Spring Break Independent Reading: March 2017

IBP: *All the Pretty Horses*

At once a Wester, a picaresque adventure, and a coming-of-age novel, suspenseful, wryly funny, and elegiac, *All the Pretty Horses* is the story of John Grady Coe, the last of a long line of west Texas. The reality is an existential setting where life and death did strange dances in the sunset and actions occurred with a randomness and happenstance that took no notice of pureness of heart or motive and often rendered foresight useless. What is most significant about *All the Pretty Horses* is that McCarthy has transcended the constraints of literature and fashioned a work that functions on a aural and visual level as well as a literary one. It is on that basis that it is possibly the penultimate American work of art of its era. One cannot come away from reading *All the Pretty Horses* without wondering if, at the end of time and all that is, one of the last sounds to be heard will be the truning of the final page of this wonderful, incredible, notable novel.

**Reading Log**: Submit at the beginning of class when you return after Spring Break.

*Cornell Style and must include*

* Title, Author, Original date Published, Publisher

Genre, Number of pages

Name of the trilogy

* Bio of author
* Character List with description and development
* Devices-literary-rhetorical: two per chapter, page number, name of device, sentence from book, explanation
* Archetypes
* Themes/motifs/symbolisms/conflicts
* Analysis of Cormac McCarty’s writing style

**Discussion Questions**: Type your answers in short answer form. Use complete heading and title. Fold and attach to Reading Log. You do not need to write the questions; however, please number them correctly. Some questions have multiple questions – answer accordingly.

1. *All the Pretty Horses* opens with one death – that of John Grady’s grandfather – and ends with the death of the family servant called Abuela, “grandmother.” (At the novel’s end, John Grady also learns that his father has died.)
2. How do these deaths impel the novel’s plot?
3. What larger meanings do they suggest?
4. a. What other events in this novel occur more than once?

b How does McCarthy use repetition as a structuring device?

1. a. How does the author establish John Grady’s character?

b How has he changed by the novel’s end?

c At what points in the book do we see him change?

1. a. What attributes does McCarthy seem to value in his characters, how does he do so?

b Do these traits always serve them well, or are the boys in *All the Pretty Horses* victims of their own virtues?

1. On the hacienda an old man named Luis tells the boys that “the horse shares a common soul and its separate life only forms it out of all horses and makes it mortal…that if a person understood the soul of a horse then he would understand all the horses that ever were.” “Among men,” Luis continues, “there was no such communion as among horses and the notion that men could be understood at all was probably an illusion.”
2. How are these statements borne out or contradicted within the novel?
3. To what extent does the author allow us to “understand” his horses, while keeping his human characters psychologically opaque?
4. What sort of contrasts does McCarthy draw between the communal soul of horses and the profound solitude of men?
5. What role, generally, do horses play in this book?
6. Rawlins says: “A goodlookin’ horse is like a goodlookin’ woman…They’re always more trouble than what they’re worth.”
7. Where else in the novel do casual statements serve as portents?
8. a. How does the author establish the differences between the United States and Mexico?

b How do their respective inhabitants seem to view each other?

1. Alejandra’s aunt offers two alternative metaphors for the workings of destiny, comparing it both to a coiner in the moment he places a slug in the die and to a puppet show in which the strings are always held by other puppets.
2. Which of these metaphors seems more apt to the narrative as a whole?
3. Is what happens to the boys in the course of the novel the result of character or fate?
4. a. Do the boys’ journey and subsequent ordeals every seem foolish, futile, or anachronistic?

b If so, how does McCarthy suggest this?

1. *All the Pretty Horses* is sparce in exposition (note the economy with which McCarthy establishes John Grady’s situation at the book’s beginning) yet lavish in the attention it devotes to scenes and details whose significance is not immediately clear (note the description of the cantina and the scene in which John Grady and Rawlins buy new clothes).
2. Why has the author chosen to weight his narrative in this way?
3. Although John Grady and Rawlins are innocent of stealing horses, McCarthy suggests that they are culpable of other crimes. At different points in the book, he compares them to “young thieves in a glowing orchard” and “a party of marauders.” When John Grady makes love to Alejandra, we are told that it is “sweeter for the larceny of time and flesh.”
4. What kinds of theft might McCarthy be writing about?
5. Might the boys’ suffering be seen as warranted by earlier transgressions?
6. What sort of moral system applies within the universe of this book?
7. a. In *All the Pretty Horses* a violent book?

b How do the novel’s characters feel about the deaths they cause?

c At a time when graphic and gratuitous descriptions of mayhem are standard in much popular fiction for purposes of mere shock and fascination, does McCarthy succeed in restoring to violence its ancient qualities of pity and terror?

d How does he accomplish this?

1. a. What role does history play in McCarthy’s narrative?

b To what extent are his characters production of a particular era?

1. Although the occurrences in *All the pretty Horses* are, strictly speaking, plausible and its human voices, in particular, are nothing if not realistic, the book also contains a strong mythic component.
2. How, and where, does McCarthy introduce this?
3. What specific myths are fairy tales does the book suggest?