Abstract

This thesis explores the role of nature in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, arguing that both novels construct natural settings that shape, mirror and sometimes dominate human experience. Both novels are rooted in the Southern Gothic tradition and share many similarities. The study offers a comparative analysis constructed through close reading and supported by existing critical works on *As I Lay Dying* and *Bloom Meridian* and their Southern Gothic symbolism, psychology, and the uncanny.

The findings suggest that *As I Lay Dying* presents a natural environment that 'acts' like an oppressive sentient agent, while the attitude and descriptions of nature and animals by the protagonists reveal their inner struggles and overall psychological decay of the Bundren family after the death of the matriarch. The desert in *Blood Meridian* is an indifferent force. Compared to nature in *As I Lay Dying,* it exhibits similar qualities, while putting more emphasis on violence, radicality and lawlessness of the frontier. It represents the clash between the passive and moral views of the protagonist, the Kid, and the desire of the novel's enigmatic antagonist, Judge Holden, to dominate nature. Animal symbols and natural imagery in both *As I Lay Dying* and *Blood Meridian* are intermediates between the internal and external worlds of the characters. Zoomorphism and anthropomorphism blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. Animals like horses, mules, dogs and buzzards, join water and fire in conveying symbolic meanings of mortality, innocence or futility that are usually specific to the character or characters. This thesis argues that Faulkner's treatment of nature and its effect on the human condition is both continued and changed by McCarthy.

Key words: animal symbolism, Southern Gothic, psyche, zoomorphism, sentience