
And Then I Woke Up: Violence, Good and Evil, Morality and Consequences in Blood Meridian, The Road, No Country for Old Men and Outer Dark

English Department

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Dulin-Mallory

Abstract

This paper considers violence, good and evil, and morality and consequence in the work of Cormac McCarthy. His novels take place in a world where good men commit acts of violence with pure intentions in their hearts, but also a world still riddled with evil men. First, I look at *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*. Which follows an unnamed “kid”, thrust into a violent world with the only way of survival being to become a part of it. Next, I look at *The Road*, the story of a father who will do anything to protect his son. Third, in *No Country for Old Men*, it is a sheriff who tries to rid the world of the evil trying to consume it. Last, I discuss *Outer Dark* and how consequence is related to good and evil.

And Then I Woke Up:

Violence, Good and Evil, Morality and Consequences in *Blood Meridian, The Road, No Country for Old Men and Outer Dark*

Novelist Cormac McCarthy has written ten novels spanning several genres. Within the four novels undertaken here, a gray area exists between the opposites of black and white. He depicts a world where good men commit acts of violence with pure intentions in their hearts, but also a world that remains riddled with truly evil men: a father who will do anything to protect his son, a sheriff whose actions seek to rid the world of the evil that is trying to consume it, and a kid who is thrust into a violent world where the only means of survival is to become a part of the violence. In contrast, McCarthy uses human morality in his characters to play a large role in all aspects of his novels. This is evident within the story of *Blood Meridian* and *The Road*. Whether the character is the hero or the villain, good or evil, almost every character has a role to play in determining the ultimate fate of individual human life. McCarthy sets these characters against forces that are often their polar opposite. Sheriff Bell from *No Country for Old Men* and Rinty from *Outer Dark* who have already been consumed by the world and its violent ways. Through these characters, McCarthy reveals that there can be justifiable, even noble, reasons that men from all walks of life commit acts of violence for

what they perceive to be justifiable reasons. The majority of the characters, however, exist in the gray area. Some of these characters are met with harsh consequences, while others face no consequences at all. McCarthy uses violence to demonstrate the contrast between light and darkness as well as the contrast between good and evil. Often times, the consequences, which his characters must face, takes the form of violence. Thus, in McCarthy's novels, he contrasts good and evil to demonstrate a moral gray area, and effectively utilizes violence as a necessary tool for survival.

Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West, is set in the 1850's in America, the novel initially follows a protagonist known only as "The Kid" who had been born in 1833 in Tennessee. This was a time where the world was on the edge of breaking through to some form of modern civilization but struggling to get there. Taking precedent over that, however, was the need to survive. "The Kid" leaves his home at a young age, entering into what is arguably the most volatile period in American history. The Wild West is dying and there are those who are trying to move forward into a more stable life, but also those trying to hold on to the way of life that they have known for so long. Men are born into this land and they are formed, "The Kid" is the perfect example of this. He survives by whatever means necessary. It is early on in the novel that "The Kid" learns that survival skills are an absolute necessity. He is not one to back down when faced with opposition: "They slogged about in the dark of the lot, coming out of their boots. The kid had his knife now and they circled crabwise and when the man lurched at him he cut the man's shirt open" (*Blood Meridian* 9). "The Kid" is young, but he knows that he cannot give an inch in the unforgiving world in which he now finds himself. One of McCarthy's most complicated and sinister characters, Judge Holden, is a man who is violent only for the sake of being violent. Holden is a member of the Glanton Gang and is described by McCarthy as being "completely hairless." Brent Cusher comments about the violent acts of Judge Holden by stating, "McCarthy, with the judge, lays bare the contours of the soul of the evil man, focusing especially on the tension between his ambitious repudiation of justice, on the one hand, and his steadfast, if unwitting, adherence to it, on the other" (1). Using this strong antagonist, in contrast to what is often referred to as an anti-hero, McCarthy sets up a commentary on the relationship between good and evil in regard to violence. "The Kid" soon joins a gang going to Mexico to continue the already concluded conflict between the United States and the Mexicans. While the majority of the group is slaughtered almost immediately upon entering the country, "The Kid" lives, but he is taken to jail in Mexico. The violence in this section of the novel centers around collecting scalps, or "receipts"

(103) as Glanton refers to them, from the groups of people who are native to the land. Violent acts committed against the indigenous population were very common during this period. Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992) comments on the various myths formed around progress, Native Americans, as well as acts of violence in the old west. Stating that, often times, violence is related to some idea of progress. Furthermore, “What is distinctively ‘American’ is not necessarily the amount or kind of violence that characterizes our history but the mythic significance that we have assigned to the kinds of violence we have actually experienced, the forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent, and the political uses to which we put that symbolism” (Slotkin 13). Here, Slotkin takes aim at the myth of conflict and violence in the west. This is represented in a large part of *Blood Meridian*. A particularly gruesome scene occurs when the gang first arrives in Mexico. Harsh imagery shows this violent act much in the mythical way that Slotkin describes. “He took a skinning knife from his belt and stepped to where the old woman lay and took up her hair and twisted it about his wrist and passed the blade of the knife about her skull and ripped away the scalp” (*Blood Meridian* 103).

The violence in *Blood Meridian* must be understood within the context of the characters. The relationship between “The Kid” and Judge Holden is as violent as it is deeply complex. Although “The Kid” may become more violent over the course of the novel, he is nothing in comparison to Judge Holden. In “Demystifying the Judge: Law and Mythical Violence in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*”, James Dorsen deconstructs the myth of Holden’s evil persona and his connection to violence. The judge is not someone who was molded into a violent person by living in a violent world. The judge is the one who is making the world a more harsh and violent place to live. Violence is as much a part of the judge as the judge is an intimate part of the violent acts that he commits.

As the novel begins, Judge Holden attacks a preacher claiming him to be an “imposter.” After attacking the preacher, he gathers a posse to run him out of town. This moment defines the judge’s sinister character because he actually had no idea who this man even was. Instead, he attacked him and ran him out of town simply because that is what he wanted to do. “Where was it you run up on him? I never laid eyes on the man before today. Never even heard of him” (*Blood Meridian* 8-9). Dorsen comments further on this relationship by stating, “There is no way of making sense of the violence in *Blood Meridian* without also making sense of its central character – not the nameless ‘kid’ whose role in the novel is mainly to focalize the action, but the indomitable Judge Holden. Violence

and the judge are as intimately connected in the novel as gravity and mass, and without understanding the one we cannot hope to understand the other” (107).

As *Blood Meridian* comes to a close, “The Kid” runs across a group of children who begin to taunt and harass him. He pulls his gun and shoots one of the children in the head. Later that day, in town, he encounters Judge Holden. The novel concludes without revealing the fate of “The Kid,” leaving the reader to assume that he was killed. In the final scene, the character of Judge Holden certainly comes full circle. He is depicted as an almost ethereal figure, which is made apparent in the final moments of the novel. Three haunting lines in which McCarthy writes, “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” (*Blood Meridian* 349). This was written to demonstrate the evil that still existed in men. Judge Holden had no reason to kill “The Kid,” as “The Kid” had become just as evil as the judge. He killed “The Kid” because it was in his nature. McCarthy reveals that there are some men who are simply not capable of being good. In retrospect, there is no question that “The Kid” is a different man in the final moments of the novel than he was at the outset of this story. Consequently, it is in this growth that Cormac McCarthy showcases that acts of violence can turn good men into evil men. He demonstrates that a harsh and unforgiving environment has the ability to turn good men into purveyors of cruel acts.

John Gray wrote an article for BBC entitled “A Point of View: A Time When Violence is Normal.” In this article, he argues a point that is not only relatable to *Blood Meridian*, but perhaps to the entire collective work of Cormac McCarthy. Gray states, “This is the truth conveyed in McCarthy’s great novel – civilization is natural for human beings, but so is barbarism” (1). In the novel, McCarthy depicts a society attempting to push toward civilization, however, the barbaric nature of man is too pervasive in this society. McCarthy does not set out to make “The Kid” a good or a bad person, nor is it clear exactly how old he is outside of being a teenager. Subsequently, it does not really matter whether “The Kid” was inherently good or evil; McCarthy is telling us that he is impressionable. “The Kid” actually has no idea of right or wrong, just that he must do what was needed to survive. This molded “The Kid” into the character he becomes at the end of the novel, the man that was capable of killing a child without remorse. Richard Slotkin’s, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* explains the way a man’s actions are shaped by the world in which he lives. Slotkin states, “The evil within man becomes inextricably associated with evil in the composition of the

natural environment, just as the Puritan sense of guilt was projected onto the Indians in the captivity narratives” (150). Seemingly, the message behind *Blood Meridian* is that the world is full of violence; some choose to be violent, while others do not. Those who make the choice to become violent, however, are forever changed by it. In McCarthy’s own words: “The truth about the world, he said, is that anything is possible. Had you not seen it all from birth and thereby bled it of its strangeness it would appear to you for what it is, a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance be populate with chimeras having neither analogue no precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tent show whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a mudded field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning” (*Blood Meridian* 256.) Over a century later, society has moved on from this time, though there are still constant threats to our humanity. Nuclear war, flood, famine and disease all still pose major threats alongside the violence of man. Set in some future time, and centered on a father and son, *The Road* paints a picture of what this type of destruction and devastation would look like. The journey of these characters spans across an American wasteland that has been devastated by an unnamed apocalyptic catastrophe. Various methods can be used to compare this world to that of the one seen in *Blood Meridian*. *The Road* reveals a world without rule or law, centered on characters surviving by whatever means they are able, and evil men overtaken by violence seeking to do harm to anyone who crosses their path. However, there are even more ways that *The Road* stands on its own and explores far reaching themes of the human morality brought into light through acts of violence. The father and son that McCarthy follows are attempting to make their way through a ruined country. They are walking south, towards the coast, where they hope to find some form of salvation. McCarthy focuses on the journey as much as he does the characters and their motivation for making the journey. He demonstrates how this affects each of them, in their own way, and how it affects the world, as he puts it, “A thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again” (*The Road* 440.)

A man must do whatever is necessary to protect the ones that he loves. It is an ideal as old as time itself. This idea of righteous violence is one that McCarthy explores throughout the journey of *The Road* and is one that is relevant to the way our society views violent acts in our world today. Arguably, this novel has a far darker tone than any of McCarthy’s other novels. The world of *The Road* is described best by Richard Deco in his essay “The Depiction of Violence in Cormac McCarthy’s Novel: *The Road*.” Deco describes the violence of the world as being “hauntological” stating “the past

which is the evidence of human existence is shattered. History is only a terrible ghost that lingers through the waste lands of the old world” (1). Through this depiction of the world, McCarthy shows how far society has fallen and how this violent animalistic nature still very much exists within some humans. He often sets aside moments within the story, moments that are used to describe the details of the horrific landscape into which the world has evolved. “People sitting on the sidewalk in the dawn half immolate smoking in their clothes. Like failed sectarian suicides... Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered, by day the dead impaled on spikes along the road.” (*The Road* 53).

As *The Road* begins, the circumstances are dire. Not all is revealed from the outset, however, there are some details regarding the world before the fall. The man speaks of the world and how much it has changed. He speaks of his fears for survival and for protecting his boy. The relationship between father and son is the driving force for the entirety of this novel. The boy represents hope and the man realizes that this must be protected above all else. It is his duty to protect this boy and he will uphold that duty by whatever means necessary. He views this boy as less of a responsibility and more as a beacon of hope, not only to him, but also to all of mankind. The boy is often painted in stark contrast to the world around him: “He just sat there holding the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God. God never spoke” (*The Road* 3). The idea of righteous violence stems from this moment and provides context for what is to come. It is highly reflective and spiritual, two themes that provide a driving force for most of the violent acts committed by this man.

The man’s first act of righteous violence is one that McCarthy paints vividly and is one not easily forgotten. The man and the boy are forced to hide in the forest as a truck approaches. The man suspects these to be cannibals, who will surely kill and eat them if they are discovered. He shoots one of the cannibals in what can be interpreted as an act of righteous violence. When the life of the boy is threatened, the man takes action. The man makes the split-second decision to take the life of another human in order to save the life of the boy, the “word of God.” This is what is referred to as an act of “righteous violence.” A horrible act committed with the purest of intentions in mind. People are capable of doing things they would not ordinarily do in order to protect the ones that they love. Nevertheless, he has killed another man.

Among many troubling scenes in *The Road* the most troubling of all is the scene when their belongings are stolen. This particular scene is troubling because it controverts the argument of righteous violence. The man and his son awaken to find that their shopping cart, containing all of their supplies, has been stolen. The man is able to track down the assailant and discovers that the thief had no sinister intentions. The thief, much in the same way as the man and his son, was just trying to survive. The man points his gun at the person who stole their cart and orders him to return it; additionally, upon doing so the man orders him further to strip out of his clothes. It is an unnecessary measure however; the man performed it anyway as an act of revenge. The world has changed this man, and the scene is crucial to the idea of righteous violence. In the man's mind, he is doing what he believes to be the right thing for his son. It is made abundantly clear that he is doing all of this for the right reasons. McCarthy shows this through dialogue between the man and his son. For example, in dialogue spoken just before the man passes away. "You have to carry the fire. I don't know how to. Yes, you do. Is the fire real? Yes it is. Where is it? I don't know where it is. Yes you do. It's inside you. It always was there. I can see it" (*The Road* 220). The harshness of his words was a culmination of everything that the man had been through. He learned by living in this world that he could not trust anyone, no matter how innocent they may seem. Furthermore, it can be argued that the reason the boy is hesitant in situations like this is because of his innocence. He has yet to be completely corrupted by this world. This certainly demonstrates that the man has undoubtedly seen more of the world's hardships than the boy has. Certainly, it is moments such as these that make this novel so intense. The controversy stems not from the grisly images but from the questions that he leaves to gnaw regarding morality.

Moreover, good versus evil also plays a very large role in *The Road*. The novel contrasts the bit of good that is still left in some men against all of the evil that is consuming the world. This is notable in the man but also in the veteran who comes to look after his son after he dies. Initially the encounter seems troublesome. A young boy, alone in an evil and dangerous world, is taken in by a man that he has never met. He asks the man if he is "carrying the fire." This is when the idea of righteousness and good versus evil is brought full circle in this novel. McCarthy could have easily ended this novel on a note as bleak as the one on which it began. Instead, he chooses to leave the story of the boy on a reasonably hopeful moment. Consequently, this demonstrates the true nature of humanity at its very essence. Perhaps mankind is violent by nature and always will be, however, there is some good in

most men. Some men lose that goodness to evil early on while others are molded into violent men based on circumstances. In one of McCarthy's other lesser known works, *The Sunset Limited*, two characters known only as White and Black debate the ways of the world. The dialogue of Black can best characterize this moment in *The Road*. He says to White, "Maybe it's the notion of original sin. When Eve ate the apple and it turned everybody bad. I don't see people that way. I think for the most part people are good to start with. I think evil is something you bring on your own self. Mostly from wanting what you ain't supposed to have" (*The Sunset Limited* 30.)

The notion of good versus evil in *The Road* validates an argument that separates it from the likes of *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. While there are many clear and present dangers within the world of *The Road*, the story lacks a named antagonist. Evil and violence do not need to be attached to a name in order to be menacing. Those trying to survive portray the evil in a sense that it is understood. Thus, there may not be a specific force onto which they can project their feelings, but the man and the boy know what lurks out in the dark despair of the world. The novel could have introduced a character similar to Judge Holden to commit violent acts against the man and boy, but it would have taken away from what makes this novel unique in its view of violence and evil. This is represented later in the novel when McCarthy writes "The men poured gasoline on them and burned them alive, having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be" (*The Road* 159.) McCarthy treats this idea with care throughout the novel, never taking attention away from the tribulations of the man and his son.

Set in a present time, rather than the past or future, McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* is a beautiful and often haunting portrait of the violence of which human beings living among us are seemingly capable. Most violent acts are brought about from some sort of motive. For "The Kid" it is the need to survive, for the man in *The Road* it is his need to protect his son. In this novel, McCarthy presents two conflicting motives for violence. The motive of Llewelyn Moss is one that could arguably be greed. He sees an opportunity to become a wealthy man and he seizes it. Furthermore, it is clear that the true nature of Moss's intentions is righteous. He wants a better life for his wife and will fight diligently to get it. On the opposite end of this spectrum is the "villain" of the novel, Anton Chigurh. McCarthy sets up a violent game of cat and mouse between Moss and Chigurh, but it is also a face-off between two opposing worldviews. Watching all of this unfold, seemingly from an outside point of view, is Sheriff Ed Tom Bell. Sheriff Bell sees the world changing; he sees it becoming a far nastier

place than the world in which he had grown up. He represents the righteousness that is fading from the world and he is desperately trying to stay relevant among the increasing darkness. He often reflects a time when even violence for a righteous reason was not commonplace, stating that he knew of some sheriffs that “never even wore a gun.” It is made clear through this character that the world is devolving. Sheriff Bell longs for this good world that he believes still exists. *Oppression and Liberty* (1973) by Simon Weil makes a great point toward this argument of good over evil by stating, “The essential contradiction for the human condition is that man is subject to force, and craves for justice. He is subject to necessity, and craves for the good” (150). The world is returning to the violent and savage place that it once was. Men cannot simply live in peace as they did in the times that Sheriff Bell is describing, humanity is slowly creeping toward a time where it must again fight for its own well-being.

No Country for Old Men contains an argument for justice over righteous violence. Justice and righteous violence can go hand in hand, but the idea here is definitely of a man seeking justice in a world where bad men seemingly run amok. While most of the physical conflict in this novel centers on Chigurh and Moss, there is no doubt that the moral conflict is between Sheriff Bell and Anton Chigurh. Chigurh represents the chaos into which the world is spiraling, while Bell represents the good that is still left in humanity. In the article “Democracy, Justice and Tragedy in Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*”, Benjamin Mangrum identifies the driving force behind these two characters. He states “McCarthy’s device of revealing the interrelations of Chigurh and Bell’s identities indicates, among other things, that human constructs (particularly involving the just and the good) often inadvertently affirm a common vision of reality. In the case of *No Country for Old Men*, Bell understands Chigurh as the embodiment of ‘another view of the world out there and other eyes to see it,’ a view that he says, ‘has done brought me to a place in my life I would not of thought I’d come to’” (117). The evil and reckless abandon of Anton Chigurh has brought Bell to a place in his life that he never thought he would see. He is the old man, the lone force attempting to allow justice to prevail while elements out of his control rage against it. This idea is in direct contrast to the idea presented in *The Road*. Rather than adapt to the changing world, Bell is beaten by it. His character and his beliefs represent a world that is being left behind. After he retires, Bell describes his dreams of his father: “And in the dream I knew that he was goin’ on ahead and that he was fixin’ to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would

be there” (*No Country for Old Men* 251). This scene is a reflection of the violent world that his father left behind and of the peaceful place that his father is “goin’ on ahead” to prepare for him.

While the sympathy, in the end, is centered on Sheriff Bell, there is certainly a case to be made on the morality of Anton Chigurh. He is a man who thrives on evil and committing acts of violence but there is a method to this madness. As previously stated, there is a large emphasis placed on the idea of justice in *No Country for Old Men*. While justice is not what Anton Chigurh represents, he does, in a way, represent a sense of moral code. There are a few scenes within the novel when he is faced with someone that he can either kill or leave alone. It is in these scenes that the method to Chigurh’s evil madness becomes apparent. Rather than allow evil to completely take over, he lets a force outside of his own control make the final judgment. He leaves the fate of these individuals up to the mere toss of a coin. Towards the final pages of the novel, Chigurh comes face to face with the wife of Llewelyn Moss. He has already killed her husband and has come to tie up loose ends. However, he does not just kill her immediately. A man who is truly evil would have killed her straightaway, however, Chigurh does not. McCarthy writes the scene with a haunting back and forth dialogue between the two. He writes, “She looked at him a final time. You don’t have to, she said. You don’t. You don’t. He shook his head. You’re asking that I make myself vulnerable and that I can never do. I have only one way to live. It doesn’t allow for special cases. A coin toss perhaps” (*No Country for Old Men* 261.) While Chigurh knows in his heart that he is going to kill her, he does not do so without letting fate run its course. This scene certainly demonstrates that there is, at times, far more humanity to evil men than is evident on the surface. McCarthy takes his time in these moments. It is these situations that bring the ideas of this novel full circle. It is about good versus evil and ultimately having that evil triumph over the good. However, these scenes also show that perhaps those evil men are not evil all the time. Thus, in *No Country for Old Men*, there is a strong notion of evil triumphing over good.

Cormac McCarthy submits many differing depictions of violence in his novels: characters that are forced into violence by their circumstances, those who commit acts of violence as a means of survival, and those who submit to a world becoming increasingly more violent. Each of these characters has much to say about violence and how it affects what each of them become. While in many of these circumstances McCarthy gives us characters who are forced into violent acts, on the contrary, he presents Anton Chigurh and Judge Holden, characters that are inherently evil because it is who they are or because they know nothing else. Thomas Bjerre comments on the very evil nature

of these characters in his essay “Southern Evil, Southern Violence: Gothic Residues in the works of William Gay, Barry Hannah and Cormac McCarthy.” He makes the statement that these characters and characters like them “are violent men of seemingly pure evil, men driven by incredible blood-thirst who will stop at nothing to satisfy their deadly desires” (79). McCarthy explores this idea of seemingly absolute good versus unfathomable evil in his second novel *Outer Dark*. Centering on Rinthy and Culla Holme, *Outer Dark* is a novel of betrayal that culminates in an act of sadistic violence. A portrait of how the selfishness of some men can lead to evil and violent acts the likes of which can not be imagined.

Outer Dark begins as Rinthy is in labor, moments away from giving birth to a child that was conceived through an incestuous relationship with her brother Culla. Ashamed of this child, Culla takes the baby into the forest and leaves it there to die. A selfish act with violent intentions, this moment sets Culla on a course from which there is no return. The novel is a parable of shining good represented by Rinthy, versus selfish evil represented by Culla. This novel examines violence in a way that many of McCarthy’s other novels do not. It examines violence from two differing points of view. However, the violence in this novel differs from that in *No Country for Old Men*. Rinthy represents the influence of good; she loves her child no matter where it came from and will do anything to find where the child has been taken. It is this reckless abandon in the pursuit of unconditional love that is the shining light amid the deep evil undertones of this novel. Once he discovers that his sister has left to find the child, he pursues her as well. It is during this journey to find his sister that the real evil and violent forces of *Outer Dark* are revealed. Culla is, in many ways, a culmination of every evil character that Cormac McCarthy has ever created.

Throughout the journey that Culla embarks upon, he often encounters three men or figures. It is left open to interpretation as to what exactly these three figures represent or if they are even real physical people. However, it is made clear that they are evil beings in nature. The leader is known only as “the minister” and his two followers remain nameless. Throughout the span of the journey, Culla visits many towns. In each town, the people who reside there suspect him of some form of wrongdoing. This leads to Culla becoming a fugitive of sorts. It is these moments that are very much a commentary on the nature of evil and forgiveness. Culla’s actions at the beginning of the novel were evil regardless of what his perception may have been. The repercussions of that evil deed follow him wherever he goes. Thus, there is much speculation that the three figures that Culla sees are not men

but rather projections of his own subconscious. One theory is that subconsciously, Culla cannot forgive himself for his evil action and these figures are there to make sure that he does not forget. What sets this apart from many of McCarthy's other novels is that these figures are not always portrayed in a hyper realistic fashion. There is much realism but there is also a great amount of mysticism. Much like the elements that surrounded Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*. Furthermore, *Outer Dark* is more about the consequences that each character must face for their actions rather than just actions perpetrated for survival. The world that Rinty and Culla exist in is often painted as a nightmare-scape. At the end of the novel, Culla is left to wander and face the consequences for what he has done. Culla's actions led both he and his sister to a gut-wrenching conclusion. Their baby has been taken, butchered and eaten by the three evil beings that Culla encountered. "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. He tried his foot in the mire before him and it rose in a vulgate welt claggy and sucking. He stepped back. A stale wind blew from this desolation and the marsh reeds and black ferns among which he clashed softly like things chained. He wondered why a road should to such a place (*Outer Dark* 242).

In the final moments of *Outer Dark*, McCarthy has much to say in regard to the path of life, both what preceded and what was to follow. Culla had come across a blind man who said that he would pray for him. Culla pondered if prayer really worked because if it did, why would the blind man not have prayed to be able to see again. Furthermore, once Culla had reached the awful landscape at the end of the road, he turns around and encounters this blind man one final time. The blind man is headed in the direction that Culla had just returned from. It is in this moment that McCarthy writes two of the most reflective and poignant sentences in the novel. "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" (*Outer Dark* 242). These final two sentences are not only a reflection of the path that Culla has taken through this novel but of the paths that all of McCarthy's characters to come will ultimately take. They may have an idea of the hell that exists in the world but often do not know just how depraved and broken down it truly is.

Cormac McCarthy illustrates the concept of consequence most profoundly in *Outer Dark*. In *Blood Meridian*, Judge Holden ends the novel dancing in the saloon; *The Road* sees the man pass

peacefully into death; and *No Country for Old Men* has Sheriff Bell enjoying coffee and talking about profound dreams with his wife. In the novel's conclusion, Culla ponders what has led him to this place in his life where he would be met with such a hellish path forward. He has come to the culmination of the choices that he has made and never quite realizes that it is his own doing that has brought him here. An article in The Pittsburgh Literature Examiner called "Outer Dark; Humanity as Only Cormac McCarthy Can Write It" states that *Outer Dark* is "An account of reality so real that it is hard to embrace. *Outer Dark* encapsulates the complexities of even the simplest of people and times and puts them on display in all of their disgusting beauty" (Pittsburgh Literature Examiner 1). This is what sets this novel, and this character, apart from almost all of McCarthy's others. Rinthy finds peace even though her baby has been killed. When the novel ends, she is broken, yet content with where the path has led her and she accepts it by lying down next to the remains of her child. *Blood Meridian* has a final confrontation that cannot compare, but *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men* both have powerful conclusions. *The Road* leaves the boy scared but accepting of the path that comes next in his life. He must continue to carry on the fire and the journey as his father would have wanted. In *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Bell is beaten, yet reflective of the life that has led him to this place. In *Outer Dark*, we see contentment from Rinthy but not from Culla. As in most of his novels, McCarthy configures endings that are highly reflective of the journey from which the characters have come.

Acts of violence and the consequences that follow have been a part of our human culture since the very beginning of time. The same can be said for the tale of light versus dark or good versus evil. It is a tale as old as time itself and one that will continue to be told. Something about violence fascinates us. Specifically, humankind is primal in nature and has a need for violence; some simply thrive on it. This is evident in films, videos games and even literature. It is a primal urge that is always satisfied from watching the hero that kills the bad guy and saves the day. However, it is always left in the mind of the reader to wonder if these heroes are really any better for committing these acts of violence than the character who is labeled the "bad guy." There is nothing that makes this hero any better, other than pure intentions and the fact that the story is being told from his point of view. It is these questions, and many like it that make the novels of Cormac McCarthy equally thought provoking and entertaining. It is these questions and ideas that McCarthy carries over in to almost every one of his novels. He explores the idea of violence turning men violent for the sake of survival in *Blood Meridian*. He took us on a harrowing journey through post-apocalyptic America in *The Road*. A world

where a loving father would do anything to protect his son. In *No Country for Old Men*, he toyed with the idea of justice in the heart of a sheriff living in a world becoming consumed by evil. Finally, in *Outer Dark*, he wrote of violence but also the ultimate consequence for that violence. Because violence will always be a part of this world, McCarthy does not shy away from writing about it. He knows that evil exists, and he knows that justice is failing us. However, he also knows that there is good left in man and that the force of good is capable of standing up to evil when pushed far enough. Consequently, violence is a necessary tool for survival and is necessary in life or death situations, whether you are inherently good or evil. Additionally, McCarthy expresses knowledge of consequence for every action, some minor while others far more severe. It is these stories and their ideas that continue to linger in the minds of many. Furthermore, they are the reason that Cormac McCarthy is one of the most prolific writers of our time.

Works Cited

- Nelson, Christopher R. "A Style of Horror: Is Evil Real in Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*?" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 22 Nov. 2011.
- Gray, John. "A Point of View: A Time When Violence Is Normal." *BBC News*, BBC, 16 July 2012, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18829385
- Bjerre, Thomas Ervold. "Southern Evil, Southern Violence: Gothic Residues in the Works of William Gay, Barry Hannah, and Cormac McCarthy." *Scourges of the South: Essays on The Sickly South in History, Literature, and Pop Culture*, 2014. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian, Or, The Evening Redness in the West*. Picador, 2010.
- Brewton, Vince. "The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy." *University of North Carolina Press*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2004.
- Mangrum, Benjamin. "Democracy, Justice and Tragedy in Cormac McCarthy's 'No Country for Old Men.'" *Jstor.org*.
- Dorson, James. "Demistifying the Judge: Law and Mythical Violence in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1 Jan. 2013.
- Deco, Richard. "The Depiction of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Novel: *The Road*" pp. 23-29.
- Cusher, Brent Edwin. "Cormac McCarthy's Definition of Evil: *Blood Meridian* and the Case of Judge Holden." *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 29 Sept. 2015.

Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

Atheneum, 1992.

McCarthy, Cormac. *No Country for Old Men*. Picador, 2010.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Outer Dark*. Picador, an Imprint of Pan Macmillan, 2011.

“Outer Dark: Humanity as Only Cormac McCarthy Can Write It.” Newsbank, 31 May 2013,
infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/146A6AC095805D30?p=AWNB

Weil, Simone, et al. *Oppression and Liberty*. Routledge, 2006.

Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*. 1974.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Picador, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Sunset Limited*. Picador, 2010.

Robinson, Matthew L. “There Will Be Violence: A Critical Analysis of Violence in the Works of Cormac McCarthy.” [Digitalcommons.spu.edu](http://digitalcommons.spu.edu), 5 June 2015, digitalcommons.spu.edu.