these apppellations of the judges of the underworld are more suited to the Dantesque hell level of the tale.

WORKS CITED


The Search for Utopia: Blood Imagery in McCarthy’s
ALL THE PRETTY HORSES

In the first novel of his Border Trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy describes a complicated landscape of verdant plains, lush forests, and deserted wastelands as his protagonist, John Grady Cole, travels through Texas and Mexico in search of identity. Cole’s quest, however, emerges as a convoluted process; while the protagonist journeys to another land to develop his imagined version of utopia, the underlying inspiration for Cole is a return to the human emotions and internal desires displaced by the intrusion of modernity. In the novel, McCarthy equates the desire for utopia with inherent human features through the use of blood imagery, specifically in the appearance of “blood red” as an adjectival phrase rather than another addition to the author’s extensive use of “blood” as a noun. The blood imagery in *All the Pretty Horses* emphasizes the integral life-sustaining features at the heart of the protagonist’s desires while connecting Cole’s quest, the landscape, and the necessities needed for survival in carefully chosen linguistic constructs.

From the novel’s beginning, McCarthy’s use of blood imagery when displaying Cole’s longing for the simple life of breaking horses and living off of the land illuminates his protagonist’s preoccupation with a previous form of existence. However, the possibility of living a life bound to the landscape appears bleak in Texas despite Cole’s efforts to save the family’s property and thus remain in his homeland. Instead, Cole finds himself surrounded by the growing presence of American industrialization. He thus turns to the Mexican frontier, hoping to discover the “openness” of undisturbed wilderness and welcoming inhabitants. Barcleay Owens suggests that “Americans have consistently perpetuated two frontier myths, one that champions progress and Anglo-American might and one that champions the preservation of wilderness and its idealized natives” (68). For Cole, the preservation of natural landscape in the United States pertains solely to a different age of American history, namely the nineteenth century, while Mexico remains untouched and wildly
naturalistic in the present moment. Cole simultaneously avoids considering the violence of the nineteenth century’s American West, portrayed rather graphically in McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*.

In his “return” to the frontier, Cole desires a world preserved from the effects of modernization. In place of his homeland, which is divided by barbed wire, fences, highways, and blacktop, McCarthy’s protagonist imagines a terrain void of man-made separations; a place where he can investigate the interior disposition and life force of nature and man—the blood and heat of the living: “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 otherwise” (6). Because of Cole’s mythological views of landscape, he cannot encounter happiness in an industrialized territory that ignores the very life forces needed for its creation; he consequently opts to pursue “life” in another region.

McCarthy sparingly employs blood as a description throughout the novel. In the first instance, Cole conducts a preliminary “practice” journey before he actually recruits his friend Lacey Rawlins in an official border crossing. Cole rides his horse across former Comanche paths surrounded by the sun that “[. . .] sat blood red and elliptic under the reefs of bloodred cloud before him” (5). The dramatic beauty of the landscape reaffirms Cole’s idealistic expectations of what he will find once he abandons progress and industrialization in favor of natural terrain and maintained majesty.

On another occasion, after Cole and Rawlins encounter a young troubled boy with a dubious past, Jimmy Blevins, the two young men are faced with the decision of whether to abandon the boy and to prevent future skirmishes with the law. Cole, however, decides to support Blevins despite the apparent danger of doing so. Once again, the rising sun swelling “blood red along the horizon” (85) coincides with a momentous occasion disguised as seemingly unimportant. Because of Cole’s decision, Blevins causes, through association, the imprisonment of the protagonist and his friend in Saltillo, a Mexican jail. In the descriptions of the sun as blood red, Cole faces a decision about his future course of action, choosing each time the idealism of his frontier myth rather than the reality of such a powerful landscape.

As the boys proceed through a region that becomes progressively inhospitable and dangerous, they suffer possible starvation and the beginning stages of dehydration. Cole discovers a nopal fruit, native to the region, that “[. . .] stained their fingers blood red” as they eat (88). Simultaneously, on separating from Blevins, the two boys receive encouragement from the terrain as they not only encounter food but also the *hacendado* of La Purísima nearby. While David Holloway suggests that La Purísima’s objective reality is the industrial breeding of horses for market (191), McCarthy indicates, from Cole’s
perspective, that the ranch and its surrounding landscape offer the protagonist the chance to pursue his interest in horses and, as a result, the opportunity to integrate himself into the naturalism of an “adopted” country’s present condition.\(^2\) The landscape, though, merely displays what is in sight. Once Cole ingratiates himself into the industrialized reality of the ranch’s “atmosphere,” the untainted “purity” of the landscape disintegrates.

La Purísima’s problematic nature results from its dualistic position between the traditional Mexican past of aristocratic custom and its necessity for progress and modernization. Although Cole briefly manages the rancher’s horses, his relationship with Rocha’s daughter and his consequent disregard for Mexican customs alert the young girl’s aunt of possible familial disgrace. Much like the binary scenery of farmland and industry present in Texas, Mexico proves to be a frontier of deserted wilderness and a rising progressive state. Cole, driven by his high idealism, ignores the incongruent details of Mexican tradition and rising technological advancement.

At the novel’s end, once Cole must confront the fallacy of his frontier myth, he finds little solace in the prospect of a return home. After his adventures in La Purísima, his unjust treatment in Saltillo, and his brief attempt at revenge with the Captain, Cole finds himself a man “without a country.” Forced to make a decision, Cole opts to return once more to Mexico in hopes of discovering the central interior nature of man mirrored in an open landscape, all of which he neglected to encounter in his first journey. Cole notices the powerful landscape as he rides his horse toward Mexico: “There were few cattle in that country because it was barren country indeed yet he came at evening upon a solitary bull rolling in the dust against the bloodred sunset like an animal in sacrificial torment. The bloodred dust blew down out of the sun” (301). Once again, the sunset colors the region blood red—so much so that the dust is converted as if directed by the sun’s will.

Cole thus circles in action and practice as he begins a second journey that promises little, if not less, success than his first quest across the border. The blood and heat of man and animals propel him toward what he innately desires: to discover the integral features of the natural world and to live by them at the same time. The connection, then, between McCarthy’s use of “blood red” as an adjective and its close proximity to Cole’s quest and his means for it, is not an arbitrary relation. By emphasizing Cole’s personal motivation through the blood of description, McCarthy parallels Cole’s desires for the mythic frontier with the landscape that he truly encounters. Blood, as a result, becomes a life-sustaining force in body and spirit, yet it is as intangible for Cole as the purity of his utopian visions.

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KEYWORDS
All the Pretty Horses, blood imagery, Cormac McCarthy

NOTES
1. Cole frequently notes the intrusion of industrialization, the train’s noxious noises, and the
infiltration of technologically produced lighting in his daily interaction with the landscape.
2. Caron, in Lilley’s article, observes that Cole’s grandmother taught him the Spanish language
but failed to instruct him in Mexican customs.

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Adrienne Rich’s SIDE BY SIDE

“Side by Side” at first appears to be an unassuming yet witty poem. On
closer inspection, it turns out to be a clever innovation in the genre of the
medieval alba (dawn song).

The poem falls into four sections that do not coincide with the eight cou-
plets. A personified bedsheets is speaking in the present tense, addressing the
silent other, a “lemon-gold pyjama” (line 5). The first four lines establish the
time—early morning—and suggest a setting, a bedroom where both figures
lie relaxed. The tone is quiet and contemplative. Lines 5–9 are ekphrastic,
describing the two figures as pieces of fabric; only the sheet is specified as
“linen” (7). The next five lines shift from the singular first person to the plural
and expand the time frame, introducing a sense of historical progression in
the series “the days, the hours, and the years” (11). There is some ambiguity
about what this progress means, notably in the comment “We are getting finer
than ever” (12). To get finer may be to improve with age, just as clothes and
sheets become softer to the touch through long use. Simultaneously, however,
cloth fades, “Slowly bleaching” (10), and wears finer in the sense of thinner
(“to silk, / to sheer spiderweb” [13–14]).

Not least among the poem’s accomplishments is the pull toward allegory,
toward reading the pyjama and the sheet as representing people, a couple
lazing into the day, comfortable in their “lassitude” (9). The allegory might
work, especially if one identifies the speaker as a woman, on the presumption