

CALL FOR PAPERS
AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION
MAY 25-28 2017
BOSTON, MA

Cormac McCarthy Society

Cormac McCarthy and Ron Rash
American Literature Association
Boston, MA
May 25-28 2017

In Ron Rash's *Serena* (Pen/Faulkner Finalist 2009), one of the choric lumberjacks named Ballard makes an off-hand comment about a girl he sees in Tennessee. Nearly lost in a welter of logger jokes and putdowns, readers of McCarthy's *Child of God* would have not missed Rash's darkly humorous intertextual nod. McCarthy's influence on the generations of writers who have followed in his wake has been immense. This panel will consider one of two important aspects of the relations between McCarthy's and Rash's works.

1. Writers might wish to consider how McCarthy and Rash represent the region known as Appalachia. As a comparative panel, two questions naturally arise from such a prompt: What are the similarities and differences between McCarthy's and Rash's representations of the mountain south? If writers consider "Appalachia" as a construct similar to what Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee have designated "the southern imaginary," a space containing "an amorphous and sometimes conflicting collection of images, ideas, attitudes, practices, linguistic accents, histories, and fantasies about a shifting geographic region and time," then we begin to see the types of comparisons this panel is seeking. (Please note the list above is not exhaustive by any means). What has happened to this "shifting geographic region and time" since McCarthy's last Appalachian novel (*Suttree*, 1979) and the evolution of Rash's strictly Appalachian writing (*Casualties* and *Among the Believers*, 2000, to his most recent novel *The Risen*, 2016)? What kinds of patterns, parallels, continuities or dislocations emerge when comparing McCarthy's and Rash's landscapes, ecosystems, individuals, families, communities, societies, economies, religious beliefs, doubts, and other philosophical positions? What do these links or patterns tell us about selected works? We are looking especially for comparative approaches between McCarthy and Rash that when rubbed together vigorously, spark new and productive insights. Please send a 1-2 page abstract of your proposed paper to Randall Wilhelm rswil@aol.com by December 1, 2016.

2. Writers might also wish to consider new theories of the undead as expressed in *Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond in Southern Literature and Culture* (LSU 2015). Writers should feel free to stretch "the South" throughout Texas and into the Global South of Mexico so that McCarthy's "western" work featuring undead elements can enter into dialogue with Rash's Appalachian contexts. (Note: Since there has been a deluge of critical work on the undead in McCarthy's *The Road*, for this panel we prefer that writers look to other McCarthy novels or screenplays for explorations of varieties of undeadness). For this panel, we are less interested in apocalyptic scenarios and popular culture references; rather, we seek more nuanced explorations of undeadness, particularly through acts of memory or memorialization, physical, emotional, and psychic wounds (and their scars), shifting self and object identities, the porous boundary between essentialist conceptions of "life" and "death," and affective hauntings where the dead continue to motivate, in ways even animate, the living. For instance, how does memory work as a receptor for vibrant elements of undeadness in McCarthy's and Rash's worlds? How do the rotting corpses of Kenneth Rattner in *The Orchard Keeper* (1965) and Holland Winchester in *One Foot in Eden* (2002) compare? How do theories of undeadness illuminate or complicate our understanding of characters such as John Glanton, Lester Ballard, Culla Holmes, Cornelius Suttree, Anton Chigurh, Billy Winchester, Widow Glendower, Leonard Shuler, Serena Pemberton, Becky Shytle, Eugene Matney, and many others? How does seeing through the lens of undeadness affect our responses to the Glancy gang's landscape of the dead; Ballard's corpse museum; Holcombe's "unholy crucifix," or the body of Matney's girlfriend, Ligeia, who rises from the dead forty years after her murder? Please send a 1-2 page abstract of your proposed paper to Randall Wilhelm rswil@aol.com by December 1, 2016.