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## CHALLENGING THE WESTERN IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

Set in the nineteenth-century American Southwest, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* rewrites the conventions of the western genre through a historically informed fictionalized account of the Glanton gang. As part of McCarthy's subversive literary oeuvre, the novel intends to deromanticize the western's underlying myths and dismantle its binaries, as well as to expose the brutality of the frontier and reflect on violence as a historiographic condition. Within studies of the western, McCarthy's work, and transgressive literature, this article wishes to contribute to the existing discussions of McCarthy's writing by examining *Blood Meridian* as a critical postmodern western or anti-western, and analyzing its strategies of demythologizing the West and the western.

*Key words:* anti-western, *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy, genre, transgressive fiction, western

### INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF NOTE ON THE WESTERN AND ITS REVISION

When Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* was first published in 1985, it did not garner much critical or readerly attention. Its graphic representation of violence and a revisionary approach to the popular western genre undoubtedly contributed to its delayed recognition, but an increasing interest in transgressive writing since the 1990s has brought McCarthy's oeuvre to attention and made *Blood Meridian* a contemporary classic. The novel exemplifies a certain tendency in McCarthy's fiction towards rewriting which uses generic subversion to deliver trenchant critique. Thus *Suttree*'s fragmented structure and alternating narrators test the genre of autobiography, portraying life on the social margins that disturbs conventional notions of family and success. *No Country for Old Men* recasts crime fiction to present a world of senseless violence, while the post-apocalyptic and ecocritical *The Road* redefines the quest narrative as a struggle to survive in a

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devastated world, ending its predominantly dystopian vision on a hopeful note. The same propensity for revision is found in McCarthy's acclaimed *Border Trilogy*, which takes the western into picaresque and philosophical realms, an effort that assumes epic proportions in *Blood Meridian*, confirming John Frow's belief that all texts may modify genres while or by using them (Frow, 2006).

Reworking epic complexity as a postmodern and profoundly critical western, *Blood Meridian* demonstrates that to simply perform a genre is to confine the work within the boundaries of convention, while to rewrite it is to offer fresh perspectives, push the limits of expectation, and unlock the work's transgressive potential. First in a series of novels set in the American Southwest, *Blood Meridian* is also McCarthy's first take on the western, where the western tradition "provides a literary context for transgressive writing" and an arena for McCarthy's exploration of "the transgressive forces of existence" (Søfting, 1999: 14). As critical analyses have so far focused on violence, morality, evil, and history, the novel's challenge to the western genre remains curiously underdiscussed. *Blood Meridian* has indeed been called a postmodern western novel (Sørensen 2005), but literature that examines its genre falls short of detailing exactly how and to what end it responds to the western tradition. Theoretically framed in studies of the western, McCarthy's prose, and transgressive writing, this article wishes to add to the existing considerations of McCarthy's work a reading of *Blood Meridian* as a transgressive anti-western that critically revisits the tradition.

Endorsing the view that the western's purpose is to rationalize the violent nature of mythological and historical western narratives, Jane Tompkins concludes that "the genre exists in order to provide a justification for violence. [...] because our society puts it under interdict – morally and legally" (Tompkins, 1993: 227). Contrary to the social restriction which turns violence into a taboo, traditional westerns offer heroes who are violent for a good cause, as well as "vicarious thrills and escape from contemporary life" (Aquila, 2015: 7). Stories infused with the frontier myth once also had an important ideological role as they advertised the qualities of the American spirit that shaped the nation's character (McVeigh 2007), and reflected "American beliefs in democracy, freedom, self-reliance, morality, nationalism, and heroism" (Aquila, 2015: 7). The popularity of this uniquely American genre, which reached its peak in the golden age of Hollywood westerns, was partly also due to a sense of comfort in familiar uniformity that allowed for little, if any, variety: "no matter what the medium: the hero is the same, the storyline is the same, the setting, the values, the actions are the same" (Tompkins, 1993: 7). Arguably the best known traditional version, for instance, follows the

adventures of a lone nomadic rider who roams the territories of the West as a location, process, “state of mind”, “myth”, or “mental construct” (Aquila, 2015: 6). Its harsh and dangerous setting, a blend of geography and myth perfect for the realization of Manifest Destiny as a “creation of political propagandists” rather than “a deeply held American folk belief” (Hine–Faragher, 2007: 80), offers riches, freedom, and dream fulfilment through struggle, evoking “an image of violent action, of pursuits and brawls” and the notion of “glamorized history” (Rieupeyrou, 1952: 117). From a historical perspective, however, the repetitive settings, storylines, characters, themes, and motifs promote a simplified image of the frontier as a world of remarkably similar dedicated sheriffs, harsh but honest cowboys and gunslingers, and brave ranchers of the Southwest. Instead of the complexities of the human condition on the frontier, the conventional western deals with “the essentials of reality” (Rieupeyrou, 1952: 123) and predictably divides protagonists into honorable, invariably white cowboys and savage Indians, lawmen and criminals, honest ranchers and corporation agents. This male-centered world is characterized by a heavy romanticization of its larger-than-life white characters whose great mythic aura owes a lot to the legendary historical figures on both sides of the law, like Wyatt Earp or Jesse James. Their world is marked by harshness, lawlessness, conflict, death, and the triumph of white man’s justice, set in and symbolized by the barren landscape as the hostile stage for the white male protagonist’s adventure, and a void in which female, Indian, and black voices are lost.

That the western is an elastic rather than a clearly defined genre despite all of its recognizable conventions is confirmed by its more recent variants which critically undermine the binary thinking of conventional westerns and may be categorized as “mature-phase Westerns” (McVeigh, 2007: 39). Their division into revisionist westerns and anti-westerns remains questionable as both subvert the features of traditional westerns, reconsidering their myths and frequently relying on historical sources in their portrayal of the frontier. If there is a difference, revisionist westerns attempt to voice traditionally negative or neglected perspectives, and expose the great white Manifest Destiny agenda while mirroring “the tumult and polarization” (Aquila, 2015: 9) which affected the American public after dramatic political and social changes in the second half of the twentieth century. Anti-westerns take the genre further, deconstructing its principal elements while creating a more ambiguous perspective of the world. They rely heavily on the “destructive impulse” and aim to “explode the form altogether” (McVeigh, 2007: 152). Their transgressive interpretation of the mythic Southwest shatters the foundational binaries of the traditional genre – good/bad, white/Indian, civilization/wilderness,

hero/villain – at times bringing the western close to parody. Such renderings of the genre are intrinsically linked with the emergence of New Western History in the 1980s, which “revisited the West and returned with unheard stories from landscape, not of heroic endeavor, progress and civilization, but racism, oppression and violent conquest” (McVeigh, 2007: viii). In a similar vein, McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* revisits the American frontier to confront its romanticization and simplification in traditional westerns and expose their underlying assumptions.

### *BLOOD MERIDIAN: A RECASTING OF THE WESTERN*

Dressed in surprisingly lyrical prose that opposes the terse language of conventional westerns, *Blood Meridian*’s bleak portrayal of the frontier, its cruelty, barbarism, senseless violence, physical and moral filth, relies on some elements of the Wild West narrative, like the southwestern setting, riders, the frontier, adventures, the ubiquitous presence of death and harshness of nature, only to expand and undermine their functions. The novel is pervaded by a sense of moral ambiguity in a world that boasts no honorable duels or violence for a good cause, and its unadorned ruthlessness carries no symbolism. The frontier is populated by characters whose one distinctive trait is a conspicuous absence of redeemable qualities as “no party engages in any action due to motivation borne of a sense of social justice” (Brannon, 2003: 46). Violence is the trademark of the frontier and, as in McCarthy’s other fiction, it is a fundamental characteristic of the history and experience of the American nation, and mankind in a broader sense, which questions the myths of progress and democracy. To project this vision, *Blood Meridian* decomposes the binaries inherent to the western paradigm, erasing or crossing their boundaries. Admittedly, the novel appropriates “the cultural myths and narrative structures associated with the historical and contemporary American West” (Brannon, 2003: 15), but they are made to serve an essentially anti-western vision. *Blood Meridian*’s metaphysical contemplation of the underside of human nature and the cycles of human history, as well as its rendering of the nineteenth-century Southwest, is an imploded, deconstructed version of the well-established genre whose goal is not to compensate for the marginalization and misrepresentation of historically oppressed groups, or to question the genre itself, but to deromanticize its underlying historical narrative.

As John Sepich shows, McCarthy invested his novel with great care for historical detail. Painstakingly explaining the innumerable historical facts behind the fictionalized story of the Glanton gang, Sepich reveals that the novel’s commitment to historical sources is the foundation of its anti-western disposition.

Unlike its thoroughly romanticized or mythicized conventional counterparts, *Blood Meridian* is defined by its reliance on a more naturalistic, if also fictionalized, representation of the western reality, driving some of the patterns of the traditional genre to excess. The frontier reality in historical sources significantly differs from its customary representation in westerns, so by artistically reconstructing elements from historical sources, McCarthy inverts the genre, painting a depressing picture of the much-idealized conquest of the frontier without granting “symbolic redemption of the fallen world or narrating the moral regeneration” (Philips, 1996: 435) of its historical agents. If we remember Hayden White’s conception of the main mechanisms of historical discourses, one that “adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it” and the other that “feigns to make the world [...] speak itself as *a story*” (Fielder, 2000: 20), *Blood Meridian* both narrates and narrativizes the nineteenth-century Southwest, defying its conventional representations.

Despite its preoccupation with history, *Blood Meridian* resists readings as a fully historical novel by offering itself up not only as an account of the nineteenth-century American Southwest, but also as a timeless reflection on human nature set in a suitably vast and featureless landscape. McCarthy’s promised land is nothing but an endless dusty void that puts forward “a view of time and history that appears ahistorical”, and “seems more concerned with what lies beyond boundaries than with what is contained by them” (Søfting, 1999: 14–15). On one hand, the novel is historically contextualized as a morally ambiguous story of the frontier that “subtracts myth from the narrative of the American West and replaces it with a more realistic [...] perspective”, challenging the construction of the West as “a place of romance and honor” (Peebles, 2003: 232, 231). On the other, it conceives of the story as “a natural history [...] concerned only with large, long-term forces that almost completely eclipse humanity, both literally and metaphorically” (Peebles, 2003: 232). In other words, in one epic sweep, *Blood Meridian* deromanticizes the western by exposing its historical realities and explores the continued presence of violence in broader human history.

The nightmarish odyssey of the Glanton gang in *Blood Meridian* thus reverses the features of the traditional western against the backdrop of a metaphysical examination of human nature and history. To counteract the many impressive western heroes, McCarthy’s unnamed main character, known only as the kid, is no hero in literary terms or as a human being. His birth during the Leonid meteor shower in 1833, an era astrologically governed by Mars, may seem to assume mythical proportions in prophesying a life marked by conflict (Sepich, 2008: 51), but there is nothing mythical about his life or character. Although the

novel starts and ends with the kid, his role as the protagonist is undermined as he virtually disappears from the story, blending into a mass of roguish characters with whom he rides. McCarthy employs the pattern of a Southerner joining a group of riders to conquer his piece of the West, introduced in Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (Kollin, 2001: 557), but the pattern's air of grandiosity is disrupted by the novel's focus on the kid's survival through violence despite his inherent weakness, "a flawed place in the fabric of [his] heart" with "clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy, 2010: 316). Historically, the kid was probably based on Samuel E. Chamberlain, whose account of riding with the Glanton gang is an intertext in *Blood Meridian* (Sepich, 2008), but he also bears resemblance to Huckleberry Finn, especially when he is described as a caricature cowboy: "He wears on his head a hat he's made from leaves and they have dried and cracked in the sun and he looks like a raggedyman wandered from some garden where he'd used to frighten birds" (McCarthy, 2010: 16). This near-parodic version of the great American hero rides a mule, carries a barely useful gun, and hides like a mouse under a rock in the face of danger, for he has none of the "decency, courage, loyalty" (Kollin, 2001: 564) integral to the cowboy code.

In fact, *Blood Meridian* partly establishes itself as an anti-western through an almost total ethical and moral numbness of all its protagonists. Their conduct does not comply with the presumed codes of traditional western narratives as Glanton and his riders do not fight for truth or justice, nor are they devoted "to righting every wrong and helping those in need" (Aquila, 2015: 3). Instead, their distorted humanity follows a nihilistic agenda and indulges in senseless violence while they roam a world in which the slightest trace of humanity is seen as a failing. The kid, who does not always commit to the infernal mission of Glanton and the so-called judge, may seem at odds with his surroundings, but thinking in historical terms, his character may be closer to the reality of the frontier than the mythicized figures of traditional westerns: a troublesome young man from a broken home going down the spiral of violence without fully understanding the scope of his gang's misdeeds.

If the kid's suitability to his context remains open to debate, the novel's main antagonist, the judge, undoubtedly epitomizes the absence of ethical and moral codes in McCarthy's hellscape. He looms large over *Blood Meridian* as a personification of evil that links the two worlds of the frontier, the civilized world and the wild one. His ability to survive and his understanding of the cultural and geographic landscapes of the Southwest are certainly inherited from typical western heroes, but his devilish nature transforms him into an antihero. His historical

background is verified only by Samuel Chamberlain, which allowed McCarthy more freedom in the characterization of the judge's "diabolical ubiquity" and "the immortality of evil" (Sepich, 2008: 127) that far outreach his mortal embodiment. The judge's mythical and almost supernatural aura then becomes a counterweight to *Blood Meridian's* historical rootedness, and his diabolical presence presides over a world of mere anarchy, to borrow Yeats's famous words.

This anarchic world cancels the western's usual dichotomies, so the existing division between whites and Indians is blurred when Indians ride with the Glanton gang as their interests overlap, and they all commit violence that disturbs the distinction between civilization and barbarism. The demarcation lines between different ethnicities also disappear, although two Delawares and a black man ride with the gang, because McCarthy's "civilized" white riders refer to all non-whites as "savages" and "niggers." In place of admirable western heroes, embodiments of honor, nobility, and righteousness, *Blood Meridian* follows these members of the gang on a journey stripped of the grandeur of a quest and reduced to a crusade of violence. McCarthy signals this through the characters' physical appearance as both whites and Indians are grotesque creatures covered in dried blood, dirt and dust, frequently resembling a clownish "horde from a hell" or "wardens of some dim sect sent forth to proselytize among the very beasts of land" (McCarthy, 2010: 54, 197). That they are closer to the primal stages of human existence than to civilization is confirmed when the narrative concludes that "[s]ave for their guns and buckles and a few pieces of metal in the harness of the animals there was nothing about these arrivals to suggest even the discovery of the wheel" (McCarthy, 2010: 244). A similar idea is suggested by the bizarre outfits of Yuman chiefs whose leader "wore a belted wool overcoat that would have served a far colder climate and beneath it a woman's blouse of embroidered silk and a pair of pantaloons of gray cassinette" (McCarthy, 2010: 268). This seemingly exaggerated yet, as Sepich shows, historically entrenched portrayal of both whites and Native Americans serves as a convincing example of McCarthy's deconstruction of customary representations in traditional westerns.

The novel again courts subversion when it transgresses the convention of a noble fight, promoted by both traditional westerns and popular culture, as the characters on both sides of the blurred divide take part in no regular duels or shootouts. Historically recorded gunfights often happened on the spur of the moment, fueled by the contenders' inebriation, and without much respect for fair play, but *Blood Meridian* takes conflicts to the extreme with the use of trickery, excessive brutality, and insatiable bloodthirst. Thus the ferocity and gore in

McCarthy's "almost forensic" (Philips, 1996: 450) description of the ferry station conflict between the Yumas and the Glanton gang, two "rival bands of apes" (McCarthy, 2010: 300), sharply contrasts the conventional romanticization of conflict and fictionalizes historical accounts of the massacre presented by Sepich and Maria Ana Montielo, a pioneer at Yuma. While Søvting suggests that the real horror of such scenes in *Blood Meridian* lies in the reader's acknowledgement of their ability to feel "fascinated by the atrocity" (Søvting, 199: 30), far more pertinent seems the potential of such scenes to communicate to the reader the historical inevitability of extreme violence.

A constant reminder of man's potential for extreme violence in *Blood Meridian* is scalping – a leitmotif, a business enterprise, and a western convention. The historical Glanton, ranger and filibuster turned mass murderer, led a gang of scalp hunters in the Southwest after the Mexican-American War, whose business was "killing Apache Indians and selling scalps to the Mexican government" (Sepich, 2008: 22). Scalp hunting was designed to clear the Southwest of hostile, mainly Apache, Indians, but as Sepich's sources confirm, when Indians were scarce, Mexicans were scalped instead. Glanton's business can be seen as propelled by "the capitalistic motivation of westward expansion in a grotesque manner" (Søvting, 1999: 16), so scalp hunters like Glanton helped establish the rule of capital in new territories. The graphic details in *Blood Meridian*'s representation of scalp hunting, and a repeated mention of scalps as "receipts" whose number determines the amount to be paid, exposes the link between capitalism and violence, undermining the usual racial undertones of scalping. Within the western genre, scalping is habitually associated with Native Americans to signal their savagery and incompatibility with the supposedly civilized ways of white settlers. *Blood Meridian* reverts the stereotype with its group of chiefly white scalpers whose business seems eerily atavistic when set in the context of the novel's epigraphs, one of which mentions a scalped 300,000-year-old skull from Ethiopia. Scalping thus serves to cancel the American West's mythical status as the New World, showing it to be a part of "a very old world, the reality of which is bedrock" (Philips, 1996: 452). The violence that scalping represents is not there for its own sake nor is it employed for shock effect. In line with transgressive writing's use of violence as an instrument of critique (Mookerjee, 2013; Booker, 1991), *Blood Meridian* connects the violence of scalping with capitalist exploitation, as the profitable mutilation of humans is in the end superseded by an image of machines drilling holes across the conquered frontier that will soon be divided into money-making units. However, the novel also considers violence from a broader perspective and proposes that it is a



constant of human nature and history, and one of its driving forces: "War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be" (McCarthy, 2010: 262).

In its anti-western thematization of the history of conflict in the American Southwest, *Blood Meridian* retrieves unheard stories and relatively obscure names like those of Reverend Green, Captain White, Sarah Borginnis, or the Yuma chiefs (Sepich, 2008: 38–76). The western's perpetual mythologization of the American Southwest through stories of legendary men like Pat Garret is thus set in doubt by McCarthy's focus on the less famous and the anonymous. Glanton, whose life and deeds were recorded in some detail, is not one of the "incorporation gunfighters" nor is he allowed in McCarthy's anti-western the status of the romanticized "resister gunfighters" (Brown, 1993: 9, 8) who broke the law and earned common people's admiration. Unlike the more famous outlaws like Billy the Kid, Glanton is systematically deromanticized through acts of violence that are beyond capitalist motivation or the western's intrinsic "code of fighting man" (Brown, 1993: 16). In fact, the Glanton gang devises an anti-code that allows for sadistic pleasure in torture and killing. The western's image of the outlaw "unconcerned with ethics and social prohibitions" (Mookerjee, 2013: 51) loses the romantic aura which diminishes or relativizes his crimes, and the obscure names of western history show McCarthy's reliance on sources far from the mainstream that allow him to recast the West as "a place where all was darkness and without definition" (McCarthy, 2010: 106).

#### CONCLUSION: TO CRITICIZE AND TO DISENCHANT

In his reading of *Blood Meridian* as a critical epic, Justin Evans proposes that McCarthy radicalizes literary conventions to criticize modern society and to disenchant (Evans, 2014: 405, 415). As the preceding discussion hopefully demonstrates, the novel is a critical anti-western which challenges conventional approaches to the western genre, simultaneously dismantling the myths of the American Southwest and exposing an inherent propensity for violence in human nature and history. The end of *Blood Meridian* closes the narrative's deconstruction of the western genre and myth by dispensing with the proverbial lone horseman who rides off into the sunset when justice has been established and balance restored, "fading away at the end of each replaying of their myth, only to reappear in the beginning" (Indick, 2008: 142). Instead, the novel ends with its devil-like judge dancing into eternity in the infernal landscapes of what McCarthy aptly calls *Blood Meridian*, implying that the horrors recorded in the narrative will continue.

The novel's epilogue suggests that the next cycle of violence will be triggered by the beginning of industrialization on the frontier. A new dawn sees "a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground" (McCarthy, 2010: 355), fencing the range and announcing the modern era whose different stages McCarthy thematizes in his *Border Trilogy* and *No Country for Old Men*. The holes are "the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence" (McCarthy, 2010: 355), signifying a change in rules and codes, and an end to "the era of the open range" (McVeigh, 2007: 5). The man "strikes fire in the hole and draws out his steel" (McCarthy, 2010: 355) as McCarthy rather oddly describes his business of prodding fence holes for "the most telling symbol of the changing face of the West" (McVeigh, 2007: 5), barbed wire. The epilogue's careful wording resembles a warriors' rather than workers' lingo, perhaps to intimate that the agrarian vision of remade America conceived in Manifest Destiny will never reach its Arcadian stage. The epilogue also beckons toward the time to come, the Western Civil War of Incorporation, possibly also to the Texas oil boom, and to McCarthy's next novel, *All the Pretty Horses*, whose main character yearns for an Arcadian past without realizing that the past was in reality closer to the one depicted in *Blood Meridian*.

If *Blood Meridian* is read through "Charles Tilly's maxim that the history of violence is the history and organization of power" (Brown, 1993: 6), the story of the Glanton gang depicts a world in which the seed was planted for the modern manifestations of that maxim, as well as modern America and the modern world at large. Scalping as the novel's chief leitmotif serves as a symbol of that history of violence, from the epitaph's reference to scalped 300,000-year-old skulls from Ethiopia to those in nineteenth-century America. Through an implied parallel between maimed human bodies and the ravished earth riddled by man-made holes, the reader is reminded of an unbroken cycle of violence that will repeat itself, as the epilogue suggests, in more contemporary times. Violence as a historiographic condition is further emphasized through *Blood Meridian's* mantra-like sentence "[t]hey rode on", and its subject, the Glanton gang, pose as the historical agents of the rule of violence whose brutal enforcement is repeatedly and graphically portrayed. Contrary to Mookerjee's belief that richness of style potentially "obscures [...] violent acts" (Mookerjee, 2013: 94), McCarthy's verbal mastery does nothing to conceal or beautify them, or to alleviate the ensuing sense of discomfort.

In the manner of all great transgressive writing, *Blood Meridian* uses violence as a constant of human nature and history to criticize, through anti-

western, the dominant institutions and ideologies underlying the grandeur of the historical Southwest. *Blood Meridian* reevaluates the great national myth of the honorable frontier, deglamorizing its history and exposing its essentially imperialistic and violent nature. The novel's parade of ruthless antagonists roaming the desert inferno systematically dismantles the stereotypical images and binaries of the western genre, suggesting that the American westward expansion was not a sentimental story of heroes, their toil and prize in harsh settings eventually transformed into hospitable land. The western contributed significantly to the romanticization of the American frontier dream, inspired by the pioneers' and settlers' motto "[w]estward the course of empire takes its way", which effectively turned the violence of conquest into a just cause. McCarthy's vision of this historical process, emblemized by poverty, stench, dust, sweat, tears, money, and, most of all, blood, strips down the mythological narrative to its bones and reveals that the promised land was a nightmarish bloodbath. The vision defines *Blood Meridian* "as a critique of the ideology that supports the concept of Manifest Destiny as well as the Western genre" (Brannon 2003, 57), but McCarthy's insistence on time immemorial evident, for instance, in his reference to the victims of a Comanche attack as argonauts and pilgrims, undoubtedly indicates that the temporal frame behind *Blood Meridian* is also the whole history of human conquest. Significantly, McCarthy's graphic representation of conquest's violent nature as a constant feature of human history makes this literary masterpiece an anti-violence as well as anti-western narrative. The historical West, revived in McCarthy's critical postmodern western as one characterized by conquest, colonization, exploitation, and massacre rather than development, civilization, progress, and culture, subverts the conventions of the western genre to speak of a larger truth: civilization is a horizon that man is yet to reach.

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PREISPITIVANJE VESTERNA U *KRVAVOM MERIDIJANU* KORMAKA MAKARTIJA

*Rezime*

*Krvavi meridijan* Kormaka Makartija, klasik transgresivne proze, preispituje konvencije vesterna kako bi demitologizovao ideološke postavke na kojima ovaj popularni žanr počiva. U kontekstu subverzije vesterna u savremenom književnom i filmskom stvaralaštvu, Makartijev roman predstavlja kritički postmoderni western ili antivestern čiji je cilj da rekonstruiše američki Zapad kroz istorijski utemeljenu dekonstrukciju vesterna, te da istovremeno predstavi nasilje kao istorijsku konstantu. U isti mah kontekstualno određen i dekontekstualizovan insistiranjem na vanvremenskom statusu nasilja, *Krvavi meridijan* razotkriva romantizovan prikaz života na granici i podriiva binarne opozicije vesterna koje neizostavno grade sliku o legendarnim pravičnim beloputim predstavnicima zakona i romantičnim odmetnicima kao otelovljenju civilizacije čiji su ciljevi opravdani nasuprot marginalizovanim i demonizovanim Indijancima kao oličenju divljaštva, primitivizma i neukosti. U okvirima studija o vesternu, Kormaku Makartiju i transgresivnoj književnosti, ovaj članak analizira Makartijeve strategije preispitivanja vesterna u *Krvavom meridijanu* kao instrument kritike popularnih predstava o devetnaestovekovnoj ekspanziji u Americi, te glorifikovanja pionira, obećane zemlje i američkog sna u širem istorijskom kontekstu koji nasilje predstavlja kao suštinsku odliku ljudske prirode i istorije. Dok prati svoje antijunake na krvavom pohodu kroz svojevrsan pakao kojim dominiraju slike okrutnosti, prljavštine i krvi, Makartijev roman deromantizuje western i uspostavlja vezu između nasilja i moći, razotkrivajući naličje civilizacijskih pohoda i ukazujući na civilizaciju kao horizont koji čovek još nije dostigao.

*Ključne reči:* antivestern, Kormak Makarti, *Krvavi Meridijan*, transgresivna proza, western, žanr

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