

## A Note on a Review of *Blood Meridian* by Roberto Bolaño

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In June 2001, *Las Últimas Noticias*, a Chilean tabloid, published a short review by Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño on McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*—actually, on the Spanish version translated by Luis Morillo Fort and published that year by Debate. Bolaño begins his review by clarifying that although McCarthy is usually believed to be a writer of *Westerns*, this novel, *Blood Meridian*, is a lot more than that—it is also, he ventures, a novel about a “delirious and hyperviolent kind of life and death, with several underground discourses” (187). From his reading, Bolaño uncovers several important themes: nature as man's main enemy, life as inertial motion, and the absolute impossibility of redemption.

It is the landscape, explains Bolaño, that becomes *Blood Meridian*'s leading character. For it is the landscape—a “Sadean<sup>1</sup>, thirsty and indifferent” kind of landscape, he asserts—that shepherds the novel's main human characters: the kid and the judge. Moreover, it is that same landscape that, according to Bolaño, determines the particular form of time readers find in McCarthy's novel—a time “ruled by pain and anesthesia” (187).

Bolaño ends his note by commenting on the novel's other main characters: the kid and the judge. He reads them as opposites, as antagonists. The judge is an educated and cold-blooded killer, who wants to know everything, to destroy it all. The kid, on the other hand, is a survivor, an innocent brute but, ultimately, a victim.

Reading Bolaño in retrospect—he died in 2003 of liver disease—one cannot help thinking about influences. At that time, Bolaño himself was working on *2666*, a novel that ended up being his last. As in *Blood Meridian*, Bolaño's story takes place along the Mexican-American border. In five liberally interconnected parts, the novel tells the story of several characters—four European-based literary critics, a mad Chilean exile with a dull daughter and a pastime for hanging math books on a clothesline, a distraught African-American journalist with a desire for literary stardom, a long list of murdered victims, and a former German officer metamorphosed into an author of cult fiction to whom all the other characters are somehow connected—mostly through a series of bizarre links that are reminiscent of Kevin Bacon's Six Degrees game. As with McCarthy's novel, in *2666* Bolaño delivers a genuine epic of the struggle between good and evil—between what Milan Kundera, in his *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, has described as the demonic and the angelic states of humanity (61-62). Whatever Bolaño says about *Blood Meridian*'s landscape, about its setting filled with a “delirious and hyperviolent kind of life and death,” goes back to his own novel. Reading one irremediably forces us to anticipate the other.

As a final remark, Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges—talking about Franz Kafka's precursors—once said that “every writer creates his own precursors” (108). Asserting whether the American was an influence on the Chilean or not is probably an impossible and meaningless task—just as much as it was for Borges to try to assert whether Søren Kierkegaard or Leon Bloy, among others, were or not precursors of Kafka. What struck Borges the most was the fact that “in each of these texts [by Kierkegaard, Bloy and others] we find Kafka's idiosyncrasy to a greater or lesser degree,” regardless

of their undeniable dissimilarities (108). One experiences an analogous response when reading *Blood Meridian* after *2666* or vice versa—the same uncanny sense of connection, of experiencing a mutually shared “idiosyncrasy,” regardless of the incontestable differences. Towards the end, we are only left to speculate which one (if any) created the other as a precursor.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> After Donatien Alphonse François, marquis de Sade.

#### Works Cited

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