

Interview with harold bloom blood meridian



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BLOOM AND BLOOD MERIDIAN Harold Bloom, the eminent literary critic, begins his discussion of the novel *Blood Meridian* by describing the horror at the heart of the story as being an accurate depiction of the genocide of the native peoples of America over the years. He says that it would be too horrible to read if the violence was not stylized in the way McCarthy stylizes it. Indeed, the scalping and the tree full of dead babies are some of the shocking portrayed in contemporary American literature. McCarthy's portrayal of life and death on the America frontier are almost without parallel in the modern novel. Bloom implies that no one has done what McCarthy has done here in terms of portraying so distinct a version of America. Gone are the glories of "manifest destiny" replaced instead by the very real and very frightening consequences of unending expansion. The violence, of course, is an integral part of this. But, as Bloom points out, there is also a dreamlike quality to the violence that is also necessary to distance the reader from the horror otherwise no one would be able to stand the book. The distance the characters have between each other is another important aspect of this: even in mortal situations, characters such as the Kid and the Judge regard one another from afar. These are themes Bloom returns to again and again in his interview with the deeply insightful interviewer.

The violent aesthetic also carries over into the characters in the book who are very compelling. Indeed, the two main characters—the Kid and the Judge—are *sui generis* and captivate the reader. The first is navigating a world he has not yet learned to judge properly, while the second appears to know everything and pursue only chaos and destruction. In the course of the interview, Bloom explicitly compares the character of the Judge, to the Shakespearean villain Iago from the play *Othello*. The Judge could well be

described as Coleridge once described Iago: "a motiveless malevolence." He appears to have no real human desire or characteristics—his only interest is violence and chaos. He has no other purpose but to cause trouble—like Iago. Also, like Iago, he refuses to explain himself or describe how he reached this point of nihilism. When he is taken away at the end of the play he concludes his role by saying, "From this point on, I never shall speak word." It is an open question as to whether he can't or simply won't explain himself.

Nevertheless, the implication is that, like the Judge, he is born this way. The word has not formed him; he has come from some other place.

Whether or not the Judge is immortal is a question Bloom also explores. This is a vital question when considered in light of so many of Cormac McCarthy's other themes in the novel *Blood Meridian*. McCarthy seems to suggest that the Judge is immortal and is a kind of devil. He doesn't age, while the Kid does age throughout the novel; also the Judge never gets sick and maintains his strength. Given the chance to kill the Judge on several occasions, the Christ-like Kid resists the temptation. Bloom suggests that if the Kid did give in he would be proving the existence of the devil and of the meaninglessness of the world—all he can do is to hold his gun and his peace.