

BORDERLANDS AND BAD BOYS: GEOCRITICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF
CHRONOTOPIC LITERARY BORDER SPACES FROM
BEOWULF TO BLOOD MERIDIAN

by

Raymond E. Stockstad, B.S.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
May 2016

Committee Members:

Susan Morrison, Chair

Mark Busby

Nancy Wilson

COPYRIGHT

by

Raymond E. Stockstad

2016

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgment. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work I, Raymond E. Stockstad, refuse permission to copy in excess of the "Fair Use" exemption without my written permission.

DEDICATION

To my wife, Kelly, whose unwavering support and love sustain me in all I do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the sage advice and support of my thesis committee, especially my thesis director Susan Morrison. Susan's passion for medieval English literature stoked a similar passion within me. Nancy Wilson believed in me from the moment we met, and her support elevated my writing as well as my spirit. Mark Busby opened my eyes to the deeper meanings great writers leave in their work for those willing to seek those meanings.

Other English Department faculty broadened my interests and challenged me to grow. Jaime Mejía made me a better writer and remains a great mentor. Victoria Smith expanded my worldview. Joe Falocco made me a better instructor. Marilyn Olson taught me to remember that literature is not just a thing to be analyzed but relished as well. Rob Tally helped me to see literary landscapes as places often more vibrant and real than any I can physically experience. Leah Schwebel reminded me to laugh, even (or especially) when others are aghast.

In addition to providing support and love throughout my academic career, Kelly Stockstad has been an invaluable sounding board, audience, and copy editor.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge David Coe—professor, mentor, and friend. He planted the seed, which bore this fruit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. BORDER CHRONOTOPE: A PLACE FOR THE ADVENTUROUS, A TIME FOR CONFLICT | 1 |
| II. THE INTERSTITIAL DIVIDE: WHERE THE MARGINAL AND MARGINALIZED MEET | 11 |
| III. A BORDER CONSOLIDATED, A BORDER WEAKENED: BEOWULF’S FEATS OF DERRING-DO—HIS ELEVATION AND HIS DOWNFALL | 17 |
| IV. INCURSIONS AND REFUSALS: MEDIEVAL LITERARY BOUNDARIES ASSAULTED | 34 |
| V. COMMERCE, FAITH, AND MATRIMONY: TRADE FREELY GIVEN (AND REJECTED)..... | 41 |
| VI. ABSURD BOUNDARY BREECHING: SEEKING UNIVERSAL TRUTHS IN REPETITION | 49 |
| VII. CROSSING BORDERS AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES: THE BORDER GENRE | 74 |
| WORKS CITED | 80 |

I. BORDER CHRONOTOPE: A PLACE FOR THE ADVENTUROUS, A TIME FOR CONFLICT

What societies deem acceptable on their fringes is often frowned upon in their centers. From *Beowulf* to Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, borders are places where conflicting interests, ideologies, claims, and beliefs constitute sources for tension within a tale. Consequently, they are excellent locations at which to set a story. Tension is what drives a story, and borders are intentionally designed to resolve cultural tensions—or not—by declaring the boundary between two entities that have settled upon a division. When borders are crossed against the legal or tacit agreement, conflict occurs. This work investigates the role of borders as a setting in literature within *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale," William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and *Blood Meridian*—five case studies spanning medieval to modern English literature chosen for their similar settings, characters, and action. They are tales in which borders are traversed by foreigners and people die violently as a result. This thesis explores literary examples to define the border genre. These are texts, situated wholly or in part along a geographical border, establish an "other" to maintain a psychic border that drives a defense of the physical one.

The Case for Borders as Chronotopes

When used as a text's setting borders make certain types of characters and particular sorts of actions necessary because competing cultures adjoin at borders. Missionaries, soldiers, pioneers, and criminals tend to populate borders, as well as people escaping their past, intent upon making a fresh start. Each of these groups are either

defending or expanding the borders of their culture, exploiting the unsettled nature of the border for profit, glory, or a better future.

Critical to the investigation of these and the other texts used in support of this investigation is understanding the purpose of border as a place within the texts. Robert Tally writes,

The analysis of spatial practices and historical spaces allows us to recognize the degree to which literary texts both operate within and help to shape the geography of their worlds, and through them, of ours. In their literary cartography, texts give form to a world that makes it real, while also making sense of that world in an allegorical structure of meaning that enables the reader to generate alternative meanings. (99)

The purpose of literary places is more than simply setting. They establish context beyond the space within which the action occurs. They establish the rules for conduct and the physics that must be obeyed. If the story is set in the past, then the author must portray the space faithfully to the period. If the story is fantastic, then the author must orient the reader with details that are familiar enough to anchor him or her. In the case of a border story, how the author defines where the action is in relation to the place that is the border affects the events of the tale. A hero can become a villain if the story places him on the wrong side of the border. The difference between place and space is one of definition: place is carved from space when it is named or provided some distinction from the space surrounding it. Consequently, the formation of a border is the creation of a place albeit one which is temporally bound.

In literature, borders that shift over time, established where none formally had existed before, create opportunities and conflicts. This fact is reflected in the many poems, tales, and novels set on or near a border and written in English. In the case of *Beowulf*, borders are not yet clearly defined during the time in which the tale is set. The poem begins at one border in Scylding lands that becomes solidified by Beowulf's actions and ends at another border in Beowulf's realm that is endangered by his choices. *The Battle of Maldon* details the perilous situation of Saxon lands in southern England during the Viking invasions, beginning in the late eighth century, that threatened the borders (and existence) of Anglo-Saxon England. Custance's travels in "The Man of Law's Tale" expand the borders of Christian influence within the tale in spite of apostasies and pagan resistance. During this time, the borders of the Roman Empire, and indeed of most of the known world, were in flux. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* deals with an impending border incursion into Denmark following the main action of the play when Fortinbras and his Norwegian army storm the castle. In Cormac McCarthy's five novels—*Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*, and *No Country for Old Men*—set along the United States-Mexico border, which shifted over the more than 150-year span of time imagined in the books, the border becomes a symbol of the absurd. Focusing on *Blood Meridian* as our case study, we see shifting border shortly before a war disputing its definition erupts between the two nations. This war will redefine the border, a boundary place to which McCarthy's characters repeatedly return, searching for a lost or desired object or person. These tales, and the many more found in English literature, comprise a chronotopically bound genre—the border genre.

Defining terms such as space, chronotope, place, border, and boundary is necessary for limiting what each of them means in the context of this discussion and what each of them mean in relation to one another. This is a difficult exercise because they are all somewhat nebulous terms that encompass many ideas depending on the realm in which they are employed. We begin with space and place. Tim Creswell introduces the terms:

Space, then has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning—as a “fact of life” which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place. (10)

In fact, naming a place serves two functions: it defines it in reference to a culture or sovereign entity, and it defines it as a place within a space distinct from other places in the space. The difference between the home you grew up in and that same home where now someone else is growing up is one of definition, not of form. The space is fundamentally transformed within the minds of those who perceive it as their home; the home is still the same space, but it becomes a different place.

Space and place vary in meaning by degrees. All places are spaces, but the converse is not true. Yi-Fu Tuan writes,

The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that

which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (6)

By suggesting that pause distinguishes place from space, Tuan introduces time as an element necessary for differentiating and dividing the terms. Concerning this, he writes, “The experience of space and time is largely subconscious. We have a sense of space because we can move and of time because, as biological beings, we undergo recurrent phases of tension and ease. The movement that gives us a sense of space is itself the resolution of tension” (Tuan 118). Movement is possible where the freedom to move exists. Tension arises when a restriction such as a border prevents free movement within a space.

This sense of space, and the distinction between the roles of ease and tension in comprehending space, is fundamental to the understanding of how borders function in literature both as spaces and as temporal constructs. When borders are not firmly fixed or do not exist in a space, there is ease. Following Beowulf’s defeat of the Grendelkin, the *de facto* border was erased and ease returned to Heorot; the Scyldings were once again able to move freely about their territory. However, when the border is erected and is made firm, tensions arise and defenses deploy to maintain the place of division. Such is the case in “The Battle of Maldon.” Beorhtnoð and his forces are called to defend Essex’s borders against the Viking invaders because of the tension stemming from the border’s existence.

For space and the temporal nature of borders to be accounted for within the context of their presence within literature, both must be simultaneously considered. Bertrand Westphal states, “The coordinates of time and space must be correlated;

certainly they are inextricably meshed. While it is still conceivable to isolate time from space, or history from geography, it seems intransigent or unwise to deliberately keep the two separate” (26). Indeed, to neglect one, preferring or deferring to the other, is to limit the scope of critical analysis to appearance while neglecting function. For this reason, a Geocritical approach to borders and their literary function is a beneficial one. “Unlike most literary approaches to space—such as imagology, ecocriticism, or geopoetics (à la Kenneth White)—geocriticism (sic) tends to favor a geocentered approach, which places *place* at the center of the debate” (Westphal 112). That is to say, rather than focus on the author writing about a place, the focus is placed instead upon the place itself and how it functions within the text (Westphal 112). Westphal states, “In a word, one moves from the writer to the place, not the other way around, using complex chronology and diverse points of view” (113). While this thesis attempts to avoid complex chronology, it presents diverse points of view from several authors living in different cultures and eras. Clearly, Westphal’s approach to space is but one of many. Sten Moslund states, “There are numerous approaches to the study of place in literature—place mapped by discourses and power; place as a transplatial contact zone; place as a dynamic process or event; place as emotional, imagined, remembered, or experienced by the senses. Ideally, our readings will bring all these approaches together” (30). It is Geocriticism’s promise in synthesizing most, if not all, of these vectors for studying place in literature that makes it a useful critical lens for studying borders in literature.

Since borders are literary places distinct from their surrounding spaces, and since they are temporally bound due to their malleability, borders constitute, I argue, a Bakhtinian chronotope. Mikhail Bakhtin proposes a radical way of approaching literary

criticism that was nearly lost to war and political upheaval. He employs the term *chronotope* in his groundbreaking essay cum lecture “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.” Bakhtin states, “We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [time-space] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity” (84). This intrinsic connectedness of time and space defines the place of a border. Historically, territories frequently have been defined by rivers. The Mississippi River divides the United States and forms the border between ten states that abut it. However, the river is a shifting geographical feature that redirects its channel over time. Prior to 1848, the Rio Grande (or Rio Bravo) was not the physical boundary that has since constituted the boundary between Mexico and Texas. Consequently, the river is not a fixed border; it is temporally bound. Similarly, national borders shift with war and have shifted because of international treaties.

With regard to borders in literature, the time component is essential in the creation of the place. Bakhtin says, “The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic *generic* significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time” (85). As a result, time and place determine the presence of a border in literature. Two stories set in the same space at different times may be set in two different nations with different cultures and languages spoken in each tale.

Introducing the Case for Border Texts as a Genre within English Literature

Having established the border as a chronotope within English literature from its origins to the present and thereby defining the border genre, chapter one addresses the types of characters that are staples within the genre. In border literature, certain characters and characteristics exist that are out of place in other genres. Outlaws such as bandits and highwaymen are fixtures in border tales but are unusual in stories set in more civilized locales. The soldier, the missionary, and the settler all find home on the frontier familiar, but none of them are comfortably situated in tales of the city or courtly romances. Chapter two describes these marginalized persons that populate border stories. It discusses the mechanisms cultures use to define themselves and differentiate themselves from the “other,” including the “other” within the culture. Veterans, adolescents, and immigrants represent those “others” and frequently represent monsters within border literature. *Hamlet* features prominently in this chapter because the play deals with youth, (in)sanity, and betrayal—factors that lead to the climactic action that opens Denmark’s borders to conquest by Norway. Because veterans, adolescents, and immigrants may look like everyone else in the culture, they are often physically segregated until their loyalties are known and their actions are deemed acceptable by the greater society.

Chapters three, four, five, and six employ *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” *Hamlet*, and *Blood Meridian* as case studies revealing the constants within the genre. The final chapter discusses the future of the genre and the literary border incursions in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In many ways, as a lesbian Chicana multilingual author who was from Harlingen, Texas, near the border between the United States and Tamaulipas, Mexico, she represents a

contemporary and uniquely modern border. Her book attempts to acknowledge the border that is her home, while identifying it as a false construct, through her discourses on language, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

Dealing with literal monsters, *Beowulf* is the first case study showing how characters and the border function in English literature's border genre. Borders are solidified by violence against the Grendelkin, and later weakened through violence by and against the dragon. Interestingly, the literary borders of the text itself are encroached upon by the interlaced stories and the physical borders of the text are damaged by fire. Beyond *Beowulf*, the third chapter discusses other medieval texts that deal with beheading and the silencing of dissenters. By quieting opposition within literature, English authors are helping to shape the national identity and define its cultural identity as distinct from the rest of the world.

The fourth and fifth chapters engage two steadfast agents of Christianity who shape England as a Christian nation and reestablish its links to Rome, which once were purely political but become religious. By forging a religious link between England and Rome, *The Battle of Maldon's* and "The Man of Law's Tale's" protagonists help to expand the borders of Christendom. Each chapter demonstrates the defense against foreign cultures and customs and their export. As in the third chapter, soldiers and missionaries cross borders to expand their domains, secular and sacred. As inadvertent missionary, Custance shows, in the fourth chapter, how borders are more permeable to ideas than to armies.

The final case study in chapter six utilizes *Blood Meridian* as a modern example of the same literary traits found in the preceding chapters. The distinctly absurdist

qualities of the novel are highlighted to both see the text as a product of its time and to demonstrate the repetitive quality of storytelling. The same sorts of characters, action, and tensions exist in *Beowulf* as in *Blood Meridian*. Soldiers behaving monstrously toward one another at a border—scalping, dismembering, and defiling corpses—justify their actions as necessary and correct because the enemy is subhuman and deserving of displacement and death. War and armed conflict are chief among the actions of stories in the border genre.

This thesis concludes with a look forward to the future of the border genre. It briefly discusses the sub-genres that have evolved within the last 150 years. Focusing primarily on *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the last chapter describes the ways in which other types of border discourses are and will continue to influence the border genre in English literature.

Who stands at the border, begins anew at the border, and slips across the border is as important as where, when, and why the border exists. As a reflection of reality and of the real concerns of its readers, literature of the border genre functions to create, maintain, and defend the borders of a culture and make sense of the “other” within and beyond it.

II. THE INTERSTITIAL DIVIDE: WHERE THE MARGINAL AND MARGINALIZED MEET

Borders, by virtue of being the place least like the cultural and political heart of the nations defined by their borders, are places populated by outlaws, soldiers, immigrants, settlers, missionaries, and entrepreneurs. These people slip out of the culture of the center and into a new culture in the borderlands that they inhabit. Frontiers, marches, wildernesses, and borders attract adventurous and marginalized persons. Set in a border state, *Hamlet* is a play populated by characters who move in and out of the kingdom, in and out of reason, and in and out of life. As such, it will be instrumental in describing the border setting and the characters found in the border genre. Because they attract many different sorts of people from different backgrounds and with varied moral and ethical foundations, borders thrive on slipping away from legal reification. Consequently, those wishing to slip away, both from their past and from the established laws and customs of the societies that meet on the border, find refuge and new perils in their new border homes.

Puissance and Punishment: Controlling the Body *Politique*

How cultures punish their transgressors is informative when considering the types of acceptable and unacceptable social exchanges within those cultures. Both civil and criminal laws are structures that shape and are shaped by cultural norms and civil institutions. Without a code of conduct, without laws, members of a society are uneasy and feel emboldened or powerless to act, depending on their circumstances. In fact, civilization cannot exist where wrongs go unpunished and the aggrieved are not satisfied.

For a society to function and amity to exist within it, that society's members must feel justice: its presence must be on display. Otherwise, chaos would reign, and the absence of any surety of punishment for crimes against person and property would embolden that society's miscreants. Criminals in *Beowulf* are made to pay for their offenses against the society, as well as against the Grendelkin, in a public setting: their punishments are corporeal, with the state or Grendel meting out punishment.

The chief offenders in the Anglo-Saxon epic are Grendel, his mother, and the great wyrm. Each are slain in some sort of hall, each of their crimes is committed in a hall, and after a struggle, each of them is slain for crimes against the local ruler by an agent of the state—Beowulf. These public executions serve to show Beowulf's proper claim to power in the poem. He is an avenging force who, even while dying, destroys the kingdom's foes and brings rings home for distribution to the king's loyal thanes.

The power struggles within *Beowulf's* main plot take place in seats of power—Heorot, the Grendelkin's mere abode, and the wyrm's earth-hall. In each place, Beowulf punishes a transgressor who has attacked the people in their homes and lands. Public executions, or public displays of the remains of the executed when no corpse remains, serve to solidify the power of the sovereign in the minds of the people, as well as reject and define the enemy or "other." In so doing, the government polices the limits of its political influence and reinforces the border.

The Liminal Other: Potentially Dangerous, Probably Problematic

For a culture to have a clear identity, it resists the presence of what Thomas Claviez refers to as "the *phaulos*, the stranger to the city— a combination of the sub- and super-human," one apart from the community and prone to violence (611). Its members

must share a set of goals and ideals that result in practices, traditions, attitudes, and ways of thinking, which define the culture and mark it as separate and unique from other cultures. The culture does this because humans categorize, assess, and determine the value of everything in their world. As Claviez states, “Indeed, all ethics based on equality and sameness is by default based on comparison” and points out that the sole exception, Emmanuel Levinas, views the “other” as incomparable because it is unequal (609). It is important for the maintenance of its self-identity that a culture compares itself to other cultures and, in so doing, categorizes its own members according to how well they conform to the culture’s self-identity. It is through this process of cultural categorization that the “other” is identified and defined by the members of a culture. By virtue of this cultural evaluation, an individual may vary too greatly from the ideal and become the “other,” the one to be feared—the *phaulos*.

As a result, this “other” becomes marginalized and is pushed to the borders of society—literally, metaphorically, or both. Variation in a population is healthy and necessary for adapting to changing conditions over long periods, but variation is an anathema to societies in the short term because it can lead to unrest. The unrest resulting from variation stems from a craving for order. As Bauman writes, “[T]he world is neither orderly nor chaotic.... [i]t is human design that conjures up disorder *together with* the vision of order” (19). Were it not for humanity’s desire to categorize, there would be no “other.” However, the “other” becomes a character or agent of the border, serving as an exemplar within the society against which proper citizens may compare themselves. The “other” resides at the margins of a society as the person beyond whom lies the truly foreign members of the adjoining cultural group.

The “other” does exist though; the *phaulos* roams the streets waiting for his turn. Frequently, members of a society constitute the “other” situationally. Their “otherness” is temporally bound. For example, youth represent both a culture’s future and its fear of the future. Youth consume—time, resources, thoughts, and passions. They seem to be wasteful in their consumption, idly frittering away their days at play, eating much and frequently. Shakespeare’s Polonius takes great pains to advise his son, Laertes, against wasting his esteem, fortune, or position while in France with advice such as, “Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar” (*Ham.* 1.3.60), and, “Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy/ But not expressed in fancy – rich, not gaudy” (*Ham.* 1.3.69-70). Certainly, Polonius wants to be sure that Laertes is not wasting Laertes’s nor Polonius’s resources while abroad. Youth are liminal. By virtue of their adolescence, they are neither fully child or fully adult. Even Beowulf is said to have shown little promise as a youth but returns a hero from fighting in foreign lands (*Beo.* 2184-2189; Heaney 149).

Only when a culture is able to harness its youth and put them to a worthy task do the youth truly become part of a culture sent away to Wittenberg or Paris, deployed to Heorot or Texas. For many cultures there is no better use to which their youth may be put than in service to their nation. While these youth are not being expelled in the strictest sense of the word, they are being sent to the border, away from polite society, to do all manner of foul deeds in service to king and country. These warrior youth are banished or exiled from the body of their nation as “superfluous matter” until such time as they are dead, grown, or too powerful to be denied any longer (Morrison 147). Even from beyond the grave, Hamlet the Elder’s shade would conscript his son to do battle against his murderer with the taunt, “I find thee apt./ And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed/

That roots itself in ease on the Lethé wharf/ Wouldst thou not stir to this” (*Ham.* 1.5.31-34). Hamlet is simultaneously called to service and compared to a lazy angler. This is emblematic of how the leaders of a culture view their youth as redundant, replacements for vacancies that do not yet exist. As such, the youth may be “disposed of *because of being disposable*” (Bauman 12). It is as if their culture admonishes them to die gloriously or return triumphant: here is no home for the middling man.

Having stood upon the walls and defended the realm against all comers, the once youthful warrior returns home a veteran to the cheers or jeers of those whom he left to defend or on whose behalf he played the conqueror. Whether visible or invisible, the scars of his service have changed him and he stands among his kinfolk, once again the *phaulos*. As John Scanlan states, “the creation of garbage results from a more or less imperceptible contest between life and death... death is *that which has to be avoided to maintain life*” (9).

Unfortunately, for the veteran, his successful avoidance of death is a terrifying quality in the minds of those members of the culture to which he has returned. The veteran is now a mirror for those who did not serve. The face they see is capable of unspeakable things. The veteran may look like the youth he was, but he is fundamentally changed. The culture sees in him what is strong and defiant about their culture and, simultaneously, what is awful and terrific about it.

Ultimately, the veteran’s service has exacted a toll, not just on the veteran, but upon the culture he has served. In *Beowulf*, Wiglaf bemoans, “Often when one man follows his own will/many are hurt. This happened to us” (*Beo.* 3076-3077; Heaney 207). The actions of the warrior king have left his kingdom open to invasion. The prince,

having pursued a vendetta to right a wrong and restore his kingdom, has paid the ultimate price and left his kingdom the poorer. In trying single-handedly to eliminate the threat, Beowulf leaves his kingdom open to a border incursion that will certainly result in change, if not its outright demise, for Geatland. Within *Beowulf*, The Saga of Finn (*Beo.* 1062-1158; Heaney 72-81) details how soldiers turned veteran may once again become blood-letters when old feuds are rekindled among men of disparate cultures. The interlaced tale demonstrates the fear that men who have once been savage may again become monstrous at any moment.

As monsters are “others” and “others” are waste, so too must veterans be, for they may turn beastly once again should they become provoked to it. However, veterans, if they have proven their valor in combat and defense of their people, may be seen as “our lord in the hall” (*Beo.* 2634; Heaney 177) and “the shepherd of our land” (*Beo.* 2644; Heaney 179). The veteran, consequently, is the uncanny “other” because he only *seems* the same. He is a trickster, at once foreign and familiar. He was our brother, and he still is, but now he is something more. In his youth, the veteran was figured as waste from the civil society to the borders, but he may yet be redeemed. In trying to redeem the veteran, the once and future warrior, his culture must find ways to overcome what Gay Hawkins calls “*distance, disposability, and denial*” (16). By closing the distance between themselves and their culture, refusing to be denied, and proving themselves not to be disposable, veterans have made their culture uncomfortable in the presence of the waste it has created, an “other” who literally created waste in combatting and killing enemies.

III. A BORDER CONSOLIDATED, A BORDER WEAKENED: BEOWULF'S FEATS OF DERRING-DO—HIS ELEVATION AND HIS DOWNFALL

While Beowulf and his troop could have been turned away by Hrothgar's coast guard in *Beowulf*, they were embraced as near kinsman due to former close association between Hrothgar and Beowulf's father. Grendel, on the other clawed hand, despite being a resident of Scylding lands, is reviled by Hrothgar's people.

Grendel is outcast and marginalized in a way that Beowulf never experiences during his visit to Heorot. Given the state of affairs in England during the latter half of the first millennium, a poem about borders and cultures occupying the same territory and enjoying differing cultural and military power is understandably appealing. Several faith cultures—Druidism, Germanic Paganism, and Christianity—were contesting for the hearts and minds of the several peoples living in England. Consequently, the problems associated with poorly established borders persist between the *Beowulf* author's Christian culture and the pagan cultures both in Britain and beyond the island. By censoring the "other," within both culture and literature, English identity begins to become consolidated.

Beowulf and the Champion of the Mere

Two cultures within *Beowulf* conflict at the ambiguously established border between Grendel's family and Hrothgar's clan, emblemized by the murky mere associated with the Grendelkin. *Beowulf's* opening eleven lines establish a pattern in which a raider comes from another place, attacks his enemies in a hall, and makes them yield to his will and pay him tribute or die. This pattern is repeated with Grendel's raids on Heorot, Grendel's mother's raid on Heorot, Beowulf's raid on the Grendelkin's home,

the great wyrm's attacks on Beowulf's hall, and Beowulf's attack on the wyrm's lair. Each attack on a hall or home calls for a legal response under Germanic law, which Foucault says focused on "a certain singular subject and was regulated to conduct war between individuals and produce acts of vengeance" ("Truth" 3). The resultant acts of vengeance beget yet further acts of vengeance.

This reciprocal violence could be set aside if "one of the two adversaries buys back his right to be at peace and to escape the possible vengeance of his adversary. He buys back his own life, and not the blood which he has shed, while thus putting an end to war" (Foucault, "Truth" 4). This situation is complicated, however, when the adversary is a kin-slayer. Both Unferth, trusted advisor to King Hrothgar, and Grendel are associated with kin slaying. Unferth is revealed a kin-slayer when Beowulf says,

þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,
heafodmægum; þæs þu in helle scealt
werhðo dreogan, þeah þin wit duge.

[though you became your brothers' killer,
your next of kin; for that you needs must
suffer punishment in hell, no matter how
clever you are.] (*Beo.* 587-589; Liuzza 89-90)

Strangely, Unferth enjoys an honored place in Heorot and is Hrothgar's trusted advisor (*Beo.* 1165-1166). On the other hand, Grendel is not called a kin-slayer himself. Rather, Grendel is described as

in Caines cynne— þone cealm gewræc
ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog;

[among Cain's race—when he killed Abel

the eternal Lord avenged that death.] (*Beo.* 107-108; Liuzza 61)

The *Beowulf* poet gives this ancient offense as the reason for Grendel's separation from Heorot and Hrothgar's people (*Beo.* 109-114). Despite the crime being avenged by God, the Grendelkin are shunned with "untýdras ealle" 'all foul spawn' (*Beo.* 111) and forced to inhabit the edges of society. This condition creates a loathing for Hrothgar and his people in Grendel's heart. He acts outside the Germanic law code, raiding Heorot and killing Hrothgar's loyal thanes without remorse (*Beo.* 115-194). Repaying a debt of honor owed by his father, Ecgtheow, to Hrothgar, Beowulf forms a troop of men and sails to the Scylding eorl's aid when he hears of Grendel's grief-giving.

Grendel's rapacious raiding results from the Grendelkin being marginalized, forced out of mainstream society. Not unique to Anglo-Saxon culture, this situation structurally exists in different eras and within other European cultures, from native Celts fleeing invading Romans and later Anglo-Saxons in Britain to Native Americans in the United States in the nineteenth century. Conditions are not much different for Grendel, who is forced to act illegally because he has no status within the structure of Scylding society. During his 12-year campaign against Heorot,

fela fyrena feond mancynnes,

atol angengea oft gefremede,

heardra hynð; Heorot eardode,

sincfage sel sweartum nihtum;

no he þone gifstol gretan moste,

maþðum for Metode, ne his myne wisse.

[The foe of mankind, fearsome and solitary,
often committed his many crimes,
cruel humiliations; he occupied Heorot,
the jewel-adorned hall, in the dark nights—
he saw no need to salute the throne,
he scorned the treasures, he did not know
their love.] (*Beo.* 164-169; Liuzza 65)

He does not recognize Hrothgar's authority, so Grendel does not feel bound by any sense of loyalty or honor in his struggle against him. Moreover, in Grendel's view, Hrothgar lacks the wealth to buy "back his right to be at peace and escape the possible vengeance of his adversary" ("Truth" 4).

Since Grendel cannot be bought off, force must be applied to stop him. Hrothgar, an elderly man, whose sons are not yet men, must count on a champion to end Grendel's reign of terror. As his thanes are either dead or not up to the task, Beowulf's party is a welcome group once the coast guard allows them ashore and leads them to his eorl. Beowulf takes up Hrothgar's cause and defeats Grendel in Heorot, fighting Grendel barehanded and wrenching his arm from his body before Grendel can make his escape. John Damon says of this dismemberment and the poem's later beheadings of Æschere and of Grendel's corpse, along with their subsequent displays at the entrances to the respective halls, "Few published studies of the poem have focused specifically on these highly visible instances of reciprocal violence and body fragmentation" (400). Subsequently, Damon says, "The hanging up of the arm (and later, presumably, the head) of Grendel is a symbol of law and victory; Beowulf is victor and through Grendel's

defeat Hrothgar's justice is reasserted" (401). The people must see the punishment or the outcome of the punishment must be placed on public display for it to stabilize the culture, reestablish the border, and demonstrate sovereign power.

Despite Grendel's demise, Hrothgar's wife, Wealhtheow, fears that justice may not pass from her lord to one of their princes, but be granted by her husband to Beowulf, so she makes a speech declaring that another Scylding, Hrothulf, would be a good regent should it become necessary (*Beo.* 1169-1187). Wealhtheow is concerned that her sons have been delivered by a foreigner from a threat her king is unable to remove, and she is worried her aging lord might value peace over blood relation. For the queen it would be little consolation to lose her position to a valiant foreign champion instead of a marauding marsh dweller.

The visible reassertion of Hrothgar's justice, however, is short lived. Grendel's mother becomes the adversary and takes up the legal dispute with Hrothgar, claiming the life of his right hand man, Æschere, while reclaiming her son's lifeless limb. Damon says, "In a sense, hand is traded for hand in this struggle between feuding parties" (428). Concerning this, the *Beowulf* scop says, "Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til, / þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon / feonda feorum!" [That was no good exchange, / that those on both sides should have to bargain / with the lives of friends] (1304-06; Liuzza 133). The raid takes the dispute and Beowulf out of Heorot, into the lands of the Grendelkin, beneath the waters of the mere, and into Grendel's mother's abode: "he niðsele nathwylcum wæs, / ðær him nænig wæter with ne sceþede" [he was in some sort of battle-hall / where no water could harm him in any way] (*Beo.* 1513-1514; Liuzza 143). After a struggle, Beowulf beheads both mother and the corpse of her son. He takes Grendel's head and the

sword's hilt with him back to Heorot to provide tangible, visible proof of his success and their demise. The tangible proof Grendel's and his mother's punishment demonstrates the removal of the threat they once posed and erases the border between Heorot and the Grendelkin, easing the tension that had existed for a dozen years. The Grendelkin's removal establishes a firm, uncontested border—at least until the next invaders arrive.

Beheading: An Excisive Force Applied to the “Other”

Beowulf's collecting Grendel's head fulfills this punishment for the Scyldings and finally cleanses Heorot of shame after a dozen years of strife. By dismembering and beheading the assassin Grendel and placing the removed appendage on display, Beowulf and Hrothgar provide the Scyldings a visible reminder of sovereign protection and might. The beheading of enemies in *Beowulf* is not unusual in English literature of the time; on the contrary, decapitation is a frequent form of execution in medieval English literature. It is how the Romans martyr Saint Alban in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (54). Much later, it is the intended fate of Shakespeare's Hamlet when Claudius sends him to England (Ham. 4.3.54-68). Beowulf decapitates both Grendel's mother and Grendel's corpse (*Beo.* 1563-1590). Chaucer's "The Prioress's Tale" tells of a Jew who grabs a young Christian "And kitte his throte, and in a pit hym caste" (PrT 1761). This wound was so deep the child says, "My throte is kut unto my nekke boon" (PrT 1839). Richard the Lion-Hearted has Muslim prisoners beheaded, their heads cooked and served at an ambassadorial feast, terrifying his guests as he dines upon the heads (*Richard* 3412-3520). Beheading separates the unhealthy or dissident mind from the healthy body and silences the voice in the now severed throat of the slain. These decapitations, successful or not, may have been ordered because the thoughts contained within the victims' heads

pose a threat to the dominant or ascendant power structure. Those who order the decapitations relegate the bodies of these persons who had been forced to the margins to waste. The beheadings inform modern scholars of medieval attitudes toward those persons unwilling to or incapable of changing their minds.

Like the victims of the Donestre in *Wonders of the East*, whose bodies the Donestre eat and whose disembodied heads the Donestre then weep over (Swanton 230), those fated to beheading in medieval English literature have their bodies relegated to waste. Their heads become gory trophies or stand as warnings to those who might follow their beliefs or embrace their teachings. While most bodies look largely alike without their heads, heads are distinctive features, providing both positive identification of their former persons and establishing a human connection between anyone seeing them and the persons who lost them. Irina Metzler writes, "Judicial mutilation looms large in the popular imagination of the Middle Ages, what with eyes being gouged, tongues cut out and limbs hacked off in punishment for anything from theft to murder" (52). Due to its horrific nature and very human connection, it seems beheading was intended to use to firmly impress upon the masses the beheading authority's rejection of the beheaded person's ideas. It divided the head and mind of the criminal from the heart of the community member. By displaying the head of the punished, beheading ultimately acts to strengthen territorial borders. Beheading demonstrates the sovereign authority's power over the life and death of those persons within the territory.

The Exeter Book of Beheadings: Reciprocal Violence and Hewn-Off Heads

In early medieval English literature, beheadings have an additional, yet equally profound, effect and purpose, beyond that of establishing territorial dominance. Damon asserts that Anglo-Saxon Christians,

ritually sanctified the two kings' [Edwin and Oswald] fragmented bodies in order to counter-balance some perceived ritual practice . . . either a pagan ritual of dedication to a god or some form of ritual desecration. . . .

It is this cultural practice of inter-ethnic reciprocal violence that underlies the imagery of decapitation. (404)

Damon believes beheadings in *Beowulf* and *Judith* have four key elements in common: a person with power is beheaded, it occurs in conjunction with an “inter-ethnic or inter-religious rivalry,” the head is taken as a trophy, and the head is sought by the aggrieved faction (404-05). He posits, “This set of elements defines a type of reciprocal violence that appears to have had religious or ritual overtones or aspects” (Damon 405).

Examining primary literature with these elements in mind will provide insight to the subject of warring ideas and thinkers who conflict with Roman Church Doctrine and the English Monarchy, thereby threatening the borders of the two realms from within as well as without.

The Exeter Book, which contains *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and *Wonders of the East*, has many more instances of beheading. In a manner akin to quartering, Beowulf wrenched Grendel's arm from its shoulder socket. The Danes display this trophy in Heorot. In response, Grendel's mother went to Heorot and “snatched their trophy, / Grendel's bloodied hand” (*Beo.* 1302-1303; Heaney 91). During her reclamation raid, she slew

Aeschere, Hrothgar's "right-hand man," (*Beo.* 1326; Heaney 93) and bore his corpse with her to her lair, declaring her territorial boundary. Beowulf, in retribution for Aeschere's beheading,

He gefeng þa fetel-hilt, freca Scyldinga,
hreoð ond heoro-grim, hring-mæl gebrægd
aldres orwena, yrringa sloh,
þæt hire wið halse heard grapode,
ban-hringas bræc

[So the Shieldings' hero, hard-pressed and enraged,
took a firm hold of the hilt and swung
the blade in an arc, a resolute blow
that bit deep into her neck-bone
and severed it entirely] (*Beo.* 1563-1567; Heaney 109)

Afterward, Beowulf beheads Grendel's corpse, the sword's blade melts, and Beowulf ignores the treasure in the lair (*Beo.* 1613-1615). The righteous protector of the Danes had slain the foul descendants of the line of Cain and had beheaded them both, taking Grendel's head as a trophy. This reciprocal violence conforms to Damon's four elements twice. The pagan Danes, rejecting Grendel and his mother, reject the ideas of Satan and his ilk. Consequently, they are allowed to complete their purification and removal of dissidents within their realm and dissolve their border with the Grendelkin, unifying the land under Scylding rule.

In the tale *Judith*, which follows *Beowulf* in the Exeter Book, Judith bests Holofernes, another heathen monster, in his gold-shrouded lair. Drunk with wine,

Holofernes commands the virgin Judith to be brought to his tent. He is so drunk that she is able to strike “the malignant-minded enemy with the gleaming sword so that she sliced through half his neck, so that he lay unconscious, drunk and mutilated. . . . In earnest then the courageous woman struck the heathen dog a second time so that his head flew off on to the floor. His foul carcass lay behind, dead (“Judith” 499). Judith returns to her people and uses the head as a symbol of the righteousness of her people’s cause. Holofernes’ headless corpse demoralizes his army, sapping their will to fight and handing victory to Judith’s people. Despite her being Jewish, it is the might of God, the same God worshipped by Christians and Jews alike, which allows her to prevail over dissonant ideas. She is figured as a virgin—an incipient martyr who nonetheless lives and prevails over her demonic foe, defending the borders of her material and supernatural realms.

Roman Church clergy define the “other” within their writings, developing a medieval alterity with other faiths. Michael Uebel says,

Western documents of alterity were the chief vehicles for transmitting how certain kinds of otherness are to be handled, how difference itself is to be countenanced, “how certain kinds of diversity are [to be] precluded, how what distinguishes ‘us’ from ‘them’ is a function of refining what [medieval culture is] over time,” and what that culture takes itself to be and wishes to become. (3)

It is no wonder that English King Richard the Lion-Hearted felt little compunction in beheading Muslim prisoners. He orders them served at a feast and eats them as a Saracen diplomatic party stares in horror (*Richard* 3412-520). The thoughts these heads formerly

contained are inconsequential to Richard. They are as wasted as the waste they soon will be.

Unlike Richard, the Donestre in *Wonders of the East*,

When they see a man of foreign race, they call him and his fellows with the names of known men, and with lying words they deceive him and seize him. And then, after that, they devour all of him, except the head, and then they sit and weep over the head. (Swanton 230)

Both Richard and the Donestre have deceived and eaten their enemies, but what is retained after these grim beheadings differs. The Donestre eat and excrete their prisoners' profane bodies, weeping over the heads whereas the heads of Richard's victims, polluted by profane thoughts, are consumed and excreted. In this manner, the Donestre's behavior toward their victims' heads was much more in keeping with Christian veneration of holy relics than with the Christian King Richard's treatment of the Saracen's heads simply because of their intent.

In contrast the Donestre and King Richard, after slaying Grendel's mother, Beowulf gives Hrothgar the hilt and the tale for which Hrothgar bestows many more gifts upon him. In the words of Foucault, "The atrocity of the expiation organized the ritual destruction of infamy by omnipotence" (*Discipline* 57). At this moment, that omnipotence is Hrothgar's over his people and the Grendelkin. In his response to Beowulf's story, he tells Beowulf the story of another king, Heremod who was stingy and so was not a good king, in the midst of a long speech about good governance.

Concerning Heremod, Hugh Magennis writes, "Heremod, unlike Beowulf, *did* turn on his close companions. . . . [and] forfeited the loyalty of his people" (16). John

Vickrey says Heremod was more than merely stingy with his rewards, writing, “I would propose to interpret Heremod’s sin as greed of another sort, not stinginess but rapacity: drunk or sober he murdered his men for their gold” (298). For this fault, Heremod was killed by giants (*Beo.* 902-904). Interestingly, the giant-crafted sword allows Beowulf to overcome Grendel’s mother when Hrunting, Unferth’s loaned heirloom sword, fails to prevail against her. Having slain the Grendelkin, the blade, like the border between the two peoples melts, suggesting the border between the behavior of the Grendelkin and Beowulf may not be as secure as the Scylding Danes might think. The giant weapon’s hilt is still a marvelous treasure and a token of Beowulf’s victory presented in the hall before all gathered. Bringing Grendel’s severed head and displaying it in Heorot unifies the Scylding lands under Hrothgar and rejects any other sovereignty within that former border place.

After receiving more gifts and thanks from Hrothgar, Beowulf and his party return home. There, Beowulf tells his lord Hygelac, king of the Geats, all that had occurred among the Scyldings (*Beo.* 2000-2162). Through the act of storytelling, Beowulf publicly executes Grendel and his mother for their transgressions a second time within Heorot, Hygelac’s hall. This action builds Beowulf’s previously dubious reputation among the Geats. As proof of his deeds, he gives his lord a share of his rewards and receives vast lands and Hrethel’s, Hygelac’s father, sword. Not long after, Hygelac and his heir both die in battle and Beowulf ascends to the Geatish throne where he ruled peacefully for half a century.

Just as Hrothgar’s peaceful, 50-year reign was ended by Grendel’s gluttonous attacks upon Heorot, Beowulf’s rule was ruined by a raider of a different sort—a dragon.

The beast is awakened by a thief who steals a single jeweled cup from the dragon's treasure hoard.

þær wæs swylcra fela

In ðam eorðse(le) ærgestreona,

Swa hy on geardagum gumena nathwylc,

Eormenlafe æðelan cynnes,

þanchycgende þær gehydde,

deore maðmas.

[There were many such

antique riches in that earth-hall,

for in ancient days an unknown man

had thought to hide them carefully there,

the rich legacy of a noble race,

precious treasures.] (*Beo.* 2231-2236; Liuzza 189)

This new hall is the site of a new slight, which leads to grief for the Geats. After 300 years of quiet guarding, the dragon's treasure has been disturbed by the thief, so the dragon leaves at nightfall, raining fire upon the Geats: "No ðær aht cwices / lað lyftfloga læfan wolde." 'That hostile flier / would leave nothing alive' (*Beo.* 2314-2315; Liuzza 193). As the wyrm has no kin, his gold is what is most precious to him, so he takes lives at Beowulf's court and burns the mead hall as repayment for the theft. Theodore Andersson writes that the thief is driven to steal the cup because he is in exile for having already been found a thief. He says of the thief,

He is not a man content to live beyond the pale of the law . . . but longs for reintegration. Driven away from hearth and home by “hateful blows,” he belongs to that unhappy society of English exiles familiar from “Widsith,” “Deor,” “The Wanderer,” “The Wife’s Lament,” and “The Husband’s Message.” . . . The thief’s crime is significantly mitigated by woe and exile. (Andersson 507-08)

To argue that woe and exile can excuse the calamity his act calls down upon the Geats is difficult to defend, considering the outcome of Beowulf’s expedition against the wyrm in his earth-hall.

Beowulf is compelled to meet the dragon and defeat him. Even though he is at least in his mid-60s, Beowulf must avenge his people under the terms of Germanic law as described by Foucault. “It is a procedure which does not permit intervention by a third individual, who would be placed between the two others as the natural element searching for the truth while trying to know which one of the two has spoken the truth” (“Truth” 4). Only combat will resolve the dispute; only Beowulf, who is ultimately responsible for the actions of everyone in his realm, or the dragon, who has petitioned Beowulf with fiery fury, can restore peace with the death of his adversary. For this reason, Beowulf tells his retainers to wait for his return as he goes to face the wyrm in the nether space of the wyrm’s lair, which lay in the liminal space of a cave between earth and sky filled with past treasures holding little value in the present.

Elizabeth Liggins writes about the reciprocal violence stemming from the dragon’s revenge for the cups theft and Beowulf’s response, stating, “The crimes have been of increasing gravity and each is met by a punishment, not a closely-matching act of

vengeance. In the last case the progression continues, and now it is life that is at stake” (203). Liggins says that Wiglaf gives all credit to Beowulf in his account of the fatal encounter between the king and the dragon, writing, “It is fitting that he should have avenged himself. The implication is that no other was able to do so, for Wiglaf lacked the experience and the other Geats had fled from the scene” (203). Beowulf slays the dragon, avenging his kingdom, but dies in the act, leaving his people open to attack by foreign forces. Although the dragon’s hoard is the prize, the Geats will not be any more able to make use of it than the dragon could.

By defeating two threats abroad, Beowulf positions himself to become king of the Geats when the king and his heirs are slain in battle. By defeating a final threat to the Geats and dying in his moment of victory, he positions the Geats as targets for foreign invaders. Kathryn Hume posits, “The controlling theme of the poem, I believe, is *threats to social order*. Specifically these threats are troublemaking, revenge, and war—problems inescapably inherent in this kind of heroic society, yet profoundly inimical to its existence. The poem’s structure is simply the progressive sequence of these threats, each embodied in a suitable monster” (5-6). The monster or “other” remains a threat to be dealt with at the end of the poem. Despite having slain the dragon, the threat of foreign invasion still exists. War remains a risky method for resolving border disputes to the end of the poem, particularly for rulers such as Beowulf who leave no heir to defend the realm after the king dies.

When marginalization leads to murder and theft leads to widespread arson, Germanic law dictates the harmed party wage personal war against the offender until reparation—either flesh or gold—is provided by the offender. Grendel must be punished

for his crimes, but he will not pay the wergild, the man price, for those he has slain, so he must pay with his life and limb. Grendel's mother, in her grief, reclaims her son's arm and the life of Hrothgar's right-hand man. The Scyldings do not consider her a threat to them, so they do not sue for peace with her. Beowulf slays her and claims trophies as repayment for Æschere's life. The dragon is robbed, so he takes vengeance for the theft, burning Geatish homes and taking Geatish lives. Beowulf reciprocates by killing the dragon, dying in the act as well. Each threat to the social order is met with retribution. Hume refers to the interlaced tales that intrude upon the poem's main narrative; she believes that they must be acknowledged if any serious thematic interpretation of *Beowulf* is to be undertaken. She says, "The subsidiary material in each movement is specifically relevant to the monster" (Hume 11). Specifically, it strengthens the case against the monsters, serving as a sort of precedent upon which suits are to be decided.

Bolstered by this subsidiary material, the *Beowulf* poet presents his complaint against the monstrous wrongdoers within the walls of the hall, where he weaves a tale for his audience that brings them to demand satisfaction. He provides them with a larger than life hero to meet their demands—Beowulf. In Heorot, the Grendelkin's mere abode, and the wrym's earth-hall, Beowulf battles against those forces that would threaten the social order. He punishes the interloping Grendel, Grendel's wrathful mother, and the ancient serpent who have butchered, besieged, and burned. He has defeated these monsters and displayed the tokens of his victory for all to see. He has distributed royal justice to solidify the power of the sovereign in the minds of the people. As a border text, *Beowulf* serves as a prime example of how a "god cyning" should act. He must be ready to erect and maintain a strong border defense against external threats. Moreover, he must be seen

treating those within his realm judiciously and respond to good service with good reward, as well as publicly punishing those who pose internal threats.

The scop delivers a cautionary tale within the chronotope of Pre-Christian borderlands. He warns the king to be generous, the thane to be loyal, the thief to be honest, the wife to be peace-weaving, and the whole people to be prepared against invasion. Many of these same messages are found in *Hamlet*. *Beowulf* is distinct from Shakespeare's play in many respects, but similarly lies in that Danish March, a borderland under threat from within and without its boundaries. The march is a territory forming a sort of demilitarized trade zone between two states. In Denmark's case, it is a land that represents the trade space between the northern and southern Germanic peoples. Denmark is the same border place in both works, the era is different, but the characters are quite similar because the chronotopes of the two tales are part of the border genre. Grendel is not that different from Hamlet. While it is true Grendel raids ravenously in the *Beowulf*, it is equally true there is no mention of Grendel being welcomed by Hrothgar prior to the attacks. As we will see, *Beowulf* and *Hamlet*, set in the same land of Denmark, have parallel concerns about the border, the "other," and the establishment of order.

IV. INCURSIONS AND REFUSALS: MEDIEVAL LITERARY BOUNDARIES

ASSAULTED

A manuscript burnt in the eighteenth included *The Battle of Maldon*, another border text set on a battleground near the banks of an estuary and concerns a Saxon defense against a Viking border assault. Fragmentary, *The Battle of Maldon* fittingly has no beginning and no end. The tale encapsulates the struggle between the invaded and the invader within the chronotope of the English border defense tale during the Viking incursions of the late tenth century CE.

The story exemplifies what one faith-filled man will do defending his people against incredible odds and against mortal foes. Beorhtnoð's beheaded and hacked corpse serves as an example of what befalls great men who suffer from a presumptuous or arrogant nature in Anglo-Saxon poetry. At least that is what some critics have claimed, J.R.R. Tolkien most prominent amongst them. Tolkien says Beorhtnoð, in allowing the Viking force to advance across the causeway separating the two armies and past the Saxon border into Essex, acts with "pride and misplaced chivalry" (4). Tolkien summarizes the remaining lines of the text saying,

It tells of the demand of the vikings for tribute in return for peace; of Beorhtnoth's proud refusal, and challenge and the defence of the "bridge"; the cunning request of the vikings, and the crossing of the causeway; the last fight of Beorhtnoth, the falling of his golden-hilted sword from his maimed hand, and the hewing of his body by the heathen men. The end of the fragment, almost half of it, tells of the last stand of the bodyguard. (4)

Again accusing Beorhtnoð of pride, Tolkien also calls the Vikings cunning. What Tolkien terms as pride and cunning, S.A.J. Bradley glosses as “extravagant spirit” (522) and cheating. As similar in meaning as these translations may be, they are not identical. Pride carries different connotations than extravagant spirit does. Cunning is not synonymous with cheating.

The Old English words *ofermod* and *lytegian* appear on lines 89 and 86 respectively. How these words are received in this work is colored by their application in other works within the Anglo Saxon poetic corpus, particularly in *Genesis B*, when *ofermod* is applied to Lucifer when describing his belief in his ability to defeat God in his bid for rule over heaven. This word signifies a chieftain’s abounding confidence, bolstered with the strength of God, in not just his ability but also the ability of his army to defeat the opposing force. Consequently, it seems appropriate that the word could be applied to Beorhtnoð and Lucifer without equating the two in any other meaningful way, especially with regard to intent or motive. In the texts, both thanes of God believe they have the strength of God on their side, both are confident that they can lead their kinsmen to victory, and both believe their cause to be right and just. Lucifer’s intent is to overthrow God whereas Beorhtnoð believes he is acting in defense of God’s people and Essex’s border against the raiding, pagan Viking forces.

In his introduction to the poem, Bradley addresses this potential misapplication of Lucifer-like pride to Beorhtnoð by the likes of Tolkien. He says, “If the *ofermod* in which Byrhtnoth yields equal footing to the Danes is ‘pride’, (sic) the poet is far from seeing it as the sin of Lucifer: it is nearer Beowulf’s *wlenco*, a superb *superbia*, derided by Unferth who explicitly lacks it, but a pride justified when Beowulf backs up his words with

deeds” (Bradley 519). Bradley is not alone in this assessment of the poet’s application of *ofermod* to describe Beorhtnoð. He is joined by Craig Davis, John Halbrooks, and Helmut Gneuss who each dispute Tolkien’s belief that the word should be interpreted as pride and misplaced chivalry. *Ofermod* signifies a border between pride justified by God’s sanction and overblown pride resulting from a corrupt sense of self and relationship to God and His divine will.

Davis says interpreting the ambiguously applied noun is difficult because “each narrative world brings with it a different formula of moral expectation” (158). He argues that the ambiguity is resolved within *Maldon* lines 94 and 95 when the Saxon chief tells the Viking messenger only God may know who will win the fight to come. This statement demonstrates the chief’s reliance on God for strength and belief that Beorhtnoð’s power is derived from Him, so His will is what will decide the conflict ahead. Davis rebuts the point made by Tolkien that too much land was foolishly ceded to the invaders out of a sense of misplaced chivalry, saying, “But of course this kind of litotes is conventional in Germanic tradition and does not necessarily function to second-guess Byrhtnoth’s decision to adduce a moral etiology of his fall; in fact, it helps more powerfully to invoke the moral universe of tradition” (160). The poet does not decry it as a fault; rather, it is a point in the piece where he takes a page from the manuscripts of his predecessors.

Halbrooks also takes issue with Tolkien’s position that “a poem that at first reading seems in praise of heroic spirit, is actually a condemnation of heroic pride or ‘chivalry’” (236). Furthermore, Halbrooks asserts, “It is my contention that the word’s ambiguity is no accident or aesthetic failure on the part of the poet; rather, like the poem

as a whole, the word pushes the reader in contradictory directions, both toward heroic elegy and toward Christian admonishment” (235). Both his rejection of Tolkien’s reading and his excusing the poet’s ambiguity lead to Halbrooks’s positing that the bulk of the poem does not support interpreting *ofermod* as a pejorative. He says the key factor in the Viking victory was not Beorhtnoð’s level of self-esteem or his foolhardy allowance of the Viking advance, but the cowardice of Godric and his brothers. “The poem gives no hint of blaming Byrhtnoth for the defeat after lines 89-90, and these lines, as we have seen, are open to debate; on the contrary, his faithful retainers fight on to the death in memory of their beloved lord” (Halbrooks 238). Indeed, even Tolkien eulogizes the bodyguards’ continuing to fight, die, and fall around their lord in his short play, “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son.”

In supporting his case, Halbrooks quotes Donald Scragg who asserts that Gneuss settled the debate of what *ofermod* means. Gneuss begins his case with a near apology for revisiting the word’s use in *The Battle of Maldon*. Concerning this he writes, “That I am nevertheless returning to this word and the passage in which it occurs is due to three main reasons” (118). His reasons are that it is essential for understanding the piece’s focal character, its meaning is contested, and some of what has been written concerning “this word in *Maldon* must be considered as superficial and even careless” (118). He constructs his philological investigation of *ofermod*’s meaning by establishing five categories of proposed meanings and providing examples of each from the literature. The five sense groups he provides are, briefly, pride, overconfidence, recklessness or over-courage, great courage, and magnanimity. The differences in meaning might be considered nuanced by some, but the border between each of the meanings divides

territories of the psyche as different as love and lust or disdain and hatred. He says pride is the most often chosen translation, citing the Bosworth-Toller Dictionary, “where the sense given for the noun *ofermod* in *Maldon* 89 and *Genesis B* 272 is ‘pride, arrogance, over-confidence’” (Gneuss 121). Gneuss tries out and rejects several of the senses and points out that “*Ofermod* as a noun occurs four times in OE texts, in *The Battle of Maldon*, the *Later Genesis* (line 272), in the *Instructions for Christians* (ed. Rosier, *Anglia*, LXXXII [1964], l. 130), and in an eleventh-century glossary” (126) before settling on pride as the sense at play in *Maldon*. With such meager representation in the Anglo Saxon word-hoard, it is little wonder why the word is debated so much.

If pride rather than one of the other senses is meant by the poet in line 89, then is it the boastful pride Tolkien believes it to be, or is it something else as Davis, Halbrooks, and Gneuss have supposed? Gneuss describes the prideful defense of a Christian nation against what is a likely overwhelmingly superior Viking invasion force that would have sailed on to wreak havoc upon other Saxon lands by a lord and his bodyguard (132-37). However, if Beorhtnoð, Brightdaring in modern English, stood steadfast in his resolve to repel the pagan advance with God’s might on his side, then a different reading might be supported. Exposed to Biblical teachings, the lord may have had a very different outlook on his chance for victory. As previously stated, Beorhtnoð declares in lines 94 and 95 that only God may know the outcome of the fight. This Bible passage gives support to Beorhtnoð’s position:

The Lord GOD opened my ear; I did not refuse, did not turn away. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who tore out my beard; my face I did not hide from insults and spitting. The Lord GOD is my

help; therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame. (“Isaiah” 50:5-7)

From the moment the speaker claims God is his help, he has placed his confidence in the power of God and the righteousness of his cause. So, too, Beorhtnoð acknowledges God’s power and surrenders the outcome to Him. With God as his help, Beorhtnoð is not demonstrating an individual pride in his abilities, but a collective pride of what he, his guard, and God can accomplish against the heathen hoard encamped across the river. Additional support for his resolve is found in the “Gospel of Mark”: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (8:35). Godric and his brothers abandon the field and ran for their lives, leaving their kinsmen to perish, but Beorhtnoð and his guard fight to the death, losing the battle but winning eternal life as promised in “Mark.” Unlike Lucifer’s *ofermod* in *Genesis B*, Beorhtnoð’s *ofermod* is a pride based on an assurance that God is on his side, and only He can know the fight’s outcome. The Christian prince is not being presumptuous of the battle’s outcome; to the contrary, he is full of pride in God and the resolve of his men, which leads to his sense of *ofermod*.

Beorhtnoð may have been guilty of misjudging his chances of victory, but even if he were unsure of his chances, he was confident that God would not forsake his people in their struggle against the truly overconfident heathen leader’s landing force. The Saxon duke was prepared to die as a faithful servant of God and his people. In lines 173-80, he gives thanks to God for his past glories and calls to Him to accept his soul in heaven and protect it from the demons of hell before being hacked to bits by the barbarous Danes.

The Saxon men of good virtue stay, fight, and die, but Godric and his kin, lacking in faith, flee in fear, earning the coward's repute.

Beorhtnoð could have acquiesced to the demands of the Danes and given them gold, but they would have returned for more in the future. He could have left the fight to someone else by resisting the Viking landing or by retreating, but the long boats would have set sail for other Saxon lands. He could have forsaken his God, his country, and his people for a long life and a warm bed. Instead, he chose to place his faith in God, to trust in the strength of his men's resolve, and to embrace his fate whatever it may be. He is not Tolkien's prideful fool, rather a faithful servant of God and country willing to die in defense of what he loves.

As with *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* relates the actions of a good king in defense of his realm's border. While *ofermod* may be glossed as excessive pride, Beorhtnoð's pride is that of a loyal subject of God, which emanates from his Lord. Beorhtnoð's defense of his kingdom against the pagan Viking invasion defines this story as a part of the border genre within the chronotope of the English coastal border during the Viking incursions of the late tenth century CE.

**V. COMMERCE, FAITH, AND MATRIMONY: TRADE FREELY GIVEN
(AND REJECTED)**

In “The Man of Law’s Tale,” Custance is separated from her culture not once, but twice. Each time, she becomes the “other”—an alien—in the dominant culture. She finds herself either able to converse with others only through those learned in the language of the Syrians or by the grace of God. Unlike Beorhtnoð, Geoffrey Chaucer’s Custance is not called upon to die for her faith. While Beorhtnoð defends Christian England from pagans, Custance brings Christianity to pagan England. The border of Christendom is the tie that binds these two tales. Beorhtnoð’s defense of Christendom’s border against the pagan Viking invaders is presented as virtuous whereas the Christian Roman Custance’s invasion is endorsed by Chaucer in his tale. “The Man of Law’s Tale” represents the chronotope of the border-crossing early Christian missionaries who spread the faith and established its churches within the formerly pagan temples and holy sites throughout Europe and the near East.

Messengers and Messages

The exchange and transformation within “The Man of Law’s Tale” begins with Chaucer’s writing the tale itself. According to Larry Benson, Chaucer draws inspiration for the story from the Anglo-Norman Chronicle by Nicholas Trivet and from John Gower’s version of the same tale (*Riverside Chaucer* 9). For the message or *sentence*, Chaucer uses Pope Innocent III’s *De miseria*, a text that Chaucer glossed, which was one of the most popular works of the era (Caie 176). Graham Caie relates several instances in which Chaucer adheres tightly to or paraphrases his sources. Most notably, V. A. Kolve provides background and historical context for Chaucer’s sources, writing,

It is certain that Chaucer wrote with a copy of Trevet's chronicle before him, for he sometimes translates it word for word. I suggest that Chaucer went to the *Chroniques* precisely because it was a book of history, and that the story attracted him (as it had Trevet and Gower) because it not only concerned a chapter in the history of his own nation's conversion to Christianity, but constituted part of an even larger true history—the spreading of the faith, the Christianization of Europe. (299)

That Chaucer borrowed this story and gave it to the Man of Law to tell has been the source of no small debate. The name, Custance rather than Constance, is an odd choice and should prove useful in this discussion of the tale. Since the name contains the idea of constancy or fortitude, but it also contains custom, which could signify trade or traditional practices, it calls to mind key issues related to borders and sovereignty. Wars are frequently fought between neighboring states over disputes based on trade, customs, and fractured alliances.

Don-John Dugas makes the case for reading the Man of Law's story "not so much as the story of the travails of a virtuous woman, but rather as an account of the basis for the monarch's right to rule 'by' one of the twelve highest-ranking legal experts in England" (28). This view is a departure from other critics who read the tale as a Christian allegory (Schibanoff; Spearing), a linguistic study (Caie; Cooper; Kolve), a commentary on commercialism and the church (Barlow; Hendrix; Lynch), or merely a semi-successful attempt by Chaucer to elevate a person to the status of an ideal (McGregor). Dugas proposes, "What becomes intellectually central to the tale as Chaucer alters his sources is the legitimate transferral of imperial power from pagan *imperator* to Christian monarch"

(28). Parallels between this tale and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* shed light on Chaucer's work and its place as a border chronotope.

Bede and Chaucer are concerned with, as Dugas puts it, virtuous kingship (31). In fact, many of the events Bede relates have direct correlations to events in "The Man of Law's Tale." Bede writes of Christian converts persecuted by Roman emperors (50-53), converts following heresies (54-56; 70-71), Northumbrian King Ethelbert's conversion (77), pagans defeating apostate kings (111), and England's return to the faith (125). Chaucer writes of Syrian converts to Christianity murdered by Muslims; "The Sowdan and the Cristen everichone/ Been al tohewe and stiked at the bord/ But it were oonly dame Custance allone (MLT 429-31). He writes of King Alla's conversion to Christianity following Custance being accused of Hermengyld's murder:

This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun,
As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee,
That from his eyen ran the water down.
"Now hastily do fecche a book," quod he,
"And if this knyght wol sweren how that she
This woman slow, yet wol we us avyse
Whom that we wole that shal been oure justise."
A Britoun book written with Evaungiles,
Was fet, and on this book he swoor anoon
She gilty was, and in the meene whiles
An hand hym smoot upon the nekke-boon,
That doun he fil atones as a stoon,

And bothe his eyen broste out of his face
In sighte of every body in the place.
A voys was herd in general audience,
And seyde, “Thou hast desclaundred, giltelees,
The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence;
Thus hastou doon, and yet hode I my pees!” (MLT 659-676)

This death is eerily similar to the divine retribution meted out to Alban’s executioner: “as the martyr’s head fell, the executioner’s eyes dropped out on the ground” (Bede 54). Chaucer’s God is more extreme in His punishment than Bede’s, but Bede writes of a divine presence no less imminent. Chaucer’s Custance, like her faith, is rejected often during her travels before she is eventually reunited with her King and husband in Rome. Sadly, this reunion is as short-lived as the turn to Christianity at the end of Roman England.

The similarities between the two texts are greater than simply in terms of plot: the conversion of pagan Britain. Histories with dates, places, and names, as well as direct and indirect references to their sources, both establish a Christian tradition dating back centuries in England. Chaucer uses the Man of Law to tell a historical tale of Christian conversion and English exchanges of faith and royalty with Rome. He adopts the language of commerce and glossing to heighten the exchange motif in the tale. He adopts the form of a Christian romance and a saint’s life to demonstrate the amicable relationship between the Church and England (*Riverside Chaucer* 9), creating in Custance a character that is able to pass through borders intact in spite of the many threats she faces.

Translating, as Chaucer does, Trivet and Innocent III as sources for the tale, he sends a Roman princess with no language apart from “A maner Latyn corrupt” (MLT 519) beyond the borders of the Roman Empire into several strange lands with different faiths, customs, laws, and moralities as a converting force for Christianity. Christine Cooper identifies many instances of translation within the tale, but focuses “on one in particular, the strange occurrence of Custance’s being understood when she arrives in Northumbria” (28). Cooper finds this to be “a miracle usually experienced by medieval saints, the gift of xenoglossia, or the miraculous ability to speak, understand, or be understood in a foreign language that the recipient has never learnt formally” (28). She understands the “Latyn corrupt” to be a sort of trade language rather than a demonstration of Chaucer’s understanding of the many vernacular Latins spoken throughout Europe as J. A. Burrow and Spearing assert (Cooper 29). Cooper believes this saintly gift is bestowed upon Custance due to “the tale’s heavy reliance on the genre of the saint’s life” (30). While this explanation is appealing, the many uses of words associated with commerce and trade make the trade language position a more palatable option for explaining Custance’s being understood by a shore guard in Northumbria. Both Custance and the constable would have been expected to speak such a tongue to some degree. In her case, she would have shopped the streets of Rome and neighboring ports. The shore guard functions as border monitor who must have some command of trade languages in his role of customs agent as evidenced by his searching her entire vessel before assisting her despite her distraught state and obvious need of aid (MLT 512-522). As cultural exchange lies at the heart of “The Man of Law’s Tale,” the trade tongue would allow

Custance to be understood with or without the assistance of a miracle; any truth she spoke would have been readily understood and received.

Borders and Linguistic Challenges to and from Foreigners

This cultural exchange employing a language of the streets, a *lingua franca*, is perhaps the point of the story. The poverty commentary in the tale's prologue informs the audience that what follows may be a remedy for not just monetary, but spiritual, linguistic, and cultural poverty as well. It asks England to enter a new, international period where the English tongue takes its place amongst the literary languages of Europe and where English ideas and ideals are exported alongside English wool. Hendrix says, "Within the context of the 'quiting game' of storytelling, Chaucer's lawyer collapses the distinction between spiritual, verbal, and monetary exchange, attempting to reduce Custance and Christ into signs which are freely traded and manipulated for profit, and the act of 'enditing' itself into a form of merchandising" (141). For this collapse to occur, Francine McGregor argues that Custance must be abstract and is made so within the tale (66-67). Custance, as the Christ Kolve and others say she represents, cannot be merely a person; she must become a conduit for ideas and a symbol of several things greater than any one person could be. By figuring Custance both as an individual and as at least one abstract concept, Chaucer "reminds us of the dangers implicit when the semiotic balance within redemption doctrine is tipped away from the mysterious means by which man accesses divine mercy and toward the marketplace of metaphors which point to these means" (Hendrix 144). In troubling the distinction between modes of communication, between the secular or profane and the holy, Chaucer threatens borders that critics are still fighting to maintain.

Rather than viewing this tale as Chaucer's embracing and extolling the coming multi-cultural world in which England is playing a greater role, Schibanoff views Chaucer's Man of Law as serving an opposing function. She writes, "The lawyer's strategy. . . is to deflect attention from potentially explosive class rivalry by confronting the fractious men of fragment I with another world, another time, ultimately with the Other, in order to forge a sense of community—that is, fraternity—among them" (Schibanoff 61). Additionally, Schibanoff maintains, "that The Man of Law is not sympathetic but hostile to Islam and that an altogether orthodox antipathy rather than 'heterodox understanding' motivates the lawyer's implication that Islam imitates Christianity" (62). This position discounts the fact that despite the heroic token's rejection, Custance is never destroyed. She is cast adrift with God as her rudder. The Sowdanesse does not destroy her as part of the story's indictment of excess, which seems to be explicitly associated with the East, as at the beginning of the tale where, in a long passage that is a rare expansion on both of his sources—Nicholas Trivet and John Gower—Chaucer has a group of Syrian merchants carry back to their Sultan tales of Custance's "unreckonable" virtue, beauty, and generosity—an act that leads to the transfer of the woman, a quick change of religions, and the "encrees of Cristes lawe deere." (Lynch 414)

King Alla's mother, Donegild, does not destroy Custance either. Both women seem unsure of what to do with Custance or unwilling to act with violence toward her directly. Instead, they cast her upon the waters, leaving her to God's mercy and care. If these

queens cannot decide what to do with Custance or what Custance might represent, it is little wonder pinning Custance down has been so difficult for critics and readers alike.

While Beorhtnoð fought to his last breath defending Christian England against heathen invaders, Custance bore Christianity across borders to heathens throughout the known world. She expands the area of Christendom's borders by serving as an example of faithful acceptance of God's will. Each of the heroes of medieval English verse stands for something beyond the individual. In donating their lives to God's service, these exemplars, who maintain a steadfast spirit in the face of great adversity, inspire others to do great things.

Custance's steadfast adherence to her faith, even when exiled by disloyal cowards, places "The Man of Law's Tale" in the realm of border literature. By defending, defining, and traversing borders, Custance and Beorhtnoð pause in the spaces between, creating both places that can be pointed to on a map but also those more difficult to see in the physical realm. Custance represents a chronotope of the Old World missionary who crosses state boundaries to establish a new Christian Roman Empire, which speaks Latin and has a single, immortal king.

As we will see in the next chapter, the violence endemic along borders portrayed in English literature is not restricted to medieval Europe. Contemporary American fiction adheres to the border genre, while fashioning a chronotope that adds layers of absurdity to vicious aggression.

VI. ABSURD BOUNDARY BREECHING: SEEKING UNIVERSAL TRUTHS IN REPETITION

Unlike the protagonists in medieval and modern English examples, McCarthy's anti-heroes are not noble, loyal citizens living at the edges of society. Themselves demons, they demonize those whom they designate "other." Instead of defending the border, they violate it repeatedly, terrorizing people on both sides. How behavior is categorized is fluid in McCarthy's evolving society. Members of the Glanton Gang are loyal only to one another. When that loyalty is breached, blood is the cost. Within the border genre, this novel defines a chronotope that disappears by the time the action for McCarthy's remaining border novels takes place.

Much like the scalping described in one of the three epigrams to *Blood Meridian*, the old patterns of border violence that occurred 600 years earlier and an ocean away are repeated in McCarthy's border novels. In the margins of an early draft of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy wrote, in tight, but legible, script, "without the spirit man is garbage – Catch 22" ("Cormac McCarthy Papers," box 35, folder 6). This reference to absurdist and satirist Joseph Heller's seminal novel demonstrates a connection to the absurd in McCarthy's darkest novel. While *Beowulf* uses interlaced tales to reinforce cultural ideals and norms, *Blood Meridian* uses repetition and interlace to demonstrate the absurd nature of human existence eked out at or on the border. *Blood Meridian* is part of the Old West border chronotope in which morals are loose, men are violent, and life is lived briefly within a hostile territory between two emerging nations.

Harsh and unrepentant in its dark view of humanity's depravity, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West* chronicles the exploits

of a band of desperados through the border deserts and pueblos of the Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexican states in the mid-nineteenth century. *Blood Meridian* peels back the sanitized historic veneer applied to a grim chapter in history, exposing the brutal truth of the settling of North America and the civilizing or eradication of its indigenous peoples. Shane Schimpf writes that it is “a revisionist western that exposes the mendacity of the romantic myth of good guys in white hats fighting, and defeating, bad guys in black hats” (1). McCarthy’s elevated prose and majestic descriptions create an image of a starkly beautiful borderland populated by criminals and heathens living at the United States-Mexico border whose lives are violently extinguished for a few dollars, their bodies dismembered and violated by Glanton’s gang. *Blood Meridian* is not simply a western novel set at in a contested borderland; it is a meditation on the nature of humankind and humanity’s place in the universe.

Much has been written concerning the philosophical subtexts in Cormac McCarthy’s novels. The two primary camps regard his primary subtext to be either nihilistic or spiritual (often Gnostic).¹ The views of both groups focus on the dark, seemingly hopeless worlds McCarthy creates in his stories, finding the grim nature of the tales to be proof of this great American author’s belief that either existence is hopeless or, at best, overseen by a flawed, monstrous god. McCarthy scholars such as Vereen Bell have written critical analyses supporting their claims that the writer is a nihilist, that man is unredeemable, that all existence—and resistance—is futile. Other critics, such as Petra Mundik, see Gnostic elements under every rock and tarot card in McCarthy’s works.

While these assessments of McCarthy’s philosophical position are interesting and bear no small amount of textual evidence to support them, a third position begs

investigation: McCarthy, as much a playwright and screenwriter as a novelist, writes works that are existentialist thought exercises in the style of Eugène Ionesco, Joseph Heller, and other writers in the Theater of the Absurd genre—writers who William Haney says, “no longer inspired confidence, leaving society with a sense of alienation and loss” (39). Throughout McCarthy’s novels, his protagonists engage in discussions that, while somewhat nihilistic or perhaps Gnostic in tone and content, are existentially driven and absurd in nearly all respects.

This tendency to the absurd, itself a sort of border between the bleak and the hilarious, seems to become stronger as the novelist’s writing progresses from his Tennessee works to his stories set in the American Southwest. McCarthy’s writing defends the borders of hope against the encroaching sense of hopelessness his stories depict. The cyclic nature of the absurd in his writing demonstrates that things will change and that things happening today have happened before and will happen again. While the repetitive dialogue and action, as well as the denials, are hilarious, the distinction between bleak and hilarious is frequently razor thin. In the context of this novel, the absurd is present in the characters’ intentionally ridiculous behavior and repetitive dialogue, as well as the work’s border setting in which people exist in a sort of purposeless state within a chaotic landscape.

The connection between McCarthy and Absurdism lies in his margin note, “without the spirit man is garbage – Catch 22” (“Cormac McCarthy Papers,” box 35, folder 6). The note refers to a passage in chapter 41 of *Catch-22* in which the novel’s protagonist, Yossarian, sits with a dying brother in arms:

Yossarian was cold, too, and shivering uncontrollable. He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all. (Heller 447)

Furthermore, the note shows that McCarthy is so much more concerned with the world and the acts of his fellow man than a true nihilist would be. McCarthy's penchant for the absurd is further highlighted by *Blood Meridian's* first epigram penned by Paul Valéry,

Your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint. Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible.

Finally, you fear blood more and more. Blood and time. (*BM* 1)

McCarthy's meticulous research, his interest in the works of other writers, and his writing itself, point to a philosophy concerned with discovering what life is all about rather than one that dismisses any meaning as nihilism does.

However, McCarthy's desire to find meaning does not necessarily lead to a Gnostic view. Rather, it reveals McCarthy's absurdist bent in his use of dialogue, which is frequently confusing because it rarely references the line's speaker and lacks standard dialogue punctuation, blurring the borders between the speakers' words and their personae. These stylistic traits frequently create a sort of vaudevillian conversation in which the characters speaking seem to be nearly as confused as the reader is.² By using the style of the Theater of the Absurd in his writing, McCarthy seems to be trying to

respond to Camus' assertion that "in our disillusioned age the world has ceased to make sense" (Esslin 24). The protagonists, their actions, and their conversations in *Blood Meridian* reveal that McCarthy is as much an absurdist as he is a nihilist or a Gnostic. Consequently, McCarthy is not merely setting *Blood Meridian* in a border place, he is setting it in a border chronotope because the recursive border violations are repetitive and violent; they are absurd.

McCarthy as Nihilist

Vereen Bell and others have successfully read McCarthy as nihilistic. Bell says, "In McCarthy's world, existence seems both to precede and preclude essence, and it paradoxically derives its importance from this fact alone" ("Ambiguous" 31). Bell uses scenes from McCarthy's first four novels to support his assertion that, "Risking portentousness, one might characterize McCarthy's nihilism as not simply ambiguous but dialectical" ("Ambiguous" 37). Indeed, it is easy to see why McCarthy's works are read as nihilistic when his protagonists meet ambiguous or fatal ends before his novels conclude. *Child of God's* Lester Ballard loses his arm to a shotgun blast and dies in the hospital. *Suttree's* protagonist of the same name abandons Knoxville, catching a ride west. The kid in *Blood Meridian* meets an undisclosed, but presumably gruesome, fate in the jakes at the hands of the judge. John Grady Cole, one of "McCarthy's most sympathetic characters," survives his trials in *All the Pretty Horses* only to bleed out in a shabby clubhouse in *Cities of the Plain* (Bell, "Between" 920). For Bell, John Grady is one of the characters who "wish to live only in the mode of description—the less narrative the better—but the God that rules their world—an editor, clearly—likes stories and, either for his own amusement or to test them, he imposes plots upon them"

(“Between” 920). Billy Parham loses everyone he ever loved during the action of the border novels *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*, never marrying and living out his old age as a guest in the home of strangers—the most hopeful outcome for any of McCarthy’s protagonists. Llewellyn Moss is murdered before the close of action in *No Country for Old Men*, while Sherriff Bell feels he must retire from his position and is still a potential target of the psychotic Chigurh. Even the boy in *The Road* is not likely to survive long in the post-apocalyptic world in which he is left to wander with a family of strangers after his father dies. With death ever-present and few opportunities to escape it for long, the characters of McCarthy’s novels spring from nothingness to wander aimlessly through a godless world. Consequently, it is easy to categorize these works as nihilistic visions written masterfully by an avowed pessimist. While McCarthy may seem to be a nihilist, this single-minded view is confounded by Gnostic and absurdist elements throughout his works. Indeed, like early absurdist Albert Camus, McCarthy “did not become immobilized by his understanding of absurdity . . . thus moving him towards greater productivity and away from total cynicism” (Sleasman 60) as evidenced by his highly productive period following *Blood Meridian*’s publication.

McCarthy as Gnostic

In support of a Gnostic interpretation of McCarthy’s writing, Mundik frequently argues the point that the author creates “darkly Gnostic,” not godless, worlds (“Diverging” 9). When writing about *All the Pretty Horses*, Mundik says John Grady Cole receives a “painful initiation, via a direct experience of evil and suffering . . . or what the narrative voice constantly refers to as the ‘terrible truth’ of the world” (“Diverging” 9). She adds this truth is “the Gnostic idea that evil saturates the manifest

cosmos and a Buddhist awareness that suffering lies at the very core of existence (“Diverging” 9). Furthermore, Mundik points to one of *Blood Meridian’s* epigrams, an excerpt from the writings of Jacob Boehme,³ asserting,

Boehme possessed a heretical, Gnostic brand of mysticism, which enabled him to see the world as we are made to see it in *Blood Meridian*.

Gnosticism is characterized by a deeply pessimistic world-view, a preoccupation with evil, mystical insights, and reinterpretations of Judeo-Christian mythologies—all of which can be found throughout Cormac McCarthy’s novels. (“Striking” 73)

Yet, while McCarthy’s works are deeply pessimistic, are concerned with the nature of evil and man’s capacity for performing evil deeds, and are frequently mystical, I will argue that they are no more Gnostic than they are nihilistic in their view of existence. Rather, they tend toward the absurdist view of existence and, consequently, are more stylistically similar to works by Absurdist writers.

McCarthy as Absurdist

By setting *Blood Meridian* at a national border and then repeatedly violating it, McCarthy is using the border chronotope to illustrate the absurdity of the notion that borders are fixed. In his book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Esslin uses Ionesco’s widely cited definition, “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (23). Samuel Hirsch states, “In the special world of the Theatre of the Absurd the word ‘absurd’ means ‘without sense, purposeless,’ not ‘ridiculous.’ . . . a rueful description of modern man’s Fall from Grace; his present

tragicomic dilemma” (49). This emphasis on the senseless, purposeless nature of existence is the defining characteristic of the Theater of the Absurd and is what places Absurdism within the philosophical realm of Existentialism because it is one response to the question of the purpose of existence. Hirsch also states that the Theater of the Absurd was an existential response to the meaning of life “in a world which no longer made sense because all moral, religious, political and social sense was nonsense” (51).

This idea that what makes sense is nonsense runs deeply throughout *Blood Meridian*. Senseless violence and mayhem are the novel’s stock and trade. Robert Cardullo offers the position that in the Theater of the Absurd, the only certainty to be found in human existence “is reflected by the viciously cyclical nature of absurdist dramatic form” (42). McCarthy’s use of a portion of an article from *The Yuma Daily Sun* as his third epigram to *Blood Meridian* poignantly highlights the “viciously cyclical nature” of humanity’s violence:

Clark, who led last year’s expedition to the Afar region of northern Ethiopia, and UC Berkley colleague Tim D. White, also said that a reexamination of a 300,000-year-old fossil skull found in the same region earlier showed evidence of having been scalped. (*BM* 1)

McCarthy’s use of this epigram in advance of the many scenes of scalping within *Blood Meridian* demonstrates his recognition of the absurdist position, particularly when his margin note referencing *Catch-22* lies within his early draft. The epigram is an example of the recursive violence described in *Blood Meridian*. Scalping has been practiced for 300,000 years. It is behavior worthy of ridicule and indicates a chaotic state of affairs like those potentially found along borders.

McCarthy seems to be telling the reader how to understand *Blood Meridian* through the order of the epigrams. He presents the absurd nature of life, the futility of sorrow, and the cyclic violence of humanity. Similarly, Gary Adelman says the “operating laws” of *Blood Meridian* are “humanity lives with terror; the world is irredeemable; the longing for redemption adds to the torment of being alive; there’s no way to rid oneself of the agony except through violence” (28). While this observation is decidedly more nihilistic in tone than it is absurdist, it does identify many of the same characteristics of the novel that are foreshadowed in the novel’s epigrams. Despite this, absurdism recognized the seemingly purposeless nature of existence without nihilism’s denial that there is any reason to continue given the chaotic circumstance. Absurdism acknowledges the situation without refusing to engage, something nihilism fails to do.

In this way, McCarthy seems to join Heller in calling attention to the unresolved question of World War II (WWII): How could a world exist where such unrepentant cruelty—an attempted wholesale extermination of a people—be found? Camus’ response to this question was “to try to make sense of things while acknowledging that determinate meaning cannot and should not exist in the world,” which he calls “absurd reasoning” (Martinez 6). Of Heller’s attempt to make sense of WWII, Joseph Waldmeir writes, “*Catch-22* is a disconcerting book; it alternately attracts and repels, delights and bores” (192). He states, “Heller’s discovery that everything in the modern world is up for grabs; that nothing—and therefore, ipso facto, everything—makes coherent, logical sense” (Waldmeir 192). In light of this description of *Catch-22* and the reference to that novel in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* notes, McCarthy seems to call attention to the fact that

because humanity's violent nature is cyclic, nineteenth-century North Americans were able to view everything equally "up for grabs."

Much like Nazi Germany's expansionist invasions of neighboring nations for *lebensraum*, or living space, during WWII, the United States in which *Blood Meridian* is set is involved in territorial disputes with Mexico and is practicing a doctrine of manifest destiny. It seeks to span the continent and increase its territory by expanding its borders. In writing about two plays set in the 1800's, Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* and Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, William Demastes states that the plays occur "at a moment in Western history when predictable order and unpredictable chaos come into immediate contact" (150). Further parallels between the early-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth exist. As the Nazi's attempted to exterminate Jews, so the Glanton Gang attempted to exterminate Native Americans; both the Nazis and the Glanton Gang murdered their victims and removed their victims' hair. *Blood Meridian's* third epigram, which also speaks of scalping practiced during the dawn of man, echoes these acts.⁴ Written in the early 1980's and first published in 1985, *Blood Meridian* has earned a reputation as an anti-war novel. If it is, then its connection to *Catch-22* is stronger still.

Absurdist connections and existential influences, particularly Camus' influence, are frequent fodder for McCarthy critics. William Prather cites no fewer than six critics who have touched upon these connections and influences in their scholarly works (139), including Vereen Bell. He says, though, that only one essay, Shelton's piece demonstrating an "affinity" between McCarthy's *Suttree* and Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, directly addresses McCarthy's "absurd reasoning" as a metaphysical "underpinning" in McCarthy's work (Prather 139). Evenson says, "McCarthy's approach to fiction seems at

least partially filtered through existentialism and Absurdism, and from here to reach back to earlier traditions” (54). Joining other critics in seeing ties between McCarthy’s writing and Camus’ work, he says, “McCarthy’s characters seem prone to seek out value and meaning in life but also are nearly powerless to find any lasting value, though at least some of his characters do manage to come to a form of acceptance of their struggle” (Evenson 54). This acceptance serves the kid in *Blood Meridian* well until his fateful, final encounter with Judge Holden. The judge himself has long since come to embrace this acceptance.

In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy creates a world with “a nightmare or dreamlike atmosphere in which the protagonist is overwhelmed by the chaotic or irrational nature of his environment” (Modreanu 172), where the kid is the protagonist and the judge is the embodiment of the “chaotic or irrational nature” of the novel. Although the judge seems to act as if some law guides his actions and as though he has a rational nature, he routinely proves himself unlawful and irrational. It is into this world and against its environment’s “nature,” in the guise of Judge Holden, that the kid steps from the low hills of eastern Kentucky. McCarthy writes of the kid, “in him broods already a taste for mindless violence” (*BM* 3)—a taste he will indulge at some length in the years to come.

When McCarthy introduces the judge in Chapter One, the judge alleges that a tent revival preacher committed child rape and sexual abuse of a goat (*BM* 7). When asked about how he had the “goods” on this man, an absurd dialogue occurs, reminiscent of the sort used throughout *Catch-22*:

Goods? said the judge.

When was you in Fort Smith?

Fort Smith?

Where did you know him to know all that stuff on him?

You mean the Reverend Green?

Yessir. I reckon you was in Fort Smith fore ye come out here.

I was never in Fort Smith in my life. Doubt that he was.

They looked from one to the other.

Well where was it your run up on him?

I never laid eyes on the man before today. Never even heard of him.

(*BM* 8-9)

This exchange demonstrates both the sort of man the judge is, someone willing and able to tell a lie for no discernible reason apart from his own amusement, and the type of absurd dialogue that McCarthy will employ throughout *Blood Meridian*, dialogue that will highlight the Glanton Gang's senseless acts, either collectively or individually. The dialogue is "disjointed, meaningless, and repetitious"—hallmarks of the absurd. By repeating the last thing said by someone else as a question, this dialogue calls to mind the classic "Who's on First" baseball themed conversation most famously performed by comedians Bud Abbot and Lou Costello⁴. This sort of dialogue creates senseless confusion, particularly when the speaker is made unclear by many lines of dialogue with no mention of who is speaking.

Not long after this episode occurs, the kid makes Toadvine's acquaintance and nearly meets his demise in a different jakes than the one in which he and the judge have their final encounter at the end of the novel. Refusing to give way on a muddy boardwalk,

the kid and Toadvine struggle, with Toadvine getting the best of him. He awoke the next day with Toadvine mumbling something to him:

What? said the kid.

I said are you quits?

Quits?

Quits. Cause if you want some more of me you sure as hell are goin to get it.

He looked at the sky. Very high, very small, a buzzard. He looked at the man. Is my neck broke? he said.

The man looked out over the lot and spat and looked at the boy again. Can you not get up?

I dont know. I aint tried.

I never meant to break your neck.

No.

I meant to kill ye.

They aint nobody done it yet. (*BM* 9-10)

In this sequence, the kid indulges his taste for “mindless violence,” nearly dying to avoid stepping in a muddy street on the way to ease himself. His encounter with the judge at the novel’s close, also while on his way to the jakes, has an ambiguous outcome. The kid crosses the border from the action of the novel into an unknown realm. He does not reappear after he enters the outhouse at the edge of town. Regardless of what has happened to him, the kid is not around to ask questions the next day; he has become the victim of another’s act of senseless violence. This mirroring of setting and action in the

beginning and end of the novel illustrate the cyclic actions and the “purposeless, confusing situations” that are features of the Theater of the Absurd. The kid meets his fate at the edge of town in a place where people go to urinate and defecate. He crosses the border between life and death (?), between town and country, between in the story and beyond it.

Later, during a failed trip to Mexico with a group of filibusters, the kid sits with a wounded Sproule, discussing their next move:

What do you want to do? said the kid.

Get a drink of water.

Other than that.

I dont know.

You want to try and head back?

To Texas?

I dont know where else.

We'd never make it.

Well you say.

I aint got no say.

He was coughing again. He held his chest with his good hand and sat as if he'd get his breath.

What have you got, a cold?

I got consumption.

Consumption?

He nodded. I come out here for my health. (*BM 61*)

The dying man's statement demonstrates McCarthy's dark sense of humor and a further use of absurdist dialogue. Sproule has come to the desert to relieve his tuberculosis symptoms, yet he has taken on a profession that is far more hazardous to his health than consumption is. In trying to decide on their next course of action, the kid and Sproule call attention to the fact that, despite the absurdly cyclic nature of history, some acts, once committed, have no safe path back.

Not all of the absurdist elements in *Blood Meridian* lie in action or dialogue. A pair of Jacksons, one white and one black, call to mind Stoppard's absurdist play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*,⁵ a play in which the title characters are never clearly delineated by the playwright. Like the pair of Danes, white Jackson loses his head to the blade, but he is slain by black Jackson rather than the headsman. In his denying black Jackson a place at the same fire at which he sits, white Jackson refutes black Jackson's claim that, "Any man in this company can sit where it suits him" (*BM* 111). This moves black Jackson to act: "the black stepped forward and with a single stroke swapt off his head" (*BM* 112). Thus, white Jackson senselessly loses his life over refusing to share a fire with a black man. White Jackson attempted to draw a border and exclude black Jackson and it cost white Jackson his life. This scene, though grizzly, is yet another in a long litany of such scenes of reciprocal violence committed in *Blood Meridian*. Of this violence, Jay Ellis references the meridian, which is another sort of geographical reference line, in the novel's title:

Perhaps, then, the meridian of the title is that line between actions that are pure force, and those that are "metaphysical" and yet unconstrained by ethics, free in art. If so, the meridian of the title distinguishes between a

land of primal killing for no real reason beyond the reason that mercury behaves as it does when you pour it on a rock, and another, more advanced *landscape* of violence: one deliberately directed against civilization. It requires some mind, after all, to be mindfully against—rather than oblivious to—mindedness. (179)

Ellis' view begs the question whether these unconstrained acts are caused by the nature of man or by the nature of the land where they take place. In either case, McCarthy's epigrams assert that man's nature has not changed in 300,000 years, and his acts are committed "as if they are irresistible" (1). McCarthy describes Glanton's Gang as "ordained agents of the actual dividing out the world which they encountered and leaving what had been and what would never be alike extinguished on the ground behind them" (*BM* 179). This description demonstrates McCarthy's view of this band of murderers. He sees them as an organizing force that destroys the past and all alternate futures leaving behind only death, acting in both the pure force and "metaphysical" senses to which Ellis refers.

In this vein, the judge is a *force majeure*. When Toadvine asks him why he should collect, catalogue, and destroy things, the judge continues to write in his journal:

Toadvine spat into the fire.⁶

The judge wrote on and then he folded the ledger shut and laid it to one side and pressed his hands together and passed them down over his nose and mouth and placed them palm down on his knees.

Whatever exists, he said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent.

He looked about at the dark forest in which they were bivouacked. He nodded toward the specimens he'd collected. These anonymous creatures, he said, may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men's knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth.

What's a suzerain?

A keeper. A keeper or overlord.

Why not say keeper then?

Because he is a special kind of keeper. A suzerain rules even where there are other rulers. His authority countermands local judgements.

Toadvine spat. (*BM 207*)

This lengthy passage begins and ends with Toadvine spitting as if he is rejecting the knowledge Judge Holden is imparting. The judge, attempting to assert his sovereignty over this border place, believes that only absolute dominion over life on earth will produce in him some form of godhood—the belief of tyrants and dictators who seek to control all thoughts and actions. When these overlords are incapable of achieving total control of something, like the fascist rulers of WWII, they attempt to exterminate it, cataloguing the extermination in minute detail. Toadvine's spitting attempts to render Holden's speech absurdly meaningless.

In a later conversation with Irving, the judge speaks of war, during which Irving claims, “The good book says that he that lives by the sword shall perish by the sword” (*BM* 259). Holden agrees and says,

It makes no difference what men think of war . . . War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. 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. That way and not some other way. (*BM* 259)

Once again, the absurdly repetitious dialogue alluding to the third epigram reveals the judge’s position on the acts of man and strengthens his role as the embodiment of *Blood Meridian’s* chaotic nature. Holden later enigmatically tells some recruits to Glanton’s Gang, “There is no mystery to it. . . . Your heart’s desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is there is that there is no mystery” (*BM* 263).

The judge is the inescapable force that is, much like McCarthy’s later villain—*No Country for Old Men’s* Anton Chigurh—let loose upon the Earth and intent upon tying up loose ends. Where Holden and Chigurh differ is how they fit in their place and time. Holden is able to be openly murderous because he is in a place and time that allows, or even rewards, his actions. Despite Chigurh’s inhabiting a space quite near to Holden’s space, he must hide his existence and his hand in the acts he commits because he is in a time that no longer allows such things, but often rewards them just the same. Brian Evenson says of the characters in *Blood Meridian* that like borders they “do not have consciences, and as a result their consciousness is much more flexible and tentative, and it is very hard for them to see others as subjects” (55). This statement is equally true of

Chigurh. That he and the judge treat others as insensate beasts at opposite ends of a century's span is also true and a further argument for McCarthy's novels being those of an absurdist concerned with the cyclic nature of humanity.⁷

Despite this nature, the humanity on display in *Blood Meridian* exists in a chronotope distinctly different from that of *No Country for Old Men*. The action and actors in *Blood Meridian* is not unusual or out of place for the time and place of the novel. However, it is very out of place within the same territory a century later.

Government and rule of law have become well established and senseless violence is no longer the rule. It is a different time, a different chronotope.

Evasion and Encounter: Chronotope of the Recursive Absurd

As Holden later pursues the kid and the former priest, Tobin, through the desert in southern California, the two discuss what they should do to escape the judge.

We got to hide, he said.

Hide?

Yes.

Where do you aim to hide?

Here. We'll hide here.

You cant hide, lad.

We can hide.

You think he cant follow your track?

The wind's taking it. It's gone from the slope yonder.

Gone?

Ever trace.

The expriest shook his head.

Come on. We got to get goin.

You cant hide.

Get up, said the kid.

Go on, go on. He waved his hand. (*BM* 308-309)

This passage near the end of the main action of the novel sets the stage for the final, presumably fatal encounter between the kid and Holden. It exhibits the well-established absurdist repetition in its dialogue and intimates that no matter the outcome of this moment, the kid will not be able to elude the judge. The kid passes on three opportunities to kill the judge in this scene. Holden judges these missed opportunities as the fault of “a flawed place in the fabric of your heart” (*BM* 311-312) before moving on, meeting up with the kid one more time at a jail in San Diego.

In this jail house meeting the judge tries to convince the kid of his benign intent. “Dont be afraid . . . I’ll speak softly. It’s not for the world’s ears but for yours only. Let me see you. Dont you know that I’d have loved you like a son?” (*BM* 319). The kid cowers at the back of his cell and denies his fear to the judge. The judge accuses the kid of being a witness against himself and sitting in judgement of his own deeds (*BM* 319). He accuses the kid of poisoning the gang’s efforts, saying, “For it was required of no man to give more than he possessed nor was any man’s share compared to another’s. Only each was called upon to empty out his heart to the common and one did not” (*BM* 319). The kid says the judge is the one who did not, and the judge leaves. In fear, the kid bribes a guard and escapes, leaving the judge behind for the next three decades. This scene is related to McCarthy’s margin note regarding *Catch-22* because the judge accuses the kid

of having no spirit, relegating him to garbage, and abandoning him. The judge must discard that disloyal element from the gang because loyalty defined the territory of the gang.

This abandonment did not take, and, as if by chance, the kid encounters the judge a final time in a Fort Griffin cantina:

He wore a round hat with a narrow brim and he was every kind of man, herder and bullwhacker and drover and freighter and miner and hunter and soldier and pedlar and gambler and drifter and drunkard and thief and he was among the dregs of the earth in beggary a thousand years . . . and he seemed little changed or none in all these years. (*BM* 338)

In this confounding description, McCarthy exhibits an absurd style reminiscent of Stoppard. He makes the judge a timeless, borderlands everyman, as if to make all humanity the judge of the kid and his wasted, violent life. In so doing, McCarthy portrays every man as the judge and no man as the judge. The judge is a force of nature come to collect a debt from the kid. The judge calls for the kid to join in the hedonistic dance of the townsfolk and visitors of Fort Griffin, but the kid denies any inclination to dancing. He tells Holden, "I got to go. The judge looked aggrieved. Go? He said" (*BM* 341). The judge presses the kid, "Was it always your idea, he said, that if you did not speak you would not be recognized? . . . I recognized you when I first saw you and yet you were a disappointment to me. Then and now. Even so at the last I find you here with me" (*BM* 341). This last line reveals to the reader that the judge will not let the kid leave as he did in San Diego and in the desert. He gave the kid as many chances as the kid gave the judge in the desert. This time, the kid likely will not live to regret his clemency: "The judge was

seated upon the closet. He was naked and he rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him” (*BM* 347). No matter what occurred between the judge and the kid in the jakes, the reader is left to imagine the kid’s fate in the judge’s hands. If, as Ellis says, the judge “raped, murdered, and mutilated” (33) the kid in the outhouse, then it is because he felt required to dispose of the spiritless garbage that the kid had become in his eyes.

Finally, in *Blood Meridian*’s epilogue is an oft-discussed scene that Mark Busby calls “a parable in which the digger is the embodiment of Camus’ Sisyphus, who achieves spirit by will in contrast to those around who live in authentic lives” (94). The repetitive nature of the diggers’ actions in the epilogue support a connection to Camus’ Sisyphus and are in line with comments written on the last sheet of 4” x 7” spiral note pages upon which Cormac McCarthy wrote, “CODA – the fence/post hole digger. Fences as symbols of fear. It is an embryonic wall” (“Cormac McCarthy Papers,” box 35, folder 4). This position is also supported by another McCarthy margin note on the epilogue, “This is also a burial scene” (“Cormac McCarthy Papers,” box 35, folder 7). That McCarthy saw the epilogue as both an “embryonic wall” and a “burial scene” echoes the cyclic nature of his entire, and entirely, absurdist novel, *Blood Meridian*. Walls, embryonic or otherwise, and graves are both borders and meridians, which must be crossed to enter a new place, existence, or realm. It is in the margins of his manuscripts that McCarthy provides brief glimpses into the gulf between the page and the man. McCarthy calls fences symbols of fear, which generates a fight or flight response. Both responses require action and take time. What action is appropriate for the time in the context of a tale is often defined by its chronotope. In the context of the Old West border

chronotope of *Blood Meridian* the ability to flee is limited when fences are erected, so fight becomes the response of the fearful.

As this analysis of *Blood Meridian* demonstrates, McCarthy exhibits more hope than a nihilist exhibits and finds human nature far too absurdly cyclic in its violent nature to ever truly be Gnostic in his metaphysical outlook. His connection to Heller, as evidenced by his hand-written note within his draft of the novel, clearly illuminates McCarthy's philosophical positions toward war, history, and the sorts of actions his characters take in *Blood Meridian*. While stark and gruesome, this novel is rife with the absurd. Like Camus, McCarthy is hopeful that, despite humanity's cyclic nature, life is worth living because to be a man without spirit, without hope, free of sorrow, is to be garbage. Within the border genre, the absurd functions as a sub-genre. The absurd sub-genre features repetitive action and dialogue that, in *Blood Meridian*, skirts the boundary between the hopeful repetitions of lifecycles and seasons and the hopeless repetition of retribution.

Notes

1. Mundik says the two primary camps of critical opinion concerning McCarthy's novels are nihilists and moralists "who, like Edwin T. Arnold, argue that the novels contain 'moral parables' and 'a conviction that is essentially religious'" ("Striking" 72). The moralists are not discussed as a separate camp of critics in this work because they are included in the spiritualists.

2. Abbot and Costello were a comedy duo that translated their Vaudevillian stage performance to a successful film career. Their films were a staple of late night and Sunday morning local broadcasts when I was a child in the 1970's. Their "Who's on First" bit was a favorite of mine. A brief search of the internet yields numerous links to different performances including this one from 1953.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTcRRaXV-fg>>

3. Mundik refers to *Blood Meridian's* second epigram,

It is not to be thought that the life of darkness is sunk in misery and lost as if in sorrowing. There is no sorrowing. For sorrow is a thing swallowed up by death, and death and dying are the very life of the darkness. (*BM* 1)

4. Further connections that must be made in a longer examination of *Blood Meridian's* relationships to *Catch-22*, WWII Germany, and to other works of literature referenced in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* manuscript notes in the Cormac McCarthy Papers found in the Southwestern Writers Collection within The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University-San Marcos. These include a mention of "Parsifal," possibly from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in box 35, folder 6, and *sie müssen schlafen aber Ich muss tanzen* (you

must sleep but I must dance) in box 35, folder 6, possibly referring to Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*, a story of a German writer's travels from southern to northern Germany.

5. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is one of my favorite movies adapted from his 1960's play. It is an absurdist, existential tragicomedy set around the events of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, another of my favorite plays, upon which it depends for structure and continuity. The ongoing joke concerning which actor is portraying which role paired with its "disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development" make this play an exemplary absurdist work.

6. Spitting occurs frequently throughout McCarthy's writing as do images of fire and references to carrying the fire (it is a constant in *The Road*). By spitting into the fire, McCarthy's characters may be attempting to extinguish the knowledge represented by fire in the Gnostic philosophy. They may also simply enjoy the sound.

7. A detailed survey of all McCarthy's novels will likely reveal justification for reading McCarthy's body of work as being entirely absurdist, but such an investigation would necessarily be the focus of a future, much longer critical analysis.

VII. CROSSING BORDERS AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES: THE BORDER GENRE

The border chronotope is present in tales set in spaces that exist for a time at a particular place. Borders define, identify, and encompass, but only as long as they have meaning to the nations, cultures, and peoples that stand on either side with shields up and weapons drawn. Concerned with the “other,” the border genre is rooted in loyalty and identity. It seeks to define each of these things by telling sovereign power how to govern its territories and how to defend its people from the disloyal, often seen as the “other.” The border genre also seeks to identify the literary territory its stories encompass by extolling the virtues of the loyal citizen and defender of the realm while demonizing the foreigner or disloyal coward within the realm. It seeks to delineate a cultural identity, differentiating what is good and proper for one society from what is alien and potentially dangerous.

For more than a century, the border genre has been looking toward the future, the past, and the fantastic for new borders. It is evident not just in twentieth-century novels such as *Blood Meridian* but is present in its many sub-genres—Science Fiction, Fantasy, Historical Fiction, Mysteries. Each of these sub-genres explores new sorts of borders—space and the future, alternate chivalric pasts, alternate recent pasts, and the mind. The crossing of borders between the physical and imaginary realms, between what is and was into what might be and what might have been, has been a feature of the border genre since *Beowulf*.

The border genre will continue to be one of the largest and most influential literary genres because it deals with a fundamental concern within the human psyche. The

concern is that others are foreign to ourselves. This difference suggests that they may not be entirely trustworthy. By creating and defining borders in literature, authors initially help readers feel secure within their realm. Borders create a feeling that those within the border share a common cause or at least a cause sufficiently similar that those outside the border can all become the other. However, the border itself remains a place of tension and concern. Indeed, does not the border genre ultimately cause feelings of insecurity, as if existence is perpetually contingent and under threat?

We can see this exemplified in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, who writes about social tension and concerns related to liminality in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. She relates tales of her childhood, growing up on the Texas border with Mexico and the cultural and linguistic gymnastics she performed to function within her border society. She writes,

“*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you’re speaking the oppressor’s language by speaking English, you’re ruining your Spanish language,” I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos as deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally.

. . . Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language. (77)

She later lists the eight languages Chicanos speak of which Standard English and Standard Spanish are but two. To write in a language is to establish a border between who can access it and who cannot. By not giving Custance a language other than Latin with which to communicate, Chaucer forces those whom she encounters to learn her language or at least to have some passing ability to speak and understand it. This gives her control over the interactions she has with others. Her language becomes an extension

of her person and a border that people must cross in the process of receiving her message and becoming part of the Christian realm she represents in the tale.

For McCarthy's characters in *Blood Meridian*, the issue with language is not one of comprehending the words but the intent behind the words. The repetition of lines between characters signals confusion. However, Anzaldúa is able to understand the many tongues in her world and the subtexts that run beneath the words. She grasps what it means when someone chooses one language over another when she or he speaks.

Anzaldúa writes,

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language.

And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

(80)

Choosing to speak or write in English, Spanish, Chicano Spanish, or any other language is a political decision that opens a speaker or writer up to ridicule or praise depending on his or her audience. The simple choice of language creates tension as much as any other border. It signals membership or "otherness" between the sender and receiver of the message. Anzaldúa is signaling her membership and her "otherness" throughout *Borderland/La Frontera*, and her audience has received her signal in surprising places.

An author whose writing crosses borders despite linguistic barriers, Anzaldúa's writing enjoys an international audience and is particularly appealing to others who inhabit borderlands. Grażyna Zygałło finds Anzaldúa relevant to her situation in Poland because after Germany reunified in 1990, "the Polish-German border became a territory

similar to the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, at least in the economic sense with industry and money in the West and cheap labor and services in the East, and with a distinct border identity” (30). Similarly, Ewa Majewska, musing about her affiliation with Anzaldúa’s writing, states, “immediate association of the borderlands between the United States and Mexico with the borderlands between Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus, and my effort to comparatively analyze them, might seem quite surprising at the beginning, yet it was the first that I had after reading Anzaldúa” (35). Much like the border between Mexico and the United States, the border between Eastern and Western Europe has shifted many times in the past few centuries due to politics and war, frequently leaving the inhabitants of the regions overnight foreigners in their own homes. These regions become sites where the newly incorporated others are objectified and abjectified. Majewska writes, “Poland’s eastern border became famous as a site for trafficking human beings, especially women, into prostitution, and later for the nearby deportation camps. This trafficking meant that it was in private homes, gardens, or brothels in Poland where people from the former Soviet Union were and are exploited and abused” (35-36). This situation exists in *Blood Meridian* and is nearly Custance’s fate on the Spanish coast in “The Man of Law’s Tale.”

The relevancy of borders and border crossing seeps from the political realm into the literary imagination. Issues of heritage, faith, culture, and language prevent indigenous populations from welcoming immigrants and refugees to their countries. Border and port of entry security is becoming increasingly strict and modern day Great Walls are being erected to keep the hordes at bay in Europe and the Americas. Consequently, the border genre is as relevant to readers today as it was a millenium ago.

Choosing a place and time in which to set a story establishes a boundary between who can relate readily to the story and who cannot. It marks a border between that chronotope and all other possible chronotopes, even those of the same time or of the same space. Writing is an act of violence that cuts out and eliminates other possibilities. Editing kills characters, moves places across time, and separates other times from a space. A tale is when and where it is; it is nowhere and nowhen else.

To remove a border tale from its chronotope is to tell another tale. *Beowulf* is a story that has been reworked by modern authors—Susan Morrison and John Gardner—who tell the story from the points of view of Grendel’s mother and Grendel. These stories move beyond the chronotope of the original by shifting the focus away from the borders defined by Hrothgar and Beowulf and remapping those same borders from the revisionists’ protagonists’ viewpoints.

Moving a tale away from the border displaces or alters its tension and drama in fundamental ways. Soldiers and missionaries seem out of place on the streets of a city tale in much the same way factory workers and chefs seem out of place in a border story. Changing the types of characters changes their functions in the story—a veteran may be at home in a city tale, a former chef may become a border story pioneer. Border stories have characters whose past is suspect or unknown, like Beowulf, Custance, and the judge. Tales within the border genre rarely look back without trying to predict or warn about what lies ahead, as the interlaced portions of *Beowulf* do.

The border genre remains vibrant because borders are inherently exciting, often threatening, places. They are spaces uniquely bound to time and defined by what they separate—nations, cultures, faiths, language groups. As long as humans define

themselves by what they are not, the liminal region between “self” and “not self,” between friend and foe, between neighbor and invader will remain a contested place in poetry and prose, as much as in politics.

WORKS CITED

- Adelman, Gary. *Sorrow's Rigging: The Novels of Cormac McCarthy, Don DeLillo, and Robert Stone*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University P, 2012. Print.
- Andersson, Theodore M.. "The Thief in *Beowulf*." *Speculum* 59.3 (1984): 493–508. Web. 27 Nov. 2015.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 2012. Print.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: U of Texas, 1981. 84-258. Print.
- Bede, and D.H. Farmer. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Trans. Leo Sherley Price. Ed. Farmer. London: Penguin, 1990. Print.
- Bell, Vereen. "The Ambiguous Nihilism of Cormac McCarthy." *The Southern Literary Journal* 15.2 (1983): 31-41. *JSTOR*. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.
- . "Between the Wish and the Thin the World Lies Waiting." *The Southern Review*. 28.4 (1992): 920-927. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.
- Beowulf*. Trans. R. M. Liuzza. 2nd ed. Peterborough: Broadview. 2013. Print.
- Busby, Mark. "Rolling the Stone, Sisyphus, and the Epilogue of *Blood Meridian*." *Southwestern American Literature* 36.3 (2011): 87-95. *Literary Reference Center*. Web. 29 Oct. 2014.

- Caie, Graham D. "Innocent III'S 'De miseria' as a Gloss on 'The Man of Law's Prologue' and 'Tale'." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 1999: 175. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.
- Cardullo, Robert. "The Avant-Garde and the Unamerican: Experimental Theatre and Drama from Europe to the United States after World War II." *Studies In Theatre & Performance* 33.1 (2013): 39-50. *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text*. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry Benson. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Claviez, Thomas. "Done and Over With—Finally? Otherness, Metonymy, and the Ethics of Comparison." *PMLA* 128.3 (2013): 608-614. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 29 Jul. 2015.
- Cooper, Christine F. "'But algates therby was she understonde': Translating Custance in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 2006: 27. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 4 Mar. 2016.
- Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University-San Marcos.
- Creswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004. Print.
- Damon, John Edward. "Desecto Capite Perfido: Bodily Fragmentation and Reciprocal Violence in Anglo-Saxon England." *Exemplaria* 13.2 (2001): 399-432. *Literary Reference Center*. Web. 4 Dec. 2014.
- Davis, Craig R. "Cultural Historicity in The Battle of Maldon." *Philological Quarterly* (1999): 151. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 01 Oct. 2015.

- Demastes, William. *Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism, into Orderly Disorder*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University P, 1998. Print.
- Dugas, Don-John. "The Legitimization of Royal Power in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'." *Modern Philology* 1997: 27. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.
- Ellis, Jay. *No Place for Home: Spatial Constraints and Character Flight in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2004. Print.
- Evenson, Brian. "McCarthy and the Uses of Philosophy in the Tennessee Novels." *The Cambridge Companion to Cormac McCarthy*. Ed. Steven Frye. Cambridge: Cambridge University P, 2013. 54-64. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage. 1995. Print.
- . "Truth and Juridical Forms." Trans. Lawrence Williams. *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 2.3 (1996): 327-42. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.
- "Genesis B." *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. Trans. & Ed. S. A. J. Bradley. North Clarendon: Tuttle, 1982. 19-35. Print.
- Gneuss, Helmut. "Battle Of Maldon 89: Byrthnoð's Ofermod Once Again." *Studies In Philology* 73.(1976): 117-137. *Humanities Source*. Web. 01 Oct. 2015.
- Halbrooks, John. "Byrhtnoth's Great-Hearted Mirth, Or Praise And Blame In *The Battle Of Maldon*." *Philological Quarterly* 82.3 (2003): 235-255. *Humanities Source*. Web. 01 Oct. 2015.

- Haney, William S. II. "Beckett Out of his Mind: The Theatre of the Absurd." *Studies In The Literary Imagination* 34.2 (2001): 39-53. *OmniFile Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Hawkins, Gay. *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. Print.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*. Trans. Heaney. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002. Print.
- Heller, Joseph, and Christopher Buckley. *Catch-22: 50th Anniversary Edition*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011. Print.
- Hendrix, Laurel L. "Pennance Profytable": The Currency Of Custance In Chaucer's Man Of Law's Tale." *Exemplaria* 6.1 (1994): 141-166. *Poetry & Short Story Reference Center*. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.
- Hirsch, Samuel. "Theatre of the Absurd (Made in America)." *Journal of Social Issues* 20.1 (1964): 49-61. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Hume, Kathryn. "Theme And Structure Of Beowulf." *Studies In Philology* 72.(1975): 1-27. *Humanities Source*. Web. 27 Nov. 2015.
- "Isaiah." *New American Bible, Revised Edition*. Ed. Louis F. Hartman, Patrick W. Skehan, and Stephen J. Hartdegen. Charlotte: Saint Benedict Press, 2008. 951-1034. Print.
- "Judith." *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. Trans. and Ed. Bradley. North Clarendon: 1995. Print.
- Kolve, V. A. "The Rudderless Ship and the Sea." *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1984. 297-358. Print.

- Levinas, Emmanuel. *On Escape: De l'évasion*. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford U P, 2003. Print.
- Liggins, Elizabeth M. "Revenge and Reward as Recurrent Motives in *Beowulf*." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74.2 (1973): 193–213. Web. 27 Nov. 2015.
- Lynch, Kathryn L.. "Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale"". *The Chaucer Review* 33.4 (1999): 409–422. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 4 Mar. 2016.
- Magennis, Hugh. "Treatments of Treachery and Betrayal in Anglo-Saxon Texts." *English Studies* 76.1 (1995): 1. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 Nov. 2015.
- Majewska, Ewa. "La Mestiza From Ukraine? Border Crossing With Gloria Anzaldúa." *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture & Society* 37.1 (2011): 34-41. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 12 Mar. 2016.
- "Mark." *New American Bible, Revised Edition*. Eds. Myles M. Bourke, Francis T. Gignac, Stephen J. Hartdegen, and John H. Reumann. Charlotte: Saint Benedict Press, 2008. 1355-82. Print.
- Martinez, Carlos. *Beyond Postmodern Acquiescence: Cormac McCarthy and the American Absurd*. Diss. Brandeis U, 2012. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2012. Print.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West*. New York: Vintage. 1992. Print.
- McGregor, Francine. "Abstraction and Particularity in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 2011: 60. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.

- Metzler, Irina. "Disability in the Middle Ages: Impairment at the Intersection of Historical Inquiry and Disability Studies." *History Compass* 9 (2011): 45-60. Web. 21 Nov. 2014.
- Modreanu, Simona. "A Different Approach to the "Theater Of The Absurd" With Special Reference to Eugene Ionesco." *Cultura: International Journal Of Philosophy Of Culture & Axiology* 8.1 (2011): 171-86. *Humanities Source*. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Morrison, Susan Signe. *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetics*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. Print.
- Moslund, Sten. "The Presencing of Place in Literature: Toward an Embodied Topopoetic Mode of Reading." Tally, Robert T., Jr., ed. *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. 29-43. Print.
- Mundik, Petra. "'Striking the Fire Out of the Rock': Gnostic Theology in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*." *South Central Review* 26.3 (2009): 72-97. *Project Muse*. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- . "Diverging Equity: The Nature of Existence in *All the Pretty Horses*." *Southwestern American Literature* 2 (2010): 9-37. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 29 Oct. 2014.
- Prather, William. "Absurd Reasoning in an Existential World: A Consideration of Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*." *Sacred Violence*. Eds. Wade Hall and Rick Wallach. El Paso: Texas Western P, 2002. 139-51. Print.
- Richard the Lion-Hearted and Other Medieval English Romances*. Trans. and Ed. Bradford Broughton. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966. Print.

- Scanlan, John. *On Garbage*. London: Reaction Books Ltd., 2005. Print.
- Schibanoff, Susan. "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, And Heresy In Chaucer's Man Of Law's Tale." *Exemplaria* 8.1 (1996): 59. *Supplemental Index*. Web. 4 Mar. 2016.
- Schimpf, Shane. *A Reader's Guide to Blood Meridian*. Comp. and Ed. Schimpf. Gainesboro: BonMot Publishing, 2006. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. (*Arden Shakespeare: Third Series*). *Hamlet*. Eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Methuen & Co., 2006. Print.
- Sleasman, Brent C. "Albert Camus and the Metaphor of Absurdity." *Critical Insights: Albert Camus* (2011): 48-66. *Literary Reference Center*. Web. 29 Oct. 2014.
- Swanton, Michael. "Wonders of the East." *Anglo-Saxon Prose*. Trans. and Ed. Swanton. London: Phoenix, 1993. Print.
- Tally, Robert T., Jr. *Spatiality*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- "The Battle of Maldon." *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. Trans. & Ed. S. A. J. Bradley. North Clarendon: Tuttle, 1982. 518-28. Print.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son." *The Tolkien Reader*. New York: Ballantine, 1966. 3-24. Print.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2008. Print.
- Uebel, Michael. *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Print.
- Vickrey, John F.. "'Egesan Ne Gymed" and the Crime of Heremod." *Modern Philology* 71.3 (1974): 295-300. Web. 27 Nov. 2015.

- Waldmeir, Joseph. "Two Novelists of the Absurd: Heller and Kesey." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*. 5.3 (1964): 192-204. *JSTOR*. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.
- Westphal, Bertrand. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Trans. Robert T. Tally Jr. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. Print.
- Zygadło, Grażyna. "Where The Third World Grates Against The First": Teaching Gloria Anzaldúa From A Polish Perspective." *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture & Society* 37.1 (2011): 29-34. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 12 Mar. 2016.