

Monk, Nicholas, ed. *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings*. New York: Routledge, 2012. 208 pp. Hardcover, \$125, ISBN-10: 0415895499.

Review by William Brannon

Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings represents an important contribution to Cormac McCarthy scholarship. The twelve essays collected in the volume, all selected from presentations to the Fourth International Conference on Cormac McCarthy in 2009, include essays that draw upon earlier McCarthy scholarship to establish new, intertextual links between McCarthy's fiction and other literary texts, as well as essays exploring connections between McCarthy's work and other media besides print, including recent dramatic and cinematic adaptations of different McCarthy texts. The diversity of these essays mirrors the maturation and expansion of McCarthy scholarship.

The first three essays explore links between different McCarthy novels and earlier literary works. In "*Blood Meridian* and Classical Greek Thought," David Williams examines the connections to classical philosophy in the novel and compares *Blood Meridian* to one specific epic, *The Iliad*. Williams uses Simone Weil's definition of *force* as simply referring to "might" and suggests McCarthy's novel can be read as a tragedy depicting human attempts to better understand and cope with the ramifications of the nature of *force*. Williams argues that the kid's failure to acknowledge the preeminence of *force* as governing principle in human endeavors compels the judge to murder him in the jakes near the novel's conclusion since the judge's speeches in *Blood Meridian* reflect the early Greek philosophers' conception of violence as a universal constant through which force is wielded. Similar to Williams, Megan Riley McGilchrist explores connections between one of McCarthy's novels and earlier literary texts in "The Ties That Bind: Intertextual Links between *All the Pretty Horses* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." McGilchrist expands upon the work of earlier McCarthy scholars who have noted the chivalric qualities in John Grady Cole's quest for adventure in Mexico following the sale of his family's ranch and identifies several parallels between John Grady's adventures and Gawain's journeys. Among these parallels McGilchrist mentions are that both John Grady and Gawain set out on adventures to unknown destinations and encounter multiple challenges along the way including problems posed by the natural world and troubles involving beautiful women. She does not, however, examine how Gawain's interaction with Bertilak's wife differs from John Grady's relationship with Alejandra, an oversight. Gawain rejects the attempts at seduction made by Bertilak's wife, while John Grady pursues his involvement with Alejandra despite the objections of Alejandra's aunt and Rawlins's counsel. McGilchrist concludes by noting the "congruencies" between the two texts "largely in matters of prescribed 'knightly' or 'heroic' behavior suggests a subtext in both works of an oblique questioning of those precepts in their respective societies" (40). In

another essay stressing contexts, Jan Nordby Gretlund seeks to examine the conclusion of *The Road* within the larger context of American literary tradition in “Cormac McCarthy and the American Literary Tradition: Wording the End.” The prominent themes in American literature Gretlund identifies as developed by McCarthy in *The Road* include the individual’s potential power and the capacity for renewal and regeneration springing from it. Gretlund argues these two themes are evident in the man and boy’s encounter with the veteran in *The Road*’s conclusion, thus interpreting the novel’s conclusion as affirming life.

The next six essays explore links between McCarthy’s fiction and mediums outside print. Peter Josyph’s “Cormac McCarthy’s House” chronicles Josyph’s series of paintings of McCarthy’s long-term residence in El Paso, Texas. In addition to providing insight regarding an artist’s creative process, Josyph’s narrative functions as a different type of literary criticism since he reflects on how his reading of McCarthy’s literary output affects his own creative endeavor, the visual interpretation of Cormac McCarthy’s home. Dianne C. Luce’s “The Painterly Eye: Waterscapes in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*” also considers connections between McCarthy’s fiction and painting. According to Luce, McCarthy’s description of the trout stream in the glen in the *The Road* functions as an example of landscape painting that transcends mere representation, providing a glimpse of “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” (84).

The success of Cormac McCarthy’s fiction has led to adaptation of several of his works for film. In “The Silent Sheriff: *No Country for Old Men*—A Comparison of Novel and Film,” John Cant compares the depiction of Sheriff Bell in *No Country for Old Men* to the portrayal in the cinematic adaptation of the novel, particularly discussing the omission in the film version of the Sheriff’s soliloquies prominent in the novel. Cant additionally explores how the portrayal of Anton Chigurh in the film compares to the novel’s depiction of Chigurh, asserting “*No Country for Old Men* is Sheriff Bell’s book: but it is Anton Chigurh’s film” (94). Cant attributes this shift in emphasis to the limitations of the film medium, suggesting that a reluctance to use voiceover narration in the film may have necessitated the omission of many of the Sheriff’s monologues, which play such a significant role in the novel. Michael Madsen likens the character Michael Myers/The Shape in John Carpenter’s horror movie *Halloween* (1978) to Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* in “‘A Nameless Wheeling in the Night’: Shapes of Evil in Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* and John Carpenter’s *Halloween*.” Madsen notes several similarities between the Shape and Judge Holden, including the endless capacity for evil and apparent invincibility of each character. He then proposes that the Shape and Judge Holden both represent the permanence of evil in the world. Positing as well that the inevitability of evil and its often horrible consequences is a recurring theme in McCarthy’s novels, Madsen suggests the exploration begins with earlier Appalachian novels like *Outer Dark* and *Child of God* and continues through the most recent novel, *The Road*. Readers are left wondering about at least two implications: If Judge Holden indeed shares a kinship with Michael Myers/The Shape in the original *Halloween* film as Madsen argues, then should Anton Chigurh likewise be identified as sharing

many of the same traits as either Holden or the Shape? Is Chigurh then a more contemporary representation of the same omnipresent evil that McCarthy suggests exists as part of the human condition, and is it this realization that hastens Sheriff Bell's decision to retire?

Ciarán Dowd proposes in "'A Novel in Dramatic Form': Metaphysical Tension in *The Sunset Limited*" that the two characters in McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited* represent opposing metaphysical philosophies evident throughout McCarthy's novels. These two philosophies include naturalism, represented by the atheist professor White and concerned with interpreting life by means of the contents of reality, and supernaturalism, represented by the religious ex-convict Black and focused on the mystical as a means of navigating life. Dowd traces these two opposing strands through McCarthy's works, labeling Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* as an example of a naturalist given his pronouncements regarding the inevitability of war and the indifference of the natural world to human suffering. In contrast, Dowd identifies Suttree as someone who can be identified as ascribing to greater belief in the supernatural due to the revelations Suttree receives via the several hallucinogenic episodes in the novel, including his recovery from illness following his encounter with Mother She. In "Believing in *The Sunset Limited*: Tom Cornford and Peter Josyph on Directing McCarthy," Josyph poses questions to Cornford about the challenges Cornford confronted in producing *The Sunset Limited* for the stage. This conversation is reproduced in the essay as an extended dialogue between the two men, and their discussion echoes Dowd's observations about the tension in McCarthy's play between two conflicting philosophies regarding life as particularly evident in White's contemplation of suicide. In the course of the discussion Josyph and Cornford discuss how the situation that Black and White confront in the play parallels the predicaments of the characters in *No Country for Old Men* and *Blood Meridian* where the protagonists react to series of events governed by chance.

The volume's concluding three essays consider more indirect relationships between McCarthy's work and other authors. Euan Gallivan examines what are shared questions about the divided self and mortality within McCarthy's *Suttree* and Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* in the essay "Cold Dimensions, Little Worlds: Self, Death, and Motion in *Suttree* and Beckett's *Murphy*." He notes that while both novels seem to offer affirmative philosophical resolutions for each protagonist, the novels differ in Murphy's and Suttree's ultimate fates, with the former meeting an untimely end in an explosion while the latter merely leaves the squalor of McAnally Flatts as the area is demolished for a freeway. Next, while acknowledging that Jean Toomer's poem "Blue Meridian" and McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* would seem on the surface to have little in common, John Ferer uses Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality to argue in "From Blue to Blood: Jean Toomer's 'Blue Meridian' and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* as Intertexts" that Toomer's poem and McCarthy's novel "intersect and neutralize each other on three thematic or philosophical levels regarding: (a) the equality of beings, (b) light as a symbol of one primordial life force, and (c) man's ability to transcend to a divine apex" (157). Ferer concludes that the approaches to life the poem and the novel offer diverge in the outcome each offers. Ferer claims *Blood Meridian* reveals a grim

world where the human race can never transcend the capacity for violence, a worldview in stark contrast to the possibility for harmony Ferer interprets as inhabiting Toomer's poem. In "Versions of the *Seeleroman*: Cormac McCarthy and Leslie Silko," volume editor Nicholas Monk contrasts the spiritual journey of Tayo in Silko's novel with the spiritual quests of protagonists of McCarthy's novels, especially those of John Grady Cole and Billy in *The Border Trilogy* and the man and his son in *The Road*. Monk cites Tayo's successful reconnection with the natural world as a more optimistic outlook for the capacity of human engagement with the natural world, an outlook contrasting with the outcome of *The Border Trilogy* and the conclusion of *The Road* where modernity has replaced the spiritual and consumed the natural world.

Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy achieves its ambitious goal in providing a showcase for scholars who have identified links between McCarthy's literary output and other works spanning different historical periods, ranging from poetry to paintings and films, as well as to other novels. An inherent danger with the type of critical project represented by this volume involves the establishment of only cursory connections between different works without providing sufficient support for them. The twelve essays in Monk's volume nevertheless avoid this potential pitfall. If any complaints remain, they would focus on the relative brevity of the essays, sometimes placing the onus on readers to consider if the connections noted by one of the collection's authors might be extended to other works by McCarthy. For example, does McCarthy address in *The Orchard Keeper* the themes of individuality and the potential for regeneration that Gretlund identifies as present in the conclusion of *The Road*? In a similar manner, how might the two competing philosophies Dowd notes in *The Sunset Limited* be applicable to interpreting the nightmarish world of *Outer Dark*?

If anything, though, the questions posed by the twelve essays encourage readers to consider further the intertextual connections between McCarthy's work and the other sources identified by the authors. In doing so, the project provides a blueprint for future critical scholarship in McCarthy studies. The essays contained in *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy* affirm not only the maturing of McCarthy scholarship but also offer glimpses of possible avenues for future McCarthy criticism.

Josyph, Peter. *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010. 247 pages. Paperback, US \$35.00, ISBN 978-0-8108-7707-8.

Review by Marty Priola

Any serious student of Cormac McCarthy's work should welcome Peter Josyph's *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy* for its invaluable perspective and incisive prose. The casual reader—wondering what all the fuss over Cormac McCarthy is about—will gain inspiration and understanding here, as well.

The book collects Josyph's essays¹ and interviews (with the likes of Harold Bloom, screenwriter Ted Talley, novelist Robert Morgan, and *Blood Meridian* raconteur Rick Wallach) sharing the theme of Cormac McCarthy. Josyph delves into *Suttree*, *Blood Meridian*, *All the Pretty Horses*, and several of McCarthy's "minor" works. Several of these pieces have previously appeared in disparate sources,² and many of them have been virtually unobtainable for quite some time; some are previously unpublished.

If a reader comes to this collection of essays looking for a coherent interpretation of McCarthy's middle oeuvre, that reader will certainly be disappointed. Josyph is not looking, as a more traditional scholar might, for recurring themes and images, or for McCarthy's agenda, whatever that might be. Nor is he placing McCarthy in an "appropriate" context, whether biographical, historical, or new critical. Nor is he concerned with any of the popular "-ism" schools of criticism.

Instead, *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy* is a personal and subjective volume. Josyph is prone, throughout, to allusion to other works—movies, novels, poems, the like—and regularly incorporates materials that seem only tangentially related to the subject at hand. But later, when he slides back to the main concern, the diligent reader is often delighted with trenchant and unexpected rewards.

For example, the book's last essay concerns (at one point) the Majestic Theater of San Antonio, Texas, which "has produced legitimate theater since . . . 1974; but prior to that . . . it had shown only films" (Josyph 203). When John Grady Cole of *All the Pretty Horses* visits there in 1949, the Majestic is not staging a play featuring his mother but is instead showing a John Wayne movie called *The Wake of the Red Witch*. Josyph gleefully reports that the movie is "your only chance to see John Wayne wrestle an octopus" (203-204).³ Eventually, by way of Orwell's *1984*, Josyph moves on to a discussion of how little regard McCarthy's characters have for literature.

So these are not critical essays in the typical sense. The pieces are more akin to literary nonfiction. Yet the essays are about McCarthy just as much as they are about Josyph's own personal and private experiences of reading McCarthy, of pondering McCarthy, of researching McCarthy, of being reminded about McCarthy's books by some random event on the street.

The scattershot approach of moments like the above Majestic Theater discussion (which in one paragraph mentions or alludes to John Wayne, George Orwell, and several others) allows these wide-ranging essays to achieve artistic unity not by hewing closely to their overall subject—McCarthy's works—but by their subjectivity. Always, whether the mode of expression is essay or interview, Josyph lurks behind the copy like a mischievous scrivener, poking and prodding and positioning his own words for maximum effect.

Even though the essays in this book do not adopt the traditional academic tone, they often include both close reading and meticulous research. The material that Josyph has amassed should prove useful to scholars looking to broaden and deepen their own understanding of McCarthy's work. *Adventures in Cormac McCarthy* suggests that deeper exploration of McCarthy's books on a textual and historical level will yield fascinating and sometimes stunning rewards.

Early in the collection, Josyph gives his reader a hint about his method of investigation. As though revealing a secret, he explains: "It can help to look at things very small—just don't expect them to remain that way" (25). And throughout the book, we see this pattern repeating itself with striking effect.

One example is the method of the book's first essay, an audacious and sometimes chilling high-wire act called "Suttree's War of the Worlds: High Noon in Knoxville." Stylistically breezy but also deeply allusive, *Suttree* is incorporated into and juxtaposed against Josyph's then-current work editing his documentary film *Liberty Street: Alive at Ground Zero*. Yet also up for examination and employed as counterpoint are the films *High Noon* (1952) and *The War of The Worlds* (1953), as well as McCarthy's other novels, most notably *Blood Meridian: or The Evening Redness in the West* (1985). Additional references and quotations range from da Vinci to Thoreau, together with thoughts about Joyce and Melville, and these merely scratch the surface of the outside content referred to in this essay. Sometimes, these references occur in stream-of-consciousness form, fevered dreams in which Whitman and Thoreau discuss McCarthy, in which *Blood Meridian's* Judge Holden is depicted "arriving on a Knoxville train the way Frank Miller inflects Hadleyville toward the end of *High Noon*. Carrying Spencer Tracy's suitcase from *Bad Day at Black Rock* . . ." (4).

Ironically, given the expansive palette of cultural, artistic, and historical references the piece encompasses, Josyph's particular gift is focus. He looks at an item, in this case the suicide's watch still ticking early in McCarthy's *Suttree*, and examines it closely. His question is: could Suttree have noticed that detail? The answer is most certainly no, but Josyph teases from the question an examination of wristwatches and a discussion of the Rolex Sign, then moves on to questions about Suttree's height, then to a discussion of the whys and wherefores of Paolo Faria's excellent Portuguese translations of McCarthy.

Consequently, *Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy* is no simple book. Like McCarthy, Josyph expects and demands work and engagement from his reader, who does not read so much as experience these essays. One may be caught off guard by a reference, or may suddenly not know the subject matter intimately. Even so, the prose in these pieces leads to contemplative places—as well as to some very funny ones.

The work demanded of the reader is matched by the work Josyph has put into researching and writing these essays. He knows, for example, that McCarthy gets the weather right in *All the Pretty Horses*, but that he once got the year wrong.

Special mention must be given to the essay "Older Professions: The Fourth Wall of *The Stonemason*." Often hilarious, and filled with notions a knowledgeable reader would expect only from a working actor/director/artist such as Josyph, the essay asks how one might go about actually staging McCarthy's first published play as something resembling a play—which it after all claims to be. If *The Stonemason* is never actually produced in full, Josyph and this particular screed will bear some of the responsibility; any director with sense would back away from such a daunting project after reading Josyph's

merciless unstaging of the play. This essay is one of the masterpieces of McCarthy criticism.

The book is, however, slightly marred by a few errors within the text itself. Faulkner expert Noel Polk is at one point referred to as “Noah Polk,” for example. But these, with a book of this sort in today’s publishing climate, are to be expected in first editions. As well, longtime followers of Josyph’s work may be slightly disoriented by additional content appearing in pieces they thought they knew, but Josyph’s new observations are no less shrewd for being later additions.

Adventures in Reading Cormac McCarthy revels in its allusions and its own discursiveness. The interviews add new voices and often serve as breathers from Josyph’s willful and energetic prose or as a useful counterpoint to his own point of view. In the end, one senses that all of these disparate items and events—all of this *stuff* about McCarthy—coalesces in Josyph’s mind, and that synthesizing process results in an autobiographical criticism that reveals and obscures simultaneously.

Many objects are featured in this book: tokens, watches, a piece of phlegm, but what matters here is Josyph’s subjective reaction to them. That notion extends to McCarthy’s books themselves. Josyph approaches them like combatants on the field of battle, not as a monk scribe might approach a holy text. And we, as readers, are fortunate enough to stand witness to the conflagration. In the crashing cacophony of these ideas and things, people and events, we ultimately draw closer to the essence of what Josyph brings to McCarthy: a mind fully engaged, a man working to understand, a writer struggling with himself to understand another writer—by writing himself.

Notes

¹ Attendees of various McCarthy-related conferences and events have likely heard versions of some of the essays, and many of the interviews were conducted for one of Josyph’s film projects related to McCarthy.

² Recent editing by the author adds new material to those pieces that have been previously published.

³ “[A]s soon as I learn the title of the play that Mrs. Cole . . . was starring in at the time, I will carry the information to the Ministry of Truth, where a grandson of Winston Smith will correct the theatre listings in all old copies of the *San Antonio Express*. . .” (204).

***The Sunset Limited*. Dir. Tommy Lee Jones. Perf. Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson. HBO, 2011. Television.**

Review by Linda Woodson

On February 12, 2011, HBO premiered *The Sunset Limited* and has continued to run McCarthy’s drama in its programming on an irregular basis. At the time of this writing, the DVD is not yet available, though according to Amazon, it will be released February 7, 2012.

The film stars Tommy Lee Jones as White and Samuel L. Jackson as Black in a ninety-minute version. Although some dialogue from McCarthy's original text is left out, the omitted passages are not significant. The film is set entirely in one room of Black's New York tenement apartment, where he ministers to junkies, and it consists of a dialectic between Black, a deeply religious ex-con who has just saved White's life, and White, a professor who has reached a profound despair and sees no reason to continue living. Black had rescued White after he had leaped in front of a subway, the Sunset Limited, and from that point on the "Sunset Limited" serves the two as a metaphor for death. This is no scholastic debate on belief in God versus nihilism, however, because the success of Black's efforts to prevent White from making another suicide attempt is literally a matter of life and death.

Jones's initiative in bringing McCarthy's play to film and thereby reaching a wider audience is a welcome gift, especially for those of us who have not had the opportunity to see it as a stage production. The film demonstrates Jones's sensitive appreciation for McCarthy's work. For fans of McCarthy, hearing the language of the play spoken by two immensely talented actors is certainly pleasure enough.

The film opens in a New York subway station with the sounds of the subway: horn, brakes, siren, cries. The camera moves from the white wall where the station is identified as 155th St. – 8th Ave. to the lights of the subway car rounding the corner, perhaps inspired by the subway lights on the cover of the play's print copy. Although the viewer sees none of the action in the subway station, having this opening scene both amplifies dramatically what has taken place prior to the events in Black's apartment and establishes the train's horn as a motif to reappear in the spare, but effective, original music of composer Marco Beltrani.

The rest of the film takes place in Black's shabby apartment, and the credits appear against the tattered furnishings. Black, neatly dressed in a Lennox Air uniform, is seated at a table, deep in thought, with White, dressed in cargo pants and knit shirt and looking like a man who hasn't slept, seated across from him. A closeup of White's hand on the table captures his widespread fingers gradually pulling together, then opening again, embodying the measured pace with which White at the beginning will abide Black's attempts to dissuade him from suicide. The attention to hands here and in several other places reflects the importance of hands in McCarthy's work, particularly in *The Stonemason* and in *Cities of the Plain*, and offers further evidence of Jones's close reading of McCarthy's writing. The round table is wisely chosen because it allows the characters to draw closer together or farther apart with little effort or distraction. The camera movement around the table and to the other parts of the room, as well as to closeups of the actors or point-of-view shots over their shoulders, is smoothly accomplished and alleviates the static nature of the set. The camera shifts reveal a bathroom with an open door, plain kitchen cabinets, a sofa with a stuffed chair beside it, the door with its multiple locks, and a window reflecting the closeness of the next brick building, a rainstorm, and the gradual movement in time toward morning.

The conversation begins with Black's efforts to understand the professor's motives for suicide and with the professor lessening the significance of what

Black has done: “If you’re just doing what you’re supposed to then you don’t get to be a hero.” When Black asks why White had chosen today, White replies that it is his birthday, adding, “But I certainly don’t regard that as special.” White often repeats that he has to go, but when he stands and puts on his jacket (lifted over his head with both arms already in the sleeves just as it is described in McCarthy’s play), Black makes preparations to accompany him. Resigned that he isn’t going to be able to leave easily, White sits back down and says, “You aren’t going home with me.” Jackson, in the role of Black, brilliantly carries the dramatic weight of some two-thirds of the film with equal skill in moments of humor and heightened emotion. Initially Jones’s performance is less believable: his character displays too much disengagement, too much docility, for a man biding his time until he can escape. (Or perhaps it’s just the “lingering scent” of his performance as Sheriff Bell.) His delivery builds in intensity throughout, though, until the end when his presentation of White’s despair is palpable.

Black works through the three Aristotelian means of persuasion—logos, pathos, ethos—as he attempts to dissuade White from suicide. Starting with a direction he believes will appeal to the professor rationally, he asks how many books the professor has read and lightens the tone by pretending to figure the total with pencil in a cheap composition book. He asks what the professor considers the greatest book ever written. The professor’s first response is *War and Peace*, but ultimately he says that it would be a “true” book, a history book, revealing the futility of asking him to make a religious leap of faith. Continuing with his logical appeal, Black asks why, if White has read all those books, he hasn’t read “the greatest book.” The body movement of the two actors convincingly supports the language: White rubs his hands, then sits with arms folded; Black’s arms are open as he leans back, then forward. It is storming outside now, and there are traffic sounds, offering the viewer some relief from the tension in the room.

Black then tries a more emotional appeal, probing for any human connections the professor may have, any friends, but White continues to request just to be allowed to go home, moving closer and saying he won’t try to kill himself. Sounds outside the apartment—a siren, someone playing a horn—break the moment, as White moves to the couch and lies down, with Black moving to the chair beside him. In this clever evocation of the psychiatrist’s couch, White shares more of his personal life, but again, in his talk about his father’s death and White’s failure to visit him while the man was still alive, his lack of any human connection once again becomes palpable. Black relieves the moment with humor, rising to check the train schedule. As heavy rain falls outside, he provides a benediction, “Bless and keep you.” Jackson’s delivery is always moving in demonstrating Black’s deep compassion.

Attempting to redirect and take control of their exchanges, White asks about Black: if he has a family, why he was in the penitentiary, and if he knows any jailhouse stories. He agrees to stay if Black will tell him a jailhouse story. Providing the highest dramatic tension of the film, the story of Black’s fight in the penitentiary that led to his hearing the voice of God as he lay wounded and handcuffed to a bed is delivered by Jackson with such energy that he is left

breathless. The story, in its honesty, offers an appeal through Black's ethos and will remind McCarthy's readers of the value of "witnessing."

When White asks for a drink, Black provides comic relief with his story of drunks hiding their booze in the toilet and his imitation of the drunk Evelyn's slurred speech. But when White offers him money to repay him for the unwanted saving of his life thereby removing any obligation, Black once again realizes his attempts are failing, explaining that White has "no notion the trouble you in."

The next segment, the sharing of a meal of stew, is perhaps the most noteworthy of the film. Sharing a meal is always significant in McCarthy's work, and ultimately this meal and the human connection established through it may offer the only hope that White will later rethink his plans for suicide. The sub-themes of poverty and race are reinforced as Black explains that the poor are forced to be innovative with what they have to eat. This scene is a turning point in the film and one of the best acted by both, with Jackson conveying Black's empathy and Jones warming perceptibly as he enjoys the food.

But that mood is fleeting, and as the scene outside the window grows lighter, White begins to assume dominance in the exchange, asserting that the "darker picture is the correct one." The background music rises, and with the words, "I can't," White explains his belief that the world is a "forced labor camp." Pink at the top of the window indicates daybreak as Jones's emotional intensity grows, expanding on White's longing for darkness having given up the world "line by line" until "only one door is left." He moves to the door and with finality speaks his creed, "I don't believe in God." Black is almost in tears as he realizes how futile his arguments have been. At the door the professor tries to open the locks, hits the door, and finally, with hands folded, begs, "Open the door. Please." Black reluctantly opens the locks, and as White leaves, a single tone of music underscores the finality of their parting.

Powerfully, then, Jackson enacts Black's deep frustration as he moves to the couch, misses the seat, and crumples to the floor crying out, "I don't understand." Calling forth the early Christian belief that if one had *Verbum*, the Word, then God would provide *verbum* to convert others, he asks why he wasn't given the words. The camera moves to a full view of the room as Black regains his resolve, "I'll keep your word," and then, "Is that okay?" with eyes raised, then lowered, followed by the refrain, "Is that okay?" The camera shifts to the sun outside, and there is a chorus with a final song: "Ain't gone rain no more." My first reaction was that this ending was too hopeful since the only affirmation at this point is Black's renewed resolve, however tentative. Subsequent viewings, though, have reminded me of its reflection of the overall themes of the Emersonian concept "the divinity within" and Hemingway's "the sun also rises."

The subtitle of McCarthy's work is "A Novel in Dramatic Form." My understanding of this designation is that, first, the work is to be read, hence a "novel." Second, because it is in dramatic form, it is expected to be staged. Jones's film, though, takes it into one more genre, and while the camera movement overcomes some of the potential sameness of a filmed play about two men in a single room, it is one of the details that makes the transfer to film less satisfying overall. In a darkened theater the distance to the stage and the

actors is constant, and the language in a play with little action is paramount. In this filmed version the contemplation required by the demanding philosophical language is often subordinated to the development of the characters through eye contact and close-ups. Regardless, the film, in sum, is at once moving and a worthy addition to McCarthy works on film.