

The Scapegoat as the Carrier of Sins: The Duality of Divinity in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* and *Outer Dark*

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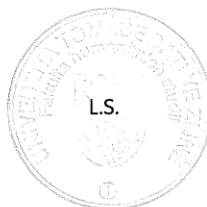
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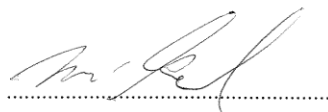
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ABSTRAKT

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat dílo a vliv významného současného amerického romanopisce Cormaca McCarthyho, jednoho z hlavních představitelů americké jižanské literatury. První část práce je soustředěna na jeho život, kariéru, literární vývoj a charakteristiku jeho děl. Cílem je probádat jeho literární předchůdce a jeho vlastní pohled na svět. Je označován za filosofického autora s náboženským cítěním v neortodoxním smyslu slova. Prvotní pozornost práce je věnována hlavním protagonistům McCarthyho raných románů *Dítě boží* a *Vnější tma*, zkoumající “Dualitu božství.” Závěr práce se snaží prokázat skutečnost, že hlavní protagonisté nesou typické znaky symbolické lidské oběti a reprezentují tak Obětního beránka jako nositele hříchů ostatních.

Klíčová slova: Cormac McCarthy, americká jižanská literatura, Jižanská gotika, agnosticismus, křesťanská mystika, Obětní beránek, Dualita božství, *Dítě boží*, *Vnější tma*

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor's thesis analyzes the work and the influence of the significant contemporary American novelist, Cormac McCarthy, one of the major representatives of the literature of the American South. The first part of this paper is focused on his life, career and literary development, as well as the main parameters of his work. The objective is to examine McCarthy's literary predecessors and his worldviews. He has been characterized as a philosophical author with religious feelings in the unorthodox sense. Finally, the primary attention of the thesis is paid to the main protagonists of the McCarthy's early novels *Child of God* and *Outer Dark*, scrutinizing “the Duality of Divinity.” Conclusion of this thesis demonstrates the evidence that the main protagonists bear the typical features of the symbolic sacrifice of a human victim and represent the Scapegoat as the Carrier of Sins.

Keywords: Cormac McCarthy, the literature of the American South, the Southern Gothic, Agnosticism, the mystical Christianity, the Scapegoat, the Duality of Divinity, *Child of God*, *Outer Dark*

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CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 9 |
| 1 CORMAC MCCARTHY AND HIS LITERARY DEVELOPMENT | 11 |
| 2 CORMAC MCCARTHY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN LITERATURE | 18 |
| 3 INFLUENCES..... | 22 |
| 4 AGNOSTICISM AND GNOSTICISM, APOCALYPTIC THEMES AND NIHILISM OF CORMAC MCCARTHY..... | 25 |
| 5 CHILD OF WHOSE GOD? <i>CHILD OF GOD</i> | 29 |
| 6 DARK IS A WAY: <i>OUTER DARK</i> | 41 |
| CONCLUSION | 49 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 51 |

INTRODUCTION

Cormac McCarthy demonstrates that all the people on Earth come close to struggling on the verge of perdition, for no one is without sin. The objective of this thesis is to analyze the novels and the influence of the contemporary American novelist Cormac McCarthy, the prominent author of the Southern Gothic. Furthermore, the thesis is focused on examining his life, career and literary development, as well as portraying the main parameters and characteristics of his literature when it comes to his valuable contributions in the literature of American South, his analogies, specifics and uniqueness. Last but not least, concerning the symbolic sacrifice of a human victim known as Pharmakos, becomes the most significant theme of this thesis. The primary focus on the novels *Child of God* and *Outer Dark* most closely scrutinize the inclinations to the aspects of nihilism, Social Darwinism and Original sin, connected with McCarthy's grotesque imaginary world of the Southern Gothic. Given the fact that McCarthy tends to be a writer with unorthodox religious feeling, there is still a significant aspect for consolation – the concept of unwavering hope for redemption from sins and its consequences by merciful God. Thus, how to achieve a way of reconciliation of human beings with God in McCarthy's perception?

The main protagonist of *Child of God* named Lester Ballard appears in the role of a lonely and unhappy character who seems to be driven forward only by his lowest instincts of physiological needs. He is being exposed to the utmost brink of collapse and self-destruction. When we first encounter Lester Ballard, he is unclean and unshaven. Already at this time, it is obvious that he is a social outcast, a loner living in wilderness rather than civil society. As Lester Ballard has neither family, home nor friends, he finally finds himself falling slowly beyond the limits of socially acceptable behavior. He symbolizes the deepest decline and innocence at the same time. He suffers in the darkness of the lowest instincts of humanity but he seems to be a foreigner in the world where men and nature relate to each other. Lester was previously harmful for society and potentially represented danger, however, vice versa in the end, society represents danger for him. He is under clasp of persecution and involuntarily takes on the role of the Scapegoat as the carrier of sins. The people put their burden of sins on him, admitting their misdoing on the one hand and distancing from it on the other. Apparently, the ritualistic sacrifice of a human victim – Pharmakos is put in place throughout the novel. Pharmakos is both sacred and terrifying and symbolizes the duality of divinity.

In *Outer Dark*, the main protagonist of the novel Culla Holme struggles in his dreary wayfaring and causes anger and distrust in everybody he encounters. He does not seem to be self-confident and his anxiety is visible at first sight. He is constantly being accused of various improbable crimes. However, he has not committed them. This invites a presumption that Culla is used as the Scapegoat as well and ends up being held accountable for the actions of other people in the county or mankind on the whole. Taking the scapegoat into consideration in more details, in ancient times, particularly in the times of disasters, the redeeming rituals were being held, designed to sacrifice certain abnormal people. Abnormal or unnatural was generally considered a degenerated or disabled person or a group of people accused of inferiority. These people were picked from the majority and ritually killed outside the communion. It was believed that by doing so, a village or municipality would be cleansed from bad blood or filthy spirit. Assassination of this sacrificed victim represents its expulsion from surrounding community. A squalor embodied in the sinister abnormality is forcibly expelled.¹

Hence, this thesis will examine the reasons and proofs that both Lester Ballard and Culla Holme bear the characteristics of the typical Pharmakos and represent the Scapegoat as the carrier of sins. The main objective is to prove this hypothesis and then draw a conclusion based on a preponderance of evidence. Apart from that, there is still one question shrouded in mystery. The clarification of this question is the key to understand the whole thesis. What do the terms “child of God” and “outer dark” really mean? Are all of the people equal under God? Are we all children of the same God? Or, does that mean that all those who are not religious or spiritually oriented and do not possess the ability of self-reflection are condemned to stray in the outer dark?

¹ See Michal, Svěrák. *Svět v hrsti prachu*. (Praha: Argo, 2012), 99.

1 CORMAC MCCARTHY AND HIS LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Charles Joseph McCarthy was born in the New England city of Providence, Rhode Island, on July 20, in 1933. His parents had six children and he was the third in a line. As the eldest son he was named Charles, after his father. The family did not live in Rhode Island for very long, however. He grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee. His family moved there when he was four years old and therefore, as a result, this was where he first in his life got in touch with the people and the places that would affect his southern works. He later accepted the name “Cormac” (the Gaelic equivalent of Charles), which was a family nickname given to his father by his aunts in Ireland. McCarthy was brought up as a Roman Catholic and this reality distinguished him from the majority, given the conditions of the South, and he got the educational background in Catholic schools until he entered the University of Tennessee. His upbringing in Tennessee was the key aspect that has influences on his later portraits of violence and bloodshed that would come to prevail in his work. “You grow up in the South, you're going to see violence,” he told an interviewer in 2007, defending the horrid aspects of his work. “And violence is pretty ugly.”² As a child he became very fond of the nature that surrounded his home. This would later influence his novels as well. When I was a kid, I was very interested in the natural world,” McCarthy remembered in 2007. “To this day, during casual conversations, little-known facts about the natural world will just crop up.”³

He tended to be rather an intellectual person, even though in his early stages of his life he was not always bookish. McCarthy finally encountered the adventure and wisdom of books to a larger extent after he left the university. As pointed out earlier, he attended the University of Tennessee, but only during the 1951-1952 academic year. In the year of 1953 he joined the U.S. Air Force and was later stationed in the barracks in Alaska where he tackled with the military tedium by reading books. After the Air Force four-year-stint, he returned to the University of Tennessee in 1957. During this second try at college he began to devote himself in writing more diligently. He found out that he was literary talented after winning the university's Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing. For the very first time he stood out in print after publishing two of his short stories in the college's literary

²David Kushner. “Cormac McCarthy's Apocalypse.” *Rolling Stone*, (December 27, 2007).

³ Ibid.

magazine, *The Phoenix*. “*Wake for Susan*” appeared in the fall of 1959 and “*A Drowning Incident*” appeared in early 1960. In the end, McCarthy left the university in 1961 without taking a degree and moved temporarily to Chicago where he worked in a warehouse designed for manufacturing of auto parts. Besides, he married his first wife, Lee Holleman, whom he had met at the University of Tennessee. Together with their son Cullen, they settled in Sevier County, Tennessee. Unfortunately the marriage was rather short and after their divorce, McCarthy ended up being in hand-to-mouth existence, migrating around the US a lot, still working on his first book.

His very first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, became quite a success. Immediately after publishing he was being compared to William Faulkner. Moreover, McCarthy's editor at Random House, Albert Erskine, had been Faulkner's editor too. As Eric Hage claims, *The Orchard Keeper* characterized a lot of writer's dark and gloomy sensibility, as well as a lack of psychological reconnaissance or exculpation, and the notion of the grotesque that would affect a lot of his early works.⁴ McCarthy depicts a weird, imaginative community characteristic by its abnormal and eccentric elements. Despite the fact that the amount of sold copies was only sporadic, McCarthy's early novels received positive reviews in general. During his early career, when his work was still closely associated with Tennessee and its surroundings, McCarthy was often described as a writer of “Southern Gothic” which was traditionally represented in past by William Faulkner and later by Flannery O'Connor.

The ambiguous term “Southern Gothic,” refers to the Southern literature works that are characteristic by close portrayals of its grotesque, fantastical, and macabre features, often enriched with the hints of black humor. According to Eric Hage, the Southern Gothic novel is a descendant of the Gothic novels of England, the permeating blackness of those books transferred to Southern locales where the ancient decaying castles and estates of England are represented by the ruins of mansions of the Southern United States.⁵ Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is generally regarded as the first English Gothic, however, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is perhaps the most well-known novel with distinct Gothic features. The prominent American author Edgar Allan Poe also used the classic elements of the

⁴ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 8.

⁵ See *Ibid.*, 150-151.

Gothic literature to create his own phantasmagoric world, and despite his relative lack of regionalism he can be seen as a precursor of the Southern Gothic writers of the twentieth century.⁶

Furthermore, Gothic elements are also pervading such eminent classics of English literature as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. As Eric Hage claims, the Southern Gothic is, however, distinct to English form in its reliance upon the bizarre, violent, grotesque, and often comic.⁷ Besides, this is evident in McCarthy's first four novels, which are undoubtedly most influenced by such regionalist masters as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Additionally, McCarthy has directly linked his own deep and vibrant explorations of violence to his Tennessee roots. The defining Southern Gothic feature of the grotesque is also on prominent display in his early works.⁸

Avoiding a conventional working life, McCarthy received a lot of grants which helped him to dedicate fully in writing. For two decades he made ends meet thanks to the awards he had won for his early novel, including grants from several foundations. For example he gained a travel fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Consequently, he decided to set off to Ireland in order to research his family history for future books. While he was on board he met with his second wife – an English woman named Anne DeLisle – who was working as a singer and dancer on the ship. They married in England in 1966 and thanks to a Rockefeller Foundation grant they travelled around Europe. Among many other places they settled on the island of Ibiza, one of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. This is where McCarthy finished his second novel called *Outer Dark*. According to Eric Hage, in this novel we can find a dreamlike and archaic atmosphere, as well as a strenuous journey motif. All along his career, McCarthy has remained secretive, refusing lucrative offers for speaking on conferences or television shows. In 1967, McCarthy and his second wife moved back to Tennessee to a residence near Knoxville, where McCarthy reconstructed a dairy barn. The next book he finished was called *Child of God*, a mysterious tale about a psychologically dejected necrophiliac Lester Ballard who, being at the bottom of the society, ended up living in a cave with the bodies of his dead

⁶ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 151.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸ See *Ibid.*, 151.

victims. As Hage also mentions, the narrative is comical and vibrant and we can even perceive an undertone of dark humor.⁹ As was said former, McCarthy's early novels are affected by his home state of Tennessee, often set in the rural regions of the Appalachian Mountains near Knoxville. According to Steven Frye, McCarthy's early rather lyrical novels are very rich in symbols and other imaginative and evocative viewpoints. His mysterious characters are realistic and symbolic at the same time.¹⁰

In 1976, McCarthy left Tennessee and separated from his second wife, however, Anne DeLisle and Cormac McCarthy have remained friends until these days. McCarthy then moved to El Paso, Texas. He earned a living only thanks to literary fellowships. According to *Texas Monthly* profile as of 1992, "McCarthy began to be seen in pool halls and bowling alleys on the south side of town, as well as in various Mexican restaurants, always with some esoteric book under his arm."¹¹

In 1979 he released a novel influenced by Knoxville settings called *Suttree*, which had been developing for a long time and McCarthy had been working a lot to finish it. The novel is unique in terms of McCarthy's own autobiographical features and has been often compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Considered by some to be McCarthy's greatest and most humorous novel, it is also sometimes marked as "a doomed version" of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.¹²

In 1981, based on Cormac McCarthy's accomplishments and potential, his financial situation improved substantially because he had been given so called "genius grant," more commonly known as MacArthur Fellowship. He was awarded a noteworthy amount of money (it has been said over \$200,000). The fellowship indicated that McCarthy was gradually gaining a higher esteem in literary circles, however, he remained to be rather a solitary man. He disagreed with interviews and kept away from public.¹³

Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West, McCarthy's key work, came out

⁹ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 9.

¹⁰ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 1-2.

¹¹ Robert, Draper. "The Invisible Man." *Texas Monthly*, (July 1992), as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 9-10.

¹² See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 10.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 10.

in 1985. Immediately after the novel came to fruition, it was regarded a masterpiece of the 1980s which substantially strengthen McCarthy's literary reputation. This graceless novel is quite difficult to absorb. It tells a story about the Glanton gang, a group of scalp hunters who took pleasure in killing and butchering Native Americans and other innocent people at the United States–Mexico border during 1849 and 1850. The novel bears characteristics of archaic prose and very frequently has been compared to McCarthy's favorite novel, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. In addition, *Blood Meridian* became famous for its vile and cruel antagonist, one of the most wicked antagonists that have ever been known, named Judge Holden, a brutal murderer and raving lunatic, who seems to be the embodied satan himself. In comparison to positive approach of literary critics, however, the novel received little recognition from public and only several thousand of copies were sold. Nevertheless, *Blood Meridian* has met with great admiration of many readers in following and mainly in recent years and moreover, a prominent literary critic Harold Bloom considers it to be one of the greatest American novels of all time. By this novel, as Eric Hage puts it, McCarthy had strongly attained an overwhelming feature that would prevail in his subsequent novels too, a worldview of sheer pessimism, apocalyptic portrayals, and his own surmise that violence is nothing but central characteristic of humankind.¹⁴

Generally speaking, McCarthy's narratives are pervaded with crude, ruthless, and terrifying descriptions of the cruelties unimaginable. Apart from that, as Hage mentions again, all of McCarthy's Western novels are rich in deep philosophical contemplations on the myths of past, nature of God, and the very essence of being.¹⁵ These various features were portrayed in McCarthy's next novel, *All the Pretty Horses*. The novel has a more accessible and adventurous narrative than his early, rather obscure novels. *All the Pretty Horses* not only became a bestseller but was even praised by wide spectrum of critics. It was intended as the first volume of the so called Border Trilogy and it won several awards such as the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. McCarthy, then nearly 60 years old, was still living in El Paso at that time and was working on the novel called *The Crossing*, which was intended as the second book of the Border Trilogy

¹⁴ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 11.

¹⁵ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 11.

and was considered to be an epic literary voyage compared to Homer's *Odyssey* in some ways. Cormac McCarthy later became friends with Murray Gell-Mann, one of the many well known scientists who had been pondering about complexities of existence. These scientists had gathered and founded the renowned Santa Fe Institute in 1984. Since 1990s, McCarthy had begun working together with them, focusing on a range of interests such as chaos and complexity theory. As a matter of fact, the place became his prior home base for him.¹⁶

McCarthy has never resisted the reality that he rather preferred the company of scientists to that of other writers or philosophers. "Science is very rigorous," he once said. "When you hang out with scientists and see how they think, you can't do so without developing a respect for it ... When you say something, it needs to be right. You can't just speculate idly about things."¹⁷

McCarthy de facto moved to Santa Fe to become their significant part. This was generally viewed as curious and noteworthy oddity among his counterparts or companions. "People who know my work walk in and they're kind of confused as to why I'm there," he said, "but that's OK. They soon get over that."¹⁸ Gell-Mann has said of McCarthy's daily presence at the institute, "He has a long-standing interest in a great many things and he knows an immense amount about them ... if he weren't so shy, he could probably ask penetrating questions."¹⁹

In 1998 the final Border Trilogy book, *Cities of the Plain*, finally came out. As Eric Hage mentions, this third novel of the trilogy is more nostalgic and sorrowful than the previous ones and was not received very well among critics.²⁰ At the beginning of the twenty first century, McCarthy became interested in drama and managed to publish several plays. Nevertheless, after some time he focused on prose again. His next novel was called *No Country for Old Men*, considered a surprising change of tone. The whole novel is regarded a crime thriller. Set in 1980, the book is concerned about drug trafficking.

¹⁶ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 11-12.

¹⁷ David, Kushner. "Cormac McCarthy's Apocalypse." *Rolling Stone*, (December 27, 2007).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Richard, B. Woodward. "Cormac Country." *Vanity Fair*, (August 2005), as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 13.

Therefore – in this McCarthy's one of the most readable works of all – there can be found a lot of rage and violence. In the following years, McCarthy started to be working on more novels at once and as a result of this endeavor he published the nightmarish, well known – Pulitzer Prize winning novel – *The Road*, one of the most dreadful and horrific works he has ever written. The novel portrays a man and his son wandering on a harsh journey across a destroyed landscape that has been almost totally obliterated by some unspecified catastrophe. Furthermore, the disaster has exterminated almost all life on Earth. McCarthy subjectively depicted how the end of the world might look like. The primary purpose of the two main protagonists is to reach the sea, float away, and try to find out if a place inhabited by good people – a safe refuge – still exists out there. Anyhow, they are struggling in their miserable lives, being pulled into constant fear because of the potential danger that lurks everywhere. They have no choice but to suffer from starvation all day long. The most terrifying menace is, however, that they are being chased by ruthless cannibals. McCarthy said he had once an image in his head of what the landscape would look like in the wake of apocalypse, with fires burning on a hill.²¹

In 2009, McCarthy obtained significant award. USA Today reported, “The author of *The Road*, *All the Pretty Horses* and several other novels was named the winner... of the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for lifetime achievement in American fiction.”As the awarding organization itself noted, the honor “goes to a distinguished living American author of fiction whose body of work in English possesses qualities of excellence, ambition, and scale of achievement over a sustained career which place him or her in the highest rank of American literature.”²²

²⁰ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 13.

²¹ See *Ibid.*, 16.

²² “Author Cormac McCarthy receives PEN award.” http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2009-05-04-mccarthy-pen_N.htm. USA TODAY, May 4, 2009.

2 CORMAC MCCARTHY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN LITERATURE

In many of his works, as Steven Frye claims, McCarthy intentionally picks to pieces and transforms the great masterpieces of literature – the King James Bible, Shakespeare's tragedies, the novels of Melville, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, and Hemingway – and out of its fragments he comes up with his own uniquely distinctive contributions.²³ In his most extended print interview, “McCarthy's Venomous Fiction,” which was guided by Richard B. Woodward of the *New York Times Magazine*, McCarthy talks about the influences on the formation of new literary works. He says, “The ugly fact is books are made out of books... The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written.”²⁴ McCarthy was described by Robert Coles of the *New Yorker* as a novelist of religious feeling, probably, as Frye mentions, because he engages the ultimate questions – the nature of the real, the possibility of the divine, the source of ethics and identity (in fact, we can find these aspects in all of his works in general) – but he does it always in a richly philosophical context, including the secular science as well.²⁵

Reading the Cormac McCarthy's works is a bit like a challenge. Here, it is necessary to point out that McCarthy must be viewed in an elaborately aesthetic way. Many of his narratives reflect the secrets of the natural world. The lyrical, descriptive, distinctive and generally unconventional style of McCarthy is very rich in unusual archaic words. The language he puts in place is very sophisticated, complex and ambiguous. According to Frye, Cormac McCarthy, above all, uses narrative techniques that are atypical, involving interior or exterior monologues, inversions, frames and dream sequences.²⁶ The other problematic and challenging factor of Cormac McCarthy's works which can be found especially in *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, *Blood Meridian*, and *The Road*, is that McCarthy focuses in details on human degradation and violence. He deals with fallibility of mankind and explores human faults and sins. In his only television interview, McCarthy was asked

²³ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

²⁴ Richard, B. Woodward. “McCarthy's Venomous Fiction.” *New York Times Magazine*, (April 19, 1992), 28-31.

²⁵ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 3.

²⁶ See *Ibid.*, 4.

what he wanted his readers to take away from *The Road*. His answer was simple: “That we should be grateful.”²⁷

The author admits his literary predecessors, showing esteem particularly for Melville, Dostoyevsky and Faulkner. As Steven Frye mentions, McCarthy is deeply inspired by the historical events of the twentieth century, such as the horrible bloodshed of two world wars, culminating in the genocide and the menace of Cold War. Therefore, he is also concerned about the development of the nuclear and generally technological age.²⁸ As Frye points out again, as a consequence of McCarthy's fascination with science, he is neither positivist, nor vanguard supporter of eighteenth-century Enlightenment notions of human perfectibility.²⁹ As a matter of fact, he says that depravity, avarice and violence are dominant to human nature, and values, meaning or purpose must be always difficult to fight for and we can find them only when we switch on the lights in the deepest darkness by doing good deeds. Again, according to Steven Frye, his work is infiltrated with these themes which are, additionally, very rich in overwhelming philosophical and religious viewpoints. McCarthy's works search for this mysterious riddle, light in the darkness. His primary objective always is to deal with the human dilemma in the most frightful and demanding ways.³⁰

The question of ethics, is one of the key aspect of his early novels, however, the right actions and the good deeds are never clearly demonstrated. Cormac McCarthy understands the frontier romance in all its historical spans simply as a means to explore the human tendency to be let astray, ending up in the corrupt state of mind which is full of avarice, blindness, violence, self-gratification, and depravity. Generally speaking, Cormac McCarthy has been marked as a philosophical and unorthodox religious writer. The academic scholars, as well as Steven Frye, have taken notice of McCarthy's perceiving the world ranging from Platonism, Neoplatonism, the Existential Christianity of Soren Kierkegaard, Gnosticism, Nietzschean Materialism, to the mystical and heterodox Christianity of Jakob Böhme. His Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road* explores the human condition as McCarthy sees it – physically, spiritually, and intellectually. That word

²⁷ Oprah, Winfrey. Television interview with Cormac McCarthy, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, (June 5, 2007).

²⁸ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 6-7.

²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁰ See *Ibid.*, 8.

is simple – mystery.³¹

In the initial reviews of his early novels in particular, as Steven Frye claims, McCarthy was regarded as being a part of the regional literature of the South. McCarthy shares analogies with W. Faulkner, T. Williams, F. O'Connor, etc. These authors are formally and thematically unique, showing their interest especially for the historical circumstances of the South after the Civil War, as well as the bitter psychological and social factors that became even more burdensome, thorny and urgent in the modern period.³²

The key genres of the gradually developing aesthetics of southern literature are the Southern Grotesque together with the Southern Gothic. The term “Southern Gothic” was coined in 1936 by Ellen Glasgow. According to Steven Frye, her intention was to define what she understood as distressing attributes of the new southern writers, particularly William Faulkner. These authors used many of the typical aspects of the gothic romance – rotting buildings, dreary settings, miserable characters that suffer psychologically, etc. Basically, the primary intention was to evoke horror, terror, aversion, disgust, perversity, etc. Tennessee Williams once described the Southern Gothic as “an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience.”³³ Coming to terms with the Southern Grotesque, as Frye mentions again, which is the ancillary term connected in many ways with the Southern Gothic, requires open mind and perception of various lascivious, immoral and humorous exaggerations of characters, including physical abnormality and sexual deviance.³⁴

In *Outer Dark*, as Frye claims, Cormac McCarthy depicts the unknown cosmic evil incarnate in the dreadful mysterious triune. These three figures that haunt Culla Holme, trying to spy his guilt, scrutinizing his pathetic soul, could be even considered as a punishment for his incest and that he abandoned his own infant child. In *Child of God*, the Southern Grotesque is put in place as the necrophiliac Lester Ballard loses his land and

³¹ See Ibid., 11-12.

³² See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 13-14.

³³ Tennessee, Williams. “Introduction to Carson McCullers: Reflections in a Golden Eye,” *Where I Live: Selected Essays of Tennessee Williams*, as quoted in, Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 14.

³⁴ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 13-14.

steeply falls into a psychological chasm, into realms of wickedness and obscenity that are hardly conceivable. In a typically southern style, McCarthy explores the senseless social habits and the inherent human weakness and fallibility.³⁵

³⁵ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 13-14.

3 INFLUENCES

As Eric Hage claims, beginning with *Blood Meridian* in 1985, Cormac McCarthy has reached a stage of surpassing all influences, cultivating them into his own distinct vision, becoming a huge literary influence himself. Nevertheless, he has had four key influences that are worthy of examination: Ernest Hemingway, Herman Melville, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. Beginning with Hemingway, one sees his doubtless influence in McCarthy's use of brief, objective and pared-back, descriptions. Usually these involve workmanlike tasks or labors in which the characters are involved. On a thematic level, Hemingway's frank confrontation of war, death, and violence also echoes in the work of McCarthy.³⁶

When it comes to the similarities with Herman Melville, as Eric Hage puts it, McCarthy has cited Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* as his favorite book and moreover, McCarthy's novels such as *Blood Meridian* and *The Crossing* owe a clear debt to the work of Melville. It could be argued that Judge Holden possesses the characteristics of several Melville's protagonists, especially of those portrayed in *Moby-Dick: or; The Whale*, as his high eloquence brings to mind Ahab and his physicality and supernatural nature, as Harold Bloom has pointed out, calls to mind the white whale itself. In addition, the multiracial Glanton Gang depicted in the *Blood Meridian* reflects the diverse crew that sailed the Nantucket whaleship the Pequod in Melville's book. Undoubtedly here, if McCarthy has taken stylistic and thematic cues from Ernest Hemingway, he has gained something more indefinable from Melville.³⁷ There is another similarity between *Moby-Dick* and *Blood Meridian*, in that both works saw their respective writers stretching themselves in new directions, testing the limits of the prose – McCarthy, like Melville, showing a “drive to break the boundaries of literary form.”³⁸ Furthermore, it has been stated that, on a more specific level, McCarthy has borrowed tropes from *Moby-Dick*. Harold Bloom, who has called *Blood Meridian* “the strongest imaginative work by any living writer” also points out how the “ragged prophet” Elijah echoes in *Blood Meridian*. Elijah is the biblically inspired character who appears in chapter 19 of *Moby-Dick* to warn Ishmael and Queequeg

³⁶ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 94.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁸ Andrew, Delbanco. *Melville: His World and Work*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 122.

against sailing with Captain Ahab. “Destroying the Native American nations of the Southwest is hardly analogous to the hunt to slay Moby-Dick, and yet McCarthy gives us some curious parallels between the two quests.”³⁹

The influence of James Joyce might not be as deep as that of Melville or as that of William Faulkner in McCarthy’s early career but the Irish writer is important as well. His impact is most significant in *Suttree*, McCarthy’s Knoxville novel, which gives epic resonance to the down-and-out residents in Joyce’s epic portrayals of an ordinary Dublin day in *Ulysses*. As for McCarthy, one also occasionally finds a stream-of-consciousness tendency that evokes Joyce, particularly in its challenging of syntax and tests on the limits of language. McCarthy remarked in his TV interview with Oprah Winfrey how Joyce influenced, or at least prompted, his own tendency to be thrifty with punctuation. “James Joyce is a good model for punctuation. He keeps it to an absolute minimum,” McCarthy said. “There’s no reason to blot the page up with weird little marks. If you write properly you shouldn’t have to punctuate.”⁴⁰

The final writer that should be definitely mentioned is William Faulkner, the novelist who became the key influence on McCarthy’s early novels. In several of his novels, McCarthy often depicts various vague characters with mysterious motives revealed by their actions in the end. This experiment in characterization is undoubtedly one of the typical aspects he gained from William Faulkner. In fact, the resemblance of Faulkner is evident in Cormac McCarthy’s first novel *The Orchard Keeper*. *The New York Times* review noted, for instance, that some writers, “although they are highly gifted... are sorely handicapped by their humble and excessive admiration for William Faulkner. Cormac McCarthy, author of *The Orchard Keeper*, is one of these.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, following Eric Hage perspective, Cormac McCarthy has eventually worked up into such a profoundly unique prose stylist, one beyond influence and one whose own work is so powerful that new springing writers who read his work may find it hard to find analogies. Therefore, it is very intuitive to also mention ways in which McCarthy ultimately differs from his key influences. Faulkner, for instance, is a typical renderer of native soil, however, McCarthy is more like an ardent

³⁹ Harold, Bloom. *How to Read and Why*. (New York: Scribner, 2000), 258.

⁴⁰ Oprah, Winfrey. Television interview with Cormac McCarthy, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, (June 5, 2007).

⁴¹ Orville, Prescott. “Still Another Disciple of William Faulkner,” *The New York Times*, (May 12, 1965).
<http://www.times.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-orchard.html>.

explorer. To put distance between Cormac McCarthy and Herman Melville, one should take into consideration the success, recognition and various awards that, despite the reading public standoff, came to McCarthy during his life: MacArthur Fellowship, National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize, several bestsellers, an Academy Award for a movie based on *No Country for Old Men*. By contrast, Melville was destitute in obscurity. A world of difference also separates McCarthy from Hemingway. Hemingway's persona was a big part of his life's work and was deeply intertwined with his books, whereas McCarthy as a typical hermitic novelist strictly avoids a public writer's persona.⁴²

⁴² See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 98.

4 AGNOSTICISM AND GNOSTICISM, APOCALYPTIC THEMES AND NIHILISM OF CORMAC MCCARTHY

In the work of Cormac McCarthy, a very complicated portrait of God emerges, one that could sometimes be termed pessimistic or agnostic but never atheistic.⁴³ The author himself has said, “I don’t think you have to have a clear idea who or what God is in order to pray,”⁴⁴ that is a useful notion to keep in mind while reading his novels. Apparently, one can clearly understand a refusal of ecclesiastical forms in McCarthy’s work. For example, the title character of *Suttree* (1979), having fallen asleep in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, is awoken by a priest, who gently admonishes, “God’s house is not exactly a place to take a nap.” The force and sharpness of Suttree’s response is surprising: “It’s not God’s house.” The priest replies, “I beg your pardon?” and Suttree repeats, “It’s not God’s house.”⁴⁵ In other words, in McCarthy’s personal view, the sacred Christian rites are disregarded and unnecessary for faith, as this quote undoubtedly illustrates the mystical and heterodox Christianity of Cormac McCarthy.

An old, perspicacious drunk in a Mexican cantina is equally scornful in terms of ecclesiastical forms in *Blood Meridian* (1985): “I pray to God for this country,” he says. “I say that to you. I pray. I dont (sic) go in the church. What I need to talk to them dolls there? I talk here.”⁴⁶ Here it is essential to point out that McCarthy is typically philosophical, contemplative and unorthodox religious writer. As Eric Hage claims, in McCarthy’s work, God is very often withdrawn from canonical perspectives, however, this not necessarily avert a great belief in God that the characters in his novels often possess. In addition, McCarthy’s novels seek to demonstrate the entity of God as a predicament or paradox.⁴⁷ Who else but Cormac McCarthy would suggest that corpse defiler Lester Ballard is a “child of God much like yourself perhaps.”⁴⁸ Because of his tendency to deeply contemplate and ultimately embranch the normative boundaries of Christianity in his texts, McCarthy has

⁴³ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 87.

⁴⁴ Oprah, Winfrey. Television interview with Cormac McCarthy, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, (June 5, 2007).

⁴⁵ Cormac, McCarthy. *Suttree*. (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 255.

⁴⁶ Cormac, McCarthy. *Blood Meridian: or; the Evening Redness in the West*. (New York: First Vintage International Edition, May 1992), 103.

⁴⁷ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 87.

⁴⁸ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 6.

often been labeled a Gnostic – a term of controversial and complicated etymology that is in a very general sense meant in this case to connote an “esoteric” approach in which one seeks to understand God through experience and understanding.⁴⁹

Sven Birkerts claims, “McCarthy has been, from the start, a writer with strong spiritual leanings. His orientation is Gnostic ... His intuitions are of the most primary sort, never even remotely doctrinaire.”⁵⁰ McCarthy is frequently emphasizing the great distance between his characters and an almighty presence, a remoteness that his characters often deliberate upon. “I always thought when I got older that God would sort of come into my life in some way. He didnt,”⁵¹ Uncle Ellis tells Sheriff Bell in 2005’s *No Country for Old Men*. Nevertheless, as Eric Hage puts it, this has not averted God from being an incisive subject matter throughout McCarthy’s novels, and the author’s characters are usually great believers in an almighty entity of God – even in their heresy.⁵²

Coming to terms with apocalyptic themes of McCarthy, as Hage mentions, his worldview and poetic vision always weighs the historical ebb and flow of civilizations, which is why the reader constantly set eyes on mnemonic traces of the past in his novels.⁵³ The beginning of *Blood Meridian* is even preceded by a news clipping from the *Yuma Daily Sun*, describing a three-hundred-thousand years old fossil skull that “shows evidence of having been scalped.”⁵⁴ The clipping is demonstrated to introduce this story of hired borderlands scalpers in the 1850s, and seems to implicitly say to the reader, “Look how far we have not come.”⁵⁵ According to Eric Hage, in McCarthy’s borderlands novels, there is always the misgiving that civilizations will rise and civilizations will fall and what seems to be permanent and omnipresent is war, brutality, and death. This is why his books, particularly his works concerning the Southwest and Mexico, are tarnished with apocalyptic themes and images – until, of course, he delivers the death of all civilizations

⁴⁹ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 88.

⁵⁰ Sven, Birkerts. “The Lone Soul State.” *The New Republic*, (July 11, 1994), 38–41.

⁵¹ Cormac, McCarthy. *No Country for Old Men*. (New York: First Vintage International Edition, July 2006), 267.

⁵² See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 89.

⁵³ See *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁴ See Cormac, McCarthy. *Blood Meridian: or; the Evening Redness in the West*. preface.

⁵⁵ Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 38.

in the post-apocalyptic novel *The Road*.⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, many Native American cultures were annihilated more thoroughly than even a nuclear disaster might destroy ours.⁵⁷

But above all, McCarthy's apocalyptic inkling was focused on the American West. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy concentrates on a locale of the American South set in the 1850s, for, as Larry McMurtry reminds us, this "process" of Native American displacement that began in the 1830s "accelerated sharply in the 1840s and 1850s, and was mostly completed, insofar as the native tribes were concerned, by 1890."⁵⁸ However, this is not to say that McCarthy's apocalyptic vision is completely focused on the Indians of the United States and Mexico. Most readers of McCarthy understand that he takes an egalitarian view of violence and clarifies it as a condition of humanity, not race or culture. Coming to terms with McCarthy's general view of the overall human condition, it is necessary to point out that McCarthy has dismissed the global threat of climate change, claiming "we're going to do ourselves in first."⁵⁹

The Border Trilogy clings on the same locale as *Blood Meridian* but takes us away from the genocide of the 1850s into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as Eric Hage claims, continues to deal with problematic genocidal moments of the humankind. *The Crossing*, for instance, ends with the blinding flash of an atomic bomb testing in the New Mexico desert. Obviously, the bloody phantom of massacres during the Mexican Revolution, which took place decades before, spews a fire over the three books of trilogy. Beyond direct allusions to events, McCarthy consistently delivers up apprehension and suggestive apocalyptic figurativeness.⁶⁰

Alan Bilton has pointed out that "there is a remarkable continuity of symbolism, theme, and authorial voice, with a kind of apocalyptic grandeur present in McCarthy's

⁵⁶ See *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁷ See Hertha, D. Wong. *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 38.

⁵⁸ Larry, McMurtry. *Oh What a Slaughter: Massacres in the American West (1846–1890)*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 2.

⁵⁹ David Kushner. "Cormac McCarthy's Apocalypse." *Rolling Stone*, (December 27, 2007).

⁶⁰ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 39.

fiction from the onset.”⁶¹ Indeed, as Eric Hage mentions, readers of McCarthy can trace an apocalyptic imagery from the 1960s into the new millennium, despite certain authorial shifts in style, intent, and geographical locale.⁶² To further develop this statement it is worth mentioning the fact that Culla Holmes’ final moments in *Outer Dark* have distinct strains of *The Road*, nearly 40 years later. While it is this tendency to incline to apocalyptic themes that often gets Cormac McCarthy marked a nihilist, it is undoubtedly also part of the increasing aesthetic vision for which the writer has come to be acclaimed.⁶³ And if one can seek a trace of nihilism in McCarthy’s work, he turns out to be a pragmatic sort of nihilist. “There’s no such thing as life without bloodshed,” he said in a 1992 *New York Times Magazine* interview. “I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea,” he added. “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.”⁶⁴

On the basis of this quotation of McCarthy, apparently, a rather bloody and realistic worldview emerges from his work. Based on this interview from 1992 *New York Times Magazine*, this specific aspect evidently permeates McCarthy’s writings and he regards notions like species betterment or universal harmony as dangerous. To think so is a naive fantasy enslaving the people in the world, showing the emptiness of human beings’ life. Here, the concept of a hereditary sin might come to the fore. Mankind as a whole inherited depravity from the Original sin and only those God-blessed can redeem and save the other from evildoing in the world. The concepts of spreading of Christianity connected with The White Man's Burden might be regarded as the key aspects in evolution of humanity. Demonstrating a conclusion and edification from this chapter, with regards to human history, we are compelled to ponder the permanent, malevolent probabilities of cruelty and violence which are ingrained in human minds and inherent to human hearts.

⁶¹ Alan, Bilton. *An Introduction to Contemporary American Fiction*. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 133.

⁶² See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 40.

⁶³ See *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁴ Richard, B. Woodward. “McCarthy's Venomous Fiction.” *New York Times Magazine*, (April 19, 1992), as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 40.

5 CHILD OF WHOSE GOD? *CHILD OF GOD*

In *Child of God*, McCarthy's purpose of scrutinizing human degradation and violence is put in its utmost limits. The main protagonist named Lester Ballard is a notorious psychotic, infamous for voyeurism caused by his neurotic disorder, culminating in raping of young dead women, ending up living with their corpses in a cave, engaging in acts of necrophilia with them. Gathering the dead women into his subterranean cave mausoleum, Lester suffers gradually more and more and descends into depravity when madness takes over his psyche. At this point in the cave, as Michal Svěrák claims, we are witnessing Ballard in his direct connection with the principle of the duality of divinity, which people always found immensely fascinating and depressing at the same time. In the minds of people, the terms "divine" or "sacred" have always evoked an impression of some kind of the secret and inner vibrancy. God created the heavens and the Earth and saw that it was good. However, destructions and punishments are the omnipresent principles as well.⁶⁵ During his life, Lester Ballard has never felt such feeling as mother's love, neither sensual touch of a woman. Eric Hage claims that: "Lester is seeking the sensual world from which he is locked out."⁶⁶ This motive stimulates him to indulge in voyeurism and it leads almost coincidentally to his descent into necrophilia. Being an outsider from the society, his degeneration is presumably inevitable from the very beginning of his life.

When he was a child, he was excluded from the surrounding community and his family ended up in oblivion. His mother deserted him and his father committed suicide. Moreover, he lost his home as the family farm and the family house of his parents were sold at auction. Lester attempted to disrupt the auction and as a result, he was brutally beaten and exiled. Consequently, all these factors culminated in his suffering from loneliness, being a miserable outlaw reliant on stealing and hunting with his rifle. He is forced to live in an abandoned cabin near his old home and he spends most of his time roving in the countryside of wooded canyons and abandoned rock quarries. Lester wanders around the surrounding community, coming across a diverse population. The people usually treat him rather scornfully and with an undertone of distrustfulness. He becomes more alienate and lonely, which probably results in his voyeurism. As time passes, he once

⁶⁵ See Michal, Svěrák. *Svět v hrsti prachu*. (Praha: Argo, 2012), 91.

⁶⁶ Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 57.

discovers an abandoned car where he finds a naked man and woman, probably asphyxiated by exhaust gas. Both are lifelessly lying and Lester finds out that they are dead. He engages in act of necrophilia with the woman and takes money from the man's pocketbook. Lester gets down further into social and emotional isolation, as he gradually becomes fiercely obsessed with more bizarre acts of perversity. As Steven Frye puts it, his dry-rot and upheaval might be the acquired feature caused by familial failure which led to juvenile ferocity, as McCarthy's outlined portraits of Lester as a young boy bears many characteristics of oppressing behavior.⁶⁷

In his adulthood of alienation, Lester struggles with the harshly inhospitable natural landscape of rural Tennessee, as the novel takes place in the Sevier County of Tennessee in Appalachian Mountains. The nature, as Steven Frye mentions, is simultaneously sublime and beautiful, ruthless and indifferent.⁶⁸ And more importantly, as Frye claims, it is amid this elusive chaos that Lester Ballard must survive and find purpose and in all his depravity with beastly perversion, he seeks a connection with the human community.⁶⁹ As Doris Grumbach puts it, the author “has allowed us direct communion with his special kind of chaos since the novel offers a glimpse of the great dark of madness and violence and inevitable death that surrounds us all.”⁷⁰ It has been believed, following Steven Frye as well as the other literary scholars, the basic situation of *Child of God* is rumored to be based on an actual murder case in Sevier County, Tennessee, though there is no firm evidence to substantiate this.⁷¹

While many critics were concerned with the novel's style and characterization, some considered these features a result of conscious artistic choice and focused more on the thematic level.⁷² In the *New Yorker*, Robert Coles ponders McCarthy's distinctiveness: “He simply writes novels that tell us we cannot comprehend the riddles of human idiosyncrasy, the influence of the merely contingent or incidental upon our lives. He is a novelist of

⁶⁷ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 40.

⁶⁸ See Ibid., 40.

⁶⁹ See Ibid., 40.

⁷⁰ Doris, Grumbach. “Practitioner of Ghastliness,” *New Republic*, as quoted in, Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 43.

⁷¹ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 40.

⁷² See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 42.

religious feeling who appears to subscribe to no creed but who cannot stop wondering in the most passionate and honest way what gives life meaning.”⁷³ McCarthy's religious feeling is well indicated by his choice of titles in *Child of God* (his third novel) as well as preceding *Outer Dark* (his second novel).

Child of God symbolizes the aspects of the Southern Gothic, as Lester Ballard typically represents a character of gothic villain. Furthermore, McCarthy puts in place the common motifs, aesthetic devices and distinctive features of the Southern Grotesque – illustrated by Ballard's perversity, such as sexual deviance, culminating in various obscene, immoral and humorous exaggerations in his activities. According to Steven Frye, McCarthy is preoccupied with finding meaning and purpose in the world in which Lester is estranged. McCarthy complicates these questions by combining Lester's depravity with an unequivocal sympathy for his alienation and loss of the land, emotionally intensified by the brutality and ignorance of all those he encounters. Lester Ballard is the personification and the dark psychological embodiment of the chaos of the universe in and of itself.⁷⁴

Considering merely the theme of the novel, following perspectives of Eric Hage, *Child of God* undoubtedly ranks in the foreground among Cormac McCarthy's most shocking novels. Typically for McCarthy, portraying of harsh and obscene details connected with cruelty and disgust becomes a daily occurrence. Doubtless similarity might be observed between McCarthy's novels and horror fiction.⁷⁵ However, taking into account the McCarthy's sensible grotesqueness and his portrayals of grotesque lecherousness, deliberating about comparisons of genres might be tricky and inaccurate. In other words, McCarthy's prose differs from being pure horror because of his permanent use of the grotesque and frivolous aspects. As Hage mentions, it is universally acknowledged that a conventional horror is, above all, primary focused on building a tension or foreshadowing of unexplainable emotions of fear. In comparison, *Child of God* crops up with toilet descriptions, incest, and grotesque caricatures of several outlandish villagers and therefore, bears the typical characteristics of the Southern Grotesque.⁷⁶

⁷³ Robert, Coles: “The Stranger,” *The New Yorker*, as quoted in, Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 43.

⁷⁴ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 44.

⁷⁵ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 55.

⁷⁶ See *Ibid.*, 55.

Elaborating the issue of the novel's grotesqueness in the novel's early stages, for instance, the potential reader firstly encounters the main protagonist Lester Ballard in a very grotesque situation as he is standing straddle-legged, urinating on the ground. This is the reader's first introduction to the protagonist, relieving himself and making "in the dark humus a darker pool wherein swirls a pale foam with bits of straw."⁷⁷ McCarthy is going even further with his descriptions, a few pages later showing the uttermost extreme details of Lester's toilet activities, which are, however, very far from being kitschy, as it is perhaps an inseparable part of the novel's grotesqueness.

We also encounter Lester's acquaintance, the dumpkeeper with his nine strumpet-like, naughty daughters. They are described as "gangling progeny with black hair hanging from their armpits."⁷⁸ McCarthy carries on, describing household conditions: "They fell pregnant one by one. He beat them. The wife cried and cried. There were three births that summer. The house was filling up, both rooms, the trailer. People were sleeping everywhere. One brought home what she said was a husband but he only stayed a day or two and they never saw him again. The twelve year old began to swell..."⁷⁹

This obviously illustrates McCarthy's tendency of the Southern Grotesque. Very frequently he puts in place the extreme and comical situations as well as immoral and humorous exaggerations, including incest and other sexual deviance or perversity. Apart from that, the Southern Grotesque in details is put in place as a consequence of the dumpkeeper's catching one of his daughters in flagrante fornicating with a boy. The dumpkeeper beats her with a stick, expels the boy and then ends up putting his pants off himself, performing incest with her. Moreover, as Eric Hage puts it, we can find both comic and tragic elements in the novel. From the beginning early on, the main purpose of the novel was to demonstrate Lester as being a harmless character who just arouse in a comic milieu.⁸⁰

McCarthy is preoccupied with pessimistic speculations about the essence of the real and ontological rendering and pondering. He strives to put the reader straight into Lester's

⁷⁷ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 6.

⁷⁸ McCarthy, *Child of God*, 27.

⁷⁹ McCarthy, *Child of God*, 28.

⁸⁰ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 56.

existence, his profane and miserable life of pain and exposure to the gloomy elements, gradually arousing the feelings of empathy in the reader. McCarthy simply demands the reader's contemplation or questioning as to what are the reasons for having such an a priori pathetic feeling about this character. On a rather somber note, it is essential to point out that the book operates at a level of naturalism where it is believed that genetic or hereditary predispositions as well as social conditions, such as a family background, environment and living conditions, inevitably entail a big impact in shaping human character. In other words, it is thought that Lester's social exclusion and absolute alienation from other human beings might be caused by his disinheritance from familial relations. This is well illustrated by McCarthy himself: "I don't know. They say he never was right after his daddy killed hisself ... The mother had run off, I don't know where to nor who with..."⁸¹ The connected issues of the disinheritance and alienation undoubtedly influenced Lester Ballard's mischievous and cave-dwelling existence.

Who is Lester Ballard, after all, when the reader first meets him? He is a "child of God much like yourself perhaps."⁸² He is engaging in voyeuristic activities, witnessing a coital couple, however, only when he comes along by chance. In fact, his gradual descent into necrophilia is a consequence of a coincidental encounter. As was already mentioned former, he does not kill his first victim but instead he coincidentally detects a young couple in a stopped car. Surprisingly, it turned out they were dead, naked and strangely entangled. Something is getting roaring on the inside of the socially poor wretched outcast, who has never felt such feeling as a sensual touch of a woman, and he becomes a "crazed gymnast laboring over a cold corpse. He poured into that waxen ear everything he had ever thought of saying to a woman."⁸³ On the rebound, he later conceived an idea of bringing the girl's corpse to his dwelling. He leaves, returns to rob the lifeless corpses, leaves again, and then, finally, gets the idea of taking the girl's body with him.

"When he got home with the dead girl it was midmorning ... He came down ... past the barn and shouldered her through the narrow doorway and went in and laid her on the mattress and covered her ... He got a fire going in the hearth and sat before it and rested. Then he turned to the girl. He took off all her clothes

⁸¹ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 22.

⁸² McCarthy, *Child of God*, 6.

⁸³ McCarthy, *Child of God*, 84.

and looked at her, inspecting her body carefully, as if he would see how she were made ... He unbuckled his trousers and stepped out of them and laid next to her. He pulled the blanket over them.”⁸⁴

Lester falls in temptation lurked by a carnal lust with insatiable curiosity and it might appear very peculiar that he is not represented as a deviant, but on the contrary, he is portrayed simply as a desperate freak and hopeless weirdo. McCarthy probably attempts to encourage the reader's sympathy with the main protagonist, demonstrating persuasively that Lester Ballard is not a real deviant but rather a miserable pariah. This is outlined well before he was busted. Lester overlooks a valley. “He watched the diminutive progress of all things in the valley, the grey fields coming up black and corded under the plow, the slow green occlusion that the trees were spreading. Squatting there he let his head drop between his knees and he began to cry.”⁸⁵ Steven Frye has pointed out that he is drawn to despair at the cold indifference of the world. It is more than isolation and alienation from the realms of human companionship that inspires this lamentation, it is a lack of meaning indicated in a nature he cannot quite grasp, an order and purpose he cannot embrace.⁸⁶

It could be argued if this means a transfiguration into a real child of God. At any case, as a child of God Lester Ballard should be born to love and being loved by someone, however, he has never experienced such emotion in his life. There is the obvious shift into more human dimension. Basically, the author presents his point of view that human beings' existence is affected by empirical situations which are gradually accumulating during life and everything is – putting it in simple terms – the issue of education, morality, family, environment, etc. It is the question of all these aspects that influence the human outgrowth. Here, again, it is necessary to draw attention to naturalism as an artistic and literary movement. McCarthy proceeds with rendering of a naturalist novel, where there is generally considered the assumption that a human being is determined by a genetic predisposition and social and familial background. Furthermore, the state of mind and human behavior is to a large extent predetermined by environment and the people, having both positive and negative impacts on human maturation. As McCarthy himself

⁸⁴ McCarthy, *Child of God*, 87.

⁸⁵ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 161.

⁸⁶ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 48.

demonstrates, Lester Ballard becomes more and more estranged in his lonesome mundane being:

“The weather turned overnight. With the fall the sky grew bluer than he'd ever known ... He sat hourlong in the windy sedge with the sun on his back. As if he'd store the warmth of it against coming winter ... An early winter fell ... Alone in the empty shell of a house the squatter watched through the motebrown glass a rimshard of bonecolored moon ... A man much for himself ... He'd grown lean and bitter. Some said mad. A malign star kept him...”⁸⁷

Child of God is remarkable in terms of its probing of the human's ability to distinguish between evil and good which is attained by God-sent gifts of Christian morals, such as self-introspection, accountability and upbringing with respect of all-embracing love, humility and dignity. These are the gifts of God which include virtues like enlightening of the human beings, making them to live in true love, meekness, and forgiveness. Any person can be blessed with Christian virtues and ethics which lead in ethically and socially desirable manners and demeanor, however, any person can be born with a certain mental disorders or bad predispositions. The object of Christianity is to procreate a genuine human being (a real child of God), in order to care for those with disabilities, providing them with deep love and compassion. On the other hand, given the situation of Lester Ballard, if a mentally unbalanced or neurotic disinherited person is constantly under the influence of the sinful and depraved people connected with the inhospitable and harsh environment, it involuntarily results into suffering in and of itself and the falling into chasm of evil deeds is almost unavoidable. Apparently, there is this lack of Christian morals when it comes to Lester Ballard with his loneliness and woefulness, resulting in his ape-like nature.

This might be demonstrated on the strange case when Lester Ballard is imprisoned briefly upon being accused of rape. In the jail he meets a black man and their conversation explores the purpose of ethics. The reader can observe the seeming uselessness of moral agency at once, though. The black man confesses to having brutally killed a man by his pocket knife, cutting his head, and claims to be “a fugitive from the ways of this world.”⁸⁸ However unconvincingly, Lester clings to a vague notion of moral order, seeking at least

⁸⁷ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 39-40.

⁸⁸ McCarthy, *Child of God*, 51.

some cause for his errors, claiming, "All the trouble I ever was in ... was caused by whiskey or women or both."⁸⁹ In fact, Lester said this to the black man only because he had always heard other men saying this and his intention was to evoke the insight and understanding of the black man. Nevertheless, the black man refused any sense of ethical obligation, making no excuses and seeing no purpose in the world defined by the "chaos." Steven Frye claims: "Lester craves human connection, even intimacy, but when he encounters it momentarily in the black man, it speaks from the abyss of violence, transgression and disorder itself."⁹⁰

According to Michal Svěrák, Lester Ballard embodies "conditio humana" as a whole. Ballard represents deranged and angry reification of our own elementary characteristics and questions. He symbolizes our panic fear of the uncontrollable passing of time, our anxiety when facing inevitable death, our uncertainty of existential loneliness, culminating in our desire for merging with other people.⁹¹ Moreover, it turns out that the term "child of God" does not necessarily mean just a grotesque irony. Although difficult to imagine, the protective and punitive "divine power," as Svěrák claims, also lurks deep inside Ballard's soul. He strenuously craves for harmony, however, his life never renders such a thing.⁹² "He wondered at such upheaval. Disorder in the woods, trees down, new paths needed. Given charge Ballard would have made things more orderly in the woods and in men's souls."⁹³

There seems to be a strange twist, as Eric Hage mentions, in that the more Lester becomes cast out of social relations and falls deeper into wilderness – from living in a house, to an overgrown hut, to a cave – he becomes more "human," but he also is driven deeper into the dark recesses of "human nature" – that is, lechery and violence that are, in McCarthy's worldview, inherent in the human condition. And Lester, just another child of God, is not an aberration from the larger human order.⁹⁴ Under the supervision of a deputy of the high sheriff of Sevier County, Fate Turner, one of the other companions named Mr.

⁸⁹ McCarthy, *Child of God*. 51.

⁹⁰ Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 47.

⁹¹ See Michal, Svěrák. *Svět v hrsti prachu*. (Praha: Argo, 2012), 76-77.

⁹² See *Ibid.*, 92.

⁹³ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 128.

⁹⁴ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 57.

Wade claims when asked if “people was meaner” back in an older era: “You think people was meaner then than they are now? The deputy said. The old man was looking out at the flooded town. No, he said. I don’t. I think people are the same from the day God first made one.”⁹⁵

According to Georg Guillemín, in the novel appears the “societally sanctioned barbarism.”⁹⁶ This explains the pedantic behavior of the students studying Lester’s corpse in the state medical school: “He was laid out on a slab and flayed, eviscerated, dissected. His head was sawed open and his brains removed. His muscles were stripped from his bones. His heart was taken out. His entrails were hauled forth and delineated.”⁹⁷ Finally, at the end of the physical examination, “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.”⁹⁸

Symbolically here, Lester Ballard takes a burden of the Scapegoat as the carrier of sins. The Scapegoat symbolizes the grime, mutilation, madness and crime. The people avoid his presence on the one hand and regard him with respect and reverential fear on the other. The Scapegoat figuratively represents all the people and becomes the metaphor of the human sins in general and therefore, bears a metonymic role. Even though Lester died of natural causes, he was totally annihilated and used as a victim. Hence, the victim represents the people as it is a part of mankind, as well as the convenient object which can absorb their guilt and sins. Thus, this reflects compassion and fear at the same time and the people assume they can get rid of their sins. The scapegoat must be adequately different so the others are afraid of it and despise it at once. And yet, it must mirror the image of community in order to prove itself as the real carrier of sins of others. The society expelled Lester Ballard on the edge and imprisoned him like an animal in a cage in the treatment center for mentally insane.

Furthermore, there is what Erik Hage defines as the indications of “bildungsroman.” Lester is becoming incorporated into the social order and community of the Sevier County.

⁹⁵ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 158.

⁹⁶ Georg, Guillemín. *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 2004, as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 58.

⁹⁷ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 184.

⁹⁸ McCarthy, *Child of God*. 184.

The several oral testimonies interspersed throughout the early part of the book – testimony from a later point in time than the narrative action – showing that, after his death, he becomes a part of the folklore of the community through the tales they tell about him.⁹⁹ The irony is that his vicious crimes have made him more a part of the social order than he ever was back when he was only a harmless voyeur. As Eric Hage puts it, he remained in subconscious of the people as one of the notorious town eccentrics.¹⁰⁰ Hage has also pointed out that as a legend, Ballard finds a more meaningful, posthumous existence in society, and the community shows much more interest in him than they ever did in his lifetime. This is quite an evolution from the shadowy community member, “a misplaced and loveless simian shape,”¹⁰¹ who once secretly crept around, gazing into car windows, concludes Hage.¹⁰²

Demonstrating rather nihilistic views of Kenneth Lincoln, it is necessary to consider the idiosyncratic style of McCarthy. Lester Ballard’s grotesque humanity, if indeed he is a child of some transcendently untamed God, mirrors this mysterious world both violently and lawlessly. There are peculiar Southern themes of bizarre, weird, strangely looking people affected by hill folk dementia and genetic disorders. The typical themes of dark humor are put in place very frequently.¹⁰³ Lester is collecting naked rotting bodies as his own intimates, friends and family the way a sadistic child would gather dead mice, slowly becoming a monstrous god of darkness and depravity and death. This symbolizes the duality of divinity. The indescribable divinity is neither identifiable nor refutable, as it is situated far away beyond knowing and rational explanation.

As Steven Frye puts it, the most disturbing aspect of the novel is perhaps not the necrophilia itself but the grotesque yoking of murder, general malevolence, hatred, and sexual perversity with the innate human desire to stand against the apparent chaos of

⁹⁹ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 58.

¹⁰⁰ See *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰¹ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 21.

¹⁰² See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 58.

¹⁰³ See Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 52.

seeming forms and to build out of death itself some order and community.¹⁰⁴ Lester becomes a self-conscious maniac and seeks vengeance by ambushing the man who had stolen his farm. Wearing female underclothes, then the outer clothes of women victims, he paints his lips red and stalks the man who bought his homestead at auction. In shootout, Lester was shot in his arm and woke up in a hospital bed. Pursued by a mob of militia, he returns to his cave, his depravity now mirrored in gothic recesses and McCarthy describes him there: “gibbering” in a “sound not quite crying” like “the mutterings of a band of sympathetic apes.”¹⁰⁵ This simian image reveals portrait of Lester’s twisted and diminished humanity.

As Kenneth Lincoln mentions: “Gospel singers at the six-mile congregation in Sevier County would testify that good Christians are called to save the wretched and poorly served sinners of the family of man. This does not happen in *Child of God*. Humanitarians say we should pity the deranged instincts of the monstrous among us. Charity stops with Lester Ballard.”¹⁰⁶ It could be argued if we are drawn inevitably to abnormal bloodlust and lechery. Is violence omnipresent? Are we voyeurs of misery and suffering? Lincoln continues and claims that the historical list of mankind is written in blood. Do we really want this man’s desecrated visage and entrails among us? The title of the novel says he is one of us. He belongs to the family of man, like it or not. If Lester Ballard is a “child of God” among us, and we are regarded as being his kinsfolk, the story questions differences between human depravity and animal nature then, making God an unholy mess-maker. All over the world, there are the incested, stillborn, partial-birth distorted characters, deviants, maniacs and murderers. If these too are God’s children, what kind of God made us all? The misbegotten child among us is not necessarily outside our religious family circle in a brave New World.¹⁰⁷

At the end, after his escape from the mob, Ballard returns to the hospital and becomes detained in a mental institution where he eventually dies. His body was shipped to a medical school in Memphis where he was preserved in formalin, flayed on a slab, carefully eviscerated and dissected by students. Then, he was dispersed among the other cadavers.

¹⁰⁴ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 45.

¹⁰⁵ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 150.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 56.

¹⁰⁷ See *Ibid.*, 60.

Ironically then, the order Lester seeks ultimately embodied in death. The novel ends with Lester as a mass of material parts, seemingly absent of spirit, implying a rigid philosophical materialism, even nihilistic aspects. It is here that McCarthy presents fascinating challenge to the readers, demonstrating that Lester eventually finds the order – in death. The seemingly infinite, precisely created, all-embracing and all-pervasive universe enables the nature of his physical system, its functional mechanisms and processes. The perfectly unique universe created *ex-nihilo* is the key to overcome every aspects of chaos. The material parts and atoms of Lester Ballard are being dispersed in the universe – the cyclical and accurate system where there is no chaos to be found. In the end, as Frye mentions, he is a configuration of flesh, flayed and systematized, and at the same time he is a sacred text, who when read aloud speaks forth whispers of an impenetrable mystery.¹⁰⁸ After all, this question of mystery is well-described when Lester is lying in a cave, contemplating the origin of the universe. Lying in his cave he contemplates the mystery of his origins, seeking again a sense of place as he watches “the hordes of cold stars sprawled across the smokehole,” wondering “what stuff they were made of, or himself.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 49.

¹⁰⁹ Cormac, McCarthy. *Child of God*. (London: Picador, 2010), 133.

6 DARK IS A WAY: OUTER DARK

The novel *Outer Dark*, which was McCarthy's second novel and preceded *Child of God*, was widely examined, reviewed and, similarly to *Child of God*, evoked rather a mixed response of book critics and readers. The novel is more demanding than *Child of God* as it includes more archaisms with intricacies of more complex and elaborate syntax. McCarthy uses the construction of semi-archaic grammar forms, dialects and difficult figures of speech. The main protagonist of the novel named Culla Holme, similarly to Lester Ballard, struggles in obscurity, his psychological processes are left in shadow from the very beginning and the readers are invited to ponder his basic identity and the circumstances that lead in his alienation. In the course of time, Culla Holme gradually descends into nightmarish psychological and existential perdition.

The novel is set in nameless southern locale, probably somewhere in the western part of Tennessee at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The main characters, young brother and sister Culla and Rinthy Holme, dwell in a wooded cabin with no other family at all. In all probability, Culla has fathered his sister's child. The baby seemed to be physically abnormal and he told his sister that their baby boy had passed away. Nevertheless, he was intentionally lying and left their defenseless infant in the forest. Rinthy, however, recognized his nasty and contemptible deceit and her endeavor is to save her baby at all costs. As Eric Hage puts it, "Rinthy bears the physical burden of childbirth and Culla bears deep psychological wounds from their incestuous union."¹¹⁰ At the beginning of the novel, Rinthy wakes Culla from a dream after hearing him wailing in his sleep. In this dream, as Hage continues, Culla is situated together with a group of ragged supplicants seeking the healing powers of a prophet.¹¹¹ McCarthy describes them as follows: "There was a prophet standing in the square with arms upheld in exhortation to the beggared multitude gathered there. A delegation of human ruin who attended him with blind eyes upturned and puckered stumps and leprous sores."¹¹² Culla waits about among them because of his own moral degeneration. He desperately pleads and craves to be healed. However, according to Hage, Culla stands apart as different in the crowd. In fact,

¹¹⁰ Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 130.

¹¹¹ See *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹² Cormac, McCarthy. *Outer Dark*. (London: Picador, 1994), 5.

his infirmity is not physically visible and the prophet wonders to see him there amidst such pariahs.¹¹³ At the end of the Culla's dream, darkness had fallen when the sun went down, causing the rest of the assembled pariahs to turn on him with the feeling of unbounded rage. In this scene, as Hage mentions, McCarthy demonstrates Culla's tormented psyche, probably as a result of his recent actions.¹¹⁴ "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."¹¹⁵

Culla's state of mind entails bitterness, uncertainty and doubtless remorse. As Hage claims, "this is allegorized in the form of shadow figures."¹¹⁶ Culla's actions call for catharsis and McCarthy indicates final retribution in the form of three malignant figures. In the novel's short opening passage, these dreadful figures illustrate an undetectable riddle. This mysterious trio is monitoring Culla's sins, stalking close behind him. They are still in motion, being described as "shadow." Apart from that, they are also described as "shapes" and "being in silhouette." The trio probably represents Culla's subconscious compunctions which always remain somewhere deep in his mind.¹¹⁷ Kenneth Lincoln even talks about satanic trinity: "They are dark figures from hell, the scourge of earthly revelations – a satanic trinity to harass and to judge and to execute the innocent and the guilty, the witless quick and the wandering dead."¹¹⁸ Steven Frye deals with the incarnate force of the triune and claims that the triune is an indeterminate essence of equilibrium and justice, ubiquitous in the universe, demonstrating the quest of retribution.¹¹⁹

According to most of the literary critics focused on McCarthy, it is believed that the Culla's affliction and disease he suffers from, represents Original sin. Considering the Christian mythology, Kenneth Lincoln claims that Culla and Rinthy represent the same family ties as Adam and Eve did.¹²⁰ What does the Bible tell us about this relationship?

¹¹³ See Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 130.

¹¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁵ Cormac, McCarthy. *Outer Dark*. (London: Picador, 1994), 6.

¹¹⁶ Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 130.

¹¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 39.

¹¹⁹ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 35.

¹²⁰ See Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 40.

Adam and Eve were God's earliest human creations and Eve came into Eden from Adam's rib. As a matter of fact, Kenneth Lincoln points out that they are bodily related like brother to sister and their union symbolizes "evolutionary incest."¹²¹ The central theme of Culla's dream is a desire for redemption and the only remedy for recuperation and salvation seems to be attained by repentance and faith. The main protagonist, as Michal Svěrák puts it, however, does not abound with these virtues and therefore, he continually lingers in "outer dark."

Nevertheless, from the very beginning, Culla operates in the ambiguous role of the culprit and victim.¹²² In fact, the idea of Culla being both culprit and victim, is represented throughout the novel in the form of Culla's constant persecution – "he is always being held accountable for crimes in which he appears to have had no hand."¹²³ By contrast to Culla, Rinthy's intentions and actions are purely maternal and unselfish. Her motivation is to find and recover her baby. The incontrovertible truth is that "what redeems us as human beings and restores us to our humanity is solicitude for those whom we love."¹²⁴ She is generally treated well by strangers and they provide her with food and shelter. Robert L. Jarrett correctly points out "two opposing forms of alienation: alienation created by Culla's repression of his sin and guilt and by Rinthy's acceptance of hers."¹²⁵ Rinthy recognized that her brother was lying by her inner maternal instincts and realized her responsibility. Discovering Culla's impudent trickery and contemptible pretense, she attempted with all her effort to save her baby. Culla, on the other hand, moves around through the wilderness of isolation and existential frightfulness. He is haunted by the impulses of his own incarnate personal conflicts, the psychological weight of his sin and guilt.

As Steven Frye claims, *Outer Dark* takes its name from the Gospel According to Matthew 8:10-12, when Christ speaks to a centurion who has come to ask for his servant to

¹²¹ See Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41.

¹²² See Michal, Svěrák. *Svět v hrsti prachu*. (Praha: Argo, 2012), 41.

¹²³ Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 131.

¹²⁴ Bruno, Bettelheim. *The Uses of Enchantment*, as quoted in, Erik, Hage. *Cormac McCarthy A Literary Companion*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, 2010), 131.

¹²⁵ Robert L., Jarret. *Cormac McCarthy: Twayne's United States Author Series*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 19.

be cured.¹²⁶ The centurion – a man outside the Hebraic “kingdom” – humiliates himself and Jesus takes up the opportunity to admonish those who consider themselves as chosen ones: “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”¹²⁷ McCarthy, typically for him, understands the overall human condition and human experience with reality, existence and nothingness as “outer dark.” As Steven Frye puts it, “McCarthy broadens the biblical motifs in a parable simultaneously mythic and symbolic, universal in theme, but distinctively real in its evocation of the natural world, dialect, regional manners and social texture.”¹²⁸

Apart from that, Frye has pointed out that Culla rambles in the “outer dark” of guilt and shame. From the inception, there is a gloomy determinism put in place, defining the evolving circumstances that push Culla into deeper realms of desperation. Coming to terms with the novel's grotesqueness, *Outer Dark* is typically depending on the traditions of the Southern Gothic as well as the Southern Grotesque. As Frye claims, McCarthy's portrayals of incest, the obscure settings and the sense of nightmare are all elements of the Southern Gothic. In addition, McCarthy elaborates the consequences of sin, the questions of morality, the problematic aspects of isolation and loss, and last but not least, the possibility of redemption amid decay and degradation. Moreover, through the triune and the figure of the blind man who appears at the end of the novel, McCarthy explores the potential role of the divine in shaping human destiny.¹²⁹ The novel is allegorically Gothic and seems to be similar to a “terrifying morality play from medieval imagining.”¹³⁰ The possibility of the divine and the substance of “isness” are the questions shared with deep interests and McCarthy seeks to find a compelling answer to these questions. As a matter of fact, we can only speculate about these issues. Nevertheless, there is still an inexhaustible hope and

¹²⁶ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 29.

¹²⁷ “The Gospel According to Matthew, 8:10-12,” as quoted in, Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 29.

¹²⁸ Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 29.

¹²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹³⁰ Kenneth, Lincoln. *Cormac McCarthy American Canticles*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 40.

consolation of God with his mercy and all-embracing love. In McCarthy's worldview, there are very important aspects of atonement and self-reflection, significant for any human being.

Outer Dark, as Frye claims, is stylistically elaborate, as the novel “alternates between the colloquial and regional and the erudite and sophisticated, grounding the lives of Culla and Rinthy in the bleak social circumstances of the southern poor.”¹³¹ Regarding McCarthy's archaic language and sentence complexity, “his prose has a quality of elusiveness that invites attention and scrutiny.”¹³² The novel bears characteristics of a strenuous and nightmarish dreamlike journey. Rinthy's maternal instinct gives unwavering hope of finding her child and she sets out to look for him. Culla, on the other hand, wanders haphazardly and looks for work to make ends meet. These journeys are vastly different in the way how the strangers react to both Culla and Rinthy. Culla wanders off and occasionally finds a chore, encountering inexplicable characters. As Frye points out, the various figures Culla comes across, indirectly refer to his sinful and unfavorable state. Rinthy, on the other hand, arouses sympathy in many people, including a kind family that provides her with food and shelter.¹³³

One of the most important scenes of the novel with symbolic function is the one where Culla comes across the drovers with their specific large herd of hogs, considered to be devilish creatures. Given their evil nature, the herd of hogs runs wild and more than two hundred of them falls down a cliff. One of the drovers is shed by the hogs and dies. The rest of the drovers convict Culla as being a murderer of their companion. Here, it should be noted that this is an allusion to the biblical story of the evil demons known as The Gerasene Demoniac. The demons were incarnated into the herd of swine and fell down into the sea. There is a presumption that Culla is used as the Scapegoat as the carrier of sins and ends up being held accountable for the actions of other people in the county. Unwanted transgressions and sins of the people are projected onto Culla who becomes the Scapegoat for the unsolvable and daunting problems of mankind. Pharmakos is used in order to eradicate the evil sins from the society. The Scapegoat is selected inside the communion

¹³¹ Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 32.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³³ See *Ibid.*, 35.

and represents the lethal threat and salvation at the same time. Distinguishing between pure and impure souls inside the communion, the Scapegoat represents the malignant and sinister incarnation of evil in the society. Those who carry out the persecutory violence are convinced that those psychologically afflicted, sickly and handicapped can harm the whole society and should be sacrificed, even though they might be innocent and vulnerable.

Given the situation of the society, this illustrates the Social Darwinism with its natural selection and survival of the fittest and strongest. The selection criterion of the scapegoat as the carrier of sins can be either racial, ethnic, cultural or religious affiliation, as well as the criterion purely biological – physical or mental abnormality. The victims of persecution processes are chosen variously by these several criteria. Apparently, Culla has many attributes of the Scapegoat since he is a common member of the human society. On the other hand, he is pushed to the lowest class status, being socially marginalized. Therefore, he carries the features of the typical Pharmakos. He is nothing but a stranger in the profane world where we live in. McCarthy depicted these aspects in the incident with drovers, as well as in Culla's early dream demonstrated at the beginning of *Outer Dark*. In this dream, Culla ends up as a victim of the disorderly crowd represented by ragged pariahs, cripples and a doctrinaire reverend. The crowd always has a tendency to persecute someone. Members of the crowd are always potential pursuers and their desire is to purify the community of impure elements. As a result, the stronger are becoming dominant, taking over the weaker. In the gospels, evil is almost completely attributable to the crowd or group. So what does McCarthy mean by paraphrasing the narratives of Evangelists, portraying the mass suicide of demons embodied in pigs? To a certain extent, the demons might symbolize those who are living far from God in outer darkness. There seems to be a correlation between the evil powers and the people in the outer darkness.

After his successful escape from lynching, Culla meets the mysterious triune of evil murderers. The evil trio probably does not come from this world and it is interesting to find out if the mysterious triune has a certain role in the divine order. The question is whether the trio conducts the justice or diffuses only the destruction, chaos and death. As soon as Culla fearfully encounters the mysterious triune for the first time, he does not seem to identify its role. By contrast, they seem to know him and show their deep interest in him. The bearded man in the triune brings to mind a demon from hell: "In the up-slant of light

his beard shone and his mouth was red, and his eyes were shadowed lunettes with nothing there at all.”¹³⁴ This illustrates an interest in the consequences of human sins in the universe defined by a force shrouded in mystery. The oblique purpose of the triune comes to full fruition in the end. The avatars of Satan in the form of mysterious triune destroy the consequences of Culla’s sin when they murder Culla’s and Rinthy’s child. It could be argued if this means the ultimate and irreversible denial of salvation for Culla, as he did not confess his evil deed and carries the sins forever. In fact, his sins might never be forgiven.

At the end of the novel, Culla encounters a sightless seer. This blind man welcomes Culla, saying he has seen him before. He advises him not to worry about the ephemeral world and that he should accept the darkness of his living. As Steven Frye claims, this wandering prophet figure appears to be open-minded and helpful. He shows his deep interest in the questions of the divine and the nature of human destiny. Blindness illustrates the incisive metaphor of the “outer dark.” Culla encounters graciousness and solace of help from helplessness itself and therefore, redemption becomes still possible.¹³⁵ On the other hand, as Frye mentions, the novel results in Culla being still lost in doubt like all human beings. The mystery of our origin remains unresolved. The novel constitutes a complicated simile of the implication of human blindness, which portrays the way in which human actions and their consequences manifest in the human soul, reflecting finally in worldview that cognition of human being is limited to mundane world and the questions of the origin of the universe with the possibility of the divine source are beyond knowing of our perceptions.¹³⁶

In the end, there is the key question shrouded in mystery. What does the term outer dark really mean? All those who do not possess the ability of self-reflection and empathy are condemned to stray in the darkness? Taking the traditional exegesis of the Bible into account, the outer darkness is usually associated with hell, limbo or eternal damnation. Some experts discuss limbo as a place where there is neither bliss nor perdition. It is very tricky to identify the outer dark with hell in and of itself. The Apostle and Evangelist Matthew mentioned the outer darkness three times in the New Testament.

¹³⁴ Cormac, McCarthy. *Outer Dark*. (London: Picador, 1994), 171.

¹³⁵ See Steven, Frye. *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*. (South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 38-39.

¹³⁶ See *Ibid.*, 39.

Matthew 8:10-12 might be the one we should follow. The Gospel refers to the Roman centurion who came to Jesus and asked him if his paralyzed servant could be cured in some way. Jesus admonishes those who consider themselves chosen. According to the doctrinal interpretation, the "sons of the kingdom" in the King James Bible or the "subjects of the kingdom" in modern English are those Israelites who did not accept Jesus as their Savior, and therefore, the grace of God will be denied to them. Taking this into consideration, however, the "outer darkness" is not the eternal damnation. It represents only a temporary human condition or state where a person lives in sin, not admitting it, disavowing any misdoing or evil deeds and refusing the repentance. In modern English, this excerpt differs to the one in the King James Bible:

"Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹³⁷

¹³⁷ "The Gospel According to Matthew, 8:10-12."

CONCLUSION

The grace and love of God for human beings come to the forth to be the only unwavering hope for redemption from sins and its consequences. So far, there have been many theological and metaphysical interpretations of McCarthy's work focused mainly on original sin and the fall of man, leading in a peril of permanent life without God in the bleak darkness. Although, McCarthy puts in place a lot of allusions to the Bible, his interests are not only imposed on the context of Christian dogmas or mythology, but more importantly, he generally deals with the allegory of evil in the absurd and unknowable world we live in, which seems to be beyond knowing from human perspective. Virtue and faith alone is not enough. The concept of transcendent God who takes away the sins of the world through redemptive death by crucified Christ, the aspect of love and sacrifice is the only key for understanding the McCarthy's point of view.

The main protagonist of *Child of God* Lester Ballard remains to be the immeasurable source of "aporia," an invitation to the significant questioning of painful human condition on Earth, where there is both guilt and evil as the integral part of God's creation. Lester suffers more and more and in the end descends into depravity when madness takes over his psyche. In the state of insanity, Lester connects with the principle of divinity. Jesus Christ, throughout his human life, endowed insanity with reverence. The intention of Jesus was to appear as a loony, in order to undergo all the misery of human decline during his incarnation. Madness becomes the ultimate form then, the last stage before reaching the incarnation back to God. Ballard's madness proves that we should acknowledge the fact that the enlightened intellect, cognition and reason are the gifts of our Creator enabled only by God's grace. The madness indicates to the people that God's kindness and love redeemed and saved human beings from falling into abyss of absolute bestiality. Without these God's gifts, humans would end up in oblivion. Coming to terms with religion, can the worst evil of seven deadly sins be forgiven sometime? This results in "aporia" again. At the end of the novel, Lester, representing the child of God, dies of natural causes, being saved by God's grace, lifted by all-embracing love of forgiveness from horrible chasm of suffering.

In *Outer Dark*, the main protagonist of the novel Culla Holme, always inspires the feelings of suspicion and mistrust. Culla is permanently persecuted by the society and condemned for the sins and evil deeds which he has never committed. As if the entire society passed the guilt on him. As a matter of fact, Culla is very similar to all of us, for the

sinful guilt is the burden of mankind on the whole. Therefore, when Culla is endangered, we experience the feelings of fear and when he suffers, we feel deep sympathy with him. If miserable and unhappy Culla Holme could be saved by salvation some day, then, a gift of God's mercy can also be granted to other people who are looking for their place on Earth, even if they are living a sinful life and do not realize that they should confess their culpa and proceed to repentance and remorse. Therefore, this expulsion into "outer darkness" becomes only a temporary and transient human condition before the ultimate and final triumph of God's love which has compassion on the soul of every single sinner of everlasting life in the infinite universe.

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