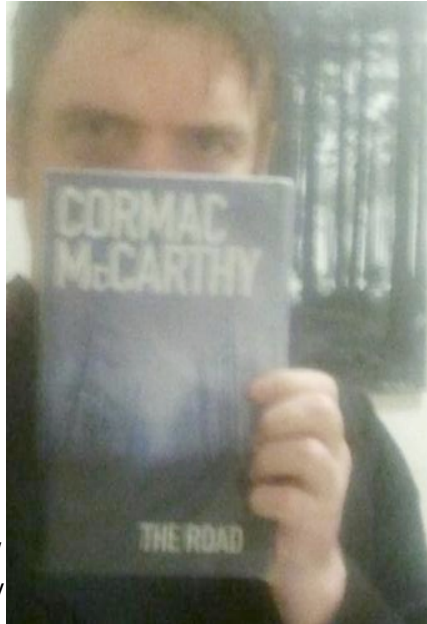


## An Unpublished Novelist's Week as Fake Cormac McCarthy

Matt Creamer 13,295 Views Jan 31, 2012

Michael Crossan, a hard-working, unpublished writer from Scotland, got the literary introduction of a lifetime last week--almost. His tweets had caught the eye of novelist Margaret Atwood, who alerted fellow A-list authors and "T-pals" William Gibson, Amy Tan and Neil Gaiman. Alas, it wasn't Crossan she thought she was introducing but rather the universally-lauded novelist and newbie screenwriter Cormac McCarthy and his improbable new Twitter account. After all, McCarthy is a famous recluse and not only does he refuse to talk about his work -- unless in the warmth of Oprah's cameras -- he doesn't even have a computer.



But Atwood could be forgiven for biting hard on the fake account, created, in Crossan's imagination, on a mobile phone by McCarthy's young son. (Crossan let us log into the Gmail account that he used to register the fake account where an email was waiting from Twitter: "Hi, CormacCMcCarthy. Please confirm your Twitter account by clicking this link.") His tweets about children and dogs and family time were laconic, earthy, and punctuationally-iffy enough that they could have issued from a 78-year-old trying to grasp a smartphone. Sample: "Please stop. This phone is a toy I should have scorned. All the rest is decency." Also: "Already finger wagers spit envy and spite and doubt. On a beautiful day this stranger was just saying hello." And, in a deft admission of the fakery: "Sidewalk starers may soon sneak aboard. Is it him. He had no *blue badge*. So it is not him then."

By the time McCarthy's publisher Vintage Books announced that they had confirmed the account was fake, five hours after Atwood's welcoming tweet, there were many who were fooled. Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey gave @cormacmccarthy a warm welcome, quickly withdrawn, and, in the week before the account was suspended, Crossan accumulated more than 6,000 followers. Once Twitter HQ cottoned to the ruse and the account took a captive bolt to the forehead, Crossan issued apologies from another account, which is how we connected. Here is our interview with Michael Crossan--writer, portrait photographer and now, to Margaret Atwood's mind, "legpuller."

*The Atlantic Wire*: Tell us a bit about yourself.

*Michael Crossan*: I am 42 years old. A family man who lives on the west coast of Scotland. I have taken a sabbatical from my photography job to write full time. I have been writing stories since boyhood. I have written enough stories to fill a dozen books. And perhaps a dozen stories that could fill one good book. I am a diligent writer. Eight-hour daily shifts are routine for me. Often I spend 12 back-sore hours at the computer. No Lettera 32 Olivetti for me. Hours pass fast and unnoticed when I write. I recently finished writing a novel. It took me three years to write it. Ironically it is a post apocalyptic story. A literary novel. But it has little in common with Cormac's masterpiece *The Road*. My book is a polar opposite vision of Cormac's tome. With few people in the world nature thrives.

*AW*: Has your work been published?

*MC*: I have no work published. I was shortlisted for the Short Story Bridport Prize 2011. The story I submitted is the only work I have sent out there. It has since been revised and is steelier since it was sent last June. I intend to enter for the Bridport Prize 2012. I believe a tale I recently wrote may be a top three placer. Published or unpublished I will always write. I am a writer.

*AW*: Your Twitter bio says your dad read Cormac McCarthy to you when you were five years old. That strikes me as quite young to be exposed to a novelist known for depictions of violence and, more generally, adult themes. What did you make of Cormac as a kid? And did those stories ever give you nightmares?

*MC*: My parents were readers and thrived when discussing authors and stories. Father worked in the Civil Service. He was bohemian and liberal. Bedtime stories were a ritual for me. My parents considered McCarthy no more gruesome than The Brothers Grimm. Father often said this and would back it up with metaphorical rants. He was a natural orator. A rare storyteller. He did each character's voice. Rightly or wrongly he read *The Orchard Keeper* and *Outer Dark* to me when I was five. He embellished the profane sentences for my infantile ears. I know that now. I was never scared after he had read McCarthy to me. I would drift to sleep with feral thoughts of remote log cabins and fireside connivers.

*AW*: What's your favorite McCarthy book?

*MC*: I do not have one. Each has a unique merit. *Child of God* is the only story I have read were I felt pity for a deviant. Lester Ballard is an

aberration. A depraved murderous necrophile. But I defy any critic to read the story without a tremble of sympathy for Lester. McCarthy's innate compassion for humanity's dungheap soars when he is hellish.

*AW:* So what inspired you to do the McCarthy Twitter feed?

*MC:* My idea was to join Twitter as myself and follow news in the literary world. Then I did a search for Cormac McCarthy. I realized the chance of Cormac having a Twitter feed were remote. Cormac is religiously private. Of course there was no Cormac on Twitter. The idea flashed to create a parody Cormac feed. I created the account and did a search of the Twitter literati. I came across Margaret Atwood's tweets. I had read and admired her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. As Cormac I tweeted her as I imagined he would do. I think Cormac is noble and sincere and blunt. I tweeted Margaret -- "Please excuse my intrusion" -- and it escalated from there.

*AW:* Did you have a process?

*MC:* I had no process for writing the tweets. I didn't know what I was going to write until I sat to tweet.

*AW:* I was surprised that so many people took it seriously. And that's not at all a criticism of your writing -- I thought your stuff was pitch perfect. But it seems impossible that Cormac McCarthy would ever sign up for a Twitter account. I mean, he's done one TV interview and that was with Oprah and the notion that the man would be tweeting about "family time" seemed ludicrous to anyone who knows anything about him. What was your reaction to the reaction?

*MC:* Margaret Atwood welcomed me with a gregarious and kind introduction to three of her followers. I was instantly flooded with tweets and got swept away in the spate. A few people queried my authenticity from the start. Mostly people were carried along in the rapid tide with me. Cormac has a renowned reclusive nature. I think people wished it real and went with the wish.

*AW:* How did you find out the account had been banned?

*MC:* I found out the @CormacCMcCarthy Twitter account was suspended when I tried to sign in and up popped "Username Invalid." I had sat down with a coffee and my most McCarthyesque tweet to date.

*AW:* Do you remember what that Tweet was to be?

*MC:* I honestly don't recall. But I do recall I was frustrated I couldn't send it. Sorry. I am out socializing with family now and my memory is puddly.

*AW:* Have you given any thought to begin it again but this time clearly marked as a fake? Anything you regret?

*MC:* I think the feed ran its course and is now rightly in oblivion. It was a thrill fueling the feed. It's not everyone who gets to be Cormac McCarthy. That is a privilege I shall miss. If I were to begin it again I would avoid family scene retorts. With hindsight I see that as the intrusion. I am sorry for that. There is a line that should not be tramped.

*AW:* The tweets from your new Twitter account contain an apology to Cormac and his family. Do you think you really did any harm there?

*MC:* That is an awful thought. I sincerely hope not. I doubt Cormac and his family would have given the feed a blink. But my references to family meals and picnics were a mistake. Family is the Holy Grail of Cormac's life. I regret that I did not think it out before plundering on.

*AW:* How has McCarthy informed your work?

*MC:* Every writer has an author whom they aspire to be like. Cormac McCarthy is mine. He has influenced my craft. All writers begin as copycat authors. But I have been writing since boyhood. I have my own voice. It is me I hear when I write.

*AW:* Do you read him to your own kids?

*MC:* Invented fables were my kids' bedtime fare. I never read McCarthy to them. My kids are young adults now. They do read and love McCarthy. We are a fable loving family. We appreciate any well crafted story.

*Matt Creamer is a freelance writer and editor at large at Ad Age. He tweets, for real, at @matt\_creamer.*

Want to add to this story? Let us know in comments. You can share ideas for stories on the Open Wire.

Sponsored Links

### Elsewhere on the Web

**Chinese carmaker blatantly copies Ford F-150** (Autoblog)

**To Hell with Tijuana** (Away.com)

## **9 Worst Recession Ghost Towns in America**

(The Fiscal Times)

## **Recession or revival? CFOs explain what's in store for the economy in 2012**

(Bank of America Merrill Lynch)

## **How many gallons of gasoline would it take to charge an iPhone?**

(ExxonMobil's Perspectives)

[what's this]

Copyright © 2012 by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved.