

Research Article

**“He Never Sleeps, The Judge” – Violence And Bloodthirst In Cormac  
Mccarthy’s Blood Meridian**

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**Abstract**

McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* is known for its depiction of extreme violence. The presence of the stunning villain Judge Holden adds a special flavor to the expectations of the audience. He cannot be just ignored as a villain in a way that his views and errands are more than it seems to be which propels his identity from a mere villain to something like a demigod. He challenges anyone he meets with his witty comments and penetrating knowledge that freezes his opponent. By saying so the researcher does not mean that the novel is all his, rather it gives a culpable figure of the judge. The judge shares the pages of the novel with his rival a 14-year-old kid who has a shallow fathom about life but braves the wind of obstacles with his courage and irresistible confidence. This paper focuses on how violence is used in an impeccable way which shows the destruction of the native Indians by the Glanton gang assaulting people and demolishing villages.

**Keywords:** Violence, Massacre, Bloodthirst, Mindless Violence, Landscape, Genocide.

The novel *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West* (1985) has a typically bleak setting, reminiscent of hell. The journey of the characters seems endless and the gang’s mission is to get rid of the Indians living in the borderland of America and Mexico. It is well-known for the grotesque portrayal of violence and moralless characters. The novel thus unfolds the story of a kid encountering a devil incarnate-Judge Holden and his catch-up with the Glanton gang a historical scalp hunting group. Only there the kid comes in close contact with the uncanny judge. This gang consists of hired gunfighters who are on a mission of hunting the scalp of Indians and Mexicans a genocide which in turn will pay them. The two main characters from the gang are the kid and the judge. The unnamed boy is referred to as the ‘kid’ and towards the end as the ‘man’.

The novel focuses on human behavior which has internalized violence and blood-thirst as the result of the characters’ overt exposure to the heartless and hostile landscape, the only environment they are in. While introducing the kid, McCarthy has left clues for his readers by telling them that the kid has a taste for mindless violence. The kid is born into the world of violence and when he flees from his home he ends up entering into the world of crucible violence where men “fight with fists, with feet, with bottles or knives. All races, all breeds. Men whose speech sounds like the grunting of apes” (BM 4).

The violence in the boy naturally comes out when there is a struggle for survival as he is already used to that through his father. He also has the skill in surviving in such circumstances. When he first witnesses the judge in the church falsely accusing the priest, he surprisingly likes him, because the trait of survival of the fittest is embedded in both the characters which are obvious to the readers.

The judge is a strange and sadistic character who considers himself a God. Whenever people are worried he used to dance. The characterization of the judge is complex to understand even after multiple readings. There is no reason why he commits crimes. His characterization surpasses everything as he is beyond our imagination and perceptions. He is clear and determined in all his actions and his eruption from within the pages is magical as his existence in such a harsh desert is unbelievable with his patchy biography given by the ex-priest Tobin.

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As the ex-priest Tobin tells the kid, the judge “can cut a trail, shoot a rifle, ride a horse, track a deer. He’s been all over the world”, he is the jack of all trades. “He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die” (BM 218). He and Glanton are the leaders of a pack of nomadic criminals who rob, rape, torture, and kill across the borderlands between the United States and Mexico and the kid has joined this band of men.

He possesses leadership qualities as he can decide on his own with no second thought. Anything good or bad is based on his decision. His predictions never went wrong. The biggest surprise in the novel is the physical appearance of the judge, “childlike, or rather fetal features...repeatedly alluded to through references to his baldness, hairlessness, paleness, the smallness of extremities, and nudity (Guillemin 242). Judge Holden’s malignancy comes from his unwavering desire for control. He is mongering for power and McCarthy portrays the fear of the readers throughout the novel anticipating the danger ahead if the judge is capable of conquering his dream. He often delivers a meaningless smile, “the judge is always found smiling when nobody knows the joke” (Owens 16).

For him, there is no hidden secret that exists without his knowledge. “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (BM 198) thus expressing his supremacy. According to the judge to control is power and says “Men are born for games,” (BM 249). When the gang meets the judge in the desert they see his in-control nature over the harsh landscape. In the words of Tobin, “And there he sat. No horse. Just him and his legs crossed, smiling as we rode up. Like he’d been expect in us . . . He didn’t even have a canteen” (BM 125). This crucial land has killed several men who try to succeed it and the place is filled with human bones that thrived to overcome its charm and cunningness.

The depiction of churches by McCarthy in this novel does not stand as abandoned but it is attacked when there is a serious need for it by the people who desperately run for life into the house of God. “Many of the people had been running toward the church where they knelt clutching the altar and from this refuge, they were dragged howling one by one and one by one they were slain and scalped in the chancel floor” (BM 181).

These churches are the parody of true faith and belief in God because the walls alone cannot save people’s lives. It is only their faith in God that protects them. McCarthy is seen mocking the folly of both the hunters and the people as well. Through the killing of fellowmen McCarthy parodies the neighborly love as insisted in the Bible. While recruiting the kid, Captain White half-correctly says, “There’s no God in Mexico” (BM 34) and the above incident of the massacre in the church proves it.

In another incident, the gang enters a village and kills all the people in it not even leaving any child or infants. A man from the gang takes an infant by its legs and smashes its head against a stone. The blood splashing from the child is explained by McCarthy as a pictorial representation which challenges the mental stability of the readers who might tend to close the book with no strength to move on to turn the pages. They rape and torture the women in the village. Such is the scenario of the expansion of Land in the history of America. 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).

This novel is notorious for both the extent and representational style of its violence. As Steven Shaviro wrote in one of the most often quoted essays on McCarthy, “*Blood Meridian* sings hymns of violence, it’s gorgeous language commemorating slaughter in all its sumptuousness and splendor” (143). The Judge in the novel is the synonym for violence. The very description of the judge made by McCarthy brings a kind of fear and a question simultaneously as to how he will appear. Such curiosity is instigated in the readers by the writer to bring in their spirits to travel along with the characters and unravel the originality of the judge. “Everything in *Blood Meridian* is violence and blood, dying and destruction” (Shaviro 155).

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 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).

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.

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).

Thus the paper shows the evident presence of violence as a synonym to the judge who is presented as a challenging character alongside Anton Chigurh of *No Country for Old Men*. Both are incomparable to any of the villains of the literary scenario. The surprisingly overflowing violence in the characterization of the judge compartmentalizes him from other characters depicting him as an awful character.

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