



BOOK JACKET PHOTO BY MARION ETLINGER, *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES*, KNOPF, 1992

Cormac McCarthy

The Road to Texas State

BY CONNIE TODD

Last December, I traveled to Santa Fe with staffers Steve Davis, Beverly Fondren and Katie Salzmann on a memorable trip to retrieve perhaps the most sought-after literary archive in the country — the papers of Cormac McCarthy.

McCarthy's body of work includes some of the finest novels of our times: *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, *Suttree*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*, *Blood Meridian*, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*.

Of *Blood Meridian* (1985), famed critic and Yale Sterling Professor of Humanities and English Harold Bloom states:

Shelley, who is a very wise literary critic in his way, defined the literary sublime as that which persuades the reader to give up easier pleasures in order to absorb more difficult pleasures. That is what *Blood Meridian* does. Like *Moby Dick*, or *As I Lay Dying*, it's a work of transcendental and very difficult pleasures indeed.... We have remarkable living American writers of narrative fiction. I've mentioned Pynchon. Philip Roth is a close personal friend, but aside from that, in the last 10 years he has written eight astonishing books, the very best of them, *Sabbath's Theatre* and *American Pastoral*, almost unmatched. And there is Don DeLillo's one great book, *Underworld*. As marvelous as those three are — Pynchon, DeLillo, Roth — they don't match *Blood Meridian*.

(From the Peter Josyph interview in *Southwest American Literature*, Vol. 26 No. 1, Fall 2000)

From the beginning of his career, McCarthy's work has garnered praise, at first from a small audience of cognoscenti who read everything he published. It was with his fifth novel, *All the Pretty Horses*, that he found a large audience — not only was it a runaway bestseller, but it won the National Book Award by a good ten lengths.

McCarthy depended on awards for many years until he was able to live by the sales of his work. In 1959 and 1960, he won Ingram-Merrill Foundation grants for creative writing, and in 1965 published his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, for which he was awarded the William Faulkner Award that same year. Also in 1965, he received an American Academy of Arts and Letters traveling fellowship to Europe. The next year, a Rockefeller Foundation grant.

In 1968, his second novel, *Outer Dark*, was published, followed by *Child of God* in 1973. He won two Guggenheim Fellowships, in 1969 and 1976. His fourth novel, *Suttree*, was published in 1979. Two years later, he received a MacArthur Foundation Grant, also known as the "genius" grant.

In the early 1980s, he left Knoxville and purchased a home in El Paso, where he remained until a move to Santa Fe a few years ago. In 1985 he published his fifth, and perhaps most highly acclaimed novel, *Blood Meridian*.

In one of very few interviews, McCarthy said he had "always been interested in the Southwest. There isn't a place in the world they don't know about cowboys and Indians and the myth of the West." (*New York Times Magazine*, April 19, 1992)

All the Pretty Horses, the first volume of The Border Trilogy, was published in 1992. It won not only the National Book Award but the National Book Critics Circle Award as well, and in 2000 it was made into a feature film. *The Stonemason*, a play McCarthy revised from text written in the mid-1970s, was published in 1994. Soon thereafter, the second volume of The Border

Trilogy, *The Crossing*, was released, and the third volume, *Cities of the Plain*, was published in 1998.

McCarthy's next novel, *No Country for Old Men*, was published in 2005. This was followed in 2006 by a novel in dramatic form, *The Sunset Limited*, originally performed by Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago and published in paperback.

He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his most recent novel, *The Road* (2006). In December 2007, the Joel and Ethan Coen film *No Country for Old Men*, based on McCarthy's novel, was named Best Motion Picture of 2007 by the National Board of Review, then in February it garnered four Academy Awards: Best Supporting Actor, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director and Best Picture. McCarthy was in the audience on Oscar night, cheering the *No Country* team.

McCarthy's literary papers at the SWWC document his entire writing career. At the core are correspondence, notes, hand-written and typed drafts, setting copies and proofs of each of his 10 novels.

I first became aware of Cormac McCarthy back in the mid-1980s when I worked for Bill Wittliff. Bill had read a script by McCarthy at the Sundance Institute and was much impressed. After the script, he read *Blood Meridian* — and so did I. At the time I was on a trip with several friends and made a nuisance of myself reading passages aloud to them, not something I often do. The prose was so astonishing that it gave me the same wonderful sense of discovery I had when I was a college student reading for the first time the great masters of world literature. Bill immediately had me buy all of

McCarthy's first editions, and we read each one with ever-increasing admiration and awe. Later on, he gifted these books, now signed, to The Wittliff Collections.

Bill contacted Cormac, then living in El Paso, and they got to know each other. Bill invited Cormac to the 1987 Texas Institute of Letters gathering in San Antonio; Cormac wanted to meet John Graves, who also wanted to meet him. We have in our archives a portrait Bill took of McCarthy from that day. Cormac and Bill traded phone calls on occasion, and he stopped by the office several times.

Because Bill and Sally Wittliff had just founded the Southwestern Writers Collection (SWWC) in 1986, Bill was curious about Cormac's archives and asked him if he was keeping his manuscripts, research notes, correspondence and such, or if they

were going to some already-designated repository. Cormac said he was keeping things himself. This was the first of many conversations they were to have about the materials, and there is no question in my mind that the acquisition of the Cormac McCarthy Papers by the SWWC resulted from years of ongoing conversations between McCarthy and Wittliff. Bill actually negotiated the agreement with McCarthy's agent on behalf of Texas State, which stepped up to the plate with true enthusiasm and support.

The purchase was funded by a combination of individual and foundation support raised specifically for acquisitions by The Wittliff Collections, added to university funds allocated for library collection development at Texas State. In order to maintain the integrity of the papers, the SWWC has contracted right of first refusal to purchase all future materials relating to work by the author, who is in the process of writing three new novels.

McCarthy's literary papers at the SWWC document his entire writing career. At the core are correspondence, notes, hand-written and typed drafts, setting copies and proofs of each of his 10 novels, from *The Road* back to *The Orchard Keeper*, plus the draft of an unfinished novel. Additionally, the archive contains similar materials related to his work on two plays, *The Stonemason* (1994) and *The Sunset Limited* (2006), as well as four screenplays, including *No Country for Old Men*, which McCarthy began as a script in 1984 then adapted as a novel 20 years later. There are more than 250 pieces of professional correspondence.

The new acquisition is complemented by several related archives already held at the SWWC. Photocopies of original typescripts of *The Stonemason* and two screenplays, signed by McCarthy, were previously donated by Bill and Cormac. The first screenplay "Cities of the Plain" (1984) predates the publication of the novel by 14 years; both it and the second screenplay, "Whales and Men" (not dated), are unpublished.

In July of 2006, the SWWC purchased from book collector and bibliographer J. Howard Woolmer an excellent subset of McCarthy materials spanning 1969-2005, featuring 100 or so letters between McCarthy and Woolmer and some 200 McCarthy books — including foreign-language editions and first editions of all his published works, many signed and inscribed. Among the materials is a photocopy of a hand-corrected *Blood Meridian* typescript.

Our lead archivist, Katie Salzmann, is currently processing the McCarthy Papers according to archival standards in the manner most effective for stewardship and research. The complete inventory

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X'd
Mar 27(?)
03
[PAGE 1]

I
~~III~~ (or II?) ... EACH section
spots w/ Bell
talking in italics?
NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN
One and only one.

1956
77
(letted injection
starts in '82)
(gossamer?)

out of his own mouth

I sent one ^{boy} man to the electric chair at Huntsville. My
arrest and my testimony. I went and visited with him ^{with me} three times.
Last time was the day of his execution. I didnt have to go but I
did. I ~~damn~~ sure didnt like ^{want to.} it. He'd killed a fourteen year old
girl and I'll tell you I ^{can} sure didnt have no great desire to visit
with him. ^{let alone} But I ^{or go to} done it. ^{visit now never did} The day of his execution, he told me
that the papers that day had said it was a crime of passion - he'd
been datin this girl, young as she was. He was ^{nineteen.} ~~twenty.~~ And he told
me there wasnt no passion to it. He ~~had~~ planned on killin
somebody for as long as he could remember. He ~~said~~ he knew he was
goin to hell and that if they turned him out he'd do it
dont know what to make of that. I surely dont. He tol
like you'd tell somebody it was rainin outside. I thou
seen a person like that before and I wondered if there

PAGE 1 OF AN EARLY
DRAFT OF THE NOVEL
NO COUNTRY FOR OLD
MEN, FROM THE CORMAC
MCCARTHY PAPERS AT
THE SOUTHWESTERN
WRITERS COLLECTION

(called a finding aid) of the contents will soon be posted online.

A new Cormac McCarthy Room is under construction at the Southwestern Writers Collection on the Alkek Library's seventh floor. The reading room will be equipped for exhibits and general research, which is expected to be brisk once the archives are processed and made available. Plans are in the works for events surrounding the archives' debut, and we'll announce things as they are scheduled.

Cormac invited us to breakfast the day we were to pick up his papers, but the snow and ice made the road to his house suspect — to me at least, unaccustomed as I am to such conditions and feeling responsible for the staff. So, we erred on the side of caution and waited for the snow to melt a bit. I hadn't seen Cormac in years; he

made coffee for us when we finally arrived, and we sat in his living room and talked for an hour or so. Wonderful talk. Then we all worked together, hauling the Rubbermaid bins out to the vans and loading them up.

We said our goodbyes and drove straight south, hung a left when we were out of the snow, and headed back to San Marcos, arriving around 1 in the morning to offload at the library. Although road weary, Steve, Beverly, Katie and I were euphoric, feeling the import of the trip — so pleasant and light-hearted but filled with deep resonance for The Wittliff Collections, for the university and for McCarthy scholars all over the world, many of whom have postponed books and dissertations waiting for us to open this amazing archive to the public, which we will do come fall. ☆

Connie Todd is curator of The Wittliff Collections.