

Unofficial Blood Meridian Glossary - Sample

Blood Meridian is widely regarded as a masterpiece, but it is a challenging book to read. McCarthy employs uncommon and archaic words, Spanish dialogue, and dense, poetic metaphors.

This unofficial glossary is intended to ease the reader's experience by defining and translating words in the order in which they appear in the book. It also includes Google Maps links to geographical locations mentioned in the text, as well as links to relevant Wikipedia articles.

The entries have been selected and curated by a Swede with English as a second language. Not all words can be defined, as some are invented, and not all locations have been identified. I hope this glossary proves valuable to you.

Send thoughts and improvements to bloodmeridianglossary@gmail.com.

Chapter 1

Scullery A scullery is a small room or section of a kitchen, traditionally used for washing dishes, preparing food, and other household chores that might be considered messy.

Leonids The Leonids is an annual meteor shower that appear every November, but about every 33 years when their parent comet Tempel-Tuttle returns they can erupt into a spectacular meteor storm. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Visage A person's face or facial expression. It comes from the French visage ("face").

Divested To be stripped of, deprived of, or relieved of something. Often property, rights, clothing, or responsibilities.

Diffident Shy, reserved, or lacking self-confidence, often to the point of being hesitant or reluctant to speak or act. From the Latin diffidere - "to distrust" (literally "not to have faith [in oneself]").

Chattels Items of personal property that you can move, e.g. furniture, jewelry, tools, livestock, vehicles

Parricide Killing of a close relative, especially one's father or both parents.

Fredonia A short-lived, unrecognized breakaway state (1826-1827) in eastern Texas, where a group of settlers rebelled against Mexican rule before being quickly suppressed. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Nacogdoches City in Texas, USA [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Batboard Board-and-batten siding, is a wall covering style where boards are wide vertical planks and battens are thin strips placed over the gaps between boards. This creates a striped look and keeps out weather. Often used in rural areas and is cheap.

Jake Outhouse or toilet

Bowieknife A large, fixed-blade fighting and utility knife that originated in the early 19th century in the United States. It's named after James Bowie, who became famous for using such a knife in the "Sandbar Fight" of 1827. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Shellalegh A traditional Irish wooden club (weapon) or walking stick

Dramshop door The swinging doors you'd find at the entrance of a dramshop (bar or saloon).

Wainscotted Wooden paneling that covers the lower part of an interior wall (for protection and/or decoration).

Chapter 2

Gourd A cup or vessel made from the shell of the gourd plant, often used for drinking. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Drygulch To attack or ambush someone suddenly and treacherously, often from a hidden position. Origin: Old American West slang - a dry gulch is a ravine or arroyo that only carries water after rain, making it a good hiding spot for an ambush.

Abilene City in Texas, USA [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Bexar County in Texas, USA [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Dígame Tell me

Abuelito Dear grandpa

Que dice el muchacho What does the boy say?

Quiere hecharse una copa. Pero nu puede pagar. He wants to have a drink. But he can't pay.

Quiere trabajo. Quién sabe. He wants a job. Who knows.

No está sucio It's not dirty

Está borracho He is drunk

Bung-starter A tool/mallet for opening barrels by removing the bung (plug).

Chancel The area around the altar at the front of a church, usually reserved for the clergy and choir.

Chapter 3

Lazarus A man in the Bible whom Jesus famously raised from the dead after four days in the tomb, demonstrating His power over life and death. Open article in Wikipedia

Onyx A variety of chalcedony (a type of quartz) that has parallel bands of different colors, often black and white, and is commonly used as a gemstone in jewelry and decorative objects.

Volunteers of Monterrey American volunteer soldiers who fought during the Battle of Monterrey (1846) in the Mexican-American War, supporting the U.S. Army in capturing the city. Open article in Wikipedia

Chihuahua A city in Mexico Open location in Google Maps

Sonora A state in Mexico Open location in Google Maps

Guaymas A city in Mexico Open location in Google Maps

Mollycoddles People who are overprotected, pampered, or treated with excessive indulgence, often to the point of being considered weak or spoiled.

Lipan Lipan Apache are a band of Apache, a Southern Athabaskan Indigenous people. Open article in Wikipedia

Karankawas The Karankawa were an Indigenous people concentrated in southern Texas along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, largely in the lower Colorado River and Brazos River valleys. Open article in Wikipedia

Cárcel Prison, jail

Y sus botas And his boots

Tack Horse equipment

Weskit Waistcoat (UK) or vest (US)

Filibuster Adventurer who engaged in unauthorized military expeditions into foreign countries

Chapter 4

Castroville A city in Texas [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Frio river A river in Texas [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Nueces river A river in Texas [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Presidio road A county in Texas [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Del norte river An older Spanish name for the river Rio Grande [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Buckbrush A common name for several North American shrubs, known for their dense, brushy growth and clusters of small flowers.

Pricklypear A cactus (*Opuntia*) with flat, spiny pads and edible fruits called tunas. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Vernier A fine-adjusting rear sight (a small sliding scale) that lets the shooter make very precise elevation (and sometimes windage) adjustments for accurate range aiming.

Mesquite A spiny tree or shrub [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Raillery Good-natured teasing or playful mockery, usually lighthearted rather than mean-spirited.

Truculent Aggressively defiant, eager to fight

Sutler A civilian merchant who followed an army, selling food, drink, and supplies to soldiers in camp.

Mortices Rectangular holes or slots cut into wood, stone, or metal designed to receive a matching projection called a tenon, forming a mortise-and-tenon joint in construction or carpentry.

Pumice A light, porous volcanic rock formed when lava cools quickly and traps gas bubbles [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Pannier A basket, bag, or similar container, especially slung over the back of an animal

Cordilleras Long chains or systems of parallel mountain ranges

Jornadas Jornada is day in Spanish. A day's travel/journey.

Sheetwise Spread out flat like a sheet

Jacal A traditional Mexican and southwestern U.S. dwelling [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Corrals An enclosed area for confining livestock

Palings A fence made of upright stakes

Purlieus The outskirts or surrounding areas of a place, especially the lands or neighborhood around a town, estate, or forest.

Farrier A specialist in horse hoof care, trained to shoe horses and treat basic

hoof problems by trimming, balancing, and fitting horseshoes.

Kerf The slit, cut, or groove made by a saw blade or cutting tool

Traprock Rock formation similar to stairs, from Swedish word "trappa" = stair
Open article in Wikipedia

Anticlines A type of geological fold where rock layers arch upward into an A-shaped structure, with the oldest layers at the core and younger layers on the outside. Open article in Wikipedia

Treeboles The trunks or main stems of trees, especially when referred to in a descriptive or literary way.

Trapdykes A steep, narrow gully or ravine in volcanic or igneous rock (traprock), often formed by erosion along a volcanic dike.

Chines Steep-sided river valleys or gorges cut into soft cliffs

Auguries Omens or signs of the future. Foreshadowing of events to come.

Slatribbed Describes something having ribs or supports made of slats, meaning thin, narrow strips of wood, metal, or another material arranged side by side.

Agoggle Askew, awry, or at odd angles

Pauldrons Pieces of plate armor that cover and protect the shoulders, often extending over part of the chest and back Open article in Wikipedia

Mace A heavy club with a metal head, often spiked or flanged Open article in Wikipedia

Brimstone Old word for sulfur

Pneumatic A sigh that is full of breath, or forcefully exhaled, emphasizing the physical release of air rather than just the emotional act.

Viscera The internal organs inside the main cavities of the body, especially those in the abdomen like the stomach, intestines, and liver.

Sodomized Having been subjected to anal (or sometimes oral) sexual intercourse, often used in contexts where the act is described as non-consensual or abusive.

Tonsured Having the head shaved

Chapter 5

Talus slides Downslope movements of loose rock debris (called talus or scree) that has accumulated at the base of a steep cliff, slope, or mountainside.

Rimrock The sheer rock wall or cliff that forms the edge (rim) of a plateau, canyon, or escarpment, often made of hard rock like basalt or sandstone.

Kiln A furnace or oven for firing, drying, or baking materials at high temperatures, most commonly used for hardening pottery, bricks, or tiles, and also for processes like drying lumber or smelting ores.

Rookeries Breeding colonies where rooks (a type of crow) or other birds and animals, like seals or penguins, nest in large groups.

Consumption An old term for tuberculosis, named for the way the disease seemed to “consume” the body through weight loss and wasting.

Corbel A projecting block of stone, wood, or metal built into a wall that supports weight above it, such as a beam, arch, balcony, or cornice. Open article in Wikipedia

Lintel A horizontal beam or stone placed across the top of a door, window, or other opening to support the weight of the structure above it.

Ocotillo A spiny desert shrub known for its long, whip-like stems that leaf out after rain and its bright red, tubular flower clusters that bloom in spring. Open article in Wikipedia

Carreta Cart

Axletrees Axletree is an older, less common term for axle, where wheels are pinned on wagon.

Tenons The pin part in a mortise-and-tenon joint Open article in Wikipedia

Que quiere What do you want?

Buscan a los indios They are looking for the Indians

Basta Enough

Caesura A caesura is a pause or break within a line of poetry, often marked by punctuation or a natural pause in speech, used to create rhythm, emphasis, or dramatic effect. Example: To be, or not to be - that is the question.

Waifs Homeless, abandoned, or neglected people, especially children

Bowstay A piece of wood, cord, or metal used to help hold or brace the bows (the arched wooden hoops) that support the canvas cover.

Rebozos A traditional Mexican garment: a long, flat woven shawl or scarf, often with fringed ends

Fusils Light, flintlock muskets. In modern French (fusil), the word still means “rifle” or “gun”.

Mescal A Mexican distilled alcoholic spirit made from the fermented juice of

agave plants, especially the maguey. Tequila is a type of mezcal.

Mire, mire Look, look

Calabazo Jail or lockup

Malandered Skin sores or scabs that form on a horse's legs, especially behind the knees, due to irritation or poor care.

Peon A landless agricultural laborer or worker of low social status, often bound in a system of debt servitude (peonage)

La gente dice que el coyote es un brujo. Muchas veces el brujo es un coyote People say the coyote is a witch. Often the witch is a coyote.

Y los indios también. Muchas veces llaman como los coyotes And the Indians too. They often call like coyotes.

Y qué es eso? And what is that?

Nada Nothing

Un tecolote An owl

Quizás Maybe

Clackdish A wooden dish with a movable lid that beggars in medieval and early modern England used to attract attention; they would “clack” the lid to make noise while asking for alms.

Sallygate A secure, controlled entryway in a fortification, designed to allow defenders (or troops) to “sally out” (make a sudden charge or sortie) while keeping the stronghold protected. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Chapter 6

Chary Faint, sparing

Piñole A traditional food made from toasted, ground maize (corn), often mixed with water or milk to make a drink or porridge.

Guidon A small, swallow-tailed military flag carried on a pole to mark a unit, company, or troop.

Reticent Being reserved, quiet, or unwilling to share thoughts or feelings.

Chihuahua A city in Mexico [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Saltillo A city in Mexico [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Argonaut Daring adventurer or explorer

Itinerant Traveling from place to place, usually for work or duty, rather than staying in one fixed location.

Heliotropic Turning or growing toward the sun (from helios = sun, tropos = turn).

Claymores A large, two-handed Scottish sword used in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. The word comes from the Gaelic claidheamh mór (“great sword”).

Chapter 7

Pritchel A small, pointed punch or tool used mainly by blacksmiths and farriers

Garraffa A large bottle, jug, or carafe

Qué pasa aquí? What's going on here?

Nada. Todo va bien. Nothing. Everything's fine.

Está bien. Negocios del Gobernador. It's good. Governor's business.

Somos amigos del Señor Riddle We are friends of Mr. Riddle

Andale All right then

Le presento al serganto Aguilar I present to you Serganto Aguilar

Mucho gusto. Igualmente. Nice to meet you. Likewise.

Vexed Troubled, annoyed, or distressed.

Extant Still existing, surviving, or currently in existence

Adduced To cite or bring forward as evidence or proof in an argument or discussion.

Pyracantha Also called firethorn, a thorny evergreen shrub with white flowers and bright red/orange berries [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

San Saba City in Texas [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Pimeria Alta Spanish colonial term for O'odham territory in Arizona–Sonora.
[Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Cholla The common name for several species of cylindrical-stemmed cacti
[Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Nopal The Spanish word for the prickly pear cactus

Artemisia A large, diverse group of plants belonging to the daisy family
[Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Palmilla A small palm or palm-like plant

Azoteas A flat rooftop or roof terrace.

Campesinos Peasants or farmers

Janos Town in Mexico [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Bufones Jesters

Los perros! The dogs!

Casas Grandes river A river in Mexico [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Animas Mountains between Mexico and USA [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Piñon Certain species of pine trees in the southwestern United States and Mexico

La baraja. Para adivinar la suerte. The deck. For fortune telling.

Venga Come

Bueono. Puedes ver? Okay. Can you see?

Los caballeros The knights

Admonished Urged, advised

El tonto The fool

Quién Who

El joven The young man

Una carta A card

Cuatro de copas Four of Cups

El hombre más joven. El muchacho. The youngest man. The boy.

Interlocutrix A person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation.

McCulloch's Rangers Were a unit of Texas Rangers organized during the period of the Texas Revolution (1835-1836) and the early days of the Republic of Texas. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

El jefe The boss

Bedlam A scene of chaos, uproar, and confusion.

La carroza, la carroza. Invertido. Carta de guerra, de venganza. The chariot. The chariot. Inverted. Card of war, of revenge.

La ví sin ruedas sobre un río oscuro I saw her without wheels on a dark river

Perdida, perdida. La carta está perdida en la noche. Lost, lost. The card is lost in the night.

Un maleficio. Qué viento tan maleante A curse. What a wicked wind.

Carroza de muertos. Ilena de huesos. El joven qué... The corpse's hearse. Full of bones. The young man who...

Djinn Beings of fire and shadow that can look human, animal, monstrous, or nearly invisible

Presidio A fortified military settlement established by the Spanish in areas they colonized

Dolmens A type of megalithic tomb built during the Neolithic period (roughly 4000-3000 BCE).

Una corta caridad. Por Dios A small charity. For God's sake.

Pase Come in

Chapter 8

Cuánto. Seis? Centavos How much? Six? Cents

Creosote A dark, oily liquid obtained by distilling wood tar or coal tar. Used historically as a preservative, disinfectant, and wood treatment (especially for protecting railroad ties, fences, and ships from rot).

Monte Card game Open article in Wikipedia

Huaraches Traditional Mexican sandals

Que soldados tan valientes. La sangre de Gómez, sangre de la gente...
What brave soldiers. The blood of Gómez, the blood of the people...

Cropping The sound of horses grazing

Surbated An archaic word meaning worn out, bruised, or sore from travel or labor, especially referring to the feet.

Scruboak Scrub oak = a low-growing, shrubby oak found in dry, rocky habitats.

Harried Troubled, stressed, or constantly bothered, often by demands, pressure, or attacks.

Aguardiente Spanish “fiery water” or “burning water”, is a general term for strong distilled spirits.

Apishamore A decorated animal-hide robe or blanket, often ceremonial, used by Native peoples of North America.

Unrectified Something left unfixed or uncorrected

Achorite A Christian hermit who lived in seclusion, devoted to prayer.

Discalced Barefoot, often describing monastic orders that renounce shoes as part of their spiritual discipline.

Sark A shirt or undergarment.

Chapter 9

Frieze Decorative band or border, often used in design, wallpaper, or textiles.

Misweave A flaw or error in woven fabric that happens when the threads (warp or weft) don't interlace in the intended order or pattern.

Weft The set of horizontal threads that are woven across a fabric, passing over and under the warp threads (the vertical threads stretched on the loom).

Buskin A high, sturdy boot or sandal that laced up and covered the calf.

Parfleche A parfleche is a tough rawhide container made by Plains Indigenous peoples of North America. Often painted with bright geometric designs, it was used to store and carry food, clothing, or tools.

Chevrons V-shaped pattern or mark

Referents The thing or concept that a word, phrase, or symbol refers to in the real world or in context.

Calculus A stone-like concretion that forms in the body when minerals build up and harden, e.g. kidney stones

Madstone A porous stone or clump of material, often from a deer's stomach, that was once believed in folklore to draw out poison from snake bites or rabid animal bites when pressed against the wound.

Anguish Severe mental or physical pain or distress

Pyrolatrous Worshipping or revering fire

Caballado Herd or drove of horses

Deputation A group of people appointed to represent others in a meeting, discussion, or negotiation.

Gutcart A cart used for transporting animal guts, internal organs and entrails

Lanneret Male, young lanner falcon

Granaries Storehouses for grain

Shaley Resembling or containing shale. Shale is a soft, fine-grained sedimentary rock that splits easily into thin layers. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Arroyo Dry creek or stream bed that temporarily fills with water after heavy rain, common in arid and semi-arid regions.

Suffused Gradually spread through or over something

Caldera A large, bowl-shaped volcanic depression formed when a volcano erupts and its summit collapses inward.

Calzones Underpants

Confound To cause surprise or confusion in someone, often by acting against expectations.

Proselytes A person who has converted from one belief, faith, or cause to

another.

Vigas Large wooden beams in architecture. They project through exterior walls and support the roof.

Declaiming Speaking in a formal, theatrical, or impassioned way, often loudly and with emphasis.

Cobalt Hard, shiny, silver-gray metal [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Cuartel Barracks

Inimical Hostile, harmful, or unfriendly.

Chromo Short for chromolithograph, a type of colored print made using lithography.

Tatterdemalion A person dressed in ragged, tattered clothing

Junipers An evergreen shrub or tree of the cypress family [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Ignis fatuus (Latin for “foolish fire”) is a ghostly light seen at night over marshes or swamps, caused by gases from decaying organic matter.

Hove on Pressed onward

Amigos, somos amigos Friends, we are friends

De dónde viene? Where are you coming from?

De dónde va? Where are you going?

Ciboleros Spanish and Mexican buffalo hunters

Tasseled Adorned or decorated with tassels (hanging ornaments made of threads, cords, or other materials).

Mesilla A town in New Mexico [Open location in Google Maps](#)

Chapter 10

Gileños The name used by the Spanish in the colonial period for the Apache bands who lived along the Gila River in present-day Arizona and New Mexico.

Awl A small, pointed tool used for piercing holes in materials like leather, wood, or fabric.

Meridian The highest point or stage of something (e.g., the meridian of his career).

Merestone A stone set up to mark a boundary, such as the edge of a property, field, or territory.

Et In Arcadia Ego The literal translation of "Et in Arcadia Ego" is "Even in Arcadia, there am I". Some mean that the I of the phrase refer to Death, thus making the painting a memento mori, reminding the viewer that even in the blissful utopia of Arcadia, death still exists. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Hark From The Tombs A hymn [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Benjamin An old-fashioned term for a man's overcoat, made of strong woolen cloth.

Draw A small, natural depression or gully that slopes downward and usually channels water after rain.

Nitre Old name for potassium nitrate (KNO_3)/salpeter. Historically important as an ingredient in gunpowder. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Mochilas Backpacks

Kiln A furnace or oven for firing, drying, or baking materials at high temperatures.

Waxing Moon

Hobbles The visible illuminated part is growing larger each night. Opposite is waning

Hardpan A dense, compacted layer of soil that is very hard and difficult for roots or water to penetrate.

Grouse Complain or grumble.

Malpais (Spanish for "bad land") is a geological term for a rugged, barren landscape of jagged lava flows. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Chancre A painless sore or ulcer that appears at the site of infection in the early stage of syphilis. Typically firm, round, and not tender.

Silica Silicon dioxide, the main component of sand and quartz. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Pastryman A person who makes pastries such as pies, tarts, cakes, and similar baked goods.

Swivelbore An early type of small cannon or firearm mounted on a swivel so

it could pivot horizontally and vertically. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Chapter 11

Coulees A steep-sided ravine or gully, often formed by water erosion.

Spangles Small, shiny pieces of material used for decoration. Used on clothing, costumes, flags, and ornaments.

Chops The jaws or cheeks

Ilex The genus of plants commonly known as holly. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Plains of San Agustin A broad, high desert basin in west-central New Mexico, USA. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Enfilade A straight line of attack or view running through a space.

Rebated To return, reflect

Graven Carved, engraved, sculpted into

Bucklered Bearing a small, round shield.

Acequias Community-operated irrigation canals or ditches

Kivas Underground or partly underground ceremonial rooms

Tapadero Cover that goes over the front of a stirrup, often extending down to protect the rider's foot. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Tabernacled An older or poetic word meaning housed, sheltered, or dwelt in, as if in a tabernacle (a sacred tent, dwelling, or place of worship).

Conceit Excessive pride in oneself; vanity.

Portmanteau A suitcase that opens into two hinged compartments. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Alleghenies A mountain range in the eastern United States, part of the larger Appalachian Mountains. [Open location in Google Maps](#) • [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Primrose A small, early-blooming flower, often with symbolic meaning. Representing youth, innocence, or the fleeting nature of life (the primrose path = an easy but possibly foolish or sinful way of living). [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Euchered To be cheated, tricked, outsmarted, or beaten unfairly.

Patrimony Inheritance. Latin pater (father) + -monium (state, condition, or property).

Anasazi The ancestral Puebloan peoples of the American Southwest. [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Ubiquity The state of being everywhere at once, or seeming to be very widespread and common. Latin ubique = everywhere

Cull To remove weaker or excess individuals from a herd or crop.

Predacious Living by preying on other animals

Adamantine Unbreakable, extremely hard, or unyielding

Acute Sharp, pointed, or severe.

Promontory A high point of land that juts out into a large body of water or land [Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Maguey A large agave plant native to Mexico and the southwestern U.S.
[Open article in Wikipedia](#)

Duplicity Deceitfulness or double-dealing, when someone pretends one thing while doing another.

Decamped Departed or left suddenly, often in a secretive or hurried way.

Egress Exit

Remaining Chapters

This is the sample version of the Unofficial Blood Meridian Glossary. The complete version contains definitions for 507 additional words.

Buy the complete version at *www.bloodmeridianglossary.com*.

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