

***Appalachian Heritage: A Literary Quarterly of the Southern Appalachians.* Ed. George Brosi. Vol. 39.1, Winter 2011. Guest editor for Cormac McCarthy Section: Rick Wallach.**

Review by Allen Josephs

This special issue of *Appalachian Heritage* opens with editor George Brosi's particular overview of Cormac McCarthy's "Rare Literary Life," an account that takes us fittingly up through Peter Josyph's memorable lecture at the dedication ceremony of the McCarthy collection at Texas State University in San Marcos in October, 2010. I say fittingly because Peter Josyph is the featured artist of this issue with fifteen photographs and five paintings—individual and personal pieces of art together with explicit photo-documentation that brings us close indeed to the reality of McCarthy's Appalachia, in particular Knoxville. My favorite is a photograph of the Southern Railroad Bridge across the Tennessee (seen on the cover of this issue of *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*) that captures evocatively the rust-iron, kudzu-draped railway that once helped define the South. The stately wreck of the bridge is set off by a distant two-story frame house that glows in the mist like an ethereal gatehouse to mountain life.

I also have to mention certain other photographs: one of the Gay Street Riviera Theatre, incandescent in the Knoxville night; another of the meticulous dry stack wall McCarthy built for his brief home in Louisville, Tennessee, which speaks mute tomes about the author of *The Stonemason*; the snapshot of J-Bone (yes, the real J-Bone, Jim Long) and Paulo Faria (McCarthy's Portuguese translator) playing pool at the Eagles Club; another of Wes Morgan at Gene Harrogate's hole-in-the-wall under the Hill Street viaduct (more on this item in a minute); and finally the weirdly flash-lit interior shot of Gene's abode. These are unique photographs of Suttree's city that urgently ground the novel in a specific and inescapable and still present reality.

And then there are Josyph's paintings inspired by the works and days: *Cormac McCarthy's House*, on the cover; a detail of the same painting and *The Stonemason* and *Child of God* inside the issue; and *Reading Suttree* on the back cover. The paintings seem expressionist a bit, surrealist a touch, and yet very much the work of Peter Josyph. While I intuit some Chagall and Munch and no little air of Matisse, these paintings are ultimately Josyph about McCarthy. They are at once personal and interpretive—rather the opposite of the photographs—ungrounded and essentialized.

For the centerpiece of the issue, Josyph does a lengthy interview with Wes Morgan, whom we can think of as our man in Knoxville. Titled "A Walk with Wesley G. Morgan through Suttree's Knoxville," this spontaneous and emotional conversation between Morgan and Josyph takes place all over Suttreeville. You will have to read it in its entirety, but I cannot resist partially revealing the climax here as the lower depths, the invasion of the riverine abode of Gene Harrogate (whose current *real* successor is—*mirabile dictu*—not home), an invasion poised harrowingly between low literary sleuthing and high literary breaking and entering. The moment at which the actual intrusion occurs is a moment you will not find in any other criticism. The grim reality of the scene produces an hallucinogenic montage of the interior. And it forces Josyph's emotional epiphany: "You see, that's... that's what... that's what all of these critics, these bullshitters, they just don't understand with their *gnosticism* and their..." (48).

Oh, and while we're on gnosticism, if you want to know how Wes Morgan determined the provenance of the watermelon scene....

The very same Wes Morgan is also a featured photographer, with five photographs and a keyed map of downtown Knoxville. One of the most intriguing aspects is how Morgan was able to get a surreal middle-of-the-night photograph of the old McCarthy home on Martin Mill Pike—the one the father visits in *The Road*—going down in flames a couple of years ago. He also took an exquisite mid-river shot of the three Knoxville bridges at dusk, the current tugging southward, the bridges reflected on the river's mirror—bridges and otherbridges—the mist rising. All that's missing is Buddy and his reflection rowing against the river's purple sludge.

Josyph and Morgan have created a synergistic triumph of art and investigation, of research and expression, for which we can all be grateful.

"Cormac McCarthy's Knoxville" by Jack Neely, a longtime local journalist, brings to light some obscure tidbits of Cormackiana, such as the four "*Suttree* Staggers," Knoxville's response to the literary pub-crawls inspired by Dublin's Bloomsday, some of which nicely anticipates and corroborates the Josyph-Morgan dialogue: "Also on the route was some trespassing well off the beaten path. Though the city is much changed, scenes under both the Henly Street Bridge (the ragpicker's home) and the Hill Street Viaduct (Harrogate's hole), out-of-the-way places rarely approached for any practical purpose, seem eerily preserved exactly as described" (18).

And speaking of Bloomsday, Rick Wallach's essay "Ulysses in Knoxville: *Suttree's* Ageean Journey," changes forever the way we will read *Suttree*. (No, that's not a typo; it is Ageean, as in James Agee, but you couldn't very well subtitle it: *Suttree's* James Ageean Journey.) Here I will unfairly extract the essence of the essay, but not so much that you can escape reading it: "the intersecting peregrinations through Knoxville and environs of its two principal figures, Buddy *Suttree* and his hapless would-be protégé Gene Harrogate, inflect the wanderings of Leopold Bloom and Steven Dedalus through Dublin, another city one could navigate successfully with its most illustrious book in hand. These wanderings are the searching of sons after fathers and fathers after sons." About to remember McCarthy's Bloom-like dictum (the other Bloom) that "the ugly fact is that all books are made of other books," Wallach concludes that "McCarthy's pilferage from both Agee and Joyce, and the spirit in which he revises his stolen material, are quintessentially parodical" (54). And that parodic nature as well as McCarthy's "obsessively chiasmatic revision of the Joycean materials" (57), ensures that "we sometimes reconstruct our subject texts, not as though they weighed upon us with an originary authority, but almost as if they had never been written before" (60).

I appreciate Wallach's inclusion of himself there along with us in this rewriting of some of our ur-texts, and I'm amused, even a trifle bemused, by the un-Blooming of it all (both Blooms), but I also have to admit to abusing his essay by hacking it up and by being constrained to leave out essential humorous aspects such as his droll observation that the prostitute is "named Joyce, no less" (60).

My failure to encompass all the issue's issues should in no way deter you from a thorough perusal of these mirrored scintillations of an Appalachian gem. Josyph and Morgan, Buddy and Gene, Bloom and Dedalus, Wallach and Bloom, McCarthy and Joyce—your reviewer and you—the whole dopplegang is herein reflected.