

# PHILOLOGIA

Vol. X

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**Title: Tarot in Blood Meridian**

Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* tracks a young man known only as "the kid" through the lawless US-Mexico borderlands in the mid-1800s. The kid, either seeking adventure or seeking pure violence, joined a gang of scalp hunters known as the Glanton gang. Among this brutal coterie were John Glanton, Captain White, Toadvine, two men both named John Jackson, Tobin, the ex-priest, and Judge Holden. The judge, an enormous, hairless man, was a polyglot, a draftsman, a man of incredible knowledge among the uneducated villains. He reproduced everything he saw in a sketchbook before promptly destroying the very thing he drew—be it plant, stone, or animal. The judge practiced a sort of devout nihilism into which he tried to fold the resisting kid. The Tarot cards referred to in the novel allowed the reader to glean meaning from the story, just as the cards allow diviners to glean meaning from the real world. The cards that I will be exploring are the Fool, the Four of Cups, the Chariot, the High Priestess, the Four of Wands, the Hanged Man, the Devil, the Hermit, the Hierophant, Judgment, and Death. While the judge's philosophy was laid out in his monologues, the taciturn kid's beliefs must be read through the cards. In applying the symbols of the cards, I propose a reading of the novel in which the judge evangelized a dehumanizing dogma of nihilism while the kid holds out for a more positive philosophy that will give his life meaning.

## THE ANATOMY OF THE DECK

There are 78 Tarot cards: 56 Minor Arcana, 22 Major. Diviners arranged the cards face-down called a spread; each placement represented a different aspect of the question. Perhaps one asked the mystic about one's love life. The diviner, then, arranges the cards and flips them over in a predetermined order. The first might represent the person in question; the second, the person in question's immediate future, distant future, distant past, and so on. Different cards yield different meanings, some of which I will go through individually. The Minor Arcana are in four suits: cups, pentacles, swords, and wands. Cups generally represent emotion and relationships; pentacles, material, possessions, swords, intellect and rationality; wands, energy and spirituality. Elementally, cups correspond with water, pentacles with earth, swords with air, and wands with fire. For each suit of the Minor Arcana, there is a page, a knight, a king, a queen, an ace, and numbers two through ten (e.g. the King of Cups, the nine of Swords). The Major Arcana are grand symbols such as the Tower of Destruction and the Moon. For divination purposes, each card has a different meaning, and when the card is inverted (drawn upside-down), this meaning changes—usually to something negative. In a Tarot reading, one might ask a single question, draw a card (or several), interpret it, and, if its meaning is obscure, the person in question might, then, draw another clarifying card.

I will include pictures from the Waite-Smith Tarot deck. Although this deck was published after the novel's setting, it has been very influential on modern interpretations of the Tarot. I will provide a picture of each card, give an explanation of its meaning, and describe its appearance in the text.

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## THE CARDS THEMSELVES

### The Fool

The Fool is looking not at the cliff falling off directly in front of him, but off into the sky. His dog nips at his heels, some say in warning (Nichols, 24). The Fool acts by intuition rather than rationality: “The Fool’s spontaneous approach to life combines wisdom, madness, and folly. When he mixes these ingredients in the right proportions, the results are miraculous, but when the mixture curdles, everything ends up in a sticky mess” (Nichols, 24). When reversed, the Fool is interpreted to mean that the drawer is either too cautious or too reckless (Greer, 41).

While on their trek through the desert in search of scalps, the Glanton gang was briefly joined by a family of circus performers. While camping together, the matriarch reads her Tarot cards to tell the fortunes of the gang. Jackson, the first man to draw, picked this card which “bore the picture of a fool in harlequin and a cat” and was called “el tonto” (McCarthy, 97). Readers are not told what exactly the woman begins to chant, but the judge interprets her as saying: “in your fortune lie our fortunes all” (97).

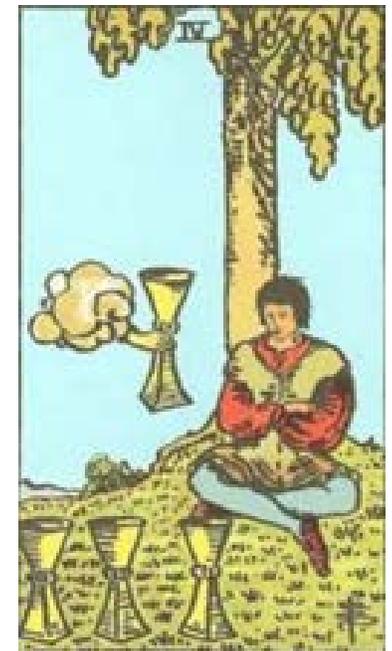


### The Four of Cups

The Four of Cups suggests a “divided heart” and is “generally associated with mercy” (Sepich, 107). This comes from the Kabbalistic interpretation of the Tarot which connects fours of all suits with ‘chesed,’ which translates to ‘mercy’ (Sepich, 106).

In the Waite-Smith illustration, viewers are shown a man sitting meditatively under a tree ignoring the gift of an additional cup. One interpretation is the man was being tempted by this offering. Often, he is interpreted as ignoring the gifts of the world and taking them for granted (Greer, 124). This card is also associated with daydreaming on things that are not there yet ignoring that which is (Greer, 124). Inverted, this card represents a “lack of devotion” (Bradford, 21). It also represents boredom, restlessness, and a need to move on (Greer, 125).

The Four of Cups is the only card in the novel that appeared twice. The first time was when the kid and Sproule encountered an empty, burned village,



just before they discovered the heap of corpses in the local church. In one house, they found: “Illustrations cut from an old journal and pasted to the wall, a small picture of a queen, a gypsy card that was the four of cups” (McCarthy, 63). At the reading, the kid drew the Four of Cups: “He’d not seen such cards before, yet the one he held seemed familiar to him. He turned it upside down and regarded it and he turned it back” (McCarthy, 97). The Four of Cups is also the first explicitly inverted card in the novel.

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## The Chariot

The Chariot was the novel's second inverted card. The Chariot referred not to the driver, but to the vehicle that bore him. The prevailing interpretation is fate or the power of the human will. It is also associated with hubris (Nichols, 145). Inverted, the Chariot illustrated recklessness, the lack of self-control, surges of power, and disregard for the effects of your pursuits on others (Greer, 58).

After Glanton, the leader of the gang, draws the Chariot, the beldam began chanting. The chanting angered Glanton so much that he drew out his gun. Glanton's anger was illustrative of the rashness represented in the card. "La carroza, la carroza, cried the beldam. Invertido. Carta de Guerra, de venganza. La vi sin ruedas sobre un rio oscuro..." (McCarthy, 100). This quote was a clear representation of the Chariot inverted: it has no wheels, no way of controlling it. "Wheel" may also refer to another card, the Wheel of Fortune, which does not represent luck so much as it does with fate (Greer, 64). Not even fate guides the wild journey of the Glanton gang.



## The Devil

The judge was a devil-like character—a brilliant dancer, fiddler, a powerful being and tempter. The Devil, of course, was a figure that was not specific to Tarot. Later in the paper, I will discuss the judge and the Devil in more detail, but here I will merely outline what the Devil represents in the cards. The Devil represented lies, fear, cruel use of power, domination, and addiction (Greer, 77). The "shadow" aspects are on display in the Devil—these are parts of oneself that one does not wish to associate with or even confront (Greer, 78).



## The Hermit

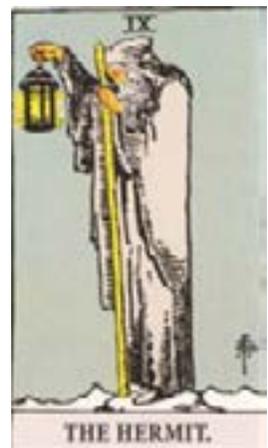
The kid met a hermit early on in the novel. The man was kind enough, opening up his home to the kid, but, ultimately, he was revealed as a deviant: he proudly owned a black, shriveled human heart and the kid woke up in the middle of the night to the disheveled man bowed over him.

The Hermit lived by his lamp, the golden thing that he had discovered. He was a solitary figure, unlike the Hierophant, and so subverts establishment spirituality:

His lamp seems an apt symbol for the individual insight of the mystic. Whereas the Pope's chief emphasis lies in religious experience under conditions prescribed by the Church, the Hermit offers us the possibility of individual illumination as a universal human potential, an experience not confined to canonized saints. (Nichols, 166)

The Hermit could represent the spiritual pining that many people go through in life—looking for wisdom greater than themselves in others (Nichols, 168).

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## Judgment

This is a card with religious imagery. An angel blew his trumpet and the dead risen from their graves, an illustration of the Bible's account of Judgment day: 1 Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Compare also to Revelation 20:13: "Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done."

In Tarot, Judgment could represent the crossroads at which great transformations were necessary (Greer, 90). Additionally: "when projected onto others, you may see them as trying to influence people through the force of their personality or propaganda" (Greer, 92). The judge certainly has a powerful personality, and he aimed to influence what he judges (perhaps those things he writes in his book), through destruction or otherwise.



## THE KID AND THE FOUR CUPS: DIVIDED HEART AND FALSE PROPHETS

Readers felt sorry for the kid the moment readers were introduced to him. His dad was a drunk, his mother was dead, and he seemed sort of neglected, wearing his "thin and ragged linen shirt" (McCarthy, 3). He ran away and readers were not surprised, although his thoughts were rarely made known. The judge and Tobin had long monologues in which the kid responded with little more than "I know" and "Yeah." However, his drawing of the Four of Cups and the way that it "seemed familiar to him" (McCarthy, 99) gave readers some insight (which I will shortly explain by analyzing the meaning of the card) into his heart beyond which readers were explicitly told about him.

The Four of Cups could be associated with mercy, a divided heart (Sepich, 107), or even a "lack of devotion" (Greer, 21). The kid, after he ran away, looked for a surrogate family, something to fill the lack of nurture he received from his own family. He found a Hermit, Captain White, and Glanton and his gang, all while avoiding the judge. His desire to find something greater than himself to cling to divided his heart between the pursuit of belonging and the judge's spiritual nihilism.

At the outset of the novel, the kid encountered the hermit: "Solitary, half mad, his eyes redrimmed as if locked in their cages with hot wires. But a ponderable body for that" (McCarthy, 17). The hermit gave the kid a place to sleep for the night, water to drink and a fire to sit by. Despite his "ponderable body"—the acuity that readers are led to believe the hermit might possess—readers were soon shown that solitude does not produce a person that one aspires to be nor one with something valuable to teach others. When the kid asked where he could get some water, the hermit told him to follow the path outside. The kid protested that it is too dark, but the hermit rebutted: "It's a deep path. Foller ye feet. Foller ye mule. I caint go" (McCarthy, 17). The kid, embodying elements of the Fool on his journey, was encouraged to follow his intuition and his animal instinct, but the Hermit was no such character. He clung to the shelter that he had managed to establish. The Hermit shrugged off the wise-old-man archetype and admitted to certain limitations despite having the wisdom of survival. The novel's hermit kept a blackened human heart with him in his home, which showed readers just how removed from the rest of the world one can become when one chooses a cloistered life—the closest he came to human

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understanding was the feeling of a dried heart in his palm. In the night that he spent in the hermit's cave, the kid "woke sometime in the night with the hut in almost total darkness and the hermit bent over him and all but in his bed" (McCarthy, 21). Hermits and monks have a sort of wisdom attached to them—many people seek them out for spiritual guidance. This hermit is no such source.

Captain White is the kid's next false leader. White has had previous followers with almost cult-like zeal, such as the man who recruited the kid, telling him: "If I'd not run up on Captain White I don't know where I'd be this day. I was a sorrier sight even than what you are and he come along and raised me up like Lazarus. Set my feet on the path of righteousness" (McCarthy, 32). The man was comparing Captain White to a sort of powerful religious figure exactly the sort that gained an undeserved following. It does not take long for the kid to realize that he has walked with yet another false prophet. After a battle between the Native American army and Captain White's battalion, the kid sees Captain White's head in a jar. The kid remarked, "Somebody ought to have pickled [White's head] a long time ago. By rights they ought to pickle mine. For ever takin up with such a fool" (McCarthy, 74). In hindsight, the kid recognized the hollowness of White's command. He specifically used the word "fool," which occurs frequently within the novel and was interpreted as many instantiations of the Fool card in Tarot. This particular use likely referred to the Fool's recklessness and his ignorance of the path ahead, emphasized by Captain White's willingness to lead others to their deaths.

The taciturn kid does not seem particularly moved by John Glanton. It was the kid's ally Toadvine who put them in Glanton's service. It was not out of reverence for the man, but out of a desire to avoid prison. There were no tender moments between Glanton and the kid. However, in a conversation with the judge, the kid defended his former leader. In their last conversation as members of the Glanton gang, the judge asks the kid: "Do you think Glanton was a fool? Dont you know he'd have killed you?" (McCarthy 319). Here the Fool reappeared, again compared to perceived leaders. The judge's question seemed to imply that Glanton was not a fool. Perhaps the judge's question was meant to show the kid that Glanton was ignorant to the danger of their trade and the recklessness with which their inverted chariot rode. The kid defended the man saying: "He never took part in your craziness" (McCarthy, 320). It seems that the kid wanted to remember his leader well, but the judge rightly revealed Glanton to be another false one. Within the Glanton gang, the kid also looked to Tobin the ex-priest for guidance. When the judge turned on the kid and Tobin, they joined forces to escape from the judge. At one point, Tobin told the kid to go on without him, but the kid refused to abandon the ex-priest. Tobin apparently had no qualms about abandoning the kid, which the latter learned when he woke up in a jail cell alone. The judge, sitting on the other side of the bars, asked him this: "What joins men together, he said, is not the sharing of bread but the sharing of enemies. But if I was your enemy with whom would you have shared me? With whom? The priest? Where is he now?" (McCarthy, 319). Damningly, the judge pointed out Tobin's desertion, but not before making reference to the fact that the kid desired someone to align with. The judge suggested that the kid would not make enemies without allies and that even alliances come from animosities.

In the aftermath of the Glanton gang dispersal, the kid wandered alone for 29 years. It was in this time that readers saw his last attempt to find someone to connect with—an elderly hispanic woman who was, like the kid, completely alone. It was a surprisingly sentimental scene for one so reserved:

He made his way among the corpses and stood before her. [The lone woman] was very old and her face was gray and leathery and sand had collected in the folds of her clothing. She did not look up. The shawl that covered her head was much faded of its color yet it bore like a patent woven into the fabric the figures of stars and quartermoons and other insignia of a provenance unknown to him. He

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spoke to her in a low voice he told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her country people who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die. (McCarthy 328)

Not only did the kid, in a seemingly uncharacteristic act of charity, tried to help the old woman, he told her that he would take her to be with her people. He admitted to her that he was not even close to his country in which he had no family. The moment he found another lone person, he immediately bonded with them, looking desperately for a human connection in this world. Most tellingly, reader were told his exact words to her: “Abuelita, he said. No puedes escucharme?” (McCarthy, 328). The kid has added a diminutive to the Spanish word for grandmother: “Abuela.” He was using the informal “tu” with her. This type of language would only be appropriate if one were talking to one’s own grandmother. Calling her “Grandmother,” might have evoked the drama of encountering Mother Earth, but instead, it more closely resembles calling one’s middle-school teacher “Mom” by accident or referring to a stranger as “Gramm-Gramm.” This scene demonstrates the kid’s desperation to find someone in this world to connect to. Yet, human connection has once again been pulled from under him when the woman turned out to be a corpse: “She was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years” (McCarthy, 328).

## THE JUDGE’S SPIRITUAL NIHILISM AND THE KID AS HERETIC

If the kid was so lonely, why doesn’t he turn to the judge? The judge seemed to have some fixation on him. The judge tempted the kid with payment for his pistol like the Devil in the desert; he visited him in jail; and he finally enfolded him in some awful embrace. The judge also seemed to understand the kid’s yearning, telling him: “Don’t look away. We are not speaking in mysteries. You of all men are no stranger to that feeling, the emptiness and the despair. It is that which we take arms against, is it not?” (McCarthy, 343). While the judge was taking arms, the kid was looking for someone to follow. It was in part this apparent lack of mystery that the kid rebelled against. The judge espoused this sort of positive nihilism—rather than there not being anything, there is nothing. In the same way that one might criticize the watchmaker argument and other theories of intelligent design for showing a lack of faith in the power of randomness and void, so did the judge insists that believing in nothing was different than not believing in anything. Unprovoked, he told the Glanton gang at fire one evening: “Your heart’s desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery” (McCarthy, 263). The shocking revelation of the judge’s world was not that there was some great unseen power, but that insufficient power has been attributed to what was seen. Another spiritual statement by the judge came from his speech on the nobility of war: “War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god” (McCarthy, 261). The judge, like the kid, saw divinity in the “unity of existence.” The kid searched for a place to belong while the judge surveyed land to conquer—both set out with the intention of discovering some sort of harmony. The judge’s evidence was the word of god, delivered through: “stones and trees, the bones of things” (McCarthy, 123). Perhaps these bones include the skull of the novel’s epigraph—the scalped head of a hominid. The judge seemed aware of this or other evidence for ancient violence, as he ominously put it: “War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner” (McCarthy, 259). “War gods” had been replaced in the west by “personal saviors,” so this notion might be unattractive to readers: all one has was what one can observe and one’s inescapable observation was that one

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was part of an enduringly violent species. The kid, readers know, was inclined towards mindless violence; yet he repeatedly rejected the judge and the judge found himself wanting.

The judge accused the kid of not being fully committed to the Glanton gang, an accusation well-illustrated by analyzing the judge as Tarot's Judgment and the kid as the Four of Cups. The judge told the kid that there was a "flawed place in the fabric of [his] heart" (McCarthy, 312), which was reminiscent of the "divided heart" sentiment of the Four of Cups. The judge went on to call the kid "mutinous" and claimed that: "You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen" (McCarthy, 312). "Clemency" is "mercy [or] leniency" especially as it is "shown in the exercise of authority or power" (OED). The kid had some amount of power, which might amount to no more than his free will: his ability to choose not to shoot the judge, to help a man dig an arrow out of his leg, and even to hold back a part of himself and not fully participate in the exploits of the Glanton gang. The kid's actions were in keeping with the judge's own vision of himself as suzerain. The kid was able to maintain some amount of autonomy under the judge, who, acting as suzerain: "rules even when there are other rulers. His authority countermands local judgments" (McCarthy 207). However, by showing "clemency for the heathen," the kid's belief in mercy went against the religious order established in the judge's kingdom. As in many civilizations, this subversion of religious principles resulted in the persecution of the kept by the keeper. It might seem as though "heathen" refers to the Native Americans, as they were frequently referred to as such. However, it is clear that two major tenets of the judge's religious understanding were: there was no great mystery, and war was god. The kid himself was the heathen, and he has clemency for the part of his divided heart that continued to yearn for that mystery greater than himself and a sense of belonging. When the judge visited the kid in prison, he said to the kid: "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 into the common and one did not" (McCarthy, 319). The kid did not give everything over to the Glanton gang because he was looking for a group to belong to, not the judge's devotion to war as an observable fact of life.

## THE JUDGE AS JUDGMENT: RELIGIOUS IMAGERY IN HIS BATTLE WITH MERCY

The Tarot's Judgment depicted a scene from Revelation in which the dead were resurrected by the blowing of the archangel's trumpet. This card was often seen to represent triumph over death and higher consciousness (Place, 211), the former of which might explain why the narrator told readers thrice at the close of the novel that the judge "says that he will never die" (McCarthy, 348). Judgment and Judgment Day were repeatedly referred to in the Book of Revelation. The judge's book in which he attempted to record things before destroying them reminded one of the book of life by which humanity will be judged:

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This was the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:13-15

The Judgment card of the Tarot depicted this moment of resurrection and triumph over death, but readers knew that soon after, judgment would be cast, and those whom the judge has not approved for autonomy would be killed. The judge's favorite game was also present in the New Testament's final book: "war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" (Revelation 7:7). The dragon (the Devil) lost this war and was

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sent to earth. After a stint on earth, he himself was sent to the lake of fire with “the false prophet” (Revelation 20:10), reemphasizing the presence of fraudulent and hollowed sources of meaning and malevolent deceivers. The judgment that the judge put onto the kid was also present in this apocalyptic book. In one of the letters of Revelation that the narrator was given to send to the 12 churches, it was written: “because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16). In this same way, the judge deemed the kid “lukewarm” —the kid is “not partisan” (McCarthy, 312). The judge attempted to evangelize to the kid of the divinity of war, but the kid clung to something more beautiful and finished the novel “against [the judge’s] immense and terrible flesh” (McCarthy, 347). The judge judged other people as well. When recording things in his book, the judge did not worry if people refused to be put into it, saying: “Whether in my book or not, every man is tabernacle in every other and he in exchange and so on in an endless complexity of being and witness to the uttermost edge of the world” (McCarthy, 147). The judge knew enough about humanity to account for everyone, to judge everyone, and he thinks little of most people. His low opinion on humanity mirrored the way in which perpetrators of heinous violence often dehumanize the groups against which they acted. In order to frame this with Tarot, I will compare this to Judge Holden’s role as the Fool.

## SCIENCE AND VIOLENCE: THE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE FOOL

The Fool was often pictured with a dog or some other small pet at his heels; in *Blood Meridian*, the Fool in the card was accompanied by a cat. Some scholars compared the Fool’s relationship with his dog to a king’s relationship with his fool (Nichols, 24). The Fool has a wide range of characteristics—he could be seen as very wise in his lack of prejudice, or stupid and reckless in his blind pursuits. Thus, it was not difficult to imagine that the interchangeability of the roles of king, fool, and dog. In her article arguing that the judge best embodies the Fool, Stinson argued that the judge’s dual role as the fool and the king fulfilled his role as suzerain—ruler among and above other rulers (Stinson, 14). The judge ruled over the Glanton gang even while Glanton was the captain. For example, Glanton has great talent taming animals, but although he could make a mean dog follow him and he responded to the title of “jefe,” readers knew that the judge ultimately had the upper hand on Glanton due to their “secret commerce” and their “terrible covenant” (McCarthy, 132).

Instead of owning a dog, the judge owned a person. When the gang met a man who travelled with his mentally challenged twin brother, James Robert, the judge adopted James Robert and, as Stinson argued, James Robert assumed the role of the Fool’s dog (Stinson, 14). James Robert was mostly referred to as the imbecile and the idiot in readers’ earliest interactions with him, but was called a fool more often as the novel progresses. Keeping a man as a pet is a dehumanizing act. Towards the end of the novel, the gang takes shelter near a community of women who recognize this dehumanization and try to rectify it. They bathed James Robert, put him in a collared shirt and a wool suit, greased his hair, fed him candy, and kissed him goodnight. After this attempt to re-humanize him, James Robert returned to the water and almost drowns:

[the judge] stepped into the river and seized up the drowning idiot, snatching it aloft by the heels like a great midwife and slapping it on the back to let the water out. [...] he twisted the water from its hair and he gathered the naked and sobbing fool into his arms and carried it up into the camp and restored it among its fellows. (McCarthy, 270)

Though this might seem a sweet moment, the judge saved James Robert only to make him his personal pet.

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Someone gave James Robert alcohol and watched him dance by the fire. When the Native Americans raided the camp, they found the judge in bed with a young girl and James Robert present. James Robert followed the judge until he disappeared from the novel. The judge had no problem with treating others as though they were less than human; however, it was not merely his treatment of James Robert, but his outlook on humanity as a whole that was degrading.

During the final conversation between the kid and the judge, the latter picked apart a man across the bar. The judge criticized his lack of agency: “his life is so balked about by difficulty and become so altered of its intended architecture that he is little more than a walking hovel hardly fit to house the human spirit at all” (McCarthy, 343). The judge seemed to think this man’s existence was typical of humans, telling the kid to “Pick a man, any man” (McCarthy, 343), reaffirming his belief that every man is housed in every other. The inability of men to bend things outside themselves to their wills and realize their own destinies leads him, the judge, to devalue them. This sort of separation of oneself from inferior others had often been used to justify war and other acts of violence. Genocide Watch published a series of eight stages of genocide in 1988. The first three are classification establishing an “us and them,” symbolization naming these separate groups, and dehumanization denying the humanity of the other group. The judge was not targeting a group and calling them less than human, but rather placing himself as suzerain and judge over a species he deemed more or less insignificant on the whole. The fear of dehumanization is that: “perceiving particular groups or individuals as subhuman can form the basis for justifying social and oral exclusion” (Vasiljevic and Viki, 137). This process leaves the dehumanized population vulnerable to violence on the immeasurable scales of the genocides society had witnessed in society as well as in the world of *Blood Meridian*. Science, for many years, was concerned with defending this process of dehumanization. An “anthropologist” named William Edwards: “postulated a basic distinction of people who are tall with long heads versus those who are shorter and have round heads, which foreshadowed the dichotomy of ‘Nordics’ compared with lesser breeds. He also contended that the physical differences would correspond to mental ones” (Jahoda, 14). This was a project of phrenology, a debunked pseudoscience that sought to uncover human nature by measuring the shapes of skulls. The judge pursued a similar study with the cranium of James Robert’s brother: “The judge reached out and took hold of the man’s head in his hands and began to explore its contours” (McCarthy, 249). The judge was very curious about the fact that James Robert’s brother was not similarly afflicted. As a man of both science and violence, the judge sought figure the world in such a way that he was above those whom he judged, much in the same way that similar, historical scalp-hunters would have imagined the victims of the genocide to which they contributed.

## CONCLUSION

*Blood Meridian* was rife with Tarot cards and similar archetypes. Analyzing these cards has led me down several paths. I explored the divided heart of the kid—the way in which the divided heart that the judge accuses him of having is illumined by his connection to the Four of Cups. This analysis required delving into the judge’s religious beliefs, if they can be called so, and the kid’s conviction that there was more to be felt. I, then, compared the judge to the Judgment card and reemphasized this conflict between mercy and judgment played out by this paper’s focal characters. Finally, the judge resembled a perverted version of the Fool, one mixed with the Devil. The judge confidently strode along the edge of the cliff with his dehumanized pet James Robert in tow. The judge considered himself a man of science, a man with an airtight philosophy, and does not question himself as he dehumanized all mankind in order to justify obscene acts of violence. Just as McCarthy opened the novel

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with a quote recounting the discovery of evidence for a genocide thousands of years old, I will close this paper with a quote from Alan McGlashan, a pilot in the first World War and a psychiatrist in the second. It similarly illustrated the real world philosophy of war as a nihilistic philosophy written into human nature:

War is the punishment of man's disbelief in those forces within himself. It is the cruel reaffirmation of those powers which the ego can never command or subdue. And disastrous as the cost may be, something in the depths of man is mysteriously assuaged by this release of daemonic and destructive energies. There is a fierce satisfaction in living under the rule of the Early Gods. There is dignity in facing powers beyond us, and indifferent to us. To be blind to this, to fail to grasp its difficult meaning, is to let slip the golden Ariadne's thread that may lead man at last out of the stinking labyrinth of War. (36-7)

Not only does this beautifully capture McCarthy's style—with ancient indifferent gods and the veneration of war, but it also described the nature of the kid's divided heart. The kid rejected the judge why? He fought against his own nature and his inclination for violence in defense of the human spirit. The kid "fails to grasp its difficult meaning," and only fought harder against his own shadow as it manifested in the judge. Readers, like the kid, cognitively or even spiritually knew that humans have no need to partake in war and violence, but to dismiss them from human nature was to underestimate our capabilities to apply science and religion to justify cruelty of which all humans are capable. The judge used twisted logic to marry barbarity and moral reasoning; the kid struggled to oppose the judge's nihilism with a belief system that allowed for humans to be violent while still being deemed good by some undefined objective moral truth.

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