

BORDERS, BARRIERS, AND CROSSINGS:
CORMAC MCCARTHY'S ALL THE PRETTY HORSES
AND THE CROSSING

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DEDICATION

To my family and friends who never quit believing in me. I especially thank my husband, Shaun, my daughter Karolyn, and my son Jeff. May your crossings always be challenging and transcending. You are my blessings and I love you beyond all boundaries.

To my mother who never gave up in life and in death. May your view from heaven bring you sunshine, joy, and more rainbows than you could ever imagine.

To my father who always told me never to run over frogs—to protect those which cannot protect themselves and that always—where there is a will, there is a way. You were right. I hope you are enjoying your jam session in heaven.

To my students and fellow teachers, thank you for your continued support, editing, and general encouragement in the face of adversity. You helped me check one more item off of the list.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the borders, barriers, and crossings of Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing. Within each of the novels, McCarthy's uses the main characters, the land, and the culture to show that when man crosses over boundaries, violence and chaos may ensue. Both novels include the crossing metaphor, and within each novel, the characters violate the unwritten and written laws that man put in place with each boundary: whether physically, culturally, or universally. The characters cross through spiritual, mystical and sometimes transcendent boundaries as well. All the Pretty Horses builds the idea that crossing physical boundaries violates the codes of the land; but the story also analyzes the transcendent boundaries through dreams, history, and references to the future. The Crossing incorporates the physical boundaries, but relies more heavily on the spiritual and transcendent crossings, as well as the idea that life continues and is the tale man becomes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Charles McCarthy, born in Providence, Rhode Island (1933) to Charles and Gladys McGrail McCarthy, was the third of six children. Known today as Cormac McCarthy, his insistence on privacy has become a fascination among scholars and critics alike. Although McCarthy does not readily agree to interviews, nor does he like to discuss his writing, readers can learn about his belief systems by reading and studying his novels ("McCarthy" 1). Illusive yet active, Cormac McCarthy's enigmatic history as an author provides a controversial discussion whereby many try to peg his writing style. Though some call him a Southern writer and give him credit for inventing his own form of the "southwestern novel" (Quoted in McCage 2), McCarthy's novels contain evidence of many aspects of writing, none of which is totally false nor true. All of these claims regarding his writing remain debatable because just as soon as one element or aspect proves true, McCarthy's writing shifts gears or offers yet another perspective to decipher.

Reading a McCarthy novel is like an intellectual jumping off of a cliff into a gushing waterfall to rocks, trees, mountains, scrub brush, torrential rains, and beautiful sunrises in the distance. Much of the gut-wrenching reading journey eats at the mind like a haunting recurring dream, and the beauty of the prose exists in the detail: vibrant, graphic, direct, and exquisite beyond imagination; but most of all, unforgettable. McCarthy's novels include elements of nihilism, existentialism, transcendentalism, spiritualism, and other

perspectives; but to categorize any of his novels into one slot or to put McCarthy himself into a single classification does not do justice to the complexity and depth of the writing or the author.

McCarthy recently won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize with his publication of his post-apocalyptic novel, The Road. With his newfound publicity, McCarthy uncharacteristically granted both Oprah Winfrey and Rolling Stone Magazine interviews during 2007; and although many readers are now gaining awareness of McCarthy's brilliance as a writer, he has actually been writing and publishing fiction since his first novel, Outer Dark, was published in 1965. His public appeal did not increase momentum until the release of his "grand and beautiful" sixth novel, All the Pretty Horses (1992); this first installment of the border trilogy won the National Book Award and a National Book Critics Circle Award and was later released as a major motion picture (Cunningham 34).

With his border trilogy novels, Cormac McCarthy writes a strange dichotomy of beginnings and endings, barriers and openings, death and life; and, through each, choices must be made. Interestingly, like his own life, his recent novels focus on the journey motif and feature wanderers who have no real place to call home. McCarthy himself has wandered extensively: from Rhode Island to Tennessee, to England and El Paso, Texas, and in 1999 he moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico (Esterson 1).

Robert Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" in which the poet used the road as a metaphor for the choices individuals make in life. McCarthy uses a similar metaphor of the road, highlighting the journey motif in many of his texts. The image becomes somewhat

dark and depressing in his border trilogy novels. In the first of the trilogy, the title All the Pretty Horses, taken from an old slave folk lullaby, refers to a slave who must leave her own babe to take care of the white child of her master.

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry, go to sleep my little baby,
When you wake, you shall have, all the pretty little horses,
Blacks and bays, dapples and grays, all the pretty little horses.
Way down yonder, in the meadow, lies my poor little lambie,
With bees and butterflies peckin' out its eyes,
The poor little thing crying Mammy. (Caprio 1)

In the folksong, the slave really has no choice but to do her master's bidding; she must sacrifice the health of her own beloved babe as she cares for another child. In the novels All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing, the choice of leaving a loved one results in death. When John Grady Cole leaves his family home to search for something different in Mexico, he ultimately returns to find what is left of his beloved "family" dead; and with that death, there is little hope of finding answers to his search for a place. Similarly, Billy Parham leaves his family home to begin a quest that ends in death, not only on his journey, but also when he returns home to find all in his family murdered except for his little brother. Consequently, All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing are about much more than the journey. The setting of All the Pretty Horses takes place at a time when the old west was dying out and a new way of life was coming to the land. After years of strife in the borderlands, All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing contain "ghosts" from the past

atrocities committed in the name of politics and culture and "continues the examination of national identity in the borderlands...after a century of US efforts to contain the region's ethnic diversity" (Eaton 157).

All the Pretty Horses and the second novel in his border trilogy, The Crossing, both tell a story of a young man's breaking through barriers in order to gain independence. Each novel encompasses a wide array of borders, barriers, and crossings. McCarthy not only shows the reader the vast geographical margins that contain universal implications, but he outlines cultural and spiritual borders that individuals must recognize. West Texas and the towns over the Mexican border feature the physical planes for McCarthy's novel, All the Pretty Horses. The Crossing covers the landscapes of New Mexico and Mexico. In All the Pretty Horses the beautiful, haunting, deadly land reflects the soul of John Grady Cole. Within this setting, Cole's journey takes place on the physical and spiritual level. In The Crossing, Billy Parham breaks a parental code to trek across the Mexican border in order to save a wolf, but the ensuing results send him down a path of fateful consequences. Throughout both novels the reader learns that society establishes boundaries for a purpose, and the physical and spiritual connections in the novels show the resultant consequences of crossing and breaking through these boundaries.

All the Pretty Horses includes borders such as the physical crossing of the river, the role of Cole in the life of the vaqueros and the boundaries inherent in that role, the physical limits and restraints of nature, the restrictions of culture and class systems to outsiders, and the prison. In The Crossing, Billy Parham's crossing of the Mexican border to the

mountains, his re-crossings and loss of a home and the final leg of his journey also contribute to the idea that crossing borders is a catalyst for bad tidings. The physical movement of Cole from youth to manhood and Cole's relationship with Alejandra also demonstrates a crossing of cultural and social boundaries and shows that breaking across these boundaries ultimately causes loss. Alejandra's Dueña Alfonsa outlines one of many examples of the physical constraints inherent in her culture when she says:

Society is very important in Mexico. Where women do not even have the vote. In Mexico they are mad for society and politics and very bad at both... (All the Pretty Horses 230)

This concept of Old Mexican customs sets up the idea that breaking through societal and cultural customs results in problems. Although sometimes physical barriers are crossed, as in the case of race or gender specific roles in society, oftentimes the breaking of customs inherent in society becomes a matter of the spiritual or conscious shattering of beliefs as well. Alejandra and Cole break physical boundaries put in place by cultural belief systems; therefore the spiritual breaking becomes as important as the physical.

Michael Cunningham, in his article "The Art of Reading Cormac McCarthy: The Darkness and the Light," states:

McCarthy "invoke[s] and explore[s] a spirit world of sorts, peculiarly American in its vastness, its rugged desolation, its inhabitation by almost nothing but individual destinies, often at war with one another. In each of

[McCarthy's] novels we find ourselves on this cruelly gorgeous, unforgiving metaphysical plain. It's a realm of raw and raging energy. (Cunningham 37)

The spiritual aspect of McCarthy's novels serves as a complex backdrop in which the reader is allowed a glimpse of the past and the future. The term spiritual has evolved in meaning from a solely religious-based philosophy to include the idea that one can commune with nature through conscience, prayer, or even meditation (Sigmund 2118). Utilizing this idea, the spiritual aspects of John Grady Cole and Billy Parham exemplify their inner essence as a prime element utilized for survival; this essence acts as the faculty that maintains life and existence. The spiritual borders in the novel define John Grady Cole's and Billy Parham's connections to the animals, culture, and elements of the past.

Although similar to the spiritual ideal, mysticism is defined as "a concern with the nature of the ultimate reality...[where] the core of most mystical traditions is a belief in the possibility of an intuitive, direct, and transforming experience of [the] ultimate reality, recogniz[ing] the validity of supra-sensual experience" (Benson 1). In All the Pretty Horses the Mexicans at La Purísima believe "that it was no accident of circumstance that a man be born in a certain country and not some other, that the weathers and seasons that form a land form also the inner fortunes of men in their generations and are passed on to their children and are not so easily come by otherwise" (All the Pretty Horses 226). Basically, these Mexican men from the ranch believe that where a man is born is no accident and that men belong with their own kind, with the land they were born into. This comment is a direct reflection on John Grady Cole. Even though he has traveled far from

home and crossed borders and barriers to get to La Purísima, in reality, he does not belong in Mexico. This reality foreshadows the chaos to come. Michael Eaton states:

These mystical claims call attention to what anthropologists call local knowledge: a network of social practices specific to a culture or region and handed down for generations—the kind of knowledge acquired through one's immersion in a set of communal activities, customs, rites. (Eaton 171)

In The Crossing, Billy Parham's journey includes a common motif, shown through the use of storytellers, regarding the crossings of fate with life's journey. Throughout various parts of the novel, Billy meets storytellers who describe the journey of life and discuss the idea of crossings, fate, and existence. In All the Pretty Horses the metaphorical crossing of the river contains another idea of breaking barriers and foreshadows the transcendent power that will engulf Cole's journey with physical and spiritual darkness. Also in All the Pretty Horses the idea of fate versus free-will reveals the limits or boundaries that characters in the novel have over their destiny.

Throughout All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing, recurring barriers appear regarding man and his quest for "something more" within the constraints of life. If man were simply to do nothing, then this action would cause a resulting sort of nothingness in life; however, by trying to influence destiny and by crossing over physical and spiritual boundaries, man invites tragedy and mayhem. Interestingly, all of the physical barriers that man attempts to break were put in place by man. Land boundaries, established by man to create a sense of order, result in disorder when broken. Cultural boundaries, created

through years of man's conscious and clannish behavior, cause chaos and sadness when breached. Even mental awareness, when man reflects on issues that breach the norm, causes emotional damage when traversed. John Grady Cole and Billy Parham cross both physical and spiritual borders, resulting in loss. McCarthy exhibits these ideas throughout both All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing and shows that although individuals break through these physical and spiritual borders, barriers and crossings, ultimately, "There is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (The Crossing 45).

CHAPTER II

BORDERS AND BEYOND IN ALL THE PRETTY HORSES

The borderlands between Texas and Mexico have a violent history filled with chaos and bloodshed. Industrialization did not begin to affect the borderlands until the late 1800s; but prior to barbed-wire and industrialization, these lands experienced wars, famine, a fight for independence and subsequent loss. Along the border, individuals struggled for food, land, rights, and culture. Hardship and destruction served as a backdrop of this formidable land and only the strongest survived.

Distance and land mass create their own burdens for movement; thus when John Grady Cole, Cormac McCarthy's central character in All the Pretty Horses, sets out on his fateful journey, the old West still echoes within the shadows of the 1940s setting. John Blair, in his article "Mexico and the Borderlands," provides the meaning behind John Grady Cole's trek into Mexico:

Mexico and the borderlands represent to John Grady the possibility of the expression of [who] he sees himself to be: it is an old place, a dangerous place, where little has changed and the history is violent, a place where a young man can test his own resolve and therefore the appropriateness of his definition of himself. (Blair 4)

The borderlands into Mexico, including Texas and New Mexico, act as the backdrop for Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing. Within this

setting John Grady Cole and Billy Parham experience the resulting chaos and destruction that occurs as each crosses over the borders, limits, and restrictions that are part of this geographical place and time. James Brooks, in his article, "Served Well by Plunder: La Gran Ladronería and Producers of History Astride the Rio Grande," describes McCarthy as a narrator who awakens historical imagination:

National boundaries and ideologies exist in their narratives as shadowy structures of constraint and opportunity, often secondary to the unity of geography and the transborder quality of their protagonists' lives. By embracing the emotional turmoil and cultural potency of borderland romances, we can lend language to the human dimension of political-economic phenomena in ways beyond the reach of conventional academic discourse. (Brooks 27)

Brooks further details the idea that narrators like those found in Cormac McCarthy's novels "make immediate a social landscape organized around intimate exchanges of fictive kinship, affinal ties, and violence" (Brooks 27). Not only do Cole and Parham experience the physical crossings over land, they each must cross through cultural boundaries as well. By crossing through these barriers each of the main characters experiences destruction and loss.

In the article, "Mexico and the Borderlands in Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses," John Blair states that, "for John Grady Cole, the border between Texas and Mexico is the line between childhood and its end, at least in the somewhat limited sense

that the border country he crosses through and lingers within becomes a medium through which he comes to understand certain truths about himself and the world" (Blair 301). All the Pretty Horses acts not only as a traditional narrative, but as bildungsroman—a coming of age story in which the main character, sixteen-year-old John Grady Cole, travels across physical borders and barriers in his quest to find a place in an ever-changing world. Many of these physical borders in the novel's setting exemplify Cole's crossing over to a new state of awareness or upcoming change.

One such example occurs at the beginning of All the Pretty Horses. As John Grady Cole crosses through the threshold of the room to look upon his grandfather's dead body, McCarthy immediately sets the stage for incoming change with the motif of reflection: "The candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door" (All the Pretty Horses 1). This reflective motif marks both the ending of a way of life for John Grady Cole as he is losing the family ranch, and a new way of life as he embarks on his journey.

Both the funeral of Cole's beloved grandfather and the impending sale of the ranch mark the end of Cole's way of life while simultaneously sealing John Grady Cole's fateful move towards something new and different. Cole must leave the ranch and its corresponding way of life to find a new place.

This marked change in Cole's life parallels the coming cultural changes. When Cole hears the incoming train crossing over the terrain, his thoughts sum up the approaching transformation of the West and its subsequent encroachment on the borderlands:

As he turned to go he heard the train. He stopped and waited for it. He could feel it under his feet. It came boring out of the east like some ribald satellite of the coming sun howling and bellowing in the distance and the long light of the headlamp running through the tangled mesquite brakes and creating out of the night the endless fenceline down the dead straight right of way and sucking it back again wire and post mile on mile into the darkness after where the boilersmoke disbanded slowly along the faint new horizon and the sound came lagging he stood still holding his hat in his hands in the passing groundshudder watching it till it was gone. (All the Pretty Horses 3-4)

The physical movement and shuddering of the train boring out of the East represents the iconic symbol of innovation and change. This dichotomous picture of steel meshed against the Western landscape creates a link as everything in Cole's life begins to change.

Paradoxically, Cole intends to attempt to ride away into the sunset of Old Mexico—away from technology, cars, and industrialization. However, like the train, though unwelcome in an alien land, John Grady Cole must move forward—crossing over and breaking new ground to create a new life.

After Cole's grandfather's funeral, he rides out "along the old war trail" and "st[ands] like a man come to the end of something" where he finds an old horseskull, metaphorically a fragment of the old ways of life and of his dead grandfather (All the Pretty Horses 5):

He squatted and picked it up and turned it in his hands. Frail and brittle.

Bleached paper white. He swatted the long light holding it, the comicbook teeth loose in their sockets. The joints in the cranium like a ragged welding of the bone plates. The muted run of sand in the brain box when he turned it. (All the Pretty Horses 6)

The image of the bleached skull, the teeth, and the sand moving within the "brain box" show what was once flesh and blood as a simple shell. The image brings up the fragility of time and life. The skull of the horse, the soul of the horse, and the flesh and blood of men draw together as McCarthy outlines the connection:

What he loved in horses was what he loved in men, the blood and the heat of the blood that ran them. All his reverence and all his fondness and all the leanings of his life were for the ardenthearted and they would always be so and never be otherwise. (All the Pretty Horses 6)

Cole loved his grandfather, who represented John Grady's own place in history, his own land, his connection to family and home. In this reflective scene, the reader comes to understand the correlation to Cole's grandfather and Cole's loss of home and family. With no success, one last time Cole attempts to reason with his mother and the family lawyer to keep the ranch. Cole asks his mother why she could not lease him the ranch, and she says, "You're being ridiculous. You have to go to school" (All the Pretty Horses 15). Like the empty skull, his hopes are effectively crushed by his mother's decision to sell the ranch. As

he sits at the dining table contemplating his mother's decision, he gazes upon the picture above the sideboard:

There were half a dozen of them breaking through a pole corral and their manes were long and blowing and their eyes wild. (All the Pretty Horses 15)

Symbolically, the painting shows another breaking through. He must seek a new life for himself, and the obviously frightened animals within the painting represent Cole. The wildness, however, is also part of the appeal that Cole sees in the painting.

Before Cole leaves with Lacey Rawlins, he goes on one last ride with his father before leaving home. As he rides he notices the sad condition of his father:

So thin and frail, lost in his clothes. Looking over the country with those sunken eyes as if the world out there had been altered or made suspect by what he'd seen of it elsewhere. As if he might never see it right again. Or worse did see it right at last. See it as it had always been, would forever be. The boy who rode on slightly before him sat a horse not only as if he'd been born to it which he was but as if were he begot by malice or mischance into some queer land where horses never were he would have found them anyway. (All the Pretty Horses 23)

Throughout the ride, father and son do not talk much; but when the two enter the café later in the day, Cole's father explains the separations from Cole's mother. He tries to

help Cole understand her leaving and asks John Grady to try to reconcile the differences between mother and son:

The last thing his father said was that the country would never be the same. People don't feel safe no more, he said. We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We don't know what's goin to show up here come daylight. We don't even know what color they'll be. (All the Pretty Horses 25-26)

This discussion between John Grady and his father shows the inevitability of the changing West and provides one more reason for John Grady Cole to leave the ranch.

John Grady cuts yet another connection as he leaves a shop in town where he had "a broken bridlebit welded" (All the Pretty Horses 27). He meets Mary Catherine Barnett, his former girlfriend, and the two have a strange conversation over whether it is proper for them to be seen talking. John Grady responds tersely to Mary Catherine's appeals: "I don't mean nothin. I got to go...It's just talk...I got to get on" (All the Pretty Horses 28-29). Immediately thereafter, the reflective motif again sets Grady on the course for change. Grady sees his girlfriend's reflection in the windows of a building as he walks away from the café:

He didn't look back but he could see her in the windows of the Federal Building across the street standing there and she was still standing there when he reached the corner and stepped out of the glass forever. (All the Pretty Horses 29)

The reflection in the glass acts as a barrier and turning point for Cole. His reflection in the mirror marks a symbolic passing to a new state of awareness and sets the stage for his leaving.

Arriving in the cold early morning at a gate, Cole immediately "dismount[s] and open[s] the gate and walk[s] the horse through and close[s] the gate and walk[s] the horse along the fence" (All the Pretty Horses 29). The gate and fence metaphorically represent the closing of one aspect of Cole's life and the opening of another phase of his life.

Cole and his friend, Lacey Rawlins, plan to ride off into the sunset across the border of Mexico to become vaqueros. "Like young thieves in a glowing orchard...ten thousand worlds for the choosing," Cole and Rawlins leave their homes behind in search of adventure and the life of a cowboy:

the earth...which carried their figures...bore them up into the swarming stars so that they rode not under but among them and they rode at once jaunty and circumspect, like thieves newly loose in that dark electric. (All the Pretty Horses 31)

As they begin their travels they hear "somewhere in that tenantless night a bell that tolled and ceased where no bell was and they rode out on the round dais of the earth which alone was dark and no light on it" (All the Pretty Horses 31). The mention of the bell brings up thoughts of Ernest Hemingway's novel For Whom the Bell Tolls and parallels to some degree the embarkation of the boys trip into Mexico; just as in Hemingway's novel the main character travels across enemy lines into Spain. The bell signifies an omen of

change as the boys ride towards something sinister; yet the boys are still innocent and unknowing, and they believe the trip will be great adventure.

After traveling for a few days, Cole and Rawlins cross Devil's River, the first river crossing mentioned in the novel and metaphorically another crossing that signifies change (All the Pretty Horses 34). In this instance the change deals more with the physical landscape and the direction that the boys take after the crossing of the river. The boys attempt to locate their destination on a map, one taken from a café, but they realize that everything beyond the Rio Grande is either white or blank on the map. Rawlins peruses Cole's map of Mexico, only to exclaim, "There aint shit down there" (All the Pretty Horses 34). The American-made map that they look at only reaches as far as the border. Because the map is American-made, the lack of geographical detail shows a distinct lack of understanding of the region, both culturally and physically. Though the boys are still hopeful about their destination, neither truly understands what barriers they are breaking as they cross over into this new world. The blankness of the map likewise represents the boys traversing an alien and barren land, one that cannot be understood by outsiders.

Crossing through the Mexican landscape, Rawlins sings to pass the time. At one point during Rawlins' song, Cole listens to the words and asks, "What the hell is a flowery boundary tree?" (All the Pretty Horses 37). The reference to which Cole refers is yet another reminder of barriers and death; and the song foreshadows the trouble to come later in the story. The referenced line from the song most likely originates from the Blue Sky

Boys' 1946 release of a gospel folk song entitled "Will You Miss Me?" The refrain from the song reads:

When death shall close these eyelids / And this heart shall cease to beat /
And they lay me down to rest / In some flowery boundary tree. (Blue Sky
Boys v9)

Obviously the song references death, but this particular track comes from a collection of folk songs entitled, *Songs of Death and Tragedy*. The specific reference that Cole asks about derives its meaning from its use. Oftentimes in cemeteries across the world, the outer perimeter is surrounded by a natural foliage boundary of bushes or trees—a flowery boundary—used to form a physical barrier and to mark the crossing onto sacred ground. Interestingly, this folk song sung by Rawlins was popular in the Appalachian mountain area where Cormac McCarthy lived during the early part of his life. The folk song was popular during the 1940s and would have been a popular selection played on the radio during the setting of the novel. Not only does the song establish the physical idea of death, it also helps to establish another connection to the time and place of the changing West, a time when people would sit by the radio at night to listen to music, fireside chats, and talk shows, a time when technology and industrialization were encroaching on the changing terrain of the border landscape. The flowery boundary marks the place where the dead are buried, and Cole and Rawlins seem to be symbolically traveling within these boundaries as they continue through the unknown land.

Cole and Rawlins travel onward, and before long they notice another traveler following them on a surprisingly good horse. Both Rawlins and Cole are suspicious of "Jimmy Blevins" and his dark horse, and neither wish to take on a third party. But Blevins tells them they should want him to accompany them simply "cause [he's] an American" (All the Pretty Horses 45). This comment should be another warning because it is the "American" in all three of the boys that hinders their assimilation across the national and cultural boundaries. However, the boys dismiss this comment and reluctantly agree to allow Blevins to join their party. With the addition of Blevins, the tone of the novel begins to change as the action of the novel becomes more complicated. At the next river crossing the physical movements of the characters and dark nature of the setting foreshadow the impending darkness and disasters to come:

They crossed the river under a white quartermoon naked and pale and thin atop their horses...and dressed only in their hats they led the horses out onto the gravel spit and loosed the girthstraps and mounted and put the horses into the water with their naked heels...the naked riders leaning forward and talking to the horses, Rawlins holding the rifle aloft in one hand, lined out behind one another and making for the alien shore like a party of marauders.

(All the Pretty Horses 45)

The boys physically strip off their clothes in order to pass through the river, but metaphorically they cast aside their societal and cultural trappings; their "nakedness" also symbolizes their vulnerability as they move into a lonely and "alien" shore. The idea that

they sneak into this land in the twilight darkness of the moon implicates them in an illicit scheme to invade an enemy land as marauders. With Jimmy Blevins' joining their party, the added dimension of suspense and darkness enters into the landscape to come:

They rode up out of the river among the willows and rode singlefile upstream through the shallows onto a long gravel beach where they took off their hats and turned and looked back at the country they'd left. No one spoke. (All the Pretty Horses 45)

Cole, Rawlins, and Blevins encountered "nothin" in the alien land, not even electricity in the small settlements they passed along the way. This crossing of the land represents a desolate calm before the storm and troubles to come after the physical crossing of the mountains:

Days to come they rode through the mountains and they crossed at a barren windgap and sat the horses among the rocks and looked out over the country to the south where the last shadows were running over the land before the wind and the sun to the west lay blood red among the shelving clouds and the distant cordilleras ranged down the terminals of the sky to fade from pale to pale of blue and then to nothing at all. (All the Pretty Horses 59)

Looking out over the terrain, Rawlins asks "Where do you reckon that paradise is at?" (All the Pretty Horses 59). Cole replies, "You cant tell what's in a country like that till you're down there in it" (All the Pretty Horses 59). This comment foreshadows the impending

trouble that literally begins with the rainstorms and Blevins' freakish reaction to the lightning accompanying the storm. Blevins at first tries to outride the storm; but when he realizes that he cannot do that, he strips naked and huddles down in an arroyo to escape "death by fire" and in the process, loses his clothes, his horse, and his gun, leaving him vulnerable to impending problems (All the Pretty Horses 68-71). In Vereen Bell's essay, "Between the Wish and the Thing the World Lies Waiting," Bell credits Blevins' "fear of lightning—and from [Blevins'] not being afraid of anything else" as the catalyst for Rawlins and Cole's being "discredited and exiled from the ancient place of the good life, the Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purísima Concepcion" (Bell 38). After Rawlins and Cole gather Blevins from the arroyo, they travel to the closest town, and the first item they observe is Blevins' gun sticking out of the pants of a man bending over a car. The car and the gun, manmade machines of steel—images of industry and technology—curiously seem out of place in the remote Mexican landscape; yet these physical images remind the reader that all is not as it should be.

Cole and Rawlins intend to investigate before making any attempt to retrieve the stolen horse and gun, and they leave Blevins in a ditch to wait on them because they are still somewhat distrustful of him. When they return, however, Blevins is nowhere in sight. They hear a horse whinny in the dark; and Rawlins ominously exclaims, "that crazy son of a bitch. That crazy son of a bitch" (All the Pretty Horses 83). At the sound of hoof beats flying their way, the boys take off on their own horses, and Blevins passes them on his re-stolen mount with dogs and men riding fast on his tail. Cole and Rawlins split off in a

different direction. Worried for their own welfare, the boys discuss the possibility that Blevins would "have no qualms about showing [the pursuers] which way [they'd] headed, [and] all they'd have to do was look at him crossways" (All the Pretty Horses 84). The boys understand that if Blevins gets caught, it could mean serious trouble for them because they were with Blevins as he stole back his horse. This scene foreshadows events to come and reiterates the mistrust that Cole and Rawlins have for Blevins. With Rawlins predicting that they were "goin to die in this goddamned country," the boys continue to ride away from the pursuers and finally believe they are no longer being chased, but not before Rawlins states, "We aint seen the last of his skinny ass" (All the Pretty Horses 86-89).

As Cole and Rawlins ride through the changing countryside, Rawlins makes one more prediction. Though referring to Blevins, the statement also looks to the future when Cole will meet up with Don Hector's daughter, Alejandra:

A goodlookin horse is like a goodlookin woman, he said. They're always more trouble than what they're worth. What a man needs is just one that will get the job done. (All the Pretty Horses 89)

Both Cole and Rawlins leave Blevins behind and continue on their journey, pursuing the cowboy way of life they had set out to find when they left their homes. After several days of riding, they finally find what they have been searching for with the first sign of the Mexican vaqueros. As Cole and Rawlins cross from the plains into the grasslands, they view the setting for their cowboy dream. The image evokes the idyllic or pastoral, the romanticized western myth of the cowboys and cattle:

The grasslands lay in a deep violet haze and to the west thin flights of waterfowl were moving north before the sunset in the deep red galleries under the cloudbanks like schoolfish in a burning sea and on the foreland plain they saw vaqueros driving cattle before them through a gauze of golden dust. (All the Pretty Horses 93)

Sometime after noon of the following day, Rawlins and Cole finally catch up to the vaqueros:

The vaqueros knew them by the way they sat their horses and called them caballero and exchanged smoking material with them and told them about the country. (All the Pretty Horses 93)

Because of the boys' physical attributes, and the fact that they looked like cowboys "by the way they sat their horses," the vaqueros allow the boys to cross-over physically into a new territory, a new job, and join their party as they ride to the "Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purísima Concepcion" (All the Pretty Horses 94-99).

Working a large cattle ranch, while idyllic, also requires a momentous degree of physical strength and stamina. John Grady Cole, the "leader" of the Cole and Rawlins duo, seems to have the gift of understanding. Cole knows that the only way to get to stay on the ranch "for about a hundred years" is to impress the hacendado, Don Hector. Cole's physical breaking of the horses earns him the respect of Don Hector, enough so that Cole is allowed special selection and breeding privileges with Don Hector's remuda of horses. Don Hector gives Cole his trust with his horses, but Cole engages in an intimate

relationship with Don Hector's daughter, Alejandra, and ruins the dream of living the life of a vaquero on one of the finest ranches in all of Mexico.

Cole sees Alejandra for the first time quickly after the boys have joined-up with the vaqueros. She "came riding down the road and passed them and they ceased talking" (All the Pretty Horses 95). The social class differences between John Grady Cole and Alejandra are made abundantly clear in the physical descriptions of each of their respective horses. Alejandra rides a spirited Arabian, known for beauty, class, endurance, speed, and purity; John Grady Cole rides a newly broken-in *mesteño*, or quarter horse—a cross-bred horse used for working the ranch and cattle. Alejandra is of an older, purer, nobler class than Cole—she can trace her lineage for generations. Likewise the Arabian traces its roots back to the pure foundation sires and Arabian mares of the desert. The opposite is true of Cole. Like his horse and the mythic cowboy archetype of the American West, Cole seems to come from a mix of hardy stock, but a mix nonetheless, and it is quite difficult to trace the origins of the horse that he rides, as he comes from a wild herd of which ancestry can only be guessed. When John Grady approaches Alejandra as she rides, the differences in their lineage and their mounts are emphasized in the behavior of Alejandra's mare, "stepping with [her] neck arched and one eye on the *mesteño* not with wariness but some faint equine disgust" (All the Pretty Horses 109).

Don Hector's ranch provides the perfect setting to establish a cross-breeding program, as he plans to mix new stock with old to create the perfect ranch horse. This mixing of different breeds serves as paradoxical message throughout Cole's time spent at

La Purísima. The juxtaposition of "purity" and "mixed" coexisting provides the parallel for the relationship of Alejandra and Cole, but Cole is also the catalyst who helps Don Hector to achieve his breeding goals for the ranch.

The whole idea of breeding animals to acquire specific qualities started before records were ever kept, but the Arabs of the desert were the first to begin documenting the ancestry and progeny of Arabian horses—the breed that Alejandra rides—making the breed much more valuable. Over the course of time breeders understood that horses would need to change to keep up with demands of both ranches and sports such as racing, cutting, and reining. One of the changes to the European "Spanish" breed and the native American "cow pony" was the advent of a new breed of horse, the American Quarter Horse. Before Cole ever leaves his ranch, he admires a painting on the wall of wild horses where there is a reference to this new blood coming to the country:

They had the long Andalusian nose and the bones of their faces showed Barb blood. You could see the hindquarters of the foremost few, good hindquarters and heavy enough to make a cuttinghorse. As if maybe they had Steeldust in their blood. (All the Pretty Horses 16)

What Don Hector brings to La Purísima is most likely one of the thoroughbred foundation studs for the new and improved horse that is to build the quarter horse industry in the West. His plan is to mix a high quality stallion from this line with his wild mares. This hybridization of the modern quarter horse was a cross between the American native horses, Spanish cow horses, and English Thoroughbred horses.

"Steeldust" was reputed to be a foundation sire for the Quarter Horse breed, but Cole realizes that not only is the stud important in breeding, but also the mare, as he tells Don Hector, "Same as the sire" (All the Pretty Horses 115). This intricate conversation between Don Hector and Cole about bloodlines, crossing Thoroughbreds, Spanish ponies, and other lesser known horses, symbolically relates to the union of Alejandra and Cole. Don Hector's opinion is that both the sire and the mare should have equal measure and quality. Cole mentions that "there'd been some good cowhorses sired out of thoroughbreds" (All the Pretty Horses 115). Don Hector's implication is that Cole is not good enough to be with Alejandra because they are not of equal measure and ancestry. Although Don Hector respects Cole's natural ability with horses, the underlying message to the conversation is that Cole does not have the pure bloodlines of the Mexicans and thus Cole should not be thinking of courting his daughter. Although only a subtle hint, what becomes evident through the conversation is Don Hector's knowledge of Blevins. At the end of the conversation, Don Hector asks Cole, "You rode here from Texas...You and your friend...Just the two of you?" (All the Pretty Horses 116). To all of these inquiries, John Grady replies, "yessir." It is never completely clear whether Cole is simply oblivious to Don Hector's innuendo or if Cole intentionally lies in order to protect himself and Rawlins. However, the reader realizes that the minor lie or omission of Blevins from the conversation may foreshadow the shattering of Cole's dream to live the vaquero life.

In every encounter Cole shares with Don Hector, Hector's masterful all-knowing persona dominates the conversations. In an earlier conversation with Cole, the reader

learns that most likely, Don Hector is aware of Blevins. But probably out of respect for Cole's ability with the horses, Don Hector chooses—at least for the moment—to be benevolent and not accuse Cole and Rawlins of any crime. It never becomes evident whether Don Hector believes the boys are guilty of any crimes, but it is understood that Cole should never have crossed over the line by secretly courting Don Hector's daughter. Don Hector essentially represents the omniscient master of his kingdom, and he chooses the time and place of Cole's punishment. Don Hector lets Cole know in his subtle way that he will stamp out the evil in his house by bringing Cole to the chapel, which ironically has been turned into a game-room. Don Hector begins his discussion with Cole by discussing the history of the chapel where they are to play billiards. He says, "What is sacred is sacred" (All the Pretty Horses 144). The idea is introduced that God cannot be taken away from a place and a man's home is his sacred place. Now that Don Hector is forced to send Alejandra away to France, Cole is likened to the evil that has entered Don Hector's house: Cole is the enemy. Prior to this news that Alejandra will leave, Don Hector establishes the idea that France is a monster that instills dreaded ideas into the minds of youngsters, *not a Spanish idea*:

One country is not another country...but it is a complicated business...We don't believe that people can be improved in their character by reason...that seems a very French idea...Beware gentle knight. There is no greater monster than reason. (All the Pretty Horses 145-46)

The analogy—from the beginning conversation in the chapel (a house reserved for God), to the reference to Don Quixote (tilting at windmills), to the end cautionary reference (beware gentle knight)—leaves the reader with the understanding that John Grady Cole, by touching Alejandra, has entered into a sacred place, and that Don Hector is not happy that the enemy has entered into his sacred domain: "The French have come into my house to mutilate my billiard game. No evil is beyond them" (All the Pretty Horses 146). The implication of evil brought into the house essentially refers to Cole. From the conversation, Cole understands that he has crossed a boundary-line by continuing his relationship with Alejandra.

After the discussion with Don Hector, Grady spends one last night with Alejandra. Neither Cole nor Alejandra can resolve the problems in their relationship. After the last interlude with Alejandra, Grady and Rawlins head to higher grounds to work with the wild horses.

One evening while the boys sit by their evening fire, three grey dogs appear unexpectedly at the perimeter of Cole and Rawlins' camp. Church Symbolism by R.F. Weber and Ralph Cram attributes the appearance of three dogs to the German art dogs that symbolize Mercy, Justice, and Truth of Christ (Weber 365). While traditionally dogs are utilized for hunting and protection, the dogs come in the night and foreshadow the wrath of Don Hector. They may even offer an analogous reflection of the boys as three "dogs" who come in the night; much like the three crossed the river under cover of darkness. On the

last evening while the boys camp and eat by the fire, Rawlins says, "We aint got anymore trips up here, have we?" and Cole replies, "Probably not" (All the Pretty Horses 148).

Five days after Cole's discussion with Don Hector, the boys return to La Purísima to discover a lack of activity and avoidance by the workers. They soon discover the reason for the change in behavior:

The following morning at grey daybreak two men entered [Cole's] cubicle with drawn pistols and put a flashlight in his eyes and ordered him to get up.

(All the Pretty Horses 149)

The boys are taken away at gunpoint and after several days of riding handcuffed to the saddles—and Rawlins' silence—they arrive in the town of La Encantada, which literally means *enchanted*. Cole finally gets Rawlins to speak to him. He asks him if he thinks the patrón sold them down river because of a lie; Rawlins replies "or some truth" (All the Pretty Horses 155). The terse exchange shows that Rawlins blames Cole and understands that no matter what was told to Don Hector—lie or truth—the only truth that really mattered was Cole's unsanctioned romance.

Rawlins understands, even if Cole does not, that a relationship with the daughter of a Mexico ranching baron was not allowed. Cole crossed over both social and cultural barriers that he never should have been breached. The two boys now have to pay the price of Don Hector's disregard. Cole, however, does understand that he "cant back up and start over again" (All the Pretty Horses 155). Cole and Rawlins must work together to try to find a way out of their dilemma. The motif of reason is brought up once again when Rawlins

tells Cole that he tried to "reason" with him many times, to which Cole responds, "But some things aint reasonable" (All the Pretty Horses 155). To Cole, these invisible borders make no sense; Cole's passions eventually overcome his reason and lead him to violate social restrictions. In this part of the novel, the reader learns that the decision to cross those fixed cultural lines ultimately results in heartache, loss, and the imprisonment of Cole and Rawlins; but first they must return once again to the town where all the problems began.

The town of La Encantada serves as the setting for Blevins' downfall and for the misfortunes shared by Cole and Rawlins. The term *enchantment* generally provokes thoughts of happiness or white magic; but in this case, the term acts more as a curse or bewitchment. The three boys first travelled through the town in an attempt to retrieve Blevins' possessions, but Blevins ended up murdering a man and running away. Because of their earlier association with Blevins and because of Cole's false statement, Cole and Rawlins are taken away from their cowboy paradise—La Purísima—to face charges alongside Blevins for the murder. It is this town of La Encantada that sets the stage for yet another crossing.

Cole and Rawlins travel back to this town as prisoners, and they meet up once again with Jimmy Blevins. They are thrown into a small stone room alongside Blevins—where they are temporarily imprisoned. As they cross through the threshold it signifies another movement of change for Cole, Rawlins, and for Blevins. Blevins' "voice out of the darkness ...[asking] Is that you all?" implies that Blevins had prior knowledge that the boys were being brought to the small prison, solidifying Cole and Rawlins' suspicion that

Blevins had already given their names to the authorities. Rawlins' exclamation of "Ah God" as he hears Blevins' voice in the dark also warns of the torment to come for all three boys.

Blevins' obscure reply, "What a man wont see when he aint got a gun" seems strange at first, but the dialogue following this exchange highlights the brutal and ruthless revenge committed by Blevins on the man who stole his gun and on the men who chased him afterwards. Blevins' debilitation confirms the boys' suspicions—"cause they busted up [his] feet all to hell"—and his physical state also shows the violent conduct of the authorities. Blevins has crossed many lines by killing the three *rurales*, or local men. Not only has he broken the law, but because Blevins is an American and an outsider, he has also broken social, cultural and racial barriers that make his crime beyond the limits of acceptance or tolerance. When Cole finally gets the full story of Blevins' attempted escape and subsequent capture, he asks Blevins what the authorities plan to do with him. Blevins replies, "Send me to the penitentiary I reckon" (All the Pretty Horses 160).

Rawlins, however, interprets the situation differently and seems to know that Blevins is as good as dead:

They aint goin to send you to the penitentiary.

Why aint they?

You aint goin to be that lucky. (All the Pretty Horses 160)

The following morning, both Rawlins and Cole face the captain's cruel method of questioning—Rawlins coming away with a brutal beating and an implied rape. When

Rawlins was in the presence of the captain, he was made to "pull down his pants and turn around," and when he returned to the small stone prison, he was "holding himself." After Cole returns from being questioned and the two are discussing their predicament, Cole sees tears in Rawlins' eyes, and Rawlins tells Cole that, "[the captain] keeps a white coat back there on a hook. He takes it down and puts in on and ties it around his waist with a string" (All the Pretty Horses 169). Thereafter, Rawlins is shown as a broken man, broken by the shameless treatment at the hands of the captain. The reader understands through subtle hints that the captain likes to abuse young boys. The golden silk scarf tied around his neck, the mention that Blevins has "no feathers" proves that he has looked at the boy's genitals, just as he looks at Rawlins during the interrogation. The captain crosses both social and ethical lines as he utilizes his office to abuse the boys. This treatment highlights both the corruption inherent in the Mexican government and the oppression of those who lack power.

Three days after the interrogation, guarded by *three* men, the *three* prisoners are loaded into a truck and taken away from their small prison. The number *three* is a physical reference to crossing space and time; but it also represents the motif of life and death, beginning—middle—end. As the truck travels farther into the distance, Blevins lies in the truck bed watching "the horizon and the thin wires of lightning and watching the dust to see how the wind blew" (All the Pretty Horses 175). The lightning is a physical reminder of his earlier brush with "death by fire," as it was the catalyst that instigated the loss of Blevins' clothes, horse, and ultimately his life. It becomes apparent that Blevins

understands how "the wind [blows]" when he reaches into his boot and drags out some dirty *peso* notes. He throws the money at Cole when the guard comes to escort him to the back of an abandoned building and his own personal firing squad. The brightly decorated *charro* and the captain take Blevins to the rear of the building, leaving Blevins' boot behind. This scene is reminiscent of the earlier brush with lightning when Blevins came crawling up out of the arroyo—one boot lost to the flood—signaling Blevins' imminent death:

They waited a long time... [Rawlins] looked at John Grady.

They cant just walk him out there and shoot him, he said. Hell fire. Just walk him out there and shoot him. John Grady looked at him. As he did so the pistol shot came from beneath the ebony trees. Not loud. Just a flat sort of pop. Then another. When they came back out of the trees the captain was carrying the handcuffs. Vámonos, he called. (All the Pretty Horses 178)

Rawlins and Cole are eventually delivered to an "old prison on Castelar...past midnight," and the prisoners stand watching the captain:

Yet the captain inhabited another space and it was a space of his own election and outside the common world of men. A space privileged to men of the irreclaimable act which while it contained all lesser worlds within it contained no access to them. For the terms of election were of a piece with

its office and once chosen that world could not be quit. (All the Pretty Horses 179)

The captain explains to the boys his reason for killing Blevins and warns that in the prison, and maybe the world, "God is no here." The idea of borders, crossing over and through, or even transcending out of the world implies other dimensions through which the boys have travelled and must travel to a place "no here" in order to escape from the world in which they are now a part. The captain further explains that if the boys do not "make arrangements," they will both die in the prison. John Grady Cole and Rawlins are then "locked into a cell in the topmost corner of the prison" (All the Pretty Horses 181-82). Even in the prison, the boys learn of the hierarchal system of barter, exchange and power. In order to survive, Cole and Rawlins must physically establish themselves as powerful; otherwise they will be killed. When the prisoner Perez tries to establish a bond with the boys, he explains the difference between the world of prison and the outside world, establishing the physical barrier inherent within the prison. Cole and Rawlins have once again, though involuntarily, have stepped through a threshold, crossing into another cultural and physical landscape:

The others are simply outside. They live in a world of possibility that has no end. Perhaps God can say what is to become of them, but I cannot. (All the Pretty Horses 189).

Cole offends Perez when he declines the offer of a "buy-out," and the next morning, Rawlins gets knifed in the stomach and must go to the *alcaide*, or infirmary. Cole's refusal

to pay Perez shows that Cole is unwilling to cross yet another social line, one that would cause a further descendance of his nature and character; however, his refusal almost causes both boys deaths. But these trials inevitably prove to be the salvation of both boys. After three days of not hearing anything about Rawlins, Cole returns to Perez, only to be told that "the anglo...looks only where he wishes to see" (All the Pretty Horses 192). Perez warns Cole that his time for arranging to get out of the prison is coming to an end, and he establishes the idea that 'things' have qualities, but no 'thing' can be tainted in a superstitious way; instead, the taint or the evil follows and attaches itself to the thing.

Evil is a true thing in Mexico. It goes about on its own legs.

Maybe someday it will come to visit you. Maybe it already has. (All the Pretty Horses 195)

Just before the day of the knife fight, Cole intuitively interprets the signals of some of the other prisoners. He also notes prisoners crossing in front of him, avoiding him or not, looking at him or not. Cole passes through yet another threshold bringing more chaos and bloodshed:

He heard the latch click shut on the door across the hall...There was no one behind the serving line. (All the Pretty Horses 199)

Cole noticed that the two guards who normally stood watch were not in the room. Only through his highly sensitized awareness does Cole foresee the attack:

When the boy reached the end of the table he suddenly turned and sliced the tray at his head...it occurred to him that he was going to die. [The *cuchillero*] leaned and took hold of John Grady by the hair and forced his head back to cut his throat. As he did so John Grady brought his knife up from the floor and sank it into the *cuchillero's* heart. (All the Pretty Horses 199-201)

Cole believes he will die in the fight, but he never gives up and through an act of fate, he turns out to be the victor. After the fight, wounded and near death, John Grady Cole lies in the small stone room for three days before waking. A man in a military uniform visits him and asks if he is capable of walking. When Cole responds in the affirmative, both he and Rawlins are released from the prison, crossing through yet another threshold into an unknown territory. Before the boys leave the prison, the *comandante* hands Cole an envelope full of money, sealing the notion that someone of wealth purchased their freedom— la Dueña Alfonsa.

Rawlins takes his part of the money supplied by Alfonsa and heads for home, across the border back to America. John Grady Cole cannot leave so readily; after seven weeks of absence, he makes a decision to return to La Purísima to reclaim what he lost when he was taken away to prison. Cole stops in the town of Saltillo to get his stitches removed; he then hitches a ride in a flatbed truck with a group of farm workers at a "crossroads" (All the Pretty Horses 219).

John Grady Cole ... [after escaping] his hellish experience in prison, understanding that 'after and for a long time to come he'd have reason to evoke the recollection of those smiles and to reflect upon the good will which provoked them for it had power to respect and to confer honor and to strengthen resolve and it had power to heal men and to bring them to safety long after all other resources were exhausted.' (Quoted in Busby 142)

Physically, the crossroads marks the place where Cole decides whether to head toward home or toward the ranch. Cole chooses to return to the ranch. However, la Dueña Alfonsa has made a deal with Alejandra; and the meeting to come will only solidify the cultural boundaries created over the course of centuries by men such as Don Hector. La Dueña Alfonsa reiterates the cultural state when Cole visits her after his stay in the prison:

Society is very important in Mexico...In Mexico they are mad for society and for politics and very bad at both. (All the Pretty Horses 230)

Dueña Alfonsa's insight shows that these rules of politics and society and culture cannot be crossed without negative consequences and repercussions; the rules are put in place by men and only the men who created them can revise them. John Grady Cole, as an outsider, cannot have any hopes of successfully breaking these rules, nor can a woman hope to change that which was created by men.

Through all of Cole's difficulties, one of the most important moments of insight comes from Dueña Alfonsa as she discusses the nature of the world in which humankind

exists, 'the border living in a world of between' (Busby 142). Dueña Alfonsa explains to Cole:

In the end we all come to be cured of our sentiments. Those whom life does not cure death will. The world is quite ruthless in selecting between the dream and the reality, even where we will not. Between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting. (All the Pretty Horses 238)

La Dueña Alfonsa, acting as a surrogate mother to Alejandra realizes through her own experiences with "dreams and reality" that the love affair between Cole and Alejandra—the dream—can never survive the reality of culture and class systems. In the article "Pledged in Blood: Truth and Redemption," Sara Spurgeon paraphrases Dueña Alfonsa's discussion of social etiquette and discusses the Americanized romantic ideal:

It is John Grady's naïve and romantic inability to distinguish the truth—defined by the Dueña Alfonsa to be not 'what is righteous but merely what is so'—which moves her to pay his and Rawlins' way out of prison but also, ultimately, causes her to reject his suit for Alejandra's hand. (Spurgeon 82)

John Grady Cole respectfully listens to Dueña Alfonsa, but he ultimately makes the decision to see Alejandra one last time, hoping for a reunion and reparation. However, Alejandra understands, even if Cole does not, that their relationship must cease.

The [earlier] dialogue between Alfonsita [Dueña Alfonsa] and Cole operates as a paradigmatic border crossing—a crossing in which the desire

of a young Westerner (an innocent of an almost Jamesian variety) is opposed by a different culture and history. (Jarrett 114)

With her rejection, Cole sees "clearly how all his life led only to this moment and all after led nowhere at all" (All the Pretty Horses 254). Cole's insight seems to question his own existence or place the world. He realizes that the reality of life is much different from the dream.

Before Cole rides across the border toward home there is one last deed that he must act upon. Cole once again finds himself at a crossing, and he makes a decision to reclaim what was taken. He must travel back to Encantada one last time:

Five days later he rode at night into a small crossroads pueblo nameless to him and he sat the horse in the crossroads and by the light of a full moon read the names of towns burned into crateslats with a hot iron and nailed to a post. San Jerónimo. Los Pintos. La Rosita. At the bottom a board with the arrow pointed the other way that said La Encantada. He leaned and spat. He looked toward the darkness in the west. The hell with it, he said. I aint leavin my horse down here. (All the Pretty Horses 257)

At this point in the novel, Cole has nothing left to lose. He has lost his home, his mythic and idyllic dream, his girl. He refuses to lose the one thing that means the most to him—his horse—so he rides back to Encantada for the third time to reclaim the horses. As noted in the "All the Pretty Horses" essay by Edwin Arnold and Diane Luce:

John Grady fails to protect ...Jimmy Blevins, for whose death he feels responsible and in expiation for which he risks his own life to recover the magnificent horse for which Jimmy was prepared to die. (Arnold, Luce 179)

Cole feels compelled to return once more, and this time it becomes evident that Cole is a changed man. Rather than being controlled by fate, destiny and the societal codes of the land, Cole appears authoritative, decisive, and even reckless at times. He is a man on a mission; and he will either die trying, or he will accomplish his goal of reclaiming the horses. Arnold and Luce note that "the rescue of his and Rawlins' horses, as well as Blevins' horse, seems certainly to be an impassioned response to Alfonsa's 'there is nothing to lose'..." (Arnold, Luce 191).

Cole rides toward Encantada resolved to retrieve the horses. He visits the captain and requests a meeting, refusing to be swayed from his purpose. Holding the captain at gunpoint, he requires the captain to escort him to the home of the *charro* who has the horses. This intense scene where Cole rides with the captain held at gunpoint while simultaneously herding the horses, marks yet another crossing for Cole, and it sets up Cole's emergence in the novel as a hero, capable of succeeding in almost super human feats. Cole ends up regaining his own horse and Blevins', but at the cost of Rawlins' horses and greater cost to himself, perhaps paralleling the unseen marks on Rawlins and Cole. Ironically, it is Blevins' horse that is saved, its character never having changed, mirroring Blevins' own journey throughout the novel.

This same scene suggests yet another crossing for Cole as well. As Cole travels away from La Encantada, he holds the captain as a hostage while simultaneously driving the other horses in front of him. The image of the four horses metaphorically represents the four horses of the apocalypse that bring war, famine, pestilence, and death. Redbo, Cole's horse, represents the red horse described in Revelations:

And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. (Revelation 6:4)

The color red symbolizes the blood that has been spilled as a result of the war and destruction brought by the horse. John Grady Cole, riding Redbo, seems hell-bent on justice and aims to kill the captain whom he carries as a hostage. The "fiery red" horse represents war, and Cole carries a gun, an implement of war.

Along the way, Cole realizes that "[he's] not like [the captain]," and this mystic connection with the four horses breaks as Cole sets free the fourth horse, the youngest and greenest horse, a "grullo" or pale grayish colored horse. This pale horse, which Cole has ridden for most of his journey toward the meeting with the captain, represents "Death" as described in both the Bible and Greek mythology as a pale or "green" or sickly colored horse:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over

the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (Revelation 6:8)

By setting this horse free, Cole symbolically breaks the pattern of death and the chaos that "hell" brings with it. Cole keeps the dark horse that had belonged to Jimmy Blevins:

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, a measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. (Revelation 6:5 - 6:6)

Cole appears saddened yet somehow peaceful with the decision to release the horse, signifying his conflicting emotions of how to deal with the captain. The final decision is taken away from him when the other riders arrive and take the captain away.

Cole's mystic connection with the horses portrays an "otherworldly" intuition that only Cole and the horses comprehend. Cole "whispers" and talks to the horses, who seemingly understand his every word—or at the least—seem calmed by his voice; Cole's first thought, his first look, is always to the horse. Cole's mystic connections, however, change back to the reality of the natural world as Cole travels on his journey and blood and mayhem ensue, a harsh reality of nature.

John Grady Cole rides across the border at the beginning of the novel—a young man full of dreams and desires, but he crosses back to Texas as a man with a sense of truth

and violent realism, having ridden to hell and back. The point at which Cole makes the decision to allow the captain to live serves as a reminder that Cole has retained a sense of his ethical code and decency. He recognizes restraint and self discipline, constraints. Cole has made the "hero" journey, faced the trials, and can now return:

By novel's end, when he returns to his own time and place and, briefly, to the now sold cattle ranch, John Grady's fall from innocence into experience encompasses sexual experience as well as betrayal in love and expulsion from paradise, his hands are bloodied with the self-defensive murder of a fellow prisoner in the purgatory of the Mexican prison, and his conscience is troubled by his passive acquiescence to Jimmy's "eye-for-an-eye" execution. He left a boy and returns a man. (Arnold, Luce 179)

Once Cole crosses the border back to Texas, he wanders from place to place trying to find Blevins' family in order to return the horse. As he soon finds out that the Blevins' name most likely originated from a lie, he gives up his quest to return the horse. Cole ends up confessing his whole story to a judge; but in his telling, he admits that he does not feel justified in his actions. He carries with him a feeling of guilt and helplessness because he feels responsible for Blevins' execution. Essentially, all that Cole had worked for and lost, all that he had been and all that was to come, was all based on lies and broken promises. From the beginning of the novel, when Cole loses the ranch where he grew up, raised by false parents, under the false notion that the ranch would one day become his legacy—to the ending of the novel, when Cole discovers that the idea of home is a false dream, the

crucial mirroring of beginnings and endings in the novel reflect the nature of man and country. Joyce Carol Oates, in her essay entitled "The Treasure of Comanche County" notes that McCarthy's "Border novels are works of surpassing emotional power and beauty; elegies to a vanishing, or vanished frontier world, in the decades following World War II" (Oates 43). McCarthy reveals the force of nature and the nature of man in All the Pretty Horses, constantly questioning man's existence within the world.

Man is bound by rules made by man; man is transformed by nature; man creates the boundaries and man renders the verdict for severing or crossing those borders. In Cole's instance, he crossed from a paradoxically new country, but an old familiar land, to a new country and new culture for him, but in reality a culture as old as the land. He searched for the truth and meaning of home and life, but he learned that none of those really mattered. Madison Bell, in the essay "The Man who Understands Horses" states that in:

McCarthy's work human thought and activity seem almost completely inconsequential when projected upon the vast alien landscapes where they occur. Human behavior may achieve its own integrity—it's John Grady's conscientious striving for this quality that makes him Mr. McCarthy's most appealing character—but it generally seems to have little effect.

(Bell, M. 9)

Upon his return home, Cole stands looking over the grave of his Abuela and the reality of this truth comes forth:

He said goodbye to her in Spanish and then turned and put on his hat and turned his wet face to the wind and for a moment he held out his hands as if to steady himself or as if to bless the ground there or perhaps as if to slow the world that was rushing away and seemed to care nothing for the old or the young or rich or poor or dark or pale or he or she. Nothing for their struggles. Nothing for their names. Nothing for the living or the dead. (All the Pretty Horses 301)

All the Pretty Horses opens with a funeral—a crossing; it ends with a funeral, a crossing to another land, place, a dimension in time. All the Pretty Horses, the opening novel of Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy, serves as the beginning of the end, framed with physical crossings of land, culture and nature. Through it all and with each crossing, John Grady Cole suffers great loss. Mark Busby sums up Cole's adventures in his essay, "Into the Darkening Land, the World to Come":

Ultimately, John Grady Cole's border crossing has taken him into a world of complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence—a mixture of good and evil, rationality and irrationality, fate and free will in a mestizo culture that is itself an amalgam. (Busby 150)

Cole ends up in the place where he started, but with a world of experience, pain and suffering. He left the ranch as a young boy and returned as man, alone with no real home, no real place to call his own.

CHAPTER III

TRAVESIAS IN THE CROSSING

To explore, to travel, to traverse, and to discover new land has long been part of humans' innate and natural desire and temperament. For thousands of years, humankind has crossed over lands, barriers, borders, and physical plains for a variety of reasons. Whether these crossings are transcendent or physical, humans face many crossings throughout a lifetime; and many even carry a "cross to bear" as they travel through life. Although these transcendent crossings may provide insight and inspiration, the physical crossings often create disorder and chaos.

Cormac McCarthy's, The Crossing, is the second installment of the Border Trilogy, which is structured around three significant crossings: Billy Parham's trek across the Mexican border to return a wolf to its home; Billy and his brother Boyd's trip across the border to recapture the family's stolen horses, and Billy's trip across the border to reclaim his brother Boyd. Within each of these crossings the main character, Billy Parham, must make individual choices, crossing through physical and spiritual borders as he travels back and forth across the New Mexico and Mexico borders during the period "not long before World War II, when Arizona and New Mexico were crossed by trailer trucks and crisscrossed by men on horseback and Mexico could be seen, from this side of the trucks, as the great dreaming past that the American Southwest was losing" (Eder 3). The dichotomy of old and new coexisting provides the landscape through which Billy Parham must traverse. Crossing through physical borders and barriers, Parham learns much about

the world from various storytellers and wanderers, all the while learning the story of man's existence in the world. Robert Jarrett explains that:

The novel's first page contains three crossings: the family's crossing from Texas into New Mexico; the consequent crossing or demarcation of nature into an individually marked possession of the family...and the crossing over of the wolf, whose existence dictates that she traverse all such human boundaries. (Jarrett 115)

Within each of Billy's crossings, both to Mexico and back, Billy learns lessons about the world that lend to spiritual and metaphorical crossings as well. According to Michiko Kakutani's review, "Border Crossings, Real and Symbolic," Billy Parham's "crossing[s] become...a kind of metaphor for the emotional traversing of borders between civilization and nature, order and chaos" (Kakutani 1). Whether spiritual or physical, the crossings in this novel create a catalyst for change and violence. The Crossing provides the "central image" that connects the three novels of McCarthy's Border Trilogy (Busby 153). Outwardly, it would seem that The Crossing explains the physical crossings of the main character, Billy Parham; but, it also "employs the road as metaphor for the life journey or the narrative of a life" (Luce 195).

Although All the Pretty Horses contains a spiritual and mystical quality in many parts of the novel, such as the horses that run through John Grady Cole's dreams at night, The Crossing is much more spiritual and mystical in nature. As Mark Busby states, "[The Crossing] shifts the focus from the human to the natural world...especially the existence

and purpose of God in a violent and inhumane world" (Busby 153). The Crossing attempts to question not only man's role in the world, but also God's role. Through almost every encounter that Billy Parham experiences, there is mention of "other worlds" or Billy's place in the world. These encounters enlighten the reader that the novel is about much more than the physical crossings of Billy Parham. Instead, Billy must also cross over into other worlds and experiences in order to find his own place in the world:

You think that this country is some country you can come here and do what you like.

I never thought that. I never thought about this country one way or the other.

Yes, said the hacendado. (The Crossing 119)

Billy learns that by crossing over the border into unknown lands, he has trespassed upon a land and culture that does not welcome him. Although he did not realize that he was a trespasser and an outsider, he also never thought about it or realized there would be ramifications to his crossing the border. The crucial lesson is in Billy's unknowing state; he is naive to the reality and nature of man. Billy does not recognize that he has crossed a line. His quest becomes somewhat mythical as he travels the land, much like Odysseus in his travels to get back home. Like Odysseus's journey, Billy has certain goals that he must accomplish—each step of the journey guided by the previous action (cause and effect), making the travel seem aimless, as if the lesson is in the travel, not in the destination. Billy's crossing over onto other territory or "sacred ground" shows the nature of the world

that Billy has entered. Man's law and man's boundaries—whether known or unknown—create the rule by which man must live and engage. The age-old customs and rules—put in place by men—place restraints on individuals, but the land itself does not see men as trespassers. The land will exist with or without humankind.

Part one of The Crossing begins with Billy's physical move to the ranch where his family settles. Billy carries his little brother Boyd up in front of him on the saddle of his horse. The scene shows Billy as the more mature sibling who watches over his younger brother. Early in the novel, Billy goes outside during the night and watches for the pack of wolves that run the antelope, dancing and playing in the snow:

On a winter's night in that first year he woke to hear wolves in the low hills to the west of the house and he knew that they would be coming out onto the plain in the new snow to run the antelope in the moonlight...they...moved like phantoms in the snow and circled and wheeled and the dry powder blew about them in the cold moonlight and their breath smoked palely in the cold as if they burned with some inner fire and the wolves twisted and turned and leapt in a silence such that they seemed of another world entire...(The Crossing 3)

A mystical quality connects the night, Billy, and the wolves; and when the wolves discover Billy watching them, they look at him and simply trot off into the night, simultaneously reinforcing Billy's and the wolves' place in the world. Billy never tells anyone about this encounter, but the scene acts as a connection and explanation for Billy's coming journey.

Although Billy has no way of knowing it, he is inexplicably connected with the fate of the wolf, which once roamed the land freely. "Billy's childhood vision of the wolf's crossing will determine his [older experiences and] identity" (Jarrett 115).

Many years after the mystical wolf encounter, Billy and his father take on the task of trapping a wolf that has come down from the Sierra Madres Mountain Range, across the border of Mexico. The trapping proves difficult because the wolf would "not **cross** a road or a rail line in daylight. She would not **cross** under a wire fence twice in the same place. These were the new protocols" (The Crossing 25). Trapping the wolf takes on a mythologized quality as both Billy and his father learn about trapping wolves through Don Arnulfo and utilize the traps of the legendary trapper, Echols.

The she-wolf has travelled across the mountains and into enemy territory in search of food and more of her own kind. Like Billy, the wolf is unaware of the consequences to her crossing over an international boundary. A "young don" advises Billy on the wolf's actions, but the advice parallels a lesson for Billy as well:

Whatever the wolf knew or did not know was irrelevant and that if the wolf had crossed that boundary it was perhaps so much the worse for the wolf but the boundary stood without regard. (The Crossing 119)

The crossing of the wolf from the border signifies the idea that borders and barriers have no value to the animal world. During Billy's first venture into Mexico, he is on a quest to return this she-wolf to her homeland across the border. For Billy, the wolf becomes a quest to return her to her rightful place. Unfortunately, Billy exists in a world

that does not appreciate the rightful place of the wolves in nature among men. Robert Jarrett discusses the history of the wolf in his article "The Wolf as the Embodiment of the Border Crossing":

Since the 1970s, the federal government has planned to reintroduce the Mexican wolf into federally owned areas of southern Arizona and New Mexico—ironically the same territories in which the animal was trapped into extinction from the 1920s to 1940s. This extinction was accomplished with the support of federal and state government bounties, as the novel suggests through the two old men, Echols and Don Arnulfo, who have made their living trapping wolves. (Jarrett 116)

Billy's quest to take the wolf back home ironically comes at a time when wolves were nearly brought to extinction as a result of trappers like Echols and Arnulfo. Billy's she-wolf essentially has no home to return to; she has left her "home" in search of more of her own kind. Her home no longer exists because her family no longer exists. The wolf's home moves with members of her family, her pack. Although she once roamed a specific geographical area, she has moved because she needs those of her own kind in order to survive. However, they do not exist; her fate and that of her pups are sealed long before Billy ever attempts to take her back home. As Wallis Sanborn's Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy notes, "borders and boundaries are manmade entities," and the wolf does not recognize man's borders (Sanborn 146). Therefore, her crossing to new territory highlights the notion that only man recognizes the wolf's boundaries and normal

geographical roaming area because man is the one who recognized or placed the borders in the first place. As part of the natural order, the wolf recognizes no boundaries. In Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy Wallis Sanborn states that McCarthy, promoting the "mythos of the wolf," is also "demonstrate[ing] man's urge to control the natural world" (Sanborn 143).

Billy first captures and controls the she-wolf through trickery and force (52). He then binds and muzzles the animal and drags her back to Mexico (74). Thus Billy's noble mission is nothing more than a man violently controlling a wild animal through the guise of pseudo-nobility, and Billy's mission is just another of many McCarthy examples of man overwhelming the fauna and flora of the natural world. (Sanborn 143)

So with Billy's border crossing with the she-wolf, he is ultimately sealing her death; and the crossing represents more than a simple traversing of land, border, and mountain. The sheer act of conquering the wolf and traveling across the border changes Billy from child to man, highlighting Billy as the "man" who attempts to control his own world, even if for a noble cause. Throughout the first "crossing" in the novel, Billy becomes aware of the differences of culture and boundaries as he continues on his mission of returning the wolf. When the wolf is confiscated from Billy after they cross the border, she is then taken to use in a bloody wolf-baiting where Billy finds her tied to a stake, fighting against blood hounds. He courageously shoots and kills the wolf rather than have her face the indignation and disgrace of defeat at the jaws of the attacking hounds. Wallis Sanborn notes that even

though "Billy and the she-wolf are encamped on the wrong side of the boundary...the wolf will die...because man occupies both sides" (Sanborn 146). After an intense scene where Billy claims the wolf in exchange for his only means of protection, his gun, Billy escapes with the dead wolf to continue with his original goal, returning the wolf to her home. What follows are a completion of Billy's journey to bring the wolf home and a ritualistic lamentation:

...as he rode he sang old songs...and a soft corrido...of the death of an old soldier.....in some old waste of death. He cradled the wolf in his arms...unfolded the sheet. She was stiff and cold and her fur was bristly with the blood dried upon it. Coyotes were yapping...calling from dark shapes of the rimlands above...where their cries seemed to have no origin other than the night itself. (The Crossing 125)

The mourning, remembering, singing, lamenting of the wolf and the subsequent wailing of the coyotes depict a ritual funerary scene reminiscent of ancient burial customs very similar to those of the Greeks. Billy's actions depict the first stage of the burial process; he is setting the wolf up for her place in the after-life, yet another crossing—albeit transcendent in nature—to another life. His next action is to cleanse the death shroud in order to prepare the body for the afterlife:

He...lifted the wolf from the sheet and took the sheet to the creek and crouched in the dark and washed the blood out of it and brought it back and he cut forked sticks...and drove them into the ground...and hung the

sheet...where it steamed in the firelight like a burning scrim standing in the wilderness where celebrants of some sacred passion had been carried off by rival sects... (The Crossing 126)

Billy cleanses the sheet or death shroud to honor the dead and "celebrate" the life of the wolf. He lifts up the shroud in an act of purification and cleansing to "celebrate" the wolf's life. While, the earlier portion of the burial ritual includes the lamentation and sorrow for the loss of earthly life, this scene shows the purification, the cleansing, the offering, and the lifting up of the spirit. The final scene shows the actual burial and then the celebration of transcendence to another world:

The coyotes were still calling all along the stone ramparts of the Pilares and it was graying faintly in the east. He squatted over the wolf and touched her fur...the cold and perfect teeth. The eye...gave...no light and he closed it...and sat by her and put his hand upon her bloodied forehead and closed his own eyes that he could see her running in the mountains, running in the starlight where the grass was wet and the sun's coming as yet had not undone the rich matrix of creatures passed in the night before her. Deer and hare and dove and groundvole all richly empaneled on the air for her delight, all nations of the possible world ordained by God of which she was one among and not separate from. ...He took up her stiff head...and held it or he reached to hold what cannot be held, what already ran among the mountains at once terrible and of a great beauty... (The Crossing 127)

Billy's final act for the burial celebrates the wolf's life as she transcends her earthly boundaries; this same scene simultaneously shows the paradox of living in a world at odds with nature. The pastoral scene with "deer and hare and dove and groundvole...for her delight...ordained by God," quickly changes to the paradoxical cycle of nature, life and death, blood and bone:

What blood and bone are made of but can themselves not make on any altar
nor by any wound of war...a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it
and the world cannot lose it...He'd...buried her...under a cairn of scree.
The little wolves in her belly felt the cold draw all about them and they
cried out mutely in the dark and he buried them all and piled the rocks over
them... (The Crossing 127-29)

McCarthy states that "doomed enterprises divide lives forever into the then and now" (The Crossing 129). Although this quote foreshadows the "divided" lives that Billy experiences as a result of his journey, it also reiterates the idea that by the time Billy begins his journey to return the wolf to her home, the fate of the wolf is already doomed because she has lost her family; subsequently, as she dies, the future of her kind is sealed with the death of her unborn pups. Wallis Sanborn notes that:

The wolf is hunted to the point of extinction because man has justified the
killing...the propagation of sustenance livestock and the commercial
livestock industry.

...man kills that which he cannot control. (Sanborn 135, 148)

The death of the she-wolf and her pups symbolically represents the death and extinction of the Mexican grey wolf, ending part one of the novel and bringing Billy a sense of closure to his journey with the wolf.

The second part of The Crossing begins with the "blood and bone" burial of the she-wolf with the pups encased within her belly. This opening scene, rather than showing a new beginning for Billy, shows an ending as Billy attempts to close the door on the animal and her world(s). Billy leaves the wolf's burial site high in the Pilares, and rather than heading straight back home, begins an aimless wandering ostensibly to "become again the child he never was" (The Crossing 129).

In The Crossing, Billy Parham travels and wanders the land, Billy meets storytellers who describe the journey of life (and death) and discuss the idea of crossings, fate, and existence. On one such encounter, a group of "wild Indians" takes him into their camp to care for him awhile. One of the elders "cradles" Billy like a child as he offers him advice:

[Billy] must cease his wanderings and make for himself some place in the world because to wander in this way would become for him a passion and by this passion he would become estranged from men and so ultimately with himself. He said that the world could only be known as it existed in men's hearts. For while it seemed to be a place that contained men it was in reality a place contained within them and therefore to know it one must

look there and come to know those hearts and to do this one must live with men and not simply pass among them. (The Crossing 134)

When the Indian addresses Billy, he calls him *huérfano*, or orphan; however, Billy assures him that he is not a *huérfano* implying that he (Billy) still has a home and a family. In the article "Crossing from the Wasteland into the Exotic," author J. Canfield notes that "young heroes always reject...older voices of wisdom, stubbornly defying chance and fate and the authority of society in favor of their own indomitable will" (Quoted in Arnold, Luce 257). Billy disregards the advice of the elder Indian who mystically sees in Billy as the lone wanderer. Billy remains blissfully ignorant of the meanings that the Indian tries to impart, and Billy does not comprehend the Indian's advice at its deepest level; thus he takes the advice only superficially. Ironically, Billy has no way of knowing that back home in Cloverdale, most of his family has been murdered, his home has been destroyed, and that now, he is indeed a *huérfano*, orphan. When the reader learns of this incident a bit further in the novel, the Indian's advice takes on a mystical quality as if the Indian could foretell Billy's situation.

Billy leaves the Indians and crosses over a "depopulate and barren" area. He views the "old pictographs of men and animals and suns and moons as well as other representations that seemed to have no referent in the world" (The Crossing 135). This phase of his journey highlights the various worlds: past present, and future "like a dream for the world to come." A "single vulture" appears as an omen of ill tidings. Billy shares

his piñon nuts and begins talking to his horse, wondering if the horse will "quit" him.

Billy next meets up with an ex-priest who explains the history of the tale, or corrido:

Things separate from their stories have no meaning... The story on the other hand can never be lost from its place in the world for it is that place...The corrido. The tale. And like all corridos it ultimately told one story only, for there is only one story to tell...and the tale has no abode or place of being except in the telling only and there it lives and makes its home and therefore we can never be done with the telling. Of the telling there is no end... I say again all tales are one. Rightly heard all tales are one. (The Crossing 143)

McCarthy's language in this portion of the novel takes on an ethereal or mystical tone portraying mythical man. Man and man's existence through time become synonymous with the tale; man's earthly mortality transcends the boundaries of time and becomes immortal through the tale and the retelling of the tale. Even the stories take on a mythic appearance as they begin to form a matrix, a blending that becomes symbolic of life.

Diane Luce asserts this same idea in her book, "The Road and the Matrix: The World as Tale in The Crossing":

The Crossing is indeed a matrix of intersecting stories, partial or complete, often competing, with varying relationships to truth, cutting across and interwoven with apparently simple linearity of the road narrative of Billy' life. (Luce 196)

At yet another crossing, Billy crosses through a river where he pauses "midstream" and drops his bow:

Midstream he halted again and slid the bow from his shoulder and let it go in the river. It turned and jostled in the riffles and floated out into the pool below. A crescent of pale wood, turning and drifting, lost in the sun on the water. Legacy of some drowned archer, musician, maker of fire. He rode on through the ford and up through the shore willows and carrizal and into the town. (The Crossing 137)

Billy's action signifies an attempt to shed the final vestiges of his trek across the border, a place of older customs and culture. The bow, an ancient ritualistic warring apparatus used by primitive man, symbolizes his communion with the natural world. By throwing it away, he metaphorically crosses back into the world of normalcy, shedding the old for new. The bow symbolizes a more primitive state and shows Billy's attempt to cross back into the world of modern man.

However, as Billy crosses into the next town, an ex-priest welcomes him into his fallen down church, noting that Billy is "lost" (The Crossing 139). What follows is a long story about man's place and God's existence in the world, with the central theme that man is simply "passing through" in search of a place, a home, a world. The ex-priest tells Billy that "things separate from their stories have no meaning...[and]...when their meaning becomes lost to us they no longer even have a name" (The Crossing 142-43).

Boundaries are put in place by men; and as noted by the ex-priest in The Crossing, what men truly "seek is the worthy adversary...otherwise there [are] no boundaries to our own being and we too must extend our claims until we lose all definition" (The Crossing 153). Again, McCarthy reiterates the idea that man is not a separate entity in the cosmos:

Ultimately every man's path is every other's. There
are no separate journeys for there are no separate men to make them. All
men are one and there is no other tale to tell. (The Crossing 156)

The ex-priest continues to tell Billy the tale of the priest and other tales within the tales, and all merge into one tale. The ex-priest tells Billy that the storyteller and the narrator have difficult jobs and must always continue to repeat the tale in order to preserve man's existence on earth. In the tale is the story of man, and man is nothing without the story. According to the priest, man does not exist without the story, which validates and immortalizes man; the story allows man to transcend the earthly restraints of life. These prophetic words end when the priest offers his last bit of advice to Billy. As Billy mounts up to ride out, he says, "I don't even know what month it is"; and the priest tells Billy to "go home" (The Crossing 159). Billy's comment that he does not know the month shows that the priest recognized in Billy the "lost soul" who is lost in time. His story, or tale, shows Billy that he needs a destination and a place in the world. Ironically, when Billy returns home later in the novel, his home has been destroyed.

Billy continues to encounter others along his road who show hospitality. As he crosses the land, the theme of crossings becomes more apparent:

He would cross and recross the river countless times in the days following where the road went ford by ford or along those alluvial fans stepped into the base of the hills where the river shoaled and bended and ran. (The Crossing159)

At one of the many towns along the road to home, Billy spends the night; and in the night, he sees what appears to be a body but turns out to be clay. Following this strange sight in the night, he awakens and steps outside only to see "his father's horse pass in the street" (The Crossing 160). The strange sight prompts him to cross the street and look for the horse, but he cannot locate the horse. The ethereal quality of the language at this point in the novel forces the reader to closely consider this omen. The reader may question whether the image is a figment or real because the reality of Billy's parents' murder is not yet known to the reader. However, Billy's actions in looking for the horse are real. But when he returns to the house and calls out, there are no people. He only finds the emptiness and a small blind dog in a child's cradle. The strangeness of the moment shows that the sightings could simply be omens of bad fortune to come.

As Billy makes his way back home, crossing the border at Douglas Arizona, "the guard" comments that Billy looks like maybe he "stayed a little longer than what [he'd] intended" (The Crossing 162). He crosses over the Guadalupe Mountains and the Animas pass to reach his home:

It was past midnight when he reached the house. There were no lights.

He went to the barn to put the horse up and there were no horses in the

barn and there was no dog. And before he even traversed half the length of the barn bay he knew something was bad wrong. (The Crossing 164)

Crossing back to the house, Billy found food, but nothing else. After spending the night and brushing his horse the next morning, Billy traveled to a neighbor's house to learn the fate of his family. He returned one last time to his old house to see on the bed ticking the "enormous bloodstain dried near black and soaked so thick it cracked and splintered like some dark ceramic glaze" (The Crossing 165). This evidence of his family's murder causes Billy to break down and sob, but the next morning he heads to town to reclaim Boyd. The sheriff tells Billy that the murderers stole six of his father's horses, came in the night, and cut the dog's throat. Billy also learns that Boyd hid in the dark, away from the house; but Boyd wouldn't speak, much like the "stone mute" dog who survived the attack. When Billy asks if it was "Mexicans" who murdered his family, he learns that it was Indians instead. The Indian had asked the boys if there were any dogs and if his father had any guns. This information links the murders to the Indian that stopped Billy and Boyd in the night.

When Billy tells the sheriff he is going to "go get Boyd," the sheriff tells Billy that he cannot do that because Boyd is a juvenile (and so is Billy). The sheriff tells Billy, "Son, don't get crosswise of the law over this." Billy replies, "I don't intend to. I don't intend for it to get crosswise of me neither" (The Crossing 169). This exchange shows the nature and perception of crossing the law and the perceived threat from both sides,

both Billy's (symbolizing family and civilians) and the sheriff's (symbolizing the law).

As he leaves the sheriff's office, people stare at him:

Something in off the wild mesas, something out of the past. Ragged, dirty, hungry in eye and belly. Totally unspoken for. In that outlandish figure they beheld what they envied worst and what they most reviled. If their hearts went out to him it was yet true that for very small cause they might also have killed him. (The Crossing 170)

Defying the sheriff's directive, Billy retrieved Boyd from his foster home. The boys stole clothes, money, food, and a gun and ammunition. They left the home with the mute dog following behind:

The **crossed** the highway and they **crossed** the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railway and turned west...All about them the dry cracked platelets of mud lay curing and the fencepost fire ran tattered in the wind and the balled papers from groceries they opened loped away one by one downwind into the gathering dark. (The Crossing 171)

These crossings set the stage for the coming journey, showing the omens of change and darkness, both exhibiting the idea of man's encroachment in the world—the garbage—and foreshadowing the "gathering dark." Boyd confirms Billy's suspicion about the Indian when he tells him that they knew his name and called it out in the dark.

After they leave town a rider spots them and allows them to continue on their travels, ostensibly toward "Douglas Arizona."

Some time midmorning they **crossed the boundary line** into the state of Arizona. They rode through a low range of mountains and descended into the San Simon Valley. (The Crossing 175)

The boys have "crossed" the law by fleeing from town, and they have "crossed" the international boundary line; however Boyd questions whether or not the American law can cross the boundary into Mexico:

Why caint the law go to Mexico? Boyd said.

Cause it's American law. It aint worth nothing in Mexico.

What about Mexican law?

There aint no law in Mexico. It's just a pack of rogues.

Will number five shot kill a man?

It will if you get close enough. It'll make a hole you can run your arm through.

In the evening they crossed the highway just east of Bowie and struck the old road south through the Dos Cabezas [two heads] range. (The Crossing 177)

The reference to Mexico and the law shows that America has no confidence in the law across the American borders; Boyd's reference to the gun shows the boys' intention to kill someone when they travel across the border. When they enter the town of Bacerac, they see "two horses standing head down" that turn out to be their father's horses. The boys take the horses and then ride back into town to get directions to their new destination. An

old man gives them a map, but others laugh and call it a map or a passage of old. They tell the boys that the map is not real, the map is a "fantasma" (The Crossing 184-85).

This reference shows a crossing to other "ancient" worlds that are not available to the boys as outsiders. Even though the boys are travelers in the land, they are unable to cross to those old worlds of another time, another culture. When the boys commence their travels, they meet up with a variety of travelers, vaqueros, Indians, and others. At many points in their journey, they are warned to go back home:

Why don't you ask him why he wants us to go home, said Boyd.

I will tell you why he wants this, said the ganadero. Because he knows what perhaps you do not. That the past cannot be mended. You think everyone is a fool. But there are not so many reasons for you to be in Mexico. Think of that.

Let's go, said Boyd.

We are close to the truth here. I do not know what that truth is. I am no gypsy fortuneteller. But I see great trouble in store. Great trouble. (The Crossing 202)

Boyd rides the "dark horse" depicting once again, as in All the Pretty Horses, the dark horse of the apocalypse that brings pestilence and starvation. The reference is heightened with Boyd's earlier reference to poverty when he is given pesos in exchange for his American money. Immediately following the mention of the dark horse "which is more true of horse" than Billy's horse, the boys see a strange sight:

Later in the day from the crest of a rise in the road they halted the horses and looked out over the broken plats of dark ground below them where the sluicegates had been opened into the newplowed fields and where the water standing in the furrows shone in the evening light like grids of burnished barmetal stretching away in the distance. As if the boundary gates to some ancient enterprise lay fallen there beyond the ditchside cottonwoods, the evening's singing birds. (The Crossing 203)

The blend of water and newly plowed fields, while suggesting something pure, is overshadowed by the darker comparison to "burnished barmetal" and the reference to the boundary gates represents yet another threshold through which the boys must cross. It is immediately after this scene when Billy and Boyd come across a girl:

Billy **crossed** his horse to the far side of the road...But when she heard the horses...she **crossed** also...they rode on...Boyd sat with his forearms **crossed** over the withers of his horse. The girl's small figure receded into the darkness. Doves were still coming into the fields to the west of the road. They could still hear them **cross** overhead... (The Crossing 204-206)

Boyd still maintains a sense of nobility and decency and asks the girl if she needs a ride, but Billy does not understand Boyd's noble act. When the boys see her once again, she again declines a ride; but when a group of riders pass them, they worry that the

men will harm the girl—so they return to her a third time and end up rescuing her from the men who plan to rape her.

Edwin T. Arnold points out in Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy that one of the peculiar strengths of The Crossing is the increased depth that at times supersedes the plot structure itself. Arnold observes that The Crossing's metaphysical and theological meditations form the "beating heart of the novel" (Arnold, Luce 221). This metaphysical meditative view shows up with Boyd's uncanny intuition:

They could hear them [the men] cross overhead even after it was too dark to see. Boyd rode on, he waited in the road. (The Crossing 205)

After a serious altercation, the boys rescue the girl. Thus, part two of The Crossing ends with "the girl" escaping with the boys. She sleeps on the back of the horse with her arms wrapped around Boyd as they travel across the land to a new place. The buzzards—omens of death—circle in the distance and foreshadow trouble to come as the boys travel across new terrain.

The third part of The Crossing shows Billy's growing attachment to the girl and shows the story of Billy and Boyd's attempt to retrieve their father's horses and hang on to them:

The boys suffer fluctuating fortunes in their ongoing attempts to regain their horses until the original quest is doomed by their second hostile confrontation with a one-armed ranch chief. As this jefe tries to deprive Billy and Boyd of three of their horses for the second time during a street

altercation, Billy spooks his horse, which tumbles to the ground, breaking the jefe's back. Soon afterwards, the one-armed man's compatriots track down and relentlessly shoot at the young Americans, wounding Boyd gravely. (*Cormac McCarthy Website*).

Throughout this section of the novel the idea of fate as it relates to Billy, Boyd, and the girl is exhibited as they pass through towns, encounter both good and bad men, listen to stories, and witness omens from the natural world through dreams and signs. The text takes on the form of a mythical odyssey where the travelers have no control over circumstances and outcomes, good juxtaposed against evil. In one encounter, the travelers are taken in by the Mexican villagers—welcomed, coddled, nurtured—while in another instance they are chased, victimized, and shot.

Billy continues his travel, searching for his place, eventually making his way back to the border toward America:

He passed back north through the small mud hamlets of the mesa, through Alamo and Galeana, settlements through which he'd passed before and where his return was remarked upon by the poblanos so that his own journeying began to take upon itself the shape of a tale. (*The Crossing* 331)

In her essay "The Road and the Matrix: The World as Tale in *The Crossing*," Dianne Luce shows again the idea that man exists through the tale, highlighting the idea

that the crossing over into new worlds or other worlds—whether transcendent or physical—is not what matters in the end; it is simply the tale:

The Crossing is indeed a matrix of intersecting stories, partial or complete, often competing, with varying relationships to truth, cutting across and interwoven with the apparently simple linearity of the road narrative of Billy's life. (Luce 196)

Part four of The Crossing brings Billy back across the border to America. Billy asserts to the guard "I'm an American," to which the guard replies that he looks as if he left some "bacon down there" (The Crossing 333). In this portion of the novel, Billy again crosses another threshold to something new and alien. He has lost his brother and the horses that both boys had attempted to reclaim.

Georg Guillemin points out that "To the observer listening to the story of a life, the person's death indeed defines the story and therefore the life remembered" (Quoted in Arnold, Luce 214). Billy discovers through his travels that death is part of life. Boyd's tale will continue to be told because it details the tale of his death; his memory will remain alive because his life is in the tale, *the corrido*.

Walking back to the fire those nights he often thought about Boyd, thought of him sitting by night at just such a fire in just such a country....He seemed to himself a person with no prior life. As if he had died in some way years ago and was ever after some other being who had no history, who had no ponderable life to come....[The corrido] tells what

it wishes to tell. It tells what makes the story run. The corrido is the poor man's history. It does not owe its allegiance to the truths of history but to the truths of men. (The Crossing 382-86)

The story to which the priest refers encompasses the history of man and his existence on earth. The priest implies that only one tale of man exists, that of life and death. When a man dies, his story goes on forever, transcending the earthly restraints of mortality.

McCarthy reiterates the troubles that man encounters through his crossing on earth when he personifies the "old woman of Mexico" and shows the history of man's existences through bloodshed and violence:

He knew her well enough, this old woman of Mexico, her sons long dead in that blood and violence which her prayers and her prostrations seemed powerless to appease...the old woman's constancy might not have stayed, what direr histories yet against which could be counted at last nothing more than her small figure bent and mumbling, her crone's hands clutching her beads of fruitseed. Unmoving, austere, implacable. Before just such a God. (The Crossing 390)

McCarthy's "old woman" represents Mexico and the generations of inhabitants who sacrificed their lives and the lives of their friends and family for God and Mexico. The old woman in the church reiterates the idea that Mexico's foundation is forged from the blood of its ancestors—and as McCarthy states earlier in the text—that the "soul of Mexico is very old" (The Crossing 385). Through Mexico's suffering, McCarthy

illustrates that man's existence and crossing on earth are filled with violence and bloodshed; and whether man's prayers are answered remains arbitrary in the face of an arbitrary God, fate. However, man exists—praying, fighting, living—while claiming a tenuous hold on land that can really never be claimed but fighting for material possessions that really have no bearing on the outcome, that all men will die and only through their stories do they retain immortality:

The corrido is the poor man's history. It does not owe its allegiance to the truths of history but to the truths of men. It tells the tale of that solitary man who is all men. It believes that where two men meet one of two things can occur and nothing else. In the one case a lie is born and in the other death. (The Crossing 386)

As Billy crosses the land searching for Boyd, who remains lost to him, he encounters a Yaqui Indian, Quijada, another adviser:

The names of the cerros and the sierras and the deserts exist only on maps. We name them that we do not lose our way. Yet it was because the way was lost to us already that we have made those names. The world cannot be lost. We are the ones. And it is because these names and these coordinates are our own naming that they cannot save us. They cannot find for us the way again. Your brother is in that place which the world has chosen for him. He is where he is supposed to be. (The Crossing 387)

In this passage, McCarthy highlights the idea that man's problems, man's existence should not be based on earthly objects or the naming of those things. Contrary to the belief that naming things gives those things power, McCarthy's message in this passage explains that naming something does not make that thing any more or any less; this naming simply gives a frame of reference to man, who is the traveler on earth. Man crosses the land and gives names to things in order that he will no longer be lost.

Ironically, when Billy finds Boyd's grave, there is no name, only a date; and as Billy digs the grave, similar to the episode in All the Pretty Horses, "three dogs appeared and sat down among the stones to watch him" (The Crossing 391). This omen foreshadows the desecration of Boyd's bones as Billy attempts to carry them back home.

When the Yaquii Indian Quijada speaks of Boyd, he explains to Billy that Boyd exists in the world as the world sees fit; he says that Boyd is where "he is supposed to be." This comment shows the interpretation of existence and even fate, exemplifying McCarthy's belief that the world governs the fate of man, not the other way around. Man does not have control over his own universe.

In the night as he slept Boyd came to him and squatted by the deep embers of the fire...he knew that Boyd was dead [and he knew] that which was circumspect in life must be doubly so in death and he'd no way to know what word or gesture might subtract [Boyd] back into that nothingness out of which he'd come. ...he tried not to wake from the dream but the ghost dimmed and faded... (The Crossing 400)

McCarthy's novel hints that man has no control over his destiny, which is exemplified by Billy's passing through and crossing over various obstacles while experiencing arbitrary violence along the way.

La tercera historia...El existe en la historia de las historias. Es que ultimadamente la verdad [The earth's history...It exists in the history of histories. It is ultimately the truth]. (The Crossing 411)

McCarthy articulates through a gypsy storyteller that "...we ourselves are our own day's journey. And therefore we are time as well" (The Crossing 413-14). This message reiterates the essence or spirit of man existing as time. McCarthy may have retrieved this idea from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's notion of man. In his essay, Hegel compared the idea of the spirit of man phenomenologically:

As such, its structure has been compared to that of a "*Bildungsroman*" (educational novel), having an abstractly conceived protagonist—the bearer of an evolving series of "shapes of consciousness" or the inhabitant of a series of successive phenomenal worlds—whose progress and setbacks the reader follows and learns from. Or at least this is how the work sets out: in the later sections the earlier series of "shapes of consciousness" becomes replaced with what seem more like configurations of human social existence, and the work comes to look more like an account of interlinked forms of social existence and thought. (Quoted in Redding 7).

Billy Parham's existence begins with his quest with the wolf; but through his crossings, both spiritual and physical, the reader comes to realize that the novel's message deals more with man's existence on earth. As the reader discovers through the random and arbitrary voyage in which Billy travels, Billy has no real control over his own journey; and therefore, he has no control over Boyd's life and death.

In "The Narrative Matrix: The Spiritual Vision of Cormac McCarthy's The Crossing," Michael Crews states that:

In the world of The Crossing, each man's story is the story of all men in an endless nexus of relationships. To be estranged from this nexus is to be estranged from one's self. And as we have seen in Billy's encounter with the wolf, this nexus stretches beyond the community of human beings to "all nations of the possible world ordained by God" (127). Humanity's alienation from each other extends to the natural world, an alienation presented starkly in the final sorrowful pages of the novel. (Crews 91)

Billy, in the final stages of the novel, wanders out of his shelter into the dark road, alone in an unknowing state, lifeless, devoid of friends and family:

He called and called. Standing in that inexplicable darkness. Where there was no sound anywhere save only the wind. After a while he sat in the road. He took off his hat and placed it on the tarmac before him and he bowed his head and held his face in his hands and wept. He sat there for a long time and after a while the east did gray and after a while the right and

godmade sun did rise, once again, for all and without distinction. (The Crossing 425-26)

In his essay "Right and False Suns," Alex Hunt notes that the strange light in the sky correlates to the historical testing of nuclear weapons in the New Mexican desert. This "false sun" and the strangely deformed dog that appears at the ending of the novel show that McCarthy's tale foretells yet other crossings to come. America will step into the future of atomic weapons, crossing over the natural divide to create something alien and unwelcome into the world of men. Billy, the idealized mythic cowboy, has no place among the future generations with their weapons of mass destruction and technology.

Billy Parham literally crosses terrain, borders, and mountains; metaphorically crosses borders and cultural boundaries; Billy simultaneously experiences a crossing—opposing, blocking, or thwarting—by numerous men and obstacles along the way. Through these crossings, McCarthy shows the paradoxical temperament of man and his place in the world, highlighting man's tenuous existence and stronghold on earth. Man's existence has value because of his interconnectedness through thought, actions, and the story. And, as the tale of The Crossing shows, man will continue; the story will continue; the tale will survive because the story of man is within the tale of man.

CHAPTER IV

CONNECTIONS, COSMOS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In 2007 after his debut of The Road, Cormac McCarthy gave a rare interview with Oprah Winfrey in which he told Winfrey that "Life is pretty damn good even when it looks bad" (Quoted in "Writer Cormac McCarthy Confides in Oprah Winfrey" 2). This insight into the mind of McCarthy is mirrored within the parameters of his stories. While many readers view Cormac McCarthy's writing as nihilistic, McCarthy actually writes a tale of hope. The barriers and crossings represent not only the physical, but the human spirit as well. Through the crossings in both All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing, the protagonists transgress multiple boundaries of geography, space, and culture. In his essay "Into the Darkening Land; the World to Come" Mark Busby comments on the metaphor of the crossings:

Cormac McCarthy's Southwestern novels are tied together by the repetition of the powerful metaphor of border crossings. In the [...] novels of the Border Trilogy – *All the Pretty Horses* [and] *The Crossing* [...]. McCarthy uses the border as a metaphor for a complex and

oxymoronic melding of nihilism and optimism, good and evil, illusion and reality, and several similar contrasts. (Quoted in Wallach 227)

All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing both contain physical frame stories that connect the tales within; but all the physical crossings and movements over terrain, barriers, and landscape ultimately lead to something much bigger than the constraints of the earthly world. As a result of these crossings, tragedy occurs; however, McCarthy does leave the reader with a small shimmer of hope for mankind; and paradoxically, each physical movement represents universal truths that depict representations of the world. These transcendent themes, mystical and spiritual connections, and the spiritual elements deal with both main characters and their connections with nature. In both novels, the main characters experience crossings that are both spatial and temporal:

While being dramatized (and titled) as spatial crossings of borders between societies, John Grady's and Billy's quests resemble in effect journeys through time (from mid-twentieth century to ever more antiquated societal structures)...They make perfect sense however, within the context of the allegorical concept of history as an atemporal correspondence of past with present. (Arnold, Luce 104)

John Grady Cole possesses an uncanny knack for communing with the horses as evidenced by his continually talking to them and the resulting calming effect that his voice has on the horses; but more than that, Cole "sees" visions of the past. This sight closely resembles the spiritual connections redolent of a spiritual or mystical being.

Likewise, Billy Parham communes with the wolf and see visions of the wolves dancing in the moonlight. Cole is "roused to action not by the ghost of his grandfather, but by another spectral vision 'like a dream of the past'...'nation and ghost of nation' along the old Comanche road" (Arnold 50). In "A Note on Horses in All the Pretty Horses," Jianqing Zheng relates Cole's spiritual connection with that of the wild horses:

To John Grady, the wild horses symbolize the unconquered spirit in nature that he desires. Although his love of horses means his love of humans, it does not mean that he is satisfied with his human life. As a result, his dissatisfaction results in his excursion to Mexico where he follows his desire to work with the wild horses and search for his real being in the world. (Zheng 1)

The landscape of All the Pretty Horses, viewed through Cole's eyes, witnesses the Indians (from the past) as they carry their travois over the land, leaving the trails as they pass.

James Beichler in his article "From Spiritualism to Spirituality," remarks that "religion is intuitive in its highest realization and explanation of our world and is often at odds with science which is based on reason" (Beichler 27). The spiritual aspect of this vision from the past acts at odds with the very real natural world in which Cole travels. Cole experiences a connection to the "ghosts" of the past as he rides out on "westernmost section of the ranch":

...like a dream of the past where the painted ponies and the riders of that lost nation came down out of the north with their faces chalked and their

long hair plaited and each armed for war which was their life and the women and children and women with children at their breasts all of them pledged in blood and redeemable in blood only...and the rattle of lances and the constant drag of the travois...the riders sang as they rode, nation and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives. (All the Pretty Horses 5)

Edwin T. Arnold's essay "Dreams and Visions in the Border Trilogy" outlines the nature of life and death, or the crossing from one known place to the 'other':

[McCarthy] provide[s] access to the 'ordinate world' not generally perceived (although perhaps occasionally intuited) in everyday human existence... [implying] some godhead perhaps, exists beyond the range of our normal waking knowledge. (Arnold 49).

Both John Grady Cole and Billy Parham have mystical experiences that transform the reality around them; thus, providing a transcendent and sometimes dreamlike quality to the text of the novels. Each character "intuits" the outer world, and through these mystical experiences, Cole and Parham essentially cross over to other worlds. These mystic experiences provide an escape from the harsh reality of the natural world where crossing borders and boundaries results in violence, bloodshed, loss, and chaos. These same mystical experiences also provide glimpses of the past and dreams for the future.

Although the boys experience these glimpses and dreams of the past and future, the idea of life's crossing is also portrayed through the storytellers who tell the tale of life and the *corridos* that describe the journey of life. In the review, "Travels with a She Wolf," Robert Hass notes that both Cole and Parham "cross over a border from what they know to what they need to know" (Hass 40). Both Cole and Parham leave a familiar state of existence to cross into an unknown territory, which is created by a set of rules that they do not understand. Violence, bloodshed and loss occur as a result of each boy's limited knowledge of the new customs, laws, and territory. In All the Pretty Horses the idea of fate versus free-will reveals the limits or boundaries that characters in the novel have over their destiny:

The Southwest is seen both as a geographical area and as a mythic place. The realities of the region—its distinctive landscape and cultural diversity—have fed the creation of a whole mythology around it. (Eaton 158)

In The Crossing the idea of man's paradoxical existence and meaning on earth are literally and figuratively explored as a type of journey or crossing; these crossings show man's transgressions on the world and the she-wolf in the first crossing sets up the "border paradigm" and the duality inherent in the crossings:

[The] she-wolf...is the most sustained signifier of hybridity—quite literally of mestizaje—or the border paradigm. Her role as exponent of the border is necessarily fluid: she is a transgressor of real (national)

boundaries; she is also an initiator, inducting Billy into his own various transgressions or crossings or attempted crossings; she is, ultimately, a guardian of thresholds, figuratively and rhetorically marking the point of entry into other narrative sequences, other spaces, other worlds. (Soto 56)

McCarthy's first two novels of the border trilogy contain the idea of crossings in many contexts: physical, spiritual, mystical, and the transcendent crossings that humans make to cross history, time, and locale. John Grady Cole and Billy Parham cross both physical and spiritual borders, and these travels result in loss. In a universal sense, these crossings could take place in any location or time; but in the physical place of the novels McCarthy utilizes the Mexican-American borderlands, the "magic curtain" of the West, as a backdrop to highlight the violence and turmoil that such crossings create. Thomas Torrans discusses the border crossings in his novel, Magic Curtain: The Mexican-American Border in Fiction, Film, and Song:

At the border itself: more cars, more cargo, more computerization, more border crossings. And with the relentless onset of familiarity, the once-alluring world of the imaginative is swept away. Myth and legend are supplanted by facts and figures. The possible, the prospective—those are no longer there. Reality rushes in. The curtain closes over the drama of the past, and with it, much of the former magic it concealed has vanished. (Torrans 217)

In his article "Into the Darkening Land, the World to Come," Mark Busby states that "The Crossing's language steps constantly across the border as well, merging Spanish and English seamlessly" (Busby 162). And although Cities of the Plain, McCarthy's last novel in the Border trilogy, is not covered as part of this thesis, it should be noted that the final novel ends with a culmination and explanation of the crossings inherent within all three novels:

Stacey Peebles writes in an article on McCarthy for *Southwestern American Literature* (Fall 1999), the conclusion of the epilogue shows that 'The borders between childhood and old age, dream and reality, the teller and the tale have dissolved.' Cormac McCarthy's parable is this very paradox. . . . By the end of Cities of the Plain, we have become the story, staring back through the glass at the person we once were. (Quoted in Priola 167)

Diane Luce notes that McCarthy uses the matrix and crossings to highlight man's environmental connection with the natural world. After the wolf dies, Billy "envisions" the wolf in her dreamlike paradise, free and happy and one with her natural world, without interruption from man's control. Luce notes that "to the wolf, the matrix of the world present and past is made real through her rich sense of smell, and she can be lured only by that matrix" (Arnold, Luce 207).

Similarly, in All the Pretty Horses John Grady Cole's crossings through land, country, and culture highlight his connections to the natural world and his lack of control and understanding of that world:

Ultimately, then, John Grady Cole's border crossings take him into a world of complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence - a mixture of good and evil, rationality and irrationality, fate and free will in a mestizo culture that is itself an amalgam... (Wallach 246)

The world contains multi-dimensional crossings that man attempts to control; however, the natural world exists in spite of man's attempts. Whether the boundaries that man encounters are put in place by God or man—when broken—chaos and violence ensue. Throughout both All the Pretty Horses and The Crossing the main characters experience crossings, both physical and spiritual; however, the novels are truly about the idea of man's crossings on earth. Men literally and figuratively traverse through life, crossing, transgressing, through life; and the journey through causes upheaval in the natural world. Cormac McCarthy exhibits this idea in both novels, that even though individuals break through these physical and spiritual borders, barriers and crossings, ultimately, "There is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (The Crossing 45).

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