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“THE PAST THAT WAS DIFFERS LITTLE FROM THE PAST
THAT WAS NOT”: PICTOGRAPHS AND PETROGLYPHS IN CORMAC
MCCARTHY’S *BLOOD MERIDIAN: OR THE EVENING REDNESS IN THE WEST*

by

Cami Ann Dilg

A Plan B Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

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Logan, Utah

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“The past that was differs little from the past that was not”:

Pictographs and Petroglyphs in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian or the Evening
Redness in the West*

Cami Ann Dilg

This literary analysis expands the scholarly canon concerning Cormac McCarthy’s regional writing by identifying the purpose of pictographs and petroglyphs in *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985). Not only do pictographs and petroglyphs tie the narrative to place, but they create a commentary regarding the erasure of Native American histories in the United States. These images record Native American memory and presence in the landscape, and by referencing them, McCarthy confronts concepts of exposure and shame, which facilitates conversations concerning Native American genocide. A close analysis of character interaction with and scene placement of these images supports this argument. I trace the shift of medium used to record pictographs and petroglyphs with emphasis on Plains Indian adornment, ledger drawings, and rock images, and I give particular attention to Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, and Shoshone actors in the United States’ national drama of land acquisition, otherwise known as Manifest Destiny.

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“The past that was differs little from the past that was not”: Pictographs and

Petroglyphs in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*

or the Evening Redness in the West

I have never told this to anyone. But if I don’t tell you, then how will you know how I feel?

--Patty Timbimboo, Personal interview, 9 March 2017

Cormac McCarthy is known for the landscapes in which his characters appear. In fact, one might argue that McCarthy’s settings are more dynamic than his human characters (Hilfer 281). However, the scholarly commentary concerning his regional writing does not include extensive study about the purposes of pictographs and petroglyphs in his Southwestern historical fiction. The pictographs and petroglyphs of which McCarthy writes are found at the actual locations described: near the Plains of San Agustin, New Mexico; Hueco Tanks, Texas; Caborca, Mexico; Cedar Springs, Texas; Lozier Canyon, Texas; and the Texas Franklin Mountains. While my future research is centered on a comparative analysis of the pictographs and petroglyphs in all of McCarthy’s Southwestern novels, my focus here is on the depictions found in *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985).

Pictographs and petroglyphs can be perceived as static markings with little connection to Native American peoples today, but viewing them as pictorial remnants stuck in the past divorces them of meaning, let alone historical or autobiographical significance (von Petzinger). Beyond referring to pictographs and petroglyphs as a way of tying the narratives to place, McCarthy brings the images to life through careful description. In this way, he is able to move the narrative across time and space drawing attention to the erasure of Native American legacies and accounts. There are several lenses through which I conduct my analysis but the overarching theme is that of palimpsest (Nabokov 149). The layering and overwriting of historical narratives,

on paper, hide, stone, or landscape, is a motif woven throughout *Blood Meridian*, and a major reason why readers are lured to McCarthy's literature (Foote 33). McCarthy uses palimpsest to facilitate discussion about the United States' legacy of conquest and colonialism, and the subsequent cover-up of that history—a tragedy the reader relives through McCarthy's writing (McCarthy xi).

The lead-up to *Blood Meridian* begins in 1821 when Mexico gained independence from Spain, but the country struggled to establish a solid government of its own and to control and develop its vast new territory full of valuable natural resources (*New Mexican Lives* 108-110, 114-15, 118-19; Paterek 148). As Mexico wrestled with internal political problems, European powers eyed the Mexican territory, and the United States military eventually engaged in battle with Mexico acting out the national quest for its Manifest Destiny (see fig. 1) (Martínez 1; McCarthy 34-35; *New Mexican Lives* 106-159, 167-70). With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which formally concluded the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), Mexico gave up almost half its territory to the United States (Martínez 1, 20-37; McCarthy 34-35; *New Mexican Lives* 107).

Blood Meridian begins in this aftermath, and the narrative follows “the kid” who signs up for a filibuster company under Captain White (McCarthy 29-30). The company journeys from the United States to Mexico to stake illegal land claims after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) has been signed, but before the countries' new borders have been determined (Martínez 20-37, 38-43, 46-49; McCarthy 29-30, 33-35, 40). Captain White's justification? “We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who

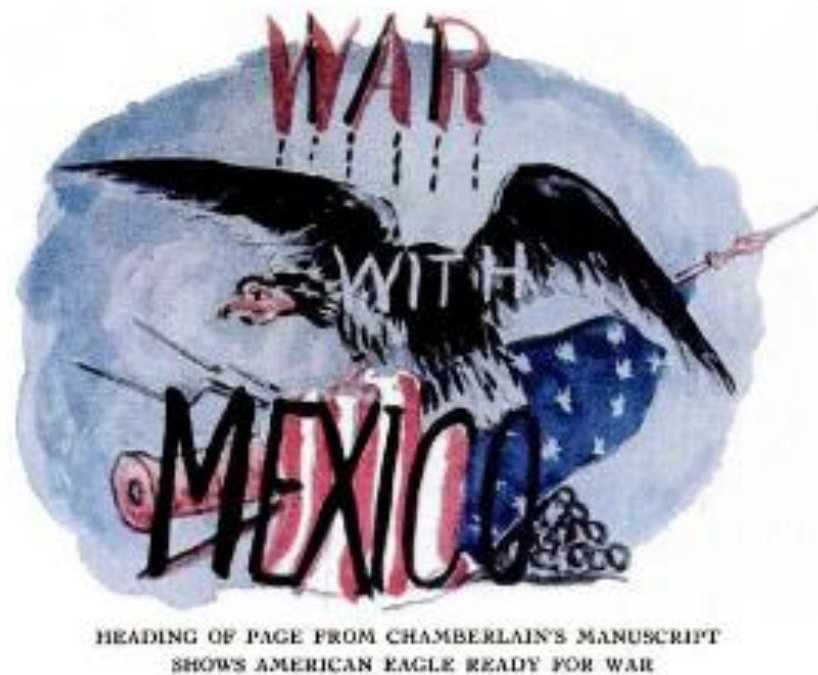


Fig. 1. War with Mexico “Heading of Page from Samuel Chamberlain's Manuscript Shows American Eagle Ready for War,” by Samuel Chamberlain, c. 1855-1861. Cormac McCarthy relied heavily on *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue* (c. 1855-1861) when writing *Blood Meridian* (Chamberlain 72).

cannot govern themselves? That’s right. Others come in to govern for them” (McCarthy 34). There were many actors in this national drama of acquisition, and Captain White’s attitude toward Mexicans generally reflected the colonial approach to all non-Anglo inhabitants of these newly acquired regions (Martínez 46-49; McCarthy 33-35; *New Mexican Lives* 137-47; Paterek 148). The so-called terra incognita spaces, “those whited regions on old maps,” were overwritten by more dominant groups bent on erasing pre-existing cultures; however, indigenous cultures proved both resistant and adaptable (Mann 13-17; McCarthy 152).

Before contact with European cultures, people of the Great Plains used different types of dwellings—the earth or mat-covered lodge, the grass house, and the buffalo hide tipi—depending on their tribal association, hunting patterns, and the

climate and geography of their region (Hansen 14-17). In these landscapes there are carved or painted images on rock “near rivers and streams, along cliff facings, on rock outcroppings, and in caves” that evince the richness and complexity of pre-contact indigenous cultures (Hansen 24; Keyser 10-11, 15). Over time, Native Americans altered their structured and symbolic ceremonial pictographs and petroglyphs into highly stylized biographical depictions (*The Five Crows Ledger* 4-18). Furthermore, contact with encroaching European and American settlers from the east and Spain’s reintroduction of the horse influenced the architecture of Plains Indian dwelling spaces and caused a shift in tribal customs; subsequently, Plains pictographs became increasingly portable (see fig. 2) (Ewers 5-7; Hansen 16-17, 115-17; Keyser 20-21; *Ledger Narratives* 3; *Robes of Splendor* 82; *The Five Crows Ledger* 3-17). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rawhide shields, tipis, tipi liners and tipi covers, robes, drums, shirts and leggings, cloth, and hides painted with mineral based pigment, were standard mediums for Plains peoples’ pictographs (Fauntleroy; Hansen 138-140; Wong 295, 297). For example, Plains warriors decorated their shields and shield covers with symbols of enormous power revealed in dreams and visions; these images served to protect the bearer of the shield and “might also imbue him with those qualities attributed to the heavenly bodies, birds, mammals, and other living creatures whose images were painted on it, or portions of which were tied to it” (Hansen 140-41; Paterek 86). Prominent Plains leaders “obtained [tipi] designs and colors [. . .] through personal visions, brave war deeds, inheritance, or marriage,” and many of the visuals were handed down from one generation to the next (Wong 299). When it came to painting images on dwelling spaces, it was not uncommon for a group of males in some Plains tribes to work collectively on adorning a single tipi



Fig. 2. Comanche shield, c. 1830 “These figures resemble some of those appearing in the numerous undated pictographs of Texas” (Ewers 6-7).

with pictographs, thus creating a collaborative narrative on the shelter (Hansen 140-41; Wong 299).

“The most frequently found pictographic records” among the Plains people are pictographic buffalo, elk, and deer hides (Hansen 138; qtd. in Wong 295). Men used these visual biographies to portray their personal accomplishments in battle, as well as to document the tribe’s historical record (Hansen 138; Paterek 85; Wong 295, 297-98). The emphasis of these narratives was on action, and authors used their illustrations as mnemonic devices to tell and perform their personal histories to a group of listeners (Hansen 138; Wong 297-98).

As Plains people navigated a shifting Euro-American presence, the pictographic medium, style, and theme continued to evolve, and it was not long before even Plains hide paintings became rare: “By 1870 Euro-Americans had virtually

exterminated the buffalo and, along with these sacred animals, the physical and spiritual sustenance of the indigenous peoples of the Plains” (Fauntleroy; Hansen 139-40; Keyser 20-21; Nabokov xiii; Wong 299). Canvas covers and muslin tipi liners began to replace hide-constructed tipis, and eventually, “as tribes were settled on reservations in log houses, muslin paintings served as wall liners in much the same manner” (Fauntleroy; Hansen 100, 139-40; Wong 299). Eventually, “pencils, ink pens, watercolors, and crayons replaced the natural pigments and stick and bone brushes formerly used in hide painting” and a new medium, paper, was introduced (Fauntleroy; Hansen 139).

From the 1860s to the 1930s, Plains people obtained “blank or partly-used ledgers, army rosters, daybooks, memorandum books, and sheaves of paper [. . .] through gift, trade, or capture,” and these authors overlaid the documents with their own pictographic record (Hansen 139-40; Petersen 25). This cultural confluence on paper is a prime example of palimpsest, for it is a visual representation of the epistemological navigation taking place during this period. “Many of the muslin and ledger drawings were created for sale to collectors, scholars, and others interested in Plains Indian life” (Hansen 139). In some instances, “the ledger books were collected directly by U. S. cavalry soldiers on battlefields and from tipis during raids on Plains Indian villages,” while “other ledger drawings were produced by prisoners of war and scouts employed by the military” (Hansen 140). Not surprisingly, much of the new ledger drawings ““emerged in army prisons—Fort Robinson, Fort Omaha, Fort Sill, Fort Marion, and others in which the Indians had been confined’ for protecting their own homelands” (qtd. in Wong 299). “Early ledger art took as its primary subject battles and hunting, but as the buffalo disappeared and the Plains tribes were

increasingly confined, the drawings began to focus more on personal experiences, such as courtship and daily life” (Fauntleroy; Hansen 140; Keyser 20). Plains peoples converted their once “heraldic expressions of self” on hide paintings into accounts on ledger paper in an effort to record a dying way of life (Keyser 20; *The Five Crows Ledger* 7; Wong 299).

In 1851, a “war of extermination against the savages’ was proclaimed by the Mexican government,” and the most famously violent of the Plains’ tribes—including the Apache, the Comanche, and Kiowa—were particular targets (Kavanagh 208, 329-30). Scalp laws had been revived and in effect since 1835 to curb Native American raiding in New Mexico and Northern Mexico, but this time, Emilio Lamberg, sub-inspector of the Military colonies of Chihuahua, proposed that the Comanche be pitted against the Apache who “had already devastated a much larger part of the state,” and who had a history of conflict with the equally nomadic Comanche (Kavanagh 207-208, 329-30, Paterek 153). The Governor of Chihuahua, José Cordero, agreed that “the scalp laws were the ‘cheapest, most effective, and surest way of getting rid of Indians,’” and he “admitted that his real goal was to see Apaches and Comanches at war with each other so that the ‘two tribes might devour each other before devouring us’” (qtd. in Kavanagh 330).

The word Comanche may come from the Ute term for “enemy” or it may have come from the Spanish term *camino ancho*, which signifies “broad trail,” referring to the extreme extent of the Comanche’s land travel. (Paterek 104). They were hunters and gatherers, and beginning in the early eighteenth century, Comanche were known to have acquired stock from raids in New Mexico and surrounding southwest regions (Betty 76, 87). About a century later, these excellent horsemen and successful horse

breeders had control of the Southern Plains and were largely instrumental in introducing horses to the Native Americans of the Northern Plains (Paterek 104; Swanton 314). Comanche learned to utilize the horse for defense, transportation of people and goods, and in hunting—especially bison (Betty 93). As horses became increasingly integral to Comanche lifestyle and trade, herds became so great that it was necessary to move them to new pasturage constantly, and at times hobbling the animals at night was impractical (Betty 86, 88-90). In addition to their numbers and horsemanship, Comanche were known for their warlike character, especially among the Texans, and for their frequent clashes with Anglo expeditions and emigrants (Paterek 104; Swanton 314). The Plains Comanche were fiercely loyal to their kin, however, and expressed this through shared religious beliefs, common language, clothing, and body painting that identified individuals as Comanche or close relatives with a distant genealogical relationship (Betty 125-26).

McCarthy details these significant pictographic identifiers in *Blood Meridian* when one morning, as Captain White's men enter a great plain, they encounter hundreds of Comanche warriors herding several thousand head of cattle, mules, and horses (McCarthy 42, 50-52, 77). As the military detail is enveloped by the herd, they see on the hides of the Comanche ponies "painted chevrons and the hands and rising suns and birds and fish of every device like the shade of old work through sizing on a canvas," and the "horses' ears and tails worked with bits of brightly colored cloth" and one whose "whole head was painted crimson red" (McCarthy 52). The Comanche "lancers and archers [bore] shields bedight with bits of broken mirrorglass that cast a thousand unpieced suns against the eyes of their enemies" (McCarthy 52). The warriors display pictographs on their bodies: their "faces gaudy and grotesque with

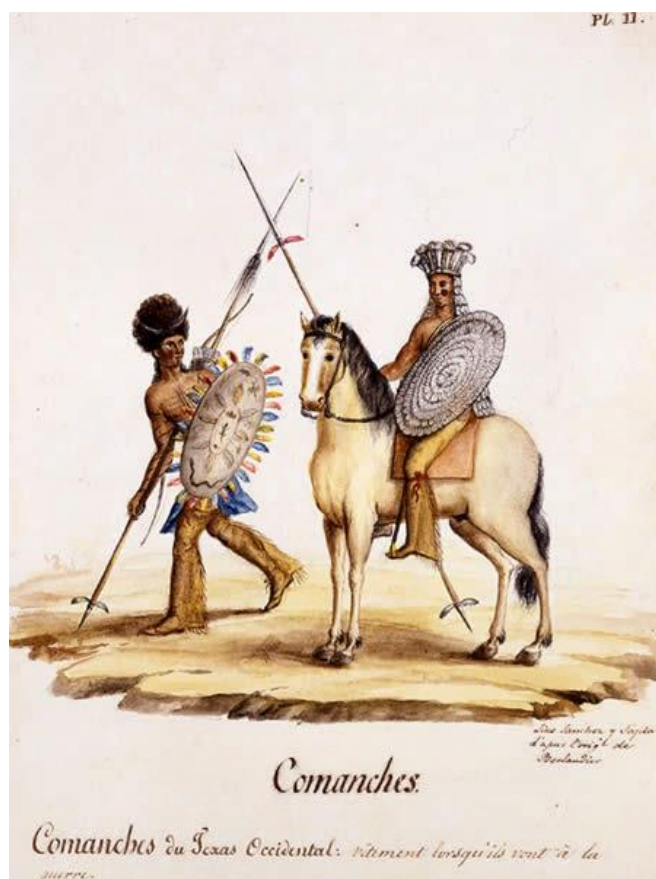


Fig. 3. Comanches du Texas Occidental, vont à la guerre [Comanches of western Texas, going to war], by Lino Sánchez y Tapia after an original by Jean Louis Berlandier, c. 1830 (Sánchez y Tapia).

daubings like a company of mounted clowns” and “nightmare faces painted on their breasts” (see fig. 3) (McCarthy 52-54).

Face and body painting functioned “not only as a matter of ornamentation but also as a great spiritual power, at times constituting a prayer to a supernatural being” (Paterek 87). It acted as “a talisman in war to protect the wearer,” indicated “membership in one of the secret military societies,” and was used in ceremonies, for mourning, or to shield the wearer from the elements (Paterek 87). Besides cultural significance, pictographs reflected historical components as well. When they obtained dyes from traders—indigo, vermilion, and verdigris—Comanche used it to brighten

their face and body painting (Paterek 106). And as Comanche adopted a pastoral lifestyle, they began to mimic “the Spanish in their use of saddles, lassos, corrals, lances, herding techniques, and livestock markings and decorations,” which allowed the Comanche to recognize their mounts (Betty 87, 91). Early accounts of permanent markings and brandings on horses state some Comanche made a slit in the tip of each ear of their horse, while others were branded using Spanish-type markings: “One horse, a roan, featured some lunettes, or crescent-shaped markings, on its haunches. The other animal, a bay, displayed a cropped tail and split ears” (recorded in 1789) (Betty 90). McCarthy incorporates these cultural and historical elements in the Comanche attack, which adds to the realism and authenticity of the violent encounter. And because they are painted on living flesh, the pictographs truly come to life in this scene, which was the original intent of early authors (Hansen 138; Wong 298). This “legion of horrors” proudly displays their unique artistry, and uses it to strengthen and protect themselves in battle and effectively intimidate Captain White’s army (McCarthy 51-54).

McCarthy continues:

[The Comanche appear] half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of cranefeathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked

and one in the armor of a spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground. (McCarthy 52)

McCarthy paints a portrait of Comanche who have interwoven Plains garb with European and American clothing, and in this moment there is a violent clash of differing historical narratives, visually emphasized by the Comanche's assorted attire and heightened by the pictographic images. Some of the European and American clothing the Comanche wear appears to have been acquired from a raid—hence the bloodstains—but some may have just as easily been obtained through trade. During the period 1846-1860, “several companies specialized in goods for the Indian trade” as a means of political control (Kavanagh 127-32, 189, 195, 376-77). Comanche chiefs were regularly gifted such items as paint, vermilion, looking glasses, handkerchiefs, glass beads and other trifles, and various types of clothing such as calico shirts, coats and suits, military uniforms ornamented with buttons, lace and ribbon, jackets, carbon umbrellas, pantaloons, and hats (Kavanagh 128, 166, 189, 195, 204, 377). The assortment of clothing in this scene may also foreshadow the Reservation Period transitional dress when ledger art was common and Comanche men and women were issued clothing by the government which was often ill-fitting, shoddy, and worthless (Paterek 106). Comanche greatly modified these articles; for example, coats were made into vests and the cut off sleeves were made into children's leggings (Paterek 106). To add another meaningful layer to this scene, McCarthy describes the pictographs on the Comanches' ponies as “the shade of old work

through sizing on a canvas” (McCarthy 52). In Western art-making traditions, sizing is a hide-glue preparation that ensures oil paints do not mar a canvas or absorb unevenly, and pentimento—when old work reappears after being painted over—is the equivalent of palimpsest (Janson). This layering methodology creates an unsettling duality, for the remnants of the attempted erasure leave what appears to be a finished piece unresolved. McCarthy draws on this overlaying motif in *Blood Meridian* to encourage readers to think critically about which historical narratives are given priority in the United States canon; as he strips historical accounts of their idealistic varnish, a clarity comes to the under-layers (Heyworth; Warrior 134).

Naturally then, this passage brings to mind portraits by the artist George Catlin, who traveled amongst various Native American groups for the purpose of painting them and preserving their history, and whose documentation had significant influence on how Native Americans were perceived (Graulich; Hasserick 23). In fact, Catlin’s *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians* “brought to the public one of the first detailed and illustrated descriptions of the Far West” (Hasserick 23). From 1837-1839 Catlin created a portrait of “The Light,” an Assiniboin(e) who, in Catlin’s depiction, wears a military coat gifted to him by the President of the United States, a top hat, and an umbrella, among other accessories (see fig. 4) (Hasserick 129; McCracken 56, 61; Treuttner 18-20, 280). “Upon his return from Washington, this once-respected man was ridiculed into ostracism by his tribesmen who thought his tales of eastern civilization were preposterous fabrications” (Hasserick 129; Treuttner 280). The visual connection between The Light’s clothing and the garb McCarthy mentions in this passage speaks for itself: the Light’s community believed he had been “among the whites who are

great liars, and all he had learned was to come home and tell lies,” and he was eventually “killed by a young Indian who could not comprehend what was probably an accurate description of a building in Washington” (McCracken 56, 61, 63; Treuttner 280). Catlin’s depictions can be read as primary documents—as texts that give historical context to and information about the era in which they were created—in the same way that Native American pictographs and petroglyphs function.

Catlin made a point to exhibit the pictographic hides, clothing, and body painting his subjects displayed when posing for their likeness (Hassrick 21; Treuttner 105). In 1832, Catlin painted a portrait of Mah-to-toh-pa (Four Bears), a Mandan chief, while visiting his people, and made an insightful observation: “Mah-to-toh-pa wore a robe with ‘the history of all his battles upon it, which would fill a book . . . if they were properly enlarged and translated’” (see fig. 5) (McCracken 93-97; *Robes of Splendor* 47; Truettner 103, 178-79; qtd. in Wong 298). In their travels, Catlin and other artists “provided paper and pencils or watercolor paints to Indians of various tribes and encouraged them to illustrate their war exploits” (*The Five Crows Ledger* 17). The earliest Northern Plains ledger drawings to have survived are those done in 1834 by Mah-to-toh-pa, but just a few years after meeting Catlin, Mah-to-toh-pa, and most of the Mandans, were destroyed by a horrific plague of smallpox, and the chief’s robe is now kept in the National Museum of Natural History (Hassrick 21, 30; *The Five Crows Ledger* 17; Thornton 95-99; Truettner 178-79).

Finally, while there are several textual and visual accounts of Comanche attacks and raids that could have influenced McCarthy’s Comanche depiction, it is fascinating to note that a record on stone could just as easily inspired him. On Cowhead Mesa, in southwestern Garza County, Texas, a Comanche historian created

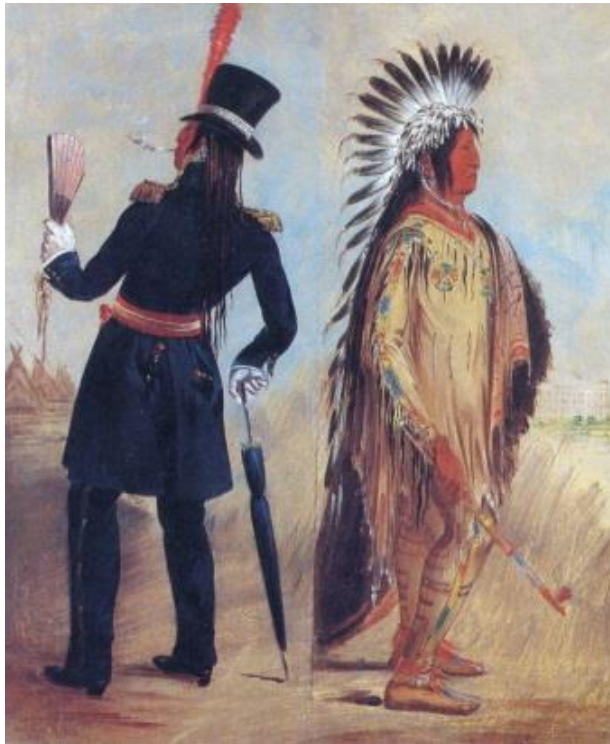


Fig. 4. The Light, going to and returning from Washington, Assiniboin(e), by George Catlin, 1837-1839 (Treuttner 18-20, 280).



Fig. 5. Mah-to-toh-pa (Four Bears), second chief, in full dress, Mandan, by George Catlin, 1832 (Truettner 103, 178-79).

petroglyphs depicting a Comanche raid at the San Sabá Mission on 16 March 1758 (Betty 121-22). Though this particular attack took place almost 100 years prior to the one in *Blood Meridian*, an eyewitness at the San Sabá Mission made a comparable account on paper: the Comanche appeared in the compound outside the mission “armed with guns and arrayed in the most horrible attire” with their faces painted red and black, disguised as “animals, adorned with various animal pelts, tails, horns, and feather headdresses” (Betty 122). Such parallels solidify what archaeologist Don Simonis argues about Native American historical landscapes: “People have to realize that these sites are incredibly important and if you take even one piece away it’s like taking a page from a book. It’s lost forever” (Utah Office of Tourism 13). Because pictographs and petroglyphs function as mnemonic devices for a largely oral history, the magnitude of destroying, or overwriting these narratives with another, is immeasurable. But something to this effect occurs in McCarthy’s narrative time and time again, which draws attention to how an order to eradicate Native Americans could so easily be made and carried out and then covered up.

As one of the few survivors of the Comanche attack, the kid eventually defects from the filibuster campaign and joins up with Glanton’s gang (McCarthy 40, 55-58, 77-79). The gang is based on the historical group of contracted scalp hunters led by Captain John Glanton, who took advantage of the monetary payout from the scalp trade and eagerly participated in terrorizing Mexico borderlands in order to harvest Apache scalps for bounty (see fig. 6) (Chamberlain 72; *My Confession* 39-40, 259-97; McCarthy 79, 98, 102, 161, 165, 168-70). The narrative follows the gang’s movements in the Southwest, and it is here, as part of the gang, that the kid collaborates with his antagonist, the judge, whose character is based on the historical



Fig. 6. “John Glanton was a Mountain Man and Scalp Hunter,” by Samuel Chamberlain, c. 1855-1861 (*John Glanton* 74).

and infamous Judge Holden—a man obsessed with blood and power (*My Confession* 265, 271-97; McCarthy 3, 6-8, 79). Some time after the violent encounter with the Comanche, Glanton’s gang sights on the skyline “a thin frieze of mounted [Apache] archers,” situated between the “Animas peaks” and a gypsum lake, about a day’s ride from Janos, Mexico (McCarthy 100, 105, 107-110, 112). The Apaches attempt an attack, but the gang responds with gunfire, and the band retreats, leaving a dead member of their group upon the desert floor (McCarthy 109-110). Glanton’s gang approaches the fallen Apache, and upon closer scrutiny, they see his torso is smeared with “rancid grease” and his face has “slashes of white paint on the cheeks” and “chevrons of paint above the nose and figures in dark red paint under the eyes and on the chin,” and old wounds scarred over and “decorated their length with tattooed images, perhaps obscure with age, but without referents in the known desert about”

(McCarthy 110). McCarthy intentionally slows down the scene for the reader to take in the detail of the Apache's adornment and dress through the eyes of the gang. Rather than lumping together the Native Americans in *Blood Meridian* under the stereotypical trope of a chief wearing an eagle feather headdress, McCarthy accurately portrays each person by making deliberate distinctions between ethnic groups. In much the same way, Catlin painted his subjects to "bring to life unknown people who become real persons forever" (Hassrick 20-21). In so doing, this nameless Apache, who the gang saw as just one of many horsemen a few moments before, is by the pictographic markings granted a moment of individuality and identity before the reader (McCarthy 110). "Far from being simple decorations," paintings on coats and clothes, as well as tattoos and body paintings, "were a form of writing that served as a social record and situated an individual within the group and society" (Keyser 24; *Robes of Splendor* 44). Furthermore, McCarthy's link between the Apache's painted and tattooed pictographs and the ancient pictographs and petroglyphs found in the landscape (referents) nods to the versatile expressive mediums implemented by Native Americans and emphasizes the interconnectedness of these forms of writing—which make it possible to communicate across time and space—as well as the fragility of these historical documents. The Judge sifts through the Apache's effects "as if there were something to be read there"—but the meaning is lost with the death of the author (McCarthy 110).

Later the gang encounters another band of Apaches, some Chiricahuas, who also decorate themselves with pictographs: "stoneage savages daubed with clay paints in obscure charges, greasy, stinking, the paint on the horses pale under the dust" (McCarthy 228; Paterek 153, 156-58). While there is no violent exchange this time,

the pictographs cue the reader that the characters are traveling through a tragic and forgotten historic landscape: “the abandoned ruins of Santa Rita del Cobre,” the heart of the sacred Apache wintering grounds, and a region that was highly valued for its location and resources (qtd. in Bowden; McCarthy 113-14; *New Mexican Lives* 156-67). The area was heavily patrolled by the Chiricahua Chief Mangas Coloradas who, after an aggressive career of upholding Apache rights and defending the Chiricahuas’ ever shrinking territory, was eventually tortured, shot, and beheaded in 1863 under a flag of truce at Fort McLane by direction of the American Brigadier General James Henry Carleton, a man who “had little respect for Indians” and viewed them as “savages who deserved death if they refused to surrender unconditionally” (Aleshire 184-85; McCarthy 113, 228-30, 241-42; *New Mexican Lives* 107, 145-46, 148-49, 156-58, 178). The chief’s great head, which McCarthy hints at in his text, was boiled and the skull was put on display (Aleshire 185; McCarthy 229, *New Mexican Lives* 107). The betrayal of Mangas increased the hostility between Apaches and Americans, with more or less constant war continuing for another 23 years (*New Mexican Lives* 158). Such obscure, underlying narratives in *Blood Meridian* are easy to pass over, but this is precisely the irony for which McCarthy writes. His intent is to draw attention to what has been the historical reality for Native American populations within the United States: that a national attempt has been made to ignore or expunge a record of shameful treatment (Foote 180, 188). At times McCarthy less subtly draws critical attention to the extermination of Southwestern Native American populations as in the following example, which highlights much older pictographs and petroglyphs (McCarthy xi).

By the fall of 1848, “news of the California gold strike reached the eastern United States” and “by early 1849 streams of gold-seeking ‘argonauts’ had set out across the plains (Kavanagh 324; McCarthy 78). Two routes passed through Comanche country: the Santa Fe Trail on the north and the less frequently used Canadian River route on the south established for gold seekers but also a prospective central railroad route to the Pacific (Kavanagh 324-26). Meanwhile, in the development was a plan for another transcontinental trade trail—the “route would pass through Texas and became known as the California Trail, later called the Butterfield Trail” (Kavanagh 324; *New Mexican Lives* 156). Glanton’s gang eventually travels on this overland route to “Hueco tanks,” Texas, one of the largest concentrations of pictographs in North America (Gelo 294; McCarthy 172-73; Sutherland 24-25).

Hueco Tanks is the remnant of a dome of uplifted molten rock that rises out of the desert floor (Sutherland 2). Weathering and erosion created several hollows (“huecos” in Spanish) in the stone that trap and contain water, drawing people to this desert oasis for almost 11,000 years (Sutherland 2). “Although Hueco Tanks was not occupied continuously for 10 millennia, it is the only place in the region where every prehistoric and historic time period is represented” on the images depicted on stone (Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory). Thus, the individuals who frequented the area created a traceable record of their presence in the landscape. While there have been several groups of indigenous inhabitants at Hueco Tanks, rarely have indigenous groups painted or carved over each other’s images; some scholars believe this may be out of respect for the existing message (Sutherland 4). On the other hand, European newcomers to the area inscribed their names together with dates on the rock wall,

often superimposing their Western form of recording over indigenous documents, creating a palimpsest representational of the cultural conflict and disregard that fueled Native American genocide in this region (Keyser 41-42; Sutherland 1, 6, 24; Toelken 165-90).

The earliest Anglo date documented on the stone at Hueco Tanks is “1849,” which appears painted over some of the pictographs (Sutherland 6, 24). McCarthy matched this date exactly with the arrival of Glanton’s gang at Hueco Tanks, who, historically, would have been targeting the Apache who raided extensively in the area between 1820 and 1840; perhaps the same who would have painted the “pictures of their rituals and depicted their contact with Spaniard, Mexicans, and Anglos” (McCarthy 74, 79, 88, 98, 102, 161, 165, 199, 204; Seymour 153-92; Sutherland 1, 6, 23-24). No doubt McCarthy envisioned the gang taking refuge in this desert sanctuary. After all, they had been wandering “ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was and each was all” (McCarthy 172). McCarthy describes the gang as “gorgons”—mythical creatures having the ability to turn whomever they look at into stone—which informs McCarthy’s critique on historical erasure that follows.

That evening, as Glanton’s gang camps at Hueco Tanks, the judge wanders about the “ancient paintings [. . .] of men and animals and of the chase and [. . .] curious birds and arcane maps,” choosing a few “which he required” and traces them into his ledger book “to take away with him” (McCarthy 173). He then “returned to a certain stone ledge and sat a while and studied again the work there” (McCarthy 173). Next, amongst the hundreds of images to be seen at Hueco Tanks, the judge selects out one and scrapes it away from the rock leaving “only a raw place on the stone

where it had been” (McCarthy 173). In gorgon-like fashion, the judge gazes on the image and, in an instant, turns the pictograph back into the mere stone from which it was born, as if the image had never existed.

This defacement of the pictograph is reminiscent of the inscriptions the Anglo and Spanish made atop the images at Hueco Tanks (Sutherland 1, 24). As I previously noted, superimposition of images by groups of indigenous inhabitants here was rare (Sutherland 1, 4, 24). On the other hand, at the Zuni reservation and surrounding area (a region containing sacred images of Kachina masks, like those found at Hueco Tanks), several examples of repeated and superimposed imagery by indigenous authors occur (Schaafsma 535-45; Sutherland 4; Young 1-2, 15, 65-67, 185). Zuni pictograph and petroglyph scholar M. Jane Young proposes that repetition and superimposition of rock images may be a method of imbuing an area with power, or designating a place that is powerful (Young 173-74, 185). But just as putting one carving or painting on top of another may increase the power of the second image or place in which the images appear, this action may also be a method of taking power away from the first image; even a means for one cultural group to establish dominion over another in a particular place (Young 185-86). This is the case at Hueco Tanks, and domination is the judge’s motive for removing the image.

Glanton’s gang wanders deeper into Mexico territory and this parallels a figurative journey back in time as they pass through landscapes that housed older cultures (McCarthy 139). At one point, the gang enters a deep gorge beyond the “plains of San Agustin,” and sees “in the dry sand of the arroyo floor old bones and broken shapes of painted pottery and graven on the rocks above them pictographs of horse and cougar and turtle and the mounted Spaniards helmeted and bucklered and

contemptuous of stone and silence and time itself” (McCarthy 138-39). The gang seeks shelter in the mountains, and about them “dwellings of mud and stone were walled up beneath an overhanging cliff and the valley was traced with the work of old acequis” (McCarthy 139). That day, the judge walks the ruins, “the old rooms still black with woodsmoke, old flints and broken pottery among the ashes and small dry corncobs. A few rotting wooden ladders yet leaned against the dwelling walls. He roamed through the ruinous kiva picking up small artifacts and he sat upon a high wall and sketched in his book until the light failed” (McCarthy 139). That night he joins his fellow travelers at the fire where

he spread part of a wagon sheet on the ground and was sorting out his findings and arranging them before him. In his lap he held the leather ledgerbook and he took up each piece, flint or potsherd or tool of bone, and deftly sketched it into the book. [. . .] His fingers traced the impression of old willow wicker on a piece of pottery clay and he put this into his book with nice shadings, an economy of pencil strokes. [. . .] Lastly he set before him the footpiece from a suit of armor hammered out in a shop in Toledo three centuries before, a small steel tapadero frail and shelled with rot. This the judge sketched in profile and in perspective, citing the dimensions in his neat script, making marginal notes. [. . .] When he had done he took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then crushed it into a ball of foil and pitched it into the fire. He gathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire and he shook out the wagon sheet and folded it away among his possibles together with the

notebook. Then he sat with his hands cupped in his lap and he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation. (McCarthy 140)

The judge continuously writes in his ledger, keeping an account of his transactions, his comings and goings, documenting flora, fauna, and historical artifacts about him (McCarthy 126-27, 133, 139-42, 173, 198-99, 243, 251, 260). He appears to use the ledger for its intended purpose: to function as an inventory and an account, but after the painstaking documentation, the judge destroys the artifacts, preserving on the pages only vestiges of the originals (Restall; Schmidt). This seems contradictory, but when asked by a member of Glanton's gang who watched the judge make his notations in the ledger "what was his purpose in all this," the judge answers, "Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent" (McCarthy 198). At one point, the judge places his hands on the ground and declares, "This is my claim [. . .]. And yet everywhere upon it are pockets of autonomous life. Autonomous. In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur upon it save by my dispensation" (McCarthy 199). When pressed by a fellow scalp hunter who "asked the judge what he aimed to do with those notes and sketches [. . .], the judge smiled and said that it was his intention to expunge them from the memory of man" (McCarthy 140). Ironically, after the gang tries to contradict the judge's claims on the origins of the earth by quoting "scripture," the judge turns to them, smiling, and answers: "Books lie," and "Men's memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little from the past that was not" (McCarthy 116, 330). The danger of the judge's ledger is that it is only one version—one witness—of his and the gang's comings and goings in Mexico territory (McCarthy 153).

The ledger is a device in *Blood Meridian* to which McCarthy invariably returns. He even mimics the format and writing style of the early- to mid-1800s, which looks eerily similar to travel narratives like Howard Stansbury's *Exploration and Survey* published in 1852. This is no coincidence, because while this was a standard method of record keeping at the time, from another perspective, it was a form of colonialism, as there is an "intimate connection between linguistic appropriation and [. . .] the removal of peoples" (Farmer 265). By naming things, the judge sets claim to them, and his documentation is thievery at best (Bacchilega 43; Farmer 241-81; McCarthy 140, 173). This was not the first time the judge had appropriated and skewed information. The night at Hueco Tanks, the judge recalls to the scalp hunters that "he'd once drawn an old Hueco's portrait and unwittingly chained the man to his own likeness. For he could not sleep for fear an enemy might take it and deface it," and the Hueco finally begged the judge to "preserve the thing and the judge took him deep into the mountains and they buried the portrait in the floor of a cave where it lies yet for aught the judge knew" (McCarthy 141). The judge and the Hueco knew the ability of the image to communicate an accurate record, so much so that the destruction of the drawing would in essence destroy the existence of the man who sat for the portrait. The exchange is reminiscent of George Catlin's study amongst the Mandan, when, "Instantly recognizing their chiefs, some commenced yelping, others crying out or covering their mouths, while still others darted away and disappeared inside their own lodges to decide for themselves what to think about the paintings. They all agreed that the visiting white man had *made living beings! They had seen their two chiefs alive, in two places at the same time!* All agreed that such an operation could not be performed without some kind of serious

harm to the chiefs as well as to the whole community. Catlin was therefore proclaimed a very dangerous white medicine-man who could make living persons by looking at them and destroy life in the same way if he chose” (Hasserick 93-94). Likewise, the judge had become god-like in his ability to provoke the image out of the canvas and to extinguish it. He was a gifted artist, and the scalp hunter Webster stated so: “them pictures is like enough the things themselves” (McCarthy 140-41). But when the judge asked if he would sit for a portrait, Webster spat, “dont draw me, [. . .] for I dont want in your book [. . .] I’ll stand for my own witness” (McCarthy 141). Webster was not one for words, but he could see that a portrait, like the various entries in the judge’s ledger, had the potential to be taken out of context, altered, or misrepresented, and the result could be damaging. “No man can put the whole world in a book. No more than everthing drawed in a book is so.” To this the judge replied, “Well said, Marcus” (McCarthy 141).

To emphasize the grave implications of the judge’s appropriation and destruction of the images at Hueco Tanks, McCarthy returns to the analogy of the gorgon. The judge’s ease of erasure of the image at Hueco Tanks foreshadows the action of Glanton’s gang when three days after the vandalism, they slaughter an entire “band of peaceful Tiguas,” wiping them out as if they had never been, “as if [their deaths] were prefigured in the very rock for those with eyes to read,” and “no man stood to tender them a defense” (McCarthy 173). Like the decorated Apache gunned down near the Animas Peaks, or the looted artifacts near the Plains of San Agustin, or the marred rock images at Hueco Tanks, McCarthy makes a clear link between the destruction of Native American historical records and the near or complete wiping out of entire Native American nations (McCarthy 100, 138-40, 173). “In the days to come

the frail black rebuses of blood in those sands would crack and break and drift away so that in the circuit of few suns all trace of the destruction of these people would be erased. The desert wind would salt their ruins and there would be nothing, nor ghost nor scribe, to tell to any pilgrim in his passing how it was that people had lived in this place and in this place died” (McCarthy 174). Whether rock images or Tiguas makes no difference to the judge, and the erasure of either presence in the landscape leaves space only for his narrative.

Historically, the Spaniards drove the Tiguas out of present-day northern New Mexico (Colloff 115; Eickhoff 3-7). A small number of them relocated a few miles east of present-day El Paso, Texas, after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt against the Spaniards which, in the context of *Blood Meridian*, would have placed the Tiguas in the area where Glanton’s gang massacred them (Colloff ; Eickhoff 7-9; McCarthy 173-74; *New Mexican Lives* 28-42, 60-62; Seymour 153-92). It should be noted that as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the Tiguas’ territory, including Hueco Tanks, the area they consider sacred, came under Texas rule, and soon after Anglo homesteaders and settlers seized Tigua land, and the tribe very nearly vanished (Colloff 115-16; Eickhoff vii-ix, 5-10). The Tiguas, however, point to rock images, such as the pictographic Tigua Shield, and the Sacred Eagle Rock, as evidence of their tribal existence—a history McCarthy gestures to in these passages (see fig. 7) (Colloff 130; Eickhoff 57, 117, 148-49; Gelo 294; Sutherland ii). Because the rock images at Hueco Tanks continue to be vandalized in modern times, the Texas Parks & Wildlife strictly regulate the number of visitors including hikers, rock climbers, and bird watchers accessing the area (Dell’Amore; Sutherland 4, 25; Texas Parks & Wildlife). And while there has been effort to restore a few of the images, for some, “the attitude

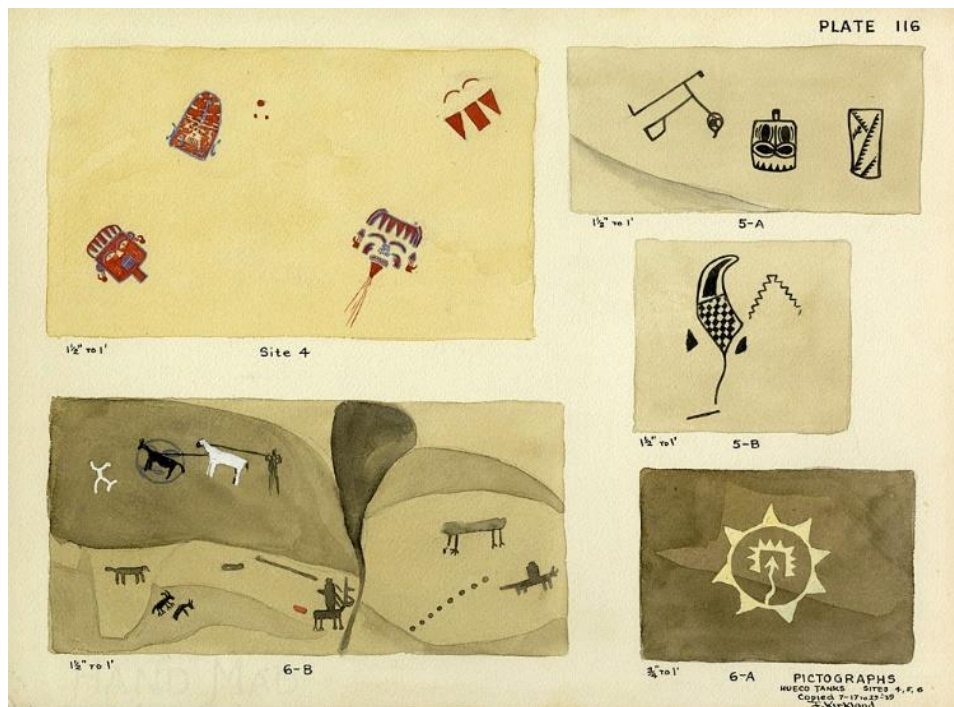


Fig. 7. Plate 3 (Kirkland Plate 116), by Forrest Kirkland, July 17-25, 1939, depicts “the [Tigua] tribe’s most revered icon, a pictograph from its sacred grounds at Hueco Tanks of an arrow pointing northward, encircled by the sun” (Colloff 130; Kirkland; Sutherland ii).

is that a monument only has been vandalized. To the Tiguas, it is a direct attack upon their belief” (Eickhoff 148; Henderson 25-40; Roe). The pictographs and petroglyphs at Hueco Tanks are some of the few artifacts that outlive their authors, and, among the various things the images communicate, they bear witness to the presence of Native Americans in the landscape. If the reader wonders whether the judge’s scalpel away the image at Hueco Tanks was merely juvenile, or if the Tiguas were a random target, the judge muses: “Whoever makes a shelter of reeds and hides has joined his spirit to the common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe” (McCarthy 146).

Another overlooked Native American counter narrative chronicled in pictographs—with which McCarthy bookends *Blood Meridian*—is that of the Kiowa, who moved throughout the same regions and shared close ancestral ties with the Apache and Comanche (Momaday 4, 6, 16-17; Paterek 116-19). From the northern Plains, the Kiowa migrated to the Wichita Mountains in western Oklahoma (Momaday 4-5; Paterek 116). “Along the way they acquired horses” (before this they utilized dogs and sleds), and “in alliance with the Comanches they held dominion in the southern Plains for a hundred years” (Kavanagh 146-48; Momaday 4, 20-21). In his book *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday writes that the Leonid meteor shower in November, 1833, “is among the earliest entries in the Kiowa calendars, and it marks the beginning as it were of the historical period in the tribal mind” (see fig. 8) (Momaday 85). “With the speed and density of a driving rain, stars were falling in the universe. Some were brighter than Venus; one was said to be as large as the moon” (Momaday 85). This marvel is commonly depicted on Sioux, Kiowa, and other Plains bison hide winter counts—calendars based on oral histories of memorable events which may include drawings of celestial phenomena, plagues, battles, and adaptations in tribal life, for example (Hansen 42-45). Because “The Year the Stars Fell” was so iconic and has been recorded and recreated so many times on various hide paintings, it is possible for Westerners to date these historical records (Hansen 43-45; *The Night the Stars Fell*; *Robes of Splendor* 82).

McCarthy opens *Blood Meridian* with a reference to the night of the kid’s birth—the night of the Leonid meteor shower—when the stars fell with such force they seemed to shatter the Big Dipper (McCarthy 3). This star cluster is also important in Kiowa memory, for it was at Devil’s Tower in the Black Hills that the



Fig. 8. The night the stars fell, by Al Momaday, 1969 “The falling stars seemed to image the sudden and violent disintegration of an older order” (Momaday 85-87).

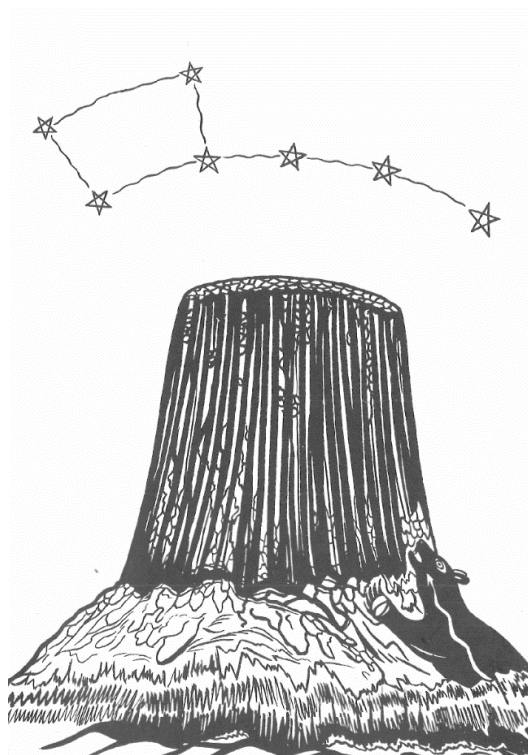


Fig. 9. Bear with Pleiades, by Al Momaday, 1969 (Momaday 8-9).

seven sisters climbed this upthrust “great tree” to escape their bear brother, after which, “The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper” (see fig. 9) (Momaday 8-9). It is appropriate, then, that McCarthy bisects *Blood Meridian* with a reference to this cluster of stars, when during the kid’s winter journey in December of 1849, “he walked all night. The stars swung counterclockwise in their course and the Great Bear turned and the Pleiades winked in the very roof of the vault” (The Kiowa say the Big Dipper; other tribal versions say the Pleiades. Fortunately, McCarthy references both constellations) (McCarthy 204, 212; Nabokov 216). It was during this time that “the buffalo ranged away from easy reach, and food was scarce,” and, according to the Kiowa winter count, Cholera swept through their camps killing half the population (The Kansas Historical Society; Momaday 19; Thornton 103-104).

Momaday learned these remnants of his tribal history from Kiowa matriarchs such as his grandmother Aho and the Kiowa memory keeper Ko-sahn (Momaday 5-12; 80-88). Momaday introduces Ko-sahn to readers at the end of *On the Way to Rainy Mountain*, when she came to see Momaday one day after Aho’s death: “Her body was twisted and her face deeply lined with age. Her thin white hair was held in place by a cap of black netting, though she wore braids as well, and she had but one eye. She was dressed in the manner of a Kiowa matron, a dark, full-cut dress that reached nearly to the ankles, full, flowing sleeves, and a wide apron-like sash. She sat on a bench in the arbor so concentrated in her great age that she seemed extraordinarily small. She was quiet for a time—she might almost have been asleep—and then she began to speak and to sing. She spoke of many things, and once she spoke of the Sun Dance” (Momaday 86).

The kid encounters a similar figure toward the conclusion of *Blood Meridian* while wandering in a mountain desert: “he saw alone and upright in a small niche in the rocks an old woman kneeling in a faded rebozo with her eyes cast down [. . .] She was very old and her face was gray and leathery and sand had collected in the folds of her clothing. She did not look up. The shawl that covered her head was much faded of its color yet it bore like a patent woven into the fabric the figures of stars and quatermoons and other insignia of a provenance unknown to him” (though the link with Momaday’s writing is the focus here, there are several intertextual connections which can be made concerning this particular scene including allusions to Christian iconography [see O’Gorman]) (McCarthy 315). The meaning of the beautiful detailing on the cloth is lost on the kid who makes a rare attempt at kindness to help the elderly Native American woman from her desert shelter: “He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die” (McCarthy 315). There is a baffling incongruity between the kid’s criminality and his momentary sincerity when he reaches “into the little cove and touched her arm” and he finds the woman is merely “a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years” (McCarthy 315). To say the kid is too late to save the woman is an understatement, and that is the tragic point McCarthy intends to make.

By the end of *Blood Meridian*, the sun is setting on the Plains culture; it is 1878, and the kid passes by mountains of bison bones, and the “Epilogue” alludes to a transcontinental railroad dividing the landscape (McCarthy 16-18, 324, 337). The Kiowa were a summer people, with a deep reverence for the sun, and “when the wild

[bison] herds were destroyed, so too was the will of the Kiowa people; there was nothing to sustain them in spirit” (Momaday 3, 8, 10, 60). “In 1837 the Kiowa made the first of their treaties with the United States,” and in 1887 they held their last Sun Dance on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek: “Before the dance could begin, a company of soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe” (Momaday 8, 10, 85). Is it any wonder that the final moments of the kid’s life were spent at Fort Griffin, a vice-ridden military outpost that housed units of Buffalo Soldiers and Tonkawa scouts who “participated in all the decisive campaigns that ended Kiowa and Comanche domination of northern Texas,” or that stars were falling just prior to and after the kid’s murder (McCarthy 316-17, 324, 333; Texas Historical Commission)?

Just moments before this deadly encounter, the judge challenges the kid to disprove his testimony concerning the kid’s involvement with Glanton’s gang: “Where is Glanton and Brown and where is the priest? He leaned closer. Where is Shelby, whom you left to the mercies of Elias in the desert, and where is Tate whom you abandoned in the mountains? [. . .] You were the person responsible,” insinuates the judge, “it was never me” (McCarthy 328-31). The kid rebuts, stating that he is his own agent and that the judge cannot implicate him for crimes he never committed (McCarthy 330-31). To this the judge “arched his brow. Did you post witnesses? he said. To report to you on the continuing existence of those places once you’d quit them” (McCarthy 331)? The judge knows the power of his written account to manipulate memory (and like the judge’s other targets, the kid is disadvantaged due to his illiteracy), and he states so with uncanny foresight: “Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical

law subverts it at every turn [. . .] It is not necessary [. . .] that the principles here be in *possession* of the facts concerning their case, for their acts will ultimately accommodate history with or without their understanding (McCarthy 3, 85, 250, 312; O’Gorman). The self-appointed judge employs partial facts and unassuming actors in the drama he creates and the tales he weaves. His ledger functions not as a tool to preserve information, but to control it, and he embodies the willful erasure and arrogance prevalent in Western narratives written during the setting of *Blood Meridian* (O’Gorman).

As readers know by the end of the novel, the judge is the only member of this pitiful party left, and his ledger is the only witness, the only version, that will be on record. Yet, in the same breath that the judge sentences the kid, he admits: “Can [a man] believe that the wreckage of his existence is unentailed? No liens, no creditors? That gods of vengeance and of compassion alike lie sleeping in their crypt and whether our cries are for an accounting or for the destruction of the ledgers altogether they must evoke on the same silence and that it is this silence which will prevail” (McCarthy 330)? A handful of retributive moments do take place in *Blood Meridian*. There is much to be said of the pictographs and petroglyphs McCarthy includes in his narrative, and it was not by chance that during the attack on the ferry at the Yuma crossing of the Colorado River when Captain John Glanton is executed in his bed by the Yuma chief Caballo en Pelo, the last object Glanton fixes his eyes upon is the device of his destruction: “a common axe the hickory helve of which was carved with pagan motifs and tasseled with the feathers of predatory birds” (see fig. 10) (McCarthy 274-75).



Fig. 10. *The Rescue*, by Samuel Chamberlain, c. 1855-1861 “As I neared the scene I recognized the gigantic form of Judge Holden, who had been brought to bay by about a dozen yelling Yumas, who appeared to be armed only with their short clubs. Holden was resting, leaning on his heavy rifle, which he had been using as a war club, with effect, for one savage lay brained at his feet [sic]” (*My Confession* 291-93).

The judge further concedes it is problematic to tamper with evidence. For even after he destroys in the fire the historical artifacts he gathered near the Plains of San Agustin, this conversation follows:

What kind of indians has these here been, Judge?

The judge looked up.

Dead ones I'd say, what about you, Judge?

Not so dead, said the judge.

[. . .] The people who once lived here are called the Anasazi. The old ones. They quit these parts ages since and of them there is no memory.

They are rumors and ghosts in this land and they are much revered.

The tools, the art, the building—these things stand in judgment on the latter races [. . .] their spirit is entombed in the stone. It lies upon the

land with the same weight and the same ubiquity. (McCarthy 138-142, 146)

It is often easier to face ghosts than to face facts (Dickey 37-48; Farmer 282-327). This passage frighteningly foreshadows the human tendency to create distance from unappealing events such as Native American relocation, land theft, and genocide (Dickey 45; Farmer 253, 294, 311-12; Foote 324). It is fascinating, but not surprising, how easily Glanton's gang disassociates the ruins they pass by from the Native Americans they murder. They make no connection between the past and the present, and their future victims may as well already be phantoms.

Native American genocide is a weighty topic, and through his writing, McCarthy takes the first step toward opening the dialogue about this tragedy, which is often the hardest, by acknowledging that it happened (Foote 323-25). As readers exhume the layers of history in the passages of *Blood Meridian*, it becomes clearer that landscapes containing shameful narratives are easily erased in national memory, and undesirable events are quickly overwritten with more palatable versions (Foote 293-94, 336). "Few societies seem to have the moral courage needed to confront directly a legacy of genocide and racism," as such matters "are difficult to weave back into American history" (Foote 324, 328).

May I illustrate an example of this challenge from my own region in the Preston, Idaho, Bear River valley: the site of the Bear River Battle or, as the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone remember it, the Bear River Massacre. The incident took place on 29 January 1863, not too many years distant from the setting of *Blood Meridian* (see fig. 11) (Gelo 276). In a small, historically inaccurate designated site, a large Daughters of the Utah Pioneer memorial was erected in July 1953 in

commemoration of the Battle. On 29 January 2015, at the 152nd memorial of the Massacre, Tribal Vice-President of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, Darren B. Parry, shared these words:

At this location 152 years ago today, a tragic event took place in the early morning hours that changed the course of our nation's history. [. . .] They were massacred at the hands of civilization.

Winston Churchill said that history, "is always written by the victors." That explains why the plaque behind me reads... Attacks by the Indians on the peaceful inhabitation in this vicinity led to the final battle here on January 29, 1863 [sic]. The conflict occurred in deep snow and bitter cold. Scores of wounded and frozen soldiers were taken from the battle field to the Latter Day Saint community of Franklin, Idaho. Here pioneer women, trained through the trials and necessity of frontier living, accepted the responsibility of caring for the wounded until they could be removed to Camp Douglas, Utah.

If written from the Native perspective the plaque may have said.... The massacre of the Northwestern Shoshone Nation occurred in this vicinity on January 29th of 1863. Coronel [sic] Patrick E. Conner and his California volunteers from Camp Douglas, Utah attacked a sleeping Indian village in the early morning hours of the day. The soldiers shot, bludgeoned and bayoneted several hundred men, women and children to their death. The Indians fought with the limited weapons available to them, but the band was all but annihilated. **BUT THIS IS NOT THE END OF OUR STORY.** [. . .]

The massacre at Bia Ogi does not define us, only the actions and hard work of those who have followed have. [. . .]

We will always remember the events of this day; we have forgiven those wrongs, but we will never forget. (Parry 1-3, 5, 7)

Landscapes that engender violence, “that do not fit an idealized, patriotic vision” of American democracy, are often forgotten, obliterated, or vandalized in an effort to silence the past (Foote 335). What took place on the shores of the Bear River that bitter-cold day in January was a tragedy for all parties involved, and while the plaque remains unchanged, atop this marker rests a cement teepee. The augmented memorial—a superimposition of sorts—seems to beg that Shoshone participants be recognized and their accounts represented.

Patty Timbimboo, the Tribal Cultural Expert of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, continues to document pictographs and petroglyphs in the



Fig. 11. The Battle of the Bear River panel, by Edmond J. Fitzgerald, 1940, commissioned for Preston City Post Office, Idaho, built in 1939 (Fitzgerald).

surrounding region of Utah and Idaho, and she still meets people who believe Native Americans never lived in these regions (Timbimboo). “Well,” she muses, “what happens when you are invaded? When a people comes in and conquers another people? We moved. But we *were* here. History books portrayed our people as if we were savages. That we were less. That it didn’t matter how we were treated. Because we didn’t matter” (Timbimboo).

It is not uncommon for private land owners to deny the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation access to pictographs and petroglyphs, but Patty calmly observes, “We simply want to document the images. We would be happy if the land owners would at least send photographs and tell us the locations. So we can show our children the photographs and teach them this is where your people came from. This is where they were living, and these are the things they were making. We can only hope that the people who have [the rock images] on their property are taking care of them and preserving them” (Timbimboo).

Pictographs and petroglyphs in *Blood Meridian* record Native American memory and presence in the landscape. By referencing these images, McCarthy confronts concepts of exposure and shame which facilitate conversations concerning Native American genocide. Certainly the novel can be appreciated for the surface narrative that traces the kid’s journey through Mexico territory—an adventure seeker betting his fortune on the spoils of war. But if readers delve beneath this plot, which is McCarthy’s intent, they find rich, layered, tragic, and, in some cases, forgotten Native American accounts. In this way, McCarthy creates a space in his landscapes for these records to speak.

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