

**The Challenge of Human Existence Free from External
Influence in McCarthy's *The Blood Meridian* or *The Evening
Redness in the West***

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Abstract

Cormac McCarthy is known for his unusual style of simple writing. His writings are plain, direct and depict the routine life with violence. Though readers feel that violence play a vital role in his works, it has its own limits and merges with usual happening in the characters' lives. His villains are prophets of destruction and have no redemption at all. His heroes are no longer from a decent background instead; they are wanderers, vagabonds and outlaws and at times innocent. There is no much scope for female characters in his works. His novel *The Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in the West* (1985) talks about a kid, an outcast who falls a prey to the Glanton's gang, the scalp hunters the real gang taken from the history of America. The novel talks about the kid's encounter with the awe-inspiring Judge Holden, a devil incarnation. These scalp hunters get contracts with the regional leaders and hunt the Mexicans for which they get bounty in exchange. They started to kill anyone they see. This is the scenario that the kid is put in to. The innocent kid slowly gets used to such cold- blooded murders and scalp hunting. The readers can see the change in the kid as the novel moves further who starts to admire the Judge and follow his deeds in all his actions. Thus, this paper focuses on how the environment and people around challenges the survival of a human being and how the need for survival changes through the external influence. The hierarchy of needs of a normal living is also

a question in such a scenario. Thus, this paper tries to put forth the traits of behavioral psychology in the characters of the novel with a special focus on the kid.

Keywords: McCarthy, *The Blood Meridian*, *The Evening Redness in the West*, Behavioral Pattern, external influence, hierarchy of needs, internal change, violence, innocence

Introduction

The novel *Blood Meridian* or *The Evening Redness in The West* (1985) 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. The unnamed boy is referred as the “kid” and towards the end as the “man”. McCarthy varies from other writers in a way that some unusual happenings or characters will surely occupy the first row of his novels. The depiction of weird characters itself is a style of him. One such technique used is the unnamed characters. The specialty of this is that it can refer to anyone in the society. It becomes rather common. This same technique is also used by him in the novel *The Road*. McCarthy’s Judge shadows Milton’s Satan, Marlow’s Faustus, Goethe’s Mephistopheles, Melville’s Ahab and Conrad’s Kurtz. The influence of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is perceptibly seen in the novel.

The boy was born during the Leonid meteor shower in 1833. His mother died immediately after the child birth. His father was taking care of him. Even at the age of fourteen he had a mind for violence which the author calls it as “mindless violence”. He was by then thin, ragged and illiterate. He runs from his house determined not to meet his father and sister and also his family house again. The violence that has assimilated in the boy is in the first place from his father who was a drunkard. The boy thus becomes an outcast and is doing some odd works to defend him against hunger.

At first the boy meets the judge in a church where he is falsely accusing the Priest Reverend Green. The judge just entered the church where the priest is preaching and accuses him of molesting an eleven-year old girl and also a goat. Later in a bar when asked about the priest the judge reveals that he has not seen him before. The boy witnessing is shocked but still enjoys his company. He sees him as the missing father figure. This is the first attraction of the boy towards the judge. When the boy along with Toadvine set fire to a hotel, it is watched by the judge and he smiles at the boy. This is their first encounter with each other.

The judge is a strange and sadistic character who considers himself a God. McCarthy says that he never sleeps. Whenever people are worried, he used to dance. The characterization of the judge is complex to understand even after multiple readings. Why is he there? What is the purpose behind his smile and His bald appearance? are unanswerably strange. There is no reason why he commits crimes. 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. He is massive, well- educated, multi-talented and an aggressive and resourceful leader of the gang along with Glanton. He is an amalgamation of savagery and sophistication. Emerging as the true authority within the gang, he leads the men towards their doom, insisting all along on the primacy of war and its essential part of the human condition.

The boy ends up landing with the armed guerrillas under the command of Captain White. But when they entered Texas they are brutally attacked and killed by Comanche warriors. He somehow survived and finds himself in jail. His cell neighbor Toadvine spoke with the authorities that both he and the kid would help in scalp hunting business and thus joined the gang of Glanton. 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 main characters from the gang are the kid, the judge, Glanton, Toadvine, Ex-priest Tobin.

That is the time of expansion of lands and the environment the boy is born into and brought up are full of violence and war. As in the words of the judge- kill or be killed. Such a scenario reminds the readers of the idea of the "survival of the fittest". This is where the behavioral pattern of the kid gets changed. The feeling of violence is already embedded in the kid and these external forces bring it out into a fully formed structure.

In spite of his assimilated violent nature, the kid is ready to help anyone despite their harsh behaviors. This can be seen when he helps Tobin to stitch one of his wounds when the rest of the gang stood watching Tobin struggling with one hand. In another situation he removed an arrow from the leg of a man when the whole gang along with the judge mocked him for helping one of his crew men who they consider as a weak being. This compassion and generosity naturally come to him even being in such a blood thirsty gang. The readers can understand the kid has ambivalence as normal human beings would possess. But it is in the hands of the responsible people or the environment around that decides which of the nature from a person should be nurtured, as in the case of the boy, violence is nurtured by circumstances and people around.

This fourteen-year old is no more a kid but is somewhere in his adolescent age. The kids of this age start to apply things practically what they have learnt and inculcated as kids. Thus, the boy has started to apply what is in him, which the readers will find this application during his early run-away days. He starts to steal, fights to survive and finally ended joining the gang.

When the kid applies this to his situation, he finds it more appealing because he is able to get whatever he demands. The kid starts applying the skills he learnt and starts getting food and shelter either by stealing or by fighting with the opponent.

When the application doesn't fail him, he ends up thinking that only this life style will provide him with whatever is necessary. That is why he is able to immediately acclimatize to the environment that the gang puts him into. This is the reason why he fights with Toadvine when he meets him for the first time. This is actually the behavioral pattern practiced by the behaviorist to build in the behavioral pattern in dogs. When a bell rings the dog is provided with food. When this becomes routine the dog starts to salivate immediately hearing the bell even before seeing the food. This is how the kid's environment and the characters build in a behavioral pattern of violence in him.

Since his father figure is missing, he tries to depend on someone and chooses the judge to be the apt person. His compassionate heart makes him to be dependent on someone. Thus, violence has gotten an important portion in his life for survival. Even when he joins the gang, the first thing he is doing was watching them and trying to imitate them especially the mysterious judge. The relationship between him and the judge is very different and complex to understand. There are no close conversations, nor did he guide or sacrifice anything for the kid. Observing this the readers feel as though they are reading a pretty good page in a book of myth in which a sorcerer with her very look mesmerizes her prey.

There is a striking resemblance between the kid in *Blood Meridian* and the kid in *The Road*. Both are nameless. But they are different in approaching or perceiving the world. Both are exposed to the harsh reality of life and its secret normally a child is kept from. They know what life and death are and the hard living in the existing world. But their perceptions are different. The kid in the novel *The Road* is purely good at heart, selfless and even when the father wanted to kill a man who comes to rob them, the kid was very particular in pardoning him and also helping people with food they find on their way, in spite of their own hunger. This is because the father figure was with him guiding wherever necessary and insisting that he has to "carry the fire" in him that is, humanity in him and should lead a selfless life with compassion.

But in this novel *Blood Meridian* the father figure is missing to guide the boy and lead him in a good path. Instead there is a figure, a devil-incarnate to show him all that is unhealthy, uncouth, uncanny and destructive to the core both internal and external. Though the father and the son in *The Road* are put into such a filthy rotten situation, they never mind about the external destructive world instead is much bothered about the internal richness of the soul that the father starts inculcating this in his son.

But in *Blood Meridian* the world is laying in front of them with opportunities but the option the kid chose is wrong. The readers can justify that there is no one with him to direct him in the right path. But the judge the assumed father figure for the kid justifies their deed by telling if they want to survive, there is no other option than to kill. Kill or be killed, thus instigating the idea of murder as a natural and justifiable cause to which the kid sticks on to throughout the novel. The judge has no difference between good or bad, right or wrong.

The kid was at first innocent and naive. Slowly as the novel moves further the kid is seen removed from his original position as a kid and becomes the part of the harshness and evil of his surroundings. His behavioral pattern from innocence and helpfulness slowly starts disappearing. This can be seen when in the desert he leaves one of his wounded gang men all alone and runs for his life. But later we find his compassion shadowing here and there. Despite being with the murderous gang, the kid tries to uphold humanism and morality in him when all the others including Toadvine and Tobin have turned to be devilish. This is the sign of ambivalence seen in the kid. There is no depiction of God in the novel and the characters are also not shown as beings but simply as rocks soulless with surrounded anarchy and disorder. In one of the scenes as they enter into a bar, an old Mexican starts calling them as “society of war”.

There is hardly any law and order of any kind and so bloodshed and violence is a common happening in the society. Also, the gang is paid by the Mexican leader to scalp hunt the Indians, especially its leader Gomez and kill him. This lawless scenario is an inevitable setting in the history as well as in the novel which forms the basis for all the violence. Had there been an existing law in the nation, the number of crimes and criminals would have vanished. In McCarthy’s words “There’s no such thing as life without bloodshed”.

Thus, the kid picks up his behavioral change from the existing environment and still at his heart he has little of humanism when he drifts apart from the scalp hunting group and now is seen and addressed as ‘the man’ in the novel. But when he finally meets the judge, he tries to prove his innocence resulting in his murder by the judge. Thus, the novel leaves a message that evil has always an upper hand against everything that is good. Thus, the kid has inculcated the attitudes the environment presents to him and has imitated it in his life which has become his part.

Thus, the paper brings forth the issue that environmental settings is always a challenging factor to shape and reshape human behavior irrespectively of caste and creed, kid or man, young or old. Thus, the external influence has a strong hold on the behavioral pattern of human beings who happens to be the puppets in the hands of fate and environment.

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