

# Blood Meridian: An Adaptation of an Ending

Blood Meridian  
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## Introduction

Cormac McCarthy's western historical "bloody and starkly beautiful tale" (Woodward), *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West*, first published in 1985, has been referred to as a "west Texas noir" (Ellis), a "mystifying book" (Arnold), "McCarthy's most noteworthy book" (Phillips), and much more. Even though the novel initially received relatively little praise, after McCarthy was given the 1992 National Book Award for fiction for another novel called *All the Pretty Horses*, his work started gaining prominence. *Blood Meridian* was soon by many acknowledged as "a canonical imaginative achievement" (Bloom) which was argued to be on the same literary level as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* or William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Academic discussion around the novel ranges from question whether the work can be considered a western and question whether the work can be considered any specific genre at all. Dana Phillips acknowledges this complexity concerning western conventions and *Blood Meridian*. In her article "History and the Ugly Facts [...]", she describes how, after *Blood Meridian* was first published, critics tried to "map out this novel's outlandish aesthetic and moral territories" and failed by simply blurting out opposing themes which, as Phillips notes as well, do not interpret the novel, but merely emphasize the novel's variety of subjects (434).

*Blood Meridian* centers around the experiences of its protagonist the Kid, a teenager who spends most of his time with a gang of scalp hunters just after the Mexican-American war which lasted from 1846 until the end of 1848. They are referred to as the Glanton gang, because of its leader John Joel Glanton. The Glanton gang travels around the United States-Mexican borderlands, slaughtering Native Americans and many others in an attempt to collect as many scalps for bounty as they can, and eventually merely for the sheer pleasure, it seems, of killing and scalping

innocent Mexican civilians. The combination of the way McCarthy structured his narrative and the variety of themes in the work makes it hard to interpret it as a whole. This has made it hard for screenwriters and filmmakers to adapt the story into a film or television series, which, to this day, has not happened yet. The only visual representation of *Blood Meridian* to date is a 30 minute test reel made by James Franco, which merely displays a group of men riding horses through dry land with only a hint of the violence of the original novel.

Instead of analysing an already existing form of visual adaptation or representation, this thesis will use academic articles and other research as a foundation to suggest a visualisation of the final part of *Blood Meridian*. For the cinematic choices that are made, research will be presented to support those particular choices. When a specific text or play is adapted into a film or television series, an intermedial transition takes place. The transition from *Blood Meridian*'s written text to the final visual adaptation will be at the heart of this thesis. Sound, editing, cinematography and content are four of the most significant cinematic aspects, which is why they have been selected to be discussed in this thesis.

The events that occur between the judge and the kid at the end of the novel remain undescribed by McCarthy. While in the rest of the book the writer shies away from no particular gruesome occurrence nor does he refrain from describing any horrifying activity, he has chosen to do so in this last scene. This contrast between this part and the rest of the book makes the ending eligible and interesting to expand on it in this thesis, especially because it is so widely discussed by critics.

### **Scene Overview**

The part of the last chapter of *Blood Meridian* describes the last moments shared between the kid and the judge. The kid finds the judge in the toilets, where he sits

naked waiting for him and then “gather[s him] in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh” (*BM*, 351). McCarthy abruptly cuts off the reader’s insight into what occurs in the toilets between the two characters by shifting his narrative back to the dance hall, where a bear is still laying on stage in a pool of its own blood. Two men walk down the boards towards the toilets, which are called “jakes”, where a third man is peeing onto the ground. They ask him if there is someone in there, after which he tells them “I wouldnt go in there if I was you” (*BM*, 352). The two men do not follow his advice and enter the jakes, only for one of them to exclaim “Good God almighty” and the other to follow his example and looking in as well. McCarthy, thereupon, once again cuts off this image, by switching back to the bear that is now being rolled onto a wagon sheet and the saloon continuing its regular clamour. Soon after the judge is found on the dancefloor where he dances with ladies and keeps calling out that “he will never die” (*BM*, 353).

### **Thesis Outline**

The chapters of this BA thesis are structured according to particular cinematic aspects. Since this is an English Bachelor’s Thesis, the cinematic aspects will be explained concisely at the start of each chapter and later on connected with the research done on *Blood Meridian*. The introduction is followed by a short overview of the scene that will be adapted and a few lines on the outline of the chapters. The original prose by Cormac McCarthy can be found in Appendix A. The thesis outline will be followed by the first chapter, which provides argumentation for and explanation of the choices made concerning the sound that accompanies the final adaptation. The second chapter explains the editing of the scene, which is to say, the shots that follow after one another, but also the order and the result of this specific

order for the content of the shots. Subsequently, chapter three will elaborate on the camera angles and manner of filming used in the shots of the adaptation. In chapter four, the content of the shots in the adaptation will be discussed. While McCarthy has chosen the kid as the protagonist of the novel, he is hardly described physically and in some parts is even completely left out, which is why choices concerning his (physical) appearance need to be supported and explained. Whether the kid is sexually assaulted by the judge in the final part of the novel is also widely discussed by critics, which is why it will be elaborated on in the final chapter as well. To complete and conclude the thesis, a storyboard will act as a visualisation of the particular shots and the structure of the scene proposed and discussed in the earlier chapters.

## 1. Sound

While normally sound accompanies the action, sound in the cinema is produced and structured independently from its visual. In *Film Art*, David Bordwell elaborates that “this makes sound as flexible and wide-ranging as other film techniques” (264). Like other film techniques, there are ways in which sound can play with its viewers’ expectations or strengthen the visual. Bordwell explains a few which will be connected with parts of the academic discussion surrounding *Blood Meridian*. The sound underlying the adaptation will be carefully supported with sources from that discussion and the choices will be clarified.

In her article “Apocalyptic Western,” Inger-Anne Søvting comments on the resemblances and differences between *Blood Meridian* and the classic western. A western, she says, consists of canonical binaries, like wilderness and civilization or masculine and feminine. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner was one of the first researchers to elaborate on the historical balance between wilderness and civilisation in his book *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Turner’s thesis concerns the transition of civilisation into wilderness, but more specifically, the transition of civilised men into less civilised men. Søvting connects his research with *Blood Meridian* and claims this canonical binary of civilisation and wilderness does not exist in the novel. She notes that “rather than inverting these canonical binaries, McCarthy dissolves the oppositional apparatus by giving exclusive attention to one side of the binary only” (Søvting 18). This leads her to believe that *Blood Meridian* is an “anti-Western”, rather than a revisionist Western (18). Whereas a revisionist Western would rebalance the binary oppositions in the work, for example, making females the leading characters in the western instead of men, *Blood Meridian* solely pushes the opposition even further and gives the femininity and women hardly any

attention. The same happens with the civilisation-wilderness opposition. McCarthy pushes wilderness to its limits in his book, which results in a constant whirlwind of barbarism. Jay Ellis writes that “[*Blood Meridian*] tests its reader, and its protagonist, with the severity of its violence” (85).

In his work, Turner also displays that American history has been shaped around the transition from civilisation to barbarism, from one side of the blood meridian to the other side. Søfting agrees. As it is described in the *Collins COBUILD Dictionary*, the definition of *meridian* is as follows: “A point or period of highest development, greatest prosperity, or the like” (557). Combined with, in this case, the adjective *blood*, it depicts the high development of mankind as a result of the gigantic amount of violence that preceded this development. Ellis agrees, as he states that “the golden time longed for at the end of [*Blood Meridian*] was purchased with the blood of thousands of people and animals” (86). Even though the time and setting in *Blood Meridian* resemble time and setting in many other western novels, Ellis’s statement emphasises that this novel is actually very different. Instead of romanticising violence like the classical western does, *Blood Meridian* exhibits the cruelty and gruesomeness of this violence. This comparison between *Blood Meridian* and the classical western, though, can solely be made when it is clear what a classical western is. The work *West of Everything* by Jane Tompkins is a valuable source for this, as she lays out the most important characteristics of the western in her introduction:

The West functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest. It seems to offer escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society [...] The desire to change places also signals a powerful need for self-transformation. The desert light and the desert space, the creak of

the saddle leather and the sun beating down, [etc.] these things promise a translation of the self into something purer and more authentic [...] (4).

The above quoted summarizes the key concept with which *Blood Meridian* can be connected. As Søvting claims, all these themes and aspects make their appearance in the novel, yet reflect none of the positive and adventurous aspects that people today are so familiar with when it comes to the westerns they read and see on screens (15). When the reader goes on a journey with the kid and travels with the scalphunting gang, it is indeed an “escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society,” as the gang makes a living by unorthodoxically scalping native Americans and not by working on a farm or in factories. Moreover, the word “conquest” is hereby also applicable, because the gang mainly tries to pursue the gang leader of the Apaches group named Gomez. The perception of these features mentioned by Tompkins, however, changes when McCarthy sheds such a gloomy and nihilistic light on them. As a result of the gruesome violence in the novel, the liveliness and adventurousness normally surrounding a western is completely dissipated in *Blood Meridian*.

The differences between a western and this, what Søvting calls an, “anti western” will form the heart of the choices made around the aspect of sound. In a classic western film, there is a great amount of heroic or thrilling music accompanying the similarly heroic shots of men on horses riding through deserts (Dirks). To proceed from Søvting’s arguments, there will be no music in this adaptation. In westerns, this adventurous music draws the audience into the adventures of its protagonist. McCarthy tries to do the opposite in his novel. There are no canonical binaries; there is just the gruesome violence that McCarthy pushes in the faces of his readers. It would be a betrayal of McCarthy’s decision to reject these binaries and have classic western music accompany *Blood Meridian*’s imagery. It

would defeat McCarthy's efforts as a writer and the strength of his plot would dissolve because of it. Accordingly, there will be only real time audio underlying the adaptation. As an audience, one expects to be swept away into the adventures of the film, but this is not the aim of *Blood Meridian*: the writing style creates distance and ossifies or petrifies its public. The kid is ostensibly killed in the final pages by the judge. Bordwell notes that "sound gives a new value to silence. A quiet passage in a film can create almost unbearable tension" (264). Adding only real time sound to this adaptation will thusly strengthen the way McCarthy has created his prose because of its abundance of silence in the first shot. Hearing the gruesome sounds of a murder in the proceeding shots will alienate its viewers. The way the audio is edited and arranged into the scene will be discussed in the following chapter about editing.



## 2. Editing

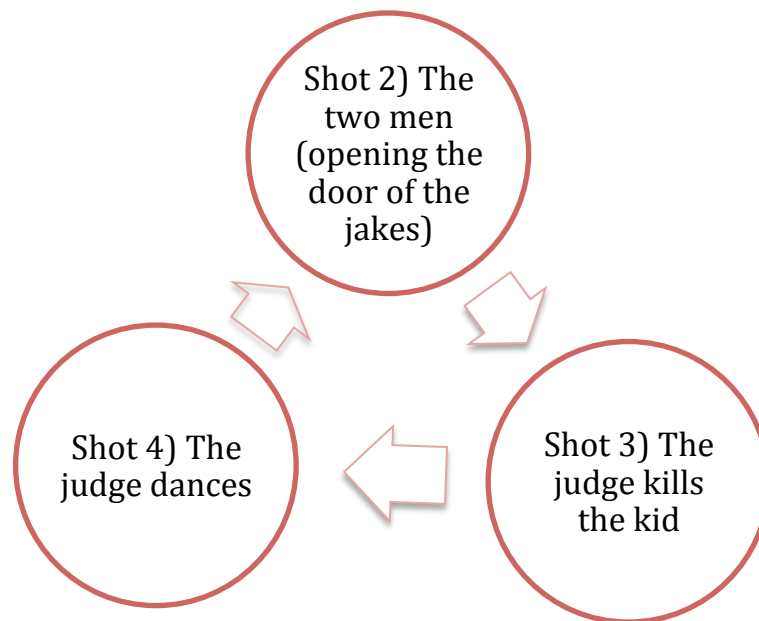
Although editing is a very broad term, the editing that is going to be discussed in this chapter is the editing of film. David Bordwell defines editing as “the coordination of one shot with the next” (218). A common term in film editing is a cut, which is the “physical junction from shot to shot” (Bordwell 218). In *Film Art*, Bordwell elaborates on the Hollywood system of continuity, in which an editor tries to structure his sequences in a most natural way possible so that the viewer hardly realises its looking at film instead of real life. However, he also explains how one can deviate from this kind of editing and how these deviations can symbolise different aspects of the content of the shots or the film. The deviations and sequence of the shots in this adaptation will be supported by research concerning *Blood Meridian*.

One of the most important paradoxes for this thesis is explained by Patrick W. Shaw in his piece “The Kid’s Fate, the Judge’s Guilt.” In this article, he tries to distinguish and verbalise the violent paradox that defines *Blood Meridian*. For this he uses a vocabulary formed by Erich Fromm in his work *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. Fromm explains that there are two types of violence or aggression (25). The first of which is benign or defensive aggression, which is the state that comes into effect when humans are in danger, a state that “insure[s] survival, and it ends when the threat to survival ends” (Shaw 104). This type of violence is present in all (animal) species. The other type of aggression is malignant, which is “cruel and destructive, has no basis in biological adaptation, and is unique to Homo Sapiens” (Fromm 25). “[This] benign-defensive aggression is rooted in human instinct and the malignant-destructive aggression is rooted in human character” (Shaw 104). Essentially, Fromm states that malignant aggression defines and characterises the human race. This violent paradox lies at the root of *Blood Meridian*.

The judge is the personification of malignant violence. In multiple parts of the book, he appears to be killing people, including children, for sheer pleasure and for simply no other reason than that he can. He believes in violence as if it is his religion and claims that there can be no life without war. Erik Hage in his work *A Literary Companion to Cormac McCarthy* has observed that “in McCarthy’s borderlands novels there is always the looming awareness that civilizations will rise and civilizations will fall, but what is constant is war, brutality, and death” (Hage 38). The kid is placed opposite this consistent presence of violence. Although the kid participates in the violence performed by the Glanton gang, McCarthy never explicitly describes the kid doing anything other than copying his gangmembers’ acts. The kid does not stand out in the way he handles violence, which the judge obviously does. There is an increasing amount of tension between the two characters because of this exact side to the kid’s character. The judge believes that war is a sort of dance that everybody eventually partakes in and cannot suddenly step out of, which becomes clear in chapter 23; “it makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. War endures. [...] War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way” (*BM*, 186). The judge believes that war is a constant aspect of life and this is supported by McCarthy’s thorough and constant description of violence and graphic horror in the book.

To visualise this vicious circle of history argued by the judge, shot 2-4 are edited like a circle too. Shot 2, the image of the two men opening the door of the jakes, is followed by shot 3, wherein the judge kills the kid, which is followed by shot 4, in which the judge is dancing on the dancefloor. Then, shot 4 is followed up again by shot 2, to visualise that time and time again in history violence recurs. Violence is

a circle and the shots are similarly structured. The sounds underlying these shots, however, differ from the images.



In the beginning, shots 2-4 will be accompanied with real time audio, as if the moments are happening at that exact moment with their original sound. After the shots have been shown a few times, however, the sound will start to deviate from the original circle and the sound of the killing, for example, will be edited under the visuals of the judge dancing, which creates an alienating effect for the public. As a viewer, one hears not what one sees. This audio deviation symbolises the resistance of the kid, because he, in a way, refuses to participate in the judge's dance of violence by committing only the necessary crimes as well as showing mercy in several parts of the book. One of the most prominent examples is when the kid is left behind with Shelby, who lies wounded on the ground with a shattered hip. The kid suggests to the gang that he will stay behind to kill Shelby while they can go on. Eventually, he does not kill the wounded man, but hides him behind a bush and rides out: "The kid crossed to where the horse stood waiting and took the pistol and stuck it in his belt and hung the canteen over the saddlehorn and mounted up and looked back at the wounded man. Then he rode out" (*BM*, 220). The mercy the kid shows here is a form of resistance,

which will be discussed further in the next chapter about camera angles.

In the last two pages of the novel, McCarthy uses his prose to confuse his reader by switching from one situation to the next without any introduction or transitional prose. These cuts are marked with a line in the original prose attached in the scene overview at the beginning of this thesis on page 6. Lines 1-3 describe how the kid and the judge meet in the jakes and how they hug. Then, there is a switch in line 4, back to the saloon in which the bear is still lying on stage and bleeding to death. The reader is forced to observe this setting now, in which two men make their way to the forementioned jakes in which the reader knows to be the judge and the kid. The men open the door of the jakes and are shocked by what they find, but in that same moment, in line 23 McCarthy again switches from the jakes back to the saloon, denying the reader the knowledge of what exactly the men in the jakes witness.

David Bordwell's work *Film Art* will be used to transform this literary trick into visual language. Bordwell distinguishes two devices with which discontinuity can be entangled in the editing of a visual representation. The first of which is called a jump cut, which Bordwell explains is "when two shots of the same subject are cut together but are not sufficiently different in camera distance and angle [which has] a noticeable jump on the screen [as a result]" (254). Bordwell mentions a second device, which he calls the nondiegetic insert: "here," he explains, "the filmmaker cuts from the scene to a metaphorical or symbolic shot that is not part of the space and time of the narrative" (254).

For the adaptation in this thesis, the jump cut will be combined with the nondiegetic insert. Instead of cutting to a similar but slightly differentiating shot or to a metaphorical shot, the cuts in the adaptation will switch from a specific place and time to another, as a way of symbolising and resembling McCarthy's writing style.

The switches in lines 4 and 23 will be copied in the editing of the shots in the adaptation. Shot 2 is of the men, shot 3 is of the judge killing the kid and shot 4 is of the saloon when the slaughtering is already over. These drastic switches result in an overall feeling of distortness, as Bordwell agrees that: "Far from flowing unnoticeably, such cuts are very visible, and they disorient the spectator" (254). By letting these shots succeed each other, the feeling of confusion is evoked in the viewer of the adaptation in the same way it was evoked in the readers of the original book.

### 3. Cinematography

While chapter four discusses what is filmed in the adaptation, this chapter will discuss the way it is filmed. David Bordwell divides cinematography into three sections: “the photographic aspects of the shot, the framing of the shot, and the duration of the shot” (162). The first two of these sections will be discussed in combination with a particular convention of the western film and appropriate support in the form of academic discussion surrounding *Blood Meridian*. The third aspect, the duration of the shot, has been discussed in the previous chapter on editing.

Even though Søvting has made clear that *Blood Meridian* at its heart is an “anti-western”, there are still a few features of the novel that do resemble the classic conventions of the western genre. Especially the plot is significant to this comparison. The central storyline of a classic western film is the simple conquest of maintaining order on the frontier. This conquest is mostly rooted in archetypal conflict, where good is put up against evil, the new arrivals are put up against the Native Americans, etc. The central plot in *Blood Meridian* does not differ from this very much: the Glanton gang is put opposite the Mexicans and Native Americans and two distinct sides are created. The hero of a classic western film is put in the same position opposite his equal: a reflection of the hero’s evil side that he has to eventually destroy (Dirks). Again, *Blood Meridian* does not deviate very much from this convention, since the kid could symbolise the hero, while the judge symbolises his evil self. To visualise this core resemblance between the classical western film genre and *Blood Meridian*, the adaptation will largely copy the colours used in this genre. Dirks describes that the colours used in westerns are mainly defined by the content of the shot, i.e. landscapes. Since the content of this adaptation will deviate in content from a classic western, the colours displayed will deviate as a natural consequence. Content

will be discussed further in the next chapter. The photographic aspect of the shots will enable the viewer to recognise the adaptation as a western at first, yet will be confused when the structure and content of the scene deviate from their initial expectations.

Appropriate clothing, which is also part of the photographic aspect, from around 1850 will be used to contribute to this recognition.

In his article “The Dance of History in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*”, John Emil Sepich elaborates on reasons why the judge kills the kid in the final moments of the novel. He connects the Tarot card-reading scene from page 86 of *Blood Meridian* with the murder. The kid draws a particularly important card from the deck of the Spanish juggler: “Quatro de copas” (*BM*, 100). It is explained by Sepich to symbolise a “divided heart” and is associated with “the quality of mercy” (Sepich 22). This divided heart could equal the forementioned “clemency” shown by the kid, for which the judge punishes him in the ending. To visualise this particular side of the kid’s character, the first shot in the scene, in which the judge and the kid face each other in the jakes, will be en profil. By framing the shot in this particular way, the two characters are displayed as two sides opposing each other, just like the way malignant and benign violence oppose each other in *Blood Meridian* constantly. In the shot, the kid is a personification of benign violence, because he has a “divided heart”, while the judge will personify malignant violence, because he seems to have no heart at all. Optically, the screen will be split in two in the same way the world of *Blood Meridian* is split in two: with benign violence on one side and malignant violence on the other. This shot can be found in the last chapter of this paper, containing the storyboard.

The camera angles and framing of the shots in the adaptation will break with classic western genre conventions. Søfting argues that *Blood Meridian* is an “anti-western” (18), which will also form the basis of decisionmaking concerning the

camera standpoints. Western films contain a great amount of wide shots, which exhibit the rough landscapes and film the characters while they are adventurously discovering these landscapes (Dirks). *Blood Meridian* is, however, stripped from this adventurousness, says Søvting, and the adaptation will be as well (18). The adaptation of the ending discussed in this thesis will contain no wide shots but only medium shots and close up shots (Bordwell 191). This way the adaptation will deviate from western film conventions and represent the ‘anti-westerness’ that Søvting asserts.

Western film is also defined by its many static shots. Combined with the wide shots, this staticness increases the feeling of adventure and conquest, which Tompkins has explained in her work to surround western literature. The adaptation will deviate from this aspect of western film conventions as well: it will only contain handheld shots. These handheld shots will make the shots more realistic and less cinematic, which mimics McCarthy’s realistic writing style. As a result, every shot in the adaptation is either a handheld medium shot or a handheld close up.



#### 4. Content

The protagonist or the hero in a western book or film is usually looked up to by its readers or viewers: “For what the hero experiences is what the audience experiences; what he does, they do too” (Tompkins 6). McCarthy never accredits his readers with this kind of connection with the character of the kid. This is because the kid is part of such a great amount of violence. It distances the readers from the protagonist and his adventures, which makes them disgusted with his experiences, rather than experience events with him, as Tompkins states. Additionally, the distance between the protagonist and the readers is created by the way McCarthy has structured the narrative around the kid. In some parts of the book, the plot seems to have forgotten him as its hero and he is hardly mentioned at all. His name is also a device used by McCarthy to prevent the readers from empathising with him. He is merely called *the kid* throughout the novel. Additionally, his physical appearance is never described in detail, nor is his character.

While Søfting has the forementioned tendency to compare *Blood Meridian* to a classical western in her analysis, both Harold Bloom and Steven Shaviro try to analyse *Blood Meridian*'s characters and violence by comparing it with Melville's *Moby Dick*. The connection Shaviro makes between the character of Ishmael and that of the kid is the most important one of the parallels between Melville's novel and *Blood Meridian* is. He notes that the kid is a drifter: he is silently resisting the judge in some passages, but mainly shies away from doing anything out of the ordinary. He engages in the same scalping activities the rest of the Glanton gang does, yet “never takes initiative” (15). Shaviro explains the character of the kid as someone who keeps his distance and observes, which is similar to Ishmael. It is exactly this trait that the judge finds so difficult to fathom and forms the reason as to why the judge shows

such an interest in him. Shaviro agrees “it is the kid’s very silence and unresponsiveness that the judge singles out in him” (15). Consequently, in the adaptation, the kid is the personification of benign violence opposed to the aggressive form of violence exhibited by the judge, but he will also personify cowardice. In the eyes of the judge, the kid is a coward. In the eyes of the reader, however, the kid is still only a kid, even though he also performs horrendous acts of war. In spite of it all, the reader pities him, probably because of his confession to a woman near the end of the novel:

He told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die (*BM*, 315).

This is one of the few occasions in the book that the reader is confronted with the kid’s vulnerability. In his MA Thesis, William Dean Clement comments that “This outpouring of the kid’s heart, as close to confession as *Blood Meridian* allows, [...] yields an understanding of the possibility of redemption with this compassionate gesture” (30). While the judge would consider this “understanding of the possibility of redemption” a weakness, the reader is given an opportunity to connect with the kid in a way that McCarthy has not allowed them to before. The reader develops a feeling of empathy by his child-like outburst. To represent this vulnerability on screen, a short actor will portray the kid, because he will seem more of a boy than a man, as opposed to the judge. In the adapted scene’s first shot, the judge will be towering over

the kid while he hugs him, because contrary to the kid's physical appearance, the judge's appearance is described in McCarthy's novel. When entering a church in the beginning of the novel, the judge as:

An enormous man dressed in an oilcloth slicker had entered the tent and removed his hat. He was bald as a stone and he had no trace of beard and he had no brows to his eyes nor lashes to them. He was close on to seven feet in height and he stood smoking a cigar even in this nomadic house of God and he seemed to have removed his hat only to chase the rain from it for now he put it on again (*BM*, 6).

The judge is described as a big man with no facial hair. The adaptation will keep in line with McCarthy's description of the judge as much as possible and will mainly oppose his characteristics with the kid's traits. While the judge is a very large man, the kid will be the opposite. While the judge will have no facial hair, the kid will have developed a beard by the time of the ending in the novel, which will hint that he never had any parents to teach him how to shave it off.

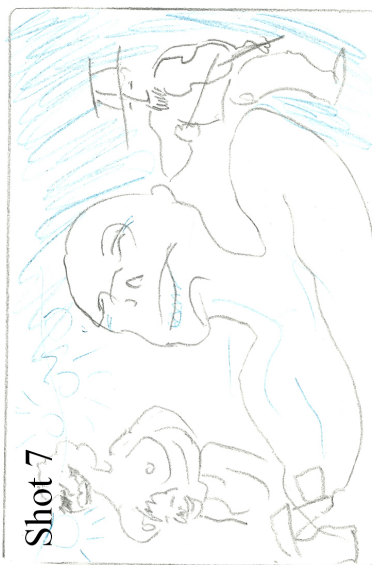
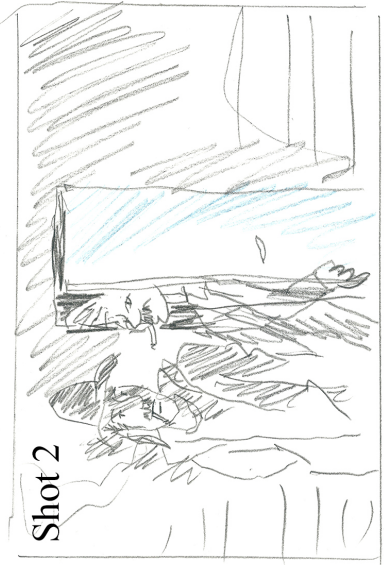
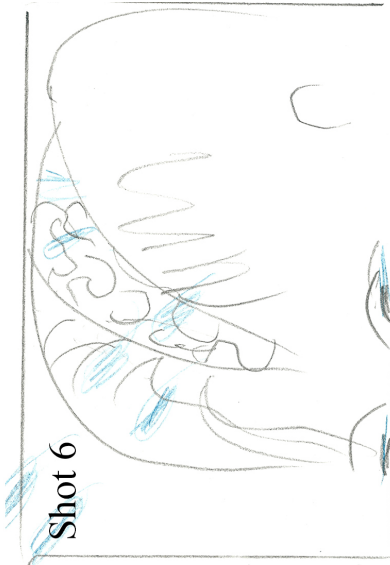
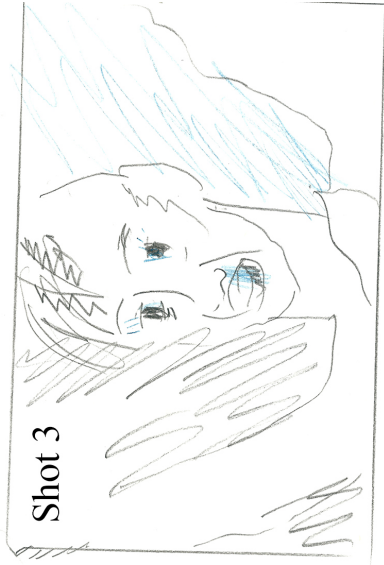
Apart from the judge's unusual appearance, it is significant that he apparently does not care about the place he is in or what it is supposed to symbolise. He is smoking in a church and is not accustomed to the unwritten rule of one taking one's hat off in such a place. Shaw comments that "As [far as] adults are concerned, the judge derives more satisfaction from tormenting than from eliminating" (106). For this, Shaw uses the judge's first act in the book as evidence. In the beginning of the book, judge Holden, essentially, frames a reverend into having violated "a girl of eleven years" (*BM*, 7), which was later admitted to be false by the judge himself in a bar full of laughing and approving townsmen. The judge apparently does not care

whether the reverend is killed or not, but “seems pleased to have destroyed his reputation and livelihood with a preposterous lie” (Shaw 107). This act by the judge is another exhibition of malignant violence. It is, Shaw explains, not just important to notice the judge’s sheer pleasure in tormenting others, but also the sexual violence that accompanies the malignant violence performed throughout the novel. Shaw sees this as a parallel to the relationship between the kid and the judge. In the eyes of the judge, the kid has “some corner of clemency for the heathen” (*BM*, 299), for which he should be comparably punished and humiliated like the reverend. In *the Achievement of Cormac McCarthy*, Vereen M. Bell explains this particular need for humiliation of the kid because “by the perverse logic that rules judge’s system of values, even this breach of faith is impermissible” (130). With this “clemency”, the kid violates the judge’s system of values and “commits a heresy” that he needs to see punished “in the most humiliating and devastating way” (Shaw 107).

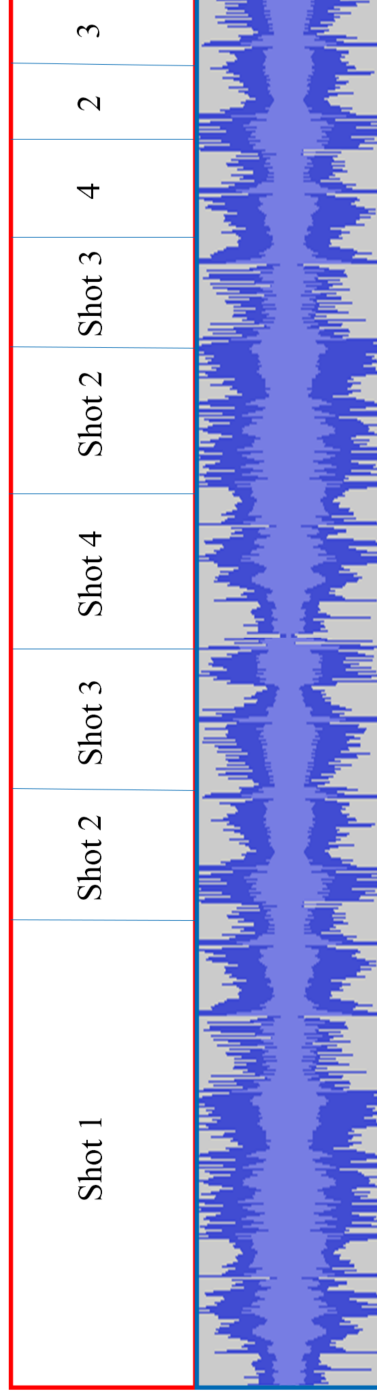
The adaptation in this thesis is based on the last two pages of the novel. The area they are in, however, is described in the book as an area in which “you can get clapped a day’s ride out when the wind is right” (336), which leads to believe that the three men by the jakes are no strangers to violence or slaughter. The man who is urinating outside the toilets has been sufficiently shocked by the sight of the inside of the toilets to warn the other two men not to go in, yet has not been as shocked as to lose his bodily need to urinate. Nonetheless, the men ignore his advice and are then shocked to silence apart from an exclamation; “Clearly, the men have seen something which experience and their androcentric culture has taught them to abhor” (Shaw 108). McCarthy, however, refrains from explicitly describing what it is that these men stumble upon in the jakes, which is a change from the rest of the novel, in which McCarthy does describe horrifying events in detail. What may have happened, and

why, has generated considerable speculation among critics. Shaw is convinced that the judge did not just murder the kid, but also sexually assaulted and humiliated him, as he comments that “The most consequential evidence is the judge’s identification with pedophilia” (108). Shaw has reason to believe so, since the judge is indeed seen with children in multiple parts of the book. The most significant event is the Judge’s relationship with the fool James Robert, whom he takes to his hut and later observes with a prepubescent girl while the three of them are naked. Even though this situation and similar occurrences in the book are not fully described, the reader is given enough information about the judge to be able to “visualize how Holden molests a child, [and] then silences them with aggression” (Shaw 109). The reason why the option of the judge sexually assaulting the kid is not featured in this adaptation is simply because the sexuality exhibited by the judge is not the only sexual assault that happens in the novel. On page 57, there has been a battle and “some [of the survivors] fell upon the dying and sodomized them with loud cries to their fellows”. Another example that should be researched along with the judge’s sexual endeavors is the moment when victims are hanged in trees with their own genitals cut up and put in their mouths. To simply put the judge’s sexual drifts into this adaptation of the ending would be unargued, since it is not only the judge who exhibits certain motives and therefore cannot be researched as such. The sexual assault of the kid argued by Bell and Shaw is not in the adaptation nor elaborated on in this thesis, since it goes simply beyond the scope of this research.

5. Storyboard



## Scene Overview



\*The scenes are shot in 4:3, instead of the usual 16:9, which will strengthen the non-existence of wide/long shots used in the adaptation.

\*All shots are filmed handheld

\*Shot 4 is filmed like it is the judge holding the camera, i.e. the viewer itself is 'dancing' with him. The viewer itself is in the dance of violence.

## Appendix A: The Original Prose by Cormac McCarthy

The judge was seated upon the closet. He was naked and he rose up smiling and gathered him in his arms against his immense and terrible flesh and shot the wooden barlatch home behind him.

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In the saloon two men who wanted to buy the hide were looking for the owner of the bear. The bear lay on the stage in an immense pool of blood. All the candles had gone out save one and it guttered uneasily in its grease like a votive lamp. In the dancehall a young man had joined the fiddler and he kept the measure of the music with a pair of spoons which he clapped between his knees. The whores sashayed half naked, some with their breasts exposed. In the mudded dogyard behind the premises two men went down the boards toward the jakes.

A third man was standing there urinating into the mud.

Is someone in there? the first man said.

The man who was relieving himself did not look up. I wouldnt go in there if I was you, he said.

Is there somebody in there?

I wouldnt go in. He hitched himself up and buttoned his trousers and stepped past them and went up the walk toward the lights. The first man watched him go and then opened the door of the jakes.

Good God almighty, he said.

What is it?

He didnt answer. He stepped past the other and went back up the walk. The other man stood looking after him. Then he opened the door and looked in.

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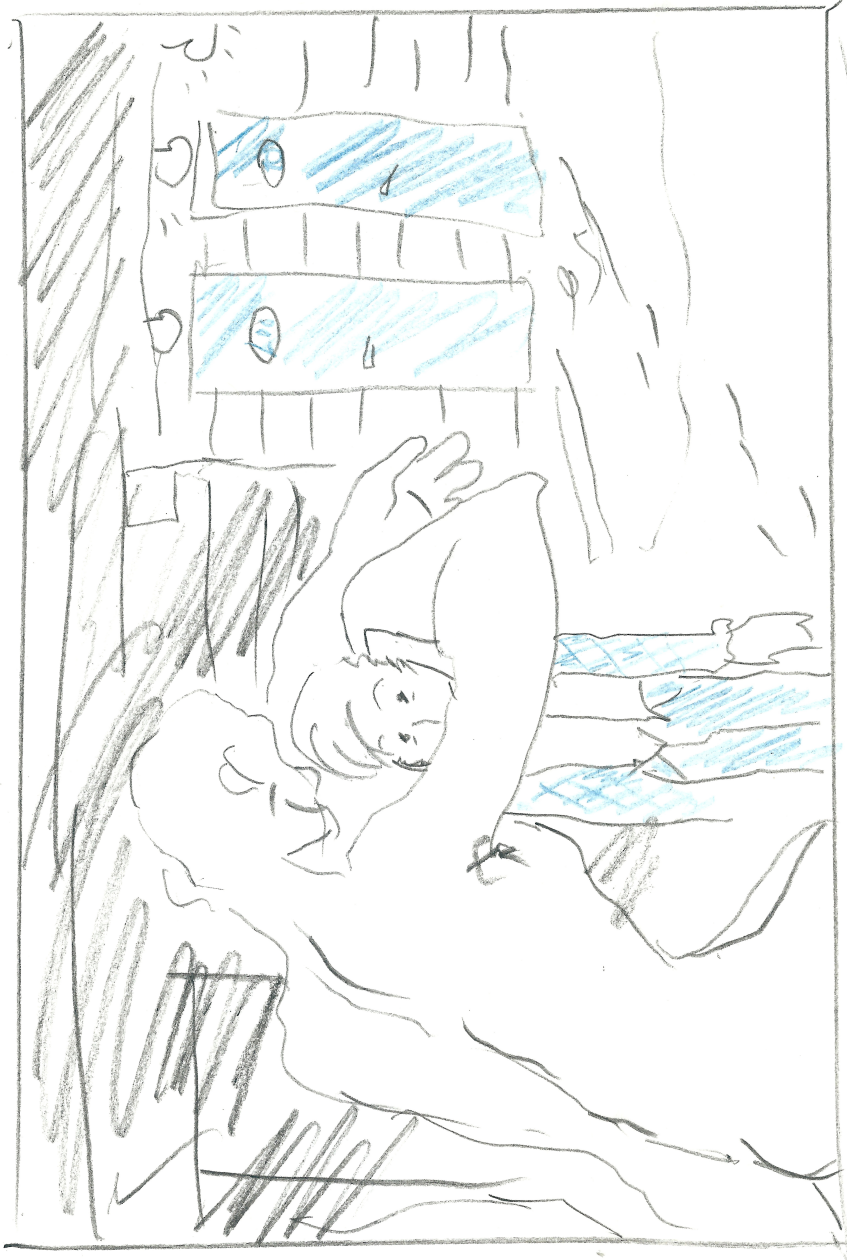
In the saloon they had rolled the dead bear onto a wagon sheet and there was a general call for hands. In the anteroom the tobacco smoke circled the lamps like an evil fog and the men bid and dealt in a low mutter. There was a lull in the dancing and a second fiddler took the stage and the two plucked their strings and turned the little hardwood pegs until they were satisfied. Many among the dancers were staggering drunk through the room and some had rid themselves of shirts and jackets and stood barechested and sweating even though the room was cold enough to cloud their breath. An enormous whore stood clapping her hands at the bandstand and calling

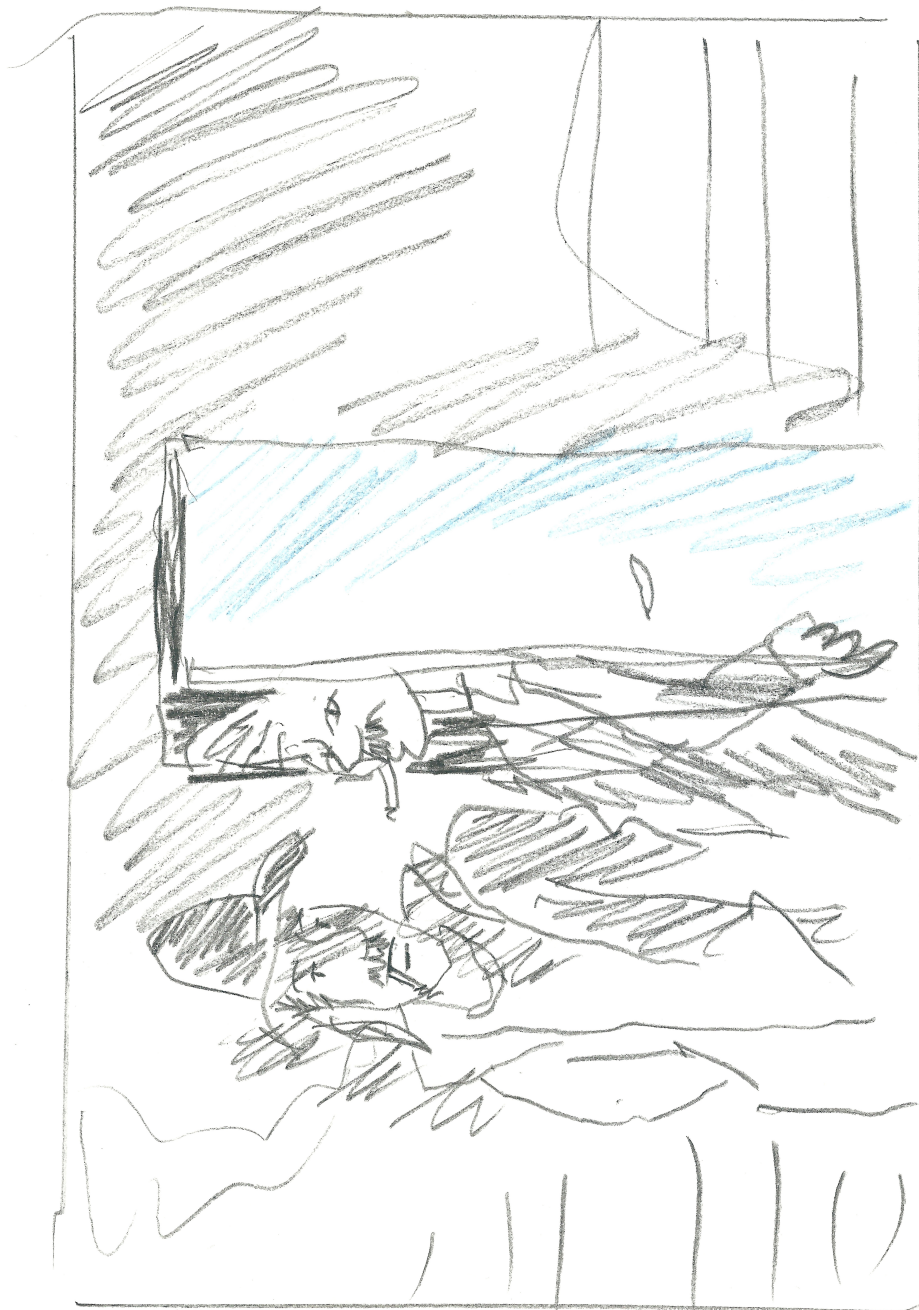


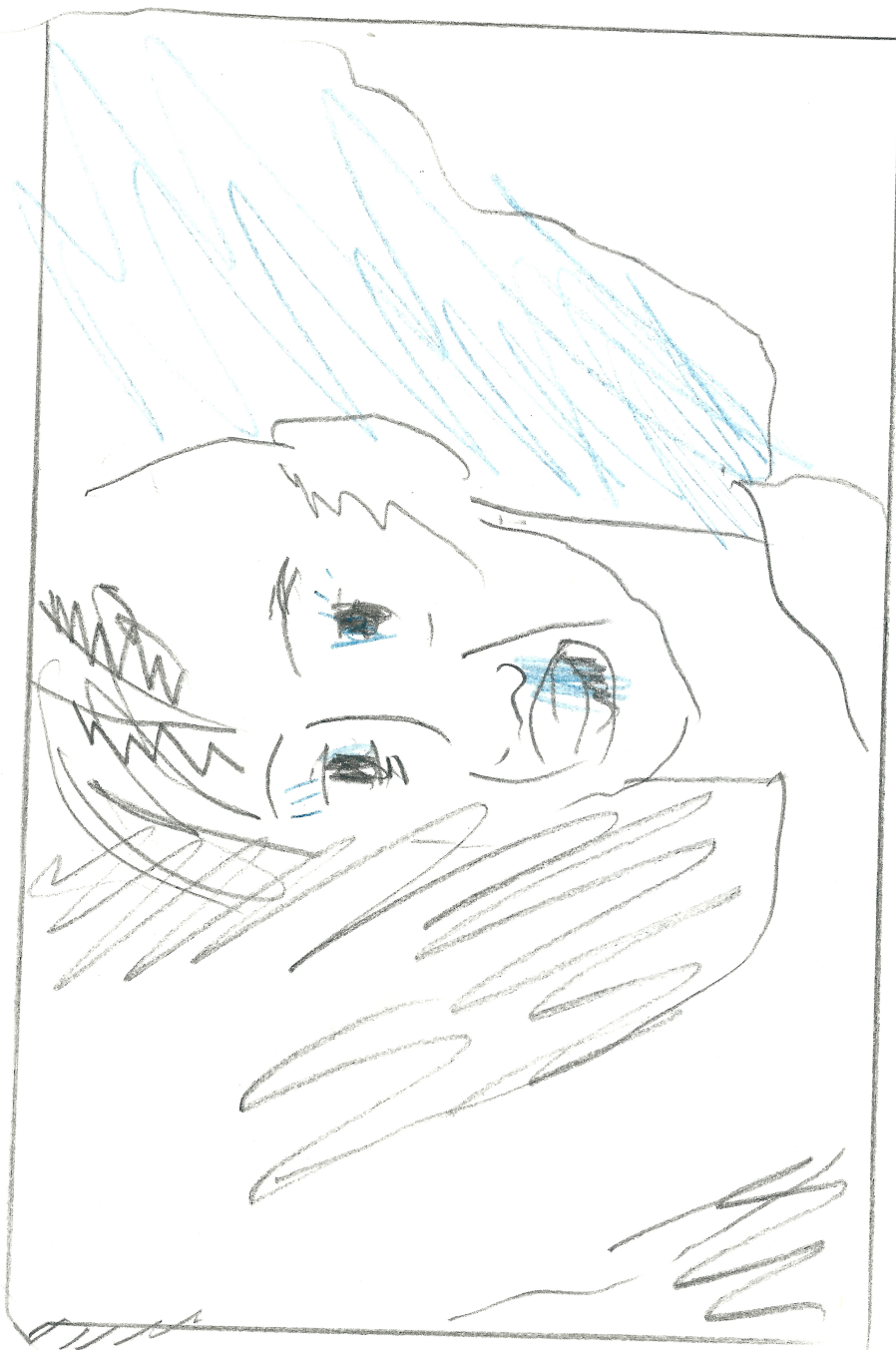
drunkenly for the music. She wore nothing but a pair of men's drawers and some of her sisters were likewise clad in what appeared to be trophies—hats or pantaloons or blue twill cavalry jackets. As the music sawed up there was a lively cry from all and a caller stood to the front and called out the dance and the dancers stomped and hooted and lurched against one another.

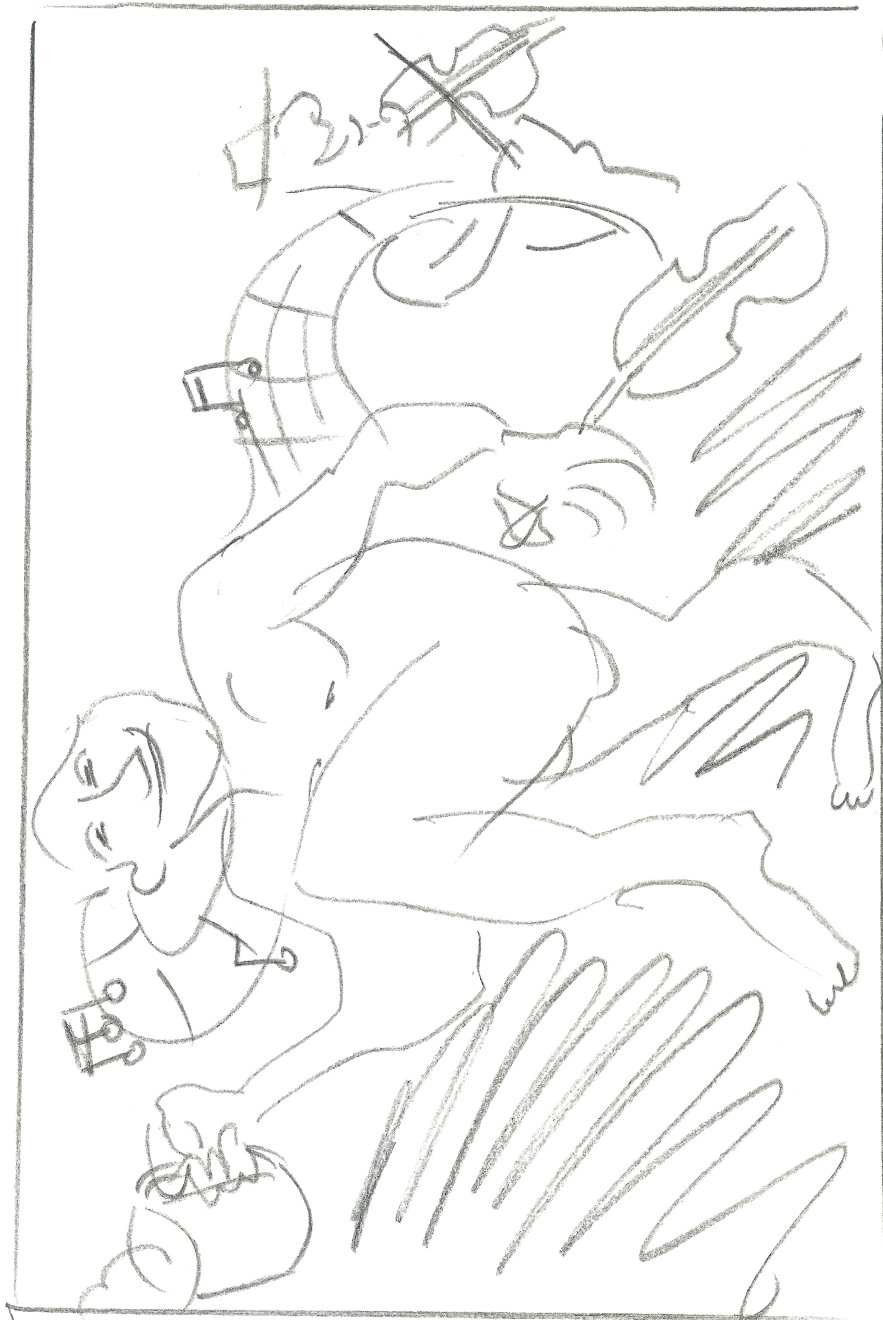
And they are dancing, the board floor slamming under the jackboots and the fiddlers grinning hideously over their canted pieces. Towering over them all is the judge and he is naked dancing, his small feet lively and quick and now in doubletime and bowing to the ladies, huge and pale and hairless, like an enormous infant. He never sleeps, he says. He says he'll never die. He bows to the fiddlers and sashays backwards and throws back his head and laughs deep in his throat and he is a great favorite, the judge. He wafts his hat and the lunar dome of his skull passes palely under the lamps and he swings about and takes possession of one of the fiddles and he pirouettes and makes a pass, two passes, dancing and fiddling at once. His feet are light and nimble. He never sleeps. He says that he will never die. He dances in light and in shadow and he is a great favorite. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die.

Appendix B: The Separate Shots

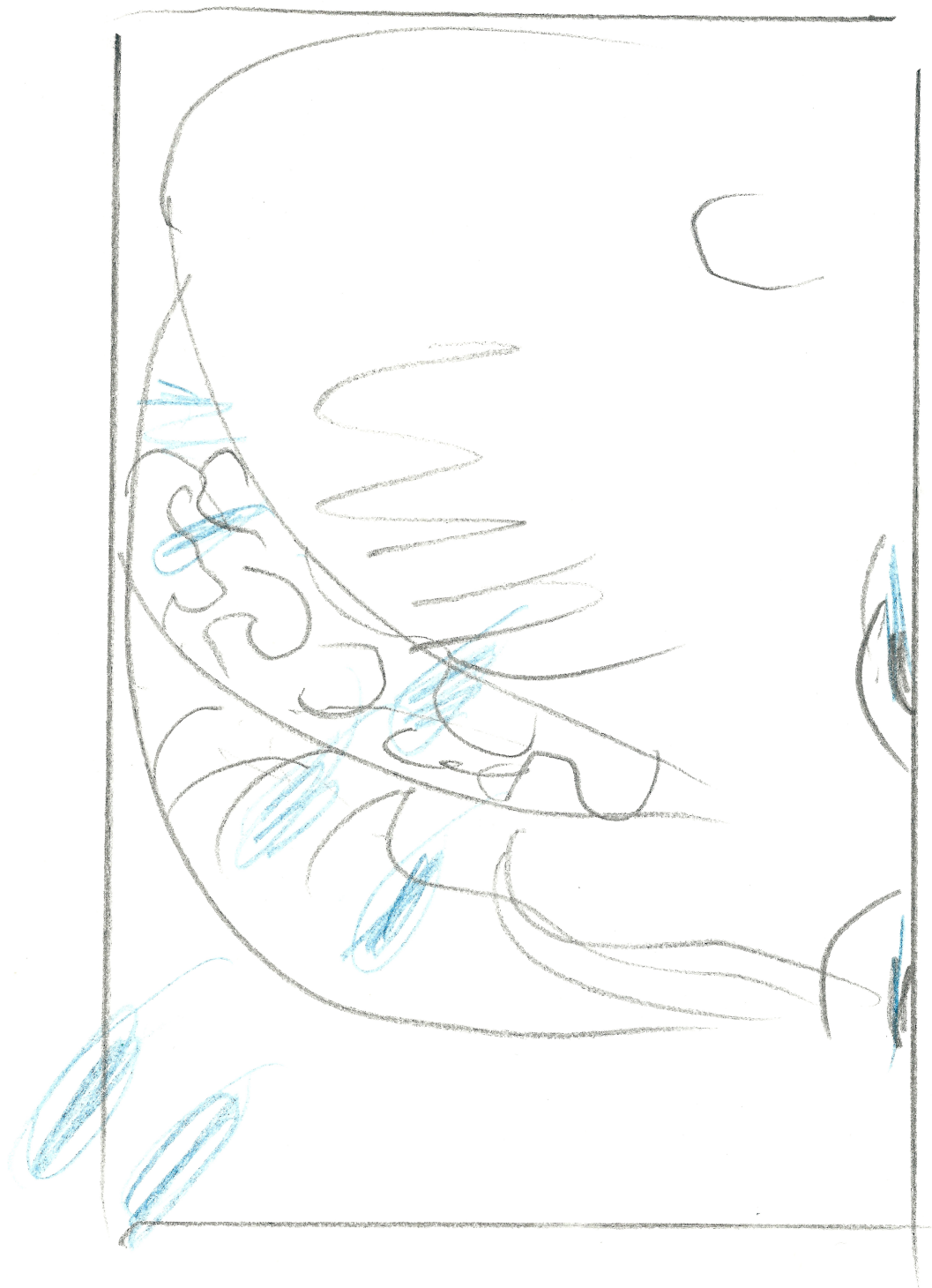




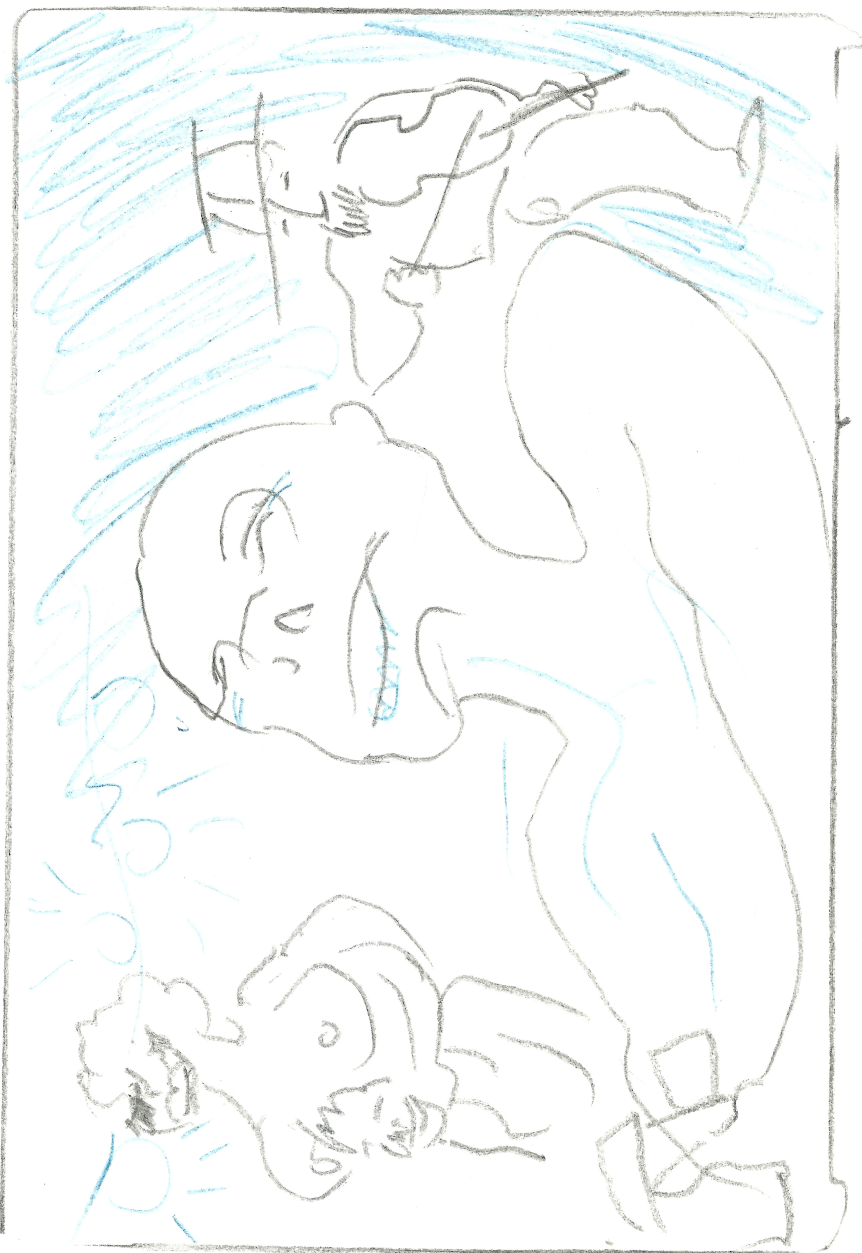














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