

## ***EDITOR'S PAGE***

---

*John Wegner*

Joan Didion has commented that “writing is the act of saying *I*, of imposing upon other people, of saying *listen to me, see it my way, change your mind*. It’s an aggressive, even hostile act. [. . .] there’s no getting around the fact that setting words on paper is the tactic of a secret bully, an invasion, an imposition of the writer’s sensibility on the reader’s most private space” (5). Later in the same essay, Didion tells her audience that she began *Play It As It Lays*, one of the truly great novels of the twentieth century, by imagining “Empty space”—a “book to which the reader would have to bring his or her own bad dreams” (7). She masterfully opens the white space within her novel, creating a haunting work where reading her words forces us to examine those bad dreams. Hers is an invasive and aggressive novel, asking the audience to bare its soul and examine its own emotions. Didion’s comments about her writing and her novel seem strangely appropriate to me as we present the second issue of the *Cormac McCarthy Journal*. Entering 2002, I can not help wondering if we need more novelists like Didion and Cormac McCarthy to aggressively invade our private space, asking us to open our minds to the imposition of great writing, challenging ideas, and, often, uncomfortable self-reflexive examination. However uncomfortable, each idea, each imposition, each invasion, moves us closer to an ideological consciousness of our self and our humanity. For this alone, I think, we should accept the discomfort.

Admittedly, reading Didion’s comments makes me self-conscious as I compose my “Editor’s Comments,” and I claim none of (but how can I deny?) the aggressive imposition of those talented writers I read and write about. Nor, do I think, would the essayists in our current volume claim the hostility Didion claims. They would, however, ask that you “*listen to me, see it my way, change your mind*.” I hope, and believe, their ideas are provocative enough to spark spirited discussion, disagreement, and inspired aggressive submissions (perhaps your own invasion of our private space?).

The publication of volume 1 of the *Journal* was somewhat of a milestone. We went to press last year as Billy Bob Thornton’s movie version of *All the Pretty Horses* headed to theaters, and McCarthy scholarship was riding the wave of the Southwestern novels’ popularity. Volume two turns some of its attention back to the South. The cover photo of Lake Pontchartrain, I hope, is a moment of brilliant foresight considering rumors that McCarthy’s new novel will be set in New Orleans.

Within the pages of the *Journal*, our essayists are on much firmer

footing than our (hopefully) prescient cover photograph. We begin with an essay by Edwin T. Arnold describing the stage production of McCarthy's *The Stonemason*. Arnold and other McCarthy fans watched the play performed at the Arts Alliance Center in Clear Lake, Texas. Arnold's essay provides insight into the origination of the Alliance Center's production, and he offers insightful commentary about the performance itself. Maintaining a focus on McCarthy's dramatic work, J. Douglas Canfield offers a provocative Oedipal reading of *The Gardener's Son* and *The Stonemason*. Canfield argues that "[b]oth are plays in which sons attempt to fill the void left by absent fathers." Throughout his interesting argument, Canfield implicitly challenges us to examine the father/son relationships throughout McCarthy's fictional world.

Following Arnold and Canfield, we move back to the Southwest with essays by Dan Moos and Chris Campbell. Moos' essay examines the violence in *Blood Meridian*, arguing that "Violence on this frontier is merely carnage, without any rejuvenating or civilizing component; McCarthy's characters establish nothing through their bloodletting, except possibly the guarantee of their own destruction." Moos' article discusses much more than violence, though. While he does look closely at the violence in the text, Moos is much more interested in examining McCarthy's work as a "novel about representation, both within its narrative and in the construction of the novel itself." Concluding our essay section, Chris Campbell offers an exciting look at the inspiration for the "Epilogue" in *Blood Meridian*. Campbell neatly shows the possibility that Walter De Maria's landscape artwork *The Lightning Field* could have inspired McCarthy. Campbell works beautifully through an explanation of de Maria's landscape art and McCarthy's "Epilogue" to "illustrate the striking thematic elements shared by the two works, and, finally, demonstrate how familiarity with *The Lightning Field* supports and amplifies Leo Daugherty's 1993 interpretation of the epilogue's meaning."

In addition to our full-length articles, we have included one Note and three reviews in this issue. Jessica Simmons offers us a brief, provocative look at transgenderism in *Suttree*. Stacey Peebles, Nell Sullivan, and Rick Wallach have generously agreed to review three new books discussing McCarthy's fiction published within the last two years. We look forward to many more books and many more reviews.

As with any Journal issue, I would be remiss not to thank the great editorial board. Dianne C. Luce, Edwin T. Arnold, Bill Spencer, and Rick Wallach form a core of knowledgeable and intelligent readers who help make my job easier. Additionally, I would like to thank Marty Priola for his tireless work on the McCarthy web site and on-line journal. I hope you enjoy the reading, and if you do not "*see it my way*", please take the time to

submit and show us your view.

John Wegner, Editor  
Angelo State University

#### WORK CITED

Didion, Joan. "Why I Write." *Joan Didion: Essays and Conversations*. Ed. Ellen G. Friedman. Princeton: Ontario Review P, 1984. 5-10.