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I'd passed-on seven or eight copies at the Bellarmine Conference. Though a decade-and-a-half has passed, it's a little but not far from where things are for me today. In fact, I believe I can see that I've followed up on some of my own suggestions. Re-reading this, any caution I would add is that historical sources are not the be-all and end-all of my interest in *Blood Meridian*. There's heart and soul to consider. Heart and soul. 26 May 2008

On Going Over My Notes

I make no claim *Notes on BLOOD MERIDIAN* covers all McCarthy's ground. Beginning research for a thesis in September 1988, it took a month of looking just to come across Holden's name. I seemed to do best in early books with scalp-hunting: James Hobbs, Mayne Reid, George Frederick Ruxton, things on Kirker, Ralph Smith's "Glanton" bibliography as I came across it later, J. Frank Dobie and his bibliography later still. I browsed the stacks for Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, for the Mexican War, at Chapel Hill, at Duke. A thousand books, I'd estimated, over eight months; some dozens since. I take the opportunity here to share some stories and reflections inappropriate to *Notes* but of some value, I believe, to that book's readers.

On my method: two items not included in *Notes* may be of some interest. Early on, even before finding Holden, looking at Coates' *The Outlaw Years*, I went off tracking Judge John Haywood stories. A Judge, immensely fat, the initial "H" in his name, and his having left North Carolina for Tennessee suspected of wrongdoing, he bears resemblance in many ways to Holden. As Chamberlain's Holden seems to me to serve remarkably well as a source for McCarthy's character, and as Haywood did not go into the southwest, he is not in *Notes*.

In Ron Hansen's *Jesse James Killed by the Coward Robert Ford* one of Jesse's gang, viewing the corpse, identifies Jesse with the words "I'd know his hide in a tanyard." Toadvine and the kid meet with virtually the same greeting in the prison at Chihuahua City. As this

colorful metaphor is by no means uncommon in the South even today, as no other distinctive phrase from Hansen's novel exists in *Blood Meridian*, and as Hansen's is not a scalphunting-related book, this item, as well, does not fit into *Notes*.

Of the stories: during a conversation with the Latin American Studies doctoral candidate who worked with me on *Blood Meridian's* Spanish. I told her a little about Tobin's story of the Judge manufacturing gunpowder, of the chase, of the volcano on which they made their stand. As I remember it she looked at me for a moment and then said that "this is the story of Cortes and the conquest of Mexico." He'd run out of powder, was on the run. That it's a story she knew from her upbringing in Sonora. That it's told to demonstrate Spanish superiority, that they achieve the height which the Indians do not, that they make powder, on the run, and turn and kill their pursuers. Incredible!..., but that she did not remember where, exactly, when, exactly, she'd heard this tale. I've spent time, on and off, pursuing her recollection, can find Cortes out of powder, find him collecting sulfur from a volcano. Somewhere out there is probably (is it not likely?) a printed version—however politically incorrect—which matches to a greater degree than that which I have proposed in *Notes*, a version of Tobin's tale with Cortes in Glanton's, Holden's, place. Allejandra thought so.

Someone else flatly told me that McCarthy's "Four of Cups" card, pasted on a wall in a ransacked Mexican town, is in the literature of the mid-nineteenth century southwest. I've invested a fair bit of time looking, will probably look for it again. I have precious little doubt it's there...and what a gem, given the use McCarthy makes of Tarot images in *Blood Meridian*. His Gypsies are from Audubon—the Tarot is not: his Tarot business might well have grown from this source. The question, finally, is not (no matter how satisfying to cite) that the Four of Cups is "historical;" the question has to do with the context of the occurrence...how old a book and

having to do with what?...what leads up to the card?... does McCarthy use anything else from the book?...is it in anybody's bibliography?...is there anything else, unsuspected, in that bibliography?

To tell another story having to do with the gunpowder episode: I remember one rainy January day standing in a construction trailer at one of the company's development sites. The weather had brought some framing carpenters and a siding crew in, too. Talking about this and that, someone brought up survivalist groups, people making their plans for an Armageddon, saying: yeah, they've got *Foxfire* books to help them do things, find food, make tools, even make gunpowder. No matter his odd assessment of the intent behind the *Foxfire* series, I took this *Foxfire*-and-gunpowder connection to the library, and, wonderfully, there in *Foxfire 5* were details which occur again in *Blood Meridian!* I still chuckle, shake my head. But Don Jarrell earns a place in the list of people to thank in *Notes'* acknowledgements.

Then there is the day I began trying to begin work on the German chapter sub-heading. Later on of an afternoon, a Thursday or Friday, as I remember, and the German language corridors pretty empty. Not a heartening sign, not a professor to be found. But as I laid-out my "does this ring a bell with you" pitch to three grad students (thank God somebody makes them take comprehensives!) they pretty much burst in on each other saying: it's turned around, it's re-written, but it's Theodor Storm, it's his "Hyacinthine," it's taken up years later by Thomas Mann in his *Tonio Kröger!* Kevin Hutt, Clint Shaffer, William Wallace go high in the "Thank You" list, to be sure.

The wildest maze I ran concerned the French chapter sub-heading, "Et de ceo se mettent en le pais." The phrase is plain to translate ("And after these things they went into the country"), except that the word "ceo," I was early-on informed, dropped out of French in the fourteenth or

fifteenth century. This dating, and with a sense of the phrase as formulaic, a refrain, got me into all sorts of things, most interestingly into transcripts of Joan of Arc's trial, and the trial of the ghastly Gilles de Rais. I even re-read J. K. Huysman's *La Bas*, which includes Gilles de Rais stories. No help there, though, it is interesting to note, *La Baa* is an "outsider" book (as is the *Tonio Kröger* which McCarthy uses), with a main character unable or unwilling to commit to an action or decision, and in *La Bas* the liaison to which the main character will not commit is characterized as a "dance." It all sounds so good!...so many analogs to *Blood Meridian* there!...if only "Et de ceo se mettent en le pais" turned up in it! So, as I say, quite a chase! In retrospect it's all pretty bland as the phrase is the formal conclusion to a particular plea in bar in what is known as "Law French," the old pronoun was frozen in form. *Black's Law Dictionary*, in which this phrase is found, is common...probably every law office in the country has a copy [2008 n.b. But the phrase exists in *Black's* only through the 1968 edition. It is not in the 1972 edition]. After remarking here that anything in "Law French" is *de facto* an example of one of *Blood Meridian's* "cycles of dominance" (French entered English law with William the Conqueror), all that I saw to do with the chapter sub-head was to write a footnote tying the particulars of the plea to the action of the novel and go on to other things.

Luckily, Holden's "Young Blasarius" turns up in *Black's Law Dictionary*, too. Black says it's "an incendiary." That narrows things down...but that "Blasarius" sounds like a name, suggesting a story behind a name (analogs to "Molotov cocktails," that sort of origin). And "Blasarius" turns up in Aelfric (I think it is). Old English this time... but no "story," there, of a Mr. Blasarius. So, then, off to pick the brain of an Old English scholar, to get some sense that a "Blasarius" story is possible. Simply, the answer was: no, no Sir, nope, just a word, no story.

In answer to a question raised by my contact with McCarthy, that is: What did he give me of

what is in *Notes*? I will say he gave me a lot, in that his interest in the work's progress kept me going on it for several years. But, in answer to the *implied* question...What insights did he give me, what nuts-and-bolts look-at-this-and-think-of-that did he go over? I will say that, in our first conversation, when I said I was trying to get at some (other) particular detail in *Blood Meridian*, and kept getting into mazes, he said he didn't remember the business so perfectly as to answer, and wasn't sure if he had—he didn't think he did—a copy of the novel around to look it up. I will say I kind of looked at the phone, did scratch my head in a figurative sort of way, and said, oh, well, that's ok, I'll keep looking. And we went on talking about some other stuff. You ask me if I believed him, that he didn't have a copy of the book?...that he wasn't just giving the brush-off? Yes, to answer you, I did...and, as I have learned more about him, heard more, from other places, I do continue to believe so. He was finished with *Blood Meridian*, had been for several years even by then, was occupying himself with newer things, I took him to be. Hardly fault him for that. In plain terms: we will need to comment on the tales McCarthy dreams.

“Hiccius Doccius,” another of McCarthy's chapter sub-heads, has to do with Holden, I think, but aside from being told it's “bad Latin” and that it probably means “This Doctor” I have no clue *Why* it's in the book where it is, or *Why* it's put in as “bad Latin” (which it is, the little I know of such things). Not a paper here, perhaps, but a good footnote, as it's from some identifiable place.

McCarthy's “planet Anareta,” as a source-text is discovered for the phrasing (I'd been through *When Worlds Collide* and some other things, looking for an occurrence), would be a “find” worth noting.

I found the source, I believe it the true one, for the Comanche in conquistador's armor, and came across a historian mentioning dead cattle stood on their feet by later travelers on the Gila

trail in some macabre joke. When I went through my Xeroxes, settling things into some order weeks later, they were gone. They're still out there.

And the shillelagh-wielding sheriff in Nacogdoches, where does he come from? This sort of detail begs some investigation, I would think.

Thomas Young, Jr.'s work on historically verifiable parts of *Blood Meridian*—he'd found things I'd skimmed over, found Grannyrat's "copper cannon balls," for instance—demonstrates that basic work can still be done on the novel.

Looking to the future: there is a paper, probably to be done by a historian—or, if you will, a historian of ideas—looking at *Blood Meridian*'s non-Christian/non-Judaic/non-Zoroastrian (probably Greek) cyclical view of history. Cycles: not one beginning, the passage of time, a battle, an end of time... that is the Christian.

McCarthy's book operates in some other pattern. A look at this pattern, and, just as certainly, a careful look at McCarthy's historical method... he knew as he wrote he was doing a "historical" piece. When he talks about witnesses arriving by "some third and other path" he is commenting on how history is written. Is he working with some "folk" method, some "public domain" sense of history, or are there in *Blood Meridian* identifiable traces of particular historians? The book deserves these appraisals.

The bit of Vietnam business I include in *Notes*, on an "atrocities" offshoot to the scalp-hunting section, slight though it is, nevertheless seems to me to beg for a paper. Spotting FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake* on a corner library stack, and looking into it, and finding its note on the origin of the title (an image of revolution from the *I Ching*), I am confirmed (by the impeccable synchronicity of the thing) that a fine paper is possible. Vietnam literature (well, even Hunter Thompson's *Hells Angels*, as I read that book) can come into play in doing a paper on *Blood*

Meridian and present-day America.

A fine paper exists exploring the first paragraph of *Blood Meridian*: great chunks, the whole novel, perhaps, I can imagine in that paragraph.

I've only in the last few months seen Wade Hall's essay from 1970 on *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark*. His words make me sit up and take notice, highlighting the fact that *Orchard Keeper's* government tank is characterized as "bald, fat, and sinister." Going on twenty-five years later, and with Judge Holden in the world, I wonder yet again at the variations-on-a-theme McCarthy writes. In this same "anachronistic scholarship" vein, Hall also writes of John Wesley's father as having died before the son learned of the man's criminal side: I hear echoes of *Blood Meridian's* story, told by Holden, which includes the thought that a son is "euchred of his patrimony" if the father dies before the son learns of the father's fallibility.

And, trying not to be far-fetched, isn't the drunken Suttree, asleep at the wheel during a robbery (a slip which gets the bunch caught), in the same position of culpability which is implied as McCarthy writes in *Blood Meridian* of the great God of the beleaguered Mexicans drunkenly asleep to their pleas?

The "Narrative Voice" business in *Notes* would make a paper, or something to rail against in a paper. *Child of God* uses a different kind of "intrusion" than is apparent in *Blood Meridian*, a more formal kind, with section-breaks marking limits. Not so, in *Blood Meridian*.

Early in *Blood Meridian* the kid comes across a hermit "anchorite." And, as McCarthy calls the scene of white John Jackson's death "another anchorite, another dawn" are these scenes not only, then, of people literally held to one place—the hermit in his hole, Jackson dead—but also of people held to one idea, anchorites in this way, too, and isn't this idea probably related to a racist belief? Owens, later, dies in a racially charged context. Isn't there a paper, exploring this?

Read *Blood Meridian*, browse *Notes*. Write some of your own.

Thank you for your attention.

30 September 1993