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Barbora Kubalová

M.A. thesis evaluation

The Role of Violence in *Blood Meridian* and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy

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In this thesis, Ms. Kubalova argues that violence has always been conspicuously present in the American nation, its culture and literature. Considering the immoderate abundance of violence in the current entertainment industry, she suggests, it would seem natural for the emotions to be dulled and unable to process any abhorrent excess of violence; the reactions that both *Blood Meridian* and *The Road* by the American author Cormac McCarthy have gathered are thus all the more surprising. Face to face with the novels' unspeakable evil, Ms. Kubalova says, many readers do recoil in horror, and the pervasive violence of McCarthy's writings has provoked a wide range of critical perception. The novels may differ significantly in their settings—the Borderlands of the 19th century in *Blood Meridian* contrast strongly with the post-apocalyptic future of *The Road*—but, according to Ms. Kubalova, the apparent gulf between both groups of characters and, mainly, between them and the reader is only another ruse of McCarthy's scheme, whereby he unveils uncomfortable truths about humankind. Although McCarthy's meticulous study of sources might support the inevitability, even a penchant for bloodshed and carnage, in specific conditions, Ms. Kubalova maintains it would be erroneous to conclude that it is a simple anomaly. The hostility in the novels should not be understood as a feature of a particular region or nation, but as an example of a subconscious cultural mechanism. By thorough depersonalization, Ms. Kubalova concludes, McCarthy makes the characters mere representatives of characteristics typical for all humankind. However, she concedes, to the great surprise of many readers and critics, even in the work of an author renowned for his bloodcurdling scenes, it is possible to find a spark of hope. That point, Ms. Kubalova asserts, testifies to one of the most representative features of McCarthy's *oeuvre*, for it is impossible to find an unshakeable and clearly demarcated system in the works which exceed every possible limitation.

My problems with this thesis in many cases owe as much to McCarthy as to Ms. Kubalova. In my judgment, the works she is analyzing do not get to—and consequently distract Ms. Kubalova's and other readers' attention from, structural/functional psychological processes at the core of American violence, mental and verbal, as well as physical. These processes are based not primarily in any intrinsic evil, but in the constant (post-Protestant) self-scrutiny and self-questioning characteristic of American cultural and personal dynamics. This is McCarthy's oversight or overinterpretation, but Ms. Kubalova, understandably, doesn't appear to register that. Fascinated, seduced, like so many readers, by the aesthetic pyrotechnics, she doesn't ever really step back to ask whether the mythic portraiture works on a psychological, cultural, behavioral level.

There are too many details, as well as too much language, in *Blood Meridian* to make psychological sense of the characters; not enough in *The Road*. Childlike quality in *Blood Meridian* opens to evil; in *The Road*, to good. If there are "good guys" in either of the two works, who or where are they, and on what ground do they, can they, stand? Earth and nature are frequently presented in mythologized form, represented as beyond human control or understanding, when they might equally well be approached as anthropomorphized constructions, the nature of which depends on how, and to what extent, they are "moralized"

based on human value judgments. These are issues that Ms. Kubalova chooses not to take up, and of which her analysis shows little awareness--which is not necessarily a bad thing, since it is often the most prudent approach for critics to follow the artist where s/he leads.

With the preceding caveat, Ms. Kubalova's textual analysis is generally of an impressive, if prudent, quality. She has some linguistic problems with English, particularly as regards articles, at least some of which have been ameliorated through my intense copy-editing attention. Despite my best efforts, and Ms. Kubalova's, certain unclarities remain in the exposition of her textual and structural analysis, whether from linguistic or from conceptual shortcomings I cannot always reliably ascertain. Her English vocabulary is extraordinary, but she seems to have only a qualified sense of how the language, like the culture, functions as an everyday instrument.

Overall, however, this is, in my view, an insightful and competently-researched master's thesis which, I believe, merits an evaluation of between "1, vyborne" and "1.5."

Thesis evaluation: Between "1, vyborne and 1.5."

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.