

**Revisiting The American Western And The
Thriller With Special Reference To Cormac
McCarthy And Stephen King**

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**By
Subhasis Chattopadhyay**

**Department of English
University of Calcutta**

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For
My Parents

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: reading the fiction of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King

When Oxford University Press launched its peer-reviewed quarterly journal *Literature and Theology* (1987 to the present) it not only extended Paul Tillich's (1886-1965) seminal conception of religion as a form of cultural practice in his *Theology of Culture* (1959), but also endorsed an innovative mode of literary exegesis, that of reading literary texts through the prism of theology. This thesis will approach the problematics of studying theology through literary praxes by following in Tillich's footsteps. Tillich begins by noticing how the textual register 'religion' disturbs both theologians and scientists. Speaking of religion causes "an almost schizophrenic split in our collective consciousness, a split which threatens our spiritual freedom by driving the contemporary mind into irrational and compulsive affirmations or negations of religion...we affirm the validity of our subject: religion as an aspect of the human spirit. But, in doing so, we take into consideration the criticisms [of both theologians and scientists] and the elements of truth in each of them" (Tillich *Theology of Culture* 3, 5).

For instance, David Jasper mentions in his *Literature and Theology as a Grammar of Assent* (2016) that "profound Christocentricity is found in the works of Blake and Milton, and [is] hinted at in the hermeneutical recoveries of Coleridge and Schleiermacher – the dark, hidden centres of our early conferences that were now dissolving into something finally more sadly pathetic rather than tragic, an apocalypse from which there was no resurrection and a tone born out of a world of ruins" (Jasper 98). This 'Christocentric' approach is now frequently deployed in literary criticism. Mark Bosco in his *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination* (2005) writes of the rise of theology within literary studies: "Much has been written about Greene's relationship to his Catholic faith and its privileged place within his texts, especially in the criticism prevalent during the heyday of the Catholic literary revival of the first half of the twentieth century. Greene's cycle of novels, beginning with *Brighton Rock* in 1938 and concluding with *The End of the Affair* in 1951, stands as the gold standard of what is often referred to as the 'Catholic novel' in English literature. The commentary surrounding these novels exemplifies a high level of interdisciplinary engagement between both religious and literary scholars" (Bosco 4). In *A Theology of Sense: John*

Updike, Embodiment and Late Twentieth-Century American Literature (2018), Scott Dill says, “Updike shared the theologian Karl Barth’s belief that human experience flourishes, becomes most fully human, in expressing gratitude to the Creator” (Dill 8). Dill’s analysis of John Updike performs its cultural work by reinforcing the idea of the holy in American fiction. Dill comments that “From Emily Dickinson’s domestic panorama to Flannery O’Connor’s incarnational affirmation of the body, I’m [Scott Dill] not sure that any other American author offers more sensuous, theologically driven descriptions of what it feels like to dwell ...[within]...Christian experience” (Dill 7). Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) is another canonical author whose novels have been seen repeatedly in the light of both good and evil. Margaret L. Pachuau wrote on the theology and theodicy found within Murdoch’s corpus in her book, *Construction of Good and Evil in Iris Murdoch’s Discourse* (2007). She constructs her reading of Murdoch integrating the work of theologians taking as her point of departure Suguna Ramanathan’s book on Murdoch titled *Iris Murdoch; Figures of Good* (1990). In her third chapter, “Narrative Construction of Good and Evil” (54-71), Pachuau quotes Suguna Ramanathan (Pachuau 69) while discussing Murdoch’s novel *Henry and Cato* (1976). And Clara A.B. Joseph and Gaye Williams Ortiz and in their edited anthology of essays, *Theology and Literature: Rethinking Reader Responsibility* (2006) speak of our need to study Christianity if we are to understand authors as disparate as Samuel Beckett and Harry Mulisch. Clara A.B. Joseph and Gaye Williams Ortiz stress the need “for examining interventions of the religious or theological” (Joseph and Ortiz 10) within literature. One example from this anthology will demonstrate the renewed interest in reading authors through a hermeneutics informed by theology. Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou in her essay collected here, *Samuel Beckett’s Use of the Bible and the Responsibility of the Reader*, writes of Beckett’s lifelong engagement with the mystical and theological. After referring to Beckett’s *Dream Notebook* (Athanasopoulou-Kypriou 64), she goes on to remark that “Beckett would question and doubt his religious heritage while at the same time this would not stop him from being thoroughly acquainted with classic theological thought...John Calder, Beckett’s English publisher, remarked in a private communication... that he found Beckett immersed in [the medieval Dominican theologian and mystic, Meister] Eckhart only half a year before his death in 1989. When asked, Beckett expressed his great attachment to Eckhart’s work” (Athanasopoulou-Kypriou 64-65). Thus we find that a

knowledge of Meister Eckhart's writings expands our understanding of Samuel Beckett's dramas.

In this thesis, it is argued that we extend this interdisciplinary interface between religion and literature, which is now an established literary practice, to the American thriller and to the American western. As will be evident, both Cormac McCarthy's (b.1933) fiction and Stephen King's (b.1947) works can be read synoptically since both of them engage with evil and God in the American west. They both use the form of the thriller and much of their work is set in the west of America. The trope of the cowboy and actual cowboys play significant roles in their fiction. Further, it is from their works that the need to theologise arises. In Stephen King's novel, *The Stand* (1978), after a superflu had decimated most of America's population, we find evil regaining its stranglehold on humanity in the American west. In King's *The Dark Tower* series (1982-2012), the Gunslinger, Rolland Deschain is a cowboy who travels between various fictional universes of King's making. In *The Stand*, as will be discussed later, one of God's chosen men, Nick Andros, who is to confront the evil now residing in the American west, says this:

Can we, as a committee, agree not to discuss the theological, religious, or supernatural implications of the Adversary matter during our meetings? (*The Stand* 874)

The question of theology in spite of Nick's motion to not discuss the theological comes up again in *The Stand* when the doctor treating Mother Abigail confirms she is alive even after having gone out into the wilderness at her advanced age, as penance for her sin of pride. To emphasize King's preoccupation with God within his fictional universe, an example from his novel *It* will show how King's works are foregrounded in theology. King speaks of God as "that Final Other" (*It* 1035):

This Final Other was, perhaps, the creator of the Turtle, which only watched, and It, which only ate. This Other was a force beyond the universe, a power beyond all other power, the author of all there was. (*It* 1035)

In the fourth chapter we will interrogate this Final Other thoroughly and show how evil's teleology is the good notwithstanding the various forms that evil takes in King's works. At this initial stage of the thesis, we need to understand that evil is not beyond

scrutiny and terming anyone evil often reduces their culpability in criminal acts. What is of importance here is that criminal acts are against natural justice and therefore since they lead to suffering, they are forms of evil. Evil in the works of Stephen King, even in his thrillers, is often represented as supernatural. Our task in this thesis is to study the natural origins of these supernatural occurrences in King's fiction. It is Stephen King who in *The Stand* warns us against giving way to irrationality:

The beauty of religious mania is that it has the power to explain everything. Once God (or Satan) is accepted as the first cause of everything which happens in the mortal world, nothing is left to chance ... or change... Religious mania is one of the few infallible ways of responding to the world's vagaries, because it totally eliminates pure accident. To the true religious maniac, it's *all* on purpose.
(*The Stand* 763 emphasis King's)

If we are to eschew being caught up by the irrational within King's works, we need to interrogate how people grow up to hate others, or, how did society make a good human being and, that too, a child, Carrie White into a monster whose anger at her peers manifests as destructive telekinesis? At the heart of *Carrie* lies Carrie's mother's religious mania which prevented Carrie from assimilating with her friends. Religion destroyed Carrie White. It is important here to clarify and distinguish between the terms religion and theology. Co-ordinate with the need for clarity regarding these terms is the question of what impels any need for distinguishing these terms. It is only in the last few centuries, beginning with the Enlightenment that we have a clear separation between the Church and the State. Immanuel Kant through his essay, *What is Enlightenment?* effects a separation between religion and theology. Taking the cue from Kant, religion is man's refusal to emerge "from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance" (Kant n.pag.). Kant locates humanity's inertia, or nonage, in questioning the status quo maintained by a group of men sworn to "certain unalterable doctrine[s]" (Kant n.pag.). But Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) would later go on to challenge Kant's understanding of religion and thus, for defining theology we turn to Schleiermacher's understanding of theology as arising out of a religious understanding of the world which does not lead to nonage but rather sets one questioning in full freedom, the essential meaning of being

human in relation to God. Schleiermacher in his *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, does not waste time “over the downfall of religion” (Schleiermacher 6) since he has “nothing to do with the conservative” (Schleiermacher 6) forms that Christianity has historically taken from its inception. Schleiermacher neither speaks “from any reasoned resolve, nor from hope, nor from fear...Rather it is the pure necessity of my [Schleiermacher’s] nature; it is a divine call; it is that which determines my [his] position in the world and makes me [Schleiermacher] what I am. Wherefore, even if it were neither fitting nor prudent to speak of religion, there is something which compels me” (Schleiermacher 6-7) to write of God. In his *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher elaborates on what he means by religion. According to Schleiermacher, the acts of interpreting religion and religious scriptures requires deep faith and self-awareness. These hermeneutical acts, or the acts of interpretation of Christianity and Christian scriptures is what we understand by theology. To put it differently, theology is the act of interpreting Christianity within the thickness of history since “the past harmonizes” (King 11.22.63 712) to produce a narrative which can be critically pressured to comprehend the process of those historical forces which shaped the founding of America. This hermeneutical act has to be always enacted keeping in mind Kant’s warning against slipping into nonage. Therefore, theology, in a certain sense, is situated more within the human sciences than it is engaged in exercises involving abstract speculations about God. Rather, through theology we try to understand whether the surplus of meaning that the world manifests is fully recorded within the limits of reason. So, in this sense, there are no differences between religion and theology. Acts of religion demand theologising. Thus, McCarthy and King theologise in their works.

Within the fiction of Stephen King, evil manifests itself both as supernatural and real, as also God’s working within human history is portrayed through miracles and also through human agency and human history. Since this is a thesis which studies Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King together, it is useful to note that Cormac McCarthy’s works too are filled with Christian motifs. He contemplates long throughout his works on the natures both of evil and God. As early as 1977, when McCarthy was not as well known as he is now, and he had yet not written his revisionary western, *Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West* (published in 1985, henceforth abbreviated to *Blood Meridian*), and the *Border Trilogy*, William J. Schafer wrote in the winter 1977 issue of the *Appalachian Journal* about McCarthy’s three

novels, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), and *Child of God* (1973). Schafer shows how in these three novels McCarthy “deal[s] with the physical and metaphysical terrain of the Appalachian South, and each story explores wide possibilities of human and natural evil, the perversity of social and individual psychology...[revealing]...individualized motions within the framework of the gothic formula...and his intense imaginative preoccupation with the ramifications of evil” (Schafer 105). Later, to give an example from *Blood Meridian*, a paedophilic hermit, says to the nameless kid who is a part of the scalping gang hired by the Mexican government:

evil...can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it...
(*Blood Meridian* 20)

The same hermit talks about God and evil together in one breath:

God made this world, but he didn't make it to suit
everybody...when God made man the devil was at his
elbow... (*Blood Meridian* 20)

And in McCarthy's thriller, *Child of God*, with the serial killer and necrophiliac Lester Ballard as the main character in this novel, the name of the novel itself reveals how we all are children of God. Ballard is a child of God just like any other person. So, God becomes a leitmotif in McCarthy's novels and in King's short stories and novels. It is also interesting to note that Schafer in his essay mentioned earlier, points to the fact that McCarthy uses the gothic formula in the three Appalachian novels. The construction of these thrillers and westerns leading to the more fluid form of the gothic will be discussed in the next chapter.

Stephen King is generally perceived as a writer of horror novels but as will be shown in a moment in this chapter, he is a writer of both thrillers and westerns which happen to be horrifying. Cormac McCarthy's works too are not less horrifying. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy calls this earth, a “terra damnata” (*Blood Meridian* 64) where “toothless paper skulls of infants like the ossature of small apes” (*Blood Meridian* 96) litter “the howling desert[s]” (*Blood Meridian* 96) and “the howling waste” (*Blood Meridian* 21) which together make for our infernal world where we humans are just “drygulch phantoms” (*Blood Meridian* 20). It should be pointed out that the western as a genre arose, as did the genre of the thriller, from dime novels in America within “the

new fiction factories of the 1860s” (Brown *Reading the West* v). The genealogies of thrillers and westerns will be traced briefly in the next chapter.

In the third chapter we will have scope to interrogate the problem of evil which too arises from reading Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King’s works. In McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses* (published in 1992, henceforth only *All the Pretty Horses*), John Grady Cole’s lover, Alejandra’s grand-aunt Duena Alfonsa while telling her life’s tragedies to John Grady, informs him that by the time she was sixteen she understood that it was impossible for God to allow the poverty and injustices she saw among Mexicans. She says:

I refused to believe in a God who could permit such injustice as I saw in a world of his own making. (*All the Pretty Horses* 234)

Thus, we perceive the need to theologise arising from the fiction of McCarthy and King. Their works demand a theological exegesis. But as will be shown, these two authors do not subscribe to fixed Christian dogmas but rather, in their works, like Graham Greene and Iris Murdoch earlier, engage with Christianity and in the process of this engagement, they critique Christian orthodoxies.

Leslie Fiedler (1917–2003) in 2003 first spoke of Cormac McCarthy (b.1933) and Stephen King (b.1947) together in an interview to Bruce Bauman published in *salon.com*. While Cormac McCarthy has been hailed as a writer of great power, who authoritatively speaks of times past (Etulain and Malone 299), interrogates the issues of American borders (McConnell 294), and “sees the Western as a site of contested meaning, a space in which to address social and political issues” (Anderson 253); Stephen King’s reception within academia remains, to say the least, ambivalent and hostile. The hostility that King faces to date will be elaborated later. Now we return to Fiedler and his observations about Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. Fiedler’s acuity in making a strong case for respecting Stephen King in an academic world which remains hostile to King’s corpus needs quoting briefly: “The one more recent novelist to come along, and he is not that recent but he’s been discovered more recently, is Cormac McCarthy. Him, I like. I have a prejudice in favor of anybody who takes off from where Faulkner stops...The other thing I love is the really popular novel. Stephen King really fascinates me. Because he’s a secret intellectual...When all of us are

forgotten, people will still be remembering Stephen King." (Fiedler *The Critic in Winter* n.pag.). Contrast Fiedler's observations regarding Stephen King with Harold Bloom's (1930- 2019) outrage against King; the difference between Fiedler's critical opinion and Bloom's are more jarring since Bloom too mentions Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King together in an op-ed published in *The Boston Globe* in 2003:

The decision to give the [American] National Book Foundation's annual award for "distinguished contribution" to Stephen King is extraordinary, another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life. I've [Bloom] described King in the past as a writer of penny dreadfuls, but perhaps even that is too kind. He shares nothing with Edgar Allan Poe. What he is is [sic] an immensely inadequate writer on a sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, book-by-book basis...There's Cormac McCarthy, whose novel "Blood Meridian" is worthy of Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick," and Don DeLillo, whose "Underworld" is a great book. Instead, this year's award goes to King. It's a terrible mistake...(Bloom *Dumbing down American Readers* n.pag.)

While the works of American writers and playwrights like Edgar Allan Poe, John Cheever and Arthur Miller have been seen as profoundly philosophical; the critical reception of Stephen King remains confined to popular literature courses and niche seminars on the gothic. This neglect of King's works will be critiqued here and it will be shown how King's works deserve a more fruitful exegesis since his theological moorings are important to understand American literature. McCarthy and King redefine the foundational structures of America's origins through nuanced revisions of American Exceptionalism and such foundational myths such as America's Manifest Destiny. Both of them effect their revisions at the theological level within the popular formulae of the thriller and the western. Americans in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* believe that Native Indian Americans, black Americans and Mexicans are races "of degenerates" (*Blood Meridian* 36) and it is their duty, or manifest destiny, to "govern for them" (*Blood Meridian* 36) since they were "dealing with...people

manifestly incapable of governing themselves” (*Blood Meridian* 36). Americans were “to be the instruments of liberation in...dark and troubled land[s]” (*Blood Meridian* 37).

Anticipating Harold Bloom’s attack against Stephen King earlier in 2001, we had Nichola McAllister remark in *The Guardian* that Stephen King was a “skilful, deliciously silly show[man] who teeter[s] close to vaudeville and whose talents highlight...horror's inherent childishness” (McAllister n.pag.). As will be shown in the next chapter, horror as a genre is not always different from the thriller and the gothic-western in the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. McAllister had missed the point raised by Fiedler in 1966 that “the great tradition” (Hicks 329) of the American novel is that of the Gothic:

Our [American] fiction is not merely in flight from the physical data of the actual world, in search of a (sexless and dim) Ideal; from Charles Brockden Brown to William Faulkner or Eudora Welty, Paul Bowles or John Hawkes, it is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, non-realistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic -- a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation. (Fiedler *Love and Death in the American Novel* xxiv, henceforth *Love and Death*).

Since the grotesque is everywhere in Cormac McCarthy, and Stephen King’s fiction we need to understand the liminal position of the grotesque before proceeding further. In *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy uses the textual registers ‘grotesque’, ‘Biblical’ and ‘Christian’ to emphasize the weird in his works, which are indeed Biblical in tone and foregrounded within Christianity. Here is a description of itinerant Native American cattle-herders who will soon attack Captain White and the nameless kid:

...legion of horribles...clad in costumes attic or Biblical...[all] out of a fevered dream...[appearing] grotesque...like a company of mounted clowns...like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than [from any] land of Christian reckoning...clothed in smoke like those

vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing...(*Blood Meridian* 55)

In *The Orchard Keeper*, Cormac McCarthy describes a forest at the east of Knoxville, Tennessee, where even “the mountains” (*The Orchard Keeper* 10) in Appalachia had “outgoing roads to their liking” (*The Orchard Keeper* 10). McCarthy describes the Appalachian mountains as if they were grotesque sentient beings able to like or, hate. The roads are represented radiating from the mountains through forests which were calm on the surface, while within them pulsed some evil saurian heart:

...the relative cool of the timber stands, possum grapes and muscadine flourish with a cynical fecundity, and the floor of the forest—littered with old mossbacked logs, peopled with toadstools strange and solemn among the ferns and creepers and leaning to show their delicate livercolored gills—has about it a primordial quality, some steamy carboniferous swamp where ancient saurians lurk in feigned sleep. (*The Orchard Keeper* 11)

These ancients inhuman saurians not only people McCarthy’s works, strange and solemn, but they are in Stephen King’s works too. In *The Mist* (1980), an apocalyptic horror novella by King, we find the description of one of these saurian creatures:

One of the albino flying things was squirming its way through the jagged hole in the glass. I could hear the soft scraping sound that it made, now that some of the screaming had stopped. Its red eyes glittered in its triangular head, which was slightly cocked to one side. A heavy, hooked beak opened and closed rapaciously. It looked a bit like the paintings of pterodactyls you may have seen in the dinosaur books, more like something out of a lunatic's nightmare. (*The Mist* 100)

The lunatic nightmare worlds of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King in their thrillers and westerns take on the sheen of the grotesque, their portrayal of the liminal in their fiction gesture towards the more sublime form of the gothic. In Stephen King’s novel,

Gerald's Game (1992), the word 'grotesque' is mentioned four times. Once for Jessie's dead husband Gerald, and thrice more, twice for the serial killing and thieving necrophiliac Joubert, then the word is used to describe the bondage-game Gerald and Jessie were role-playing, as "a grotesque accident" (*Gerald's Game* 289). Here are the other three uses of the textual register, "grotesque":

Jessie opened her eyes and the first thing she saw was Gerald, lying on his own reflection in the highly polished bedroom floor like some grotesque human atoll. (*Gerald's Game* 68)

Joubert is described in terms which are alien to human comprehension:

The face was that of an alien being that has tried to mimic human features without much success...[Joubert's] forehead bulged like a grotesque garden bulb. (*Gerald's Game* 262)

Further, when Joubert is produced in the court, Jessie feels she is in the presence of the grotesque:

His grotesque asteroid of a face, with its swollen, poochy lips, its knife-blade of a nose, and its bulging bulb of a forehead, is totally vacant, totally incurious . . . (*Gerald's Game* 313)

It is in passing we note that within King's fiction, those of his characters King does not want us to sympathise with, often have faces which are entirely devoid of all emotions. Geoffrey Galt Harpham in his book, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982) explains the difficulty in defining the trope of the grotesque which we will have occasion to discuss later. Harpham says, that:

Grotesqueries both require and defeat definition: they are neither so regular and rhythmical that they settle easily into our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all. They...question the adequacy of our ways of organising the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles...The

grotesque is concept without form: the world nearly always modifies such indeterminate nouns as *monster*, *object and thing*...the word designates a condition of being just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language...it is a defense against silence when other words have failed... (Harpham 3, emphasis Harpham's)

McCarthy and King's works are peopled with monsters, objects and things which defy nomenclatures and categorising. Both authors try to give form to formless consciousness, and they gesture at mapping through language, these indeterminate nouns Harpham writes about in the quotation above. Stephen King in his story, *Survivor Type* (1982) writes of Dr. Richard Pine's self-reflection as a monster and a freak in his diary after Dr. Pine had begun to amputate himself and started cannibalising his own body parts. He is a disgraced surgeon who is the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Pine's lifeboat before "it could sink...was dumped on [a] godforsaken pile of rocks" (*Survivor Type* 440). At the end of the story, this is his realisation:

Looked at my face in the water today. Nothing but a skin-covered skull. Am I insane yet? I must be. I'm a monster now, a freak...Just a freak. A head attached to a torso dragging itself along the sand by the elbows. (King *Survivor Type* 450)

Since this is a study of McCarthy and King together it is befitting to illustrate this notion of freakery from Cormac McCarthy's novel, *Blood Meridian*. The nameless kid in *Blood Meridian* dreams of Judge Holden who will finally kill him. The seven-foot tall Judge is portrayed by McCarthy as a grotesque and a freak, a sort of monstrous presence who haunts the nightmares of dying men:

A great shambling mutant, silent and serene. Whatever his antecedents he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there [any] system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go. Whoever would seek out his history through what unraveling of loins and ledgerbooks must stand at last darkened and dumb at the shore of a void without terminus or origin and whatever

science he might bring to bear upon the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia will discover no trace of any ultimate atavistic egg by which to reckon his commencing...he stood in his bespoke suit with his hat in his hand and he peered down with his small and lashless pig's eyes...(Blood Meridian 309)

The characters in both McCarthy and Stephen King's fiction are atavistic mutants, monsters, and animals with lashless pigs' eyes. According to Rosemarie Garland Thomson in her edited anthology of essays on freakery, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (1996), writes that the freak "mock[s] the predictable, exciting both anxiety and speculation...at once familiar and alien [taking on the forms of] fanciful hybrids such as centaurs, griffins, minotaurs, sphinxes...and cyclopes --- all figures [with] startling bodies whose curious lineaments gesture towards other modes of being and confuse comforting distinctions between what is human and what is not" (Thomson 1). The thrillers and westerns of McCarthy and King are populated with freaks and monsters who mock the predictable and force us to rethink the verities of our lives and the assumptions which are to be encountered in the American dream.

Having used the term 'monster' so many times already, there arises a need to briefly review the trope of the monster before we proceed further. Stephen T. Asma in his book *On Monsters*, traces this trope from antiquity to our times. He points out that

...it is ironic that the current champions of neo-Enlightenment liberal values...consider the superstition that lies *outside rationality* to be a repressive and totalitarian monster, forcing everything into a procrustean fit... [After Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism] ...Reason has sought to map reality, but what about [asks Asma] the obscure territories that fall outside of the map? Individual monsters [post Derrida] ...are now [seen as] ...violations of normal rational taxonomy...[whereby if] everyone is a monster, there will be no monsters...(Asma 253 emphasis Asma's).

Thus, Asma in his book goes on to warn his readers to not easily succumb to the temptations of following the neo-Enlightenment and deconstructionist thinkers in thinking of the monster “as an outmoded relic” (Asma 253). Rather, he tells us that we should think of the monster in a more “subjective” manner and this too, he points out is nothing new (Asma 316) and derives from various ancient thinkers (Asma 316). In other words, the term monstrous remains problematic and no definition of the monster can pin down its essence. It is a word which one must understand simultaneously as indicating a certain reality, and as being a metaphor within the fiction of McCarthy and King. In the seventh book of Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* series, Roland of Gilead, the time-travelling multi-dimension traversing cowboy, meets the ‘low men’ who serve the Crimson King. There Roland encounters:

...a fat woman whose humanity ended at the neck. Above her trio of flabby chins, the mask she’d been wearing hung in ruins. Looking at the rathead beneath, Roland suddenly understood a good many things...[He understood, the priest, Father] Callahan’s low men for instance...[to be] creatures...[not] of the natural world but misbegotten things...sometimes known as the third people [who served the evil Crimson King]...(King *The Dark Tower* 21)

Even in Stephen King’s westerns, evil is represented as misbegotten things, monsters, and freaks, who are scarcely human. Stephen King is generally not considered to be a writer of American westerns, though his *The Dark Tower* series is a prolonged multi-volume American western. King in his other works refers to cowboys as well and locates evil as residing in the American west. In *The Stand*, Harold Lauder is derisively informed by Nadine Cross about the cowboy, Stuart Redman who wooed Frances Goldsmith away from Harold. Nadine stokes Harold’s hatred against an unjust world by reminding him of Stuart Redman’s winning the hand of Harold’s childhood sweetheart, Frances Goldsmith:

How the cowboy took your woman and then kept you off the Free Zone Committee [located at Boulder]. (*The Stand* 993)

Leslie Fiedler who is right in terming American fiction as being written in the gothic mode (Fiedler *Love and Death* xxiv), later laments that “the novel of detection [that is, the hard-boiled noir] is nearly dead in the United States” (Fiedler *Love and Death* 476). Fiedler was writing this in 1966. By the 1970s both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King would go on to revive the novel of detection, or the thriller within the American literary landscape. Both excel in writing in this genre and this is one more reason why reading them synoptically is necessary and fruitful. McCarthy will do so most memorably in his *Child of God* and his western-thriller, *No Country for Old Men* (2005), and Stephen King will do so in many novels including *The Colorado Kid* (2005), *Joyland* (2013) and his thrillers in the *Bill Hodges* (2014-2016) trilogy. This trilogy is a reinvention of the form of the thriller with serial killing and mass murders being their subjects. *The Green Mile* (1996) by Stephen King, for all its supernatural elements, is a ‘whodunnit’ loosely based on Harper Lee’s (1926-2016) book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), at least as far as evil in the form of racial discrimination is concerned. Stephen King’s novel is a supernatural novella, whereas there is nothing supernatural about Lee’s novel. All of Stephen King’s thrillers and hard-boiled noirs are also horror fiction. King blurs the borders between the genre of the thriller and the genres of the gothic and the horrific. James Smythe writing on the gunslinger Roland Deschain’s exploits in *The Guardian* in 2012, commented that *The Dark Tower* series is “funny and dark and scary and nasty and really, really strange. Somewhere between high and (so-called) low art; literary metafiction meets SF/fantasy/western pulp” (Smythe n.pag.) and the series “is a hodge-podge of genres and styles, thrown together, that somehow works perfectly” (Smythe n.pag.). *The Dark Tower* series is also a neo-western series with landscapes in multiple dimensions akin to J. R.R. Tolkien’s (1892-1973) gothic landscapes in the latter’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). King had always been fascinated by Tolkien’s works. *The Dark Tower* books reinvent Tolkien’s medieval and gothic atmosphere in their content and form and thus, King inherits consciously and disseminates knowingly the theological concerns that configure Tolkien’s works. An early reference to Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* is found in *The Stand* where Larry Underwood thinks of Tolkien, after Rita Blakemoor refers to *The Lord of The Rings* (*The Stand* 382) to Larry. Larry muses about Tolkien’s universe:

Tolkien with his mythic lands seen through the lens of
time and half-mad, half-exalted imaginings, peopled

with elves and ents and trolls and orcs. There were none of those in New York, but so much had changed, so much was out of joint, that it was impossible not to think of it in terms of fantasy. (*The Stand* 383)

The antinomies of a very Christian theology present in Tolkien's works, permeate the works of King too. The elves and ents and trolls and orcs are all there in King's huge body of works, including his thrillers, westerns, and hard case crime novels. *The Stand*'s form is constructed as a western but to the west in this novel, only those who choose evil go. In *The Stand*, the American west is a site of tremendous but artificial violence. Be that as it may, we return to issue of genres in King. It is impossible to demarcate the boundaries separating the genres of the thriller, the horror and the American western in King's works. These separate genres as had been pointed out earlier, reinvigorate the genre of the gothic. Patrick McAleer in his book on Stephen King, *Inside the Dark Tower Series: Art, Evil and Intertextuality in the Stephen King Novels*, quotes James Egan's essay titled *The Dark Tower: Stephen King's Gothic Western* published in an edited anthology by Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne on Stephen King's works; *The Gothic World of Stephen King: Landscape of Nightmares* (1987). McAleer's observations interweaved with Egan's comments on the genre-identity of *The Dark Tower* series show how similar McCarthy and King are in their constructions of the American western:

...the West of Roland's world is anything but a bastion of budding civilization. Instead, the West is a place for outlaws and failed gunslingers. In other words, as James Egan notes, "one expects clarity in a formula Western, but this is not the case with *The Dark Tower*" ([Egan] "Gothic Western" 99). And while the formula of the Western is in some disarray when it comes to *The Dark Tower*, especially as the West is a locale of shame and of figurative darkness in the *Dark Tower* series, the Western formula does not completely fail in its potential in illuminating the gunslinger's ultimate ends... Yet Roland can function as a Western hero in that he comes from civilization and whose presence may prove to be

advantageous to those living in the
borderlands...(McAleer 40-41)

Thus, we find that apart from the violence and the horror that unite Cormac McCarthy's vision of the world with that of Stephen King's vision of the world, we now see how the American western is revised as a genre by both McCarthy and King to accommodate theological views. Roland with his band, or ka-tet, is a minister of the scared force of Ka, in fight against cosmic evil symbolised by the Crimson King and his minion, the man in dark who has no essence. As Randall Flagg or, the man in dark is a constant in King's works, so is Ka, or the sacred, a leitmotif in his works. Since we are studying Cormac McCarthy and King together, we will now proceed to the works of McCarthy. Before proceeding to the works of McCarthy, there is a need to reflect upon the fact that the west in *Blood Meridian* and the west in *The Stand* are sites for incredible violence. McCarthy and King's shared vision of the American west as being violent also warrants the synoptic study of their works.

Turning to the works of Cormac McCarthy, though fewer in number than King's, we find that McCarthy's popular *Border Trilogy* fuses the trope of the American western with the trope of the gothic. The deaths pile up in the three books of the *Border Trilogy*. All the elements of the gothic are present in this *Trilogy* too. McCarthy's celebrated revisionist American western, *Blood Meridian*, is a tale of relentless bloodshed which match only the British Elizabethan Revenge tragedies in their portrayal of revenge and gore. Thus, McCarthy's thrillers and westerns too can be termed gothic. This is why we will need to map the architectonics of the gothic, primarily theologically, in the next chapter. As will be seen then, both McCarthy and King effect a new theological turn within their chosen genres.

Now we turn to the history of the critical reception of Stephen King which has often been quite disparaging and also uneven. It is only recently that a few critics have started taking King's novels seriously whereas McCarthy's works have never been seen as less than canonical. Critics like Toni Magistrale and Heidi Strengell did pioneering critical work to show why and how Stephen King's texts should be accessed and glossed. In the next chapter of this dissertation, we will find Simon Marsden engaging seriously with the works of King with an entirely new theological focus on King's work, quite distinct from Magistrale's and Strengell's criticism. Marsden in his book *The*

Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction: Holy Ghosts (2018) is one of the few critics who read *The Dark Tower* series with the seriousness that it deserves (Marsden 181-185). This series was dismissed by Michael Agger in 2004 in *The New York Times*'s 'Review of Books' as "pulp metafiction" which none would read had they not been written by Stephen King (Agger n.pag.). Whereas Marsden reads this same series framing his arguments within the apocalyptic configurations found in the last book of the Bible, that is, the Book of Revelations (Marsden 184). Like Harold Bloom, Nicola McAllister and Michael Agger, Edward J. Ingebretsen writing in 1998 for *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* had evaluated Stephen King's works as just "socially marginal money-making pulp" (Ingebretsen 105) and thus, worthy of no further critical comment. This thesis will show, following the theological and literary work already done by Simon Marsden mentioned above, why it is necessary to read Stephen King's fiction seriously. Incidentally, the very apocalyptic *The Road* by McCarthy has been considered as a "genre work...:adventure and Gothic horror" (qtd. in Edenfield 583) by Michael Chabon in *The New York Review of Books*, February 15, 2007.

As has been mentioned already, another literary critic who tried to establish the canonical status of Stephen King is Heidi Strengell. Strengell in two books perceptively scrutinized King's contribution to American letters - *Dissecting Stephen King: From the Gothic to Literary Naturalism* (2005) and *Stephen King: Monsters Live in Ordinary People* (2007). Nevertheless, not much has changed about the academic perception of Stephen King as a 'nobrow' writer. Peter Swirski and Tero Eljas Vanhanen in their edited anthology of essays, *When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow: Popular Culture and the Rise of Nobrow* (2017) writes that "the Gothic from Ann Radcliffe to Stephen King, beach and fashion wear, online confessionals and unboxing vids [open video formats], and not least mountains and fountains of gross-out gore. Each of these cultural phenomena, as you [the reader of this book] are about to discover, is a milestone on our way to understanding what nobrow [i.e. as opposed to 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow'] is all about" (Swirski and Vanhanen 6). Further, one of the contributors to this anthology, Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet commented about the acceptability of the gothic as a genre in the popular imagination:

...the rise in popularity of the Gothic and its multiple registers of address—in true nobrow style—is one of the

results of [the] relaxation of literary borders. The cultural work of the Gothic, now as always, is to subtly raise questions about ethics and epistemology while appealing to nobrow readership through stories that deftly combine horror with irony and intelligence. The Gothic plays a major role in every medium of cultural production at the moment—literature, film, television, computer and online gaming, graphic novels, fashion—and shows no signs of slowing down... (Soltysik Monnet 128-129).

The point to note here is that Soltysik Monnet locates the gothic in its forms as thrillers, westerns, and horror fiction to be able to reach the so-called nobrow reader with essentialist questions about ethics and epistemology. Therefore, the apparently nobrow Stephen King, can reach his nobrow audience and speak of truths which are now relegated in tomes known as Patristics, or, the works of the Church Fathers like St. Irenaeus (circa 130 - 202 AD) and St. Augustine of Hippo (345 -430 AD). Except a few theologians and seminarians, hardly anyone anymore reads these works of formative Christian doctrine. Yet as this thesis will show, Stephen King in his works engages with Patristics and then presents to his readers works which have important theological implications. These theological implications spill over into our understanding of the ethical. It should be clarified that King does not agree with the entirety of Patristics but through his works, he challenges Patristics and furthers theological concerns which have relevance to our zeitgeist.

Swirski and Vanhanen distinguish between highbrow literature and lowbrow/nobrow literature: “Next on the menu is a steady diet of murdered doppelgängers, desecrated corpses, and queer incestuous family secrets, all found in the nobrow thrillethons [which is a neologism by Swirski and Vanhanen]...[of the]...Gothic, that suspect motherlode of genre fiction that devolved into modern horror, detective stories, science fiction, fantasy, and romance...”(Swirski and Vanhanen 7-9). Swirski and Vanhanen rightly see the highbrow as only a cultural construction “consumed by library dust-covered academics and other refined tastemakers, [who reify] the classics” (Swirski and Vanhanen 3). This dissertation echoes Peter Swirski’s question in his *American Crime Fiction: A Cultural History of Nobrow Literature as Art* (2016):

Popular fiction's alleged ill-effects on literary culture are said to be two. First, because genre fiction borrows from highbrow fiction, it debases it. Second, by offering powerful economic incentives, it diverts artists from more esoteric pursuits. One can begin by asking, however, what is wrong with popular creators borrowing from the highbrows? It would seem that such crossovers should be applauded rather than deplored insofar as they introduce aspects of high culture to readers who might otherwise remain outside it... (Swirski 13)

The crossover located and shown in this thesis is between the American thriller, the American western, the American horror novel and their interface with Christianity.

While King subverts the notion of horror fiction being philosophically and spiritually vacuous in the process advocating the need for a vigorous defense of horror fiction, uniting “the horror genre to broader concerns about the nature of good and evil” (Russell *Revisiting Stephen King: a Critical Companion* 56); Cormac McCarthy's emphasis on violence has been noticed by critics repeatedly (Giles 8 and Rudnicki 23). McCarthy's westerns are for example, unlike the works of either Louis L'Amour (1908-88) or even, Larry McMurtry (b.1936). Louis L'Amour in *How the West was Won* (1963) creates a picture of machismo and white benevolence during America's frontier expansion while McCarthy in his *Border Trilogy* (1992-1998) paints a gloomy picture of unending violence engulfing everything with “a sense of some brooding and malignant life” (*All the Pretty Horses* 152). L'Amour sees America's manifest destiny in the noble tradition of white Americans conquering the west: “'Tis in the noble tradition to fare forth and conquer the wilderness with bare hands and stout hearts...[each American will] sally forth in the spirit of [their] forefathers. Americans just can't be whopped!” (L'Amour *How the West was Won* 61). Earlier in the novel, Louis L'Amour describes the white man's movement west, foregrounding it within the Biblical narration of the Exodus:

West...there's a mighty movement afoot...Greatest movement since the children of Israel fled from bondage in the land of Egypt. The world has never seen the like,

folks from all the lands of creation, streamin' west,
 flowing like a great tide, some of them walkin', some
 drivin' wagons, some a-horseback... (L'Amour *How the
 West was Won* 55)

Yet in his book *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Philip J. Deloria raises question which
 before McCarthy wrote *Blood Meridian* few bothered to ask or write about:

Why were images of Indian violence locked in a
 nineteenth-century frontier setting even as they
 proliferated in the representational forms of the twentieth
 century... The disconnection between the popular culture
 embrace of (nineteenth-century) Indian violence and the
 equally widespread expectation of its impossibility in the
 twentieth century proved critical to American
 engagements with the world of modernity. Images of
 Indian violence evoked both a specifically nationalist
 history of defensive conflict and a general primitivism
 against which the modern might be measured and made
 visible. The classic...Indian-fighting western, then
 tended to fetishize the violent potential of the Indian,
 creating a particular array of racialized images and
 expectations against which members of an assumed
 audience might imagine themselves. (Deloria 50)

This is why Cormac McCarthy's westerns are termed revisionary since McCarthy
 wants us to move away from fetishizing either Indian violence or the violence with
 which the white settlers of America conquered the west. In *Blood Meridian* McCarthy
 does not shirk from portraying native American Indians as being equally bloodthirsty
 as the white man. There is only one exception to the bloodthirst on both sides:
 McCarthy has created Judge Holden who is white. No such corresponding figure is to
 be found amongst the native Americans in *Blood Meridian*.

In McCarthy's novels, births are like being born into a "dim camarine world"
 (McCarthy *Outer Dark* 18) and living itself is hellish; the very first shrieks after being
 born declare the dark future that await the child in *Outer Dark*:

It howled execration upon the dim camarine world of its nativity wail on wail while he lay there gibbering with palsied jawhasps, his hands putting back the night like some witless Paraclete beleaguered with all limbo's clamor. (McCarthy *Outer Dark* 18)

Later, McCarthy will develop this picture of 'all limbo's clamor' to create limbos, for instance, in the *Border Trilogy*. Yet even amidst the violence that is life, within the fictional world of McCarthy, life carries on, albeit in a limbo:

...a procession of schoolchildren dressed in blue uniforms all alike were being led along the gritty walkway. The woman had stepped from the curb to take them across at the intersection when she saw the man coming up the street all dark with blood bearing in his arms the dead body of a friend. She held up her hand and the children stopped...He passed...The dead boy in his arms hung with his head back and those partly opened eyes beheld nothing at all out of that passing landscape of street or wall or paling sky or the figures of the children who stood blessing themselves in the gray light. This man and his burden passed on forever out of that nameless crossroads... (McCarthy *Cities of the Plain* 261)

Perchance, one of these schoolboys will someday take the place of John Grady Cole whose dead body is being carried by Billy at Juárez. Through textual registers like 'blood', and phrases like "the gray light", "the dead body" and the "dead boy" in the quotation from *Cities of the Plain*, one finds, as it were, a shadow cast over life. With the death of John Grady life has become meaningless for Billy. But we should also not lose sight of the fact that in this last book of the *Border Trilogy*, McCarthy shows that friendship endures through time even when the crossroads are nameless and will remain unknown forever. Even then, John Grady Cole and his friendship with Billy will be known because John Grady overcame oblivion through love. In the *Border Trilogy*, nothing but love endures. As is the contention of this thesis; there is always hope for all

of us since the children who blessed themselves in silence carry within them the possibility of redemption. As the anonymous wise man once told Billy Parham:

You call forth the world which God has formed and that world only. Nor is this life of yours by which you set such store your doing, however you may choose to tell it. Its shape was forced in the void at the onset and all talk of what might otherwise have been is senseless for there is no otherwise. Of what could it be made? Where be hid? Or how make its appearance? The probability for the actual is absolute. That we have no power to guess it out beforehand makes it no less certain. That we may imagine alternate histories means nothing at all. (*Cities of the Plain* 285)

The quotations from Cormac McCarthy shows how he imbues his novels, normatively American westerns, into long meditations on theology. This unfurling of the theological in McCarthy and King is the purpose of this thesis. McCarthy deals here with the calling forth of the world. Who called/calls the world forth? Why and how is it our lives are vain, no matter how we choose to represent it to others? What does McCarthy mean by absolute? It is interesting to note that we do not have any foreknowledge to guess beforehand since we are free to choose. As the dissertation proceeds, we will find that those who are determinists within McCarthy's fiction are aligned with evil. This in turn, will be shown as being in line with the Christian idea of the human subject being autonomous asserting that we are not puppets devoid of agency. Later while analysing *All the Pretty Horses*, we will have scope to discuss freewill versus determinism in that novel and its theological implications.

To hastily answer that God called and even now calls the world forth and it is God who is the absolute in a Thomist sense is to err on the side of imposing a worldview, onto the works of McCarthy. We must interrogate the truth in the proposition that McCarthy is a writer who is concerned with Christianity. Powerful critics have desisted to call him Christian while they have pointed out the Biblical tone of his language. For instance, Stacey Peebles in her essay *Yuman Belief Systems and Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian* published in 2003, reviews all extant sources and

critical perspectives about *Blood Meridian* and then through a reading of the Leonid meteorite showers in 1833 mentioned by the nameless kid's father, at the beginning of *Blood Meridian*,

Night of your birth. Thirty-three. The Leonids they were called. God how the stars did fall. I looked for blackness, holes in the heavens. The Dipper stove. (*Blood Meridian* 3)

Peebles remarks that the belief system encoded within *Blood Meridian* is gnostic and also is in synchronicity with the Yuma tribe's theology which Peebles terms as Yuman mythology. She mentions that the Yuma were so called by the Spaniards and their real name was Yuman. This thesis does not disagree with Peebles's contentions but makes a case for reading *Blood Meridian* and other works by McCarthy from a Christian perspective since McCarthy himself though widely read, is a Christian and while many belief systems are indeed at work within *Blood Meridian*, the most plausible and overarching theological system to be found in *Blood Meridian* is Christianity. The very form and content of *Blood Meridian* and the three books of the *Border Trilogy* cannot be fully explained only through native American theologies and myths. The apocalyptic form that the western takes in the hands of McCarthy is modelled on Hebrew apocalypses found in the Apocrypha and in other Hebrew apocalypses. Meteor showers are not confined to either Gnosticism or only to Yuman belief systems. The Judge and the kid are not antipodes; they are part of the same system which brutalise others. In this thesis we further the discussion of Peebles's that while Gnosticism and Yuman beliefs inform the fiction of Cormac McCarthy; nonetheless a very mainstream Christian consciousness too is to be found in McCarthy's works. The problematics of reading *All the Pretty Horses* will be illustrated by engaging with Dueña Alfonsa's character as found in *All the Pretty Horses*.

John J. Collins in his work on the apocalyptic *Book of Daniel* in the Old Testament, titled, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* comments on the Biblical genre of the apocalypse. According to Koch Vielhauer writing in *Semeia* 14, which is dedicated to *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* which Collins in 1979 edited; the Biblical apocalypse "is [found to be] a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being

to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (qtd. in Collins 4, *Semeia* 14 p.9). This is how Biblical apocalypses are constructed and Collins agrees with this definition by Vielhauer. This construction of the Judaeo-Christian apocalypse is the foundation upon which the contemporary literary apocalypse is constructed. Paul Ricoeur in Volume 2 of his *Time and Narrative* correctly defines the literary apocalypse as being “theological by way of Judeo-Christian eschatology” (Ricoeur 23). Further Ricoeur locates a crisis within the heart of the literary genre of the apocalypse. He writes that the apocalypse as a genre “shifts its imagery from the last days, the days of terror, of decadence, of renovation, to become a myth of crisis” (Ricoeur 23). For our discourse here, we need to note two points. The Biblical genre of the apocalypse is formulaic in form and involves eschatology. The literary form of this essentially Biblical genre is formulaic, eschatological, and crucially, it culminates in a crisis. It is in this eschatological sense that the thrillers and the westerns of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King are apocalyptic in their portrayal of worlds trapped within crises from which it is not easy to escape. Since this is a study of McCarthy and King together, it is right that two separate illustrations are provided from both authors. In *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady is able to hear the beating of a doomed world awaiting some dreadful apocalypse, in this instance by Grady’s hunting down of “the smallest doe” (*All the Pretty Horses* 285). Now having watched the doe die, after “she looked at him and her eyes were warm and wet [with] no fear in them” (*All the Pretty Horses* 285), John Grady,

...felt a loneliness he'd not known since he was a child and he felt wholly alien to the world although he loved it still. He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower.
(*All the Pretty Horses* 286)

Blood Meridian and *The Road* are easily recognisable as apocalyptic in tone. But *All the Pretty Horses* is perceived more as a western with romance at its core. *The Crossing*

and *The Cities of the Plain* are dark in their themes than *All the Pretty Horses*. They are easily recognised as Biblical, and the undercurrent of apocalyptic doom is more evident in those last two books of the *Border Trilogy*. Yet *All the Pretty Horses* is only superficially grounded in romance. Ingrained within the novel are hints of its apocalyptic nature and its theological concerns. Earlier in the novel, we find a discussion between him and Dueña Alfonsa:

I thought you didnt believe in fate. [John Grady says]

She waved her hand. It's not so much that I dont believe in it. I dont subscribe to its nomination. If fate is the law then is fate also subject to that law? At some point we cannot escape naming responsibility. It's in our nature. Sometimes I think we are all like that myopic coiner at his press, taking the blind slugs one by one from the tray, all of us bent so jealously at our work, determined that not even chaos be outside of our own making. (*All the Pretty Horses* 243)

All the revolutions and deaths in Mexico, the harsh conditions of the prisons there and the inequalities between the Spanish conquerors and their Mexican subjects found here portend nothing but doom for John Grady and Alejandra. While *Blood Meridian* has been termed a revisionary and divisionary western, here in *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy furthers his revision of the American western to represent apocalypticism within the American formulaic western which is nonetheless narrated within a framework of love and despair. The apocalyptic tone of the western arises from John Grady realising that beauty and love in this world come at a terrible cost which according to Christianity is the price that Christ paid with His life. This reading of Christian eschatology within the fabric of the *Border Trilogy* is furthered by McCarthy in the last two novels in this *Trilogy*. The apocalypse in *All the Pretty Horses* is at one level, a personal apocalypse. The love between John Grady and Alejandra is doomed. At another level, it is the doom of a way of life. In other words, it is the doom antecedent to an entire era. Agricultural reforms through industrialisation would soon seal the fate of cowboys like John Grady Cole. These interpretations yield to the wider issues at stake here. Dueña Alfonsa raises the theological issue of predestination and as will be illustrated later, Dueña Alfonsa while speaking about her youth to John Grady Cole,

while questioning God about social inequities, unknowingly aligns herself to determinism. As has been mentioned before, this thesis proceed to show, determinists within the fiction of not only McCarthy, but also within the fiction of Stephen King, often serve ends which are theologically poised against the freedom that we find within the Kingdom of God. Dueña Alfonsa also refers to a coiner at his press. While she may or may not be aware of the reference to God as a watchmaker, Cormac McCarthy certainly is aware of the history of ideas behind the teleological analogy of the watchmaker who is represented by a coiner in *All the Pretty Horses*. Dueña Alfonsa had learnt this determinism from her father who “had a great sense of the connectedness of things” (*All the Pretty Horses* 233). Her father claimed that:

the responsibility for a decision could never be abandoned to a blind agency but could only be relegated to human decisions more and more remote from their consequences. The example he gave was of a tossed coin that was at one time a slug in a mint and of the coiner who took that slug from the tray and placed it in the die in one of two ways and from whose act all else followed...No matter through whatever turnings nor how many of them. Till our turn comes at last and our turn passes. (*All the Pretty Horses* 233)

One notices how Dueña Alfonsa’s father who for “all his strictness and authority [was] ...a libertine” (*All the Pretty Horses* 242) and his fatalism made Dueña Alfonsa:

think if it were fate that ruled our houses it could perhaps be flattered or reasoned with. But the coiner cannot [be flattered or reasoned with]. Peering with his poor eyes through dingy glasses at the blind tablets of metal before him. Making his selection. Perhaps hesitating a moment. While the fates of what unknown worlds to come hang in the balance. (*All the Pretty Horses* 233)

Following this train of reasoning Dueña Alfonsa veers off to a course of logic which ultimately ends in despair. Dueña Alfonsa’s personal doom, or apocalyptic moment will arrive when she rejects God as conceived within a Christian paradigm to embrace fate

and give up all hope that any good can happen to Mexico in the future. By extrapolation, she also indicates whether anything good can happen ever to this world where according to her, events recapitulate forever. According to her, we are caught within a perpetual loop. This is not what Christianity informs us about the teleology of history. Neither does Christianity support the giving up of hope. Hope is a cardinal virtue within the economy of Christian salvation. Within this economy of salvation, determinism leads to spiritual death. Dueña Alfonsa thinks that human beings are puppets controlled by some other agency, probably she means God. Later in this thesis we shall see how John Grady believes in choice. So within the fiction of Cormac McCarthy, we have McCarthy making a strong case for human autonomy and agency while some of his hard-hearted characters repose their faith in fate, or, destiny. Dueña Alfonsa elaborates to John Grady Cole her father's beliefs, with her own conclusions about them. But we must not lose sight of the fact that Dueña Alfonsa is not theologically evil. Her ideas are not in congruence to Christian ideas about freedom and agency. But that does not make her even remotely like Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* or other characters aligned against natural justice and God found in other characters within McCarthy's works. The problem with Dueña Alfonsa's character is her ambiguity renders her incapable of the Christian cardinal virtue of faith. She is portrayed as a strong woman in *All the Pretty Horses* but her strength now in her old age derives from a rejection of human agency with a firm belief in the fact that human beings have no free-will. This is against mainstream Christianity and thus makes her fallible within the Christian matrix of *All the Pretty Horses*.

In a certain sense, Dueña Alfonsa speaks up for the cause of feminism and inequalities within the Mexico of her times. As has been pointed out earlier, both the authors synoptically studied here while revising the genres in which they write, also revise mainstream Christian theology. In the next chapter we will interrogate how both of them do not agree entirely with Christian doctrines. For instance, both McCarthy and King are not homophobic, neither are they against pre-marital physical intimacy. On the other hand, both of them see the murder of others as against natural justice and Christianity. Their theologies are concerned more with questions not of adultery, liturgy or institutional religious beliefs. They are more occupied with evil in the form of untruth, skewed distribution of wealth and the rights of women.

Dueña Alfonsa raises issues which are problematic within Roman Catholic doctrine. One needs to single out Roman Catholicism within Christianity since Dueña Alfonsa was a Spaniard who called Mexico her own. Her European roots are Roman Catholic, and she had once thought of Mexico as “a rare vase being carried about by a child” (*All the Pretty Horses* 236). In her youth there was a great passion in her for her country mediated by her revolutionary beau, Gustavo Madero. She had been certain of the revolutionary spirit that would bring justice to ordinary Mexicans:

There was an electricity in the air. Everything seemed possible. (*All the Pretty Horses* 236)

And then she had to face the truth:

I thought that there were thousands [of idealists] like us. Like Francisco. Like Gustavo. There were not. Finally in the end it seemed there were none. (*All the Pretty Horses* 236)

Her revolutionary spirit died then. Later with Gustavo’s being lynched let Dueña Alfonsa give way to hopelessness which hardened her soul against God. No God according to Dueña Alfonsa came to help either Gustavo, or the poor Mexicans:

In the end we all come to be cured of our sentiments. (*All the Pretty Horses* 236)

This same bitter old lady, Dueña Alfonsa, once was moved by the plight of Mexicans and their poverty. Before describing what was that she saw in Mexico as a child, it will be prudent to comment on an aspect of Roman Catholic theology that has posed problematic for practising Roman Catholics. Here we must mention that the current Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI is also known for his theological scholarship. His writings and the last Pope’s, that is, John Paul II’s writings are often construed as being skewed by their anti-materialist and conservative views. But like Benedict XVI, the late John Paul II, was a philosopher and theologian in his own right. While Pope Benedict XVI issued encyclicals against what he perceived as insufficient exegesis of South America’s socio-economic conditions by revolutionary clerics like Gustavo Gutiérrez who were influenced by thinkers like Antonio Gramsci; Pope John Paul II went on to publicly reprimanded theologians who veered from Roman Catholic doctrine by

embracing revolutionary methods to bring about change in Latin American society. It is within these upheavals in Latin America, that we find the revolutions in Mexico and the personal salvific history of Dueña Alfonsa problematic. *All the Pretty Horses* when read through the hermeneutics of subversive Roman Catholic theology, becomes a very important cowboy romance where issues of salvation and damnation overshadow the pastoral beauty of the Texan and Mexican landscapes. Let us investigate now why this new theology of Gutiérrez caused so much furore in Latin America and Rome and what exactly it has to do with *All the Pretty Horses* and this thesis,

South American and Latin American theologians like Dom Hélder Câmara, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino sought for concrete solutions within that broader compass of beliefs which are termed carelessly, socialism and Marxism. Gutiérrez, as it were, not only critiqued Catholic doctrine, but he changed the direction of Catholic theology to make it alive to the realities that plagued Dueña Alfonsa's Mexico through his seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. Gutiérrez reacted to the injustices he saw around himself in terms which we will in a moment see Dueña Alfonsa articulating. Gutiérrez writes that the utter helplessness of the people of Latin America had led him to rethink Roman Catholic dogma about violent revolutions. Gutiérrez saw:

...quite clearly that the political arena is necessarily conflictual...the building of a just society means the confrontation—in which different kinds of violence are present—between groups with different interests and opinions...Social praxis makes demands which may seem difficult or disturbing to those who wish to achieve—or maintain—a low-cost conciliation. Such a conciliation can be only a justifying ideology for a profound disorder, a device for the few to keep living off the poverty of the many... (Gutiérrez 31)

It is to do this sort of theologising which justified the taking up of arms against the Latin American bourgeoisie, that Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, reacted by warning against armed violence. The then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) had written that liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez “in an

effort to learn more precisely what are the causes of the slavery which they want to end, make use of different concepts without sufficient critical caution. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to purify these borrowed concepts of an ideological inspiration which is compatible with Christian faith and the ethical requirements which flow from it” (Ratzinger n.pag.). As we find in the writings of Cardinal Ratzinger, Catholic dogma does not advocate this new form of theology which is rooted to the land where it is practised. Catholic theology and Christian theology at large, after Gustavo Gutiérrez’s insights, has not remained what it was before Gutiérrez wrote his book. Keeping in mind Gutiérrez’s insights and Ratzinger’s warnings against what Ratzinger perceived as insufficient exegesis which the then Pope, the late John Paul II, ratified in his encyclicals, how are we to judge Dueña Alfonsa in *All the Pretty Horses*? It is easy to categorise Judge Holden, it is easier still to categorise John Grady Cole and John Grady’s friends and we can also easily access the character of Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, but Dueña Alfonsa poses a theological roadblock for both the literary critic and the theologian. Her believing that we are all puppets in a puppet show does not make her an existentially inauthentic human being for truly believes in what she says. Humanity has no choice being trapped in poverty as Gutiérrez pointed out in his theology. Dueña Alfonsa says to John Grady:

For me the world has always been more of a puppet show. But when one looks behind the curtain and traces the strings upward he finds they terminate in the hands of yet other puppets, themselves with their own strings which trace upward in turn, and so on. In my own life I saw these strings whose origins were endless enact the deaths of great men in violence and madness. Enact the ruin of a nation. (*All the Pretty Horses* 233)

The theological problem posed by her view of life is how did this view of life arise in the first place. If according to Christianity generally considered, we are free beings, then she is wrong doctrinally. But from an early age she read books in five languages and then she was schooled at two of the best schools in Europe. So, her views cannot and should not be dismissed lightly. In the third chapter of this thesis, we will find her clearly elucidating the problem of evil for us, more lucidly than most philosophers and theologians have been able to explain the problem of evil. She provides a first-hand

witness to the systemic injustices that she saw in Mexico within all spheres of Mexican life:

The societies to which I have been exposed seemed to me largely machines for the suppression of women. Society is very important in Mexico. Where women do not even have the vote. (*All the Pretty Horses* 232)

Just a few paragraphs later she tells John Grady Cole of the condition of Mexicans when she was a child. This is what she told John Grady:

When I was a girl the poverty in this country was very terrible. What you see today cannot even suggest it. And I was very affected by this. In the towns there were tiendas which rented clothes to the peasants when they would come to market. Because they had no clothes of their own and they would rent them for the day and return home at night in their blankets and rags. They had nothing. (*All the Pretty Horses* 233-234)

Then, Dueña Alfonsa informs John Grady of what the Mexicans believed they had:

It was a faith that no disappointment seemed capable of shaking. What else had they? For what other thing would they abandon it? (*All the Pretty Horses* 234)

When Dueña Alfonsa was a child most Mexicans, according to her, had never seen heavy industry and there was no industrial progress in Mexico. Spaniards ruled Mexicans, and Dueña Alfonsa's family never ceased to be "gachupines" (*All the Pretty Horses* 232) at Mexico. Dueña Alfonsa is not morally wrong in questioning the status quo at Mexico and the Roman Catholic conception of freedom. The prevailing religious and theological discourses in Mexico then, only meant freedom for the imperialist Spaniards and serfdom for their Mexican subjects. She is neither ethically amiss in criticising the suppression of women within both Spanish and Mexican societies which were both Roman Catholic. Critical assessments of *All the Pretty Horses* have tended to analyse the centrality of John Grady's life and love for both horses and Alejandra and a vanishing way of life. Here the task is made difficult because Dueña Alfonsa is

often overlooked in reading *All the Pretty Horses* deeply. Linda Woodson in her essay “*This is another country*”: *The Complex Feminine Presence in All the Pretty Horses* in 2011 wrote that “[u]nique among the many male teachers who populate McCarthy’s fiction, Alfonsa is given a central place in articulating much of the philosophical position of the novel” (Woodson 26). It is while taking seriously Woodson’s remark about Dueña Alfonsa, that we find both Woodson’s comment about Dueña Alfonsa’s centrality to McCarthy’s philosophical project original and correct as also there is nothing amiss with Dueña Alfonsa’s philosophy that:

If there is a pattern there it will not shape itself to anything these eyes can recognize. Because the question for me was always whether that shape we see in our lives was there from the beginning or whether these random events are only called a pattern after the fact. Because otherwise we are nothing. (*All the Pretty Horses* 232)

She can see a certain shape that her life has taken but stops short of attributing Divine Providence to her personal life and to the broader narrative of history. Rudi Te Velde in the *Introduction* to his book, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* defines the Christian understanding of God in this manner: “not with God considered from a purely metaphysical point of view, but with the Christian God who by his revelation has entered into human history and assumed a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ” (Velde 10). So Dueña Alfonsa may be mistaken in her theology, but she cannot be held culpable for protesting against Catholic theology in the light of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s paradigm-shifting theology.

Dueña Alfonsa’s character then again proves the point made here in this discourse, that McCarthy and King not only critique their chosen genres of the thriller, the hard-boiled-noir and westerns, but they like Gustavo Gutiérrez engage with Christian theology without being lost in some of the narrow conservative ideological forces that propel Christian theology, whether then or now. Dueña Alfonsa’s existence in *All the Pretty Horses* is itself a sign that McCarthy wants his readers to acknowledge the limitations of mainstream Christianity as well as Roman Catholicism.

To term McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* and his *Border Trilogy* as revisionary westerns is to confine them within the genre of the western. As will be seen in the next

chapter, through the foregrounding of their fiction within the Burkean sublime, McCarthy's works transcend the constraints of the formulaic western. The *Border Trilogy* is not a gaucho trilogy. While on the topic of westerns, and, since this is a synoptic reading of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King, it must be mentioned that neither is *The Dark Tower* series a fantastic rendering of the gaucho form. Roland Deschain and his 'Ka-tet' move like cowboys through the many dimensions that King creates but they are far from the gaucho mode of traditional American westerns.

To further illustrate this process of generic subversion in Stephen King, one can compare King's novels with Jack Finney's (1911-55) famous and popular science-fiction horror novel *The Body Snatchers* (1954). While Finney's book tells the hackneyed story of aliens invading human bodies, King brings to our notice broader issues like depression, suicide, and redemption through self-sacrifice in his novels. King himself refers "the late Jack Finney...one of America's great fantasists and storytellers" (King 11.22.63 740). For example, in King's novel *The Tommyknockers* (1987), drug-addiction is interrogated within a science-fiction schema paralleling the plot of Finney's *The Body Snatchers*; and in the novella *The Green Mile* (1996) King questions the sociology of capital punishment; comments on jurisprudence including what constitutes the ethically good, as also on the insane inner world of the paedophilic murderer. John Coffey, a physically huge black man, a stereotypical Southern grotesque, with miraculous healing powers and who has been wrongfully convicted of raping and murdering two white girls, meditates on life, all the while running away from the police and those who are intimidated by his sheer physical presence. This is what Coffey says while waiting for the death in the prison:

I'm rightly tired of the pain I hear and feel, boss. I'm tired of bein on the road, lonely as a robin in the rain. Not never havin no buddy to go on with or tell me where we's comin from or goin to or why. I'm tired of people bein ugly to each other. It feels like pieces of glass in my head. I'm tired of all the times I've wanted to help and couldn't. I'm tired of bein in the dark. Mostly it's the pain. There's too much. If I could end it, I would. But I cain't. (King *The Green Mile* 200)

Before commenting on Stephen King's portrayal of the Deep South in *The Green Mile* and in *The Shawshank Redemption*, we must also pause to study how McCarthy portrays the Deep South since this is a synoptic study of McCarthy and King. McCarthy in his Southern novels, like King, portrays what Gary M. Ciuba in his book, *Desire, Violence, and Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction: Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Walker Percy* calls "the grotesque", the trope of which is used to reflect how violence disfigures the familiar and conjoins the contradictory" (Ciuba 52). John Coffey's loneliness is an existential cry begging for death which echoes throughout human history as well as in the fictions of McCarthy and King. The gothic genre is not about knowing the essence of disembodied beings, or ghosts, but about loneliness and abjection. To emphasize King's engagement with sublime issues generally not associated with popular literature; here is a rollcall of some of the novels King has written on child abuse which has devastating consequences for the children concerned. In *It* (1986) Beverly Marsh is abused by her father and Morris in King's thriller, *Mr. Mercedes* (2014), grows up to be a mass murderer since his mother had abused him as a child and as an adult, she continues her incestuous relationship with him. The ramifications of child abuse have been captured by the psychoanalyst Leonard Shengold in his book, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (1989) where he writes of child abuse as "the abuse of power...Soul murder is as old as human history, as old as the abuse of the helpless by the powerful in any group --- which means [it is] as old as the family" (Shengold 3). And abuse and incest are typically present in the genre of the gothic. Both Cormac McCarthy's gothic thrillers and westerns and most of King's horror fiction, thrillers and gothic westerns have numerous examples of both child abuse and incest in them which make us wonder whether we have not moved into the territory of the gothic in their works. Child abuse is a recurrent motif in popular horror fiction and in no way, can we consider it as less than serious. King's revisionary horror fiction, is, therefore, neither nobrow, nor is it less than high literature. The American gothic, the American thriller and the American Western are not cultural artefacts which do not deserve serious academic study. Popular literature can tell us more of life's tragedies than serious tomes on paedophilia. King's fictional abused children can never shake off their pasts. *Carrie* (1974), *The Shining* (1977) *The Dead Zone* (1979), *Dolores Claiborne* (1992), *Gerald's Game* (1992), *Insomnia* (1994), *It* (1986), *Rose Madder*(1995) all meditate on either paedophilia or familial domestic abuse or, on both of these devastating personal tragedies. An

interesting misconception about King's portrayal of an orgy of eleven-year-olds' in *It* needs to be clarified. Emily Gesse and Kaitlyn Tiffany, to name two media influencers (they are part of what is now a lucrative gig-economy), or online reputation destroyers in King's case, find the end of *It* nauseating. They both, like many others, miss two points operational within *It* and King's fictional town of Derry where *It* and many other novels of King like his *Dreamcatcher* (2001) are situated.

Childhood awakenings of sexuality are nothing new and have been portrayed in fiction ranging from Vladimir Nabokov's (1899-1977) *Lolita* (1955) to Laurie Lee's (1914-97) *Cider with Rosie* (1959). Azar Nafisi's (b.1948) spin on Nabokov's *Lolita*; *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) confirms for us the ambiguity in Nabokov's prose. Nafisi observes that "Nabokov's prose provides trapdoors for the unsuspecting reader: the credibility of every one of Humbert's assertions is simultaneously challenged and exposed by the hidden truth implied by his descriptions" (Nafisi 42). Similarly, Stephen King's prose provides trapdoors for the unsuspecting reader. For instance, the orgy which is required to defeat It in Stephen King's *It* is informed paradoxically by pure love. Beverly Marsh as an adult, in the lair of *It*, realizes that she was the first love of all her childhood male friends. This love is pure and unsullied by adult complications. In other words, the love of those boys for Beverley was redemptive:

All of them...I was their first love. (King *The Stand* 1060,
italics and ellipses are Kings)

We need to be careful while reading both our authors without losing the insight that they engage with Christian theological tropes without being dogmatic. No Christian theologian will agree that an orgy is redemptive within Christianity. Like no Christian theologian will agree that the physical intimacy shared by John Grady Cole and Alejandra is redemptive despite McCarthy portraying their love in lyrical prose and that portrayal being the high point of *All the Pretty Horses*. Here are John Grady Cole and Alejandra together on a rainy night in Reina Cristina Hotel at Hidalgo (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 250):

...he held her pale and naked against him and she cried
and told him that she loved him...(McCarthy *All the
Pretty Horses* 254)

Again, just a little later, before Alejandra decides to abandon John Grady Cole, McCarthy in unambiguously portray the lovers in an erotic light. This would not be acceptable either to Mexican Catholic Christianity or to American Protestant Christianity. Christian theology is unwavering in its stance about chastity. Before the sacramental sanction of marriage, it is immoral according to Christianity to be physically intimate. But this stance is not McCarthy's stance. His is a more practical and ethical theology, even though many critics have termed McCarthy's writings as Biblical. But under no circumstance the following quotation can be accepted by anyone who lives by the Bible as ethically correct:

...they closed the curtains and made love and slept in each other's arms [when they were unmarried and never will be married]. (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 256)

This is where we must be careful in not confusing literature with theology or any other religious dogma. As has been shown, both McCarthy and King engage with Christian theology and in their engagement with this theology they not only refashion the thriller, the western and the horror genres but also provide a critique of Christian doctrines. In a certain sense, both McCarthy and King make Christian doctrine more humane and practical. For instance, as will be shown later in this thesis, Stephen King writes against homophobia within Roman Catholicism. Through the person of Father Callahan who appears in both *Salem's Lot* (1975) and in *The Dark Tower* series, we are urged by King to accept homosexuality as normative and to not marginalize homonormative individuals. Father Callahan's realization and acceptance of his own nascent sexuality is discussed later in this thesis. The point here is that Christianity in the works of our two authors is more concerned with inauthentic existence. It is this movement from the inauthentic to the authentic that is also the subject of Christian theologians. More harm is done by religious hypocrites than by those who are in love with each other. This is not a new theme within American letters. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) has mapped the trajectory of religious hypocrisy in his *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). What is new here is that Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King revise their chosen and fluid genres to critique and transmit their understanding of Christianity to a new generation and to a wider audience. Those who avoid their books have mostly watched the screen adaptations of both their works. The cinematic adaptation of *All the Pretty Horses* made Cormac McCarthy popular among American audiences. McCarthy's literary fame was

galvanized by *Blood Meridian*, but the movie based on *All the Pretty Horses*, and then the movie based on *No Country for Old Men* and finally the cinema made based on his apocalyptic novel, *The Road* cemented his reputation within the popular imagination. In this regard too, Stephen King is similar to McCarthy. King's tomes like *The Stand*, *It* and *Under the Dome* are read by his fans, each one of whom he calls his constant reader. But beyond this group of constant readers, very few have the patience to read his long books which generally go beyond thousand pages. Their cinematic and online adaptations have made his fan following larger. It is thus, that these two writers who are so different from each other at first glance and yet so similar with each other once we take Leslie Fiedler seriously, demand synoptic study.

Cormac McCarthy's characters and Stephen King's portrayal of meanness amongst neighbours in *Needful Things* (1991) is another instance of evil masquerading as holy in the real-world. Quotations, which will be provided in a moment, from *Needful Things* are necessary since many Christian theologians point out that child abuse is only one among many radical evils that haunt our world. Systematic evil is not confined to paedophilia but is also to be found in our disobedience of Christ's command to not slander: "For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come— sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person" (Bible *Mark* 7:21-23).

In *Needful Things*, the demon Leland Gaunt points out that systemic evil which engulfs every part of the world. We are alerted to the evils of slander and calumny, through Leland's musings about the gossip, albeit, religious gossip, circulating in King's fictional town of Castle Rock:

Someone who didn't know what a sleepy little place this town [Castle Rock] is would think we're really goin [sic] to the dogs, I [Leland Gaunt] guess. ...Churches in small towns...get along with each other- sort of-but they ain't never really happy with each other...the only place the Catholics and the Baptists talk to each other is in the Letters column of our little weekly paper, where they rave and rant and tell each other they're goin to hell.
(King *Needful Things* 3)

This evil of slander mentioned above in *Mark* 7:21-23, is an evil whose consequences are no less than the evil of child abuse. For example, Arthur Miller's (1915-2005) play *The Crucible* (1953), based on the Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693), and Senator Joseph McCarthy's (1908-1957) witch hunts of Communists and others whom Senator McCarthy presumed were against America, are both based on mass hysteria originating from slander. Small-town America is haunted by gossip and slander. Shirley Jackson's (1916-1965) haunting story, *The Lottery* (1948), is so visceral in its critique and effects of slander in small-town America, that it initially received a lot of hate mails. Jackson's story has become the prototype of many horror stories. Stephen King's *Children of the Corn* (1977) retells Jackson's macabre short-story about lynching in the name of Christian atonement. Here is the ending of *The Lottery*. In *The Lottery*, a nameless bloodlust arises out of a tradition which revises the image of small-town America as peaceful and idyllic. Before, we quote from Shirley Jackson's story, we need to contextualize lynching as a theological metaphor for atonement. René Girard (1923-2015) in his work, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (henceforth *Things Hidden*) comments on lynching as representing a community's mythic attribution of "the qualities of the sacred" (Girard *Things Hidden* 105) and "the topological schema" (Girard *Things Hidden* 105) at work in mob-violence is "what in reality is a representation of collective [expiatory] violence, [which is only] a description of...lynching" (Girard *Things Hidden* 105). Though in no way is this violence to be confused with theologically informed religious referents (Girard *Things Hidden* 105). In her book *Elements of Ritual and Violence*, Margo Kitts makes two observations which are important for this thesis. She locates rituals within space and time and mediated through human agency and insists on the embodied nature of a ritual's sensory dimensions. Christian theology emphasizes the human person in the here and the now. Therefore, this phrase 'in the here and the now' while used in the discourse which follows arises out of the spatiality of the subject within Christian salvific and eschatological history. Within Christianity, there is no scope for incorporeality and disembodiedness. Thus, Kitts' contention that textual ritual violence often defeats discursive reasoning proves the theological foundation of both King's novella and Shirley Jackson's short story. Kitts helps us to effect an irrepresion of the theological within not only Shirley Jackson, Stephen King and as we will see; her insights are valuable when we study *Blood Meridian*. Kitts write that even with "all the complexities of even identifying a ritual...[we have to] accept that something is being

experienced and communicated via a bodily event which is not quite casual and which occurs in space and time...Rather, textualization brings with it an intrinsic problem, namely the extent to which discursive reasoning...may capture a ritual's full sensory dimensions" (Kitts 3). Here is the ritual stoning in *The Lottery*, which reminds us of Christ's prohibition of stoning (Bible *John* 8: 3-11) not only a wrongdoer but, anyone for that matter. Yet the American Dream based on the Pilgrims' version of Puritanism is more of a nightmare in America's forgotten towns:

"All right, folks." Mr. Summers said. "Let's finish quickly."

Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones...

The children had stones already. And someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head...

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her. (Jackson n.pag.)

In Stephen King's *Children of the Corn* (1977), 'He Who Walks Behind the Rows', a demon who demands continual blood sacrifice, transforms what is evil into a religious rite. The children in this short story are isolated from the rest of the world, having been coerced by 'He Who Walks Behind the Rows' to invert Christian motifs. They murder their parents and all who come into their ghost-town of Gatlin in Nebraska to satiate the blood lust of 'He Who Walks Behind the Rows'. However, the motif of slandering culminating in the mimetic inversion of the Biblical casting of stones remains: "When they [Jewish rabbis] kept on questioning him [Jesus], he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her [an adulteress]" (John 8:7). René Girard, previously referred to, writes in another of his

books, *The Scapegoat* (published in French in 1982, translated to English in 1986) that: “Now we must discuss an essential dimension of myth that is almost entirely absent from historical persecutions: that of the sacred. Medieval and modern persecutors do not worship their victims, they only hate them. They are therefore easy to identify as victims. It is more difficult to spot the victim in a supernatural being who is a cult object” (Girard *The Scapegoat* 38). This economy of hatred charted by Girard in his *The Scapegoat* is the esse of evil. The gothic mode, which includes the thriller, the Western and horror fiction, simply put, is about the presence of sin. Sin will be defined later within this thesis. Whether this sin, as understood by Christian theologians, can ever give way to the good in the here and the now, will be investigated later. Stacey Peebles the Cormac McCarthy scholar who has been quoted above in relation to Yuman myths and *Blood Meridian* and has published *Cormac McCarthy and Performance: Page, Stage, Screen*, in an interview with Cal Flynn on the website *Five Books*, makes a very pertinent statement about how we should approach the evil that we encounter in Cormac McCarthy’s novels. When questioned about the element of evil in the works of McCarthy by Flynn; Peebles’ answer while specifically about McCarthy is equally true for the evil that we encounter in Stephen King. Peebles says:

...how talking about ‘evil’ as simply a metaphysical category might be an easy way of *not* talking about some of the motivating factors for why this violence was occurring. Or look at *Child of God*. One of the big conversations around that book is how the community can be seen as driving Lester to do this. They repossess his farm; they reject him socially, they keep pushing him away and away and away. The guy just wants to have some space for himself and he literally is denied any kind of human community or resource. This is his reaction. To call it ‘evil’ is too simple” (Peebles and Flynn *Interview* n.pag., emphasis original).

Since we are reading McCarthy and King together taking the cue from Leslie Fiedler as indicated above, we need to see what Stephen King has to say of the metaphysical idea of the supernatural. The difficulty in representing the miraculous in *The Green Mile*, since it is difficult, if not impossible to configure the miraculous as being from

God in the face of so much evil in its various non-miraculous forms both within King's fiction which mimetically represent the world in the last century and in this century. Thus, to explain the nature of evil and the nature of an omnipotent and omniscient God within Christianity as represented within the neo-thrillers and neo-westerns of McCarthy and King, it is wise to refer to Jürgen Moltmann's (b.1926) views regarding God. Moltmann's theology is in turn informed by the philosophy of Hannah Arendt. It was Arendt who in her *Preface to the First Edition* (vii-ix) of her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* writes about the division of humanity between "those who believe in human omnipotence" (Arendt vii) and "those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives" (Arendt vii). Jürgen Moltmann's reading of Arendt and both their thoughts inform the thrillers, the westerns and the other genres revised by McCarthy and King.

Jürgen Moltmann writes of a living and suffering God at the heart of the Christian experience. This weakness of the Christian God, as will be shown later in this thesis, will be expanded by the deconstructionist philosopher John D. Caputo (b. 1940). It is from this suffering God of Christianity contemporary currents in Christian theology arise. Moreover, the God found within the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King is a God who preferentially abides among the powerless. That is why, Suttree in McCarthy's *Suttree* leaves the comforts of his house and felt called to live a marginalised life in the first place. In theological terms, Suttree had to live an apostolic life of being thrown willingly to the periphery of respectable society. And, he chose that life and always had the freedom to return to his wealthy family with its inherited respectability. The difference between Dueña Alfonsa and Suttree is all the more evident: Suttree was true to himself and God and never gave in to despair. Dueña Alfonsa had once heard the call to follow the liberating God of Gustavo Gutiérrez but chose to harden her heart and abandon herself and the people of Mexico to their destinies by rejecting free-will.

Authentic Christianity and Christian theology cannot arise without addressing the problems posed by various systemic injustices in the real world. Christian theology addressed these injustices in the past and continues to respond to social inequities ranging from the unjust allocation of wealth in the hands of oligarchs to issues like nuclear holocausts and plagues which have no end. McCarthy in his *All the Pretty Horses* writes of the wealth of Mexico's Spanish conquerors. In his *The Road*, McCarthy writes of a probable nuclear disaster which has decimated humanity. And in

The Stand, Stephen King writes of a fever which erased human civilisation to the extent that humanity is forced to rebuild itself from nothing. In *The Stand*, even powerplants have stopped production since the engineers who ran those power stations were dead from the constantly mutating virus which King named Captain Trips. Yet through all these disasters, both McCarthy and King show us that God has not given up on humanity and indeed, God in both their works, not only suffers with those who are victims of evil in its myriad manifestations, but intervenes within the history of humanity in their fiction. This is not a Gnostic or Kabbalist view of the world. This is a mainstream Christian view of the world articulated by Jürgen Moltmann, another of the last century's greatest thinkers who did not hesitate to face the problem of evil within a theistic doctrine of a Christian God who nonetheless permits suffering, even though He is by definition omnipotent. Moltmann in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (1981) writes of the passibility of God who is often conceived of as impassible. We will have to discuss the passibility and the impassibility of God in relation to the genres within which McCarthy and King write. Jürgen Moltmann advocates for a passible conception of God which is now one of the main currents within Christology. The implications of Moltmann's insights are important to the discourses we find in McCarthy and King. In both authors, God is shown to be personal and weak and suffering with the suffering. Therefore, when we encounter radical evil in their fiction, we know from thinkers like Moltmann and Caputo, God is present when children are scalped in *Blood Meridian*, or when Beverly Marsh and Dolores Claiborne are victims of paternal abuse and domestic violence respectively. Moltmann writes:

The more [we understand] God's experience, the more deeply the mystery of God's passion is revealed to [us]. [We] then perceives that the history of the world is the history of God's suffering. At the moments of God's profoundest revelation there is always suffering: the cry of the captives in Egypt; Jesus' death cry on the cross; the sighing of the whole enslaved creation for liberty... God suffers with us – God suffers from us — God suffers for us: it is this experience of God that reveals...God [to be God] ... carried on today in the context of the question

about God's capacity or incapacity for suffering.

(Moltmann 4)

For instance, the guards entrusted with punishing John Coffey start doubting themselves and finally realise that in their power over Coffey, inheres their own damnations. They must let go of their beliefs in their own omnipotence, and believe in the goodness they knew existed in their childhood. As God instructs Billy Denbrough in *The Stand* to have faith in human goodness, these prison-guards have to unlearn in order to learn to accept and live with the holy, not merely with a sense of the holy. If they are to understand John Coffey who is one of those men who are naturally like unto children as Jesus demands from those whom He elects as His own (Bible *Matthew* 18:3-4), the policemen realise that they need to empty themselves to become receptacles of the Word of God as embodied in John Coffey. This process of emptying oneself to allow God to function within the human person is known as kenosis. Kenotic theology plays an important role in King's fiction. In King's thrillers and gothic-westerns, being open to kenosis is one of the prerequisites to serve God. This is why we find so many characters praying to God in King's fiction and letting go of their preconceived notions of their selves fashioned by pride. Later we will see Mother Abigail in *The Stand* focus on her own hubris. David Carver, though just twelve years' old in *Desperation* had to first effect kenosis within himself and then through this kenotic process which in simpler terms, is prayer within the theological paradigms in *Desperation*, can make space for God to act through him. Within Christianity, God acts through human beings and propels all historiography which in turn, awaits the second coming of Christ. In the following quotation we will see that the guards had also concluded that God cannot be trapped within human utterance. This is the mystery of God, whereas evil being banal and finite within Christianity, can be mapped. We are not concerned here with supernatural qualia, but that evil which we find within the human condition. The guards at last understand the holy and their places among the elect of God's kingdom:

...we seemed to have decided without saying a word, [since speaking about the supernatural, especially the holy] might go a long way toward spoiling something that was special, and beautiful, by virtue of its strangeness and delicacy...[God, working through John Coffey] had chosen us, after all, in some way [we did]

not understand, even now. Maybe Harry came closest when he said it would do no good to tell other people, not just because they wouldn't believe but because they wouldn't care. (King *The Green Mile* 40)

The theological exegesis of King's supernatural thriller above shows that he is no less a theologian than he is a great American writer within the gothic mode of fiction writing. Yet, Stephen King and other gothic writers are normatively dismissed as writers of pulp-gore, while King wants us to care and believe in both evil and the telos of evil, that is, the fact that within Christian theology, God ultimately brings good out of evil. This teleology of evil as being good will be studied in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

McCarthy and King's works are testimonies that both radical evils and radically good qualia exist and manifest themselves in different, humanly comprehensible terms. The Christian concepts of sin recur in the works of McCarthy and King, and these concepts of sin provide the theological basis for reading McCarthy and King synoptically. As will be proven later, this theological synoptic reading will help elevate the popular and thus, accessible, cultural artefact to the level of the sublime. The disdain with which popular literature is seen is proven erroneous here since the following examples will illustrate how popular literature has conveyed these themes of sin and redemption within their fictional worlds.

Raymond Chandler's (1888-1959) *The Long Goodbye* is relegated to the backwaters of literary studies. Here is Chandler writing about the freedom of the press. In the process of describing how the newspaper industry works, he raises the issue of oligarchy and their entitlements. This is, within Christian theology, a systemic wrong which is in the final analysis, an evil. Albeit it is nothing supernatural. Supernatural evil is easy to locate within texts, but evil which passes off as normative within society and takes the broader form of corruption with its bias towards the wealthy, is harder to pin down. Chandler correctly observes in *The Long Goodbye*: "Newspapers are owned and published by rich men. Rich men all belong to the same club. Sure, there's competition—hard tough competition for circulation, for newsbeats, for exclusive stories. Just so long as it doesn't damage the prestige and privilege and position of the owners" (Chandler *The Long Goodbye* 525). It is this sensitivity towards structural

economic disparities that makes Chandler worth reading and should prevent us from dismissing Chandler as a popular writer unworthy of deep literary scrutiny. Chandler like Stephen King critiques certain aspects of Christian dogma without accepting all Christian theological positions. Raymond Chandler has been mentioned since we will now move on to the hard case noir of McCarthy and King. King's noirs especially owe a lot to Chandler, and we will discuss Chandler below in some detail with reference to his theories of writing so called nobrow literature.

Both Cormac McCarthy and especially, Stephen King have revived the genre of the hard case noir which as the following chapter shows is part of the gothic mode of fiction writing, but both have given a new theological turn to their thrillers. Simon Marsden in 2018 clearly showed the new theological turn within the gothic. Before Marsden few literary critics bothered to study these noir fiction for their theology. Had their Christian roots been interrogated earlier, then we would not have neglected these works. The Christianity that they relate is not one of institutionalized religious discourses, but these authors blur the line between existential loneliness leading to adultery and adultery considered as a mortal sin within Patristics. St. Augustine writes in his *The Good of Marriage* that “Adultery or fornication, however, is mortally sinful... The sealing of the marriage compact is so clearly governed by a kind of sacrament that it is not made void even by the act of separation; for if a wife marries another while her husband is still alive, she commits adultery even if he has abandoned her, and he is the cause of this evil for having left her” (Augustine 15). The Church Fathers long before the splitting of Christianity into Roman Catholicism and the various protestant branches, had condemned infidelity as one of the most grievous sins known to man. St. Cyprian writes in one of his *Letters* : “For since our bodies are members of Christ and we are each a temple of God, whoever violates the temple of God by adultery violates God” (Cyprian 151-152). But writers of hard case crime and horror and the American western, do not agree with the Church Fathers. These noirs are critiques of Patristics. Infidelities and affairs have disastrous consequences in these thrillers but after reading these thrillers, one is left wondering to what extent the Church Fathers were correct in calling out as sinners, women and men whose lives had become meaningless in stale marriages. This, when Christ Himself decried judging others and forgave the adulterous woman. These noirs are within the literary continuum constructed from the tradition of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel about clerical hypocrisy

in his *The Scarlet Letter* mentioned above. To be human is to be broken, and it is this emotional topography that Patristics condemns. Thrillers and other neglected genres pose a challenge to Patristics. The need to study these genres arise because they are actually read by thousands and their cinematic adaptations reach millions of others. Very few outside academia bother with what John Milton thought about sin; but millions bother about the portrayal of life in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Novels like Ray Bradbury's (1920-2012) *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) and Gillian Flynn's (b.1971) *Gone Girl* (2012) deal with serious themes which have far reaching consequences, which within Christianity, determine our eternal salvation or eternal damnation. *Gone Girl's* main theme is unfaithfulness within marriage; and if we were to only refer to Patristics, we would find every single character in *Gone Girl* to be a sinner. Gillian Flynn on the other hand, critiques this position of judging characters as adulterous or otherwise and instead of providing for some divine punishment to sort the protagonists' marriage out; Flynn creates a novel which read theologically will reveal a critique of Christian views on marriage. *Gone Girl* engages with the Exodus 20:14 prohibition against adultery: "You shall not commit adultery". Yet Flynn chooses to portray American society as it is; adultery is normative and instead of asking her readers to judge the sinfulness of her characters; she asks us to empathise with her characters. This tension is there between literature and theology. While Christianity in all its different forms condemns adultery as a mortal sin; writers of hard-boiled noirs and thrillers and westerns do not. Instead, these writers show why one must follow the spirit of the law and not be bound to the letter of the law. For instance, Nick Dunne's adulterous affair with his student Andie Hardy destroys the family unit in *Gone Girl*. No matter what moral philosophers have to say about adultery, it remains a Biblical taboo. But Gillian Flynn does not agree that it is a taboo. She presents to us the realities of life as found in a normatively Christian nation. The thriller removes the patina of self-satisfaction and self-aggrandizement that sometimes masquerades as Christianity. Flynn asks us to reflect on the effects of extra-marital relationships and thereby we are alerted to the destructive nature of sin. In this sense, this thesis proposes to read the works of McCarthy and King as works which challenge, reshape, and asks hard questions of Patristics and our notions of both evil and good.

If we study James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, we find sexually deviant behaviour brought about by an existential ennui experienced by Cora

Papadakis, who is married to Nick Papadakis. Nick and Cora's marriage has become intolerable to Cora, and Cora finds solace in Frank Chambers who comes to work in the Papadakis's diner in rural California. Cora engages in, and enjoys deviant sadomasochistic sexual encounters with Chambers. Thus, the Christian prohibitions against adultery are dismissed within a secularized America. Finally in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Cora and Chambers murder Nick Papadakis in their pursuit of illicit happiness. It needs no theology to understand that murdering anyone does not bring existential happiness to the murderers. In James M. Cain's novel, Cora and Frank end up in jail accusing each other of provoking one another to kill Nick. James M. Cain does not want his readers to focus on the adultery unlike mainstream Christian theologians do. But he wants us to see the effects of the relationship between Cora and Frank leading up to the murder of Cora's husband. The relationship between Cora and Frank was initially a result of boredom; we cannot term it as supernaturally evil. Their marriage had become meaningless for Cora. Cora speaks of her marriage and of her husband as unbearable: "I took him, and so help me, I meant to stick by him. But I can't stand it any more... To have to be around somebody that's greasy and makes you sick at the stomach when he touches you. I'm not really such a hell cat, Frank. I just can't stand it any more" (Cain 13). This boredom and hatred of her husband leads to homicide. This is the point where this thriller becomes genre-transgressive. The murder they commit transgresses natural justice and thus, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* becomes a cautionary tale against infidelity. The theological part in this outcome is in keeping with mainstream Christian doctrine; both Roman Catholic dogma and all manners of evangelical zealots will agree that they were punished for their sins beginning with adultery. This is the disjuncture between popular American literature in its various forms ranging from thrillers to 'whodunnits' and between mainstream Christian theology. Popular genres of American fiction invite us to experience loneliness and ennui through their portrayal of women and men exhausted by the grindmill of daily life and then rethink Christian doctrinal positions. This is the new theological turn to the gothic which we will discuss in the next chapter. Tony Tanner in his *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (1979) sees in adultery a "gap, or silence, in the bourgeois novel" (Tanner 14) in which "we can find a strictness that works to maintain the law, and a sympathy and understanding with the adulterous violator that works to undermine it" (Tanner 14). It is this sympathy with the so-called adulterous violator which distinguishes the fiction of Cormac McCarthy, Stephen King

and other writers of thrillers from the Church Fathers' harsh dogmatic positions. While Saints Augustine and Cyprian are inflexible in their condemnation of infidelity; noir and genre writers pose a challenge to this manner of theologising. It is also important to note that in American noir as well as American westerns homophobia is challenged. This too is in contradiction from mainstream Christian theology. Christian theology cutting across denominations is overtly homophobic; but American horror fiction, like Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* series is a critique of homophobia. Thus, it is incorrect to state that the American thriller and the American western convey theological truths as they were originally formulated within Patristics. Rather, the stance of the writers of these genres is more aligned to Christ's message of suspending our judgment of others. From Raymond Chandler to Gillian Flynn, most writers of the gothic form accept the presence of systematic sin, but they suspend judgement and manifest an empathy for the neighbour which is often absent from Patristics. In other words, radical evils are mapped by these authors but without accepting that homicides are equal in gravity to infidelities.

In Raymond Chandler's hardboiled novel, *The Lady in the Lake*, we find again the theme of adultery, this time complicated with the involvement of a gigolo. Like *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, we find that *The Lady in the Lake* too has multiple murders in it. Thus, here too, mortal sins are committed but with no explicit references to the Bible or to the concept of sin. Chandler's *The Little Sister* is about organized gangsters and the violence that define these gangs. We encounter this kind of violence in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*. In *Playback*, we have the descriptions of various erotic encounters and find ourselves in a morally ambiguous world where affairs are common and normative. Chandler's vision of the world accepts the normativity of adultery but like other noir writers his internal Christian censor, forces him to end these thrillers with veritably tragic endings. This is not to be confused with the formulaic structures of noirs. The formulaic structure demands murders; the formulaic structure of these novels demand that the murderers are discovered. But what is not there in the formulaic structure is the ethical and theological turn that these thrillers take in their endings. Murder is at the heart of the thriller and noir and by extrapolation of the gothic. This is a serious theological issue involved here. Human life is considered to be a gift from God and created ex-nihilo by God and each human being is unique and created in the image of God. To kill a person is to not only be

violent but to take on and usurp the role of God, the Creator of each human person. It is actually an iteration of the sin of pride within Christianity and in the Bible. Thus, it is important to mention an essay by Raymond Chandler aptly named, *The Simple Art of Murder*. In this essay, Chandler points out that “Murder, which is a frustration of the individual and hence a frustration of the race, may have, and in fact has, a good deal of sociological implication” (Chandler 1). In endnote 16, the theologian Stanley Hauerwas, in his essay *McInerny Did It, or Should a Pacifist Read Murder Mysteries?*, which is part of a festschrift on the mystery writer and neo-Thomist, Ralph McInerny, titled *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny* (1999), points out the implication of Chandler’s statement about murder. Hauerwas hints at the theological ramifications of the act of murder being more in its consequences than being only sociological in nature. Hauerwas writes in his endnote: ““A good deal of sociological implications” is, to say the least, an understatement” (Hauerwas 174). Thus, Hauerwas connected the noir to theology way back in 1999. It is interesting to read his endnote 10 of the same essay. There he comments on the theological and specifically Thomist nature of a Benedictine thriller with its endless murders. Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) is seen by Hauerwas as a symbol of Thomistic virtue:

...*The Name of the Rose* is obviously one of the most exemplary forms of the re-narration of the past using the form of mystery...it is not accidental that his mystery depended on the forms of life shaped by monasticism i.e., it takes monastics to exemplify the law that should shape life outside the monastery. In other words, monasticism is the institutional form of Aquinas' claim that charity is the form of all the virtues... (Hauerwas 173).

This is one instance of a theological reading of two separate thrillers. Neither James M. Cain, nor Raymond Chandler, and in this thesis, Cormac McCarthy or Stephen King are bothered about what Patristics has to say about sexuality and adultery. All of these authors focus on murder as being the real issue at hand. This is the essential theological problem in their fiction. Having pre-marital physical relationships might have disturbed the Church Fathers and might still continue to disturb Christian ministers, but within the world of thrillers and gothic westerns the more important aspect is the consequence

of these infidelities if they end in murders. It is the injustice of murder of another human being posited as a solution to boredom that is the human condition and is the focal point of the cultural act of theologising that these novelists interrogate. These novels convey to us, in this postreligious age, the religious and profound importance of following Yahweh's command to humanity through Moses: "You shall not murder" (Bible *Exodus* 20:13). Annihilating another human being is no slight matter. While being unchaste according to Patristics is a moral failure or a sin; within the ambit of thrillers and Westerns and especially in the works of McCarthy and King, murders are theologically unacceptable. This is the one deed which neither McCarthy, nor King can excuse. In *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady Cole confronts Blevins in the prison and points out to Blevins that he ought not to have murdered "for a chew of tobacco" (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 162). John Grady Cole says to Blevins's excuse that the man he stole tobacco from came to accost him.

He come at me.

Come at you.

Yeah.

So you shot him.

What choice did I have?

What choice said John Grady. (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 162)

Once John Grady Cole comes to know of Blevins's homicide, he no longer aligns himself morally with Blevins. According to *All the Pretty Horses* we all have choices which we need to exercise. Alejandra chooses to leave John Grady Cole after promising to love John Grady Cole till her death. She says to him:

I cannot do what you ask, she said. I love you. But I cannot. (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 256)

John Grady Cole had proposed that they run away from Mexico and have a better and freer life at Texas:

He told her that he could make a living and that they could go to live in his country and make their life there and no harm would come to them. (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 254)

Alejandra next morning, takes John Grady Cole to her maternal grandfather's statue at Guadalarita and informs John Grady that her grandfather was killed there for the cause of Mexico. She points out that he died a stranger in a strange land away from his home with none to console him:

There was no mother to cry [for her grandfather]...Nor
[any] little bird that flew. Just the blood on the stones [of
the city]...(McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 256)

Because of her rootedness in Mexico and inspired by the patriotism of her grandfather, Alejandra makes a conscious decision to not accept the American dream even if that meant to lose the love of her life. Alejandra is thus very unlike her great-aunt, Dueña Alfonsa who says that one cannot choose because man has no choice to begin with. She has already been quoted above as remarking that we are all puppets who are not autonomous. John Grady himself does not justify attacking a man who wronged him at the 'messhall'. Rawlins says to John Grady:

You didn't have no choice. (McCarthy *All the Pretty
Horses* 218)

John Grady replies to Rawlins that Rawlins need not justify Grady's deed:

You don't need to try and make it right. It is what it is...I
knew when I bought the knife what I'd bought it for.
(McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 219)

In McCarthy's fiction everyone has a choice unlike the philosophy of the hitman Anton Chigurh. Chigurh murders people by tossing a coin. In this way Chigurh absolves himself from all wrongdoing and can blame every action of his own and the victim's death at his hands to both their destinies colliding. Theologically seen, Christianity is based on the autonomy of the human person; we are free to choose our lives' paths, and nothing is predetermined. In both McCarthy and King evil is marked by determinism and freedom characterizes the Kingdom of God. This issue will be discussed in some detail later in this thesis.

To illustrate how Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King accommodate the Bible, evil and God within their works and why we need to refer to Christian theologians, we turn to the Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann (b.1933). Brueggemann has

repeatedly shown how we are living in the time of the nameless Pharaoh, instead of living within the relaxed, emancipatory, and non-commodified time of Yahweh. In his book *Sabbath as Resistance* (2014), Brueggemann illustrates how the Judaic God of the Sabbath in the Old Testament invites us to extricate ourselves from the capitalist framework of consumption and production. In *Sabbath as Resistance* Brueggemann writes that “In Exodus 5, we are given a passionate narrative account of that labor system in which Pharaoh endlessly demands more production. What the slaves are to produce is more bricks that are to be used for the building of more “supply cities” in which Pharaoh can store his endless supply of material wealth in the form of grain... In this narrative report, Pharaoh is a hard-nosed production manager for whom production schedules are inexhaustible...” (Brueggemann 3). There is no rest possible under the rule of evil which rests on increasingly harried production systems. This the world from which Suttree in Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree* flees. This is the world where Randall Flagg has set up his fiefdom in Stephen King’s *The Stand*. The nameless Pharaoh’s world is one of surplus, one of hoarding and looks forward to a logic of capitalism which knows no interruptions. This is the American Dream become nightmare. The Pilgrims who settled in the east coast coming from Europe became caught up in a maze of violence and continuous work with no rest as they moved west where they had to live through hard labour, building colonies and towns and cities working every day of the week. The day of rest or Sabbath became just like any other day responding to the harshness of the land where even on this day appointed for rest, they had to be on the move westwards. In American westerns including Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* series the gunslinger Roland and his group have no time to rest. Roland is always on the move. Thus, when Brueggemann further writes in *Sabbath as Resistance* that the “Sabbath rest of God is the acknowledgment that God and God’s people in the world are not commodities to be dispatched for endless production... Rather they are subjects situated in an economy of neighborliness. All of that is implicit in the reality and exhibit of divine rest” (Brueggemann 6). Yuval Noah Harari is not a theologian, and he professes to be an atheist in the strictest meaning of the term. He believes that religions have done more harm to humanity than any other discourse, like Karl Marx and so many others before him. In his books, Harari contests any idea of transcendence and provides a thorough critique of religions and rituals. His insights are valuable to the theological discourse in this thesis since Harari affirms what theologians have maintained about the relaxed economy of God. Harari does not speak of God, but he

does speak of the nameless pharaoh's anxiety ridden economy of hoarding. In his book *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind*, Harari writes of the disastrous effect of capitalism against which Christian theologians and Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King write: "The history of ethics [according to Harari] is a sad tale of wonderful ideals that nobody can live up to. Most Christians did not imitate Christ, most Buddhists failed to follow Buddha... In contrast, most people today successfully live up to the capitalist-consumerist ideal. The new ethic promises paradise on condition that the rich remain greedy and spend their time making more money and that the masses give free reign to their cravings and passions and buy more and more. This is the first religion in history whose followers actually do what they are asked to do" (Harari 391). This is precisely where Harari, Christian theologians and Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King agree. This is why, one has to emphasise that the problem of evil is not a supernatural problem. Capitalism is an evil which had been seen as Christ being so defiling that He said "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Bible *Matthew* 19:23-24). It is this spirit of the capitalist work ethic that Harari captures when he writes: a "pharaoh who pours resources into a non-productive pyramid is not a capitalist" (Harari 349). Avarice and capitalism lead to the violence portrayed in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and his *No Country for Old Men*. The Glanton gang and Judge Holden only understand power mediated through money. *No Country for Old Men* with its drug cartels and hitmen is at its core a representation of the evil of capitalism come alive. And characters in poverty in both McCarthy and King's fiction, prove the power of capitalism. For instance, King writing as Richard Bachman has written about dystopias which are fuelled by mass poverty set off against oligarchs. In *Under the Dome*, it is capitalism in its various discursive forms which destroy Chester's Mill. Thus, the economic background to be found in both McCarthy's and King's fiction is important since capitalism is a sin according to the Bible and is condemned by Christian theologians. Jesus clearly prohibits capitalism when He says: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Bible *Matthew* 6:24). This is why Mother Abigail in *The Stand* asks men to venture west to confront evil without having money or anything that might veer towards capitalism. Within a Christian schema, a capitalist is someone who can never depend on God for his/her daily bread. Someone

who cannot trust or depend on God one day, cannot be trusted to trust in God's Providence on any other day. This is the simple logic why Jesus has so many injunctions against capitalism and capitalists: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Bible *Matthew* 6:26). In *Mark* 12:41–44, Jesus observes to His disciples after seeing a poor widow give away all her money to God that while the rich just gave what they could easily afford to give without their offering making any difference to their hoarded wealth: "He called his disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all the others. For they all gave out of their wealth. But she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had" (Bible *Mark* 12:43-44). For Cormac McCarthy's assessment of the relentless movement of Christian settlers who routinely berate native American Indians as savages and heathens, we turn to his *Blood Meridian* where the scalphunters who:

...had turned their tragic mounts to the west and they rode infatuate...toward the red demise of that day, toward...the distant pandemonium of the sun. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 195)

It hardly requires explanation that the redness in the quotation from *Blood Meridian* is a reference to the blood of hundred of aboriginal Americans and Mexicans who had been scalped in *Blood Meridian* and remain to be scalped. The scalping was purely for capitalist gains in the form of land and money. The men who went west, in the words of McCarthy, were like:

Itinerant degenerates...[moving]...westwards like some heliotropic plague. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 83).

This heliotropic plague was routinely glorified by other writers of westerns before Cormac McCarthy began writing his western novels.

It is within these structures of thought, beginning with the first quotation, then with the second and finally with Brueggemann's quote on the capitalist work ethic and the paralyzing evil that the Pharaoh stands for, we look at Randall Flagg, the 'man in black' who is a recurrent figure in King's novels. For instance, Flagg, demands hard labour from his followers in *The Stand* while Mother Abigail is content to have a less ambitious community of followers gathered around her in rural Nebraska and thence,

her community of followers move finally to Boulder, Colorado. Flagg's community of followers are in Las Vegas, Nevada. The typology does not end here: Mother Abigail is a black, which itself is a foil to the white Randall Flagg; Mother Abigail goes into the wilderness as the Biblical prophets did and most notably, Moses and Jesus. To be more specific, Moses did not really choose to go into a desert, he had perhaps lost his way (*Exodus* 3-4); Jesus, according to Christianity, of His own free will, went to the desert to encounter God and rebuff Satan (Bible *Matthew* 4:1-11, *Mark* 1:12-13, *Luke* 4:1-13). Here we must add that the discourse on free will in the Bible cannot be reduced to simple platitudes. This tension between the plan qua Will of God and the will of man is a contentious subject within Christianity. The most important Christian discussions range from St. Paul's justification theories to be found most notably in his letter, or the *Epistle to the Romans*, leading up to St. Augustine of Hippo's long rejoinder to the Pelagian heresy (Augustine *On the free choice of the will, on grace and free choice, and other writings* 3-126) to Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (1525). This thesis is not a thesis on Christian theology; therefore it is prudent to mention only three names and move on with the cultural work at hand. It suffices to stress at the cost of being tautological, that Christian theologians over the centuries have continually reflected on the problems posed by the need for closure or punishment of perpetrators of heinous crimes and the Covenant forgiveness or, hesed promised by Yahweh to the Israelites. There can never be any resolution to this problem; nor do Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King give any reasonable answers which close this debate, even within the limited Biblically echoing fictional worlds they create in their novels and short stories. But we digress unless we return to Mother Abigail in *The Stand*. Mother Abigail represents the relaxed time of Yahweh, and Randall Flagg represents the anxieties that the nameless pharaoh creates in the Hebrew Bible. The God of the Jews and the Christians is omniscient (Wierenga n.pag.), yet this same God asks Adam after the Fall of his whereabouts, this same all-knowing God asks both Adam and Eve of how they came to hide from Him and this same God, knowing even before their Fall, punishes Satan for tempting Eve only when Eve accuses Satan of seducing her to disobedience against Yahweh. However, God has fore-knowledge which constitutes His omniscience (Wierenga n.pag.). This shows God's infinite covenant love for man or, hesed:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord
God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the

day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked?”

(Bible *Genesis* 3:8-11)

This attitude of God found in *Genesis* is mimetically re-enacted throughout the Hebrew Bible and typologically foresees the coming of Jesus Christ for Christians, in the New Testament. Christ repeatedly stresses on the need to forgive others: “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15) and “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and, Luke 11:2-4) is absolutely conditional; God forgives the human being in the here and the now only to the extent that we forgive others. Mere repentance for sins does not bring the human person within the Christian economy of salvation: “... And forgive us our debts,/ as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Bible *Matthew* 6:12). It is this stress on God’s repeated forgiveness of human sin which we are to mimetically re-enact in our lives if we are to find the hesed-informed economy of God that Cormac McCarthy wants us to reenact in our lives. According to McCarthy we are not to judge Lester Ballard in McCarthy’s thriller, *A Child of God*. Instead of imputing demonic activities at work in pushing Lester to become a serial killer we are invited by McCarthy through his retelling of hesed, to understand a social milieu that can make a monster out of a not so very intelligent man. And it is evident that we are all children of God. This is the powerful message of McCarthy in this novel. In a certain sense, authors like McCarthy recognize the evil action which is a consequence of the socio-economic world that we inhabit. Ballard is in the ultimate analysis a mentally ill person and his mental illness drives him to serial killing and necrophilia. Mental ill health is a marker for the social forces which unhinge people. Lester Ballard perhaps would not have become who he became had his property not been taken from him. Ballard is a symptom of the sickness within America and therein enters the concept of systematic sin. Systematic sin and original sin are concepts which will be explained later in this thesis.

Stephen King too represents hesed in *The Stand* and in his other novels. Mother Abigail goes out to the wilderness to pray perchance she has sinned against Yahweh. When she returns, like Moses returning from Mount Sinai (Bible *Exodus* 32); Mother Abigail finds that her community is slowly breaking apart for Flagg's seductions are too great for her people to resist. Unlike Moses in *Exodus* 32, Mother Abigail living within the economy of Christ's grace does not order anyone to be killed for their succumbing to Flagg's temptations. Christ came to fulfil Mosaic Law and not to destroy them: "Do not think that I [Christ] have come to abolish the Law or the [the Laws of the Major and the Minor Biblical] Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Bible *Matthew* 5:17). King's understanding of sin is foregrounded in his understanding of Christ's abundant economy of love over the fire and brimstone economy of parts of the Old Testament which seems, through insufficient exegesis, to be a very harsh ideology of revenge. King is not amiss in his reading of the Hebrew Bible, but like Emily Brontë (1818-1848), who, in her *Wuthering Heights* (1847) to name a book as gothic as any novel King has written till date, shows in his short story *Children of the Corn* and his novella *The Mist*; the power of Mosaic Law as an agency of radical evil when read without proper exegesis. In Cormac McCarthy's apocalyptic and violent worlds found in his *The Road* and *No Country for Old Men*, we have destructions of apocalyptic proportions in the first novel, and within the second novel, we have every character defying the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue, (Bible *Deuteronomy* 5:7–21) given by Yahweh to Moses. They are violent because they covet what does not belong to them. The premise of *No Country for Old Men* is that two of the most addictive things known to man are the cause of all the other evils which follow the murder of the drug-dealers: heroin and money. Jesus says that one cannot have two masters simultaneously: Mammon and God. In all of Cormac McCarthy's and King's novels, man serves the cause of Mammon until God intervenes in their lives. These insights are necessary to understand the theology to be found in the fiction of both McCarthy and King.

In Stephen King's *Gerald's Game* (1992), a supernatural thriller which has all the staples of the gothic in it including incest, insanity and serial killing is another novel by King which deals with several theological motifs. Jessie Burlingame enjoys consensual sexually deviant bondage games, until her successful lawyer husband, Gerald, dies from a heart attack while in the act of deviant coitus. Jessie, handcuffed to

the bed, has to face her past and a serial killer. Like a leitmotif, what happened between her father and Jessie when she was only ten years old returns to haunt her. This is the kind of evil that King repeatedly writes about in his works. Jesus warns adults of the consequence of child abuse in clear terms: “It would be better for them[paedophiles] to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble” (Bible *Luke* 17:2). The Biblical command against paedophilia is entirely accepted by King without any critique of theology here. But King has no qualms about erotic role plays in his novels including *Gerald’s Game*. For King, the play of erotic games between Jessie and her husband Gerald are not problematic and within the fiction of King, these erotic encounters are normative. There are three issues which King foregrounds in this novel which are theological in their foundations. First, when the consensual game begins, Jessie plays along. Then when she had asked her husband, Gerald to stop this game of bondage, he tries to rape her. In other words, Jessie was robbed of her autonomy and the full import of the patriarchy within American society is vividly portrayed in the novel. King asks through the portrayal of Jessie’s plight whether marital rape is permissible? The answer is unambiguously in the negative. The Bible on the other hand often portrays women as inferior to men. Thus, King’s stance is revisionary as a conveyor of Christian theology which finally has as its origins in the Bible. Then King takes up the issue of child abuse and in this novel, it is the abuse of a ten year old girl by her father. Jessie’s life had been upended with this primal trauma. Jessie had always been on the run from “some other man, some other Daddy” (King *Gerald’s Game* 145). She tells herself that what had happened to her when she was only ten is normal and by implication King wants us to understand that incest is common in American society. This primal taboo of incest is a grave sin according to Christianity.

Then the eclipse had started, and she had sat on his lap in the sundress that was both too tight and too short — the sundress he himself had asked her to wear — and what had happened had happened. Just a brief, goatish interlude... My father wasn't the first college-educated, upper-middle-class man...*That's not to say it was right, or even excusable; it's just to say that it's over, and it*

could have been a lot worse. (Gerald's Game 145-146, emphasis original)

But it is not over, later her father manipulates her to not inform her mother lest she thinks that the ten year old Jessie seduced her father. Jessie connects that day of the eclipse to her present situation at their lake house at Kashwakamak Lake where she remains tied to the bed:

... I suppose that what my father did to me then might have something to do with what's happening to me now...(Gerald's Game 145, italics are King's)

The demon that needed exorcising from Jessie is the memory of her father. Not some actual demon possessing her. As Simona Argentieri writes in her essay, *Incest Yesterday and Today: from Conflict to Ambiguity* collected in an anthology on the trope of incest, *On Incest: Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (2005) : “we know that, unfortunately, incest can occur at any age...and that, on the whole, the earlier it occurs the more devastating it is, when the damage penetrates into the organization of the structure and of the thought processes, producing the more invalidating defences of splitting and denial” (Argentieri 25). So, we can only imagine the trauma the ten year old Jessie suffered on the day of her father’s abuse of her. Jessie indeed splits up into multiple personae to cope with that primal betrayal by her biological father. That experience has made time stand still and stale for her and blurred the distinctions between other males in her life and her father.

Time was a cold sea through which her consciousness forged like a waddling, graceless icebreaker. Voices came and went like phantoms. (Gerald's Game 141)

The phantoms are not supernatural but her unconscious at work, connecting the past with the present. She feels that somehow, she is to be blamed for her current condition. And then we have Jessie encounter ‘the space cowboy’, Raymond Andrew Joubert, who was “a real live monster — a ghoul, in fact — running around” (*Gerald's Game* 200) desecrating buried dead bodies and robbing houses by the lake. Further, the law-firm where Gerald used to work, covers up the whole episode. The law as it were, is used to erase human desires and turn what is not shameful into something ghastly, making Jessie re-live her trauma both as a child and then as an adult in her lake house.

This is systemic sin at work. While Joubert plays games with Jessie's mind; the law-firm where her husband worked, robs Jessie of self-respect. These are the real evils in this novel. Therefore, we find that King's portrayal of evil can be mapped within the human sciences. In this thriller, King brings in all the elements of the genre of the gothic and interrogates, as we have seen, serious themes which are also some of the same themes that Christian theology is concerned about. In the Old Testament *Leviticus* 18:6 decrees: "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations" (Bible *Leviticus* 18:6). *Leviticus* 18:6-23 are decrees about sexual misconduct within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But it has to be kept in mind that King is not writing theology but rather transmitting the essentials of Biblical theology to us. Therefore, he is against homophobia and the shunning of those having extra-marital relationships. Yet *Leviticus* 18:22 prohibits homosexuality. As we find in King's works, King considers homosexuality far from evil. Rather, in his works, homophobes are condemned by King as brainless bullies. The real concerns of King are murders, rapes, paedophilia, hypocrisy and robbing the human person of agency.

When King pseudonymously wrote as Richard Bachman, in his dystopic novel *The Long Walk* he addressed the issue of robbing human beings of their autonomy. In *The Long Walk* he laid bare that most shameful and degrading human condition which makes people want to die. Poverty is one of the most degrading causes of all human evils. The powerful are so because they have resources at their disposal which the poor do not have. In novel after novel and in his short stories, King shows how the movement of capital either elevates people or demeans them. In *The Long Walk*, it is the need for money which drives the walkathon. Those who have money watch the competitors from their picnic tables by the sides of the roads where the walkers pass by. King compares the wealthy watchers with the ancient Roman elite who behaved in orgiastic ways after gladiators fought and killed each other in Roman times. In *The Long Walk* we are within a deeply conservative America where the military and the secret police rule the nation and teenage boys, and poor men have to keep walking or they are shot. They enter the walking competition for survival. In his books written as Richard Bachman King interrogates the loss of autonomy of the citizenry. The evil in *The Long Walk* is the poverty of the boys and the men who have to walk to provide much needed money for their families while only the :

...Crowd, a creature with no body, no head, no mind...[which] was nothing but a Voice and an Eye...[the] Crowd was both God and Mammon. (King *The Long Walk* 276)

No Christian theologian will utter the name of God and Mammon together unless they want to contrast one with the other as the Bible contrasts them. Yet King does so; he problematises the notion of God here and in his other works to the extent that we need to study what he means by God within his fictional discourse. In *The Long Walk* onlookers and the nameless hundreds who need not participate in the deathly competition just jeer at the walkers. At the end of *The Long Walk*, it is a supernatural being of this dystopic and horrific thriller who prods Garraty who won the race to carry on running, reminding us of the anxious economy of Egypt's nameless pharaoh. Garraty is beckoned by "a dark figure" who:

...beckoned for him to come and walk, to come and play the game...

Eyes blind, supplicating hands held out before him as if for alms, Garraty walked toward the dark figure.

And when the hand touched his shoulder again, he somehow found the strength to run. (King *The Long Walk* 339)

This, in spite of Garraty knowing that those who take part in these deadly races, take part in them knowing fully well that they choose to run because they want to escape this dystopic world which is ruled by an Orwellian Big Brother.

In the four novellas in King's *Full Dark, No Stars* (2010). Stephen King's theology is not entirely his own; it is derived from the long tradition of Roman Catholic theology which has insisted on the fallen nature of all humanity. In *A Good Marriage*, the first novella in *Full Dark, No Stars* (2010), Darcy Anderson finds out after being married to her humdrum husband, Bob, that Bob is a serial killer. Appearances are deceptive within factuality as also, within the American thriller. There is nothing supernatural about *A Good Marriage* except the mystery of evil which propels a person to become a serial killer. In *Big Driver* too, appearances are proven to be deceptive. When the aged, grandmotherly librarian Ramona Norville invites Tess, an author of

thrillers, to give a talk to Ramona's library at Chicopee, Massachusetts, Tess does not suspect she is being set up by this elderly and apparently kind librarian for being tortured and raped by her sons, "Big Driver" and "Little Driver". "Big Driver" is at first a good Samaritan, but he is the one who knocks Tess out on Stagg Road, all for getting Tess raped by his brother, "Little Driver". 1922, the last novella in *Full Dark, No Stars* is about avarice. Moral evil in the form of greed gnaws at the heart of the Nebraska farmer, Wilfred James. James kills his wife Arlette for a hundred acres of land despite owning eighty acres himself. Murder and avarice are both prohibited in the Decalogue as found in Exodus 20: 13 and Exodus 20:17. If *Full Dark, No Stars* is not about theological truths, then what is?

Before we study evil further, we need to define sin which is a moral failure within Christianity. According to Ted Honderich's (b.1933) edited, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2005), sin is:

Is [a] moral wrongdoing, or in some cases the omission of what one ought to do...in some cases sin can be more meaningfully construed in terms of faults of character or in terms of states, such as a state of rebellion against God or estrangement from God. From medieval times the Church has distinguished mortal sins from venial, or less serious, sins. More controversial is the notion of original sin, or guilt inherited from Adam, the first man. Those who take seriously the notion of original sin place great emphasis upon the effects of sin in the world... (Honderich 870).

While Honderich's definition of sin is limited in scope for the purpose of Christian exegesis, we turn to W. R. F. Browning's definition of sin in his *A Dictionary of the Bible* (2009): "...'sin' denotes what is unacceptable (to God or humanity), not necessarily disobedience to God, or rebellion against him ...not to be equated with crime, which is an offence against society. Anything wrongly related to God is sin...The condition is irreversible by human effort... and it is only by God's initiative that any change is possible..."(Browning 35-36). Martin Buber still remains a better explicator of what constitutes sin or, evil. In his book *I and Thou* first published in

1923 and first translated into English in 1937, he wrote between the distinction of the human and the inhuman. Interestingly he calls the inhuman *It*. The eponymous *It* in the novel by the same name by Stephen King is also inhuman and evil. Buber writes: “If a man lets it have the mastery, the continually growing world if *It* overruns him and robs him of his own *I*, till the incubus over him and the ghost within him whisper to one another the confession of their non-salvation” (Buber 46 italics are Buber’s). This is the exact essence of *It* in King’s *It*. *It*, beckons, and whispers to the townspeople of Derry, of their damnation. *It* in King’s novel is a miasma which can only be removed by love. Buber’s understanding of humanity and inhumanity is close to the understanding of man’s relational structure with other men within the fiction of both McCarthy and King. In both McCarthy and King, it is some or another oppressive institution which through its oppressive processes defeats humanity. For example, in King’s thriller, *Roadwork* published under the pseudonym, Richard Bachman, we have the state compelling Barton George Dawes to take up arms against state power. In *The Long Walk* (1979) discussed earlier and at some length later, the state forces boys and men to compete to death in walkathons for survival-money for their families. In an earlier line Buber, presciently wrote of this state machinery dehumanising man: “How does...man, who made spirit a means of enjoyment for himself, behaves towards the beings that live round about him...he has divided his life with his fellow-men into two tidily circled-off provinces, one of institutions and the other of feelings --- the province of *It* and the province of *I*” (Buber 43 italics are Buber’s). This province of *It* is the province of the inhuman. “It is of evil” (Buber 46) since, *It* “presumes to have the quality of the present being” (Buber 46). This lie of having the quality of being, is the quality of evil as found in McCarthy and King. Both of them depict evil as masquerading as what it is not. In McCarthy the Judge in *Blood Meridian* is a judge of nothing. The ex-priest Tobin, who was really only an ex-novice, has a conversation by the fire with the nameless kid:

What’s he a judge of?

What’s he a judge of.

Tobin glanced of across the fire. Ah lad, he said. Hush now. The man will hear ye. He’s ears like a fox.

(McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 142)

The man in black, Randall Flagg, the representative of everything evil, turns up to be a shapeshifter throughout King's works. Flagg is not one of the tricksters that we find in native American mythology. In this synoptic study it will not be too far to say that the Judge and Randall Flagg both represent the inhuman It that Buber had written of.

According to the Judaeo-Christian continuum, the natures of Judge Holden and Randall Flagg will never change. They are eternally poised against the sovereign good, or God. To understand the Christian conception of sin further we turn to Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929), the Scottish ethicist, who defines original sin in terms of its effects and shows how, no matter what we as autonomous individuals do, unless God intervenes in our personal salvation history, we cannot be redeemed: "The effect of original sin is that the will of each and every individual is informed by sin, notably by the sin of pride...No one can rescue themselves from this condition, for to do so would require an act of will. But every act of will is infected by the very condition from which the will needs to be rescued" (MacIntyre 24-25). Karl Rahner (1904-1984), one of the greatest thinkers of the last century, had long thought out the implications of monogenism and original sin in his monumental *Theological Investigations* completed in twenty-three volumes. Rahner's *Theological Reflexions on Monogenism* (sic) (Rahner 229-296) has not dated and remains one of the best anthropological exegesis on original sin:

There is no doubt that in this definition there is contained a statement (*mitgesagt*) that a single individual stands at the beginning of human history, who as 'first man' and as ancestor of all men handed down original sin to his posterity by means of the natural bond of generation...Original sin is spoken of as *origine unum*...in saying which the Fathers of the Council once again had in mind the single deed of a single historical ancestor. It cannot be doubted that the Conciliar Fathers had in mind only a single, numerically individual person at the beginning of human history, who by means of his unique historical act instituted the sin-fulness of the race, a sinfulness which becomes each individual man's own in so far as he is connected with his fellows and so with the

first ancestor by a bond of natural, biological generation. It cannot be doubted that the whole Tridentine teaching on original sin is formulated on this presupposition. Nor is it a matter for doubt that something contained (*mitgesagt*) in this way in the solemn definition of a fundamental dogma is of great theological weight, even if it is not defined. (Rahner 244).

That sin has not been annihilated from the world and neither can it be annihilated from the world is pointed out by Cormac McCarthy at the end of his *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985), henceforth called only *Blood Meridian* in this thesis:

A man's at odds to know his mind cause his mind is aught he has to know it with. He can know his heart, but he dont want to. Rightly so. Best not to look in there. It aint the heart of a creature that is bound in the way that God has set for it. You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow. A creature that can do anything. Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it. (*Blood Meridian* 17)

Yet, McCarthy's understanding of evil is clearly Christian; especially in his opinions about evil. Perez, another prisoner, albeit separated and in a hut by himself at Encantada says to John Grady Cole:

The Mexican does not believe that a car can be good or evil. If there is evil in the car he knows that to destroy the car is to accomplish nothing. Because he knows where good and evil have their home. The anglo thinks in his rare way that the Mexican is superstitious. But who is the one? We know there are qualities to a thing. This car is green. Or it has a certain motor inside. But it cannot be tainted, you see. Or a man. Even a man. There can be in a man some evil. But we don't (sic) think it is his own

evil. Where did he get it? How did he come to claim it?
 No. Evil is a true thing in Mexico. It goes about on its
 own legs. Maybe some day it will come to visit you.
 Maybe it already has. (*All the Pretty Horses* 194-195)

J. A. Bernstein in his essay, "*What manner of heretic?": Demons in McCarthy and the Question of Agency* (2013) writes at length about the layered approach of McCarthy to the problem of evil and what St. Paul in the Bible calls the problem of Justification. Bernstein writes that "evil is a distinct metaphysical object" (Bernstein 391) in the eyes of Perez. Whether it is a distinct metaphysical object in Cormac McCarthy's oeuvre is uncertain. Even in the novels and the short stories of Stephen King no definite answer is provided. Everything about the nature of evil is blurred. Unless one is moved by faith, one cannot grasp this mystery of evil. The Absolute Other instructs Bill Denbrough to have faith if he has to destroy It:

...believe, believe in all the things you believed in [as a
 child]... (King *It* 1038)

And faith returns to the adult Bill. He becomes like unto a child in his faith. He realises that God had always been with him:

...even at eleven he had observed that things turned out
 right a ridiculous amount of the time. (King *It* 1038)

While we are discussing the need for faith within Christianity it is important to refer to Graham Greene. Greene in his *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960) changes the problem of evil to one of suffering in its most banal forms: discomfort. The burnt-out case, Querry, writes "in his diary a parody of Descartes: 'I feel discomfort, therefore I am alive'" (Greene 9). Cormac McCarthy in a certain sense rereads Graham Greene and therefore, his ambivalence towards the nature of evil¹.

1 Vida A. Markovic writes of Greene's faith that his "faith enables Greene to accept life as he sees it, in its gloomiest aspects. But this same faith leads him further away from real life. He tries more and more stubbornly to adapt his experience of life to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, to its conception of human existence as he understands it. Realistic elements which held such a conspicuous place in his novels,

Stephen King in his portrayal of pre-teenage sexual orgy critiques these concepts of sins. He vividly constructs the orgy in a way which challenges all definitions of sin covering the various branches of Christianity in the definitions of sins, original and otherwise. The problem that this orgy raises about the concept of evil needs to be recorded since to equate mainstream Christianity with the beliefs of King is misleading. Here again like so many times illustrated before, King contests the orthodoxies of the conservative American Christian:

Eddie comes to her [Beverly] first, because he is the most frightened. He comes to her not as her friend of that summer, or as her brief lover now, but the way he would have come to his mother only three or four years ago, to be comforted ...

...She thinks of birds; in particular of the grackles and starlings and crows that come back in the spring...what she feels is not shame or fear now but a kind of triumph.

...Ssssss! — she draws her breath in, her teeth biting at her lower lip and thinks of all the birds again, the spring birds, lining the roofpeaks of houses, taking wing all at once under low March clouds.

...She feels no physical pleasure, but there is a kind of mental ecstasy in it for her.

Her consciousness breaks down a little there. She's quite sure there's more talk some whispered, some loud, and can't remember what is said. It doesn't matter. Does she

his severe social criticism by which he reacted to the events and atmosphere of the moment, give way to a melodramatic presentation of the struggle waged no longer between men in real life only, but increasingly often in the mind of man" (Markovic 276). Greene conflates ennui with evil and anticipates the same narrative technique, as it were, in the works of both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. McCarthy and King's characters too are tortured by loneliness and acedia, that is, an inability to self-actualise.

have to talk each of them into it all over again? Yes, probably. But it doesn't matter. They have to be talked into it, this essential human link between the world and the infinite, the only place where the bloodstream touches eternity. It doesn't matter. What matters is love and desire. Here in this dark is as good a place as any. Better than some, maybe. (*It* 1100-1101)

This is where King diverges from Patristics and contemporary theologians. This is not a description of eroticism. It can only be defeated through a total self-surrender on the part of Beverly. Thus, we have Eddie thinking of his mother. The force of love can alone defeat evil. But no matter the end, this justification of a ritualized orgiastic frenzy will never be agreed as even remotely a right act within Christian theology, to justify the annihilation of It's power over Derry. This is why it is necessary to be alert to the ways in which King not only revises the genres of the thriller and the western, but also how he revises Patristics and contemporary theology. In this brief interlude we can see hints of *The Song of Songs* in the Bible. What Beverly Marsh does is to empty herself for the cause of God. This is known as kenosis within Christian theology. But no mainstream Christian theologian will agree that this is an instance of kenotic self-sacrifice on the part of Beverley Marsh. But the description of the episode is replete with mystical symbols like grackles and starlings and that symbol of evil, crows. She feels no physical pleasure but is acutely conscious of what she has to do for the sake of defeating evil. And, within this mystical process, she is able to metacognise about her consciousness and is always aware of her giving of herself not to her friends but to God. Yet this will not be accepted as ethical within Christianity. So, in a sense, King revises mainstream theology through the formulaic genres he practices.

For, as has been remarked by Karl Rahner quoted above, original sin is here to stay and no matter what one does in the here and the now; within Christianity, evil can only give way to the good during the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, it is not surprising to find that both in Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King's worlds, evil manifests itself in various forms. If evil manifests as Judge Holden and Toadvine in *Blood Meridian*, then it manifests as Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* (2005). If the demoniac had been Pennywise in *It*, then in King's *The Dark Tower* series (1998-2004), evil takes on the form of 'The Man in Black' or, Randall Flagg. Cormac McCarthy and Stephen

King's engagement with evil leads us to the problem of evil, and the need to justify it in a world ruled over by an infinitely loving, personal, Christian God. McCarthy and King in their works do not focus on non-Christian ideas of God. More of God's goodness later in this thesis. Before we proceed further, we need to interrogate less supernatural reasons for the existence of the thriller as a genre, and the gothic to be specific. In a moment of awareness about the Gothic novel, Mike Hanlon in *It* reminisces about the presentation of evil in literature:

The gothic conventions are all wrong. My hair has not turned white. I do not sleepwalk. I have not begun to make cryptic comments or to carry a planchette around in my sportcoat pocket. I think I laugh a little shrill and strange, because sometimes people look at me oddly when I laugh. (*It* 100)

Both Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy, though committing themselves to different genres, have the same aim: they subvert their chosen genres and engage with theological issues. Nevertheless, though this complex vision has been noted by critics separately in King and McCarthy, there has been no attempt till date to consider them together as authors who use popular fiction powerfully and unconventionally to explore seminal philosophical and theological issues.

One of the ideological issues that both McCarthy and King engage with, as has been stated above, is the problem of evil. Their portrayal of violence goes beyond surface gore and questions the meanings of both good and evil, for "a fundamental religious and moral question has to do with goodness amid ... evil. Still, in the configurational act of understanding, "world" comes to some meaningfulness, whether good or evil. This is not a creation ex nihilo since the fundamental fact of our existence is that we find ourselves in a world to which we respond. The struggle of understanding is to enact a meaningful world" (Schweiker 201). Both McCarthy and King grapple with the reality of evil in their efforts to contextualize the individual as an autonomous *dasein*. Therefore, they interrogate the problem of free will of this *dasein*. And both of them find that evil inheres in determinism in respect to the *dasein*, as will be discussed later. It is in their efforts to configure *dasein* that they confront what Gillespie calls "contingent evil" (Gillespie 23). For instance, in King's *Desperation* (1996), David

Carver, a twelve year'- old boy with a prophetic role who hears "the voice of God" (*Desperation* 83) feels evil to be "nothing... the absence, the gone- ness... It was more than wrong. It was ... was...Evil" (*Desperation* 136). Cormac McCarthy's Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* is like an "awful Ahab [referring us to Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*] recast in diabolic form" (Edwards 35) and "clearly satanic" (Arnold 62), representing "the relation of individual folly to a *telos* of history that operates on and through such individuals, albeit without their knowledge" (Winfree 144). The Judge, like Ahab before him, holds that "If war in not holy man is nothing but antic clay" (*Blood Meridian* 307). Evil in both their works is aimed towards constructing "Being-in-the-world of the Dasein" (Binswanger 17). It is this concern "to account for the richness and diversity of life as it is lived" (Horner 52) that forces them to also engage with the sovereignty of good. Like Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) they are "haunted by a sense of cosmic mystery" (Greene *Moral, Aesthetic, and Religious Insight* 92). It has been remarked recently that "some of the most stirring affirmations of Christian faith can be found in the chilling stories of King" (Blake n. pag.) and Cormac McCarthy's novels have been seen as allegories of spiritual survival, suggesting "religious themes centering around suffering and a hope for answers, if not redemption" (Rothfork 285). But as this thesis will go on to show, evil in the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King finally lead to an understanding of love qua God. Richard Rohr (1943-), a Franciscan Friar in an interview available on YouTube, quotes an unnamed scientist who happened to be a Jewish rabbi informing Rohr how the Hebrew language without having vowels as we know them in English, pronounce YHWH while inhaling and exhaling (Rohr n. pag.). The point here is that all beings, whether good or bad, live within the economy of God, what Rohr terms as cosmic Christ in his many talks available on YouTube. He explicates his understanding of Christ in his 2019 book, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*. In a very Christina sense, in the sense of Rohr's strict theological sense, demoniac as well as good qualia, all live within the redemptive and sacred presence of Christ qua God qua the sovereign good. In King's *The Dark Tower* series, we have mention of Gan who is King's version of God, in his sixth volume of the series, *Song of Susannah* (2004):

[Father]Callahan [who first appears in King's *'Salem's Lot* published in 1975] turned to him [Jake] and saw the

boy's head cocked to one side, his face wearing the calm look of entrancement.

Jake said: "So speaks Gan, and in the voice of the can calah, which some call angels. Gan denies the can toi; with the merry heart of the guiltless he denies the Crimson King and Discordia itself."

Callahan looked at him with wide eyes — frightened eyes — but Harrigan nodded matter-of-factly, as if he had heard it all before. Perhaps he had. "There was a vacant lot after the deli, and then they built this. Two Hammarskjöld Plaza. And I thought, 'Well, that'll end it and then I'll move on, for Satan's grip is strong and his hoof prints leave deep tracks in the ground, and there no flower will bloom and no grain will grow.' Can you saysee -lah?" (*King Song of Susannah* 264)

The above quotation illustrates King's understanding of both evil, in its fictional manifestation of the 'can toi'; "the Crimson King and Discordia" (*Song of Susannah* 264) in his neo-fantasy American Westerns which comprise the eight books in his *The Dark Tower* series. Father Callahan, while fighting evil represented in the form of the vampire Kurt Barlow in *'Salem's Lot*, loses his Roman Catholic faith. In *The Dark Tower* series, Father Callahan regains his faith after he is willing to sacrifice his own life fighting the "can toi". King's *'Salem's Lot* and his repeated evocation of Father Callahan in *The Dark Tower* series is very much Christian and Roman Catholic. This is the reason that this dissertation quoted earlier the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, while discussing original sin. It is Roman Catholic theology and theodicy which informs *'Salem's Lot*. Father Callahan in *Salem's Lot* was tired with the "petty sins" of "elderly Ladies" trying to "shuttle to heaven" (King *'Salem's Lot* 107), while he knew that evil existed, and none wanted to speak about it. In the confessional there was only a:

...ritualistic acknowledgment of evil by a church now more concerned with social evils...It was the actual presence of evil in the confessional [that Father Callahan

knew existed], as real as the smell of old velvet. But it was a mindless, moronic evil from which there was no mercy or reprieve. The fist crashing into the baby's face, the tire cut open with a jackknife, the barroom brawl, the insertion of razor blades into Halloween apples, the constant, vapid qualifiers which the human mind, in all its labyrinthine twists and turns, is able to spew forth. (King '*Salem's Lot* 107)

Father Callahan was aware of that the ways in which society dealt with evils was not through Christian ethics but by becoming more and more of a welfare state with questionable morality as far as the Roman Catholic Church was concerned. For instance, Roman Catholicism does not permit abortions under any circumstances whatsoever, but American society has normalized what according to Father Callahan is evil. American society has thrown out Father Callahan's version of God and faith in God to embrace a more morally liberal ethos. Here is American society through the eyes of Father Callahan who yearns to fight tangible evil:

Gentlemen, better prisons will cure this. Better cops. Better social services agencies. Better birth control. Better sterilization techniques. Better abortions. Gentlemen, if we rip this fetus from the womb in a bloody tangle of unformed arms and legs, it will never grow up to beat an old lady to death with a hammer. Ladies, if we strap this man into a specially wired chair and fry him like a pork chop in a microwave oven, he will never have an opportunity to torture any more boys to death. Countrymen, if this eugenics bill is passed, I can guarantee you that never again — ('*Salem's Lot* 107)

Father Callahan did not become a Roman Catholic priest to live within what would be relativist morality to him. His studies in theology at seminary had not prepared him for what he perceives as a morally degenerate society where everything is permissible, and sin has been exorcised. Thus, he slowly becomes an alcoholic and loses his faith, not in God, but in himself after his final encounter with the vampire Kurt Barlow who had

come to prey on the town of Jerusalem's Lot. In the gothic-westerns comprising *The Dark Tower* series, we again meet Father Callahan who had finally found his mission in life as a vampire-slayer. In the fifth book of *The Dark Tower* series, titled *Wolves of the Calla*, we find a rejuvenated Father Callahan more at peace with himself. In *Wolves of the Calla*, he comes to terms with his homonormative instinctual love for Lupe Delgado after he had left Jerusalem's Lot. It was an unconsummated love but nonetheless a love unacceptable by the Roman Catholic Church. Father Callahan in *Wolves of the Calla*, after being prodded by the Gunslinger Roland Deschain to tell his story (King *Wolves of the Calla* 351) is much more at peace with himself and accepts himself as he really is and finally admits to being kissed once by Lupe Delgado (King *Wolves of the Calla* 355) after the latter had been bitten by a Type Three or, the lowest class of vampires (King *Wolves of the Calla* 354) :

Nor was there anything physical between Lupe and me.
But I loved him, and I'm not talking about his
mind...There was a physical attraction...[Lupe] was
beautiful...(King *Wolves of the Calla* 353)

Paradoxically it is through this breaking of the priestly vow of chastity that Father Callahan finds his vocation as an exterminator of vampires since he becomes enraged that his friend Lupe, had been bitten by a low category vampire. This is Father Callahan speaking:

In any case, it was because of Lupe that I made my first
kill. The first of many...(King *Wolves of the Calla* 358)

Lest we think of vampires as real, we find King, through Father Callahan providing us with a more plebeian meaning of vampiric behaviour. Father Callahan speaks for himself and all other alcoholics that:

An alcoholic is also a vampire, and that part of me was
getting thirstier and thirstier...(King *Wolves of the Calla*
351)

Thus, while we read Stephen King's gothic thrillers, horror fiction and westerns as essentially informed by Christian theology, we have to keep in mind that we are dealing with the singularity of literature and King does not convey to us Christian ethics

wholesale but rather engages with Christianity and in the process, critiques Christian theology. It was the rookie priest, Father Callahan who had yearned for encountering tangible evil in *'Salem's Lot* and when he meets that evil, he nearly loses his sanity. Here it is worthwhile to pause and see what Nina Auerbach has to say on the relationship to the vampire and ourselves. Auerbach's comments become necessary since Father Callahan here imbues social meaning to the configuration of a vampire. The vampire is representationally a force to be erased from society within Christian theology since a vampire is not only a metaphor for alcohol, but it is also a metaphor for incest and other familial taboos. Therefore, being a Catholic priest, Father Callahan wages war against all types of vampires. Nina Auerbach writes of the interfusion between the human and the vampire: the "interfusion, as between vampire and mortal makes familiar boundaries fluid, offering a wider world than home and a larger self than one sustained by sanctioned relationships" (Auerbach 19). Father Callahan had to let go of his fixed views about life after being bitten by the Type One vampire, Kurt Barlow in *'Salem's Lot* to understand that his addictions were also vampiric in the sense that he was bored with humdrum daily life, and he was originally afflicted with the SSDD syndrome. In King's *Dreamcatcher* we find SSDD is the acronym for 'same shit, different day' (King *Dreamcatcher* 3). Till Father Callahan realizes that he too is part of the same rigmarole of life as everyone else is; each boring day leading on to another boring day, and he learns to accept this reality, he can neither serve God, nor forgive himself for his own sins. Stephen King's thrillers and westerns deal with existential loneliness which gesture towards the sublimity of the gothic discussed in the next chapter.

References to God also abound elsewhere in King's corpus. In *It*, for example, God is ironically compared to a "stupid old Turtle" (*It* 1008) who "sicked up the universe and then fainted inside its shell" (*It* 1008); *It* considers the possibility of God's existence as an Other who, unlike It, is, in Lévinas' words, a "hospitable entity" (Lévinas *Collected Philosophical Papers of Emmanuel Lévinas* 97). Further, we must refer to the works of the process theologian, Roger Burggraeve (b.1942), for our purpose here in this thesis, of proving Stephen King as a contemporary theologian, we find that "there runs [through King's works] a metaphysical trace 'to-God' ('à-Dieu') as a desire for the wholly Other" (Burggraeve 38):

And so a last new thing had come to It, this not an emotion but a cold speculation: suppose It had not been alone, as It had always believed?

Suppose there was Another? And suppose further that these children were agents of that Other? Suppose... suppose . . .It began to tremble. (*It* 1008)

This quest for mapping the terrain of good and evil will be further explored in this thesis. It is acknowledged that the likes of “Origen [from Alexandria], Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Thomas, [Nicolas] Malebranche, [Maurice] Blondel, Ricoeur, Lévinas, and so many other great thinkers have known that it is quite possible as a philosophizing person to remain in close contact with faith in the living God of the Jewish and Christian history” (Peperzak 165). It is within this Judaeo-Christian continuum that we will synoptically study both McCarthy and King. While discussing the incarnational configurations of both good and evil, both these authors have to deal with the “chronotopes” (Bakhtin 84) of “temporality” and “infinite” which are terms used by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) who “draw[s][them] not from Descartes but from Hegel and through him [that is, Hegel, from] Aristotle” (Hannay 25). This necessitates the study of time in their works since both King and McCarthy reject the notion that “no event is for the sake of any other - that there is no natural teleology ordering events in [a] relation to each other” (Lloyd 121). McCarthy and King consciously locate good and evil within the teleology of the discourse of Judaic apocalypses and both their apocalyptic fictions show some “great catastrophe [which] has wiped out the best of civilization...Only the best is rebuilt...[When such rebuilding is possible] the societies are new ones, discarding the restrictive elements of the old” (Shreve 127). Works like Stephen King’s *The Stand* (1978) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) perform their “cultural work” (Tompkins 200) by creating a nexus with other works of American apocalyptic fiction, anticipating, and influencing novels like Justin Cronin’s (b.1962) *The Passage* (2010) and carrying on the legacy of novels like *The Dragon Masters* (1962) by Jack Vance (1916 - 2013) rather than by explicitly invoking the Jewish genre of the apocalypse. An “apocalyptic tone” (Derrida, *Apocalyptic Tone* 3-37) provides them the necessary intellectual space required to study Christian theology and theodicy in terms of the thriller and the American Western. Both Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy *make explicit* the *risks* of “doing theology”

(Hopkins 136) within the paradigms of their fiction and this theologizing is of concern in this study. Through their fictional disclosures of time, they articulate human history not merely as “a cultural palimpsest that develops through human agency over time” (Tilley 44) but rather as a dialectics whose core is informed by the antinomies of supernatural evil and good. Therefore, end-times, millennialism, and messianic upheavals, become another area of concern since “Millennial ideas have played an important role in the history of the United States... In its American form, the millennial myth renders America a sacred land and Americans a chosen people” (Lamy 409). Stephen King in *Carrie* (1974) wrote of the power of religious fixation; Carrie’s mother, Margaret White destroys Carrie’s life by her incessant haranguing about sin and a vengeful Yahweh to Carrie. She and Mrs. Carmody in King’s story *The Mist* (1980) represent a recurrent type in his works. *The Dark Tower* series is marked by a messianic zeal. Ronald Deschain, the protagonist in this series is himself portrayed throughout the saga as a messiah who will eventually lead his ‘ka-tet’ to some kind of transvalued Christian redemption. Cormac McCarthy’s novels too deal with millennial fervour. While *The Road* is explicitly apocalyptic, his *No Country for Old Men* (2005) has one of the most blood-thirsty characters in all of American literature – Anton Chigurh. Chigurh is messianic, but he is a messiah who has taken upon himself to shoot whoever crosses his path on the basis of flipping a coin (McCarthy *No Country for Old Men* 28).

Slavoj Žižek (b.1949) in his book, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008): “chastise(s) violence outright, to condemn it as ‘bad’, is an ideological operation par excellence, a mystification which collaborates in rendering invisible the fundamental forms of social violence”(Žižek, *Violence*, 206). While Žižek is not a theologian or an expert in horror literature, yet his understanding of violence which characterises the genre of the gothic is important for us here. Both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King render visible Žižek’s “invisible...forms of social violence”. The genre of the gothic interrogated in the next chapter is the site for these invisible forms of social violence. Albeit the cultural work of this thesis shows the gothic as profoundly theological. Neil McGregor in his book *Living with the Gods: on Beliefs and Peoples* (2018) makes a pertinent observation which we need to keep in mind. He writes that “Western society has been so deeply shaped by its long Christian traditions” (McGregor 124) that the theological has become part of the Western ethos to the extent that being there for

millennia it has become hidden and thus forgotten. McCarthy and King effect a new theological turn to the gothic through their thrillers, horrors and westerns to reveal these hidden Christian traditions in Western society now.

CHAPTER II

The Architectonics of the Gothic and the New Theological Turn

It is Jacques Derrida who contemplated at length about the return of religion to the human sciences and about radical evil in his book, *Acts of Religion*. It is in this book that he problematizes religion in ways in which it had not been scrutinized before Derrida performed his cultural work. Derrida points out the ease with which we would want to expunge the turn to religion as being opposed to all other discourses. He writes

Why is this phenomenon, so hastily called the "return of religions," so difficult to think? Why is it so surprising? Why does it particularly astonish those who believed naïvely that an alternative opposed Religion, on the one side, and on the other, reason, Enlightenment, Science, Criticism (Marxist Criticism, Nietzschean Genealogy, Freudian Psychoanalysis and their heritage), as though the one could not but put an end to the other? (Derrida *Acts of Religion* 45 italics are Derrida's).

The theological turn that the gothic has taken in the thrillers and westerns of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King are foregrounded within the categorical imperatives of the evil and the good require studying along with Derrida's contention that we need Enlightenment science and different hermeneutical approaches to interrogate this new theological turn that the gothic has taken in recent history. The study of the genres practised by McCarthy and King not only redefine the genre of the gothic but they lead on to another series of questions Derrida asks in *Acts of Religion*: "What of reason and of radical evil today? And if the "return of the religious" was not without relation to the return --- modern or postmodern, for once ---- of certain phenomena, at least, of radical evil? Does radical evil destroy or institute the possibility of religion?" (Derrida *Acts of Religion* 77). The gothic has always been the site of what is considered radical evil. It is within this formulaic genre that we intend to contextualise both Cormac McCarthy's and Stephen King's fiction. In this process of contextualization that we will have to first understand what constitutes the gothic, especially in the works of the two authors under consideration in this thesis and then, we have to begin reading McCarthy and King's fiction within the matrix of Christian theology.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797), in the eighteenth century saw terror as sublime in his treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). He went on to write that

No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on any thing as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous... Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime... (Burke 47-48).

It is this sublimity which lies within the heart of the gothic. As mentioned in the last chapter, the American thriller, the American horror novel and the American western revise the genre of the gothic through the works of both McCarthy and King. The sublime terror that Edmund Burke writes of is found often in McCarthy's westerns. In *Blood Meridian* we find this palimpsest:

The judge rode at the head of the column [of the scalp hunters] bearing on the saddle before him a strange [kidnapped] dark child covered with ash. Part of its [the child's] hair was burnt away and it rode mute and stoic watching the land advance before it with huge black eyes like some changeling. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 169)

Just a few pages later in *Blood Meridian* we find the Judge scalping an Apache child "in a scene viewed [only] in a diorama" (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 173). *All the Pretty Horses*, which is on the surface, an archetypal American western, is filled with a "sense of brooding and malignant life slumbering" (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 184) everywhere. Nonetheless this is sublime and gothic. The American western, which before Cormac McCarthy began writing his thrillers and westerns, was a genre extolling the glory and the triumph of America's conquest of the untamed West. Popular writers like Louis L'Amour (1908-1988) fed into the concept of American exceptionalism in

novels like *The Lonesome Gods* (1983), where white settlers think of themselves as pioneers since each of them “has a history that is part of the history of California, part of the history of the United States and the world” (L’Amour 178). This exultation of the white settler at the cost of the Native American Indian derives from Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1861-1932) essay, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* published in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* where Turner writes that the “peculiarity of the American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people --- to the changes involved...in winning a wilderness and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive...conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life” (Turner 31-32, qtd. in Faragher). This essay which today is known as the Turner Thesis not only suppressed the atrocities of white scalp hunters but fuelled the writing of westerns which suppressed the truth of the violence that occurred during the extermination of Native American Indians at the hands of cowboys. These westerns before Cormac McCarthy began writing his westerns echoed Turner’s statement that the “true point of view in the history of this nation [America] is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West” (Turner 32, qtd. in Faragher). White settlers in the west justified the genocide of native Americans by creating an alternative history of the native Americans’ violence. Thus we find McCarthy pointing out in *Blood Meridian* how white scalp hunters butchered other white settlers pretending to be native American Indians:

The tracks of the murderers bore on to the west but they were white men who preyed on travelers [sic] in that wilderness and disguised their work to be that of the savages [native American Indians]. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 161)

This work of the ‘savages’, strewn through *Blood Meridian* and in *The Border Trilogy* transforms the westerns McCarthy has written into gothic works. Later in this chapter we will find more instances where McCarthy’s thrillers too engage with the gothic mode. He radically refashions the genre of the gothic as a more theological site of contemplation involving both evil and the sovereign good, that is, God. This is possible because the gothic mode is always sublime in the sense that Edmund Burke defines sublimity. Since this thesis studies McCarthy and King together, we now briefly digress

to one of Stephen King's noirs or, hard crime thrillers. This digression is required if we are to reveal how the thriller in both the writers under consideration here engage and redefine the genre of the gothic making it a genre which can accommodate theological discourses within it. In King's novel, *The Colorado Kid* (2005), King defines the thriller through one of the detectives in that novel:

Well then, I'm going to tell you a secret almost every newspaper man and woman who's been at it awhile knows: in real life, the number of actual stories - those with beginnings, middles, and ends - are slim and none. But if you can give your readers just one unknown thing (two at the very outside) and then kick in what Dave Bowie there calls a musta-been, your reader will tell himself a story. (King *The Colorado Kid* 47)

This musta-been plot is not only confined to the works of King alone. In both McCarthy and King, these musta-been plots lead to sublime discussions on fate and destiny, transforming the forms of the thriller, the horror and the western into the more sublime form of the gothic. This sublimity in the fiction of these two authors is essentially theological, as will be shown later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters. When the incestuous Brady Hartsfield, the mass murderer in Stephen King's *Mr. Mercedes* listens to the radio in his car, and the radio jockey of the channel, BAM-100 announces that "the hottest boy band is coming" (King *Mr. Mercedes* 257) to Brady's hometown, he believes that through this radio channel

"Fate [was] speaking to him" (King *Mr. Mercedes* 257).

In this police procedural we have both incest and serial killing, the former is a staple of much gothic fiction and we have a foreboding in this first novel of the *Bill Hodges* trilogy and in the next two novels, of everything being predetermined. This belief in fate and not God's plan while being within a Christian milieu informed by Christian theology is problematic. The problem of human autonomy is generally not seen as been interrogated by thrillers and westerns. McCarthy and King interrogate this and other theological issues in their works and redefine extant ideas about the genre of the gothic. Here is Cormac McCarthy writing about destiny in *Blood Meridian*:

...this will to deceive that is in things luminous may manifest itself likewise in retrospect...may also post men to fraudulent destinies. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 127)

This preoccupation with human autonomy and determinism is an ancient theological and philosophical problem. The philosopher of religion Nelson Pike (b.1930), in 1965 wrote an essay on this problem entitled *Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action* where he began with Boethius' arguments about omniscience in his *Consolations of Philosophy* and ended the essay with pointing out the various problems arising out of an omniscient being knowing in advance what might occur. Pike ends his essay with a warning against "a finished Christian theology" which for the purpose of the discourse here, we might want to consider seriously. Pike writes: "There is a pitfall in the doctrine of divine omniscience... if one affirms the existence of God, one is committed to the view that no human action is voluntary" (Pike 46). McCarthy and King through their works further these theological concerns and in the process, their works achieve the sublimity of the gothic as a genre. Their works exegetically critique St. Paul in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* in the New Testament where Paul tells the faithful that they are not entirely free. They are free to the extent that they can choose between separate non-sinful, or holy, actions and are not permitted to participate in anything unholy since Christ had sacrificed Himself as ransom for all humanity throughout all of history, including that history which yet is not. According to Christianity, Christ redeemed all humanity within created time. Writing of one of the foremost Christian theologians of the last century, Karl Barth, Matt Jenson writes that the "atonement... [of Christ according to] Barth extends to include all of Jesus' life, not merely his passion or the event of the cross...[it is the entirety of]... history, 'the very special history of God with man...' in which God is humbled and humanity is exalted..." (Jenson 156). St. Paul writes: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (Bible 1 *Corinthians* 6:19-20). But if we are not our own then whose are we? It is this stark theological choice that we find in the fiction of both McCarthy and King. In the next two chapters we will have the scope to study evil and God and will see how the works of both McCarthy and King are theologically foregrounded. It is their theological profundity which leads us to the study the form of the gothic in this chapter.

David H. Richter in his book *The Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (1996) traced the origins of thrillers to the gothic mode. Richter wrote:

The most complex derivation is from Mother Radcliffe herself. The aspect of mystery in Radcliffe—mystery solved through the "explained supernatural"—is rationalized and reshaped the mystery novel..[and]...is codified...into a popular fiction form...By now the mystery novel itself has subdivided into various subgenres: the standard private-inquiry agent form, the *roman policier*, the hard-boiled detective story, the crime novel, and further developments and cross-cousinly forms in the thriller and the spy novel... All these forms are dark daughters of the Gothic novel...which looks as though it will be with us, in its avatars, the various genres of popular fiction, for the foreseeable future... (Richter 153-154, italics are Richter's).

Earlier in page 150 of his book, Richter wrote how John Grisham in his "hideously written" (Richter 150) novels tried to enact a return of the thriller to the gothic mode. Grisham's efforts "constitute an attempt to bring affect back into the crime novel by returning to the Gothic in yet another way, by placing an innocent character at the center of a pervasive criminality within the power elite of American society" (Richter 150).

Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* successfully brings back the affect into the crime novel and restores it to the gothic novel's sublimity. Adam Sternbergh in his *Remembering No Country for Old Men, a Masterful Book-Movie Collaboration, 10 Years Later* (2017) writes about the genre of *No Country for Old Men* thus: "the skeleton of the tale is a familiar one, sun-bleached in the desert of Western noir. Man finds a bag of ill-begotten money. Man takes the money. Man runs. McCarthy even sets a relentless, remorseless killer on the man's tail, another shop-worn development. McCarthy — while famously not prone to public pronouncements on the meaning or motives of his work — might argue that he's interrogating these conventions, rather than simply recycling them. He's asking you to consider their

appeal, even as he exploits that appeal. This is what the best genre novels do” (Sternbergh *n.pag.*). Sternbergh refers to James Wood’s dismissive review of *No Country for Old Men* when it was first published in 2005. Writing for *The New Yorker*, Wood had derisively pointed out that “the book gestures not toward any recognizable reality but merely toward the narrative codes already established by pulp thrillers and action films...Other codes are studiously obeyed” (Wood *n.pag.*). Wood went on to lampoon *No Country for Old Men* by dismissing the genre of the thriller as “the weightless codes of thriller-writing” (Wood *n.pag.*) and foretold the demise of McCarthy’s credibility as a writer. Yet, in the same essay Wood wrote how “McCarthy is never very far from theodicy” (Wood *n.pag.*) in *No Country for Old Men* and in his other works including *Blood Meridian* and *Child of God*. Though, Wood adds that in *No Country for Old Men*, McCarthy is less theological than in his other works: “though lacking such theological soundings [in *No Country for Old Men*], flirts with the theological” (Wood *n.pag.*). It is most notably Cormac McCarthy who effected the new theological turn in the American thriller. It began with his novel about the serial killer and necrophiliac Lester Ballard in *Child of God*. *Child of God* is the typical whodunnit and will be discussed later in this chapter. We return to *No Country for Old Men* to study how McCarthy effects a new theological turn in this novel. While his other novels, especially *The Crossing*, the second novel in the *Border Trilogy* has much to say about God and theology; *No Country for Old Men* is unique in being a noir which meditates long on human destiny, time and the nature of evil. The hitman, Anton Chigurh, in *No Country for Old Men*, modelled after Judge Holden from *Blood Meridian*, after killing Llewellyn Moss, goes on to murder Moss’s wife not because Carla Jean had done something wrong or had any money with her which belonged to the drug-cartel that had hired Chigurh; nonetheless Chigurh goes to Carla Jean because he had warned Moss that if Moss did not return to Chigurh the drug-money which Moss stole from the border shootout site, he would kill Carla Jean. Before shooting Carla Jean, Chigurh distances himself from what he is going to do; that is, kill Carla Jean. Instead he imagines himself as an instrument of some force in the world which is inevitable and predetermined. It is in Chigurh’s insistence on predetermination; that he negates human agency and through this negation of human freedom, Chigurh finally like Judge Holden, negates the freedom that God bestows on all humans in the here and the now. This is Chigurh telling Carla Jean about fate and destiny:

I had no say in the matter. Every moment in your life is a turning and every one a choosing. Somewhere you made a choice. All followed to this. The accounting is scrupulous. The shape is drawn. No line can be erased. I had no belief in your ability to move a coin to your bidding. How could you? A person's path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly. And the shape of your path was visible from the beginning. (*No Country for Old Men* 259)

When Chigurh declares that he had 'no say in the matter', he becomes as it were, an agent of vengeance and becomes something not human. To call him a psychopath; Carson Wells a war veteran and counter hit-man, albeit with a conscience, calls Chigurh a "goddamned psychopath" (*No Country for Old Men* 178) perhaps is not apt. Psychopaths do not philosophise on the nature of the dasein struggling in the here and the now. What Chigurh says is a contradiction. He pretends he has no choice in getting on with the tossing of a coin to kill Carla Jean but he insists that Carla Jean had the autonomy to have chosen differently. This is the perversity in Chigurh. He elides his own culpability as a murderer, all the while putting across reasons why the person he chooses to kill must die:

[Chigurh] shook his head...I have only one way to live. It doesn't allow for special cases. A coin toss perhaps...When I came into your life your life was over. It had a beginning, a middle, and an end. This is the end. You can say that things could have turned out differently. That there could have been some other way. But what does that mean? They are not some other way. They are this way. You're asking that I second say the world. Do you see?

Yes, she said sobbing. I do. I truly do.

Good, he said. That's good. Then he shot her [Carla Jean]."

(McCarthy *No Country for Old Men* 259-260)

“How to prevail over that which you refuse to acknowledge the existence of” (McCarthy *No Country for Old Men* 260) is the predicament that McCarthy has in his works. Chigurh’s nature, like Judge Holden’s nature before him is inexplicable and the term evil does not even begin to describe either of them. It is as if Chigurh is some nemesis come from the land of the dead to work as a doomsday demon. Chigurh does not allow exceptions and reduces the value of life to tosses of coins. In front of Chigurh, characters become what Giorgio Agamben termed homo sacer. They are rendered powerless and somehow excluded from the mainstream of life itself and they are annihilated by Chigurh. The gothic mode can and does accommodate the homo sacer; we will return to this aspect of the gothic later. Agamben observed in his *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* of the paradoxical situation of the human being within history which informs theology: “It has often been observed that the juridico-political order has the structure of an inclusion of what is simultaneously pushed outside” (Agamben 20). Chigurh effects this push outside whoever he decides to kill, sometimes and not always, on the basis of the toss of a coin. In front of Chigurh, the human person is forced to give up her autonomy and even while within a juridico-political order, they cannot take recourse to either the judicial process or of the political process which together define our existence. They refuse Chigurh’s existence but at the end it is Chigurh like Judge Holden who becomes their sole judiciary and political master. The role of Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* is to exercise sovereignty over those whom he kills. In other words, he renders them powerless and he usurps the role of God within the novel. Thus this thriller becomes a theological statement about the power of determinism and thus, a strong critique of Christian dogma which emphasises free will. From a purely Christian perspective, our futures are not predetermined. Thus through the cold rationality of Chigurh we are to contemplate the new insights about theology in this thriller which finally engages with the genre of the gothic. The gothic as a genre is populated with liminal beings and with those rendered powerless.

It was Martin Heidegger in the earlier part of the previous century who in his work, *Being and Time* showed us how we are free in our wills. He wrote that the “*perfectio* of the human being --- becoming what one can be in being free for one’s ownmost possibilities (project) --- is an “accomplishment” of “care” (Heidegger 192 emphasis original). Heidegger wrote of ‘being free’ before the Second World War. After that war, it is the philosophy and theology of Agamben that has replaced

Heidegger's since the Nazis robbed all free will within the politico-theological sphere of Heidegger's being within time or, history. The gothic mode's revival is a reaction to the Second World war and then the Cold War with the latter's threat of imminent nuclear disasters. The gothic in the hands of McCarthy and King now naturally accommodates the homo sacer since as a genre the gothic had always been occupied with the liminal.

Chigurh is able to rob this Heideggerian dasein of all autonomy and reduce it to a cringing fearful being who cannot be called human anymore. They are frightened into becoming rightless human beings traversing the world in a limbo before their lives are annihilated. Chigurh's philosophy is a phenomenological one; solipsistic and fundamentally nihilistic. He has a habit of experimenting on his own self from time to time to assert that the world is only an idea created by one's own will. Before murdering Carson Wells, Chigurh tells Wells of his giving himself up to the law and when he was set free, Chigurh knew that he had to follow his principle of killing others, mostly on the basis of the tossing of a coin:

An hour later I was pulled over by a sheriff's deputy outside of Sonora Texas and I let him take me into town in handcuffs. I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible.

(McCarthy *No Country for Old Men* 174-175)

After proving to himself that his will alone extricated himself, he goes to murder Carson Wells. Before shooting Wells, this is what Chigurh has to say of life in general and of Carson's life in particular:

Do you have any notion of how goddamned crazy you are? [Carson Wells asks of Chigurh]

The nature of this conversation?

The nature of you.

Chigurh leaned back. He studied Wells. Tell me something, he said.

What.

If the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?

I dont know what you're talking about.

I'm talking about your life. In which now everything can be seen at once...

I thought you might want to explain yourself.

I dont have to explain myself to you.

Not to me. To yourself. I thought you might have something

to say. (*No Country for Old Men* 175)

The nature of Anton Chigurh will continue to provoke debates but one aspect of his character is clear. Chigurh is no ordinary criminal or psychopath. He has his own perverse logic for killing. Further, Chigurh does not ask Carson Wells to justify his actions to God; rather he asks Wells to justify himself to not even Chigurh, but to himself. This indicates that for Chigurh, nothing exists but himself. This is precisely what Christian theology terms pride. It is Chigurh's pride that marks him as a being, who represents evil in so far as evil as a qualia is self-absorbed. Saint Thomas of Aquinas in his book *On Evil* defines an evil qualia in terms of its will and intellect: "since they are intellectual substances without a body, have only an intellectual appetite, which we call the will" (Aquinas 444). Chigurh appears to be intrinsically evil from the quotations above. This intrinsic evil has been commented upon by Saint Aquinas thus: some "are evil by their nature...Nothing unnatural belongs immutably to things, since everything left to itself returns to its nature. But wickedness belongs immutably to... [evil]. Therefore, wickedness belongs to them by nature" (Aquinas 444). It is in this Thomist sense, that we can call Chigurh evil. So in the hands of Cormac McCarthy, the genre of the thriller becomes one not of banality but one of theological introspection. Yet, McCarthy keeps himself confined within the archaeology of the thriller. The thriller here becomes gothic through its sublimity which is a character of the gothic as Edmund Burke, quoted at the beginning of this chapter has pointed out. Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, near the end of *No Country for Old Men* describes

one of his dreams about his father. The powerful imagery of the dream with fire, darkness, far off lights and silence creates a gothic atmosphere:

But the second one [dream] it was like we was both back in older times and I was on horseback goin through the mountains of a night. Goin through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothin. He just rode on past and he had this blanket wrapped around him and he had his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up. (No Country for Old Men 309, italics are McCarthy's)

The gothic nature of *No Country for Old Men* is not confined to this dream-vignette alone. The entire novel has a surreal quality with its lengthy sentence structures and in its use of language. The drug-mafia fight; the hitmen running after drug-money and Carla Jean being shot at point-blank range are typical of the thriller-form. But what is striking is that the thriller becomes subsumed within the gothic in this novel. The same process is at work in *Blood Meridian* where the genre of the American western becomes gothic in tone.

Child of God by Cormac McCarthy is a thriller and there is nothing supernatural in it. We know who the serial killer and necrophiliac is right from the beginning of the novel. The townspeople find out later. And, only when the necrophiliac Lester Ballard is dead, the townspeople find the dead bodies of the girls and women he shot and had post-mortem coitus with. Apart from the staples of the gothic, like necrophilia, which we find in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, we have descriptions of the terrain in terms which echo Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, we have this description of

Ballard, where the textual register important to us is that he dressed himself as a “gothic doll”:

He'd long been wearing the underclothes of his female victims but now he took to appearing in their outerwear as well. A gothic doll in ill fit clothes, its carmine mouth floating detached and bright in the white landscape.
(*Child of God* 140)

Katie Owens-Murphy writing in *The Arizona Quarterly* in 2011, finds embedded layers within *Child of God* which elevates the novel from a gothic-thriller to that of a gothic-thriller turned American western since she finds the novel exhibiting “many of the positive frontier values” (Owens-Murphy 166) and she also substantiates through textual references, the novel’s “underlying frontier ethic” (Owens-Murphy 166). Like *The Dark Tower* series, we find generic boundaries blurring and one genre spilling over into another genre. So, in King’s multi-volume fantasy we find that they are at the same time thrillers with the Gunslinger Rolland Deschain being a hitman who is on the right side of moral imperatives, and we find pastiches of intense passion and also the cowboy ethic of exploring new dimensions fused in those books simultaneously. The *Dark Tower* series is primarily gothic; but within its gothic structure we have the American western and the thriller. The genre of the thriller subverts the gothic in both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. Even McCarthy’s *Border Trilogy* has elements of the thriller but in their depiction of a stark landscape and cramped prisons and brothels and through the inhumanity that marks the *Border Trilogy*, we find these three novels foregrounded in the gothic.

Stephen King in novels like *The Colorado Kid*, *Joyland* and in his *The Bill Hodges Trilogy* made up of *Mr. Mercedes*, *Finders Keepers*, and *End of Watch*, engages with the genre of the thriller. We will study *Joyland* at some depth in this chapter while remarking how King has been able to successfully appropriate the genre of the thriller. Janet Maslin reviewing *The Colorado Kid* for *The New York Times* in 2005 wrote that *The Colorado Kid* had “the hallmarks of the classic deductive mystery, as Mr. King leaves a fine trail of bread crumbs: clues with nostalgic exactitude to summon the work of Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes” (Maslin n.pag.). In the hands of both McCarthy and King, the traditional gothic, the western and the thriller engage with problems of theology and theodicy and in the process, they become sublime. The

sublimity is not easy to access unless one is equipped with the hermeneutics that is required for reading them. *Joyland*, for instance, has supernatural elements in it but falls into the hardboiled genre of the noir thriller. Both the noir and the thriller which include detective fiction, all have very predictable structures. In most thrillers the victims are avenged; so too in Stephen King's *Joyland* where Linda Gray had been murdered in the eponymous theme park by a worker there. Lane Hardy, the murderer, is exposed as the serial-killer he is, and is finally fatally shot. In the meanwhile King has been able to effect a theological turn in this thriller by ruminating on life's tragedies and other verities. Devin Jones is here reminiscing about his past; how he has survived while others more talented than him had died. In the process, King inserts a little bit on W.H. Auden in Devin's thoughts:

The world has given me a good life...but sometimes I hate the world, anyway. Dick Cheney...for too long chief preacher in the Holy Church of Whatever It Takes, got a brand-new heart while I was writing this-how about that? He lives on; other people have died. Talented ones like Clarence Clemons. Smart ones like Steve Jobs. Decent ones like...Tom Kennedy. Mostly you get used to it. You pretty much have to. As W. H. Auden pointed out, the Reaper takes the rolling in money, the screamingly funny, and those who are very well hung. But that isn't where Auden starts his list. He starts with the innocent young. (*Joyland* 279)

Death is portrayed in *Joyland* within a formula where we have the images of the Reaper who first takes away the pure of heart first. King's reference to W.H. Auden's poem "As the poets have mournfully sung" is one of Auden's many poems where Auden meditates on mortality and the brevity of human life:

As the poets have mournfully sung,
Death takes the innocent young,
The rolling-in-money,
The screamingly-funny,
And those who are very well hung. (Auden n.pag.)

This reference to Auden along with King's reference to the grim, possibly medieval, Reaper, situates the narrative of *Joyland* within the continuum of the gothic genre which has its roots in European medieval dance of death tropes. We will soon find how gothic the genre of the thriller becomes in *Joyland*.

Bradley Easterbrook, the owner of the carnival in *Joyland*, at age ninety-three, tells the 'greenie' or the new hires, about the nature of the world. From his evaluation of the brokenness of this world, we see how King is building up a theological statement about our world being bereft of the grace of God delivered in what Devin Jones will remember as "a kind of rough poetry...[which]...delighted" (*Joyland* 59) him.

This is a badly broken world, full of wars and cruelty and senseless tragedy. Every human being who inhabits it is served his or her portion of unhappiness and wakeful nights. Those of you who don't already know that will come to know it. Given such sad but undeniable facts of the human condition, you have been given a priceless gift this summer: you are here to sell fun. In exchange for the hard-earned dollars of your customers, you will parcel out happiness. Children will go home and dream of what they saw here and what they did here. (*Joyland* 59)

Except in their dreams, children will have to live in this broken world for such is the human condition, where young women are murdered in their prime. Also, King is writing here of the existentially fragile human condition which is a trope within philosophy and within existential theology. Unlike how both atheistic and theistic philosophers see the world, Christian theologians see within the human condition the presence of sin. Writing in 2002, Hugh Connolly, points out that just "as there is solidarity of all Christians in Christ, so too there is a kind of solidarity in sin, which is almost a part of the human condition" (Connolly 36). Sin has been defined at length in the last chapter. The explication of this sin is effected by King in his thrillers, horror novels which are thrillers too and within King's westerns. Thus, King transforms the genre of the gothic into a commentary on the Christian ideas of sin, and sometimes, redemption. In this world, presumably when these children are grown up they too will be contaminated by systematic sin and find themselves amidst wars, and be themselves

cruel and caught up in senseless tragedies. Systematic sin is a concept found within Christian theology. It is that manifestation of evil which is commonly encountered in the form of corruption and other social and collective works of commission and omission.

In *No Country for Old Men* money is the trigger for unbelievable violence. The point being made is this: as far as Cormac McCarthy is concerned evil in the form of lucre informs not only the motives of Anton Chigurh but it infects every single character in this gothic-thriller. Thus *No Country for Old Men* is a thriller about systematic sin or, systematic evil. In Stephen King, for instance, social injustice and tensed race relationships represent systematic evil. In King's *The Dark Tower* series we find racial tensions throughout. Susannah Dean is a black woman acutely aware of her liminality and driven to schizophrenia by socio-economic forces. Racism is thus another form of systematic sin. Returning to the discussion of the children in *Joyland*, we know that they will be tortured by sorrow and insomnia till they go insane with this world. Alison Flood reviewing *Joyland* for *The Guardian* in 2013, pointed out that *Joyland* was a 'thriller' (Flood n.pag.) and then goes on to write: "*Joyland* is a far gentler, deeper, more thoughtful book than the one it masquerades as" (Flood n.pag.), meaning to say that it transcends the genre of the thriller to rise to the sublimity of the gothic. Flood began her review with an excerpt from the novel. It is followed by the comments by Flood which are important for us to understand the genre of the thriller and how King appropriated it:

Horror House was a dark ride, but when it was in operation, this stretch was the only completely dark part. It had to be where the girl's killer had cut her throat and dumped her body... And suppose... just suppose... a young girl's hand reached out in that darkness and took mine?" (King *Joyland* 143-144)

Flood comments, even "the wonderfully retro cover, which is bedecked with a horror-struck redhead in a tiny green dress and which blares, "Who Dares Enter the FUNHOUSE OF FEAR?", promises us terrors galore" (Flood n.pag., Flood has kept the capitalization of *Joyland*'s first edition's cover). The 'wonderfully retro cover' harks back to the golden age of hard-boiled American noirs but as Flood has pointed

out, *Joyland* is a thoughtful and deep book unlike its generic predecessors. Thus, both Cormac McCarthy and King both rework the familiar formula of the thriller and while at work within the paradigms of a thriller, they both engage with the sublimity which is to be found within the genre of the gothic. Their sublimity in turn derives from their ontic roots within Biblical theology.

H.P. Lovecraft in his 1927 essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, defined the staples of the gothic in a way which is lucid and pointed. Lovecraft recapitulates for us the essential building blocks of the gothic. This with the caveat that Lovecraft's claims of the superiority of horror over the gothic seems to be tenuous. Nonetheless one should engage with Lovecraft because he not only saw the importance of the genre of the gothic, he anticipated much before anyone else did, the importance of horror fiction as sublime in the Burkean sense. Stephen King's importance therefore increases not because many are glossing his corpus, but because Lovecraft, being himself a horror writer, shows us how majestic the genre of the horrific actually is. Lovecraft's essay provides us with the best answer about the jaded quality of the gothic vis-à-vis the originality of horror. Here is Lovecraft in his own words: "This novel dramatic paraphernalia consisted first of all of the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends, as a nucleus of suspense and daemoniac fright...All this paraphernalia reappears with amusing sameness, yet sometimes with tremendous effect, throughout the history of the Gothic novel...The best horror-tales of today, profiting by the long evolution of the type, possess a naturalness, convincingness, artistic smoothness, and skilful intensity of appeal quite beyond comparison with anything in the Gothic work of a century or more ago. Technique, craftsmanship, experience, and psychological knowledge have advanced tremendously with the passing years, so that much of the older work seems naive and artificial; redeemed, when redeemed at all, only by a genius which conquers heavy limitations" (Lovecraft *n.p.*). Certainly King's thrilling horror fiction and horrific thrillers conquer the heavy limitations of both the genres of the gothic and the horror which two genres, notwithstanding Lovecraft's sharp division between the two in his essay, actually converge and prove the fluidity of each genre in molding the other. It is impossible to demarcate where the genre of the horrific ends and the genre of the gothic begins within King's novels and innumerable short stories. It is equally impossible to

clearly show that the genre of the western and the genre of the gothic are not separate within King's fiction. They all take an undertone of the gothic. Before commenting further on Lovecraft's observations, we will briefly review what other literary critics had to say about the gothic genre which unlike Lovecraft, they conflate with the genre of horror fiction.

"Horror comes in several forms...[and]...horror can be realistic, even historically verifiable and it can be psychological, supernatural...[dealing with] Historical accounts of cannibalism and serial killing...[Horror fiction] includes speculative fiction, the fantastic, science fiction...[hostile] alien invasions...flesh-eating zombies...vampires transcending time, space, death and the fixity of bodily shape" (Wisker 134). Gina Wisker's original insights in her chapter entitled *Disturbance, Disorder, Destruction, Disease: Horror Fiction Today* (129-146) finds a place in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction* (initially published in 2015, reprinted in India in 2017) edited by Christine Berberich, and not in any anthology of essays on the gothic. This is important to note because earlier Anne Williams in her seminal book on the gothic, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995) pointed out the false distinction between the realist novel and the gothic novel. About two and a half decades ago Anne Williams questioned the prevailing critical reception of the gothic in her book.

Twentieth-century keepers of the House of Fiction have always treated Gothic as a skeleton in the closet. F. R. Leavis, one of the most influential such keepers, named the novelists occupying the House's grand public rooms "The Great Tradition" (1948); he traced their genealogy from Austen through Eliot, James, and Conrad. (Leavis at least mentions the "astonishing" *Wuthering Heights*, but attributes its power to its status as a mutant, "a sport.") Although other influential Anglo-American critics such as Ian Watt and Wayne Booth were less inclined than Leavis to such a politics of exclusion, in practice they accepted the assumption that great fiction is Realistic fiction. The index of Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (1957) does not contain the term "Gothic"; and though Horace Walpole's name appears, he is not evoked in his

capacity as author of a Gothic novel... Even the enthusiastic historians of Gothic tend humbly to accept the place accorded them in a Realism-centered criticism...But regarding Gothic as an outmoded embarrassment fails to conceal one unmistakable fact: a form of fiction remarkably akin to that of Walpole and Radcliffe remains very much alive. If sales figures are evidence, much of the reading public still prefers a gallop on the back of the nightmare to Realism's seemly trot --- nowadays Stephen King perennially haunts the best-seller lists. Confronted with this reality, Realism-centered critics have...relegate[d] later Gothic to the outer darkness of "popular fiction." (Williams *Art of Darkness*1-2).

To redress this injustice in the very first paragraph of her book, Williams, asks us to rethink this genre: "a radical remapping of the territory is warranted; the familiar guides have not served us well" (Williams *Art of Darkness* 1). So the shared idea between Lovecraft, Anne Williams and Gina Wisker is that they all take the genre of the gothic with the genre of the horror seriously. The only point that all three miss is that the gothic begins to become important theologically with critics like Simon Marsden and Jonathan Greenaway now having definitively affected a turn towards theology in their critical corpus.

Marsden in his book *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction* and Greenaway in his book *Theology, Horror and Fiction: A Reading of the Gothic Nineteenth Century* systematically corrected the perception of the gothic in works such as Graham Ward's *Cities of God* (2000). In *Cities of God*, Ward subtly dismisses the gothic genre thus: "the historian of science, Bruno Latour who, in his book entitled *We Have Never Been Modern* distinguished one of the fundamental trajectories of modernity to be the aspiration for purity... As Latour points out, modernity, then, both 'allows the expanded proliferation of the hybrids whose existence, whose very possibility, it denies'...The effect of this was the production and yet the suppression, or erasure, or fear of *the hybrid*. That which did not conform to the rules of conduct or the laws of science (which the ethics of natural law conflated) was criminal,

pathological, or perverted. These types were produced only to be publicly, clinically, and scientifically exposed and shown to be in need of reformation, healing, or disciplining. The natural was the understandable, the rational, that which conformed. What took place sociologically was the production of an underworld: a world of the prostitutes, the transvestites, the sodomites, the paedophiles, the criminal, the insane, the vagabonds, the gypsies that haunt Victorian novels. What took place, imaginatively, was the development of the dark side of the romantic: the gothic, creatures of the supernatural, the demonic, the pornographic, the suicidal and the sublime... Unlike the romantic 'monsters' their faces were more publicly acceptable. For rather than exemplifying the hybrid – which they might well have done since Old Testament scholars in the nineteenth century recognised that angels were imported into ancient Judaism via Babylon, where *kerub* (from which we derive *cherubim*) were bulls with wings and the faces of the human beings – angels became figures for modernity's obsession with the pure" (Ward 208-209). If this is contrasted with Noël Carroll's (b.1947) understanding of monsters and other supernatural beings in his book *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), we will find Carroll pointing out a truth which Ward denies in his *Cities of God*. For Ward everything is a metaphor. For instance, Dracula according to Ward is an inversion of the "Christ figure: taking rather than giving His blood" (Ward 206) and "Vampire stories are eucharistic stories played out negatively" (Ward 206), but for Carroll "art-horror requires that the emotion be focused upon monsters where those are understood to be creatures not countenanced by contemporary science" (Carroll 37) and to the type of explanation provided by Ward, Carroll answers "The problem with these types of counterexamples, which are legion, is that though nominally the antagonists belong to our everyday world, their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings. Ostensibly whales, sharks, and men, they acquire powers and attributes above and beyond what one would be willing to believe of living creatures" (Carroll 37). Nowhere does Carroll ask us to believe or even disbelieve in supernatural beings. He only asks the reader to suspend disbelief. Without this suspension of disbelief, the leitmotifs of the gothic would be rendered meaningless. So when one encounters the gigantic and bald Judge Holden in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, one has to believe that such a man existed within the scope of McCarthy's America of marauding pioneers. If we do not believe within the scope of Stephen King's *Joyland* that ghosts haunted the theme park then we cannot believe in Deuteronomic theology. Thus we have Simon

Marsden write in his book that even “If Christ remains an ambiguous figure in contemporary Gothic fiction, defined as much by his absence and hiddenness as by his presence, his traditional antagonist has often been far more visible. Christians in the twenty-first century may be less likely than their medieval predecessors to believe in the existence of a literal, embodied Satan, but Christianity’s fallen angel retains a prominent place in the cultural imagination” (Marsden 141). It is in this vein of talking about Satan who manifests as systematic sin in Derry in King’s novel *It*, that Marsden engages with the fiction of Stephen King in his book’s eighth chapter titled *The Sense of No Ending: (Re)Reading the Apocalyptic Stephen King* (163-188). Marsden weaves the Gospel of Luke to his interpretation of the evil that haunts Derry in the form of Pennywise or, It. Yet, as will be evidently shortly, Marsden’s hermeneutics does not hesitate to structurally scrutinize the supernatural locating the horrors as being collective since the adults of Derry refuse to see their own complicity with *It*. Marsden points out that “The being known as ‘It’ appears as multiple objects of childhood fear — Pennywise the Clown, the leper, the werewolf, Dracula—but its shifting appearances are always displaced representations of the abuses that have become normalised in Derry. Many of the people (most of them children) murdered by It are already victims of child abuse, domestic violence, bullying, racism or homophobia. The monster manifests the undercurrent of violence already present within the town” (Marsden 170). Then in page 171, Marsden effects a theological reading of *It*:

As the child protagonists prepare to confront the town’s supernatural monster, they recognise that they cannot seek help from the town’s adults because ‘*They won’t see, they won’t hear, they won’t know*’ (*It* 1177).

The novel here recalls the words of Christ in Luke 8:10:

He said, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,

“though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”’

The biblical text identifies the inability or unwillingness to see and understand as a moral failure. To ‘see’ and to

‘understand’ parable is not simply to perform an act of interpretation but to recognise the ethical and spiritual claim of the parable upon one’s own life. King’s novel similarly identifies the refusal to ‘see’ as a moral failure. In refusing to see the abuse taking place in their town, the people of Derry become complicit in that violence. There is blood on their hands, and they do not—will not—see it. (Marsden 171)

It is this theological reading of Stephen King which is advocated in this thesis and in the next chapter, the problem of evil and empathy will be interrogated more fully and the content of both McCarthy and King’s representation of evil within the form of the gothic which includes their thrillers and westerns. It is interesting to note that Marsden unlike Graham Ward quoted above does not dismiss the genre of the gothic as one of inverted tropes. Rather, Marsden emphasises at the cost of tautology in his book, what is known as systematic sin. “King in *It* delineates a world in which abuse and violence are concealed by existing social, economic and political structures and perpetuated by a community that benefits from those structures and so refuses to interrogate them. The supernatural in the novel makes visible Derry’s hidden abuses and so offers a different way of looking at contemporary urban life. The children in the novel recognise a ‘sightline’ below which adults do not look” (Marsden 171-172) and then Marsden quotes Sara Martín Alegre as observing that in “*It* children understand the monsters that threaten them because of their familiarity with the monsters of their private fears, which they must eventually forgo and forget as adults” (Alegre 110, qwt.d.in Marsden 172). Though Sara Martín Alegre confined herself to a non theological critique of King’s works, Marsden carries on this critique within a very Christian hermeneutics constructed from theological works ranging from that of Jürgen Moltmann to Emil Brunner’s works and to Tom Wright’s (Marsden 179) corpus. In the beginning of his book, Marsden inaugurates a project of rejuvenating the gothic through a new theological turn: “The supernatural in Gothic fiction can and has represented many things, but it no longer represents a commonly shared framework of belief in non-material reality. In a reading of the vampire as a figure that embodies its contemporary modernity, Stacey Abbott argues that modernity is ‘essentially a posttraditional order, and therefore being removed from the trappings of tradition is intrinsic to the experience

of modernity'. This aspect of modernity is reflected in modern Gothic, as symbols and tropes that once had specific religious and theological resonances became increasingly distanced from the traditions and communities in which they previously had their meanings" (Marsden 5). 'A commonly shared framework of belief' is no longer possible since "In his influential book *A Secular Age* (2007), the philosopher Charles Taylor argues that one of the main characteristics of secularisation is 'a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace'. In a secular culture, religious faith is not impossible, but it can no longer be held naively as self-evident or uncontested" (Marsden 4). It is within this 'secular culture that we have to read Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King mapping the ways in which both authors challenge this 'secular culture' to bring back to the gothic a sense of sin leading to damnation and a sense of the holy leading to salvation. The gothic, thus is a site for theological deliberations in the works of Stephen King. Jonathan Greenaway more recently in his book mentioned above, *Theology, Horror and Fiction* perceptively points out that "to theorize [about] the interactions of the Gothic and religion as solely a political or social discourse is to ignore the causal role theology holds in the formation of cultural discourses... Without examining the theological ideas which inform and define the religious symbolism, an accurate understanding of the relationship between Christian belief and Gothic writing remains, at best, merely half complete – dependent upon a structuralist understanding of religious pattern, but without the necessary commitment... that would give those patterns coherence" (Greenaway 11). Theological readings do not imply opacity or the giving up of structural scrutiny. Rather, theology as practised now is rooted in the fabric of society in the here and the now. Therefore, both Marsden and Greenaway would agree with Mrs. Shoplaw in *Joyland* when she comments about institutionalised religions thus:

"I can't understand why people use religion to hurt each other when there's already so much pain in the world," Mrs. Shoplaw said. "Religion is supposed to comfort."
(*Joyland* 168)

McCarthy and King both are against institutionalised Christianity but advocate Christianity's message of filial love and love for the marginalised and the forgotten.

It is within this Christian understanding of eschatologies of both damnation and hope that Cormac McCarthy and King ought to be read. Once this cultural work is started, then we can see in them deeper reflections on theology, theodicy and spirituality. Thrillers like *Child of God* and *Mr. Mercedes* become our new conduits through which eternal truths reach us. They elevate the gothic into the Burkean sublime. For instance, *No Country for Old Men* has a lot of gore and has no supernatural element in it; yet in its portrayal of violence it is both gothic and horrific. And, for the purpose of this thesis, it is a synecdoche for systematic evil. Both traditional and Lovecraftian horror is found in McCarthy and King.

The tinker has run away with the nameless child whose one eye has been gauged out. Here is McCarthy's description of the tinker from *Outer Dark*:

What discordant vespers do the tinker's goods chime through the long twilight and over the brindled forest road, him stooped and hounded through the windy recrements of day like those old exiles who divorced of corporeality and enjoined ingress of heaven and hell wander forever the middle warrens spoorless increate and anathema. Hounded by grief, by guilt, or like this cheerless vendor clamored at heel through wood and fen by his own querulous and inconsolable wares in perennial tin malediction. (*Outer Dark* 229)

These discordant vespers will lead finally to the three men who pursue the child and Culla culminating in this description of the child. It is both gothic and in a certain sense, Lovecraftian, since we cannot distinguish whether the three men are parodies of the three witches from *Macbeth* or they are demons in what they have done to the child?

There were three of them and there was a child squatting in the dust and beyond them the tinker's cart with the hung pans catching the light like the baleful eyes of some outsized and mute and mindless jury assembled there hurriedly against his coming... These three men "wore the same clothes, sat in the same attitudes, endowed with a dream's redundancy. Like revenants that reoccur in

lands laid waste with fever: spectral, palpable as stone...

(*Outer Dark* 231)

We are, as it were, in hell:

[Culla's son] had a healed burn all down one side of it
and the skin was papery and wrinkled like an old man's.
It was naked and half coated with dust so that it seemed
lightly furred and when it turned to look up at him [Culla]
he saw one eyeless and angry red socket like a stokehole
to a brain in flames. (*Outer Dark* 231-32)

Stephen King in his collection of short stories, *Skeleton Crew* has one rare poem which he composed. It is titled *Paranoid: a Chant*:

I can't go out no more.
There's a man by the door...
Men have discussed me in back rooms.
If the phone rings there's only a dead breath.
In the bar across the street a snubnose
revolver has changed hands in the men's room
Each bullet has my name on it.
My name is written in back files
and looked up in newspaper morgues...
My brother's with them, did I tell you?
His wife is Russian and he
keeps asking me to fill out forms.
I have it in my diary... (King *Skeleton Crew* 283-86)

The quoted poem of course, is about a man suffering from paranoid delusions. That is, he is a schizophrenic. This is only one of the staples of the gothic mode. The poem has nothing to do with the supernatural and the only evil that is found in this poem is a malfunctioning of the narrator's mind/brain complex; an Augustinian privation of the good. This is the traditional understanding of the gothic. Insanity is one of the staples of the gothic mode in its classical form. Insanity finds many forms in McCarthy and King: in Stephen King's *Finders Keepers* (2015) we find the hero-worship of an author

by insane fans. The same motif about an insane fan is there in King's novel *Misery*. The same is the case with King's *Dolores Claiborne*. In *Dolores Claiborne*, the main gothic elements are the traditional staples of gothic literature: huge mansions; lonely dowagers, and incest. And parapsychic phenomena. While the parapsychic phenomena does not interest us here; it is of importance to note that murder and incest are both mortal sins within Christianity and defy natural justice.

What *Dolores Claiborne* is about is the systematic evil perpetrated against women by men. It is a commentary on the absent men in the lives of the women in the novel. Therefore, to term the murders of abusive husbands in this novel as mortal sins do not hold up. The murders in this novel cannot be termed sins since they are instances of either retributive justice or, are committed as the last resort to protect oneself against unbearable domestic violence, or, when in the form of euthanasia, it is a matter not so much of sin but of ethics. The ethics of terminal illness care demands euthanasia and cannot be termed as sinful. In the last chapter it was shown how our two authors do not agree with the entirety of Christian dogma but revise and critique Christian doctrines to form a new mode of theological discourse within the genre of the gothic. The eponymous Dolores Claiborne recollects her life:

In those days I [Dolores Claiborne] still believed the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man was stronger than the love of drinkin and hell-raisin—that love would eventually rise to the top like cream in a bottle of milk. I learned better over the next ten years. The world's a sorry schoolroom sometimes, ain't it?
(*Dolores Claiborne* 19)

Similarly the supernatural elements we find in other gothic novels throughout the world are all set off against social concerns. As shown in this chapter all McCarthy's and King's works are based on socio-economic injustices and the theological exegesis reveals that they are less about the supernatural and more about human evils like child abuse and racial bigotry and the way power deriving from capitalist forces destroy everything good. *Under the Dome* by Stephen King is all about money and power. The aliens in *Under the Dome* catalyze the manifestation of evil within Chester's Mill; the homophobia, the xenophobia and plain bullying of the poor by the rich. King separates

Chester's Mill from the rest of the world and focuses a microscope on contemporary American society and finds the grittiness of life the most disturbing. Aliens do not imprison and murder women; but insane boys imprison their lovers in *Under the Dome* and to cover it all up, James "Junior" Rennie's father, James "Big Jim" Rennie promotes his necrophiliac son into a police officer at Chester's Mill. Even when James "Big Jim" Rennie gets to know of his son's serial murders and necrophilia, he does nothing to reign in James "Junior" Rennie. The dome put in place by aliens in this novel unleashes the worst in most of the citizens of Chester's Mill. *Under the Dome* with its insanity, religious zealotry, murders and necrophilia, is both a gothic and as far as the missing women go, a taut thriller. It is within the microcosm of Chester's Mill, separated from the rest of the world that we have an opportunity to study evil in its minutiae. There is not much evil in King's *Pet Sematary*; it is mostly supernatural and has an eerie effect but what goes on in the lives of those isolated from the rest of the world, in Chester's Mill is somewhat akin to what happens to the people in Albert Camus's *The Plague*. In *Pet Sematary* dead animals return to haunt the living. In *Under the Dome* the animality in humans is scrutinised.

Returning to supernatural tales globally, we find that John Ajvide Lindqvist's (1968-) *Let the Right One In* (Swedish original 2004, translated to English in 2008) and his *Harbor* (Swedish original in 2008, translated to English in 2010) both deal with childhood traumas. Nonetheless, Eli in *Let the Right One In* is two hundred years' old and is eternally doomed to remain a child, albeit a castrated boy who has to pretend that he is a girl. In *Harbor*, Lindqvist portrays the remote fictional, icy island Domaro as malevolent. Simon, the magician in *Harbor*, does have a magical insect in his keeping. Behind the supernatural in *Harbor* lurks the anxieties of Swedish life with its falling indigenous population and loneliness and uprootedness. *Let the Right One In* is less about vampires and more about the pangs of growing up and the loneliness of children in contemporary Sweden. To emphasize this point about the social function of the gothic, we turn to Peter Høeg's (1957-) *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (originally published in Danish in 1992, translated to English in 1993). Høeg's novel is more about racism and xenophobia in Denmark, than it is also about aliens with supernatural powers. Critiques of the gothic, ranging from Geoffrey Galt Harpham's (1946-) *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982) where Harpham theorizes that "the Gothic resists precise conceptualization" (Harpham xxii) to Fred

Botting's (b.1963) *Gothic* (1995) have repeatedly stressed this aspect of the gothic. Marsden and Greenaway then effected a theological turn which this thesis takes forward and makes a case for scrutinizing, in particular the trope of sin in the gothic, including contemporary gothic novels and thrillers.

While studying the genre of the gothic, it is best to let King speak about genre fiction in his own words. He gave an interview to *Rolling Stone's* Andy Greene in October, 2014. King's understanding of the vituperation that popular literature is met with, within mainstream highbrow literary circles, justifies the writing of this chapter. Otherwise, one cannot proceed with showing why McCarthy and King should be read together:

Michiko Kakutani, who writes reviews for *The New York Times*, is the same way. She'll review a book like David Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks*, which is one of the best novels of the year. It's as good as Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, has the same kind of deep literary resonance. But because it has elements of fantasy and science fiction, Kakutani doesn't want to understand it. In that sense, Bloom and Kakutani and a number of gray eminences in literary criticism are like children who say, "I can't possibly eat this meal because the different kinds of food are touching on the plate!" (King and Greene *Interview* n.pag.)

In this same interview, King clarifies his stand on horror literature and what is dismissively termed genre-literature. King speaks of his role in elevating horror literature to high art. When we speak of horror literature, it might seem oxymoronic to some; when we speak of horror literature, one cringes and tries to slot horror fiction within the comparatively respectable gothic genre. Thus King's answers to Greene's questions are self-explanatory and important to our discussions here:

[Greene's question] By writing horror novels, you entered one of the least respected genres of fiction.

[King's answer] Yeah. It's one of the genres that live across the tracks in the literary community, but what

could I do? That's where I was drawn. ... And I have to say this: To a degree, I have elevated the horror genre.

[Greene's statement] Few would argue with that.

[King's response] It's [the horror genre] more respected now. I've spoken out my whole life against the idea of simply dismissing whole areas of fiction by saying it's "genre" and therefore can't be seen as literature. I'm not trying to be conceited or anything. Raymond Chandler [quoted twice in the last chapter of this thesis] elevated the detective genre. People who have done wonderful work really blur the line. (King and Greene, *Interview* n.pag.)

It is King's devotion to the horror genre and his need to blur lines, mentioned above, is what brings a kind of gravity to the gothic. Harold Bloom and Michiko Kakutani notwithstanding, American gothic literature is here to stay, and one neglects it at one's own peril. Dani Cavallaro in his *The Gothic Vision* (2002), points out "that terror and horror, the concepts around which assessments of dark fiction have traditionally revolved, are not antithetical, as it has often been contended, but complementary. Terror has conventionally been linked to fear triggered by indeterminate agents, and horror to fear occasioned by visible gore. Although feelings of disorientation and anxiety indubitably alter according to the degree to which their causes may be related to material or incorporeal occurrences, these do not constitute fixed and self-contained categories for they incessantly collude and metamorphose into each other as fear's interdependent affects" (Cavallaro vii). Thus we find Stephen King rightly pointing out the value of the gothic mode when he refers to Donna Tartt (b.1963). Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992) is a horror-thriller with supernatural elements in it. *The Secret History*, though King does not mention this novel in his interview quoted above, is replete with Greek tragic references and through intertextuality, harks back to Hellenism and the Greek classics. Since Tartt foregrounds her novel within classicism, critics like Kakutani while reviewing her book for the New York Times in 1992 hone in on Tartt's association with Bret Easton Ellis. The literary task of canon making or, rather canon destruction, as will be evident from Kakutani's review, is flawed and has never done

justice to horror writers. That *The Secret History* is genre literature and a horror-thriller at that, has escaped Kakutani: “How best to describe Donna Tartt's enthralling first novel? Imagine the plot of Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment" crossed with the story of Euripides' "Bacchae" set against the backdrop of Bret Easton Ellis's "Rules of Attraction" and told in the elegant, ruminative voice of Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited." The product, surprisingly enough, isn't a derivative jumble, but a remarkably powerful novel that seems sure to win a lengthy stay on the best-seller lists” (Kakutani 18).

“The Sovereignty of [the] Good” was proven by Iris Murdoch (1919-1999) in her eponymous monograph published in 1970 and will be discussed in the fourth chapter in this thesis. Stephen King provides a clue to why we should study Murdoch's monograph. King in his interview with Terry Gross quoted earlier has this to say of the real horror which frightens the ageing King:

The supernatural stuff doesn't get to me anymore. But here's the movie [*Iris*] that scared me the most in the last 12 or 13 years. The movie opens with a woman [the British philosopher and novelist, Dame Iris Murdoch] in late middle-age sitting at a table and writing a story. And the story goes something like, then the branches creaked in the - and she stops, and she says to her husband [the British literary critic, John Bayley], what are those things? I [Iris Murdoch] can't think of them. They're in the backyard, and they're very tall, and birds land on the branches. And he says, why, Iris, those are trees. And she says, yes, how silly of me. And she writes the word, and the movie starts. That's Iris Murdoch, and she's suffering the onset of Alzheimer's disease. (King and Gross *NPR* n.pag.)

Thus, when we encounter the explicitly supernatural as both radical evil and the sovereign good, we must remember that we are encountering fictional qualia and thus need to modulate our exegesis of McCarthy and King through the hermeneutics based on comprehensible critiques mentioned above.

To return to the discussion of theology, theodicy and the sovereign good; we must now chart a proper territory for such exegesis. To begin with, we need to spend some more time gothic at some length. This discussion of the gothic is necessary since it is within this domain of the gothic that all American literature is written, as Leslie Fiedler pointed out in his book *Love and Death in the American Novel*, mentioned at the beginning of chapter one here. It is within this same mode of the gothic that we have Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King write. The presence of evil, albeit metaphoric evil is a staple of the gothic western and the gothic thriller. Sigmund Freud had noted long ago that as a species, human beings are not altruistic, nor are we given naturally to charitable acts. Before Freud, within the Continental and the American traditions, Judaism and Christianity had insisted on us being altruistic. But before quoting the Bible, we would do well to remember Freud's observations about human nature in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (originally published in German in 1930, translated into English by Joan Riviere, 1994):

human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love, at most able to defend themselves if attacked; on the contrary, they can count a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments. Hence, their neighbour is not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to take out their aggression on him, to exploit his labour without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to take possession of his goods, to humiliate him and cause him pain, to torture and kill him. *Homo homini lupus* [Man is a wolf to man]. Who, after all that he has learnt from life and history, would be so bold as to dispute this proposition? (Freud *Civilization and its Discontents* 58-59)

Freud here writes of the naturally violent nature of the human person. This violence for Freud is not supernatural violence. But when studied through a theological hermeneutics, we find that Freud without mentioning theology anywhere in his works, revises the notion of original sin defined at the end of the last chapter. Freud's reflections about human nature and the problematics of the neighbour, as has been

pointed out, echo Judaic and Christian notions of the neighbour. One instance from the Hebrew Bible is “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) and in the New Testament, we have St. Paul summing up the entire teaching of Jesus, and by extrapolation, the entire teaching of the *Torah* thus:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled [both] the [Judaic and Christian] law[s]. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Bible *Romans* 13:8-10)

It is this law of love that is the theme of both McCarthy and King. It is this law of charity which is broken in small-town America as represented in King’s novels. *Carrie* (1974) is not only a novel about bullying as also are *The Stand* (1978) and *Dreamcatcher* (2001), but like *The Stand* and *Dreamcatcher*, these are novels about small - town America and actual neighbours who fail to be neighbourly. In *Carrie*, an entire town is against a lonely adolescent girl for no fault of hers. *The Dark Tower* series is also about small-town America with its own ethnic and religious bigotries transported like other science fiction novels to multiverses and other dimensions. Roland Deschain, the taciturn, ‘Gunslinger’ in King’s the *Dark Tower* series is constructed from the taciturn private eye of the hard-boiled noir. Therefore it is important to interrogate hard-boiled fiction, before we proceed further. Cormac McCarthy too uses the hard-boiled mode in his fiction. To give one example, Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, though a murderer in the lineage of Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* is as taciturn and ‘private’ as King’s Gunslinger and as “hard-boiled” and “pig-headed” as Continental Op in Dashiell Hammett’s (1894-1961) works. Both McCarthy and King, therefore, share their antecedents in the hard-boiled mode of Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). It is in *Red Harvest* that we find the use of the adjectival phrase “hard-boiled” used to define the private investigator who goes by the name of Continental Op:

...My God! for a fat, middle-aged, hard-boiled, pig-headed guy, you've [Dinah Brand to Continental Op] got the vaguest way of doing things I ever heard of.
(Hammett *Red Harvest* 84)

It is this inheritance of American “hard-boiled” fiction that inform the works of both McCarthy and King. This is further enabled by the form of the novel itself which is very liberal in accommodating various narratives. “The [novel is the] most protean of literary forms, the novel is also the least amenable to formal definition...Discussions of subgenres within crime writing broadly considered tend to be quite fuzzy at the edges...Thus, both scholarly commentary and the nature of the marketplace reinforce the fact that the novel and noir writing, broadly conceived, are extremely elastic with regard to formal requirements. At the same time, readers of the latter bring a set of relatively firm expectations to each book. The result is that those who work this particular territory are both liberated and constrained at the same time. Their achievements come, in part, through an appreciation of the balance between the liberation and the constraint and the degree to which that balance can be adjusted. This is a more difficult task than it at first appears to be, but we are blessed that so many writers are able to accomplish it so often and so well” (Schwartz 139-41).Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King use this liberated “latitude” (Schwartz 140) of the novel’s form to construct their mythos of the frontier as well as of small-town America respectively. To enact their respective revisionary modes of approaching their nation, both writers conflate the idea of America defined by American Exceptionalism which derives from the Turner Thesis with the idea of an America intolerant of any but male-white Christian ideologies.

In short, McCarthy and King’s America may be critiques of white America, but nonetheless they are about white America where indigenous women and men and those of colour are barely tolerated and are forced to live marginal lives. Thus the choice of form for the contents of both McCarthy and Kings’ critiques of their nation is crucial: the novel form or the “abbreviated version of the novel”, which is “the short story” (Schwartz 140) provides them with the narratorial space to engage with both different theologies and with theodicies. The violence that has marked American imperialism from the Vietnam War and the continuous menace of the Cold War has provided these

two writers fertile grounds to write their own thrillers. Both of them realized the fatal environment of the America they were brought up in and continue to live in.

The revisionary American Western becomes in the hands of Cormac McCarthy, a thriller. The violence that we encounter in *The Crossing* (2001) or, in *Blood Meridian* is no less than that we find in *Carrie*, not to speak of in *The Dark Tower* series by Stephen King. The miscibility or, fluidity of genres; which is not an instance of the transgression of genres; allows us to consider King and McCarthy together. They both address the “pathetic”, “political” God who suffers along with all humanity. The American thriller and the American western in the hands of McCarthy and Stephen King, are both sites where suffering or, pain is contemplated through their respective generic modes. It is true that King’s novels and stories like the works of Shirley Jackson (1916-1965) earlier, and Jack Ketchum (1946-2018) now show us the lives of real Americans in the here and the now, more than they show people haunted by evil forces which are beyond scrutiny. Cormac McCarthy’s works seriously challenge concepts of Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism; here is how McCarthy shows the West was won:

Within that first minute the slaughter [of Native Americans] had become general. Women were screaming and naked children and one old man tottered forth waving a pair of white pantaloons. The horsemen moved among them and slew them with clubs or knives...When Glanton and his chiefs swung back through the village people were running out under the horses' hooves and the horses were plunging and some of the men were moving on foot among the huts with torches and dragging the victims out, slathered and dripping with blood, hacking at the dying and decapitating those who knelt for mercy...one of the Delawares emerged from the smoke with a naked infant dangling in each hand and squatted at a ring of midden stones and swung them by the heels each in turn and bashed their heads against the stones so that the brains burst forth through the fontanel in a bloody spew and

humans on fire came shrieking forth like berserkers and the riders hacked them down with their enormous knives...(*Blood Meridian* 133-134)

This is how the west was won and this is what none wrote about before McCarthy wrote his *Blood Meridian*.

This thesis through its synoptic engagement with the novels of McCarthy and King, tries to carry forward the cultural works of Simon Marsden and Jonathan Greenaway within the domain of the American gothic. The discussion in this chapter began with Jacques Derrida's questions about religion, then we assessed the Burkean sublime and then proceeded to show how Simon Marsden and Jonathan Greenaway effected a theological turn to the gothic mode while reading McCarthy and King. It is only fitting that we end this discussion on the gothic mode which is reshaped by the thrillers and the westerns of both our writers under considering recapitulating what Edgar Allan Poe writes in his marginalia, *On Imagination*(1849):

The *pure Imagination* chooses, from *either Beauty or Deformity*, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound, as a general rule, partaking, in character, of beauty, or sublimity, in the ratio of the respective beauty or sublimity of the things combined — which are themselves still to be considered as atomic — that is to say, as previous combinations...Even out of deformities it fabricates that *Beauty* which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test...It is this thorough harmony of an imaginative work which so often causes it to be undervalued by the thoughtless, through the character of *obviousness* which is superinduced. We are apt to find ourselves asking *why* it is that these combinations have never been imagined before. (Poe 447, italics are Poe's)

What Edgar Allan Poe says of the sublime being undervalued by the thoughtless is precisely the fate of the American thriller and the American western. Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King by gesturing towards the gothic mode through these two genres have

been able to combine what Poe says can only be combined by artists with the highest powers of imagination. It is only when we study the thrillers and the westerns of both our writers, we are able to observe how easy it is to miss the obvious. We tend to overlook the sublimity inherent in American popular fiction, especially fiction written in the gothic mode. Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King have the ability to make the obvious into art. While theology is part of what they convey as content, we must not lose sight of their use of language and form, while conveying these theological truths. They are both artists first who happen also to be excellent theologians. Thus it is important to contextualise their writings within the history of ideas that Poe brings up in the part of his marginalia quoted above. McCarthy and King are imaginative writers, not conservative theologians. They both work within generic formulae but in reality both of them have made the formulaic beautiful in an imaginative manner. Their powers of imagination have effected a theological turn within the gothic. Following Poe, we now ask of ourselves why it is that we have not imagined the thriller and the western in ways which only McCarthy and King have been able to do.

CHAPTER III

The Problem of Evil in Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King

Before we discuss the problem of evil in this chapter, we have to bear in mind Terry Eagleton's comments about evil in his book *On Evil* (2010). He points out that to "acknowledge the reality of evil, however, it is not necessarily to hold that it lies beyond all explanation" (Eagleton 16) and then he goes on to write later in this book that evil "is a form of transcendence...Perhaps it is the only form of transcendence left in a postreligious world" (Eagleton 65). As we will find in the next paragraph, evil is both explicable rationally and inexplicable to an extent within the fiction of McCarthy and King. The Cormac McCarthy scholar, Stacey Peebles in the interview mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis has further pointed out that she "think[s] sometimes attributing the term 'evil' to someone or something is an easy way out—it can subvert the need for investigation, for asking really tough questions. I [Peebles] mean, if you look at *Blood Meridian* and some of the really atrocious stuff that's happening, these things are also politically motivated, right?...how talking about 'evil' as simply a metaphysical category might be an easy way of *not* talking about some of the motivating factors for why this violence was occurring" (Peebles n.pag. italics' Peebles') Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King both deal with the philosophical and theological implications of evil in their works. In our exegesis of their works, we will try to understand why their works must need to be contextualised within a socio-economic and culturally informed theology gesturing to both authors' theodicies. This is because contemporary Christian theology is rooted within the socio-economic and cultural milieu of the theologian. During the last half of the previous century and in this century, theologians have appropriated deconstructive strategies and have begun unravelling "the secret" (Derrida *Literature in Secret* 126) which Jacques Derrida mentions in his *Literature in Secret*. Derrida writes of "preferring the secret that binds me to you rather than the secret that binds me to the other other [sic]" (Derrida *Literature in Secret* 126). What binds us to each other is not evil, but what binds us to ourselves and to metaphysical trappings is solipsism and is inhumane. Georges Didi-Huberman in an essay published in the anthology *What is A People?* writes that the "best historians are those who contribute most effectively to lifting the lid—the lid of the repression" (Georges Didi-Huberman, 74) of the marginalised everywhere.

McCarthy and King in their works unravel Derrida's secret and lift the lid off various atrocities performing their cultural work as writers. They take the help of the supernatural in their gothic thrillers and westerns to reenchant a world which does not accept institutionalised religions anymore. In the words of the psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim, in both children and adults "the unconscious is a powerful determinant of behavior" (Bettelheim 7). Evil enacts a repression of the unconscious and one's "personality may become severely crippled" (Bettelheim 7). But through works of the imagination, if this repressed unconscious is "permitted to come to awareness...[then]...its potential for causing harm...is much reduced" (Bettelheim 7). Thus we have Bruno Bettelheim proving to us the uses of enchantment which McCarthy and King go on to do their fiction. At the end of the last chapter, the imagination has been defined through the marginalia of Edgar Allan Poe. McCarthy and King through their imagination not only effect a re-enchantment but also show us that the process of enchantment that Bruno Bettelheim writes of is only possible if we first disenchant ourselves. This disenchantment will lead us to confront the inequities of life and historical injustices we find within the narratives found the fiction of McCarthy and King. Then only will the unconscious be allowed to come to our awareness and harm caused by repression is much reduced.

In *The Dark Tower* series, Roland Deschain and his group move between dimensions and reenchant as once J.R.R. Tolkien did in his works. Evil within literature holds our attentions since it is perhaps the last transcendence left for contemporary humanity as Terry Eagleton points out. Sin, a theological trope, is much more fascinating than goodness. In Ray Russell's novel, *The Case Against Satan* (1962), which predates William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971), we have in the best formulaic tradition of the gothic, incest at the root of demonic possession. It is no supernatural entity who possesses Susan Garth in Russell's novel, but it is paternal incest that has somatised as aberrant behaviour. A Roman Catholic priest in *The Case Against Satan* puts the role of the unconscious at the centre of everything. Father Halloran sees our anxieties of diabolism as being located within the "unconscious mind, slips of the tongue and the hand; seemingly meaningless... [repressed as] hostilities deep within the mind" (Russell 127). It is with these deep hostilities within the mind that we will have to deal in this chapter. Economic greed and a surplus of desire manifest themselves as evil in both the authors under consideration in this thesis.

Theologians agree that both greed and capitalism in the form of consumerism are the real evils that plague us. We will further interrogate whether this repression is a result of inequities within American society.

The problem of evil arises within this thesis from our readings of Cormac McCarthy's and Stephen King's fiction. In *The Stand*, Frances Goldsmith, or Frannie as she is called in this novel, protests Mother Abigail's instructions to the newly founded town committee's members to travel west (*The Stand* 1127) to confront the "Imp" (*The Stand* 1125), "The Dark Prince, [the] Man of Far Leagues" (*The Stand* 1126). Like Christ's instructions to His apostles, "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— [or a] bag for the journey or [an] extra shirt or sandals or a staff" (Bible *Matthew* 10:9-10), Mother Abigail mimetically echoing Christ tells the four men who are to be God's new apostles in the post-plague world of *The Stand*, what they were to do if they wanted to fight Randall Flagg:

"You are to go west," Mother Abigail whispered. "You are to take no food, no water. You are to go this very day, and in the clothes you stand up in. You are to go on foot."
(*The Stand* 1128)

It is important to understand the significance of the west in American literature. The Turner thesis and the way it has distorted American history has been discussed earlier. It is now necessary to refer to Richard Slotkin's book, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier; 1600-1860*. Mother Abigail's instruction while being Biblical is also uniquely American. Slotkin points out that "the characteristic American gesture in the face of adversity is seen to be that of immersion in the native element...as the solution to all problems, the balm to all wounds of the soul...If the [west] hold terrors, embrace them as signs of nature's power and God's. Do not flee from them.." (Slotkin 267). So going west is what the original Puritan settlers of America would have done and they indeed went west. It is therefore interesting to notice how evil in *The Stand* resides in the west. Because as Slotkin shows in his book, the American west was the site of great violence between the native American Indian and their colonisers. The colonisers imputed evil as residing within the native American Indians occupying the west. Thus to only see the Biblical references in Mother Abigail's instructions is to miss the more nuanced stance of King.

The deeper one goes into the west, the more formidable the violence and opposition. Therefore King problematises the west here by calling Flagg evil. In the last book of *The Dark Tower* series of gothic westerns by King, we find that evil within the fictional universe of Stephen King endures for ever and cannot be exorcised ever. The *Dark Tower* is replete with characters found in the earlier works of King. There, in *The Dark Tower*, finally when the gunslinging cowboy Roland Deschain climbs up the eponymous Dark Tower, he has a revelation which is a “hammerblow” (King *The Dark Tower* 670) to Roland. He understands that he and all others are caught in a loop which will never end. The evil we encounter in King’s world is perhaps eternal and a product of the imagination. Roland’s wonders:

How many times had he travelled [this] loop...How many times *would* he travel it? (King *The Dark Tower* 670, italics are King’s)

And, as the series had begun, the series ends:

As for now he would resume his journey...The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed.
(King *The Dark Tower* 672)

The man in black in *The Dark Tower* series is the same man who had settled in the post-apocalyptic west found in *The Stand*. Since this thesis is based on similarities between the worldviews of both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King, we need to validate whether our contention that McCarthy and King should be read together or not. As quoted in the earlier portion of Chapter one of this thesis, in *Blood Meridian* Cormac McCarthy points out that evil tends to run itself for ever (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 20). To give another example, in *All the Pretty Horses* McCarthy refers to a “brooding and malignant life [to be found] slumbering” (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 184) throughout this western thriller and in the entirety of the *Border Trilogy*. The evil that both McCarthy and King write of in *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses* and in *The Stand* have more to do with theft, murder and the rich exploiting the poor, all for money. The logic of capitalism is personified in *Blood Meridian* by the Glanton gang and Judge Holden. In *All the Pretty Horses* it is personified most memorably by John Grady Cole’s lover, Alejandra’s family and finally in *The Stand* by the pre-plague society at large and in the post- plague society by Randall Flagg. This logic of capitalism is known as

systemic sin within Christian theology. It is against this logic of capitalism discussed earlier, that we find an extrapolation of the deeds of the nameless pharaoh of the Old Testament. The vampiric nature of capitalist production has been discussed within Judaeo-Christian theology through the plights of the Israelites at the hands of their Egyptian masters. Now we return to the apostolic injunctions of Mother Abigail to the westward bound travellers. Mother Abigail does not forget to add that, “one of you will not reach your destination” (*The Stand* 1128) because “the man in the West is the wheel on which [all of you] will be broken” (*The Stand* 1126) since according to Mother Abigail, “God will dispose as He sees fit” (*The Stand* 1126). The superflu survivors need to realise that they are only “but the potter’s clay” (*The Stand* 1126) and not potters themselves. This insight into the ways of God that Mother Abigail had gained through leaving the Boulder community to mimetically follow Christ in the wilderness (Bible, *Mark* 1:12-13) where she at one hundred and eight years of age, had to go to purge herself “of the old blood of sin and [to prepare] the fresh blood of sacrifice” (King *The Stand* 886) and repent for her sins, surviving “on roots, herbs, grass” (King *The Stand* 1115) alone. Glen Bateman who was an erstwhile sociology professor before the superflu, observed that Mother Abigail was “other-directed” (*The Stand* 802), she is one of those who “won’t necessarily [abide] by what this society needs or by what it’s mores turn out to be” (King *The Stand* 802) since Mother Abigail listens “to some other voice [like] Joan of Arc [listened to some other voice]” (King *The Stand* 802). So when Mother Abigail asks Stuart "Stu" Redman to join the others to go to the west, to fight evil, since Randall Flagg “represents the forces of evil” (King *The Stand* 1118), Frannie who is with Stu’s child, cannot help herself and confronts Mother Abigail with a statement which philosophers and theologians have termed the problem of evil:

“Killer God! *Killer God!*” she spat. “Millions—maybe *billions* dead in the plague. Millions more afterward. We don’t even know if the children will live. Isn’t He done yet? Does it just have to go on and on until the earth belongs to the rats and the roaches? He’s no God. He’s a daemon, and you’re His witch.” (King *The Stand* 1127, italics are King’s)

But Frannie here is echoing Mother Abigail before Mother Abigail had repented in the wilderness. Earlier in the novel Mother Abigail in her manner describes the problem of

evil to Nick Andros who is later killed by the explosion set off by Harold at the Free Zone:

“Oh, Nick,” Mother Abigail said, “I have harbored hate of the Lord in my heart. Every man or woman who loves Him, they hate Him too, because He’s a hard God, a jealous God, He Is, what He Is, and in this world He’s apt to repay service with pain while those who do evil ride over the roads in Cadillac cars. Even the joy of serving Him is a bitter joy. I do His will, but the human part of me has cursed Him in my heart. ‘Abby,’ the Lord says to me, ‘there’s work for you far up ahead. So I’ll let you live an live, until your flesh is bitter on your bones. I’ll let you see all your children die ahead of you and still you’ll walk the earth... And in the end, your reward will be to go away with strangers from all the things you love best and you’ll die in a strange land with the work not yet finished. That’s My will, Abby,’ says He, and ‘Yes, Lord,’ says I. ‘Thy will be done,’ and in my heart I curse Him and ask, ‘Why, why, why?’ and the only answer I get is ‘Where were you when I made the world?’ (King *The Stand* 645)

Mother Abigail sums up the problem of evil in her speech to Nick; God permits evil to have a good time while good people are to die miserably having even lost their own children in strange lands. She echoes *Psalms* 137, which begins with the lines:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
 when we remembered Zion.
 There on the poplars
 we hung our harps,
 for there our captors asked us for songs,
 our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
 they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” (Bible,
Psalms 137:1-3)

Mother Abigail freely chooses to obey God's fiat but like Frannie later, she had cursed God as once Job had cursed God:

I loathe my very life;
 therefore I will give free rein to my complaint
 and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.
 I say to God: Do not declare me guilty,
 but tell me what charges you have against me.
 Does it please you to oppress me,
 to spurn the work of your hands,
 while you smile on the plans of the wicked? (Bible,
Job 10:1-3)

Perhaps Job, Mother Abigail and Frannie finally understood the God they cursed for permitting evil is a weak God as shown in some detail by the deconstructionist John D. Caputo (b.1940) in his book *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (2006). Caputo in his fourth chapter entitled "Omnipotence, Unconditionality, and the Weak Force of God" (Caputo 84-97) quotes from the theologian Jürgen Moltmann's (b.1926) book *The Crucified God* (published in German in 1972 and translated into English in 1974): "God cannot love if God cannot make himself vulnerable" (Caputo 85). To understand this weakness of God, we must read Caputo's second chapter in this book. In "St. Paul on the Logos of the Cross" (42-54), Caputo challenges the "notion that Jesus could come down from the Cross had he [so] wished" (Caputo 42) does not fall within the ambit of Christianity but "belongs to the unbelieving, uncomprehending Romans who taunted him, as if Jesus were a magician, whereas the genuine divinity of Jesus is revealed in his distance from this request for magic, in his helplessness, his cry of abandonment" (Caputo 42-43). Caputo then goes on to comment on Slavoj Žižek's (b. 1949) book *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003) that "Žižek [was] only half right to say that the perverse core of Christianity lay in Jesus' being abandoned and that what we should learn from his death on the cross is that there is no Big Other to save us, so we should get on with our lives" (Caputo 43). Žižek's atheism sounds similar to what Harold says to Nadine Cross, Randall Flagg's would-be bride about God, after Harold had set off his explosives at Free Zone townhall. Nadine had seduced Harold but insisted in an inversion of apostolic celibacy, or virginity that she be left a virgin by Harold since she belonged to Randall Flagg:

“I’m a virgin. And I am going to stay that way. Because it’s for someone else to . . . make me not a virgin anymore” (*The Stand* 992). The only difference between Žižek and Harold is that Harold knows of evil’s presence while Žižek finds existence marked by nothing. There is no supernatural evil in existence in Žižek’s world, whereas there is Randall Flagg in Harold’s world and in all of King’s fiction:

“Get used to it,” Harold said brutally [to Nadine]. He flung the tent on the back of his cycle and began to tie it down. “It’s over for them down there, and it’s over for us, and it’s over for everybody that died in the plague. God went off on a celestial fishing trip and He’s going to be gone a long time. It’s totally dark. The dark man’s in the driver’s seat now. Him. So get used to it.” (*The Stand* 1096)

Caputo does not let his explanation of the weakness of God pause with remarking that Žižek’s advice to us that there is no Big Other out anywhere to save us. Caputo further writes of Žižek that “what Žižek leaves out, is that in this abandonment there lies the weak force of God. . . we should not think of God as a source of magical effects or as a master manipulator of mundane powers and that in that sense we should get on with our lives. But the divinity of the truly divine God is to be displayed neither in a display of magic by Jesus or his heavenly Father, nor in the secret hope that the Father is going to square the accounts for him in an afterlife and give these Roman soldiers their comeuppance in the world to come. The divinity is rather that his very death and humiliation rise up in protest against the world, rise up above power. . . The perverse core of Christianity lies in being a weak force. The weak force of God is embodied in the broken body on the cross. . . The power of God is not. . . brute power, or vulgar magic; it is the power of powerlessness. . . the power of protest that rises up from innocent suffering and calls out against it, the power that says *no* to unjust suffering. . . the power to suffer-with (*sym-pathos*) innocent suffering, which is. . . the central Christian symbol” (Caputo 43, italics are Caputo’s). This powerlessness of God and the construction of an empathic God had begun in Latin America through the liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez (b.1928) and Jon Sobrino (b. 1938) as mentioned earlier. It is their thought that informs the theodicy, or solution, to the problem of powerlessness or evil, in the sense of an apparent lack of power, that Caputo posits when he writes of a powerless

God. This is the same God who permits perfect freedom to reign in His kingdom. That is why the Free Zone in *The Stand* represents human autonomy and a certain laid-back attitude which is not to be found in the west where Flagg rules. In Las Vegas evil itself rules and thus the punishments to human beings are disproportionate to their crimes. In Boulder, on the other hand, the freedom to read anything one wants, and being high on “good drugs” (*The Stand* 1410) was always allowed and after Las Vegas was blown up, in the new world, will always be allowed. Access to all kinds of books signifies the freedom to choose between good and evil. Nick Andros in his new house finds “on the desk beside his right hand – *Set This House on Fire*, by William Styron” (*The Stand* 819) a book as replete with the symbolic logic of evil as *The Stand* itself is replete with metaphors for evil. In *The Stand* evil often is shown as real and is tangibly represented by “Not just the evil ones that are like him [Randall Flagg], but the weak ones ... the lonely ones ... and the ones that have left God out of their hearts” (King *The Stand* 636). In William Styron’s works and especially in Styron’s *Set This House on Fire* which King explicitly draws our attention to; evil is not supernatural but open to historical scrutiny. In contrast to Styron’s conception of evil, King posits his theory of evil. Since King wants his readers to register this fact, he singled out *Set This House on Fire* in this novel. King’s defines evil not merely in terms of metaphors. Without defining evil, we cannot offer an answer to the problem of evil in the first place, if an answer is at all possible. In a moment King’s view of evil will be clear to us and then we can proceed to address that problem, or offer a theodicy.

Mother Abigail knows that though “God has put His finger on [Nick’s] heart” (*The Stand* 635), Nick has doubts about the existence of Satan or any other malefic presence. Nick, being deaf and mute, wrote for his fellow survivor Ralph to read to Mother Abigail about his doubts about the true nature of both God and evil:

“I don’t know about the God part, but I know something is working here...

“And you think going to Boulder is the right thing?” [Nick asked Mother Abigail]

Mother Abigail said, “It’s what we’re meant to do.”

Nick doodled aimlessly on his pad for a moment and then wrote, “How much do you know about the dark man? Do you know who he is?” (*The Stand* 636)

Mother Abigail’s answers and thoughts are theologically orthodox. She answers Nick without bypassing the definition of evil or the relation between Randall Flagg and Satan: “I know what he’s about but not who he is. He’s the purest evil left in the world” (*The Stand* 636) and Nick is quick to retort:

“Maybe he’s [Randall Flagg] not real,” Nick wrote. “Maybe he’s just ...” He had to nibble at the top of his pen and think. At last he added: “... the scared, bad part of al of us. Maybe we are dreaming of the things we’re afraid we might do.” (*The Stand* 636)

Mother Abigail “grasped what Nick meant right off” (*The Stand* 636). In other words, Stephen King wants his readers to know that Mother Abigail does not fully agree with structuralist critiques of evil, though she is aware of “sexfiends and people who like to use their fists” (*The Stand* 636). But King wants us to be aware of a fuller understanding of evil which recognises metaphors for evil as is to be found in writers like William Styron’s works, yet through Mother Abigail he wants his readers to understand that evil is an esse, as God is an esse within his fiction. Mother Abigail muses:

It wasn’t much different from the talk of the new preachers who had got on the land in the last twenty years or so. There wasn’t really any Satan, that was their gospel. There was evil, and it probably came from original sin, but it was in all of us and getting it out was as impossible as getting an egg out of its shell without cracking it. According to the way these new preachers had it, Satan was like a jigsaw puzzle—and every man, woman, and child on earth added his or her little piece to make up the whole. Yes, all that had a good modern sound to it; the trouble with it was that it wasn’t true. And if Nick was allowed to go on thinking that, the dark man would eat him for dinner... (King *The Stand* 637)

Instead of telling Nick and others of this, what Mother Abigail told them of Flagg is that, “He ain’t Satan,” she said, “but he and Satan know of each other and have kept their councils together of old” (King *The Stand* 637). Mother Abigail offers in way of a theodicy, that evil is a mystery and “It’s God’s way. He don’t explain to the likes of Abby Freemantle” (*The Stand* 637). This theodicy sound suspiciously like the answer God gave to Job when Job asked Him why God, although omnipotent, allowed suffering and injustices to prevail (Bible, *Job*, 38). Chapter 38 of *The Book of Job* is God’s answer to the problems of evil, suffering and socio-economic injustices within Christianity. It is this Judaeo-Christian vision of the world that informs the works of King, and as we shall later find, it is this same vision of the word that permeates McCarthy’s understanding of evil. While Walker Percy (1916-1990), Flannery O’Conner (1925-1964) and Graham Greene (1904-1991) did not bring in Satan and Satan’s minions into their fiction; King does not hesitate to write of Satan and Satan’s followers. Within the fictional universe of Stephen King, Satan and demons are real. This is where Patristics comes in and this thesis’s argument that the popular thriller, the popular horror novel and the gothic-western are all media through which the ancient problems posed by evil, and suffering are addressed. Bestsellers unlike works of high art, can reach an audience which say, Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s (1821-1881) novels cannot reach. King’s view of evil is more akin to the Church Fathers’ view of evil. The Church Fathers saw evil as real and considered Satan and other demons to be real too. In a correspondence between Saint Barsanuphius (circa 6th century AD) and one John, the Saint answers to John’s queries regarding prayer and its effects on elating the soul in terms which show that evil entities provoke and stain the elations when prayers are answered. Saint Barsanuphius’s answer is that when one is truly praying then his soul is far from any divine joy: “When you have been praying and feel that your prayer has been heard, if indeed you are elated, it is clear that you have neither prayed according to God nor have you received the help of God, but rather the feeling that worked in you was from the demons so that your heart might be elated. For whenever assistance comes from God, the soul is never elated; instead, it is always humbled” (Barsanuphius 50, *Letter* 421). Like Mother Abigail in *The Stand*, and John Caputo’s powerless God, Saint Barsanuphius much before Caputo saw God as sorrowing for the world and as One who does not feel elation. God’s chosen are always abnegated. Contrary to God’s servants, the demons who are real for the Church Fathers and for Mother Abigail, revel in their pride. Earlier in *Letter* 418, when this same John had asked Saint Barsanuphius whether

dreaming the same dream thrice was a sign of foreknowledge, the Saint cautions John pointing out that it is the father of lies who often comes into our dreams: “This is not true either. Nor should you believe in any such dream. For the one who appears to us once in the form of a lie can also achieve the same thing three times or even many times” (Barsanuphius 49, *Letter* 418).

Returning to Nick Andros and his realisation that in the New Free Zone the freedom to read any book one wanted meant that in God’s kingdom “*ideas were free*”(*The Stand* 891, italicisation is King’s) and the access to drugs signifies a certain autonomy which evil denies. *The Stand* is foregrounded by the fact that the survivors of the superflu were all caught up in a cosmic battle where they were “all pawns in some post-Apocalypse game of good and evil” (*The Stand* 802) where there both exists the nameless pharaoh’s time which Walter Brueggemann writes about and the relaxed time of Yahweh. The difference between the nameless pharaoh’s time and Yahweh’s time has been discussed at length earlier since it is crucial to the arguments of the discourse here. In Flagg’s kingdom life is regulated by rules and regulations and harsh punishments for the smallest of transgressions while Flagg, who is an evil entity, gets away with heinous crimes. In the New Free Zone community there is forgiveness, whereas in Flagg’s west there is no scope for forgiving anyone howsoever innocent they are. When Hector Alonzo Drogan is charged with the possession of drugs, his erstwhile friend, the Trashcan man disowns Drogan (*The Stand* 772) and leaves Drogan to be crucified:

“Attention attention attention! By the order of Randal Flagg, Leader of the People and First Citizen, this man, Hector Alonzo Drogan by name, is ordered executed by an act of crucifixion, this penalty so ordered for the crime of drug use... Drug use is not allowed in this Society of the People because it impairs the user’s ability to contribute fully to the Society of the People... “—is done for the good of this Society of the People,”... “This communication ends with a solemn warning ...to the People of Las Vegas. Let this bill of true facts be nailed above the miscreant’s head... (King *The Stand* 773, capitals are King’s)

Flagg's and all his followers' proclamation that Drogan's punishment is for the greater good of humanity where each person is to live for the common good seems historically rooted in the Nazi regime's work-ethics in Nazi concentration camps. And earlier still, in the collective fate of the Israelites in Egypt under the tyrannical and nameless pharaoh. Within the continuum of literature, this work-order and faux ethics seem to be Orwellian. Dystopias are made of what Flagg's community at Las Vegas had become. John Caputo in his book *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, mentioned above, further engages with Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) when he sees the vulnerability of the being made in the image of God, struggling within human time unable to understand that the "being of time and the time of being are defined by their utter transformability, their thoroughgoing vulnerability and susceptibility to transformation; being and time are radically...reformable, reworkable, remarkable...(Deconstructible!)" (Caputo 151). Mother Abigail's world is deconstructible whereas the kingdom of evil has no such provision for transformation since human vulnerability is looked down by Satan and Satan's imp, Randall Flagg, as found in *The Stand*. Before we end this study of evil within *The Stand*, we must reckon with the fact that King emphasises the reality of evil as an eternal principle, as does Cormac McCarthy in his fiction. Mother Abigail believes that:

we are all a part of a chess game between God and Satan; that Satan's chief agent in this game is the Adversary, whose name she [Mother Abigail] says is Randal Flagg ('the name he's using this time,' is how she puts it); that for reasons best known to Himself, God has chosen her as His agent in this matter. She believes...that a struggle is coming and it's going to be us or him [Randall Flagg]. She thinks this struggle is the most important thing [in the universe] ...(*The Stand* 873)

This materiality of evil is far removed from the ideas of thinkers like Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) who had studied evil in his book *The Symbolism of Evil* (first published in French in 1960 and then published in English in 1967). In his book Ricoeur does not want to admit of embodied evil or, as he puts it, as an "idea of a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force in the field of our undividedly psychic and

corporeal existence. We no longer understand what the substance-force of evil, the efficacy of a something that makes purity itself an exemption from defilement and purification an annulment of defilement, could be” (Ricoeur 25-26). Yet it is exactly the presence of infectious filth, the substance-force of evil which Stephen King wants his readers to be aware of. Mother Abigail as shown earlier in this chapter, rejects all metaphors for evil. It is another matter that evil in all its forms finally serve God according to Mother Abigail. When Nick first met Mother Abigail and she told him of their need to go west where Flagg had set up his community of survivors, and confront Randall Flagg, Nick had suggested moving east (King *The Stand* 637). Mother Abigail had gently pointed out to Nick that:

all things serve the Lord. Don't you think this black man serves Him, too? He does, no matter how mysterious His purpose may be. The black man will follow you no matter where you run, because he serves the purpose of God, and God wants you to treat with him. It don't do no good to run from the will of the Lord God of Hosts. (King *The Stand* 637-638)

In the next chapter we will have occasion to interrogate how all things serve the Lord. Having defined evil as King wants us to define it, we turn to the problem of evil within *The Stand*.

If God were all good and perfect, then why does God not end all our miseries? And as Stu had earlier confided in Frannie: “That’s the same God [who] murdered His own boy, or so I heard” (*The Stand* 1103). It is this God that Mother Abigail defends in a manner of providing a theodicy when one of the chosen men, Larry, asked Mother Abigail whether they had any choice but venturing west (King *The Stand* 1129)? Mother Abigail’s comments on the freedom of the human person in the here and the now leads to the problem of evil:

She [Mother Abigail] turned to look at him [Larry], surprised. “A choice? There’s always a choice. That’s God’s way, always will be. Your will is still free. Do as you will. There’s no set of leg-irons on you. But...*this is*

what God wants of you.” (King *The Stand* 1129, italics are King’s)

So, we have a theodicy in Mother Abigail’s answer. She is a messenger of God who was not tasked to convince anyone about the veracity of her claims: “It’s not my place to argue with you, or convince, but only to put you in the way of understanding God’s plan for you” (King *The Stand* 1129) because “God don’t lay on no bribes” (King *The Stand* 1128). God “just makes a sign and lets people take it as they will” (King *The Stand* 1128). On the other hand, Randall Flagg’s new community in the west runs on the cogwheels of military law. Harold Lauder, being spurned by Frannie, and being filled with hate, had at one point, for “an hour or an instant” (King *The Stand* 842) “contemplated jettisoning the hate” (*The Stand* 842) but:

when faced with the knowledge that he [Harold] was free to *accept what was*, had rejected the new opportunity. To seize it would have been to murder himself. The ghost of every humiliation he had ever suffered cried out against it. His murdered dreams and ambitions came back to eldritch life and asked if he could forget them so easily. In the new Free Zone society he could only be Harold Lauder. Over there he could be a prince. (King *The Stand* 843)

Unlike Mother Abigail who went out to the wilderness to repent for her sin of pride in her presumption “to know the Mind of God” (King *The Stand* 889), Harold chooses to follow “the dark malignancy” (King *The Stand* 842) that is Randall Flagg, and Harold on the other hand, does exactly the opposite. In the private journal he maintained, named Ledger by him, Harold, on 12th August, 1990 wrote:

It is said that the two great human sins are pride and hate. Are they? I elect to think of them as the two great virtues. To give away pride and hate is to say you will change for the good of the world. To embrace them, to vent them, is more noble; that is to say that the world must change for the good of you. I am on a great adventure. (King *The Stand* 843)

So, within the fictional world of King, *The Stand* is only one example from King's works, human autonomy is always available to the human person in the here and the now. There is no determinism at work except within Flagg's kingdom. Harold realises that all the efforts of the community at the Free Zone at Boulder at restoring democracy through setting up of an electorate were useless in this new, post-superflu America where the townspeople had even "adopted the [old American] Constitution" (*The Stand* 1021). Harold wanted "to tell them the facts of life" (*The Stand* 1021). Though finally he did not say what he wanted to say but kept himself confined to "a few constructive suggestions" (*The Stand* 1021):

...America is dead, dead as a doornail...While you are meditating on the beauties of constitutional rule, spare a little time to meditate on Randall Flagg, Man of the West. I doubt very much if he has any time to spare for such fripperies as public meetings and ratifications and discussions on the true meaning of a peach in the best liberal mode. Instead he has been concentrating on the basics, on his Darwin, preparing to wipe the great Formica counter of the universe with your dead bodies...he has probably already seen to the creation of a Gun Cleaning Committee, not to mention mortars, missile sites, and possibly even germ warfare centers...
(*The Stand* 1021-1022, italics are King's)

In Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, we have Judge Holden disagreeing to even let birds being free, since in the Judge's domain, as in the domain of Flagg, it is a personal insult to him. The Judge says:

The freedom of birds is an insult to me. I'd have them all in zoos. (King *Blood Meridian* 210)

And McCarthy describes the Judge later in the novel as one riding happily with a crown of wreath. He rode:

...with a woven wreath of desert scrub about his head like some egregious saltland bard...as if the world were pleasing to him alone. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 231)

Here McCarthy is inverting Jesus's sayings and counterpoising the Judge as an anti-Christ. Jesus says "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Bible *Matthew* 6:26) and Jesus wore a crown of thorns before His crucifixion. The Roman soldiers "after twisting some thorns into a crown...put it on his head" (Bible *Matthew* 27:29). Judge Holden mocks Christ who emphasises freedom not only for the human person but even for birds, the Judge cannot tolerate anyone to be free because unlike Christ the Judge believes not in God but in creating his own destiny. He maintains that:

...it is only by taking charge [of one's self that]...man
will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate.
(McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 210)

Therefore, studying Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy, the problem of evil as explicated here is limited to a Judaeo-Christian point of view. We will not engage with say, Wendy Doniger's (b.1940) book on evil within Hinduism, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (1980); nor will we discuss the problem of evil within Buddhism with its myriad branches. This thesis is constructed around Judaeo-Christian metaphysics since Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy can be best read synoptically within the Judaeo-Christian histories of theologies and theodicies. Therefore, we assume a construction of evil that arises out of the exegesis of the Old Testament and from the New Testament. The non-theistic problem of evil is not difficult to address; as Susan Neiman in her book *Evil In Modern Thought: an alternative history of philosophy* (2002) points out:

nothing is easier than stating the problem of evil in
nontheist terms...Any observation of the world that
continues for more than a couple of minutes should do.
Every time we make the judgment *this ought not to have
happened*, we are stepping onto a path that leads straight
to the problem of evil. Note that it is as little a moral
problem, strictly speaking, as it is a theological one. One
can call it the point at which ethics and metaphysics,
epistemology and aesthetics meet, collide, and throw up

their hands. At issue are questions about what the structure of the world must be like for us to think and act within it. Those questions will quickly become historical. For what most demands explanation is not how moral judgments are justified, but why those that are so clearly justified were disregarded in the past. When one begins to seek explanation, one can end in anything from myth, like the Fall, to metaphysics, like Hegel's *Phenomenology*. (Neiman *Introduction* 5, italics are Neiman's)

So, if there is no God, then one can explain away the existence of evil as being part of the woof of our being in the world. But the problem of evil arises if we agree to the existence of God. Christianity holds that God exists and therefore, the problem of evil cannot be addressed in nontheistic terms.

The problem of evil engages with the problem of pain. Evil can be of many types. The existence of terminal diseases; the impoverishment of nations, social injustices and natural calamities like extreme natural phenomena including tsunamis, earthquakes and floods are all evils and cause pain to others. Then, there are socio-economic evils arising out of the logic of capitalism. To state the obvious, some countries are wealthy whereas others are impoverished. At a personal level, a person might be within a precariat economy and therefore, has no social security and thus, suffers from personal setbacks in the form of unemployment leading to the lack of access to life's basic needs like proper healthcare. A more insidious but pervasive evil cutting across age groups, nationalities and socio-economic loci, is loneliness and boredom. Simply put, it is existential loneliness. For instance, in Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1927); Steppenwolf is existentially alone. The theatre of the absurd is based on the meaninglessness of life and our inability to come to terms with the fact that language has failed us in communicating to others our deepest thoughts. These too are evils. And all of these cause pain which the philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) terms as afflictions. C. Fred Alford points out the distinction between suffering and affliction according to Simone Weil in his book on the challenges of philosophising and theologising after the Holocaust. In *After the Holocaust: The Book of Job, Primo Levi, and the Path to Affliction* (2009), Alford points out two distinct subjects: the difficulty

in practising both philosophy and theology after the Holocaust and the unique nature of the Nazi regime. Both of these topics are of concern in this thesis since we are engaged here in studying the problem of evil long after the Holocaust. Susan Neiman in her book quoted observed how philosophy could not be practised as it was before the Holocaust since: “ The tentative and fragmentary discussions of the problems of evil that have arisen in the wake of Auschwitz reflect the fact that abandoning discussion comes too close to abandoning the principle of sufficient reason itself. Moral and epistemological scruples destroyed our hopes for complete explanations of reality. Twentieth-century events made systematic explanations of the whole seem not only impossible but finally and decidedly wrong. Were we offered an account that shows Auschwitz to be part of the order of things, most of us would reject it. Yet any account of the world that ignores it will be worth very little” (Neiman 326). Earlier in her *Introduction* to her book, Neiman had observed how the problem of evil arising out of the Holocaust made all efforts at philosophizing ‘hopeless’: “the problem of evil shows the hopelessness of twentieth-century attempts to divide philosophy into areas that may or may not be connected” (Neiman 6). Susan Neiman writes of the retreat of philosophy into metaphysics so that philosophers need not confront the problem of evil posed by the Nazis in the last century: “The picture of modern philosophy as centred in epistemology and driven by the desire to ground our representations is so tenacious that some philosophers are prepared to bite the bullet and declare the effort simply wasted” (Neiman 5-6). She goes on to deal with the problem of evil head on, writing: “The fact that the world contains neither justice nor meaning threatens our ability both to act in the world and to understand it. The demand that the world be intelligible is a demand of practical and of theoretical reason, the ground of thought that philosophy is called to provide. The question of whether this is an ethical or a metaphysical problem is as unimportant as it is undecidable, for in some moments it’s hard to view as a philosophical problem at all. Stated with the right degree of generality, it is but unhappy description: this is our world. If that isn’t even a question, no wonder philosophy has been unable to give it an answer. Yet for most of its history, philosophy has been moved to try, and its repeated attempts to formulate the problem of evil are as important as its attempts to respond to it” (Neiman 7). McCarthy and King try to respond to the problem of evil in their works.

Therefore, it is important to interrogate both evil and the problem posed by it keeping in mind C. Fred Alford's book mentioned above and his remarks about Simone Weil's concept of affliction (Alford 1-2). For Weil there is meaning in suffering: "For Weil, affliction shares the quality of what Julia Kristeva...calls abjection [in Kristeva's *An Essay on Abjection*] means more than the loss of pride, dignity, and worth; in abjection, one loses more than one's self-worth --- one is in danger of losing one's self...both Weil and Kristeva understand the attractions of abandoning the self. The difference [between Weil and Kristeva] is that for Weil, affliction may have the quality of a blessing. For Weil, affliction is suffering made meaningful...[through]...the experience of *metaxy* (*metaxu*), a Platonic term adopted by Weil...to signify that one is not the center of the world, that the center is outside..."(Alford 1, italics are Alford's). This is precisely what Alford goes on to reject in his book. Alford does not agree with Weil and therefore he states the problem of evil in reductive language indicating that whether one calls evil suffering or affliction, it still is absurd:

Absurd suffering – suffering that seems meaningless, purposeless, pointless – is the problem...Sometimes the world itself is rendered meaningless because one cannot imagine a sensible world in which terrible suffering has no point at all...Dumb, brute suffering is the lot of most men and women at most times and places, including our own. We should not work too hard to transform all suffering into affliction, as though doing so were a moral duty, as though the failure to do so were a sign of moral or psychological weakness...absurd suffering is on the rise, especially since Auschwitz. The mark of modernity, absurd suffering started long before Auschwitz and continues for reasons having little to do with Auschwitz. Nevertheless, Auschwitz is the high-water mark of absurd suffering, and from studying it there we can learn much... (Alford 7-8).

This absurdity of suffering is the problem of evil. There is no honour in either abjection or, affliction. McCarthy and King's fiction gesture more towards Weil's understanding

of suffering as a blessing. For example, Ellis, now an old man who is paralysed from a gunshot injury, says:

You never know what worse luck your bad luck has saved you from. (McCarthy *No Country for Old Men* 267)

Suffering has meaning within McCarthy's fictional universe. And, as has been shown earlier, Mother Abigail in *The Stand*, says that suffering is not the end of life. According to her, God uses Randall Flagg to serve his cause. So, the theodicy that McCarthy and King gesture toward is one of meaningful suffering. In other words, McCarthy and King both are very Christian in their response. Christianity sees everyone and everything serving the cause of God. Everything, as it were, according to Christian mystics and theologians hasten towards good. The medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich in her writings repeatedly affirms that at the end "all manner of things shall be well" (Norwich 447). It is this affirmation which McCarthy and King echo in their fiction. In Stephen King we find the Holocaust mentioned; we find the absence of the good in particular texts and the presence of the malefic in other texts. In Cormac McCarthy we find genocides and long meditations on both the absence of the good and the presence of the malefic. Stephen King's *The Apt Pupil* is about a boy and a Nazi war criminal in hiding in suburban America. While discussing the political upheavals in Chester's Mill, Dale Barbara speaks of the need to act in the here and the now. The motif of 'the here and the now' is a very Christian theological motif. The phrase emphasises our need to act within temporality and spatiality since this is the only moment that exists, and which is gratuitously given to us by God to choose or reject the moment's sanctity. Dale says about how we lose opportunities if we do not act in the here and the now. He explains his point by referring to the Nazis:

"I'm sure the enemies of Hitler said pretty much the same thing. They said it in nineteen thirty-four, and they were right. In thirty-six, and they were right. Also in thirty-eight. 'The wrong time to challenge him,' they said. And when they realized the right time had finally

come, they were protesting in Auschwitz or Buchenwald.” (*Under the Dome* 352-353)

There cannot be any theodicy within both Judaism and Christianity without accounting for the Holocaust. The event of the Holocaust had changed the way we philosophise, theologise and read literary texts.

A quite simple formulation of the problem of evil is as follows: if there is a God who is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) and everywhere (omnipresent), then how is it possible that this God allows suffering anywhere at all; whether as consequences of natural evils like weather-phenomena or, allows children to suffer. A classic example of this quandary is given by William Rowe in his essay *Evil and Theodicy* published in 1988 in the Journal *Philosophical Topics*. Rowe begins his paper by presenting to us “The Structure of the Problem” as being:

In some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering... (Rowe 119)

Rowe goes on to write that he has “good reason to believe that no good state of affairs we know of would justify an omnipotent, omniscient being in permitting” (Rowe 120) the fawn to suffer so much. The problem of evil then shows how evil in its various forms exist and no matter how we explain the persistence of this evil; it is pervasive and meaningless and far from being annihilated. It’s existence cannot be justified by any extant hermeneutics. No amount of ratiocination can justify the existence of this evil in presence of an omnipotent God. By definition, God does not need any created being to make Him happy. He is perfect unto Himself. And being all-powerful, God does not require anyone to suffer. The problem of evil challenges all philosophising and theologising about God. There cannot be any reason for God wanting an innocent fawn to die. If such a painful death or untimely death is necessary in some manner to purify a created being to reach God; then such a God is a sadist. If God is so powerful, why does He not stop the fawn from suffering?

In the case of the Holocaust, what was the need for even one Jew to be killed? The Chosen people of Yahweh did not deserve to be tortured for their faith in Judaism. And the answer to the problem of evil that Yahweh gave to Job is insufficient. Job was

informed that Job had not created the galaxies and this universe, so Job is unfit for an answer as to why he had to be tested in the first place by this entity called Satan. Neither does it suffice to know that evil is an absence of the good as St. Augustine of Hippo would have us believe. Nor does it help to know from St. Thomas of Aquinas that there is a malefic being at work in the Universe that contradicts God and God's love every moment. The question remains that if God is so powerful and loving, why did he allow even one Jewish child to be killed by the Nazis? Why does God need human atonement? And more importantly, why did God allow sin to come into being and stain creation in the first place? These are the problems and difficulties faced within the Judaeo-Christian worldview.

According to St. Augustine, evil is a privation of the good. It is Augustine's way of carrying forward Aristotle's theory of teleology. According to Augustine's views, we are created good and if we assent to the Will of God, we will become perfect. But through free will leading to a series of choices freely taken by an individual, a person becomes that what she was never meant to be in the first place. Rowan Williams quotes St. Augustine from Augustine's *The City of God against the Pagans*, in the Latin original: "Mali enim nulla natura est; sed amissio boni mali nomen accepit" (qtd. in Williams *Insubstantial Evil* 105) at the beginning of his classic essay *Insubstantial Evil*. David S. Wiesen's English translation from the Latin original, published by the Loeb Classical Library, is, "For evil has in itself no substance; rather the loss of what is good has received the name evil" (Augustine *The City of God* 463). This 'loss of what is good' or, the privation of the good, is what Rowan Williams calls "the 'grammar' of evil". Just after quoting Saint Augustine, Williams writes: "Thus Augustine most epigrammatically sums up his view on what might best be called the 'grammar' of evil. Talking about evil is not like talking about things, about what makes the constituents of the world the sorts of things they are; it is talking about a *process*, about something that happens to the things that there are in the universe. Evil is not some kind of object—so we might render the phrase from the *City of God*—but we give the name of 'evil' to that process in which good is lost" (Williams *Insubstantial Evil* 105). Thus, Saint Augustine can provide us with a solution to the problem of evil. Evil is not something that is actually there but is rather the absence of the good, or God's grace. Not because God is thrifty with His grace but the subject chooses to refuse this salvific grace. Saint Augustine's 'grammar of evil' leads up to Rowan Williams's making a case for

historicising suffering and pain. Pain, suffering and Simone Weil's understanding of pain and suffering as afflictions are all evils or, consequences of evils:

Perhaps it is time for philosophers of religion to look away from theodicy - not to appeal blandly to the mysterious purposes of God, not to appeal to any putative justification at all, but to put the question of how we remain faithful to *human* ways of seeing suffering, even and especially when we are thinking from a religious perspective. Part of the task of a good theology and of a candid religious philosophy is, I believe, to reacquaint us with our materiality and mortality. And part of that is the knowledge of suffering as without explanation or compensation - and also the knowledge, of course, that there are unpredictable, unsystematisable integrations of suffering into a biography in the experience of some. But this is to say, I think, that we should be worrying about seeing suffering always in its historical particularity: this, here, for this person, at this moment, with these memories. (Williams *Insubstantial Evils* 147)

So, while Saint Augustine terms the absence of the good being evil; he never tells us why a benevolent and omnipresent God allows this absence to exist in the first place. Further, St. Augustine's *privatio boni* does not explain the necessity of God allowing the good to be not there. Later St. Thomas of Aquinas will talk of the nature of demons and how God permits them to exist without causing them to behave in demonic manner:

Purely intelligent beings, when they know their essence or other things, know by the modality of their substance. But the first cause surpasses the modality of an angel's or devil's substance. And so an angel in knowing its *essence* need not comprehend the entire ordination of God's governance...although devils did not sin because of another's persuasion, nor because they were attracted by the flesh, which they do not have, nor by the sensibly

perceptible things of the world, which they do not need, they sinned because they were attracted by the excellence of their nature. And so Ez. [Ezekiel] 28:17 says: "You have lost your wisdom in your comeliness." (Aquinas 451 italics are Aquinas's)

Yet we do not get to know how and why God allowed these angels to be moved by their own excellence, or pride. Neither is this explicated by the Church Fathers whose writings taken together is known as Patristics. A study of Patristics proves the existence of evil but not why evil persists within the economy of salvation as found within Christianity. As we have seen in this regard McCarthy and King follow Patristics and later St. Thomas of Aquinas and conclude that evil exists, but they do not give within their fiction any reason for this evil to exist in the first place.

Stephen King, in an interview given to Janet C. Beaulieu spoke of his interests in good and evil:

Above all else, I'm interested in good and evil. And I'm interested in the question about whether or not there are powers of good and powers of evil that exist outside ourselves...The goodness in the human heart is probably more interesting, psychologically, but in terms of myth, the idea that there are forces of evil and forces of good outside, and because I was raised in a fairly strict religious home, not hard-shelled Baptist or anything like that, I tend to coalesce those concepts around God symbols and devil symbols, and I put them in my work... I'm really sort of impressed by something that C. S. Lewis said about The Rings trilogy, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, where he said, "as good as Tolkien was at depicting good, he was much more effective at depicting evil." I think that that's true, and I think that it's easier for all of us to grasp evil, because it's a simpler concept, and good is so many-faceted and it's so layered. I've always tried to contrast that bright, white light of real goodness

or Godliness against evil. I'm not a proselytizer, and I hate organized religion. I think it's one of the roots of real evil that's in our world. If you really unmask Satan, you'll probably find that he's wearing a turnaround collar. (King and Beaulieu *Interview* n.pag.)

And Cormac McCarthy in 2009 said in an interview to John Jurgensen:

I have a great sympathy for the spiritual view of life, and I think that it's meaningful. But am I a spiritual person? I would like to be. Not that I am thinking about some afterlife that I want to go to, but just in terms of being a better person...it is more important to be good than it is to be smart. That is all I can offer you...There's not a lot of good guys in "Blood Meridian," whereas good guys is what "The Road" is about. That's the subject at hand... I don't think goodness is something that you learn. If you're left adrift in the world to learn goodness from it, you would be in trouble...There's not much you can do to try to make a child into something that he's not. But whatever he is, you can sure destroy it. Just be mean and cruel and you can destroy the best person. (McCarthy and Jurgensen *Interview* n.pag.)

The last century has been "marked by war...even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not exploding" (Hobsbawm 22), since it was an 'age of genocide" (Smith 21-39), and yet "the real problem, the only problem" (Baudrillard 81) endures, forever tormenting us with the rhetorical question:

...where did Evil go? And the answer is: everywhere ...In a society which seeks ...to concern itself solely ...with the discourse of the Good, in a society where it is no longer possible to speak Evil, Evil has metamorphosed into all the viral and terroristic forms that obsess us. (Baudrillard 81)

Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy try to mimetically represent for us that lost discourse on evil; interrogating how this evil is “established here in the domain of seeing [and yet] we [have been able to] make it vanish” (Lacan 85), which is a consequence of the waning of the academic study of the Problem of Evil both within secular academe (Neiman *Rethinking Evil* 5 -6) and within the Catholic Church (Martin 33), since “evil [poses] an epistemological problem, highly ambiguous in origins, intractable, and woven into a net of other religious, philosophical, and political issues” (Murley 191). This approach “insist[s] that [evil] is fundamentally mysterious” (Neiman *Theodicy in Jerusalem* 85) and thereby “relegate[s] it to religion, rather than to politics” (Neiman *Theodicy in Jerusalem* 86); thus never permitting the problem to be located within established domains of philosophical and theological narratives (Dalferth 154, Inbody 1- 9). Yet it is urgent that we comprehend evil as “neither imposed on human beings by something outside” (Keohane 94) or see it as “innate to all human beings, nor one inscrutable component of a larger creative design” (Keohane 94) for actually evil “results from the dialectical interaction” (Keohane 94) of forces of human progression. This meta-narrative of evil mirrors other narratives of power and abjection. This necessitates a critique of evil which locates the problem within the cultural forces which legitimize the imperial impulse of the white man leading to the atrocities committed through beliefs in the concepts of American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, heteronormativity and a relentless marginalization of the Other. Richard Drinnon has hit the nail on the head when he interrogates the racism found within the discourse about American Exceptionalism, which has nearly annihilated Native American Indians and finally led to slavery. The annihilation of Native American Indians and hatred of black Americans are to be found in the works of both McCarthy and King. But before we turn to their work, we must pause and consider what Drinnon has to say in his *Facing west: the metaphysics of Indian-hating and empire-building* (1980): “The origins of [American] racism remain relatively obscure...The evidence suggests that the roots lie there intertwined with more general repressive attitudes toward nature and the body, and with concomitant associations of dark skin color with filth, death, and radical evil generally. Out of this psychosexual complex arose the generic native, that despised, earthy, animalic, suppressed "shadow self" projected by the Western mind”(Drinnon xxvii). Thus our cultural study of evil exposes the oppressive tactics of the historical process thereby showing evil’s concrete nature verifiable by ideological and historical registers. If we are to understand evil as real, it is essential to establish it within “a field

of intelligibility” (Laclau 64) informed both by the human sciences and theology, which is all about bringing the incomprehensible within intelligibility.

King is theologically oriented despite his avowed hatred for organized religion. Cormac McCarthy makes a case for being good over being smart when in his 2009 interview to John Jurgensen he said that:

...it is more important to be good than it is to be smart.
(McCarthy and Jurgensen n.pag.)

Thus both novelists emphasize the ethical over the evil. Moreover, as we shall discover, neither is the triumph of evil, the assumed telos of history within the Judeo-Christian traditions of theology. For example, earlier Aristotle (circa 3 B.C.) sees man struggling for eudaimonia, “which bases excellent activity on stable goodness of character, [and thus] makes the good life” (Nussbaum 334) possible against external “constraints” (Nussbaum 335) wherein “something of real value is forgone” (Nussbaum 336) to actively choose the good over the bad. Before Aristotle, Plato (circa 4 B.C.) had commented on what constitutes goodness and the good life. Yet according to Christian exegesis “Plato's Good cannot penetrate the soul with its sight, cannot see the secret that lies in the heart of the soul...That is... reserved for Christianity, which ...enact[s] a "repression" (refoulement) of the Platonic by virtue of achieving a one-to-one relationship to a personal God” (Caputo and Scanlon 192). Following this logic, the Greek discourse on the good was later appropriated by the Judeo-Christian tradition which values the triumph of the good (Hare 272), the “idea of the holy” (Otto 45) and the belief in the messianic role of Jesus Christ (Mowinckel 360). History began to be understood as informed by a personal God (Kooi 450) and Christ became the type for future evaluations of the good. This good is expressed within the domains of history and fiction as a gesture towards cosmopolitanism (Appiah 219 -20), hospitality, and the revaluation of the Darwinian man as homo sacer (Agamben *Homo Sacer* 71-74); as “no longer [being] a transcendental objective, [but] as an experience of personal goodness...[as] infinite love[that] can renounce itself and, in order to become finite, become incarnated in order to love the other, to love the other as a finite other [considering the object of love as an] irreplaceable singularity” (Derrida *The Work of Mourning* 139). Since it is now clear that the good as a transcendental notion is continuously assailed by the factuality of evil, it is legitimate to interrogate it within

Western theology and philosophy. This is unavoidable since both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King comment on the structures of the good and the existence qua function of God within human history. Stephen King in his novel *Under the Dome* (2009) contemplates the Godhead, imagining the human community as being an insignificant species which can be freely experimented upon by indifferent aliens much in the manner in which we experiment on laboratory animals.

In an interview in 1997 King said that he believed in a personal God:

I'm not conventionally religious in the sense that I don't go to church. Do I believe in God? Yes. Do I believe in a personal God? Yes. (King and Stahl *n.pag.*).

Cormac McCarthy in *Cities of the Plain* (1998), the final volume in his *Border Trilogy* writes of Billy Parham being told that one can only

call forth the world that God has formed and that world only... (*Cities of the Plain* 285).

Our notions of evil and the good have to be situated within the thickness of history since mainstream Christian theology posits a historical-narrative which is informed by a personal God who interferes in the salvation history of humanity. We will discuss this good which has been called forth in the next chapter.

Since free will is involved in making choices which are not good, we need to study McCarthy and King's perspectives on free will and determinism in their fiction. In chapter one of this thesis we noticed that in both their fiction, those who are aligned with wrong stress that man has no free will to begin with. Before ending this chapter, we need to interrogate this further. Here is McCarthy writing about human freedom and determinism; a blind man explicates this problem to John Grady Cole in *Cities of the Plain*:

Men speak of blind destiny, a thing without scheme or purpose. But what sort of destiny is that? Each act in this world from which there can be no turning back has before it another, and it another yet. In a vast and endless net. Men imagine that the choices before them are theirs to make. But we are free to act only upon what is given.

Choice is lost in the maze of generations and each act in that maze is itself an enslavement for it voids every alternative and binds one ever more tightly into the constraints that make a life. (*Cities of the Plain* 195)

Thus, the study of theodicy and particularly, in the fictions of McCarthy and King remain urgent. Freedom and freewill are both exploited by the pimp Eduardo in charge of The White Lake brothel. Russell M. Hillier in his book, *Morality in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction: Souls at Hazard* (2017) has this to say of freewill and agency while analyzing McCarthy's *The Cities of the Plain*:

Eduardo's language can possess a sinister doubleness that betrays reluctantly admitted truths...For instance, when Eduardo evades Billy's accusation that he is a sex-slaver, he skirts his culpability for exploiting his girls by countering that they are all "free in their persons"...Eduardo's phrase quips on the meaning of "free" as both "at liberty" and "licentious," a move that suggests that these girls, far from being wanton, are chattels deprived of the same existential and moral freedom Eduardo superficially alleges they enjoy...In a lawyerly fashion, he justifies his own position to Billy against John Grady's improper "coveting of another man's property and his wilful determination to convert that property to his own use without regard for the consequences"...Eduardo's eloquence makes it easy to forget that the convertible property in question is Magdalena, who is by rights not vendible goods, rather a moral agent and an autonomous bride-to-be...(Hillier 150, all quotations within Hillier's quoted passage refer to *Cities of the Plain*).

It is important to note the fact that Hillier gets to the crux of the problem. He sees through the archaeology of Eduardo's evil which rests in the quoted portion from Hillier, on language games which decentre ordinary meanings to becoming menacing

puns. But the point remains that like Anton Chigurh, Eduardo aligns himself to rob autonomy from Magdalena. Since this is study of McCarthy and King, we must note that in King too Randall Flagg and other characters who are ethically wrong do not allow autonomy to the human person. For them, people are simple chattel and are commodified to goods with only exchange value. Again to emphasise a point made from the beginning of this thesis, Eduardo belongs to the category of the nameless Egyptian pharaoh discussed at length earlier, who stands for robbing people throughout history of their autonomy and demanding slave labour from people under him. Eduardo being within this line of inhuman capitalist exploiter cannot but think of women as property. McCarthy and King take up repeatedly the injustices to women throughout their careers as writer. Evil, after all, is not so intractable and vague. Among other consequences of the presence of evil and sin, as mapped by theologians and by these two authors, manifests itself an oppression of women throughout the centuries. In this sense the problem of evil in both McCarthy and King include the problem of existing patriarchal structures which can only continue to commodify women.

Blood Meridian, is one of those novels which are hard to categorise. It is easy to reduce it to a revised western or to say that it a novel which is a gothic western. These are all genres which fall within certain formulae. But we need to interrogate the appropriateness of slotting this novel into any particular genre. *Blood Meridian* may be many things to different readers, but it is a book which unlike most westerns resonate with all humanity. Its long digressions about human destiny, the holiness and need of war speak to us as no other American western does. Its setting is the west and Mexico. The time when the Glanton gang scalped other white people, Mexicans and native American Indians is certainly during the nineteenth century. But our thirst for blood as a collective has not reduced or disappeared. To just record the gothic character of this western is to do injustice to it. It is a theological treatise where the Judge sermonises and does so in a vein counter to all natural justice and Christianity. These digressions McMurtry mistook as windy and without focus. But these same digressions elevate *Blood Meridian* from being just another western either revisionary or gothic. This is not to say that *Blood Meridian* is not gothic or it is not a western. It is both of these and more than either of these two genres or their sum. *Blood Meridian* as a novel, contains within itself matter of:

such singular vision as to justify every fear of man and the things that are in him. (*Blood Meridian* 182)

And the Glanton gang hunted for native Americans, being:

Deployed upon that plain they moved in a constant elision, 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. Spectre horsemen, pale with dust, anonymous in the crenelated heat...Like beings provoked out of the absolute rock and set nameless and at no remove from their own loomings to wander ravenous and doomed and mute as gorgons shambling the brutal wastes of Gondwanaland in a time before nomenclature was and each was all. (*Blood Meridian* 182)

McCarthy minces no words in describing these cowboys as ordained agents who will carve out the pristine land among themselves and yet they are primal and hungry for possessing both wealth and to revel in the blood of whoever crosses their paths. They are mercenaries but their bloodthirstiness is ravenous and knows no end. They are champions of war. They are unreal at first glance, but too real when they start killing the women and children whom they go on to scalp for money. The Americans in Glanton's gang are like a "dusty pandemoniac" (*Blood Meridian* 183) in hell:

They rode like men invested with a purpose whose origins were antecedent to them, like blood legatees of an order both imperative and remote. For although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined they made a thing that had not been before and in that communal soul were wastes hardly reckonable more than those whited regions on old maps where monsters do live and where there is nothing other of the known world save conjectural winds. (*Blood Meridian* 160)

This collective thing that had not been before with a communal and monstrous soul spared none. They killed each other in tavern brawls, they killed women and children and even innocent white people who had paid them for protection and safe passage. *Blood Meridian* is more about scalping for the joy of killing than it is about avarice or winning the west even for the mercenaries themselves. The Glanton gang's members were like "supernumeraries in a dream" (*Blood Meridian* 191). In this novel, the dreaded Judge intended to:

...expunge [the truth]...from the memory of man...(*Blood Meridian* 148)

This is why McCarthy points out that the native American had no chance against these marauders:

...the fate of the aborigines had been cast into shape by some other agency altogether. As if such destinies were prefigured in the very rock for those with eyes to read. No man stood to tender them [the Apache] a defense. (*Blood Meridian* 183)

Who is this other agency altogether? It is Glanton and the Judge and their group of murderers who when done with scalping passed on like phantoms which never existed. The women, children and the men they scalped were also forgotten as if they never existed in the first place:

...the dead [Indians] lay with their peeled skulls like polyps bluely wet or luminescent melons cooling on some mesa of the moon... The desert wind would salt their ruins and there would be nothing, nor ghost nor scribe, to tell to any pilgrim in his passing how it was that people had lived in this place and in this place died. (*Blood Meridian* 184)

The evil that *Blood Meridian* shows us is not supernatural in nature. It is evil arising out of human nature. This is the evil that theologians term, original sin which turns even good men into monsters. The expriest and the kid to begin with were good. The kid is told by the Judge in the last part of the novel:

You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen. (*Blood Meridian* 316)

On the surface, it might seem that the Judge is praising the kid but as Richard Slotkin who has been quoted earlier, points out that this is not what the Judge might be hinting at. It may be an oblique way of deriding the kid for going soft on innocent native Americans. Slotkin remarks on the Puritans' "image of the of the wilderness as the land of the terrible unconscious...[where]...The hunter becomes like the beast he hunts" (Slotkin 475). The repeated use of the textual register 'savages' and 'heathen' and ape-like, renders the aboriginal people of America into beasts. McCarthy uses the words 'savages' forty seven times in *Blood Meridian* and the word 'heathen' is used ten times in the novel. From Mexicans to native American Indians to white old men, often called hermits and anchorites in this novel, McCarthy's portrayal of white debauchery is matched by the way he shows native American Indians' penchant for depravity. In this representation of the native American of the American west as perverse, he is realistic and does not veer away from historically verifiable facts. Indeed the American Indians of the west were more given to sexual depravity than their eastern counterparts. Slotkin observes that the "western tribes had no taboo against rape and...made it part of their celebrations of triumph, along with the torturing and sexual mutilation of male captives" (Slotkin 357). In *Blood Meridian* we find precisely this sort of torturing and sexual mutilation of male captives:

...some with nightmare faces...riding down the unhorsed Saxons and spearing and clubbing them and leaping from their mounts with knives and running about on the ground...like creatures driven to alien forms of locomotion and stripping the clothes from the dead and seizing them up by the hair and passing their blades about the skulls of the living and the dead alike and snatching aloft the bloody wigs and hacking and chopping at the naked bodies, ripping off limbs, heads, gutting the strange white torsos and holding up great handfuls of viscera, genitals...some who fell upon the dying and

sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows...

(McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 57)

Later in the novel, to give another example, we have white men pretending to be Indians, as mentioned above, murdering their own in Indian fashion. The hypocrisy of the white murderers has been discussed above. The point here is that the way they murdered their own shows how Indians in the American west behaved. As Slotkin quoted above has pointed out, the Eastern native American Indian was not so brutal or perverse. This is what Glanton, the Judge and the Brown brothers found:

...the riders dismounted and moved among the bodies of the dead argonauts in silence, those right pilgrims nameless among the stones with their terrible wounds, the viscera spilled from their sides and the naked torsos bristling with arrowshafts. Some by their beards were men but yet wore strange menstrual wounds between their legs and no man's parts for these had been cut away and hung dark and strange from out their grinning mouths. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 161)

McCarthy's ambivalence towards the native American Indian is interesting. If *Blood Meridian* was just another formulaic American western we would have found only the brutality of the American Indians there and the cowboys would never be called filibusters and portrayed as:

...some ignis fatuus belated upon the road behind them which all could see and of which none spoke. (*Blood Meridian* 127)

The Judge is often dismissed as evil. Calling him evil is to extenuate his culpability as a criminal who lied, thieved and relentlessly hunted the indigenous populations of America and Mexico. From reading *Blood Meridian* we can only surmise that he is frightening and people whom he encounters are afraid of him. To call him evil is to avoid interrogating the Judge's milieu and the violence that he represents and perpetuates. Far from being anything supernatural, he is a scalp hunter and he

murders those whom he calls his own children. A few days before killing the kid, he tells him:

Don't you know that I'd have loved you like a son? (*Blood Meridian* 323)

Later without hesitation the Judge stabs and kills the kid and then went on to dance. The Judge, according to Tobin is the greatest dancer that Tobin had ever seen:

...the man is a dancer, you'll not take that away from him. And fiddle. He's the greatest fiddler I ever hear...(*Blood Meridian* 130)

Thus, at the end of the novel, just before the 'Epilogue' we find the Judge dancing. His dance is a parody of the Easter hymn:

Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he...(Carter n.pag.)

McCarthy writes of the Judge right at the end of the novel:

Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing...bowing to the ladies, huge and pale...like an enormous infant...He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die. (*Blood Meridian* 353)

Earlier, it has been pointed out how the Judge mocks Christ by wearing wreaths of flowers even in the harshest terrains. Even while he is fleeing the Yuma whose men he had betrayed, he wears:

...on his head...a wig of dried river mud from which protruded bits of straw and grass...(*Blood Meridian* 297)

And he is learned. To sum up, he is also a determinist and determinists like him and Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, deny the human person of all autonomy. Like Chigurh, the Judge tosses coins and believes that the toss of a coin or the flinging

of a coin through its arc is all the freedom that is possible for humanity (*Blood Meridian* 259). Judge Holden is evil to the extent that the likes of him endure since he has effectively reduced himself to the level of an inhuman war-machine and believes in the laws of the jungle. We can see this archetype of evil, imputing to the expriest what actually he is. Judge Holden refuses to serve anyone including God, and thus he tells the god-fearing expriest:

The priest will be no godserver but a god himself. (*Blood Meridian* 264)

It is the Judge who is but a god himself and much before Nietzsche wrote of the superman who leads others, the Judge had concluded he is a god and no less. McCarthy repeatedly compares him to some deity though he also calls the Judge a “vast abhorrence” (*Blood Meridian* 256) and likens him to “some great balden archimandrite” (McCarthy 287). This archimandrite perchance had been born to bring on more destruction which would leave more men dead and scalped and looking like monks “tonsured to the bone” (*Blood Meridian* 57). The judge is after all, it is revealed in the nightmares that the kid has after his operation, a judge of a night which never ends (*Blood Meridian* 327).

When the juggler who had begged Glanton safe passage through the prairies had entertained the scalphunters with his fortune telling tricks , while others are agitated, we find the Judge composed:

The Judge sat upwind from the fire naked to the waist,
himself like some great place deity. (*Blood Meridian* 98)

And as befits a deity, the Judge presumed to know everything that is there to be known. In a certain sense he has usurped God in being omniscient. Holden finds no mystery in anything anymore. He says to other mercenaries:

Your heart’s desire is to be told some mystery. The
mystery is that there is no mystery. (*Blood Meridian* 266)

And earlier he had pontificated:

Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists
without my consent...The man who believes that the

secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. (*Blood Meridian* 209)

Lest we think that the Judge is bored or suffers from some gnawing sorrow of finding out that life held no mysteries for him, to the contrary he is a man much travelled, much read in various languages and can quote from ancient European classics. In fact the Judge holds carries a rife where was inscribed in Latin. 'Et In Arcadia Ego' (*Blood Meridian* 132). The Judge has been everywhere from London to France, he is a polyglot and yet his travels and learning has not prevented him from being someone:

...indulging a latent taste for rape among the sloe-eyed girls [of Mexico and also girls of native American descent]. (*Blood Meridian* 186)

He is a votary of war and determinism. But before discussing his views about war and determinism we need to find out what he has say of this world, created beautiful by God, if we are to go by Christian theology. The world is very real according to Christian theologians. But to the Judge the world is like a will-o'-the-wisp, being:

...a hat-trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue or precedent...whose ultimate destination...is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning. (*Blood Meridian* 258)

According to the Judge only the fit survive and the Judge has been able to reduce everything to commodities which can be traded. The Judge is wearing "bandoliers of sunblackened meat" (*Blood Meridian* 298) and after removing his dress of meat, he demands to have a hat which he is bargaining for with Toadvine. This, after Glanton himself and most of Glanton's gang of filibusters have been killed by Yuma Indians after the Judge prodded Glanton to betray the Yuma.

Louis, he said. What will you take for that hat?

Toadvine spat. It ain't for sale, he said.

Everything's for sale, said the judge. (*Blood Meridian* 298)

This philosophy of the Judge is what is frightening about him. He holds views which are antithetical to both natural justice and to Christianity. Yet *Blood Meridian* is a Christian text filled with gutted churches and cathedrals and at the beginning of the novel, we have an old Mennonite warning the kid in a tavern of the wrath of God:

The wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a million years before men were and only men have power to wake it. Hell aint half full. Hear me. Ye carry war of a madman's making onto a foreign land. Ye'll wake more than the dogs. But they berated the old man and swore at him until he moved off down the bar muttering, and how else could it be? (*Blood Meridian* 43)

Through a night of debauchery and fighting amongst themselves, a young recruit of Captain White, named Earl was dead. This is the beginning of the end for the kid. Through the fire and brimstone warnings of the old Mennonite, only once in this novel do we hear the truth. From now on in *Blood Meridian*, the young American recruits will only wage war till they kill their enemies or they are themselves killed in war. War is the main theme of this novel. And it is the Judge who repeatedly speaks of the glory of war.

The Judge's harangue about wars begin with an attack at the religious expriest who, as has been made clear above, has been only an ex-novice. The Judge equates the Roman Catholic priesthood with warring. Whereas priests are to war against evil and shed no actual blood and are to be peaceful, following the Beatitudes, the Judge believes wars are what make men truly authentic. According to the Judge, bloodlust is all. He says to Tobin:

Men of war and men of God have strange affinities. (*Blood Meridian* 264) Near the end of the novel, the Judge tells the imprisoned kid:

If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay...
What joins men together, he said, is not the sharing of bread but the sharing of enemies. (*Blood Meridian* 323)

This is not the first time the Judge had spoken about the glories of war. He found that nothing but war endures for ever. Not camaraderie, neither loyalties. Only war endured even time:

It makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. 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. (*Blood Meridian* 262)

It is this war-machine that we have to interrogate if we are to understand the Judge. The Judge considers war to be God (*Blood Meridian* 263). And in the Judge's scheme of things:

Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak.
(*Blood Meridian* 263)

So who is thus Judge, or rather, what does he symbolize? If he symbolizes anything at all. The bare minimum that we can comprehend is that he is a man like no other men, monstrous in his appetites and looks but in a man who explicitly proclaims that morality is naught, our need to assess him in the light of reason seems to be thwarted right at the beginning of our exegesis if we slot him as a gnostic or as evil. These terms hide the true nature of the Judge. The Judge is a man and that is why we will try here to understand him through a hermeneutics arising from Christian theology. Christian theology as it is practised today does not deal merely with abstractions but is rooted within history as a comprehensible discourse. Christian theology does not involve humanity talking to God about God; it is rather humanity talking to itself about God and this too within the limited scope of human comprehensibility. This is known as the scientific-historical method of interpretation within Christianity. We can only comprehend a person to the extent that we can solve the problem of other minds. This problem of other minds deals with the intractability of individuals and leads to the problem of empathy which Edith Stein would go on to write about in her book *On the Problem of Empathy*.

We now need to consult Thomas John Hastings and Knut-Willy Sæther's jointly edited anthology on fallibilism within theology. Fallibilism within the empirical sciences and within the human sciences which include theology in the light of our definition of theology in the preceding paragraph, means that we are ready as human beings to admit errors within our own domains. Our truth-claims are challenged by fallibilists and as Knut-Willy Sæther shows in his essay titled *The Many Faces of Fallibilism: Exploring Fallibilism in Science, Philosophy, and Theology* (13-34), fallibilism is a necessary part of today's theologising and steers clear of dogmatism, foundationalism and relativism. Knut-Willy Sæther points out the uncertainty at the core of Christianity by referring to the Nicene Creed where Christians begin by uttering "We believe" and not by saying "I'm certain that ..." (Sæther 23-24). Here Sæther cites an online essay by M. Craig Barnes published in July, 2018 at *The Christian Century*. Sæther cites Barnes in fuller detail in his footnote 25 on page 24 of this anthology edited by him and Thomas John Hastings. Sæther takes the discussion by Barnes further by pointing out that "faith and uncertainty are at the core of what Christianity is all about" (Sæther 24) since the object of theology is self-evident. It is God and as had been pointed out earlier in this thesis through the exegesis of Joh Caputo, the Christian God is a weak God. Therefore, Sæther writes that in practising theology we "deal with a *rationale*, as faith seeking understanding, accompanied by the deeper mystery of the object of theology. A humble approach to what we can claim as certain in theology, should be more or less self-evident since the nature of the object of theology is" (Sæther 27, emphasis original) ever mysterious and will always elude human comprehension.

This fallibilist attitude which inheres within Christian theology is challenged by the Judge in *Blood Meridian* who claims that there is nothing mysterious in the world. It is the same attitude we find in McCarthy's hitman Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*. Both Judge Holden and Anton Chigurh live in a universe which they can comprehend and both emphasise the void that is the universe. This is precisely how Stephen King portrays Randall Flagg's understanding of the universe. Flagg and others like Flagg, like the demon Tak in Stephen King's *Desperation* all finally retreat to a void incomprehensible to human beings. These forces cannot be annihilated, they only retreat for some great span of time, only to return. In this sense, Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* poses for us two theological problems. First, how does Holden know everything. If nothing is mysterious for him then he is like unto God in his omniscience.

But the Judge admits of no God since according to the Judge, nothing can and does exist without him knowing of it. By definition God cannot be known because God, according to both Patristics and contemporary fallibilist theology cannot be certainly comprehended. Further, Emmanuel Levinas, the Talmudic scholar turned philosopher writes about the process of knowing God is itself a temptation. In his chapter *The Temptation of Temptation* in his book, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Levinas points out the “temptation of temptation is...the temptation of knowledge” (Levinas 34) and goes on to write that the ultimate culprit is the practise of philosophy which is “in contrast to a wisdom which knows everything without experiencing it” (Levinas 34). If Christian fallibilists are correct and Emmanuel Levinas is also correct then the Judge is wrong in claiming to know everything that is there to know. Therefore the Judge is a victim to the temptation of temptations. Judge Holden’s knowledge is not hubris masquerading as gnosis. The Judge’s essence is defined by his inability to consider anything which he cannot understand to be existent. His knowledge is non-experiential and that is the reason for the expriest Tobin to find the Judge’s sermon an abomination which Tobin had never heard before or since:

It was like a sermon but it was no such sermon as any man of us have ever heard before...[the Judge] delivered himself of an oration to what end I know not, then or now...(Blood Meridian 137)

Whereas theology is done with uncertainty; the Judge’s life is one of dogmatic certainty. He repeatedly in the novel says he knows. He even knows that he will never die (*Blood Meridian* 353). This is the same stance that the entity It has in Stephen King’s *It*. It believed that it was alone in the many universes and it was certain that it could never be annihilated or feel fear. In other words, the Judge is like It. They both know that there is nothing worthwhile beyond their own existence. This is the temptation to which the Judge and It succumb to. It is not pride which makes them so certain. Pride is a character of the fallen angels within Christianity and of human beings. Like the textual register ‘evil’, the word ‘pride’ again is a way to elide the nature or the origins of pride and to give into an irrational and insufficient scrutiny of those we term proud. The need is to understand what is pride, the need is to understand what constitutes someone we call proud and under what circumstances does anyone become proud. The word pride by itself is a tactic to avoid serious engagement with human

emotions. It is to take at face value that pride or hubris is the reason for the Judge's reflections about the world. But the fallibilist theology at work in this thesis will not allow for accepting without sufficient critique the act of naming anyone as proud, and therefore, evil. Here, in the person of the Judge, we are dealing with a human being who claims to neither ever sleep, nor ever die (*Blood Meridian* 353). The Judge, at least, is intellectually self-complacent though he notes down botanical and paleontological facts in his ledger. This shows that he is a logical positivist who believes in the power of empiricism and takes at face value what he thinks he sees. What Knut-Willy Sæther writes about Richard Dawkins' new atheistic empiricism is equally applicable to Judge Holden. The Judge believes in "naturalism or scientism—not science" (Sæther 17). Since the Judge then and now Dawkins has not seen God, for both of them God is irrelevant and non-existent. Judge Holden happened to "put...God on the scientific table, testing the hypothesis of God's existence empirically" (Sæther 17) and then through "verification and inductive inference, he ... puts God on the wrong table... [and] advocates a worldview where science is the only deliverer of knowledge about reality [and therefore he]...will not find God" (Sæther 17). There is nothing supernatural about the Judge and therefore from a theological perspective we can be certain that he is part of the matrix of that evil which will not allow itself to be revealed as existentially plausible. This too is nothing new within Christian polemics and theology. C.S Lewis showed us the entire process of the annihilation of evil by itself for its own interests Lewis's epistolary novel, *The Screwtape Letters*. There the demon Screwtape writes to Wormwood, his nephew, about the problems of revealing the existence of evil. Screwtape writes: "Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and sceptics" (Lewis 31). Now we can be sure that the Judge gestures towards something truly unspeakable and therefore he elides qualities which define humanity even in its fallibility. That does not mean he is evil. One needs to remember that C.S. Lewis in his *The Screwtape Letters* wrote in a polemical manner. He has been referred here since his writing as a Christian polemicist makes us aware of two separate facts. Lewis shows definitively that demons exist. In this he is dogmatic and therefore we cite him as someone who is perhaps naïve enough to explain everything in simple dualistic, good and evil terms. We must avoid this sort

of polemics and rather situate the Judge within the history of logical positivism. The Judge is an exemplar of a logical positivist before logical positivism became a movement within empirical science. Since the Judge has not seen God he gives up on God:

If God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind
would he not have done so by now? (*Blood Meridian*
154)

The Judge here clearly states the problem of evil with which this chapter is occupied. It is because the Judge does not admit of the existence of God that he lectures of:

*eons...[and]...ancient chaos and other apostate
supposings.* (*Blood Meridian* 123, italics are
McCarthy's)

to Glanton's group of illiterate filibusters and then the Judge "laughed at them for fools" (*Blood Meridian* 124). But being rational or a logical positivist does not make the Judge or anyone bad, leave alone evil. Neither does disbelief in God make him a bad human being. What makes the Judge's character perverse is his use of his rationality to justify his logic of capitalism which manifests itself as scalping and raping having begun with lying in *Blood Meridian*. When we first meet him, he rabble-rouses and sets the rabble against an itinerant preacher whom he had never met. The Judge in the final analysis is only too human and while he tries to discard his humanity as also we are tempted to do so through the narrative techniques of McCarthy's lulling and lyrical prose, we have to be careful that we do not lose sight of the fact that the Judge chooses to depravity over anything good. He is a good orator who unlike Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* has no purpose in life except to kill anyone and if it were possible, everyone. The Judge's actions leading from his conscious discarding of natural justice and morality makes him a degenerate of the species if ever there was one. This degeneracy simmers behind a patina of faux learning and faux manners. Here is a man who is neither Nietzschean nor is he a demiurge. He is not Satan. Nor is he any suzerain but of himself. In his banality and war-mongering he too is another filibuster and the banality of his deeds were indeed common during the America of his times. What is uncommon is that such a man had been resurrected by Cormac McCarthy and has been shown as a principle of evil which tends itself to the end of time. But to

return to the question, what manner of evil does the Judge represent? The Judge represents capitalist urges in their worst manifestations. In this the Judge is far removed from God. The Judge hides his own immorality by rejecting all morality. He hides his fears by preying upon the weak. According to a fallibilist theology, we can at the most say that the Judge is all that God does not want us to be. There are societal and Biblical taboos against rape, paedophilia, murder, theft and hoarding wealth. The Judge broke each and every social more and Biblical taboo in the best imperialist mode. This is the Judge's evil. Like the nameless Pharaoh in the Old Testament discussed above, the Judge never sleeps and never will die because he has chosen to become the loci of unstoppable consumerism. As the Pharaoh endures, in the same manner, the Judge endures. He will indeed never die since the force of capitalist production has been unleashed on earth. This is why at the end of the novel, he dances in joy and says that he will never die. It is through grand-filibusters like him that the spirit of capitalist production at any cost remains alive. The Judge speaks of all of us being witnesses to the world. But he never speaks of what we are witnesses of and what is there to witness:

every man is tabernacled 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. (*Blood Meridian* 148)

The Judge cannot name anything that can be witnessed because within his ambit there is nothing to witness except himself for he is what endures. The spirit of the nameless Pharaoh brooks no greater witness than production and gain and continual hard labour. Similarly the American west for the Judge is not the end of his journey. It is the site from where he begins his life as a war-machine. Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* declares:

Men are born for games...Seen so, war...[is a game]...
War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god. (*Blood Meridian* 263)

We can comprehend his essence to an extent if we turn to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of a war-machine in their book, Sæther: *The War Machine* where they write of the war machine that it is "irreducible to the State apparatus" and is like "a pure

and immeasurable multiplicity...an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis...a power...against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus...bear[ing] witness to another kind of justice, one of incomprehensible cruelty at times..."(Deleuze and Guattari 4). It is in this sense the Judge poses a challenge to the laws of humanity and all sovereignty. Now we can better comprehend his views on war and his cruelty. It is not mysterious, neither is it senseless. The Judge's deeds are all too real and all too comprehensible if we stop judging him as evil. He is not a demon, the pain he inflicts is all too real for his victims. There is nothing incomprehensible in that pain. This is the reality about the Judge. He has no special knowledge about anything since creation has given up its mystery to him. To put this another way, he needs no mystery in inflicting pain for profit. In this sense of being a profiteering filibuster he is not a sadist. He is the nameless pharaoh of Exodus. He does not care whether he inflicts pain to the Mexican child he rapes or the Indian boy whom he scalps. He is after all a war-machine. Thus to call the Judge evil is to miss the point. He is a depraved human being who has a certain scientific approach to life and considers those who search for the inexplicable, and believe in empirically untenable phenomena, fools (*Blood Meridian* 124).

So within the scope of *Blood Meridian* we can only limit our observations of the largescale violence within the novel and the Judge's character as only evil in a strict socio-economic sense which arose in America in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. But that does not defeat our theologising. Theologically socio-economic and historical genocides are all evil. The cause of these evils should not be attributed to demons or any other supernatural entity since evil as represented in this novel by McCarthy there is no element of the supernatural in it. In this very lack of it being supernatural, McCarthy transforms the formulaic western into not only a gothic western but a treatise on how logical positivism poses challenges to theological exegesis and further problematises the troubling issue of evil manifesting itself as poverty, violence and racial marginalisation in this novel. *Blood Meridian* is more of a horrifying American western than most books of cult gore and horror.

From the discussion above it is now evident that both Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy have extended the unique American literary syndrome of constructing the Gothic to the realm of popular culture. And thereby they have revised American horror and western literature into vehicles of theodicy, theology and apocalyptic meditation.

They are our neo-evangelists. But as has been stressed in the beginning of this thesis, evil is not the telos of history but the sovereign good is. This absolute good will be studied in the next chapter and here we end with three examples of the way both evil and the good which Iris Murdoch defines as can only be good if it is good for nothing, will always persist in the here and the now. The tinker in *Outer Dark* says:

I've seen the meanness of humans till I dont know why
 God ain't put out the sun and gone away" (*Outer Dark*
 192)

As will be shown in the next chapter, God never goes away. God never abandons anyone within the fiction of McCarthy and King.

McCarthy's and King's characters resist evil through not only kenosis but also through coming to terms with their pasts. Evil persists in this world, if in no other form, then at least as memories which can never be erased. Here is Dolores Claiborne's realisation in King's thriller written in the stream of consciousness mode, *Dolores Claiborne*:

But if I've found out anything...it's that they [the dead]
 ain't never gone, not really. You think you're shut of em,
 that you neatened em all away and there ain't a dust
 bunny anyplace, n then they come back, they look like
 faces, they always look like faces, and the faces they look
 like are always the ones you never wanted to see again,
 awake or in your dreams. (King *Dolores Claiborne* 302)

McCarthy in his revisionary westerns and King in his revisionary thrillers have lifted the covers off America's past as not so glorious after all. In doing so both of them have confronted the evil that lies within the heart of America as a body politic and also as a country which actually has a history. America's history begins with the life-stories of native American Indians. McCarthy and King not merely critique the Turner thesis, the idea of American exceptionalism and the idea of the American Dream in their works; they both reject these three ideals which hide the true history of America as a country where human freedom and liberty are severely constrained, often through violence.

In *Under the Dome*, the town of Chester's Mill being cut off by aliens from the rest of America, becomes the microcosm which represent the rest of America. What do we find at Chester's Mill? Rather which for of social evil do we not find there? An unheard of catastrophe has happened to Chester's Mill, and instead of neighbourly good behaviour, we find the residents at Chester's Mill committing gang-rape, indulging in petty politics in the town's greatest hour of need for following Christ's command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Bible *Matthew* 22:39). Instead of any semblance of sanity at Chester's Mills after the dome was put over the town by aliens called leatherheads in this novel, we find anti-semitism and homophobia. Cale, a Jew is commented upon by "Big Jim" Rennie as one who understands "inventory" (King *Under the Dome* 370) not because of Cale's accounting abilities but for Cale's being Jewish, "he's Jewish, after all" (King *Under the Dome* 370). This same "Big Jim" Rennie far removed in time from when the west was violently won, declares:

Big Jim raised a blunt-fingered hand to the declining sun that seemed to be spreading across the western sky like a great poisoned egg. "You think all this is our fault, somehow. That God is punishing us for propping up the town when times were hard. That's just not true, pal. This isn't God's work. If you wanted to say getting beat in Vietnam was God's work—God's warning that America was losing her spiritual way—I'd have to agree with you. If you were to say that nine-eleven was the Supreme Being's response to our Supreme Court telling little children they could no longer start their day with a prayer to the God Who made them, I'd have to go along. But God punishing Chester's Mill because we didn't want to end up just another moribund wide spot in the road, like Jay or Millinocket?" He shook his head. "Nosir [sic]. No." (King *Under the Dome* 212)

"Chef" Bushey, maker of hard-drugs, has this vision of Jesus but yet he chooses to not read much to this drug-induced vision. This same "Chef" Bushey had no compunction in gang-raping earlier in the novel. Nonetheless, God does not abandon him. His vision of Christ simply fades away since he chooses evil over the sovereign good:

The end of the world, he thought. *Probably for the best...*

Next came fire. A roaring furnace, as if someone had opened a hidden trapdoor and loosed Hell itself on Chester's Mill...

The fire was becoming a face, an orange version of the bloody ones he'd been looking at in the clouds just before the fit fell on him. It was the face of Jesus. Jesus was scowling at him. And talking. Talking to him. Telling him that bringing the fire was his responsibility. His. The fire and the ... the ...[ellipses here are King's]

"The purity," he muttered as he lay in the grass. "No ... the purification." (King *Under the Dome* 350 emphasis are King's)

It is important to notice in *Under the Dome*, which is a science fiction thriller with elements of horror in it; while the vision the "Chef" has of Jesus perhaps is a crystal-meth hallucination, but nonetheless he saw Jesus demanding atonement for what he as an autonomous subject had done against natural justice. "Chef" Bushey, like the Trashcan man in King's *The Stand* had never done anything ethical, or morally good. Yet King shows his sensitivity to God's covenant-love for man when in his nightmare Bushey was given one more chance to atone for his wrongs against his wife. Yet when his seizure had ended, King notes in deadpan voice:

When he ["Chef" Bushey] woke up, it was full dark— every trace of red gone from the sky. He was chilled to the bone, but not damp. (*Under the Dome* 350)

In his vision, Christ had wanted purification, but "Chef" Bushey chooses to ignore his chance for redemption. He just carried on living the life he always led. A life morally reprehensible. Terry Eagleton's definition conflating psychoanalysis with theology can be used as a rough definition of theology which is relevant to this thesis:

The modern age has witnessed what one might call a transition from the soul to the psyche. Or, if one prefers, from theology to psychoanalysis. There are many senses

in which the latter is a stand-in for the former. Both are narratives of human desire—though for religious faith that desire can finally be consummated in the kingdom of God, whereas for psychoanalysis it must remain tragically unappeased. In this sense, psychoanalysis is the science of human discontent. But so, too, is theology. With Freud, repression and neurosis play the role of what Christians have traditionally known as original sin. In each case, human beings are seen as born in sickness. But they are thereby not beyond redemption. Happiness is not beyond our grasp; it is just that it requires of us a traumatic breaking down and remaking, for which the Christian term is conversion. (Eagleton 17)

It is interesting to find Eagleton speaking of both a sense of sickness within humanity and not pausing there but going on to locate the disease plaguing us but also noting that happiness is not unattainable. Eagleton clearly sees that the telos of evil is the sovereign good and this good is within our reach. McCarthy and King remap the genres of the western and the thriller to also show us how this happiness can be attained.

CHAPTER IV

The Leitmotif of God in the fiction of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King

The fiction of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King engage with theology and therefore, God. Before trying to define God, it is important to show through instances within their texts how they portray God. Then it will be fruitful to further show how evil in these two authors are not the telos of history but demand the repeated references to God. Thus God becomes one of the central motifs, or a leitmotif, in their fiction. For instance, some of Cormac McCarthy's characters, like some of Stephen King's characters have what is known within Christian theology, vocations to serve God.

Without understanding the theological nature of a vocation within Christianity, our understanding of God's call throughout human history and within the thrillers, westerns and the other genres within the gothic mode utilised by McCarthy and King will remain unexplained. Vocations within both Judaism and Christianity are nothing new. The major and the minor Prophets in the Old Testament were all called by God by name. From Moses to the unwilling Jonah were all called by God. The radical nature of God's call to Jonah and Jonah's reaction to this call is worth mentioning: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah: son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish" (Bible *Jonah* 1:1-3). The point here is that Jonah could not flee God, a vocation within Christianity, is a call reserved for only some. These few are chosen by God and only these few. They very rarely have the chance to evade their vocations. In *Desperation*, the child David, was called by God to free the town of Desperation from the demon Tak and to free the adults who were imprisoned by Tak. Within the fiction of McCarthy and King, God calls everyone from the nameless boy's father to protect his son in *The Road*, to the once dispersed friends in Stephen King's *Dreamcatcher* to unite as adults to fight evil, and, of course, more radically, Mother Abigail in *The Stand*. Therefore we must first understand what constitutes a vocation within Christianity and then proceed.

Anton Losinger in his book *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner* writes about the "theological vocation of the human

being as the point of departure for the divine revelation of salvation” (Losinger 4) and writes about the single most important Roman Catholic theologian in the last century, pointing out Karl Rahner’s rethinking of Martin Heidegger’s concept of the *dasein*. Losinger writes:

the formulation of this central concept [of the vocation in]...Rahner’s theology suggests a contradiction, thereby giving expression to the relation, in itself ambivalent, of nature and grace to one another. In connection with the concept of the “existential” coined by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Rahner has recourse to the phenomenological constitutedness of *Dasein* as “being-in-the-world,” thus to a determination of its being which is “naturally” appropriate to this *Dasein* and characterizes its existence. (Losinger 36, emphasis original)

For Rahner, the being, or the *dasein*, due to no merits of its own is freely given the grace to choose “transcendence” (Losinger 29) by a fecund God bound to humanity by His covenant love. A vocation is to respond to the immediacy of God’s call (Losinger 37) and make a definite election between “between finitude and infinity” (Losinger 29). From Suttree to John Grady to Billy Parham to the police officers who first do not believe in the innocence of John Coffey, all respond to God’s call. It is by His call to humanity and to the fictional characters in McCarthy and King’s works that we get to know of God. Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time*, wrote of the *dasein* being fundamentally constructed as a “being- toward-death” (Heidegger 228). Rahner redirects Heidegger’s death-oriented being towards a being which can existentially look forward to transcendence. Rahner’s understanding of the Heideggerian *dasein* is an eschatological gesture towards the infinite. The *dasein* in Cormac McCarthy and King who are invited to transcendence by God have what then, is known, as vocations within Christianity. Their phenomenological response to God’s call changes their being in time which can no longer be measured by finitude.

The ex-priest turned filibuster, Tobin, who in spite of being one of the scalp hunters in this novel tries to win the nameless kid to the cause of God. Tobin articulates

the idea of the vocation, or God's anthropomorphic call to the human person as an inner voice:

No man is give (sic) leave of that voice...

I ain't heard no voice, he [the kid] said...

When it stops, said Tobin, you'll know you've heard it all your life. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 131)

Those who hear the voice of God are portrayed as being called to explicitly fight various manifestations of evil. This evil, as had been pointed out in the last chapter, is, within the works of McCarthy and King sometimes supernatural and sometimes systemic in nature and thus manifests itself as economic and racial marginalization. Within Christian theology, God chooses a few to inform the dialectics of history. And according to liberation theologians, God is always with the powerless and the suffering. But before proceeding further with our discussion on the nature of God, let us show how God's call is direct and inescapable for His chosen ones. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, God has called the child's father to take care of the child and the father knows that. He says to the child that he has been appointed by God to protect the child at any cost:

My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand? (McCarthy *The Road* 77)

Father and son have survived the apocalypse in *The Road* and the boy brings hope within the wasteland that America and the rest of the world has become. The genre of the apocalypse within western literature derives from Hebrew apocalypses which inform the last book of the Bible, the *Book of Revelations*. These apocalypses like McCarthy's apocalyptic novel all end with God redeeming humanity through his anthropomorphically chosen ones. Further in *All the Pretty Horses* Rawlins and John Grady Cole discuss God and how God takes care of His own. In a conversation between Rawlins and John Grady Cole we hear them talking of God's intervention within human history:

You think God looks out for people? said Rawlins.

Yeah. I guess He does. You?

Yeah. I do. Way the world is. Somebody can wake up and sneeze somewhere in Arkansas or some damn place and before you're done there's wars and ruination and all hell. You dont know what's goin to happen. I'd say He's just about got to. I dont believe we'd make it a day otherwise. (McCarthy *All the Pretty Horses* 94)

In *Blood Meridian* too God is present as an antithesis to the Glanton Gang of scalp hunters and to the Judge. Of God, Tobin tells the kid, contrasting the learned Judge Holden who “could outdance the devil himself” (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 130):

...how little store he [God] sets by the learned...He’s an uncommon love for the common man and godly wisdom resides in the least of things so that it may well be that the voice of the Almighty speaks more profoundly in such beings as lives in silence themselves...God speaks to the least of creatures. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 131)

Tobin’s understanding of God has to be counterpoised to the Judge’s understanding of creation; he speaks of God in terms which are more akin to his own nature. In this sense, the Judge anthropomorphizes God. The Judge says of God’s creation:

The truth about the world...is that anything is possible...[Creation] is a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue or precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tent show whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a muddled field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning. (McCarthy *Blood Meridian* 258)

This speech of the Judge terming creation as an abomination is exactly the opposite of what the Church Fathers speak of in their corpora where they extol the beauty of the created world and repeatedly emphasize that this world is good and not an abomination under any circumstances. According to the Bible and according to Patristics, God’s love

for the human person is irrevocable and bound through a covenant with His chosen ones. This unwavering love between God and His creation is known as *hesed* within Christian theology. *Hesed* within the salvific economy of the Bible and Christianity is defined by God's utterance to the Israelites: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Bible *Isaiah* 49:15). In Saint Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* we find the Saint writing of "God's boundless wisdom and love" (Gregory 89) and later Saint Gregory proclaims that "God is love" (Gregory 103). This is the Christian concept of God. God is seen as possessing unconditional love for everyone, no matter how unjust we are. The Christian God is also a weak God as had been pointed out in the first chapter. He hangs in shame from His rood in solidarity with the least of this earth as Tobin said when he was quoted earlier in this chapter. The Jesuit liberation-theologian, Jon Sobrino in his book on liberation theology, *Jesus the Liberator*, writes of Jesus's partiality towards the marginalised and the least among us. Sobrino writes that Jesus through his parables throughout the Gospels, is "sallying forth to defend the poor and justify his own partial actions on their behalf... In the stories he tells, Jesus is trying to convince his adversaries of the tragic situation of the "little ones": they are like a lost sheep, like a son in despair,

like a destitute beggar...he tells them how the heavenly Father reacts to smallness and weakness..." (Sobrino 100-101). The Christian construction of a weak God as we will now see, is also reflected in the works of Stephen King. This is another reason to read the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King together. They have the same essential understanding of God as being weak and it is from this weakness their God, like the Christian God derives His power. In the Gospels when Jesus was brought in front of Pontius Pilate and Pilate ridiculed him by asking Christ to answer Pilate about the nature of truth, Jesus was simply silent. This is the silence of which Tobin speaks of in the quotation above. When jesting Pilate asked Jesus "Quid est veritas?" which is the Latin for "What is the Truth?", Jesus gave no answer (Bible *John* 18:38). We shall see this same silence in the chosen ones by God in Stephen King's works.

In King's novel *It*, the truth about God is realized by those of whom God had chosen to fight evil. God is love as Jon Sobrino above pointed out. The way to understand who God is does not require learning but to love. When Bill Denbrough, now grown up and has become a successful writer, is fighting the nameless inhuman

evil, It, he realises that he cannot win the battle against evil unless he realises that love is possible in blighted Derry (King *It* 1038) and believes in:

The Other...a power beyond all other power, the author
of all there was. (King *It* 1035)

When Bill prays to God for help, God tells Bill of the need for faith in God, the author of all there was and will be:

*son...once you get into cosmological shit like this, you
got to throw away the instruction manual. (King It 1035
italics' King's)*

It is faith which reveals to us the Kingdom of God and only when we become like unto children as Jesus had proclaimed, and reject the complexities of adulthood can we find God in our midst. In the *Dreamcatcher* Gary Ambrose "Jonesy" Jones, Pete Moore, Joe "Beaver" Clarendon and Henry Devlin realise that friendship and living for others gives their lives meaning. King's novels often revolve around childhood friends growing up and getting caught up in the troubles associated with adulthood, then reuniting with friends and defeating various forms of evil which. In *Dreamcatcher*, the existential loneliness the characters suffer only disappears when they are united by their autistic friend, Douglas "Duddits" Cavell who brings them together to fight evil in the form of deadly aliens. The hard lesson that characters in King's novels learn is best understood through Emmanuel Levinas's insights involving one's relationship with others'. To live for others is to have meaning in life:

To maintain that the relationship with a neighbor,
incontestably set up in saying, is a responsibility for the
neighbor, that saying is to respond to another, is to find
no longer any limit or measure for this responsibility,
which "in the memory of man" has never been
contracted...There is an abandon of the sovereign and
active subjectivity, of undeclared self- consciousness, as
the subject in the nominative form in an apophansis.
(Lévinas *Otherwise than Being* 47)

It is through this apophansis, that is, in this negative method, mentioned by Lévinas above that we seek to understand what Iris Murdoch termed good in her eponymous

monograph mentioned earlier. It is this apophansis that will inform how we gesture towards God which is the subject of these thrillers and westerns.

As evil is hardwired in the universe there exists great good too in this world as we know it in the here and the now. It is this goodness that is gestured to by McCarthy and King in their novels. In *Cities of the Plain* (1998), McCarthy writes this of God qua the sovereign good:

After a while he [John Grady Cole] said that he believed in God even if he was doubtful of men's claims to know God's mind. But that a God unable to forgive was no God at all. (*Cities of the Plain* 206)

It is this God who forgives us, no matter how dark our wrongs, not from any merit of our own, but out of hesed, is the sovereign good that we encounter in popular literature including the American Westerns. All exorcisms portrayed in the fiction of Stephen King as well as real exorcisms within Christianity, occur in the name of God. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the theology of the gothic is an apophatic and apophantic² theology. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

For now we see only a reflection [of God] as in a mirror [darkly]; then [being redeemed by Christ's gratuitous Atonement for our sins, after our deaths] we shall see [God, the sovereign good] face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully [the mystery of that evil

² Apophantic theologising has an inherent problem since one cannot know or prove or for that matter, disprove God, without experiencing God's grace within one's being. The response to God's hesed is always one of kenosis and we can only agree with the old man in Cormac McCarthy's *The Orchard Keeper* when he says: "I could tell you why—and you stit [sic] wouldn't know. That's all right. You can set and ast a bunch of idjit questions. But not knowin a thing ain't never made it not so" (*The Orchard Keeper* 221). Apophantic theologising indicates here an explicatory theology. In other words, apophantic statements are self-revealing.

whose telos is good], even as I am fully known. (Bible 1
Corinthians 13:12)

For, within Biblical exegesis, God finds expression in man, that is, God walks with humans in the here and the now. Elizabeth A. Johnson in her *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (2007), writes of ‘doing theology’ and finding the presence of the good qua God amidst the ruins of horror which continues to cast its evil and dark shadow on us:

In crafting an approach to theology that would deal with massive public suffering and the middle-class attempt to ignore it, the young Germans [Jurgen Moltmann (1926-), Dorothee Soelle (1929-2003), Johann Baptist Metz (1928-)] began to use the term "political theology,"...This is not theology done in direct connection with political parties or movements, lobbies or governments, as the name might suggest. Rather, it is theology that seeks to connect speech about God with the *polis*, the city, the public good of massive numbers of people, living and dead. Political theology as they developed it is wary of a privatized type of religion that focuses on an individual's religious experience and morality alone...Post-Holocaust political theology rediscovered a God deeply involved with the pain of the world. Moltmann and Soelle, among others such as Eberhard Jüngel (b.1934), heeded the famous insight of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a Christian theologian hanged by the Nazis, who wrote from prison that in the midst of this disaster: "Only a suffering God can help." They developed the powerful symbol of the suffering God who endures and is defeated with those who suffer. This symbol opens up the idea that God takes the pain of the world into the divine being in order to redeem it. Taking a different tack, Metz, among others such as Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009), envisioned a God of

deep compassion who stands in solidarity with those who suffer...Whichever symbol they chose, these political theologians glimpsed a God of overwhelming *pathos* whose presence enables hope even in the midst of brutal death...[to call this] God a God of pathos is not a psychological claim but a theological one. (Johnson 49-65)

It is this pathos of a suffering God, as defined anew out of the heart of the Holocaust, this political God, as understood by Jurgen Moltmann, Dorothee Soelle, Johann Baptist Metz and Eberhard Jüngel is mapped by McCarthy and King. Evil is there in their novels, but their portrayals of human suffering in these same works, make us comprehend that the sovereign good is that qualia which can feel empathy. Whereas God is that being who suffers with us in our pain. The teleology of the gothic genre is this affirmation of empathy. Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) reflection on God qua goodness will clarify this suffering God of faith. It is another matter beyond the scope of this thesis that it is Kierkegaard who effected the modernist turn in Continental philosophy and not Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who ushered in European and by extrapolation, American modernism within philosophy and theology. Here is Kierkegaard in his own words:

To be without care-indeed, it is a difficult walk, almost like walking on water, but if you are able to have faith, then it can be done. In connection with all danger, the main thing is to be able to get away from the thought of it. Now, you cannot get away from poverty, but you can get away from the thought of it by continually thinking about God: this is how the Christian walks his course. He turns his gaze upward and looks away from the danger; in his poverty, he is without the care of poverty. (Kierkegaard 21-22)

In short, there is no Inhospitable Absolute Other in the here and the now. Kierkegaard saw the good in his own interior life and has explicated above how to attain this supreme good. Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King too, reveal in their novels, the techné to live

for others, leaving aside avarice for realizing the sovereign good in the here and the now. In *The Road*, the boy's father contemplates his bare existence and how in a world no longer existing, he has no hurry, he lives and experiences the state of being in the here and the now as Søren Kierkegaard speaks of life: to be without care except for abiding in the love of God whom, in *The Road* the nameless father finds within his son:

No lists of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later. All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes. So, he whispered to the sleeping boy. I have you. (*The Road* 46)

From *Suttree* to *No Country for Old Men* we do not find this deep resignation to divine providence that we find in *The Road*. In *The Road* the boy is humankind's only chance for survival. The boy has to participate in the community of the those who will, as it were, bear into the future, the breathe of God. Before we proceed further it is best to remember what the American political philosopher, John Rawls (1921- 2002) wrote in one of his lesser known works. In Rawls's *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* edited by Thomas Nagel, and posthumously published by Harvard University Press in 2009, we have a clear elucidation of what it means to be ethical as a person. Rawls argues that unless a person is working for the common good, that person is not worthy of being called a good person. Rawls is known more for his work on jurisprudence but in this tract which was discovered after his death we have a critique of the Christian understanding of the sovereign good which deals with the preconditions for a child to enter a faith community. Rawls, of course, is not interested in the supernatural. Therefore, his is a unique voice within both political philosophy and theology: "Concerning political theory, our view suggests that any contract theory of society is false. Therefore theories along the order of Hobbes and Locke must be rejected. The person does not bring anything to society for the simple reason that he is nothing until he is in community. Once the human person is in society, he can give something to it; but he cannot bring anything to it. Once integrated into community we become persons, and then we can contribute to the life of the community...we do become independent in the provisional sense that we can live positively in community, fulfilling our obligations and creating possibilities of mutual co-existence... A

community is always a group of persons integrated together by faith, and there is no mysterious principle which subsumes all persons into one person.” (Rawls 126-127). Time and again we find in the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King a preoccupation with entering the faith community through the power of prayer. Whenever there are existential crises in the lives of the protagonists in McCarthy or King’s fictional universe; we find them first praying and then helping other. Yet, all these with the caveat that both McCarthy and King, as has been shown throughout this thesis, are sceptical about institutionalised religion. Therefore, it is more apt to say that their worldviews are theological rather than religious.

The contention of this thesis is that both Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King’s fiction have their telos in redemption. This redemption is hard to actualise but following Søren Kierkegaard, it can be achieved. Stephen King in his *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* writes of spirituality and the power of prayer. This recurring motif of praying is found throughout King’s fiction as has been shown above while discussing both *Desperation* and *It*. Trisha, just nine years’ old, faces the worst crisis of her life and instinctively turns to prayers and spirituality:

She went to it, sat down, closed her eyes, and tried to pray for rescue. Asking God to not let her Walkman be broken had been easy because it had been unthinking. Now, however, praying was hard. Neither of her parents were churchgoers—her Mom was a lapsed Catholic, and her Dad, so far as Trisha knew, had never had anything to lapse from—and now she discovered herself lost and without vocabulary in another way. She said the Our Father and it came out of her mouth sounding flat and uncomfoting, about as useful as an electric can-opener would have been out here. She opened her eyes and looked around the little clearing, seeing all too well how gray the air was becoming, clasping her scratched hands nervously together. (*The Girl who Loved Tom Gordon* 63)

Trisha is without the required vocabulary for accessing the holy. It is another matter that God listens to her prayers. But the quoted passage is important for us since it shows how apophatic theology functions. It is the way of both revelation and negation. It was easy for her to pray for her Walkman but in the midst of a spiritual crisis she has to find words to reach out to God. Human effort too is needed within the fictional universe of both McCarthy and King to connect with the Sovereign Good. Here is Trisha again thinking of her past and inventing for herself a language which extols the sovereign good. Lest one forgets, she has no hope for survival unless God saves her. This is akin to St. John of the Cross's dark night of the soul. Within the scala spirituality of John of the Cross; one truly begins to pray only when the shadows deepen and there is no hope except in seeking help from God:

She couldn't remember ever discussing spiritual matters with her mother, but she had asked her father not a month ago if he believed in God...

“God,” Larry McFarland had said, licking his ice cream. “God, now, God . . .” He thought awhile longer. Trisha had sat quietly on her side of the picnic table, looking out at his little yard (it needed mowing), giving him all the time he needed. At last he said, “I’ll tell you what I believe in. I believe in the Subaudible.”

“The what?” She had looked at him, not sure if he was joking or not. He didn't look as if he was joking.

“The Subaudible... (*The Girl who Loved Tom Gordon* 63-64)

So God and spirituality were indeed discussed in Trisha's family in spite of her parent's marital problems. Only, God and the sense of the holy had become sub-audible. In *The Cities of the Plain* John Grady Cole has a conversation with his lover, Magdalena on prayer and God (*Cities of the Plain* 205-206). John Grady Cole comes to the conclusion that for God to be truly God, He has to be weak, as John Caputo has shown us earlier in this thesis: “He believed in God even if he was doubtful of men's claims to know God's mind. But that a God unable to forgive was no God at all” (*Cities of the Plain* 206). The sovereign good within Christian theology is weak and personal. But

McCarthy's portrayal of religion and God are ambivalent. Suttree in the novel *Suttree* hears the priest's utter prayers and give him the sacrament of extreme unction. Yet, it is not Suttree who laments for his own sins, but only the priest does so. Whether Suttree assents to these prayers is not explicated in the novel:

Suttree surfaced from these fevered deeps to hear a
maudlin voice chant latin by his bedside, what medieval
ghost come to usurp his fallen corporeality. (*Suttree* 460)

Iris Murdoch in her essay *On 'God' and 'Good'* (1966) collected within her anthology of three essays in her book *The Sovereignty of Good* discusses what goodness means in terms of the ethical. She writes that the "Good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose... The only genuine way to be good is to be good 'for nothing' in the midst of a scene where every 'natural' thing, including one's own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity. That 'for nothing' is indeed the experienced correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself" (Murdoch 69-70). This is being good for there are no other choices possible for the one who is entirely good. This sovereign good is often known within Christian theology as God. God is good because there is simply no other way of being God. God is the original good who is an invisible and non-representable blankness of the idea of the good from time immemorial. Like evil discussed in the last chapter, we have to take Murdoch's understanding of the sovereign good further and interrogate within the limits of comprehensibility the goodness called God. Murdoch, further writes in her essay, that there exists "no complicated secret doctrine. We are all capable of criticizing, modifying and extending the area of strict obligation which we have inherited. Good is non-representable and indefinable. We are all mortal and equally at the mercy of necessity and chance. These are the true aspects in which all men are brothers" (Murdoch 72). While this author is in agreement with Murdoch about the need to criticize, modify and extend the discussion about the good, we intend to try to represent and define this good. This very same good which Murdoch says cannot be represented, nor be defined. And, this cultural task of revealing and defining the good, to give one instance, by Cormac McCarthy in his second novel in the *Border Trilogy*. In *The Crossing*, McCarthy engages with the idea of the good or, God and repeatedly theologises about the nature of the good. What Murdoch took to be non-representable and indefinable, Cormac McCarthy represents and defines. In the previous chapter of

this thesis we interrogated evil as arising out of particular social, economical, historical and philosophical milieus. While reading *The Crossing* closely we will find that the absolutely good too does not exist within a vacuum, but manifests itself within human history whose telos as had been emphasised in this thesis, is not evil but good.

Earlier we have discussed the call of God which can be heard only by those who are chosen by God to fight social and economic injustices and thus, resist the exhausting economy of the nameless pharaoh who without resistance, would subjugate us all through his vicarious consumerist ethic and through his shrill declaration that to resist the logic of capitalism is equivalent to being slothful. These chosen ones God's elect and paradoxically they are cursed since they have little options but to confront systemic evil and resist the princes and potentates of this world. For the sake of clarity, it must be noted that there are no more pharaohs now, as there are no more princes and potentates now. There are rich ranchers in McCarthy's fiction and rich, ruthless businessmen in King's fiction. But for evermore, as McCarthy has declared, Judge Holden keeps on dancing and as Stephen King has declared, the man in black, Randall Flagg, lives on to carry on the legacy of that pharaoh who demanded hard labour of the Israelites. While except in the fiction of Cormac McCarthy we will never find another Judge Holden, or except within the fiction of Stephen King, we will never encounter Randall Flagg but if we look around we will find what Guy Standing in his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011), describes precariats as a new nomadic work force who have to fight each other like animals to survive in an economy which "is the embodiment of the Darwinian metaphor, 'the survival of the fittest'...[in this economy]...those who are 'poor' must prove they are not 'lazy'...The precariat hovers on the borderline, exposed to circumstances that could turn them from strugglers into deviants and loose cannons prone to listen to populist politicians and demagogues" (Standing 155). Our economy demands that precariats possess "personal deportment skills, covered by what some sociologists call 'emotional labour'. The ability to look good, produce a winning smile, a well-timed witticism, a cheery 'good day' greeting, all become skills in a system of personal services" (Standing 144). What Standing states is an elaboration of the work ethics of the pharaoh who only wants hard labour without any complaints. There is no place in this economy for Murdoch's being good for nothing. In other words, this economy is devoid of the relaxed time of Yahweh. The men and women who are chosen by God in the fiction of Cormac McCarthy and

Stephen King are people who have to resist this precarious economy within their situatedness in their personal histories. At the cost of tautology, one needs to keep in mind that Christian theologising arises not out of a vacuum but is a sign against the times. Within the Bible, prophet after prophet leading up to the Messiah stood against institutions of economic might and challenged the status quo. This is the function of the chosen ones of God in the works of both McCarthy and King. The prophetic role that God assigns to man is not one of self-glory. It is one of utter tragedy. In *The Crossing*, the ex-Roman Catholic priest told Billy Parham about a father who had lost his only son. Yet God has called this dead child's father in God's mysterious ways. The old convert says:

You must not suppose such elections to be happy ones
for they are not. (McCarthy *The Crossing* 103).

At the core of Christianity is the mystery of God who is inscrutable and yet, nonetheless who wants to be known:

Nor does God whisper through the trees. His voice is not to be mistaken. When men hear it they fall to their knees and their souls are riven and they cry out to Him and there is no fear in them but only that wildness of heart that springs from such longing and they cry out to stay his presence for they know at once that while godless men may live well enough in their exile those to whom He has spoken can contemplate no life without Him but only darkness and despair. (McCarthy *The Crossing* 106)

In the apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, the father of the boy who had to be protected cried out in despair and hope to God:

Then he just knelt in the ashes. He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at the last? (*The Road* 10)

But the God we encounter in Cormac McCarthy is a God with whom there is no bargaining, no reciprocity but as we will see in a moment, this same God is neither

formless, nor impersonal. But first let us see what is meant by a God with whom no bargaining is possible:

The boundaries of the world are those of God's devising.
With God there can be no reckoning. With what would
one bargain? (*The Crossing* 105)

This insight is not gained by ordained Catholic clergy. The ex-priest says that he was, “something of a philosopher” (*The Crossing* 106), lived precariously since:

...in the very generosity of his spirit stood in mortal peril
and knew it not... (*The Crossing* 106)

For the heretical priest had been swallowed up by mere words of a high canonical nature and since the priest had never lost a son, being no real father to any child, he became powerless to understand the personal God of Christianity:

The priest wagered nothing. He'd nothing at hazard. He
stood on no such ground as the crazed old man. Under no
such shadow. Rather he chose to stand outside the critical
edifice of his own church and by this choice he sacrificed
his words of their power to witness. (*The Crossing* 106)

And because the ex-priest never experienced the love of a child, being bereft of a family, the ex-Mormon points out to Billy how the priest could not experience the love of God whom he never conceives of as pure good, pure love since:

As with all priests his mind had become clouded by the
illusion of its proximity to God. (*The Crossing* 108)

The priest never could think of God as a mother, as God says Himself in *Isaiah* quoted earlier:

He believed in a boundless God without center or
circumference. By this very formlessness he'd sought to
make God manageable...In his grandness he had ceded
all terrain...

To see God everywhere is to see Him nowhere. (*The Crossing* 106)

And then we arrive at Caputo's understanding of a weak God discussed earlier in this thesis. A God who is powerless to deny existence to that which denies God existence. Through much soul searching the old anchorite, said the ex-priest to Bill, came to this conclusion:

...And he began to see in God a terrible tragedy. That the existence of the Deity lay imperiled for want of this simple thing. That for God there could be no witness. Nothing against which He terminated. Nothing by way of which his being could be announced to Him. Nothing to stand apart from and to say I am this and that is other. Where that is I am not. He could create everything save that which would say him no. (*The Crossing* 107)

But before this realisation dawned on this man turned mystic through the death of his son, he had realised that old philosophical fact of God being the unmoveable mover:

Acts have their being in the witness...In the end one could even say that the act is nothing, the witness all...As has been the case with many a philosopher that which at first seemed an insurmountable objection to his theories came gradually to be seen as a necessary component to them and finally the centerpiece itself. He saw the world pass into nothing in the very multiplicity of its instancing. Only the witness stood firm. And the witness to that witness. (*The Crossing* 107)

It is this understanding of God that is at the core of the McCarthy's works. This is not merely a Biblical understanding of God, but it is a theological understanding of God as being both passible and impassible. In other words, God according to Christian theologians possesses both emotions and is beyond human emotions. Paul L. Gavrilyuk in his book on Patristics titled, *The Suffering of the Impassible God : The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (2004), discusses the nature of God. Gavrilyuk notes the tension within Patristics and theology, between the ancient Hellenist conception of God as

wholly beyond experiencing human emotions and the Christian conception of God experiencing a wider range of human emotions. The inability of the Godhead to experience human emotions is known as divine impassibility and God's possessing human emotions is known as God's passibility. The prevailing theological climate at the time of writing this thesis is that the God of the Bible is supremely passible, experiencing the full range of human emotions: "Without exception, biblical authors ascribe to God strong emotions. God becomes angry and repents, feels sorrow and rejoices. Above all else, he is the God of self-sacrificial love and self-giving compassion. He hears prayers and responds to them. The God of the Bible is deeply involved in history. The prophetic writings speak of him as actually suffering with and for humanity" (Gavrilyuk 2). Gavrilyuk goes on to caution us against anthropomorphising God. Because this was never the stance of the Church Fathers. Within Patristics, as Gavrilyuk shows, God's impassibility is also shown, divine "passibility and impassibility are correlative concepts, both of which must have their place in any sound account of divine agency" (Gavrilyuk 20). It is this God who is both passible and impassible that McCarthy portrays in his works, and especially in *The Crossing*. Here again is the ex-priest speaking about God:

Who can dream of God? This man did. In his dreams God was much occupied. Spoken to He did not answer. Called to did not hear. The man could see Him bent at his work. As if through a glass. Seated solely in the light of his own presence. Weaving the world. In his hands it flowed out of nothing and in his hands it vanished into nothing once again. Endlessly. Endlessly. So. Here was a God to study...Not chaos itself lay outside of that matrix. And somewhere in that tapestry that was the world in its making and in its unmaking was a thread that was he and he woke weeping. (*The Crossing* 104)

Evil is easier to comprehend since we know evil when we experience its consequences. But it is difficult to define God whose very nature does not allow for human comprehensibility and the consequences of God's action within human history is not easily comprehensible since our understanding of what Iris Murdoch terms the good is always tainted by the human need to know whether, to again use Murdoch's definition

above, the good is, good for nothing. For only then, is the good from God. Then, there is the question raised in the previous chapter, how God being all good allows suffering? This problem too is engaged with by the old anchorite. Through his tale to Bill, in two separate vignettes, he completes his definition of God and also what it means to herald in the liberating time of Yahweh. In the first instance he tells Billy of the way in which God bends all things within human history to himself:

...[God] turned even the old man's heretical usurpations to his own service. The sense of election...now stood fulfilled in a way he'd not foreseen and before his troubled gaze stood the truth in its awful purity. He saw that he was indeed elect and that the God of the universe was yet more terrible than men reckoned. He could not be eluded nor yet set aside nor circumscribed about and it was true that He did indeed contain all else within Him even to the reasoning of the heretic else He were no God at all. (*The Crossing* 108)

When the priest “was greatly moved by what he saw” (*The Crossing* 108) and heard, the old anchorite, according to the ex-Mormon, tells the priest about his realisations about God and how God can be attained and also, how we are all one humanity. This is the manifestation of the sovereign good that Murdoch had spoken of. Yet when the priest is informed about this good for nothing God’s grace, the priest only understood that the time for extreme unction and the final confession for the anchorite had come. So when the priest began the rite of “absolution” (*The Crossing* 109), the old anchorite:

...let go the priest's other hand and raised his own. Like a man going on a journey. Save yourself, he hissed. Save yourself. Then he died. (*The Crossing* 109)

The priest’s reaction in the forms of absolution after hearing the old man’s understanding of God shows how Cormac McCarthy is against institutionalised religion but not against the idea of the holy. Thus *The Crossing* in its sublimity and reflections, is a contemporary theological treatise. Here is the part which set the priest offer the formula of absolution to the dying man. As has been remarked above, the priest

mistakenly thinks that he is closer to God for being ordained and from a false sense of being one of the elect:

He told the priest what he had learned. In the end he said that no man can see his life until his life is done and where then to make a mending? It is God's grace alone that we are bound by this thread of life. He held the priest's hand in his own and he bade the priest look at their joined hands and he said see the likeness. This flesh is but a memento, yet it tells the true. Ultimately every man's path is every other's. There are no separate journeys for there are no separate men to make them. All men are one and there is no other tale to tell. But the priest only took his telling for confession...(*The Crossing* 109)

For all God's terrible aspects, that is, His impassibility, God is finally revealed as moved by human frailty. This is the God who emptied Himself and became one of us and suffered the full range of human emotions in a process known as kenosis within Christianity. This kenotic God is the subject of McCarthy. His westerns are unique because they convey to us more about this loving and weak God who never deserts humanity, because in the Old Testament we see him promising to the Jewish people, His everlasting bond. This bond is called within theology as covenant love. McCarthy's God is a God who freely redeems though humanity does not merit this grace. This is the Christian theology of grace and redemption. No matter what manner of the not-good is committed, this God bound to mankind by covenant-love always forgives. This is the message of Christianity and this is the message of Cormac McCarthy in his fiction. The anchorite in his death bed, realised that:

...the path of the world also is one and not many and there is no alter course in any least part of it for that course is fixed by God and contains all consequence in the way of its going and outside of that going there is neither path nor consequence nor anything at all. There never was. (*The Crossing* 109)

What this man realised very few realise, that one can do “ nothing that such great good befall him” (*The Crossing* 110). This is truth that sets men free. God gratuitously gives “possession [of] that elusive freedom which men seek with such unending desperation”(*The Crossing* 110). McCarthy further adds one point which the ex-priest realised but the anchorite did not. It took the priest some time to realise this truth: we are all equal in the eyes of God. Within McCarthy’s works, whether we are good or not-good, whether we are serial murderers like Lester Ballard, or, we are honest cowboys like John Grady Cole or, we are like the hitman Chigurh, at the end we are all children of God:

What the priest saw at last was that the lesson of a life can never be its own. Only the witness has power to take its measure. It is lived for the other only. The priest therefore saw what the anchorite could not. That God needs no witness. Neither to Himself nor against. The truth is rather that if there were no God then there could be no witness for there could be no identity to the world but only each man's opinion of it. The priest saw that there is no man who is elect because there is no man who is not. (*The Crossing* 110)

The priest realises the essence of religion and Christianity, and thus abjures his vocation. We find meaning only if we live for our neighbour. This is where Emmanuel Levinas’s concept of the neighbour becomes necessary for our comprehension of the neighbour. We had occasion to quote Levinas as a Talmudic scholar. It is from his readings of the Old Testament that Levinas derives his concept of the neighbour which finally is at the heart of Christianity. The message of Levinas is essentially theological and its relevance to what the Roman Catholic priest realises is profoundly Christian. This is in spite of the fact that Levinas was a Jew. Yet when Levinas writes that to “maintain that the relationship with a neighbor, incontestably set up in saying, is a responsibility for the neighbor, that saying is to respond to another, is to find no longer any limit or measure for this responsibility, which “in the memory of man” has never been contracted, and is found to be at the mercy of the freedom and the fate, unverifiable by me, of the other man...”(*Lévinas Otherwise than Being* 47), then Levinas is no

different from any Christian theologian. Christian theology is anchored in the neighbour.

To say that Cormac McCarthy's novels are only about violence is to insufficiently study his works. And, perhaps rely too much on reading *Blood Meridian* and his earlier novels. Once one starts reading the works that McCarthy wrote after *Blood Meridian*, one then is in the presence of an author whose foundation is not in fire and brimstone but in God. To put it more technically with specific reference to *The Crossing*, Cormac McCarthy in *The Crossing* shows a transition from the conception of God as impassible to the conception of God as passible. In a certain sense, *The Crossing* within the limits of our fallibilist theologizing is the turning point in Cormac McCarthy. He, as it were, moves from the confines of Mosaic Law to the new Law of Christ.

The Crossing, thus from the perspective of theology represents a crossing over from a naïve understanding of God as impassible to a more Christian understanding of God as passible and an advocate of those who suffer dark nights of the soul. Later when Billy Parham meets another old man, he gains a better understanding of the world in which human beings have to work out their salvation through cooperating with God's will. For as the ex-Mormon told Billy, there is no other course for man but to follow the Will of God. Here we need to be careful and not confuse the Will of God with determinism. We are free to follow our own path and we always have choices and we always have the freedom to choose between various good qualia but what Patristics and McCarthy mean is that we would be what we are meant to be, that is, we will become our best selves, that is, we will self actualize, if we follow the Will of God. If we do not follow the Will of God, we still remain God's elect and yet God will find ways to bring out good from our misguided choices. As has been pointed out earlier in this thesis, the Kingdom of God is one of freedom and God's economy of salvation is enacted within a relaxed history unlike the nameless Pharaoh's anxious and frenetic construction of time. God's Kingdom is one of love and mercy so when the blind old man whose eyes had been gouged out in Mexico, says to Billy that:

...he had become but a voice to speak in a darkness
incommensurable with the motives of life. (*The Crossing*
210)

This darkness incommensurable with the motives of life can be overcome with faith. Faith in God is also a leitmotif in Cormac McCarthy, and in Stephen King. King returns even in discussions on McCarthy as McCarthy returns in discussions about King, since the discourse here proposes to read them synoptically. This faith which is needed to overcome this darkness had been located by Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals and Notebooks* collected and published recently about the nature of God and the nature of salvation:

A *Providence* is in no way easier to understand (to grasp) than the *redemption*: both can only be believed. The idea of Providence is that God concerns himself with the individual and with that which, in the individual, is most individual...Redemption is the *continuation of Providence*, that God will continue to concern himself with the individual and with that which is most individual about the individual, regardless of the fact that this individual has squandered everything...Providence and redemption are categories of despair, that is, I would have to despair if I did not dare believe it. They are not to despair over, but are that which keeps despair at bay...(Kierkegaard *Journals and Notebooks* 52 italics' Kierkegaard's).

So within the Christian schema of salvation God is indeed concerned with the individual though the individual does not merit this concern. Interestingly, Kierkegaard considers providence and redemption as categories of despair. Faith in Providence keeps one away from the darkness and life inimical that we encounter in this world. Since all of us are God's elect we cannot but see now that McCarthy's earlier vision of the fallen man is revised in this second novel of the *Border Trilogy*. In *Suttree* McCarthy had conceived human beings as demented and decocted out of the cauldrons, as it stirred in hell:

What deity in the realms of dementia, what rabid god decocted out of the smoking lobes of hydrophobia could

have devised a keeping place for souls so poor as is this
flesh. This mawky worm-bent tabernacle. (*Suttree* 130)

This crossing which McCarthy writes of is also a crossing over of McCarthy himself from his relentless engagement with the “gaga” (*Suttree* 129) of time out of joint, radiating out of some “*visionary light of a massive rapacity*” (*Suttree* 2, italics McCarthy’s). In *The Crossing* McCarthy cathartically overcomes or, at least, comes to term with this chaos which tends to overwhelm the reader in his earlier books. McCarthy’s subject matter is not so much about evil but rather, it is about God and is too vast in scope to be accommodated within the formulaic western. Thus, in his works he amalgamates other genres too. For example, later Suttree will think of life as being not meaningless, but with a meaning too hideous to contemplate:

Lives running out like something foul, nightsoil from a
cesspipe, a measured dripping in the dark. The clock has
run, the horse has run, and which has measured which?
(McCarthy *Suttree* 136)

But unlike what Suttree’s father let him know, the weak God of liberation theologians is precisely with those forgotten by others, in the dark alleys of the world including places where cesspipes drip for eternity. Suttree was informed by his father that:

There is nothing occurring in the streets. Nothing but a
dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent.
(*Suttree* 14)

The Crossing is the novel where we understand that the helpless and the impotent too are important to God. In *The Crossing* we have a God who reveals Himself to be kind and a God filled with empathy for His creation. As the ex-priest says to Billy the first requirement for beginning anything noble requires:

first that God be in men's hearts for it is there alone that
it truly has its being and there failing no power can build
[anything] back again. (*The Crossing* 103)

This is not the Cormac McCarthy that we had encountered earlier in in *Suttree* and *Blood Meridian*. In *Suttree* we find Suttree despairing about the human condition. In

Blood Meridian, we have no God and in that novel, all is atavistic and violent. *Blood Meridian* is about the triumph of Darwinian laws. In *All the Pretty Horses* we have the love of John Grady Cole for Alejandra at its heart which transforms that western finally into a cowboy romance. It is only from *The Crossing* onwards that we have McCarthy foregrounding Billy Parham's journeys within theology.

It is to Emmanuel Levinas again we turn, this time to his book *Of God who Comes to Mind*. In Part II of this book, Levinas deals with *The Idea of God*. Here he writes of God as the "Infinite's...[whose]...meaning...[cannot] be reduced to manifestation, to the representation of presence...its meaning is not measured by the possibility or the impossibility of the truth of being..." (Levinas *Of God who Comes to Mind* 66). Earlier it had been pointed out in this discourse that it is easier to know evil by its results. But to capture the essence of God within words is an impossible task and to know how God manifests within history is problematic to say the least. Because what is utterly not-good, too serves the purpose of God. Therefore we have to rely on Levinas whose understating of God is akin to a fallibilist theologian. In other words, Levinas is uncertain about the esse of God but does not doubt that God exists. He locates God as love of the neighbour in *Of God who Comes to Mind*. Levinas writes of love for the neighbour being truly love when one is ready to sacrifice or substitute for the neighbour, one's own being. This according to Levinas, is the love that we must bring for the neighbour. He writes that the "referring to another is awakening...awakening to proximity, which is responsibility for the neighbor to the point of substitution for him...[it is being] faithful to an engagement it never made" (Levinas *Of God who Comes to Mind* 68). Then Levinas defines God as far as any philosopher or theologian can define that which is indefinable. God, according to Levinas, is fully oriented to the other. The hospitality that Levinas brings to his understanding of God as infinite good is what interests us here: "The goodness of the Good – [which]...inclines the movement it calls forth, to turn it from the Good and orient it toward the other, and only thus toward the Good... In this ethical reversal, in this reference of the desirable to the non-desirable, in this strange mission that orders the approach to the other, God is drawn out of objectivity, presence and being" (Levinas *Of God who Comes to Mind* 69). It is this ethical gesture to the undesirable other that Cormac McCarthy in *The Crossing* writes about. In other words, only love for the other, that is, the neighbour who if one

pays close attention to Levinas, is indeed an undesirable neighbour endures. The rest is a gaping void.

It is this void where evil or the not-good, or the good for something, to restate Iris Murdoch's case for the good for nothing, resides. Where there is a lack of turning to the other to the point of substituting the self for the other, it is there that God is not. This is the theological message of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King within their fictional worlds. Levinas's understanding of the human being as being finally called to respond to the neighbour who is the undesirable other which is true goodness has its origins in Martin Heidegger's theology in his *Being and Time*. There Heidegger configures the human being within the light of theology. He writes that one of the guidelines "for the determination of the being and essence of [a] human being is a *theological* one" (Heidegger *Being and Time* 45) and then he laments that this Christian idea was "de-theologised in the course of the modern period" (Heidegger *Being and Time* 45). Heidegger then remarks about the unique quality of being human. He locates this quality in the being's ability to experience transcendence, a "human being is something that goes beyond itself" (Heidegger *Being and Time* 45), that is, "the human being is more than a rational being" in its ability to look forward to God (Heidegger *Being and Time* 46). It is this transcendence and looking forward to God that Billy Parham in his journeys in *The Crossing* achieves.

McCarthy and King create beings within their fiction who are essentially theological beings if we are to accept the contentions of both Heidegger and Levinas. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in her book on narratology, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* has a cautionary ending. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan maintains that we must not confuse between the author and the speakers found within a text. And more importantly, when a narrator tells a tale, we have to also be alert to the fact that both the author who has created the narrator and the narrator's tale's characters are all separate entities within a novel. "Thus, speaking and seeing, narration and focalization, may, but need not, be attributed to the same agent. The distinction between the two activities is a theoretical necessity, and only on its basis can the interrelations between them be studied with precision" (Rimmon-Kenan 74). So while McCarthy and King in their interviews present a world-view which only gestures at Christian theology, we must be careful following Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, that we do not impute to either McCarthy or King these theological views. The point here is that these theological

views inhere within their corpus and should be scrutinised further without entirely rejecting these views as actually belonging to McCarthy and King. The nature of this thesis demands a certain focalisation, or filtering the theological elements in the works of the two authors being studied together here. The ideas of focalisation, and filtering have been studied thoroughly in a different context by the Biblical scholar John. B.F. Miller in his book *Convinced that God had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts* (2007). Miller in the *Introduction* (1-20) to his book has discussed at some length the origins and differences between focalisation and filtering and his preference for the concept of filtering for his exegetical task in pages sixteen and seventeen of *Convinced that God had Called Us*. But for our discourse here we need to simultaneously use both the concepts of focalisation and filtering to make certain that we comprehend the profundity of the truths that are relayed to us by McCarthy and King.

Unless we agree with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan that it is a theoretical necessity to conflate our authors and some of their ideas about the good for nothing and the good for something, or evil, we will not be able to filter the theological elements in their works. John B.F. Miller in his book writes of the need for filtering (Miller 17). Miller got the idea of filtering from the literary critic Seymour Chatman who in his book *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Chatman 2).

After discussing the narratorial strategies within Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, Chatman discusses briefly Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Then he puts forward his theory of narratological filters since any points of view is "subsumed under ideology in the broadest sense. One can cite the ideological point of view of someone who is not alive: "From Franklin Roosevelt's point of view..." (Chatman 141). Thus, Chatman uses the term filter to capture the mediating function of a fictional character's consciousness: "Filter," on the other hand, seems a good term for capturing something of the mediating function of a character's consciousness — perception, cognition, emotion, reverie — as events are experienced from a space within the story world" (Chatman 144).

There are many instances in the fiction of both McCarthy and King where characters within their fiction tell tales or briefly digress about other events which apparently have little to do with the main plot of the novel or short story. Unless we focalise and filter these tales and use these concepts as valuable hermeneutical tools,

we will not be able to show that our authors are theologians who can reach an audience which the Church Fathers could never reach and now, having lost their relevance in a culture which has little time for theology, they are well nigh forgotten. Paul Tillich referred to at the beginning of this thesis, in his book *Courage to Be* writes of the need for a theological praxis which makes contemporary theology comprehensible to our times and which addresses the human condition in the here and the now decentred by discourses which makes life uncertain with its emphasis on fate, “ Fate is the rule of contingency, and the anxiety about fate is based on the finite being's awareness of being contingent in every respect, of having no ultimate necessity...Yet it is not causal necessity that makes fate a matter of anxiety but the lack of ultimate necessity, the irrationality, the impenetrable darkness of fate” (Tillich *The Courage to Be*). As has been repeatedly shown in this thesis, evil within McCarthy and King is associated with fate and destiny, devoid of that freedom which affirms the humanity of the human person. Tillich in *The Courage to Be*, in his chapter entitled, *Being, Nonbeing and Anxiety* (31-58) affirms the need to theologise anew so that this new theology responds to the human condition in flux through the situatedness of the dasein in the here and the now. McCarthy and King both through their works, revise mainstream Christian theology in a manner which Tillich wanted theology to be practised. Tillich writes:

It is not always personal doubt that undermines and empties a system of ideas and values. It can be the fact that they are no longer understood in their original power of expressing the human situation and of answering existential human questions. (This is largely the case with the doctrinal symbols of Christianity.) Or they lose their meaning because the actual conditions of the present period are so different from those in which the spiritual contents were created that new creations are needed...In such circumstances a slow process of waste of the spiritual contents occurs, unnoticeable in the beginning, realized with a shock as it progresses, producing the anxiety of meaninglessness at its end. (Tillich *The Courage to Be* 47)

It is this courage or, resilience that we find in the fictional characters of McCarthy and King. They resist evil through not only kenosis but also through coming to terms with their pasts. Evil persists in this world, if in no other form, then at least as memories which can never be erased. Here is Dolores Claiborne's realisation in King's thriller written in the stream of consciousness mode, *Dolores Claiborne*:

But if I've found out anything...it's that they [the dead] ain't never gone, not really. You think you're shut of em, that you neatened em all away and there ain't a dust bunny anyplace, n then they come back, they look like faces, they always look like faces, and the faces they look like are always the ones you never wanted to see again, awake or in your dreams. (King *Dolores Claiborne* 302)

McCarthy in his revisionary westerns and King in his revisionary thrillers have lifted the covers of America's past as not so glorious after all. In doing so both of them have confronted the evil that lies within the heart of America as a body politic and also as a country which actually has a history. America's history begins with the life-stories of the native American Indian. McCarthy in his westerns makes amend for America's past, and King through his fiction atones for the various injustices still prevalent in contemporary America and for the various injustice in America's past. Evil cannot be exorcised unless one confronts it and has the courage to write of the wrongs done in the past.

The battle between the popular and the canonical is a longstanding source of acrimony among literary critics. But before discussing high and so-called popular cultures, we must revisit the 1937 essay of Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), titled *The Affirmative Character of Culture*. In this essay Marcuse draws out attention to the repression of humanity in the guise of culture. He writes that the domain of culture "belongs not to him who comprehends the truths of humanity as a battle cry, but to him in whom they have become a posture which leads to a mode of proper behavior: exhibiting harmony and reflectiveness even in daily routine. Culture should ennoble the given by permeating it, rather than putting something new in its place. It thus exalts the individual without freeing him from his factual debasement. Culture speaks of the dignity of 'man' without concerning itself with a concretely more dignified status for

men” (Marcuse 75). Therefore, high art, according to Marcuse is that which should concretely concern itself with a more dignified status for humanity. On the other hand, high art is put forward as being concerned with eternal truths posited ahistorically. As we will find later, that punching-bag of Western philosophy, that is, Christian theology, and especially Scholasticism too are not static qualia. They are reinvigorated by process theologians and as has been argued in this thesis, by McCarthy and King. Max Horkheimer (1895- 1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* pointed out the need for a culture not so much as an abstract value but as foundational to social reform:

What is at issue here is not culture as a value, as understood by critics of civilization such as Huxley, Jaspers, and Ortega y Gasset, but the necessity for enlightenment to reflect on itself if humanity is not to be totally betrayed. What is at stake is not conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes. Today, however, the past is being continued as destruction of the past. If, up to the nineteenth century, respectable education was a privilege paid for by the increased sufferings of the uneducated, in the twentieth the hygienic factory is bought with the melting down of all cui rural entities in the gigantic crucible. That might not even be so high a price as those defenders of culture believe if the bargain sale of culture did not contribute to converting economic achievements into their opposite (Adorno xvii-xviii)

It is from these views of the need for the transmutability of art to fashion ethically good human beings that we should see the theological project at stake in this thesis. Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno do not write on spirituality except in pejorative terms, yet their insights prove valuable in understating the work of McCarthy and King as purveyors of a certain kind of new Christian theology. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno see theology as merely “the spiritualisation of magic” (Adorno 145). Marcuse sees spirituality within the broader ambit of culture as “to allude to those areas of life which cannot be managed by the abstract reason of bourgeois practice” (Marcuse 78).

Therefore, that is not art for Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno which is not in a certain way utilitarian. Within their analyses, culture is historical and to qualify as culture, it has to effect a concrete change in the human person. Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) in his book *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* writes about the aesthetic reception of a new type of literary artefact. Jauss's understanding of this process of recognition of a text as literature is worth reviewing. Otherwise we cannot understand the value of the works of especially Stephen King and in, the case of Cormac McCarthy, the value of his western-romance, *All the Pretty Horses*. *All the Pretty Horses* is neglected by critics in comparison to McCarthy's other novels. So, at one level, definitely Stephen King and in at least, in the case of *All the Pretty Horses*, we will be unable to see their values as works of art unless we discuss the nature of what constitutes high art and what constitutes valueless pulp. Though, to generally write off all pulp-fiction as valueless would not only be naïve but we also then need to understand what constitutes value. Rather, what is then valuable within an ideological schema which functions through ideologically loaded registers like 'values'. Cormac McCarthy most memorably in *All the Pretty Horses* and Stephen King, in all of his works challenge what readers expect of formulaic genres: "but rather as precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire for the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions; makes unusual experiences enjoyable as "sensations"; or even raises moral problems, but only to "solve" them in an edifying manner as predecided questions" (Jauss 25). There are no edifying ends to the works of McCarthy and King.

Rather, what is to be found in the works of McCarthy and King are new motifs which blur the distinction of high and low art. Stephen King in his supernatural thrillers and supernatural westerns uses the formula of the thriller and the westerns to create something entirely new, and unrecognisable at first glance. Therefore, if we are to apply Jauss's observations to King's works then we will see the value of King as a writer of sublime gothic fiction who does not confirm to familiar sentiments, nor does he satisfy the desire of the reader whose only wish is to confine herself within the familiarly beautiful world of hackneyed fiction. Indeed, Stephen King raises moral problems but he does not solve them. We do not know, for instance, reading his works why there exist so much suffering in his fiction. We are not confining ourselves here to only his supernatural fiction. But we are also, if not more so, interested in what S.T. Joshi in his

The Modern Weird Tale terms the “nonsupernatural horror” (Joshi 88) of Stephen King. In these novels and short stories King engages with the problem of evil and the reality of God qua the good, without infusing anything supernatural in these novels, though they are horrifying nonetheless. For instance, in *Under the Dome* humanity is spared because some alien child takes pity on us and removes the dome over Chester’s Field. The alien child, was not sorry for what had happened to the citizenry of Chester’s Field, but rather, she “took pity, but she wasn’t sorry” (King *Under the Dome* 874). Because she is an alien child, she feels sorry for us. In *It*, the Turtle felt sorry for humanity. But God, on the other hand according to King's larger vision as articulated in his corpus, feels not pity for humanity but loves us unconditionally. This stance makes King a part of the Christian theological tradition. In *It*, God, as has been mentioned earlier, is the absolute Other, the creator both of the Turtle and It.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788) in his book, *British Education: Or, the Source Of the Disorders Of Great Britain* (1756) questioned the value of veering off the canonical texts of his time. He suggested

... as models of style, Milton [whose core arguments are theological] in the poetic, and Shakespeare in the dramatic, Swift, Addison, Dryden, and Sir William Temple...in prose, may be considered as truly classical, as the Virgil, Caesar, Tully, and Sallust of the Romans; nor is there any reason that they should not be handed down as such equally to the end of time....And shall we not endeavour to secure to future generations, entire and unchanged, their birthright in Milton, in Addison, and Swift? Or shall we put in the power of one giddy and profuse age to dissipate, or render of no value, the heaps of treasure now collected in the many excellent books [at our disposal]...(Sheridan 180 & 192)

The aim of this thesis has been to show how through the use of theology Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King have reinvigorated and revised the formulaic genres of the thriller and the western, albeit, often in their gothic forms. The excellent books which Sheridan speaks of, as it has been shown here, now should include Stephen King too. McCarthy and King call forth that community of Christians whose existence is deemed necessary by T.S. Eliot. Eliot in his *The Idea of a Christian Society* advocates for a more committed church, a more prophetic church within Christianity: “We need therefore what I have called "the community of Christians, “by which I mean, not local groups, and not the Church in anyone of its senses, unless we call it "the Church within the Church." These will be the consciously and thoughtfully practising Christians, especially those of intellectual and spiritual superiority” Eliot *The Idea of a Christian Society* 34). It is this new Church of committed Christians that Stephen King too advocates in his works. Mother Abigail’s community is no longer under the tyranny of

the nameless pharaoh of *Exodus* who appears in every age. In the works of King, he appears as that man in black, as vampires and zombies and psychopaths or, more memorably as Randall Flagg. This thesis rests with the fact that further cultural work is warranted in studying the American thriller and the western to read between the lines what generally is missed in their exegesis.

We have discussed how the mode of the gothic, including American thrillers and westerns, have become vehicles of serious meditations on evil and on God in the novels of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. This led us to the sovereign good extolled by Iris Murdoch (1919-199) in her book *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), and it is this good that is named by McCarthy and King as God. As has been shown in the last chapter, Murdoch's terms this higher good, as good 'for nothing'. Murdoch indicated God in being that perfect good which exists for no good of its own. This is the good that McCarthy and King too map in their novels. Further, the God of McCarthy and King, happens to be a God who reveals Himself through the love of one's neighbour (*Leviticus* 19:18, *Matthew* 22:39). This thesis, while focusing upon evil and God within American popular literature as represented within the gothic mode, has come to the conclusion that the greatest law is the law of love. In the works of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King, we have this law of love shown as more powerful than evil in its many socio-economic manifestations. This thesis is an act of "lifting the lid—the lid of ...repression" (Didi-Huberman 74) of the human person caught in a history which is marred by real violence and various social inequities. For instance, wherever Glanton and his gang of scalphunters move in *Blood Meridian*, there everything is swallowed up "by some maelstrom out there in the void, some vortex" (*Blood Meridian* 102) and the west itself becomes an "evil terrain" (*Blood Meridian* 94). As has been shown earlier Stephen King too locates horror in the west in both *The Stand* and in the time travelling cowboy, the gunslinger Roland Deschain in his *The Dark Tower* series.

McCarthy in his novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, writes of the racial inequities to be found in American society. Much before he wrote *Blood Meridian* and his *Border Trilogy* McCarthy wrote about the white man's hatred towards not only native Americans and Mexicans but also about the way erstwhile slaves in America, were treated:

Which'd rather be, Boog asked John Wesley, white or Indian?...White I reckon. They always whipped the

Indians... I had a [sic] uncle was a White-Cap, John Romines said. You ought to hear him on niggers. He claims they're kin to monkeys. (*The Orchard Keeper* 140)

Stephen King too is very sensitive to the evil of racism that has plagued America's past. In *The Stand*, very significantly God chooses a black woman to fight the man in black, Randall Flagg who is also there in his other novels including the Bachman novels and in *The Dark Tower* series. As has been shown in the foregoing chapters, McCarthy and King take up the cause of women, and women of colour. Evil, as has been pointed out earlier, is very much comprehensible and one can find it in the patriarchal narratives which McCarthy and King, both subvert through their creation of strong women characters. As has been discussed, Alejandra in *All the Pretty Horses* chooses to determine her own fate and decided to not move over to Texas with John Grady Cole. She chooses to stay back at Mexico. So, McCarthy and King consciously destabilize any force which would consider evil as intractable and opaque. Both of them bring to comprehensibility the problem of evil and their discourses clearly explicate the evils which are very much open to scrutiny and historical accountability. To give another example of the concrete form that evil takes on in King's works, it is the trope of bullying. In many of his novels, he discusses childhood bullying as having disastrous consequences on children. In *Dreamcatcher*, Douglas Duddits Cavell, is relentlessly bullied by cruel boys till he is rescued by four other children. Yet, we do not know whether Duddits rescues these four children or they rescue him, or, it is some unknown force which brings these five together. We, normatively call this unknown force, God. But, both of them are also very clear in their assessment of the impassibility of God which has been discussed in the last chapter. Their theologizing does not anthropomorphize God. They are certain that God can only be understood to a large extent, by following Christ's command to love one's neighbour. This too has been shown earlier in this thesis. For instance, they are both aware of the fact that writing of God is more problematic than evil. So as has been shown they use various theological tools to probe the nature of God. King in *Desperation* has this to say about the difficulties in writing and talking about God:

This wasn't the kind of thing you could discuss rationally, even if there was time, because faith wasn't

rational. This was something Reverend Martin had told him over and over again, drilling him with it like some important spelling rule, i before e except after c: sane men and women don't believe in God That was all, that was flat. *You can't say it from the pulpit, because the congregation'd run you out of town, but it's the truth. God isn't about reason; God is about faith and belief God says, "Sure, take away the safety net. And when that's gone, take away the tightrope, too."* (*Desperation* 101, italics are King's)

Further, both of them use apophatic theology which gestures towards knowing what God is not. When both of them cannot proceed further in knowing God, they both write of the ethical gesture towards the others as being more concrete than any apophatic theology. Repeatedly in both their works, we are asked to stop judging others; kindness and respect for all living beings binds both McCarthy and King together. Horses in McCarthy and dogs in King too are shown as deserving of love, and both animals reciprocate to human gestures of kindness. This understanding of the totality of creation being an expression of God is integral to both their fictional narratives. The American west in both McCarthy and King is a violent site for both of them. It has been discussed in this thesis how the western in both McCarthy's and King's hands become something entirely new. What they write are neo-westerns within the gothic mode.

Within the obsidian, apocalyptic earth, where people look,

...like the last survivors of Armageddon... (*The Orchard Keeper* 104)

we have McCarthy writing of God. Rawlins and John Grady Cole in *All the Pretty Horses* have this conversation about the existence of God:

You think God looks out for people? said Rawlins.

Yeah. I guess He does. You?

Yeah. I do. Way the world is. Somebody can wake up and sneeze somewhere in Arkansas or some damn place and before you're done there's wars and ruination and all

hell. You dont know what's goin to happen. I'd say He's just about got to. I dont believe we'd make it a day otherwise. (*All the Pretty Horses* 78)

Since this thesis attempts a synoptic reading of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King, we turn to David Carver in King's *Desperation*. David, whose name and actions echo the Biblical King David, prays for deliverance from Tak, an ancient evil force which had imprisoned many in the fictional town of Desperation in rural Nevada. However, to do so, David had to agree with God's fiat to let his mother, whom he loved so much, die:

“[God] Bless our fellowship, take care of us, and deliver us from evil. Please take care of my mom, too, if it's your will.” He paused, then said in a lower voice: “It's probably not, but please, if it's Your will. Jesus' sake, amen.” He opened his eyes again.

Johnny was moved. The kid's [David's] little prayer had touched him in the very place Entragian [Tak] had tried and failed to reach. (*Desperation* 159)

David has to act for others and take risks for others. He has to agree to lay down his life for the sake of his neighbour. This assent of the will is akin to the assent of Abraham, to kill his son Isaac because God in *Genesis 22:2* demands in His justice, atonement for the historical wrongs that white American have committed against people of colour. McCarthy and King write about this Biblical love for one's neighbour repeatedly in their works. Stephen King in an interview he gave to John Marks in 2008 for salon.com had this to say of Jesus's commands to love one's neighbour:

I'm particularly interested in the idea that in the New Testament, you're suggesting a moral code that's actually enlightened. Basically what Christ preached: get along with your neighbor and give everything away and follow me [Jesus]. (King and Marks *Interview* n.pag.)

We have seen earlier how both McCarthy and King challenges theologically the economic wrongs found in a society which calls itself Christian but is so only in name.

Throughout the thesis we had often discussed the anti-capitalist stance of Christian theologians and of McCarthy and King. Money is often seen as being at the core of much human misery. Returning, to King's comments about the moral code of Christ, we find that it is this love-in-action for the neighbour which is the sovereignty of the good. In *Desperation*, David, and finally, the writer Johnny Marinville, have to mimetically repeat Christ's death on the Cross to atone for the sins of previous generations of white men in the town of Desperation, who had mercilessly, in the nameless Egyptian pharaoh's fashion (*Exodus* 5: 6-9), worked the Chinese in the town of Desperation's mine-pits leaving them to die when the mines collapsed. The nameless pharaoh of the Old Testament appears throughout human history challenging the notion of a people bound by this love to God as neighbour. Jacques Rancière's observations that the 'people of the covenant' are continuously threatened by anarchy gives way in McCarthy and King's works to some semblance of a true communion of brotherhood knit by this love which is the sovereign good or, God. Rancière writes in *What is a People?* about the problem of acknowledging any chosen community of covenant-people:

Because 'the people' does not exist. What exist are diverse or even antagonistic figures of the people, figures constructed by privileging certain modes of assembling, certain distinctive traits, certain capacities or incapacities: an ethnic people defined by the community of land or blood; a vigilant herding people by good pastureland; a democratic people putting to use the skills of those who have no particular skills; an ignorant people that the oligarchs keep at a distance; and so on ... ignorant masses impressed by the resonant words of the 'agitators' and led to extreme violence by the circulation of uncontrolled rumors and contagious fears" (Rancière 102-3).

While acknowledging Rancière's problems with 'the people', one can indeed define a covenant group of people characterized by love. This love has been mapped by both McCarthy and King within their fiction and has been show in detail throughout the discourse in this work.

For example, in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*, the eponymous Suttree tries to find this love for the neighbour which has been mentioned above by ironically, living alone. Suttree experiments in Thoreau's manner as in *Walden*, that is, living a minimalist life finding his moorings within the dregs of Knoxville society. Yet, Suttree has to understand that

...all souls are one and all souls lonely... (*Suttree* 459).

Suttree's life becomes meaningful only when he helps, and as it were, empathizes with the lives of the marginalized, mostly illiterate people he encounters in Knoxville. He realizes that he is only one individual: "I learned that there is one Suttree and one Suttree only" (*Suttree* 317), but he also had to learn that "A man is all men" (*Suttree* 290) and Suttree was forced to participate in that communion of misfits in downtown Knoxville. Till he is able to shed his narcissism, Suttree has no peace. Right at the end of the novel, Suttree comes to this conclusion:

His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them... (*Suttree* 324).

The flight from evil is a natural and theological response, but more interesting is the fact that Suttree realizes that he has to communicate to others that one ought to escape this evil that is ravenous for souls. It is this realization for the need to communicate to others that their souls are in danger unless they choose to avoid evil is McCarthy's message to his readers. Long ago, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) had remarked on the self-absorbed nature of Americans while visiting America in his *Democracy in America* (Vol 2, Chapters II-IV). Americans came to be distinguished from Europeans in Tocqueville's mind as individualistic to the point of narcissism. Many of McCarthy's and King's fictional characters, whom we have already met in the course of this discussion, are indeed self-absorbed to the point of solipsism. But the characters in their fiction who are less self-absorbed and live for others is also a significant understanding of the American mind. Not everyone is self-absorbed in both their fiction.

Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* and Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, are testaments to Slotkin's revisionary scholarship of Frederick Jackson Turner's works. This is with the caveat, that the America and Americans as constructed by

McCarthy and King, are less self-absorbed as one would think them to be. McCarthy and King are innovators to the extent that they are able to show in their works, a less preoccupied country. The following examples show how they diverge from earlier American writers. Both McCarthy and King build on the scathing critiques of American solipsism to be encountered in the early twentieth century American realists' novels. Some examples of these novels are, Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922), Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912-1914) and *An American Tragedy* (1925) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). In *The Great Gatsby* Nick Carraway says this, while trying to avoid another character in the novel.

I couldn't forgive or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewellery store to buy a pearl necklace--or perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons--rid of my provincial squeamishness forever. (Fitzgerald 114)

What we need to notice here are the instances of self-absorption that are registered within the quotation. 'I' and 'retreated' are obvious textual registers for proving the point that the world revolves around the narrator and Tom and Daisy, at least in the quotation above. McCarthy and King in a certain way, reacted to this kind of self-rumination. Tom, the man that Nick had to shake hands with is compared to a child. McCarthy and King's children are more mature than the adults in *The Great Gatsby*. Earlier we had discussed Immanuel Kant's understanding of immaturity as nonage; the characters of McCarthy and King have outgrown their nonage unlike so many other fictional characters in American literature.

John Updike's (1932-2009) *Rabbit* series of novels shows the protagonist Harry Angstrom as solipsistic and relentlessly pursuing the American dream. Angstrom does

not live for others; his world revolves around himself. Then, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye's* (1945-1946) Holden Caulfield is endlessly talking to himself and considers everyone else as "phony". Caulfield's brooding melancholia defines the world to Caulfield. Carson McCullers in her *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*(1940) and *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951) writes about grotesques who are solipsistic. Updike, Salinger and McCullers are just three examples from American literature, which show the self-absorption of America as a nation; not to mention the famous recluse, Thomas Pynchon (b.1937). American letters have extolled a sort of deep self-preoccupation which is subverted to an extent by the revisionary works of both McCarthy and King. This comparison of Thomas Pynchon with McCarthy was done by Harold Bloom in his analysis of *Blood Meridian* published in his anthology of essays *The Bright Book of Life*. Bloom writes there that there "are passages of Melivillean-Faulknerian baroque richness and intensity in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and elsewhere in Pynchon, but we can never be sure that they are not parodistic" (Bloom 475), unlike what Bloom found in *Blood Meridian* where "the prose soars" (Bloom 475) and nothing is similar to Pynchon's works.

Within the American gothic, too, the prevalent narrative had been one of self-absorption. Anne Rice's (b.1941) Vampire Lestat, in Rice's *Lestat* series continually ruminates on his Tithonus-like existence as a being for whom the external world has little meaning. Lestat in *An Interview with the Vampire* (1976), carries on, what appears to be internal monologues which show how disconnected Lestat is from not only the humans he preys on, which is to be understood as natural within Rice's fiction for a vampire. But Lestat is not concerned about other vampires either. He lives only for himself. While all the authors mentioned here show the phenomenological turn, within American fiction; McCarthy and King go beyond this self-absorption to advocate a new urgency in finding God in one's neighbour. As had been noted, we are to consider the serial killer Lester Ballard in McCarthy's *Child of God* as another child of God like the rest of humanity. What Lester had become defies the imagination, but we are first informed about what had been done by society to Lester to make him a murderer who dressed in the clothes of the women he killed. So we find even the title of McCarthy's thriller, gesturing to God. We are forced by McCarthy's novel to rethink our conception of God who permits Lester Ballard to kill and the novel ends with the readers being asked to empathise also with a serial killer. This is unlike so many other American

writers and challenges Alexis de Tocqueville views of Americans being self-absorbed. It is this mode of self-absorption that is interrupted by both King and McCarthy. That is, their fictional characters overcome this unique American self-absorption and lead a life informed by the unique concept of love for neighbour as God found within the Judaeo-Christian continuum: hesed. Hesed this foremost the love of God for humanity and then God invites us to love others. This love has been captured by both McCarthy and King in their works. This thesis would be incomplete if we do not mention an author who is not often associated with either McCarthy or with King, but she in a sense anticipated the spirituality to be found in both their works. She is Willa Cather (1893-1947), who in her deceptively simple prose talked of some of the theological issues dealt with by both McCarthy and King. It was Willa Cather who made the issues of loneliness, abandonment by God and the struggles against the internal demons we encounter in both McCarthy and King, very tangible in her *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927). She spiritualised the landscape of New Mexico within Christian terms. Then McCarthy showed us the evil that is also there in that land. But Willa Cather originally effected a theological turn within the American settlers' narrative. This thesis has left Willa Cather out of its ambit since she does not show the evil that is inherent within the Turner thesis discussed earlier. Willa Cather too before McCarthy and King mapped hesed in her works. It is Willa Cather's God whom we find in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* who later will inspire the conception God as love in action for one's neighbour in both our authors.

Further, what stands out while synoptically reading McCarthy and King is their urgency interrogating not only evil, but also of the good. Technical language borrowed from Aristotle, like 'eudaimonia', does little to explicate the good. We are left with an overwhelming experience of the wholly Other, experienced within both the human person in the here and the now, and within the community within which this person operates. For the conclusion of this thesis in its limited scope, we have to be satisfied with mentioning a few important details. Hesed operates not merely within a human being; hesed is a function of a fecund God whose covenant-love informs the dialectical march of history. No matter how inwardly-turned a person is, it will not make hesed operational in the life of the individual unless this person turns outwards and becomes an agent of change according to God's plan in the here and the now. Otherwise, a person, cut off from God's community, that is the neighbour, becomes just another

solipsistic individual. This idea of communion flies against the face of American self-absorption. Individuality, American exceptionalism and the concept of America's manifest destiny are all challenged by this call of Yahweh throughout history, discussed at length in the previous chapter, inviting us to participate in the act of redemption by serving others; rather than by just preaching, lamenting or crying Lord, Lord (*Matthew* 7:21). Without corporal acts of mercy to the point of dying for others, there cannot be any redemption for humanity (*Matthew* 25:30-40). McCarthy's and King's fiction change American literature and they show how both of them, through their writings, refashion the primary mode of American literature; which happens to be the gothic mode. While evil can be comprehended, God or, the sovereign good is not so easy to configure within human intelligibility, King remarks about the intractability of God:

Johnny made no effort to wipe away the boy's spittle.
 "Listen to me, David. I'm going to tell you something you didn't learn from your minister or your Bible. For all I know it's a message from God himself. Are you listening?"

David only looked at him, saying nothing.

"You said 'God is cruel' the way a person who's lived his whole life on Tahiti might say 'Snow is cold.' You knew, but you didn't understand." He stepped close to David and put his palms on the boy's cold cheeks. "Do you know how cruel your God can be, David. How fantastically cruel?"

David waited, saying nothing. Maybe listening, maybe not. Johnny couldn't tell.

"Sometimes he makes us live." (*Desperation* 270)

Earlier in our exhaustive analysis of *The Stand* we have seen how Mother Abigail had been purified by God to ready herself for a final battle with the evil in the post-plague world of *The Stand* where evil resides in the west of America. She had to live through the Jim Crow laws and see all her children and grandchildren die apart from other concrete misfortunes that had beset her, for instance her extreme poverty as a young

woman. In *The Sunset Limited* McCarthy has his own understanding of the mysteries of life presented to us:

I loathe these discussions. The argument of the village atheist whose single passion is to revile endlessly that which he denies the existence of in the first place...The shadow of the axe hangs over every joy. Every road ends in death. Or worse. Every friendship. Every love. Torment, betrayal, loss, suffering, pain, age, indignity, and hideous lingering illness. All with a single conclusion. For you and for every one and everything that you have chosen to care for. There's the true brotherhood. The true fellowship. And everyone is a member for life. You tell me that my brother is my salvation? My salvation? Well then damn him. Damn him in every shape and form and guise. Do I see myself in him? Yes. I do. And what I see sickens me. Do you understand me? Can you understand me? (*The Sunset Limited* 137-138)

It is this human need to “understand” why both evil and good coexist and God allows them to do so, is what McCarthy and King keep writing of in both their works. We have mapped evil in their works in this thesis but like all attempts to understand God, is thwarted by both their fictional accounts and the very limitations of the finite nature of the human sciences. Also, we find that McCarthy deliberates on the problematics of dealing with the transcendent, because, for all practical purposes, there seems to be no voice echoing in our minds other than our own:

The universe in its billions of years remains a creation of total silence and total blackness. The incendiary explosions of the novae can be no more than optical constructions and no matter what your view of the nature of reality they can have no existence in the absence of an eye or something very like it. And the likelihood of such an instrument coming into being anywhere other than in

the natural history of the earth seems more than vanishingly slim. The truth is that there is limited evidence for the existence of the visual. (What? What's he saying?) To what might it be compared? That which is seen is pretty much left to speak for itself. (McCarthy *Kekulé Problem* n.pag.)

Cormac McCarthy is not nihilistic or atheistic here. He states the problematics involved in perception, that is, of interpretation, or, hermeneutics which when it comes to God, naturally fails. No theologian can prove the existence of God since theology is categorically different from philosophy in that theology begins with faith. This thesis has tried to address the issue of evil, and in the process of doing so, has found evidence within the fiction of McCarthy and King, that the telos of history, is not evil, but it gestures towards the sovereign good or, God. According to Cormac McCarthy this world of ours is not bereft of beauty and the immeasurable good. In *The Crossing*, McCarthy points out that:

There is but one world and everything that is imaginable is necessary to it. For this world also which seems to us a thing of stone and flower and blood is not a thing at all but is a tale. And all in it is a tale and each tale the sum of all lesser tales and yet these are also the selfsame tale and contain as well all else within them. So everything is necessary. Every least thing. This is the hard lesson. Nothing can be dispensed with. Nothing despised. Because the seams are hid from us, you see. The joinery. The way in which the world is made. We have no way to know what could be taken away. What omitted. We have no way to tell what might stand and what might fall. (*The Crossing* 142-3)

The articulation of evil is easy since we find pain and suffering everywhere but we do not perceive directly God who is the subject of Christian theology. At the end of *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy writes in the *Epilogue* of human history beginning anew:

In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground. He uses an implement with two handles and he chucks it into the hole and he enkindles the stone in the hole with his steel hole by hole striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there...(*Blood Meridian* 355)

Now turning to genres and questions of art, even now, American popular literature is not taken seriously by mainstream literary scholars. It does not appear that the scene has changed much from the days of Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis and Harold Bloom. Arnold wrote in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-8) that it was:

fatal to Americans to have no religious establishments and no effective centres of high culture; but it is fatal to them to be told by their flatterers, and to believe, that they are the most intelligent people in the whole world, when of intelligence, in the true and fruitful sense of the word, they even singularly, as we have seen, come short.
(Arnold 27)

McCarthy and King have rectified and answered Matthew Arnold through their works as has been shown here. The late Harold Bloom had categorically dismissed Stephen King and praised Cormac McCarthy without, possibly reading King's corpus with respect. It is suggested that we begin studying popular literature with an open mind and begin taking American popular literature as a serious field of academic scrutiny. By reading Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King together, this thesis tries to show what we might lose if we do not practice such synoptic readings. American studies in particular and literary studies broadly have long forayed into interdisciplinarity. However, a strong case is made in these pages for approaching American popular literature which includes the American western, the American thriller and cult-horror novels through the lens of Christian theology. We have to remember that Stephen King focuses in his fiction on none other than God, who is more mysterious in his infinite possibilities than evil can be in its fungi like banality:

-when he [David] felt really in need of God, the front of his mind was serene, but the deeper part, where faith did

constant battle with doubt, was terrified that there would be no answer. The problem was simple enough. Even now, after all his reading and praying and instruction, even after what had happened to his friend, he doubted God's existence. *Had* God used him, David Carver, to save Brian Ross's life? Why would God do a wild and crazy thing like that? Wasn't it more likely that what Dr. Waslewski had called a clinical miracle and what David himself had thought of as an answered prayer had actually been nothing more than a clinical coincidence? People could make shadows that looked like animals, but they were still only shadows, minor tricks of light and projection. Wasn't it likely that God was the same kind of thing? Just another legendary shadow?

David closed his eyes tighter, concentrating on the mantra and trying to clear his mind.

See in me. Be in me. Speak in me if it's Your will.
(*Desperation 75*, Italics are King's)

Conversely, American Christian theologians like Walter Brueggemann have not as yet bothered to study accessible popular American cultural documents to find a ratiocination for their concerns which include such issues as sin, atonement and redemption. The American western too is a site where these concerns are articulated and the problem of empathy, or the inability to empathise is answered:

He [John Grady Cole] imagined the pain of the world to be like some formless parasitic being seeking out the warmth of human souls wherein to incubate and he thought he knew what made one liable to its visitations. What he had not known was that it was mindless and so had no way to know the limits of those souls and what he feared was that there might be no limits. (*All the Pretty Horses 214*)

Thus, the works of McCarthy and King emphasize the need for greater dialogue between literature and theology within the domain of popular culture studies. The thesis begins with a quotation from Leslie Fiedler and at the end of this dissertation we conclude that Leslie Fiedler's contention that when much of the so-called high art is forgotten, the gothic in all its forms will be remembered. For example, *Under the Dome* which is more about human free will and God-like omnipotence, drawing on the clockwork theory of creation, than it is about aliens, is more a theological tract than it is a science fiction futuristic horror story. Nonetheless, it has gone unremarked by both theologians and literary critics alike that American popular literature is about the hard questions of life: it asks of us, why everything remains the same even when our lives break down and how is it that God who is omnipotent allows everything to break down in the first place. Our long earlier discussions showing the weakness of God in the works of our two authors have partly answered this problem of why God permits suffering to exist in the first place.

Despite high art around us, we have to confront the real: none in the long future might care for high art. We end with the sombre thought that Shakespeare's contemporaries probably did not think that his plays will be adapted for streaming online while their plays will be relegated to class lectures and notes. This is for the simple reason that when Shakespeare wrote and directed his plays, even he had not foreseen the invention of the internet. However, now that we are cutting cables and the world is increasingly watching net-series' on their phones; it is Shakespeare and not his peers that Arnold's philistines and Eliot's uneducated consume. While millions of people watch *Gerald's Game* and *The Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin; very few care to read Thomas Pynchon. The reception of American popular cultural artefacts requires rethinking and more openness than which exists now. We end with parts of King's interview to Andy Greene in *The Rolling Stone* in 2014:

[Harold] Bloom never pissed me off because there are critics out there, and he's one of them, who take their ignorance about popular culture as a badge of intellectual prowess. He might be able to say that Mark Twain is a great writer, but it's impossible for him to say that there's a direct line of descent from, say, Nathaniel Hawthorne to Jim Thompson because he doesn't read guys like

Thompson [who wrote thrillers and hard case crime]. He just thinks, “I never read him, but I know he’s terrible.” (King and Greene *Interview* n.pag.)

From asking us to go beyond Harold Bloom in this interview, King also talks of evil:

I believe in evil, but all my life I’ve gone back and forth about whether or not there’s an outside evil, whether or not there’s a force in the world that really wants to destroy us, from the inside out, individually and collectively. Or whether it all comes from inside and that it’s all part of genetics and environment. When you find somebody like, let’s say, Ted Bundy, who tortured and killed all those women and sometimes went back and had sex with the dead bodies, I don’t think when you look at his upbringing you can say, “Oh, that’s because Mommy [abused him].” That behavior was hard-wired. Evil is inside us. The older I get, the less I think there’s some sort of outside devilish influence; it comes from people. And unless we’re able to address that issue, sooner or later, we’ll [certainly] kill ourselves. (King and Greene *Interview* n.pag.)

The cultural work that Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King accomplish is not limited to their radical revisions of formulaic genres or in their portrayal of theological verities. Both of them engage with contemporary Christian theology and, in the process, they also present a systematic theology in terms of their literary works. They focalise on the essentials of Christianity and decentre aspects of Patristics and contemporary theology, some of which are regressive. The genres of the supernatural thriller and the gothic western become for both authors sites where various theological issues are raised but only some are addressed.

The genres of the supernatural thriller, the supernatural western and the neo-western which gesture towards the gothic are theologically constructed by McCarthy and King. They ask questions about life and what happens after death in their fiction, thus opening up an eschatological space which needs further scrutiny. Many questions

raised by their works remain unanswered. In both their fiction, the relationship of humanity with God is explained within formulaic genres accessible in language which is contemporaneous in the case of Stephen King, while in the case of Cormac McCarthy the language often becomes Biblical. Nonetheless both authors raise the same spiritual questions about evil, God and the human condition. If box-office numbers and IMDb ratings are to be followed, even if the ordinary person does not read McCarthy's works for their medieval tone; even if none reads Stephen King because of the length of his books, even then, the public at large through online platforms have watched the cinematic adaptations of their works. McCarthy became known for the cinematic adaptation of *All the Pretty Horses* and King's movies remain blockbusters. Very few in the world today have not watched *It* on Netflix or have not watched *The Road* on other streaming platforms. This dissertation has attempted to show how crucial questions relating to Christianity which may have been imagined as pertaining only to theology may have significant literary repercussions.

The thesis ends with a note on the symbol of the quest that we find in King's *The Dark Tower* series. In the *Wolves of the Calla*, the gunslinger Roland affirms his mission:

The Tower's more important...and a certain rose
growing there...all things serve ka...(*Wolves of the Calla*
920)

While it important to know evil in all its manifestations so that by understanding pain and suffering we can end them, it is also very important that we take the cues from McCarthy and King and search for God since it is God alone who according to both these authors end for good the evil that otherwise endures. Ka in *The Dark Tower* series refers to God and the rose is a symbol within this series of the beauty and intractability of God. In Cormac McCarthy too we find the nameless boy understanding more about the meaning of life as rooted in goodness and God, than his father is able to answer in the post-nuclear world they live in:

The frailty of everything revealed at last. Old and
troubling issues resolved into nothingness and night. The
last instance of a thing takes the class with it. Turns out
the light and is gone. Look around you. Ever is a long

time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all. (*The Road* 24).

Ever is no time at all within the salvation history of man as found in the fiction of Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. As had been pointed out, after the gunslinger reaches the Dark Tower, he begins the journey all over again because it is the truth of God which elides man for ever in our search for meaning. Everything may be frail and life might resolve into nothingness but the little boy knows that there is meaning in life and he is to go forth in a world destroyed by war with the understanding that he alone possessed.

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