

II

ALLEN JOSEPHS

The Quest for God in *The Road*

Yo no soy un hombre del camino.

But the gypsy only smiled and waved one hand. He said that the way of the road was the rule for all upon it. He said that on the road there were no special cases.

– The Crossing¹

Sometimes it's good to pray. I don't think you have to have a clear idea of who or what God is to pray. You could even be quite doubtful about the whole business.²

– Cormac McCarthy to Oprah Winfrey

Virtually all of Cormac McCarthy's fragmentary, often picaresque, novels are road or trail novels involving walking, riding, driving, rowing, or some combination thereof, and all of his characters are indeed *hombres del camino* or men of the road. At the end of *No Country for Old Men*, the sheriff sees his father in a dream riding the trail in the snow: "I seen he was carryin the 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." Father and son, carrying the fire, in all that dark and all that cold³: Which novel are we in? We are in all of them – they are all one long variously fabled story – and we have come to the end of the road. What is there? What is at the end of *The Road*, at the end of "[t]he immappable world of our journey,"⁴ to purloin a phrase from *Cities of the Plain*?

The science-fiction writer John Clute cuts through the critical clutter: "The central riddle of *The Road* is God." I could not agree more, but I cannot quite agree with his final opinion: "It is a story I for one find it impossible to think of as being redeemed by a Christ. It is a story about the end of the world in which the world ends."⁵ In other words, Clute's answer to my question is – nothing, there's nothing at the end of the road. Such a statement – "in

which the world ends” – strikes me as too categorical for *The Road* or for McCarthy’s work as a whole, of which *The Road*, presaged over and again from *The Orchard Keeper* onward, is both a logical continuation and a kind of termination. I believe, with Edwin T. Arnold, that McCarthy’s work is grounded in moral choice.⁶ Clute’s statement – you remove the Christ-figure and you are left with virtually nothing – leaves little room for choice. But I think the novel, in its own contradictory and ambivalent way, does.

How then do we go about searching for the relative evidence for and against God in *The Road*, as the father and son make their harrowed way through the post-apocalyptic chaos McCarthy so bleakly paints? We look directly at the text, at what McCarthy intentionally did or did not write. What and where is the textual evidence working against God? What and where is the evidence working for God? And how do they stack up? And finally, what do early drafts of the novel in the Cormac McCarthy Papers suggest about McCarthy’s original intentions? In the earliest of these drafts, with the working title “The Grail,” the father thinks of himself as neither believing nor disbelieving in God, then goes on to say that the idea that God had “looked upon his work” and then “despaired of it,” abandoning man, did not seem “unlikely.”⁷ So it is clear from the very beginning that ambivalence about God was to form a central theme of *The Road*.

In the published novel’s second fragment we can begin to accumulate the evidence against God. There is a simple description of the setting as “Barren, silent, godless.”⁸ A few pages later a single snowflake sifts down: “He caught it in his hand and watched it expire there like the last host of christendom.”⁹ It is the boy who catches the snowflake but the narrator’s simile is hardly of the boy’s imagining. Sometimes McCarthy reverses the religious reference for negative effect, as in this un-writing of Genesis by the man: “The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. [...] The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality.”¹⁰ Subtract the idiom and you subtract the referent – the un-reification of God.

Beyond the pervasive horror and starkness and gloom that never cease, probably the most unimpeachable godlessness comes in this descriptive prose poem: “He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover.”¹¹ If there is a god out there somewhere, he is not very evident. The narrator or the man – it is often hard to distinguish between them – laments this state of affairs as irremediable: “Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it.”¹² *Relentless, intestate, implacable, blind, crushing,*

hunted, trembling – is there a more ferocious description anywhere of our *borrowed* world?

If that hyper-McCarthy prose poem is the most negative ponderation on God, the most intriguing is surely the father and son's encounter with the old man who calls himself Ely. Their conversation treats survival, death, and God, but it raises more questions than it answers. Ely, whether factual or some perverse *nom de guerre*, is the only person in the novel endowed with any sort of proper name. Why? What – beyond urging the critics to hustle – is the significance of the name? Some of the criticism takes Ely to allude to Elijah, a connection I fail to see except on the most superficial level. The wise old biblical prophet, other than caricature or intentional reversal, he is not; even less is he Melville's Elijah from Chapter 19 of *Moby-Dick* – and I don't understand any link beyond some weird possible version of Elijah's sharing of the Passover meal, a flimsy tie, for what it is worth, seen also by Phillip A. Snyder in the context of hospitality.¹³

What about Ely itself? I mean E-L-Y, but pronounced Eel-ee (possibly derived from eels), the city on the River Great Ouse in Cambridgeshire, the cathedral of which is called the Ship of Fens, popularly believed to be built on Cromwell's Rock, on a meteorite that may have helped put the dinosaurs out of business (Ely Ghosts).¹⁴

Most readers tend to think that the unspecified catastrophe in the novel is man-made, but if so, why does McCarthy deliberately fail to say so, either in the novel or in subsequent interviews? What if it is God-made or, perhaps worse, a catastrophic accident? McCarthy remarked somewhat facetiously in a recent interview in the *Wall Street Journal*: "I don't have an opinion. At the Santa Fe Institute I'm with scientists of all disciplines, and some of them in geology said it looked like a meteor to them," as if they were privy to information beyond his ken. "But it could be anything – volcanic activity or it could be a nuclear war. It's not really important."¹⁵ One critic who wants to keep the question open is Jay Ellis, who does not decide between "nuclear winter, or the calamitous climate change sped up by a comet strike."¹⁶ McCarthy's interview, even given his well-known propensity for hermetic or enigmatic pronouncements, only strengthens the possibility that the catastrophe was not necessarily man-made, a possibility that in turn strengthens the idea of no God or an absent God.

If we accept McCarthy's ingenuousness or ingeniousness, we also have to accept the somewhat outrageous notion that the only direct proper name of a person in the novel coincides, at least in the popular mind, with a great physical disaster, which did to the dinosaurs what the current disaster in the novel is doing to man. And then we must ask if it is also coincidental that this character Ely, the only one with a name (if that is in fact

his name), is the one to tell us: “There is no God,” an utterly un-Elijah-like judgment that he promptly reiterates: “There is no God and we are his prophets[?]”¹⁷ And why does he look like “a starved and threadbare buddha”¹⁸ and talk like the prophet Mohammed? That sort of multi-religious palimpsest is clearly contrived, but to what end? Are we meant to believe Ely? Maybe he is just crazy, or maybe he is right and crazy, or maybe he is trying to tell us in his own crazy Nietzschean way that God is so utterly removed from us as to be dead, an idea Jay Ellis flirts with when he writes of: “[...] the larger philosophy we keep determining in these novels – including McCarthy’s sense of god as a kind of absent parent no longer able, or willing, to do anything,”¹⁹ a sense that echoes tangentially Leo Daugherty’s Gnostic reading of *Blood Meridian*.²⁰ The disaster may not be caused by man, but the episode with Ely can only reinforce a case against any God other than a totally absent one, no matter how eccentric or contrived Ely himself may be. And his pronouncement – a brilliantly succinct Nietzschean-Islamic oxymoron – may be the ultimate expression of atheistically existential angst.

Another of those prose poems occurs in a kind of flashback or memory: “Out on the roads the pilgrims sank down and fell over and died and the bleak and shrouded earth went trundling past the sun and returned again as trackless and as unremarked as the path of any nameless sisterworld in the ancient dark beyond.”²¹ The passage sounds like certain descriptions from *Suttree* and something like the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. The key word, for my purposes, is “unremarked,” a word which seems to indicate a nonexistent or uncaring God. The passage echoes one from early in the novel: “The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air.”²² These passages point convincingly to nothingness and doubtless are among the major reasons the novel has been labeled nihilistic or godless.

There is also a brief fragment that would seem to deny any afterlife: “Do you think your fathers are watching? That they weigh you in their ledgerbook? Against what? There is no book and your fathers are dead in the ground.”²³ This denial seems to issue straight from the man as does a subsequent passage of the same type: “I think maybe they are watching, he said. They are watching for a thing that even death cannot undo and if they do not see it they will turn away from us and they will not come back.”²⁴ Who are “they,” we are forced to ask, ghosts, spirits, angels, archons, aeons, gods? There is no answer and all that is clear is the quandary itself, yet the very nature of the question, at once rhetorical and pointed, seems to signal some T. S. Eliot-like turning, however bleakly. Is it some spark of divinity – the

“thing that even death cannot undo” – that “they” must see in order not to turn away?

The textual case for God, or more specifically a Christ-like figure in the boy, difficult to imagine without some a priori God, however aloof, comprises more evidence than the negative case, and I think more convincingly. We can understand much of the material by stringing it together, almost without explication, beginning with this passage, which is the first description we hear of the boy: “He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke,”²⁵ a passage that seems to allow a laconically twofold interpretation, while clearly alluding to the Logos: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” and to the “Word [...] made flesh” of John 1:1 and 14.

Shortly after they emerge from the mountains, the father, having left their camp, observes: “When he rose and turned to go back the tarp was lit from within where the boy had wakened. Sited there in the darkness the frail blue shape of it looked like the pitch of some last venture at the edge of the world. Something all but unaccountable. And so it was.”²⁶ Except for being *unaccountable*, this phenomenon – whatever it describes – is wholly unremarked in the narrative or in the criticism, but it foreshadows much of what follows. That literal foreshadowing, while easily slipping by unnoticed here early in the novel, cannot be anything other than explicit and intentional, as we will see with complete clarity. And the light continues to allude to the first chapter of John.

Some twenty pages later, as the father washes the road rat’s gore from his son’s hair, comes another direct inkling of the boy’s role: “All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you’ve nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them.”²⁷ Messiah, of course, means anointed one and while this passage does not proclaim a messiah, it does plant a seed of implication, especially when on the next page we read that the man “sat beside him and stroked his pale and tangled hair. Golden chalice, good to house a god.”²⁸ In an early draft the wording was stronger and the chalice was where “a god was housed” and will again “be housed.”²⁹

Then in time the boy himself begins to make pronouncements. First he says that nothing bad will happen to them, “Because we’re carrying the fire,”³⁰ when there is no fire and they are about to sleep in a car with only suit coats piled on for warmth. This figurative fire will become a central motif for the boy’s sacred nature, which the father will continue to assert, as when he asks Ely: “What if I said he’s a god?”³¹ a role the boy will eventually take for himself. In an early version of this scene with Ely, the father asserts three times that he thinks the boy *is* “a god.”³²

When later the boy replies to his father, saying that he is the one “who has to worry about everything,” saying, “Yes I am ... I am the one,”³³ he is echoing Jesus in a number of instances – I am the way, the truth and the light (John 14:6); I am the door of the sheep (John 10:7); I am the good shepherd (John 10:11); I am the light of the world (John 8:12); I am the alpha and the omega (Revelation 1:8), to mention a few of the most obvious. Suffice it to say the proclamation “I am,” particularly as avatar, is among the strongest phrases in the Old and New Testaments, the latter inevitably an echo of God’s pronouncement to Moses: “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Not only does the boy offer to take responsibility, he offers to do so in unmistakably religious language, with none of the equivocation or contradiction so evident in Ely’s negative discourse. The boy, born after the disaster, has been raised, we must assume, without church or scripture, and his scriptural echoes must therefore issue forth from narrative design or divine inspiration. They cannot be – not in a Cormac McCarthy novel – inadvertent echoes or unintentional allusions. It is also revealing to note that McCarthy added the phrase “I am the one.” In the original draft the boy merely says: “Yes I am.”³⁴

Later the boy asks: “Is it real? The fire?” and the man answers: “It’s inside you. It was always there. I can see it.”³⁵ This fire motif, pervasive in McCarthy’s work, appearing in novels such as *Outer Dark*, *Blood Meridian*, and *No Country for Old Men*, was evident from the earliest typescript, “The Grail,” in which the father tells the boy that he has the fire inside him and that, in a phrase later crossed through, “It’s very strong.”³⁶ Is that the figurative fire of civilization? I think it means – textually, in this novel – less something vaguely Promethean than the literal belief in or presence of God or at the very least some entrapped divine spark of the Gnostics. My reading stems not from any innate desire to interpret the text that way. Instead, it seems on textual evidence alone the weightier of two intentionally conflicting possible readings or discourses, set out as though the narrator himself were engaged in some mono-dialogical debate meant to be attended and adjudged by the reader, the very process we are engaged in.

Alongside the fire motif runs a continuing light motif – when there is in this darkest of worlds no source of light – that only reinforces the sacred nature of the boy: “There was light all about him” and “when he moved the light moved with him.”³⁷ The man is compelled to comment: “There is no prophet in the earth’s long chronicle who’s not honored here today”³⁸ an inference, by the father at least, that the boy incarnates some second coming.³⁹ My reading here is borne out by a remarkable passage I discovered in the all-important Box 91 of the Cormac McCarthy Papers housed in the Wittliff Collections, a part of the Southwestern Writers Collection in the

Alkek Library at Texas State University, San Marcos. It is a longer, more detailed version of the same passage. The boy again has light all about him. But the light does not fall on him – for there is no source of light – but issues from him in a “constant and slow emanation” that spreads from him and from his hand, and “even from” what he touches. The father whispers “Oh blessed child” and goes on to make the comment about all the prophets being so honored here today.⁴⁰ Evidently in editing, McCarthy wanted a more subtle rendition of the boy’s blessedness, just as he apparently wanted to tone down the title from “The Grail” to *The Road*, but the combination of the *grail* and the *blessed child* in the early drafts clearly conveys McCarthy’s sense of the boy’s role in unmistakably Christ-like iconography. The fact that he cut it does not mean he changed his mind. It is a Hemingwayesque burying of the all too obvious – the famous iceberg technique – to strengthen the power of the passage.

Finally, there are two poignant words that I believe strengthen the textual case for God. The first is *salitter*: a word used almost exclusively by Jacob Boehme (or commentary on him, as by Hegel), the Lutheran mystic clearly familiar to McCarthy, to judge nowhere beyond the two citations, one used as epigraph and the other reversed as subtitle, for *Blood Meridian*. *Salitter* – there could be a dissertation on this usage, as well as a study on the meaning of *fire* and *light* as God and Christ in Jacob Boehme and Cormac McCarthy – means divine essence, the stuff of God (not unlike the Tao or Brahman, or in quantum physics the matrix of Max Planck, or even the so-called god-particle of recent physics): “He walked out into the road and stood. The silence. The salitter drying from the earth.”⁴¹ John Clute properly underlines the vital importance of this sole word, acknowledging God’s presence but believing that “the Christ figure must somehow be seen – be felt – to transcend the drying of the divine out of the earth.”⁴² I agree, at least to the point that Clute has put his finger in the wound. The central question would seem to be precisely that: Does the Christ-like figure of the boy transcend – or reverse or compensate for – such an absence or withdrawal?

It is reasonable to argue, as Clute does, that the answer is no. But what are we to make of this passage, giving us the second poignant word, just before the father dies: “he [the man] would raise his weeping eyes and see him [the boy] standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle”?⁴³ *Tabernacle*: In general terms, a place of worship. For the Old Testament Hebrews a tent for the Ark of the Covenant. For Catholics the receptacle for the Eucharist, the Host, the body of Christ. Is the father delirious or divinatory: “*from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle*”? If the father is in some mortal delirium – there is nothing in the text to so indicate – then

Clute is still in cogent territory. But regardless, why *tabernacle*, why the singularly most ecumenical term imaginable to express the essence of God? And what if the man *is* seeing into the future, or what if the boy does indeed glow? What if McCarthy is not making a reasonable or cogent argument?

The last thing the father says is: “Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again.”⁴⁴ While the father is referring to the little boy his son had seen, it is very clear he is at once transferring that sentiment to his own son. The father dies, the boy stays with him for the emblematic three days and then as if on cue or as if preordained or as if popped from a machine, Parka-man “hove into view.”⁴⁵ To say that Parka-man is a *deus ex machina* is as obvious as it is correct, and that is precisely the point. His woman, who welcomes the boy, doesn’t talk to him of civilization, she talks to him about God and tells him that “the breath of God was his breath.”⁴⁶

If McCarthy didn’t want us to read it the way I just have, why did he write it that way? Why say goodness will find the boy and have goodness find the boy? Why drag out a deliberate and undisguised *deus ex machina* – no one could seriously argue that McCarthy was unaware of the fact – if what you want to do is deny any sort of *deus*? And it is not just goodness that finds the boy but a new and this time caring mother, the mother that does not exist for the long list of road warriors that inhabit all of McCarthy’s novels, the mother absent or defective in every single one of them, including most especially this one, and not just goodness but warm caring affectionate understanding maternal goodness – quite the opposite of the mother who has abandoned the boy – the only such maternal goodness, all one short paragraph of it, in virtually all of McCarthy’s work. If the message according to Clute is meant to be nothing more than the withdrawal of whatever Gnostic substance there is out there, why have as the subject of the last paragraph of the plotted novel a mother who is not only all of the foregoing, but also a mother who understands how to explain the unexplainable without attempting to force any belief on the boy?

What is at the end of *The Road*? What textually, with no need to adduce scientific opinion from the ironically named Santa Fe Institute? *Stabat mater*, not yet *dolorosa*. And that mother who is there, standing there, not yet grieving, means that the pistol-packing, fire-carrying boy, the light-bearing boy, the golden chalice and glowing tabernacle of an anointed boy who honors all the prophets and whom goodness has found is who and what we have. He and she – mother and child reunion – are the final image of the plotted novel.

It is not just that the novel’s “literary passion defies the very emptiness that it proclaims,” as John Cant has written.⁴⁷ No, it is much more. It is that the rhetorical cloud of melancholy and pessimism and doom that informs

the novel from the opening dream onward and that indeed pervades most, if not all, of McCarthy's work, has lifted.

The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time.⁴⁸

Here I am reaffirming Jay Ellis's optimistic reading of "[t]he ending [that] provides us for the first time in a McCarthy novel with a full family,"⁴⁹ but I want to go a step beyond that assertion and nail my reading in a text that is pure McCarthy: "She would talk to him sometimes about God." That sentence describes an intentionally and pointedly repeated action, not the indefinite future of "[s]he would talk to him sometime about God," but "She would talk to him *sometimes* about God,"⁵⁰ and that single letter "s," showing us a continued and continuing action, opens us to the only remotely happy ending in all of McCarthy's work, scented as it is with the boy's breath that is the breath of God.

Could it be the gypsy of my epigraph from *The Crossing* needs to make an exception? I think McCarthy is telling us – finally – that there *is* a special case on the road. You could no doubt attribute the change to McCarthy's son John about whom he has spoken glowingly and to whom he dedicated *The Road* – and who appears once in "The Grail" under his own name⁵¹ – but the biographical argument isn't necessary. The evidence is in the text.

Epilogue or Coda

I have dealt with what I call the plotted novel – but there is still that stunning and cryptic last paragraph. It is distinct in tone and voice and time and perspective from the novel, raising more questions than it answers, serving as the novel's undesignated epilogue or coda.

Is the narrator addressing the reader directly when he says: "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand"?⁵² Or is that second-person pronoun directed at the narrator himself, as a rhetorical question? Or is there an intentional conflation of narrator and reader and even ghosts? The man who remembered the trout in the early mountain section of the novel is dead. But you, the reader, cannot help associating the trout here with those remembered trout. They are as iconic as Hemingway's trout, or more so, as

they are intentionally evocative, both early in the novel and intensely so now in this echoing vision of them, shared in the foreground between the complicit narrator and the willing reader and in the background with Hemingway and the deceased father.

Native brook trout (technically a char, *salvelinus fontinalis*) are as perfect a species as exists in nature, yet they are delicate and susceptible to the effects of any kind of pollution. McCarthy uses them to stand for all the particular natural miracles that have been destroyed by whatever cataclysm has occurred: “Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming.”⁵³ These miracle trout of becoming are at once real (the light wavy markings on the brook trout’s dorsal area are called vermiculations) and intricately evolved, and they return us to *once* – what is now, from the current point of view of this narrator-after-the-fact, *in illo tempore* – to our as yet undestroyed world where the brookies still wimple and swim, while not releasing us from the recorded destruction in the novel: “Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again.” We are returned, briefly and ever so hypothetically, to the irreversibly fragile pristine mountain setting – *a thing which could not be put back* – of the sacred trout for the ultimate, possibly guilt-laden, possibly not, nostalgic and mystical pronouncement: “In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.”⁵⁴

In the deep mountain hollows and coves where the trout *once* lived, emblematic of the entire natural world, all of nature was older than man and all of it, everything, hummed with the essence of life. It is no coincidence that the final word of the novel is “mystery.” Much of Cormac McCarthy’s work hums with mystery, and at the end of *The Road*, or more precisely at the end of the epilogue or coda of *The Road*, we are left with exactly that – with mystery – because McCarthy knows, as Federico García Lorca said, that “Only mystery makes us live. Only mystery.”⁵⁵ Dianne C. Luce believes that in this paragraph “the transcendental leap of McCarthy’s language moves into the realm of the Sublime.” And she writes most fittingly: “The place represented here is not just a lovely microcosm, but a realm of being, an awareness of the mystery and plenitude of the natural world and of our blessed and transient place within it, lost, guided, illuminated.”⁵⁶

Read this exquisite epilogue or coda of *The Road* as agnostic or Gnostic; call it deist or pantheist or naturalist (in the theological sense). Or call it Christian – the trout, whatever else it is, is a fish, one of the most obvious and unmistakable of Christian symbols. Perhaps we can best read these final words as McCarthy’s ultimate poetic commentary on his own creation, on his own version of what seems a kind of Christian existentialism. Regardless

of how we conceive of God – even as transcendent or removed or absent – the divine becomes immanent in the love between the father and the boy. As Steven Frye writes: “This theology finds God [...] in a father and son and the stubborn will that binds them, as well as in a family that rescues a child who is not their own.”⁵⁷ Such a reading favors the imbedded tapestry of Judeo-Christian iconography, yet does not exclude the philosophical latitude of Gnosticism and agnosticism, or the tangled contradictions of faith and reason and doubt. As in Christian existentialism, there are no easy answers in this novel, only difficult questions and the need for what Janet Maslin called in her review, “an embrace of faith in the face of no hope whatsoever.”⁵⁸ McCarthy claimed the message is simple. He told Oprah Winfrey in an uncharacteristic moment of candor and teleological reticence: “Life is pretty damn good, even when it looks bad. And we should appreciate it more. We should be grateful. I don’t know who to be grateful to, but you should be thankful for what you have.”⁵⁹

No matter how you read it, *The Road* – *polished and muscular and torsional* – lies beyond the constraints of any particular category, imbued with its own inextinguishable sense of mystery. In the face of the unbearable bleakness and desolation and despair of the novel, that very mystery – the mystery of love, incarnate, emanating from the boy – gives us an exemplar and it shines a ray of hope in all that cold and all that dark.⁶⁰

NOTES

1. Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 414.
2. Interview with Oprah Winfrey. Oprah’s Book Club. (July 2007) January 14, 2012. <http://www.oprah.com>.
3. Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (New York: Vintage, 2006), p. 309.
4. Cormac McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain* (New York: Vintage, 1992), p. 228.
5. John Clute, “The End of the Road,” *Science Fiction Weekly* 497 (October 30, 2006).
6. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce, eds. *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, revised edition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999).
7. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
8. *TR* 4.
9. *Ibid*, p. 16.
10. *Ibid*, pp. 88–89.
11. *Ibid*, p. 130.
12. *Ibid*, p. 130.
13. Philip A. Snyder, “Hospitality in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*,” *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 6 (Autumn 2008), p. 81.
14. Ely Ghosts. December 15, 2009. <http://internet.ge.ms/aj/meteorite.html>

15. John Jurgensen, "Hollywood's Favorite Cowboy" (interview with Cormac McCarthy), *The Wall Street Journal* (November 20, 2009).
16. Jay Ellis, "Another Sense of Ending: The Keynote Address to the Knoxville Conference," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 6 (Autumn 2008), p. 28. David Kushner in his *Rolling Stone* interview noted McCarthy's interest in the meteorite that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago (December 27, 2007).
17. TR 170.
18. *Ibid*, p. 168.
19. Ellis, p. 35.
20. Leo Daugherty, "Gravers False and True: *Blood Meridian* as Gnostic Tragedy," *Southern Quarterly* 30.4 (Summer 1992), pp. 122–33.
21. TR 181.
22. *Ibid*, p. 11.
23. *Ibid*, p. 196.
24. *Ibid*, p. 210.
25. *Ibid*, p. 5.
26. *Ibid*, p. 48.
27. *Ibid*, p. 74.
28. *Ibid*, p. 75.
29. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
30. TR 83.
31. *Ibid*, p. 172.
32. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
33. TR 259.
34. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
35. TR 278–79.
36. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
37. TR 277.
38. *Ibid*, p. 277.
39. In *Understanding Cormac McCarthy* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2009), p. 169, Steven Frye notes that the clock time the apocalyptic event takes place in *The Road* is 1:17 and that this is most likely a reference to Revelation 1:17, when Christ appears in the second coming.
40. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 2.
41. TR 261.
42. See Clute "The End of the Road."
43. *Ibid*, p. 273.
44. *Ibid*, p. 281.
45. *Ibid*, p. 281.
46. *Ibid*, p. 286.
47. John Cant. "*The Road*," *Cormac McCarthy*, new edition, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), pp. 183–200.
48. TR 286.

49. Ellis, p. 37.
50. TR 286.
51. Cormac McCarthy Papers, Southwestern Writers Collection, Wittliff Collections, Alkek Library, Texas State University, San Marcos, Box 91, File 1.
52. TR 286–87.
53. *Ibid*, pp. 286–87.
54. *Ibid*, pp. 286–87.
55. Federico García Lorca, *Obras Completas*, ed. Arturo del Hoyo 3 vols. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1986), Vol. 3, p. 86.
56. Dianne C. Luce, “The Painterly Eye: Waterscapes in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*,” *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings*, ed. Nicholas Monk (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 84.
57. Frye, p. 177.
58. Janet Maslin, “The Road through Hell, Paved with Desperation,” *The New York Times* (September 2006).
59. Interview with Oprah Winfrey. <http://www.oprah.com>.
60. Parts of this essay appeared in different form in *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 74. No. 3. My thanks to the editors for the opportunity to use them here.

