pushing the boundaries of the erastes-eromenos relationship to a brutal extreme.

The analysis presented in these three chapters has led to several conclusions derived from the dissertation's central research questions. While I acknowledge that "masculinity is a diverse, mobile, even unstable, construction" (Beynon 2), McCarthy, through the exploration of fatherhood, violence, and sexuality, consistently constructs male characters who inhabit violent worlds. These characters are either men of violence, violent men, or both. My argument is that McCarthy's depictions of masculinity serve as cautionary tales about the destructive extremes of masculinity in fatherhood, in man's conflict with other men and nature, and in male-female dynamics and male sexuality. His portrayal aligns with Beynon's assertion that

masculinity should be read as “variety and fragmentation” (2). Moreover, if masculinity is viewed as containing “the possibility to critique social conventions and produce alternative modes of social belonging,” offering “a site for protest against the dominant, a way of channeling power into unconventional publics and subjects” (Worden 3), I affirm that McCarthy’s representations of masculinity indeed serve this purpose. His portrayals of failed fathers, violent men, dysfunctional male-female relationships, paraphilic disorders, and criminal sexual behaviors exemplify his critique of traditional masculinities. Simultaneously, McCarthy illustrates how masculinity can evolve toward more caring and even harmonious forms. Acknowledging the significance and influence of the feminist movement, McCarthy employs powerful female characters—such as Rinthy, Carla Jean, Malkina, and the mothers in *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Road*—to further his critique of masculinity.

Through his depiction of male characters, I argue that McCarthy advocates for more compassionate masculinities, ones that reject domination and embrace values of care “such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality, into masculine identities” (Elliott 241). Cant asserts that “McCarthy’s angst is that of a writer who feels the need to establish his own voice within a tradition that intimidates as much as it inspires” (47). McCarthy’s portrayal of masculinity reflects both this sense of intimidation and inspiration. I contend that his thesis on masculinity and his advocacy for more caring masculinities is articulated by Black in *The Sunset Limited* when he states: “I think for the most part people are good to start with. I think evil is somethin you bring on your own self. Mostly from wantin what you aint supposed to have” (67). In these portrayals of male characters, McCarthy suggests that men are inherently capable of goodness, while those who pursue what they “ain’t supposed to have” represent cautionary examples of what a man ought never to become. In sum, McCarthy’s sustained focus on American masculinity throughout his career suggests that the men he portrays are

reflective of existing types or potential representations. His depictions serve both as inspiration and as a warning.

With this dissertation, I hope to have contributed to the scholarly discourse on McCarthy's oeuvre, particularly in relation to representations of masculinity. While I believe I have provided a comprehensive and compelling analysis of the McCarthy works here examined, certain limitations, including space constraints, have inevitably left some ideas unexplored.

The theoretical framework utilized in this dissertation could also be applied to other McCarthy works not included in my analysis. Although Vågnes has explored masculinity in *Suttree* and delved into the relationship between Cornelius Suttree and his father—as discussed in the first chapter—, my framework on fatherhood could be insightful for this novel as well. This is particularly relevant given that *Suttree* can be read as a “self-reflexive depiction of what it means to live within patriarchy and the ensuing psychological problems in breaking with it” (Vågnes 20), as well as for its portrayals of oppressive fathers and Suttree's abandonment of his family. This approach could also extend to the relationship between Billy Parham and his father in *The Crossing*, and between Robert Western and his father in *The Passenger*.

While *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris* provide only sparse references to the relationship between siblings Robert and Alicia Western and their father, the narratives' focus on the consequences of having a father involved in Oppenheimer's Manhattan Project is intriguing. Reflecting on his father, Robert observes: “Fathers are always forgiven. In the end they are forgiven. Had it been women who dragged the world through these horrors there would be a bounty on them” (McCarthy, *The Passenger* 370). The father's guilt—as another case of a detached father and as a collaborator in the creation of the atomic bomb—and its impact on his children's lives could be a compelling area for further exploration.

Additionally, as briefly mentioned in the introduction, Robert and Alicia's claim to have loved each other hints at a consensual romantic, and possibly sexual, incestuous relationship. Alicia herself confesses to Dr. Cohen that she used to tell people she was married to Robert, that she "wanted to be married to him," and that she even asked him to marry her (McCarthy, *Stella Maris* 160–61). A comparative analysis of the incestuous relationships in *Outer Dark*, *The Passenger*, and *Stella Maris* could provide new insights that build on the ones presented in this dissertation.

Moreover, the theoretical framework could be extended to characters excluded from the analysis due to their age. This includes figures such as John Grady Cole and Billy Parham in the Border Trilogy, as well as White and Black in *The Sunset Limited*, among others. McCarthy's portrayal of adolescent characters, for instance, could be examined through the lens of Kimmel's perspective, as outlined in the following passage:

Hardly tremulous individualists, Coleman saw adolescents as frighteningly dependent on peer culture, and boys, especially, as desperate to prove their masculinity in the eyes of other boys. This certainly seems to be the case today, as guys continue to turn to another for the validation of manhood that was once provided by the community of adults. (*Guyland* 30)

Conversely, it has been argued that in old age, men are often exempt from adhering to many of the rigid gender prescriptions (Guasch Andreu 118). A potential avenue for research on McCarthy's elderly characters is the concept of "ageism." Scholars assert that "ageism is one of the main problems in our societies" (Armengol, "No Country for Old Men?" 2) and that it "describes the subjective experience implied in the popular notion of the generation gap. Prejudice of the middle-aged against the old in this instance, and against the young in others, is a serious national problem" (R. Butler 243). Robert Butler elucidates that ageism "reflects a deep seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged—a personal revulsion to and

distaste for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, ‘uselessness,’ and death” (243). Armengol further contends that “little has been done on how age can affect masculine identity in decisive ways throughout the life course, particularly late life” (“No Country for Old Men?” 2). For instance, an illustrative example of how elderly men in McCarthy perceive their ageism is that of Arthur Ownby. Ownby, an elderly man and one of the main characters in *The Orchard Keeper*, reflects on his old age by stating:

If I was a younger man (...), I would move to them mountains. I would find me a clearwater branch and build me a log house with a fireplace. And my bees would make black mountain honey. And I wouldn’t care for no man.

He started down the steep incline.—Then I wouldn’t be unneighborly neither. (59)

Another example of the bleak outlook held by elderly male characters in McCarthy’s works is White in *The Sunset Limited*. In his conversation with Black, White reflects on old age and the world, stating: “You give up the world line by line. Stoically. And then one day you realize that your courage is farcical. It doesn’t mean anything. You’ve become an accomplice in your own annihilation and there is nothing you can do about it. Everything you do closes a door somewhere ahead of you. And finally there is only one door left” (131). Both passages exemplify the unsettling sense of defeat these characters experience, whether in longing for a lost, youthful past or dreading an inevitable future. Their advancing age diminishes their masculinity, leaving them no recourse but to yearn for death.

The intersection of aging and masculinity can also be explored through the character of Sheriff Bell and his retirement from law enforcement in *No Country for Old Men*. A comparative analysis of the novel’s portrayal of Bell and the Coen brothers’ film adaptation could yield insightful findings. Armengol observes that “the preliminary results do seem to suggest that while men’s and women’s experiences of aging may certainly differ, aging is

neither less varied nor easier for men than it is for women” (“No Country for Old Men?” 8). Moreover, as has been noted, in retirement, “older men have a harder time finding themselves without gender-appropriate occupations in the domestic sphere” (8); a sentiment Sheriff Bell seems to share.

Furthermore, since masculinity requires acculturation and “is composed of social codes of behaviour,” it also serves as an index of class, subculture, ethnicity and other factors (Beynon 2). The ethnic portrayals of masculinity in McCarthy’s works could provide additional fruitful avenues for analysis. Mexican characters in *Blood Meridian* and the Border trilogy, or Black characters in *The Stonemason* and *The Sunset Limited*, could be explored using the methodological framework applied in this dissertation. Connell asserts that “[r]ace relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities” (80). Two potential lines of inquiry in McCarthy’s works emerge from this observation.

On the one hand, the way in which “black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender construction” (80), a theme briefly explored in my analysis of Lester Ballard in the third chapter. On the other hand, how “hegemonic masculinity among whites sustains the institutional oppression and physical terror that have framed the making of masculinities in black communities” (80). For example, exploring Black’s residence in a New York ghetto in *The Sunset Limited* could bring about valuable insights and complement existing scholarship, such as Dudley’s analysis. In his exploration of *The Sunset Limited*, Dudley argues that McCarthy “associates black characters not only with the conventions of religious practice, but also with the humility and suffering that bring them closer to God’s grace” (“Race and Cultural Difference” 210). The exploration of other ethnicities, whether linked to religious practices or not, would also provide a valuable complement to this dissertation as well as to other studies on masculinity in McCarthy’s oeuvre. However, such an analysis must be approached with caution. As Tim Edwards observes:

The study of black masculinities, such as it is, is mostly dominated by a specifically black North American cultural and political agenda that makes remarkably few inroads into the wider study of gender and ethnicity or, more specifically, the analysis of Asian, Catholic, Chinese, Eastern, Hispanic, Indian, Irish, Islamic, Japanese, Jewish, Latin or Oriental masculinities. The incipient and indeed still somewhat *separate* literature developing on this dazzling array of ‘other’ masculinities has yet to truly inform a wider analysis of ethnicity, race and masculinity. (77–78)

Finally, the concept of “hybrid masculinities” offers a potential avenue for exploring the portrayal of other ethnicities in McCarthy’s works. Tristan Bridges and C. J. Pascoe define hybrid masculinities as “the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and—at times—femininities into privileged men’s gender performances and identities” (246). While scholarly attention on hybrid masculinities has apparently focused on “young, White, heterosexual-identified men” (246), a group extensively depicted by McCarthy, there is scope to explore how other groups of men in his works engage with these dynamics. An additional line of inquiry could investigate “the ways that men are increasingly incorporating elements of various ‘Others’ into their identity projects” (246), providing further insight into McCarthy’s complex portrayals of masculinity.

Regardless of the direction future scholarly approaches to masculinity in the works of Cormac McCarthy may take—whether through comparisons with other contemporary authors or writers within the same literary genres—one thing remains clear: McCarthy’s portrayal of gender is essential to understanding gender dynamics in both American society and literature. It is possible that McCarthy will be seen as a visionary ahead of his time, with new interpretations of his works continuing to emerge. His literature may even align with current

gender perspectives, potentially “point[ing] in a new, more liberating direction” (Bridges and Pascoe 246), free from the constraints of past limitations and narrow ideologies. While we may never fully grasp McCarthy’s intended message about masculinity, that ambiguity, I am sure, was intentional. As any devoted reader of his works understands, McCarthy’s focus has always been on the journey, not the starting point nor the destination.



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