

An Ecocritical Reading of *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been*

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This article provides a postcolonial ecocritical perspective on modern American novels by relating and examining aspects of ecological and human violence in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian: The Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and Anne Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007). While McCarthy represents examples of ethnic and racial violence and Pancake focuses on class violence, the two novelists articulate a particular awareness of the interconnections between economic and political hierarchies and different forms of ecological and human violence in different American contexts. The two novels, then, denounce the deterministic, colonial constructions of economy, power, and knowledge in modern societies on the one hand and the validation of antagonism and violence against otherness and difference on the other. Specifically examining daily experiences, psychological-mental challenges, and changes of the fifteen-years-old female teenager, Bant, in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and the male teenager, the kid, in *Blood Meridian*, I will show how specific individuals and groups deconstruct deterministic, colonial constructions of patriarchy and violence through their ecological awareness. My analysis exposes that colonizing and colonized countries still suffer from discrepancies and contradictions of colonial culture and modern politics and ultimately reveals the limitations of white Americans' freedom and equality within colonial and national frameworks.

Introduction: Ecocritical Concerns

- 1 This article compares *Blood Meridian* and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (hereafter *Strange*) for two reasons: The first is that the bloody imperialist missions in *Blood Meridian* and the violent mountaintop removal in the Appalachians in *Strange* expose an ongoing, inherent process of political violence and cultural militarism in America. This process is upheld and sustained by fetish identity patterns and hierarchies that not only produce angry, repressed, and guilty individuals and communities, but also establish violence as an acceptable everyday discourse of interaction within American society. The article specifically focuses on the systematic, politically-oriented interplay between the concepts of security, economy, and development to control natural resources and to justify forms of sexual violence and child abuse as represented in the two selected novels. It relates both Americans' spatial violence against their neighbors in *Blood Meridian* and their silence over their country's violence against the Appalachian community in *Strange* as reflecting a collective, complicit consent of practices of discrimination and aggression that undermine democratic principles. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes:

Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing contest between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. Imperialism [is] a process occurring as part of the metropolitan culture, which at times acknowledges, at other times obscures the sustained business of the empire itself. (59)

- 2 In this quote, Said reflects on postcolonial cultures and literatures from an ecological point of view. He draws attention to the crucial role of geographical and cultural violence in establishing and maintaining imperialist ideologies and patriarchal power relations within modern Western and Eastern contexts. For Said, imperialism develops from being an act of violent territorial invasion of a foreign land to a chronic state of cultural and political struggle over resources, spaces, and power. During this struggle, the dialectic of the self versus the other spins out. In this regard, Said emphasizes that authoritarian as well as democratic administrations worldwide are still affected by imperialism in their use, yet at different degrees, of colonial, deep-rooted hierarchical divisions to impose their authority over the natives or the periphery or the other through endorsing “selfish and narrow interests-patriotism, chauvinism, ethnic, religious, and racial hatreds” (21–22). Different forms of ecological, economic, social, and human violence are, then, intertwined, organized, and presented as systematic ideologies of subjugation and repression. Imperialism is not only about white and native, or center and periphery, but rather about hierarchal governmentality and narrow identity patterns.
- 3 This article argues that processes of ecological violence of deforestation and pollution as well as aspects of human violence, such as sexual violence and child abuse in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange*, show that humans are not separate from their ecological surroundings. Rather, spatial violence in the two novels informs of fissures and discrepancies within the American social, cultural, and democratic systems that tolerate obvious injustices and abuses. For example, the kid and many American fighters in *Blood Meridian* being engaged in extremely violent wars justify their callous disregard of the lives of both their enemies and their own colleagues to defend access to labor and land and to demonstrate masculinity. Yet, American fighters, being linguistically, culturally, and socially inferior to Judge Holden and other leaders, become a “silent mob of spectators” who if they want to express an opinion, either “mutter obscenities” or “shake their heads silently” (McCarthy 78). Repressed and silenced American fighters exercise their violence over others, for instance women, fearing a threat to their masculinity and loss of power. Likewise, the violent, industrial transformation and destruction of the landscape in *Strange* disturbs the familial and social relationships of the repressed and marginalized Yellowroot’s residents. For instance, while women like Lace and her daughter Bant work to support themselves and their family, men are unemployed or do unsuitable jobs like house cleaning. Consequently, all family members are resentful and angry and constantly project their anger on each other. The socio-cultural and political contexts in both *Blood Meridian* and *Strange* produce isolated and angry Americans who live in virtual worlds and who take out their anger on others and on themselves.
- 4 The second reason for comparing *Blood Meridian* and *Strange* is that they share an innovative view of environmental consciousness as a form of psychological and mental exoneration, exculpation, and self-forgiveness. In this sense, the ability of some characters, like the kid in

Blood Meridian and *Bant and Lace* in *Strange*, to form new perceptions and connection with land and space destabilizes their fetish identity filiations and helps them to overcome their internalized violent feelings of oppression and deterministic subjugation. Many ecological critics and thinkers agree that the history of the relationships between human beings on one side and the spaces and places they inhabit on the other tell of processes of identity oppression, change, and regeneration that contribute to either the committal or the survival of colonial and discriminatory histories and their resistances. For instance, Noel Sturgeon argues that “an environmentalist politics is a useful location for interrogating the construction of an identity politics since it is not a political location solely located around a human body constructed by axes of naturalized hierarchies of value, as in racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism” (18). Sturgeon asserts that hierarchical politics, exploitive economic structures, and separate identity constructs are universal, interdependent forces of repression and discrimination on gender, sexual, class, and ethnic levels. Likewise, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley argue that landscape is “a participant in the (imperial) historical process rather than a bystander to human experience” (9). They believe that postcolonial ecology is an epistemology that emphasizes the alterity and interdependence of history and nature, empire and colony, and body and place. Postcolonial-ecocritical readings, then, open new spaces for examining effects of imperialism and colonialism on landscapes, personalities, and power relations of both colonizers and the ones being colonized.

- 5 Taking cue from the above-mentioned ecocritical arguments concerning the complicated relationship between nature, history, and ecological and human violence, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part discusses restrictive identity patterns in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange* in relation to hierarchical economic and political structures in the two novels. The second part examines discourses of femininity and masculinity in the two novels with a specific focus on the concepts of sexuality and sacrifice. The last part of this article examines the development of ecological awareness in the two novels as empowering the characters’ identity development.

Hierarchical Structures, Militarized Cultures, and Violent Identity Patterns

- 6 In *Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler argues that “power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are” (2–3). Accordingly, Butler continues, “power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity” (3). In this sense, “subjection signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” and aims at producing and maintaining “social categorizations that establish the vulnerability of the subject to language [and] both psychic and historical change” (3). Butler analyzes the specific mechanisms of how the subject is many times formed in submission as a way of securely accessing the benefits of identifying with power. Butler’s argument is valid for an analysis of the power relations and identity discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange*. In the two novels, economic subjugation, militarized practices,

and collective indifference as well as silence and complicit consent over the excessive use of different forms of ecological and human violence are dominant and revealing.

- 7 To begin with, American colonizers in *Blood Meridian*, as safe guardians of spreading civilization and scientific development from 1849 to 1850, launch systematic, bloody wars on their neighbors, including African Americans, Mexicans, Indians, Spanish, and Apaches, all of whom are described as “robbers,” a “race of degenerates,” and “barbarians” (33). Expectedly, American military invasions in *Blood Meridian* encourage, as Bertrand Westphal writes, “ethnotyping, that is to say, the stereotypical representation of people categorized according to a series of xenotypes, cast in bronze for all time. [...] The ethnotype reinforces a desirable self-identity in opposition to neighbouring entities, regarded as irrevocably other (a pejorative ethnotype)” (*Geocriticism* 144). Imperialism is a theory and a practice. In *Blood Meridian*, Judge Holden’s power as a leader and as a supporter of Western civilization is sustained by his linguistic superiority over his submissive followers. Judge Holden declares that “words are things. Their authority transcends [the speaker’s] ignorance of their meaning” (McCarthy 85). Judge Holden uses his linguistic ability and knowledge to impress and convince the kid and other American fighters to participate in his imperialist project. He says that “God made this world, but he didn’t make it to suit everybody” (19). Since God discriminates between people, Judge Holden asserts that “war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god. It’s the testing of one’s will and the will of another” (248–49). Judge Holden establishes a secular order, with the workings of God or religion suspended, declaring an order of hierarchy, of exclusion, of identity conflicts, and of a monolithic white power. As winners, Judge Holden promises Americans wealth, jobs, and power: “[W]e will be the ones who will divide the spoils. There will be a section of land for every man in my company. A land rich in minerals, in gold and silver I would say beyond the wildest speculation” (35). Americans regard themselves as superior to what they believe to be their uncivilized and inferior neighbors who need to be disciplined and managed.
- 8 The American need for money and massive military budgets to fulfill its civilizing missions in *Blood Meridian* further validates xenophobic, hierarchical attitudes towards nature and established social orders. As Judge Holden aims to establish “a new order for fools,” he leads American scientific inquiries and exploration. He “speaks in stones and trees” and claims knowledge in “ecology,” “teleology,” “paleontology,” and “science” (46, 106, 105). However, scientific development is corrupted, economized, and politicized. During the fights, “huts, [...] abodes and whole villages are abandoned” and ecological orders are disturbed with fighters “blackening the cottonwoods with their fires and driving forth the sleeping birds, the flames lighting up the wretched towns” (46). Rivers and lakes are contaminated with “blood and dead bodies” (134). Polluting and deforesting lands and natural resources deem American victory as pyrrhic and questions “temporal narratives of progress imposed by colonial powers” (DeLoughrey and Handley 2–3).
- 9 American militarism in *Blood Meridian*, according to Gareth Cornwell, is a cornerstone of the oppression of the vulnerable, particularly women, and the destruction of the nonhuman world. Cornwell argues that “the entire thrust of the novel is to unseat the anthropomorphic perspective that privileges humanity over the rest of nature” (533). Militarism, Cornwell continues, turns human order in *Blood Meridian* into “animal-like rather than god-like” (533)

order. I agree with Cornwell that spatial and environmental brutality of the colonizers in *Blood Meridian* exposes a deep-seated, problematic attitude towards women, nature, and animals as subordinate and mere possessions. Yet, processes of pollution and deforestation in *Blood Meridian* can also be seen as calculated methods of erasing and concealing the colonizers' crimes. Spaces, landscapes, and places always tell of history, achievements, values, and memories of their inhabitants. The Americans in *Blood Meridian* try to wipe away traces of their violation when they destroy the cultural heritage of other nations, leaving behind "ruined villages, buildings and old churches" where they then "collect and search for the bones" (300) of their victims.

- 10 Susan Kollin argues that *Blood Meridian* represents a "western landscape that is supposed to be a test of character, bringing out the best in the hero and the worst in the villain, is emptied of its sacred qualities, becoming instead a fully defiled, profaned space" (562). Kollin regards colonial landscape as violently contested and overturned to spread certain forms of human and natural subjugations and hierarchies that McCarthy reflects in "the lack of fully developed female characters in his Westerns and its obsession with Anglo-American masculinity" (569). I agree with Kollin that the violent, militarized order in *Blood Meridian* masculinizes culture, economy, and social conduct. Women do not have a decent role to play during times of war and excessive exposure of physical brutality. Yet, I argue further that McCarthy aims at refuting an important concept in American literature, "American exceptionalism," that depicts the frontier region as somehow standing apart from the rest of the United States as a unique development (Limerick 700). Border wars in *Blood Meridian* establish American militarism not as self-defense strategies at times of war and chaos, but as planned national and identity ideologies of duty, solidarity, and economic growth as well. The kid and many American fighters in the novel are deprived, uneducated, and feel weak and vulnerable as individuals abandoned by their families and their nation. Their solidarity and integration within the colonial project make them feel worthy and secure together and mold their sense of home belonging, filiation, and affiliations.
- 11 Nonetheless, participation in American border wars in *Blood Meridian* is deterministic. As time passes, American fighters, like the kid, realize the futility of their fights. However, they maintain their violence until the end out of "the pursuit of some continuance rather than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality" (300). They do not have a choice to stay outside the military order within which agents and leaders are not equal. Judge Holden's promises of wealth are conditioned by silence and obedience that uphold white identity as hierarchical, individualistic, and militarized. Consequently, the kid and deprived white fighters, like the barbarians, are inferior and subjugated. The kid, for instance, is categorized "with others of his kind" (131) who, despite being essential participants in the American imperialist project, are humiliated as "the dignity was gone out of them" (6).
- 12 These different forms of narcissistic militarized interventions in international politics that obviously contradict the American pride of defending democratic principles and human rights worldwide are sustained by a repulsive state of internal forms of violence. For instance, buying weapons in the US is legal and easy to do. Consequently, contemporary America suffers high rates of anti-racial, antireligious, and anti-sexual orientation hate crimes, homicides, and violent deaths with weapons being "used in a quarter of violent

incidents" (Brennan and Moore 1). In *The Value of Security*, James der Derian explains how in today's world, "out of fear, for gain, or in the pursuit of glory, states will go to war because they can" (30). Der Derian refers specifically to a statement made by George H. W. Bush during a joint press conference in 1990 with then-chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Helmut Kohl, when he stated that "the enemy is unpredictability. The enemy is instability" ("MT442" 32:16–32:23). Statements such as this paved the way for the American war in Iraq. This war, in turn, is seen as "the enemy other that helped to redefine the Western identity" and "the deterritorialization of the state" as well as "the disintegration of a bipolar order" (41). The war in Iraq exposed a world of virtual enemies and stimulations that prepare for demographic and territorial violence and give absolute authority to governments and administrations to make decisions concerning the level and reasons of using violence. Yet, virtual enemization and punishment of difference runs on the national level as well. This is clearly reflected in the case of the Appalachian area in *Strange* that is seen as an "internal colony" (Anglin 285) and a "culture of poverty" (Billings 57). Appalachians are generally described in the American media "as backward, unintelligent, fatalistic and quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression. But, at the same time, these 'submissive' mountaineers are seen as among the most vicious and violent people in the United States" (Fisher 1). Stereotyped as different and unpredictable, Appalachian people become a potential threat to the solidarity and progressive image of the American nation. They need to be civilized, and their landscape, like the colonized in *Blood Meridian*, is transformed to meet modern and development criteria.

- 13 Under the pretext of developing the primitive area of the Appalachian Mountains, American authorities in *Strange* allowed mining companies to change the place: "they blasted the top off the mountain to get the coal, they had no place to put the mountain's body except dump it in the head of the hollow" (20). The urgency of advancement and industrialization entails redrawing and sacrificing the history of that "once-live stuff, strange animals and plants, giant ferns and ancient trees, trapped down there for 250 million years, captured, crushed, and hard-squeezed into-power" (312). Yellowroot's people breathe "cancer-causing dust," (83) while their green land deteriorates with "dead damp leaves," "dead branches," "dead garter," "dead trees," "full-sized dead fish," and "bulldozed and slaughtered trees, hundreds of them" (352). The single-industry coal economy in Yellowroot in *Strange*, like the colonial project in *Blood Meridian*, accelerates levels of poverty and unemployment and limits possibilities of existence outside specific economic structures that subjugate them to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call "schizophrenic capitalism" (33). For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenic capitalism reproduces hierarchal categories, separating those of power or socio-political representatives, described as "the paranoiac despotic signs" from other economic agents defined as "the sign-figure of the schizo as a unit of decoded flux" (260). For example, foreign workers in Yellowroot lack any human contact with the people of Yellowroot as "they couldn't do much but eat, shower, and sleep" (79). People work without forming any cultural or social connections with the spaces and places they inhabit. When Lace's family moves to Raleigh in search of a job for Jimmy, they turn into "encoded schizos" that inhabit a foreign space as part of their integration within the free market. However, the new place is racist and hierarchical. Lace reveals that "the way people looked at us, regardless of how much money they had. Somehow people knew we were different from

them, even before we opened our mouths [...]. It took me back to Morgantown again, the way the out-of-state students saw us, the way some professors did" (195). Lace has to terminate her university education as she could not stand the degraded outlook towards the Appalachian Mountains.

- 14 Yellowroot's residents are neither against science, technology, industrialism, or the integration into American culture, nor do they have a romantic, dreamy attitude towards nature. Rather, they are realists. For example, Lace, like the majority of Yellowroot people, emphasizes that "I was not against coalmines: My dad and granddad and husband were all miners. I just believe they can do it a better way, a way that would actually give us more jobs and not ruin everything we have" (301). Lace asks for a balanced economic-social attitude that protects the rights of her indigenous group and her landscape as "killing the trees [...] for certain meant the death of Yellowroot" (300). When Yellowroot's residents try to peacefully object to their deteriorating condition, mining companies repress them by paying "their workers to counter protest or to speak at the permit hearings against [residents] Lyon Strips they called them, like they were in some kind of brainwashed zombie army" (302). Likewise, politicians fail Yellowroot's inhabitants who "learn very young where a West Virginia politician's loyalties lay" (275). The fact that peaceful dissent in Appalachia is targeted by traditional colonial methods, such as intimidation, imprisonment, and death threats, shows an endemic concern with security in America. In the novel, the majority of Americans seems to tolerate violence against dissent and to approve aspects of collective punishment and internal exclusion. Like in Iraq, Appalachians face anti-terrorism laws and accusations. Larry Wilson, the President of Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC), explains how Appalachian people "didn't tell each other what we were doing, individually, about the creek because it was private, like religion and politics" (qtd. in Fisher 73). Wilson emphasizes that the Appalachian people learn to be silent and repressed since acts of objection are seen as "acts of individual sabotage or terrorism" (73). Terrorizing and silencing the Appalachian community are intentional methods of creating passive, dependent individuals, particularly men, whose inability to act and effect change inhibits their subjectivity.
- 15 The security-oriented culture in America reintroduces angry, guilty, and violent characters that accommodate these negative feelings through self-centeredness, dependency, and indifference. Accordingly, although the tragic situation of Yellowroot deserves a reasonable degree of political and social attention and support in contemporary democratic America, the majority of Americans in the novel and in reality seem to intentionally ignore it. Lace states that "Nothing on TV, nothing in books, nothing in magazines looked much like our place or much like us. [...] Growing up here, you get the message very early on that your place is more backwards than anywhere in America that does not come only from outside" (82). Lace refers to Appalachian people's internalized feelings of inferiority, fear, and anger that inhibit their solidarity as a resistant group and grassroots movement. Unlike in *Blood Meridian*, where the kid and American fighters project their anger and violence on the others, Appalachian people oppress each other. Lace and her husband live like enemies, and their four children indulge in negative thoughts that not only further victimize and isolate them, but also disturb their traditional identity patterns. Bant lacks familial love and understanding. She disrespects her passive, helpless father and projects her anger and frustration on her mother, blaming her that "you're the one married him, how could you not see how he is?"

(82). However, Bant is incapable of changing her own life. She does not complete her education and fails to find the right man to love. Bant's brother, Dane, is isolated and feels guilty for his weak body and his jobs as a cleaner. In the second part, this paper discusses effects of processes of militarization and identity patterns on men-women relationships in the two novels that incapacitate their freedom on the individual and national levels.

Playing out Masculinity and Femininity: Psychology of Subjugation

- 16 Although the historical contexts in *Strange* and *Blood Meridian* are quite different, their discourses of masculinity and femininity are similarly transhistorical in the sense that men and women are stabilized and sacrificed as sexualized products of militarized and violent economies and cultures. Jacques Derrida as well as Carol Adams trace the different connections and ramifications between the abuse of animals and women on the one side and military, economic, and political domination of Western cultures and systems on the other. Derrida argues that "the full transcendence to the human requires the sacrifice of the animal and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in a 'non-criminal putting to death', not only of animals but of humans as well as by marking them as animal" (39). Derrida introduces the concept of "carno-phallogocentrism" to uncover the systematic decriminalization and justification of (colonial) violence, mass killings, and wars within Western democratic societies that extends the concept of "*West's phallic*" to refer to the concept of "sacrifice in killing the animals and in animalizing the other" (1). Like Derrida, Adams discusses "the sexual politics of meat" within Western culture that is still submerged into "masculinity along multiple material, ideological, and symbolic lines: *men need meat*, have the right to meat, and that meat eating is a male activity associated with virility" (4). For Adams, Western masculinity validates the idea of "the woman animalized; the animal sexualized" (4). Derrida's and Adams' arguments are applicable to the American imperialist and capitalist discourses in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange*, respectively. Sexuality in the two novels is an indicative of fulfilling certain, always hierarchical gender roles in society, signifying an orderly process of identity sacrifice and stabilization in America.
- 17 On the one hand, in *Blood Meridian*, native animals are hunted to extinction soon after the Americans arrive. American fighters not only shoot "fowls," "goats," and "deer" to eat, but they also shoot "cats," "dogs," "sick horses" and frequently "beat the screaming horses into submission," with the result that "animals dropping silently" (137, 165). Although this violence against animals seems random, it shows a systematic disregard of natural equilibrium and animal rights that does not coincide with the American claim of civilizing the barbarians. Animal abuse in *Blood Meridian*, then, sets new, unavoidably hierarchical social, cultural, and political norms. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin explain how "although not quite a relationship of equals, the connection between Indians and prey was not essentially hierarchical. But notions of domination and subordination were central to the English, who believed that the act of hunting epitomized the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humankind over animals" (58). The adoption of anti-animal colonial practices, though, exposes deeper identity problems. Victorious white Americans in *Blood Meridian* celebrate their virility and racial domination through eating meat and practicing their sexuality. After eating "a tandem run of dishes, fish and fowl and beef and wild meats of the countryside and

a roast shoat [...] Americans in plenty commandeering meal and meat or indulge in a latent taste for rape among the sloe-eyed girls of that country" (152). Animalizing and sacrificing women, American fighters get their self-esteem and value in life from their sexual and military domination over others. The war-related rape and the epidemic public sexual violence in *Blood Meridian* not only show the gendered side of war, since sexual assaults are political tools to intimidate and humiliate women and their male guardians, but also establish American white power and superiority as unaccountable and immune to punishment.

- 18 The disappearance of respectable, natural male-female relationships in *Blood Meridian* further reveals sexual violence as a constitutive aspect of social life and ethnic violence as a constitutive aspect of political life in the novel. Americans neither have families nor female companions as mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, or daughters. Rather, American men live in a dehumanized and callous order with space and time becoming mere backdrops for competing militarized masculinities. Changes in the ecosystem conspicuously reproduce and disclose unequal power relations. Hence, the frequent scenes of American fighters eating meat and then exercising their sexual domination over women uncover the inherently shameful aspect of the novel's imperialist economy and politics. Women do not even do traditional war-related respectable jobs, like cooking, nursing, or laundry. Rather, the only roles that white as well as colonized women inhabit are those of "pimps," and "whores of every age and size" (3, 38, 145, 167, 169, 267). Additionally, white male fighters do not need nurses since they are animalized, sexualized, and sacrificed as well. Judge Holden and other leaders like Glanton show no mercy or respect to their white followers. Rather, injured fighters are "finished off" or their leaders "leave them behind to die and ride away" (152). The concepts of sacrifice and vulnerability, then, affect both the colonized and the colonizers and the female and the male.
- 19 Moreover, taking sexual abuse from the world of adults to the world of childhood in *Blood Meridian* further refuses American literary idealization of the concepts of innocence and childhood. Children occupy a great percentage of Judge Holden's corrupt thinking that he advises fathers that "children should be put in a pit with wild dogs and they should be made to run naked in the desert" (129). Children, including the kid, are involved in organized processes of adult crimes and killings through which they not only perceive female inferiority and male (sexual) superiority as the established social norms in society, but also their engagement in pathological practices of advantage and savagery upholds their complicit beneficiary commitment to their authority. The judge's unrestrained use of children in his corrupt order and his sexual abuse of "the Mexican Boy," "the Indian girl," "the imbecile," and "the kid" (165, 41, 281, 285) deconstructs the very notion of democracy and civilizing missions he initiates. Vereen Bell as well as Edwin Arnold see the judge's implied sexual abuses of children from a moralistic perspective. While Bell describes the judge as "a murderer of innocents" and as exemplifying "nihilism" (134), Arnold considers him "clearly satanic" and a "supernatural leader" who represents "terrible justice and retribution" (62). For Bell and Arnold, the judge implies a moral dilemma. Patrick Shaw takes a different perspective and sees the judge's sexual violations as a "seduction into public homoeroticism" to "offend their masculine sensibilities" (118). For Shaw, Judge Holden's sexual violations of the kid condemn "the intense androcentric code" of his time (111).

- 20 I agree with Bell, Arnold, and Shaw that the judge's sexual domination over children exposes an order of nihilism, repression, and vulnerability. However, I argue that the pedophilic practices of the judge, who is the prevalent model of power and knowledge in the novel, can be seen as exposing a calculated American policy of identity adulteration. To begin with, the judge's pedophilic attitudes denote an unethical order of disinhibition, absolute authority, and sexualized violence. He is not deterred from his moral crimes by normal social or legal prohibitions. The judge affirms that "considerations of equity and rectitude and moral right [are] rendered void" (McCarthy 250). In this sense, sexual child abuse "bisects the line of normal development, disrupts the natural timing of the biological clock and turns the Oedipus complex upside down." Furthermore, sexual abuse is expected "to be repeated by representatives of society's authority" (Campbell 32). In this novel, child abuse is symbolic of state domination over beneficiary individuals like the kid. It utilizes "a country filled with violent children orphaned by war" (McCarthy 274) to produce easily-controlled identities struck by feelings of guilt, fear, low self-esteem as well as unstable moral perceptions and economic dependency. As the kid shows signs of real independence, he is othered, disciplined, and controlled. A dominant way to punish the others in *Blood Meridian* is to animalize and sexualize them. The judge's sexual domination over the kid, then, is an economic punishment. The violated kid becomes a figure whose performative identity is disturbed and distorted, and who therefore cannot be incorporated within the masculinist-economic order of the judge.
- 21 Unlike the masculinist, colonial economy in *Blood Meridian*, the capitalist system in *Strange* is male-less and desexualized. Rather, in *Yellowroot*, women are important agents of development and production, but they are still inferiorized. Impoverished and deprived, Lace, like many Appalachian women in the novel, turns from a housewife into a working woman at the Dairy Queen where "big women and little kids" work "silent and serious on hot dogs and sundaes" (5). Working like "humped animals," Lace criticizes her husband Jimmy who is unemployed and depressed: "Jimmy sat at home paralyzed, like a girl" (138). Lace demasculinizes Jimmy who becomes a burden and an enemy. As Lace and other Appalachian women support their families while men stay at home, Pancake challenges the formative stereotypical image of men having "access to the truth, not women" (10), and exposes the sexual politics of capitalism as one of need and urgency. Lace reveals that "everybody around here is raised to take it, that's what makes us tough, but especially the girls, the women, are tougher than the men [...]. Women are tougher, because they take it from the industry, the government, and the men" (133). Lace's words show the reduction of space and time in *Yellowroot* into scary and suspending containers of interior and exterior tests, responsibilities, and transformations that include "a complete exchange of gender identity of which erotic behavior was but one small part" (D'Emilio and Freedman 266). Lace's daughter, Bant, like her mother, does not like her job as a painter of "scab walls" (51) while her 12-year-old son, Dane, does not like his job as a caretaker and a house cleaner at Mrs. Taylor's: "Do the kitchen and the bathroom. Every day but Sunday—wash dishes, vacuum falling plaster, help check her sugar, dust, follow her directions on cooking supper" (46). Because of his job and his physical fragility, Dane "is even more girl than girl" (44).
- 22 The feminization of men and the masculinization of women in *Yellowroot* reflect deeper ecological and economic-cultural problems. Human and cultural spaces in the novel are

reduced, defertilized, and dehumanized. Characters are disturbed and their life choices and familial and communal relations are severed. Dane confesses that his father's passivity "irritated and disappointed and confused him" (82) while his uncertainty about gender roles and sexuality forces him to withdraw into his "dark" room remembering his grandma who "called him Minner, his grandma tendered him. Didn't hate his softness like Corey does, didn't deny it like Jimmy Make does, didn't ignore it like Lace and Bant do" (112). Despite his age, Dane is aware of his lack of the traditional virile scripts of his Appalachian culture. Yet, he cannot express his feelings: "He is good at listening. It is the only way he knows how to be liked" (44). In "Masculine Dwelling," Gillian Rose argues that "the distinction between real and non-real space is constructed in terms which are also gendered: material real space as the effect of masculinist power, its very materiality also its particular masculinity; but non-real space is also the effect of masculinist power, its lack of reality the sign of feminization" (58-59). Dane's reversed (feminine) and instable real spaces displace his relationships to his culture and nature. He is torn between his masculine imaginative spaces and his powerless realities. Likewise, Bant, described as "born with the age in her" (140), is, like the landscape in Yellowroot, denied normal physical, emotional, and mental growth. Rather, Bant and her surrounding ecological system are overloaded with distressing changes and experiences that force them to age and deny them real presence. Here, aging does not reflect accumulated physical, psychological, and social experiences or gained wisdom and knowledge over time. Rather, aging denies and suspends time progress and development. It is an abnormal physical-psychological activity that implies a continuity of restrictive discourses, but signifies linguistic, cultural, and ecological dementia.

- 23 Discourses of capitalist modernization in Yellowroot create angry, unhappy, and guilty characters still informed by hierarchical concepts of masculinity and femininity based on sexual difference. Bant's and Lace's economic power does not pay off in terms of their basic need for security, stability, mutual communication, and a peaceful stay in their homeland. Quite the opposite, Jimmy and Dane show resentment over their economic-social helplessness and enmize Bant and Lace. Women's power seems to annihilate men's power and vice versa. Familial unity and love are ruptured while sexuality becomes an exercise of regulating and disciplining women and maintaining the social/cosmological order. Lace's and Jimmy's sexual needs are fulfilled out of "urgency. Pressure. Strain. No love, no pleasure" (187), and Bant, in search of male protection, willingly allows the Ohio-boy to abuse her. Because women's sexual agency and erotic autonomy are always troublesome and threaten the heterosexual family as the cornerstone of the nation, Jimmy and Dane in *Strange* can only restore their masculine and sexual power by leaving Yellowroot. In this matrix, then, those who remain in Yellowroot, particularly women, like the kid in *Blood Meridian*, operate outside the boundaries of law and state order, and, therefore, are to be disciplined and punished as terrorists.

Ecological-Spatial Awareness and Self-Forgiveness

- 24 In *Plausible World* Bertrand Westphal argues that individuals and communities can deconstruct securitized and militarized forms of Western authority and culture through forming "a new conception of the world as *plausible*, postmodern possible worlds in a fluid

and moving environment, the eternal truths remain ideas in the air" (4). Like Westphal, Jacques Derrida proposes that all concepts are "arbitrary signs or effects of difference" (99), produced by systems of oppression. To achieve liberation, Derrida continues, signs need "a structure prior to any entity of which they might be the trace" (99). For Westphal as well as Derrida, human beings can only overcome their deeply-rooted-patriarchal and hierarchical filiations and beliefs through creating alternative worlds devoid of preconceptions or stereotypes. The kid in *Blood Meridian* and Bant in *Strange* can be seen as developing a postmodern, fluid perception of space that disconnects their suppressive ties and subjugations to forces of homogenization and repression. In *Blood Meridian*, the kid is the only character who deconstructs Judge Holden's imperialist parable that "the judge was a man like all men" (259). Consequently, he annihilates his racial superiority as void: "Whatever his antecedents he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go. No old dated maps" (270). The kid is aware of the map's significance within an imperialist ideology that turns lands, houses, and even open spaces into dense and overworked spaces. His spatial and theoretical dissociation from the American empire and its racist economic-political structures denotes not only the reconstitution of his filiations and affiliations as a white American individual and disciplines his sensual needs and desires, but also marks his repentance.

25 The kid's dissociation from Judge Holden's order exposes an autocratic discourse of punishment. When Judge Holden threatens the kid that "you came forward to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself" (McCarthy 307), the kid confronts him with "I aint afraid of you. Told them the truth. That you were the person responsible" (307). The main threat the kid presents to the imperialist order is that he tells the truth, holds Judge Holden responsible, and is able to forgive himself. These characteristics mark the kid's maturation into manhood: "He did not avoid the company of other men. He worked at different trades. He had a bible that no word of which could he read. [...] He seemed to travel with no news at all, as if the doings of the world were too slanderous for him to truck with, or perhaps too trivial" (272). Despite the fact that the kid still cannot read, he is able to gain new knowledge and to define those inner ways which lead to the cultural identity he seeks for himself. He regains belief in faith, celebrates human diversity and difference, and adopts morals that provide him with the mental strength and psychological integration to escape the strong grip of the judge and his privileged group. Here, manhood is not merely a biological process, but rather a cultural process of independence and self-control that dictates "natural history which regards neither nature nor man as symbolic" (Phillips 448). For the kid, "men are made of the dust of the earth" (McCarthy 297) and "war becomes dishonored and its nobility called into question" (331). He is a confident, independent individual who joins "honorable men who recognize the sanctity of blood [and] will become excluded from the dance, which is the warrior's right, and thereby will the dance become a false dance and the dancers false dancers" (331).

26 Unlike the kid, Bant in *Strange* comes to appreciate her indissoluble links with her homeland. After the death of her grandmother, Bant thinks about whether it was "worse to lose the mountains or the feelings that you had for it? Now that I'd lost this much, I realized that to not care wasn't to save yourself at all. It was only another loss" (25). Bant's restraining, dutiful connection to her nature burdens and inhibits her life with feelings of guilt and anger at

herself, her family, and her community who fail her expectations. Once Bant is able to understand the decisions of others, such as her repressed father and brother, to abandon their land and community to the mining company, she forms a new, forgiving perception of her land and identity. Bant no longer looks for what is missing, but instead thinks of what she can do to feel happy, assured, and free. Finally, Bant manages to unify with her community: "In times like these, you have to grow big enough inside to hold both the loss and the hope" (357). She thus not only rebuilds the ruptured mother-daughter bond, but also reconstructs her Appalachian identity as equal and worthy. A major problem that faces Appalachian people is individualism and indifference that, Bant thinks, aim to "leave you empty inside" (102). She discovers that uniting with her Yellowroot community that suffers the same senses of isolation and repression is a form of resistance. Bant, like the kid, develops a new relationship to nature and place, a relationship that goes beyond the symbolic to stand for the real conditions of her time and history. She stays in Yellowroot not because she has to, but because she wants to. Although the Appalachian area still faces discriminatory practices, Bant declares that "the machines were running between me and them but that there was no fear" (354-55).

Conclusion

- 27 This article showed that ecological and human forms of violence in *Blood Meridian* and *Strange* are planned tools of ongoing processes of cultural, political, and economic militarism and securitization in America that establish American identity as violent, angry, and gendered and American land as excluding. In the two novels, the characters' perception of their land is politicized and corrupted so that their subjugation and injustice seem fatalistic and deterministic. In this sense, the American legacy of civilizing border countries is inseparable from the contemporary American double-standards towards the rights of minorities and others inside and outside their borders. However, the paper maintains that some characters in the two novels, like Bant and the kid, liberate themselves of these restrictive, subjugating cultural-economic positions through seeing themselves and others not as opposites but as simply different.

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