



ALL THE PRETTY HORSES

A TRANSNATIONAL READING



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1. ABSTRACT

In this paper, we develop a close-reading of McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* from a transnational point of view. Prompted by the increasing fame of the author and the numerous studies about the text, which acknowledge the existence of several myths such as the frontier or the notion of American exceptionalism while avoiding the one of globalization from an American point of view, we decided to focus our attention on the transnational analysis of the journey and the language present in the novel. The reason for this is that these two elements are among the most important stylistic and thematic strategies used by the author to provide the reader with the opportunity of taking a closer look at the mythological processes taking place in Cole's world and psyche as well as their deconstruction. On the one hand, the journey, from this perspective, depicts a clear opposition between the United States (as the global) and Mexico (as the other) that will fade progressively as the plot develops, as John Grady Cole becomes more and more conscious of the falsity of this image of Mexico, which enables him to build "transnational bridges" between both nations. The Spanish language, on the other hand, enables us to perceive a sort of linguistic transnationalism because it is made part of the United States' identity through its presence in the graveyard and through the crucial role of the abuela. Moreover, as neither Spanish, nor English, can convey every reality, language helps us to understand how this linguistic transnationalism functions in a symbiotic way.

Nevertheless, in order to be able to develop this reading, we first summarize McCarthy's professional trajectory as a writer and we link its topics and main characteristics with those present in *All the Pretty Horses*. Moreover, we explain and apply Slotkin's definition of "myth" to McCarthy's novel and, from this basis, we explore the concepts of "globalization", "otherness" and "transnationalism" in the context of the novel.

As a result, this reading of the novel allows us to present McCarthy's discourse from a new perspective that will not only restate that the: "frontier was the imaginary boundary (for whites) that demarcated the turning of space to place and McCarthy's texts explore the power of this thought in American society, a power which extends far beyond the material demise of the frontier" (Estes 43), but that will also enable us to redefine the relationship between Mexico and the United States in transnational terms, thus rewriting the characterization of both nations.

2. INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the finest human products in the sense that it represents the different aspects of humanity and, at the same time, it influences our behaviour as human beings; thus, this obliges literature itself to develop new ways of depicting and explaining the new ways of “being human”. In this regard, one of the most praised authors of the late 20th century and beginnings of the 21st century is Cormac McCarthy, as his literary production is claimed to be both extremely modern (or postmodern), following the path of literary milestones such as Faulkner; and outstandingly human, for he deals with some of the most transcendental issues to the point of claiming that his production is “universal”:

There is no way to overstate the power, the absolute literary virtuosity, with which McCarthy draws his scenes. He writes about the finite world with an accuracy so absolute that his characters give the impression of a universality which they have no right to claim... It is the way of the good writer to find the universal in the particular, for finally it is the universal that he seeks. [Walter Sullivan for *Sewanee Review*] (T. Arnold 1999)

Nevertheless, the label “universal”, as well as that of “global”, are fragile because they imply a totalizing organization of reality in spite of the fact that, if we perceive the “global” or “universal”, we do so by contrasting it with the “local” or “particular”, elements that they cannot include. Thus, this characterization is made through a comparison, so that every piece that cannot be included in these groups is condemned to be “the other” and is left behind or aside. Therefore, in this end-of-degree project we will study one of the most important novels by McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*¹, in which we will analyse the implications of the notions “global”/ “universal” and “otherness” in the themes and style through an exercise of close reading. Thanks to this, we will be able to perceive the value of the book in literary and

¹ In order to facilitate the reading of this paper we will be using the abbreviation “APH” to refer to McCarthy’s book, *All the Pretty Horses*.

humanistic terms, the incompleteness of some critics' reading of the novel and, most importantly, we will be able to call into question the validity of the dichotomy "global"/"universal" versus "otherness" (especially in the context of the American-Mexican frontier).

However, in order to do so, it is almost mandatory to provide some background information about the criticism of McCarthy's previous works and the change that *All the Pretty Horses* implied in his career.

a. McCarthy's literary career

Most critics coincide in signalling style, characters and themes as the principal characteristics which distinguish McCarthy's prose from the rest. This is due to an outstanding lyric style, especially when used in order to depict grotesque and / or violent actions, as Caryn James signals about *Blood Meridian* for the *New York Times Book Review*: "Any page of his work reveals his originality, a passionate voice equally given to ugliness and lyricism." (Arnold & Luce 8); but also because these actions are usually carried out by characters that are qualified as "sub-human", and who oblige the reader to confront the so-called "universal problems" such as death, loss, etc.; but also some other issues such as incest, necrophilia and infanticide, among others, that raise more problematic questions about our nature as human beings. Consequently, while part of the readership considered these novels unforgivably dark, cruel and gruesome; many critics, such as Guy Davenport writing about *Outer Dark* for the *New York Times Book Review* (a) or Walter Sullivan for *Sewanee Review* (b) (Arnold & Luce), regard these features of McCarthy's style in a very positive manner:

a. With total objectivity he describes what they do and records their speech. Such discipline comes not only from mastery over words but from an understanding wise enough and compassionate enough to dare tell so abysmally dark a story (Arnold & Luce 4)

b. There is no way to overstate the power, the absolute literary virtuosity, with which McCarthy draws his scenes. [...] McCarthy, on the other hand, seems to love the singular for its own sake: he appears to seek out those devices and people and situations that will engage us by their strangeness (Arnold & Luce 4)

Thanks to this, we are able to perceive that McCarthy's novels were creating a "new way" of depicting our humanity and, in spite of that, many authors compared him with Faulkner, a similarity which, although palpable to some extent, fails to recognise the uniqueness of an author who was trying to develop a new narrative style. Nevertheless, these first novels were only appreciated and read by the critics, thus reducing their potential readership, something that would change with *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992.

b. Introducing *All the Pretty Horses*

The truth is that, in spite of the fact that *All the Pretty Horses* was considerably more successful than the previous works by McCarthy, some authors considered it as an attempt to adapt to the mainstream literary panorama:

But for the most part the reviews of *All the Pretty Horses* contributed more to media show than to understanding. The book, despite substantial praise, received less thoughtful consideration than most of McCarthy's earlier novels. Its place in the canon had yet to be fully appreciated. (Arnold & Luce 9)

Nevertheless, the truth is that this novel maintains McCarthy's trajectory and develops it, especially in terms of style and themes, which are the ones that will have more implications for the objective of this paper. Thus, as Gail Moore Morrison states, *All the Pretty Horses*

Simultaneously recapitulates and transcends many of the themes, situations, structures and characters of his earlier work, even while it is remarkably different from them. (Arnold & Luce 175)

Like virtually all of McCarthy's work to date, *All the Pretty Horses* is permeated with a sense of loss, alienation, deracination and fragmentation. (Arnold & Luce 175)

As a result, I consider *All the Pretty Horses* as a key piece in McCarthy's writing because, although it made less impression on the critics, who read the book as a romantic fiction, as a bildungsroman² or as a deconstruction of foundational American myths³; it reached a wider range of readers. However, the diversity of themes and styles allow a much more profound reading and questioning of key concepts of this modern era such as "globalization" and "otherness". For these reasons, I have decided to choose *All the Pretty Horses* as the subject matter of this end-of-degree project.

3. MYTHOLOGY IN *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES*

a. The definition of myth and its applicability to *All the Pretty Horses*

In order to understand how *APH* functions in the context of transnational literature⁴, that which is defined by cultural and social cross-border practices, we are obliged, paradoxically, to perceive how it embraces several myths because the truth is that McCarthy, in this novel, has decided to convey their incongruities through their direct depiction and the stylistic and plot development, which tend to negate the precepts of those same myths.

Therefore, so that we can evaluate the importance of McCarthy's efforts, it is fundamental to begin with a definition of myth and its main characteristics, as well as to study

² "For this novel [*APH*] is fundamentally a Bildungsroman, a coming of age story in the great tradition of Hawthorne, Twain, Melville and James, that archetypal American genre in which a youthful protagonist turns his back on civilization and heads out – into the forest, down river ...- into the wilderness where innocence experiences the evil of the universe and risks defeat by it." (Arnold & Luce 178)

³ "It can be seen that the later texts depict and deconstruct foundational myths of U.S. culture such as the frontier (*Blood Meridian*), the cowboys (*The Border Trilogy*) and the journey to a new land and better land" (Estes 2013)

⁴ This is just a functional definition of transnational literature so that the reader may understand the reference; nevertheless, the complete one will be provided in the section entitled "The myths of globalization and otherness".

how the novel adapts that definition. Furthermore, we will try to analyse how the author intentionally mirrors some structures and patterns that would lead us to read the book in the light of certain stereotypes and, as we said, we will try to relate these efforts to the deconstruction of the prevailing mythicized realities of the global and of the other.

For these purposes, we are going to apply the definitions of the different constituents of the myth as proposed by Slotkin in *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1996). We will begin with the relationship between myth and reality:

[...] Myth-artefact, which is the actual tale or some sacred image or object connected with the myth-narrative. The artefact symbolically embodies the mythopoetic perception and makes it concrete and communicable. (Slotkin 8)

The “myth-artefact”, as Slotkin explains, is the element that is transformed into a myth, thus making it concrete and communicable. However, this “being concrete and communicable” is the beginning of the end of the myth itself because the process of abstraction needed in order to create it tells a particular story, a particular myth, while its applicability to the concrete and contextual undermines the universalizing myth. This is so because, if we read carefully these words, we will be able to understand that, in order to transform something into a myth, we are obliged to kill it in the sense that it must become something homogeneous and universal for a particular community, no matter how large. That is to say, if we want to be able to communicate something concrete this element must be recognized by a wide range of people and, therefore, the individual and local connotations and the particularities of their idea about that element must be ignored in favour of a series of universalizing factors that allow that myth to cross cultural boundaries. As a result, this process of creation becomes, really, a destruction or deprivation of the differences in favour of the process of globalization.

As a result, ideas present in *APH* such as the frontier (in all its perspectives) or even the identities of Mexico and the United States are myths, sacred images which embody the mythopoetic perception of these territories that renders them communicable and concrete. In this sense, the frontier serves as a mythical tool in order to separate two states, which avoids, especially in the case of the United States, the recognition of the transnational links between them, thus promoting the romantic notion of the nation.

In the middle of these two great myths, we encounter John Grady Cole, our protagonist. He, as the hero, is the one who is most affected by these images of the world during the pursuit of a certain quest. However, McCarthy, just like Cervantes in his most famous novel, will not present us with a hero that accepts those myths and acts according to their way of functioning, but with a kind of quixotic antihero that progressively discovers the “malfunctioning” of those mythologies. As a result, Grady Cole, just like Alonso Quijano or even Billy (protagonist in *Cities on the Plain*) in the following quotation, is unable to distinguish between those myths and reality, an effect that exposes the downside of these mythological constructions:

I don't even know what this life is. I damn sure don't know what Mexico is. I think it's in our head. Mexico. I rode a lot of ground down there. The first ranchera you hear sung you understand the whole country. By the time you've heard a hundred you don't know nothing. You never will. [Conversation between John Grady and Billy in *Cities on the Plain*] (218)

In spite of that, Cole is just a representation of mythical figures used by McCarthy in order to construct his discourse. It is true that it is thanks to him that the reader is able to perceive the criticism of our societies' mythological matrix, but the character is made to represent different myths in order to convey that. In fact, just as Estes and Moore pinpoint, Cole is both the mythological representation of the bildungsroman's protagonist and of the cowboy, but he is also quixotic, and a prototypical American. However, he will become a pariah and not the

successful citizen that the bildungsroman usually produced, he will also be the realist and pragmatist in contrast with Rawlins, and he will represent the product of a transnational society. This, which could seem complicated is not, because:

Hero and universe may be readily abstracted as “images”, which may in turn be evocative enough to become equated in our minds with the whole of the myth itself. The narrative as a whole is more difficult to abstract, since its action defines (explicitly and implicitly) the relationship of hero to universe and of man to God – and so establishes the laws of cause and effect, of natural process, and of morality. It is the narrative which gives the images life by giving them a mode of interaction. (Slotkin 8-9)

This explains how John Grady Cole, in particular, and the novel, in general, function. Cole is an image that evokes different myths. First, he is the typical American cowboy of the western movies, a romantic hero that fights for his individual rights and whose Americanism leads him to be always searching for that free land that would enable him to develop as a free and truly American citizen. However, the reader will soon find that the protagonist is too young (sixteen years old) and that his quest is too “real” (his emigration is prompted by economic causes) to be a romantic hero and, in addition to that, there are almost no shootings to defend what is righteously his. Secondly, Cole will be the famous American frontiersman, the settler who tries to identify his nation by moving forwards in search of a clear frontier that will enable him to differentiate his global conception of America from the Mexican otherness. In spite of that, he will find no physical frontier, although he will be able to discover the promised land of the Hacienda. Nonetheless, he will be soon expelled from Paradise, thus becoming a sort of Adam. Finally, he will be another Quixote in the search of a sense for the world he lives in.

This is possible thanks to the narrative, structured as a journey, both physical and metaphorical, which defines the relationship of Cole to both America and the United States—“and so establishes the laws of cause and effect, of natural process, and of morality” (Slotkin 8-

9). In addition to that, we must remember that the multiple changes in what Cole represents is a device designed to criticise the different myths with which we identify as Westerners, but that McCarthy's principal goal is to destroy the notion of myth in itself by showing its failure to represent reality despite its constant readjustment:

Images of the hero and the universe are devices that enable us to identify with (and thus enter) the world of the myth, and these may change fairly rapidly to accommodate new perceptions or requirements of the myth-makers and their audience. (Slotkin 9)

This last quotation enables us to perceive how this novel by McCarthy is cathartic in the sense that it adapts in order to respond to our new requirements as an audience and, at the same time, the author keeps questioning each new transformation of the character's perception of his world or even that of our interpretation of the character's symbolic meaning. However, what importance do these insights have in our reading of McCarthy's work as a transnational discourse?

The universal archetype is essential to myth, since all myth, to be credible, must relate the problems and aspirations of particular cultures to the fundamental conditions of human existence and human psychology. But the viability of myth also depends upon the applicability of its particular terms and metaphors to the peculiar conditions of history and environment that dominate the life of a particular people (Slotkin 14)

Here, Slotkin relates the particular cultural conditions the myth addresses to universalization through the amenability of the former to the latter via the myth itself, thus returning to an idea that I had pinpointed before: the process of mystification is an exercise in globalization or universalization in the sense it seems to provide us, human beings, with something we all share, an ideal that would mean the end of all myths; however, the truth is that myths, and in particular the myth of globalization, require the suppression of "the other". This is so because one particular culture creates its own mythological system, formed by the

homogeneous part and “the other”, in which the latter serves as a contrast for the construction of the homogeneous one; and acts accordingly. We could affirm that this society tries to avoid the elements that do not stick to those homogeneous patterns by accommodating them, which means the suppression or nullification of the differences thanks to the creation of another myth, that of “otherness”. In our case, as we will see in the next chapter, Cole’s psyche mirrors this pattern during his journey, as Mexico begins as a blank space, the other; but it will also become part of the myth of Eden or the promised land; and it will end up being as valid (or invalid) as the United States for Cole’s aspirations. Therefore, once more, we will be able to perceive McCarthy’s critique, as the universal archetype will collide with the “peculiar conditions of history and environment” and, consequently, with Cole’s search for a space free of “progress”.

Nevertheless, until now we have only explained, in abstract terms, crucial elements playing important roles in *APH*’s mythological deconstruction and of its criticism of globalization; so a close-reading is still necessary. Because of that, in the next section we will conclude with the more theoretical approach by defining key concepts such as “globalization”, “otherness” and “transnationalism” in order to lay the foundations for our analysis of the book itself.

b. Globalization and otherness: mythicized realities

Myths, as we have just suggested, are fundamental constituents of our societies, even nowadays, because they construct our identity as a community and they determine, at least to some extent, our perspective of the world. However, due to the increase of links (economic, cultural, etc.) between the different communities of the world, some of these myths have been spread worldwide allowing many critics to talk about “globalization”, “transnationalism” and other similar concepts. This, which can seem a quite modern phenomenon, is not so, as literature worldwide has dealt with so-called “universal problems” since its beginning, thus assuming that all peoples share an intrinsic curiosity for certain themes such as death, love, etc. As a result,

some authors, such as Cant (2008), Holloway (2002) or Estes (2013) have tried to explain sociocultural modes of behaviours in McCarthy's production from that point of view. Nevertheless, these studies, although incredibly meticulous in their respective interests, fail to recognise the "bigger picture", that McCarthy is trying to deconstruct the greatest myth, that of the "global" or "universal", which includes the rest of them in a sense, in favour of a transnational vision. However, in order to understand this, we should clarify what is understood by "universal", "globalization" and "transnational".

The idea of "globalization" can be explained from several points of view. However, it is crucial, for a paper of these characteristics, to offer a simple definition, so, as many authors do, we will start from the basic notion of "globalization" as a "[...] contemporary phenomenon linked to the development of electronic media, the rise of transnational corporations, global financial institutions, and proliferating forms of entertainment that easily leap national boundaries [...]" (Jay 2). Nevertheless, due to the setting of McCarthy's novel we are obliged to slightly modify this definition. Therefore, we will understand that "globalization" is a contemporary phenomenon linked to the development of economic, linguistic and political links (among others) that easily leap national boundaries and that has "an inherent violence that makes everything interchangeable, comparable and thus the same. Ultimately, this total equalization leads to a negation of meaning" (Han).

Thanks to this "mixed" approach, we are able to perceive that this concept implies that everything must be included in a sort of universal homogeneity, leaving everything that does not fit in that pattern as "the other. "Otherness" can be understood, then, as a:

[...] concept [that] can refer to any person or anything that is perceived by the in-group as not belonging, as being threatening, or as being different in some fundamental way. In literary works, representations of "otherness" are always used to express writers'

or the whole society's concern about certain things or phenomenon, usually things that could not be understood or controlled. (H. Jin)

As a consequence of this dichotomy, the global versus the other, the idea of "transnationalism" was created. From the literary point of view, we understand that "transnationalism focusses especially on cultural and social cross-border practices and contributes to the redefinition of cultural identity beyond national borders." (Brouwer 17). This concept is considered, by some critics, as the foundation of human interactions nowadays because it depicts an organic model that blurs the frontiers between human beings while avoiding the rigid and old-fashioned concept of nation because, although the critics need those national boundaries to define the "transnational", the artists incorporate or encompass different sociocultural realities in order to construct a new reality and, consequently, there is no room for "nations" in homogeneous terms. Thanks to it, we are able to account for authors such as Achebe or Rushdie because it allows them to be a Nigerian writing in English about Nigerian themes and a British Indian, respectively, and to be understood and read like that.

Therefore, my contention is that this perspective, can also be applied to McCarthy writing about America in *APH*:

In writing in and of the Southwest, McCarthy finds the landscape and the mythology of American epic and his texts begin to express the necessary largeness of an American scale. (Cant 158)

The Border Trilogy, for example, recounts various wanderings across the U.S.-Mexican border; these novels interrogate ideas of wilderness and the partitioning of space along national and cultural lines. (Estes 21)

My contention is that McCarthy's concerns are wider than the South alone and that he addresses American culture as a whole. In some respects, he goes beyond this and expresses universal concerns.⁵ (Cant 16)

4. *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES*: A TRANSNATIONAL READING

a. **The frontier as the evidence of nothingness**

All the Pretty Horses, as a novel, works, as I foregrounded, as an exercise in myth deconstruction through a series of stylistic and thematic elements, ingredients which, joined together, demystify the notions of “globalization” and “otherness”. In that sense, the (in)famous image of the American frontier, plays a very active role, because it takes multiple shapes throughout the novel: the territorial, the economic, the linguistic, etc.; but, in all of these cases, the frontier is also something ideological and psychological. As a result, the frontier, which defines the notion of a closed, delimited and impermeable nation, becomes proof of its own non-existence in these mythical terms in the sense that it is recognised to be a creation of a nationalist-imperialist ideology, a narration which idealizes this determinate idea of a nation as a whole or as something global in terms of culture, economy, language, etc., elements through which it is opposed to the others. Then, underlying the notion of the frontier we can find the idea of “truth”:

The very nature of “truth” in any instance is not immanent but based on difference, and regimes that regulate and police the truth (formal and informal) all operate by enforcing behaviors and identities associated with socially and historically articulated values based on the interest of those who wield the power to enforce them (Jay)

⁵ About these “universal concerns”, I must signal that I think that Cant does not refer, with these words, to a globalization of the United States’ mythological system, but to the fact that McCarthy’s questioning of the American mythological matrix can be applied to the one belonging to any community in the world.

However, in the next sections we will analyse how *All the Pretty Horses* defies the frontier image and understands the notion of the “global” or “universal” through different stylistic and thematic elements, and how the characters contribute to this understanding of modern society.

b. Going beyond: journeys and languages

McCarthy is one of those authors who are recognized by his ability to convey meaning through stylistic elements. In that sense, the novel we are studying is a perfect example and, as a result, though we cannot study all the stylistic devices used, we are going to analyse what is the role of two crucial elements in the novel: its structuration as a journey and the presence of the Spanish language. This decision is based, on the one hand, on the fact that languages have been always considered key elements in the construction of any nation and, therefore, the interactions of John Grady Cole with other communities whose language is not English defies that same idea of nation and questions the global aspect of a determinate community, thus allowing us to talk about transnationalism. On the other, the journey is a key stylistic device. Thanks to it Cole’s story is linked with the bildungsroman tradition, an association that allows nuances that we have already pinpointed, but which also enables John Grady Cole, with all his symbolism, to interact with other characters and communities and to suffer a transformation that seems logical in a text which, a priori, responds to this tradition of the bildungsroman. These processes, however, will lead to his alienation due to the failure of every myth rooted in his American culture in general and, consequently, to the deconstruction of the myth of globalization.

Therefore, this section of the paper will consist in a sort of pilgrimage through a mixture of stylistic and thematic elements, including ideas drawn from the theoretical basis explained beforehand, that starts from the general, the journey itself, and finishes in the particular, the usage of Spanish, which is another of the main stylistic devices that McCarthy uses in order to

contest the notion of the global or universal. Nevertheless, in contrast to the previous sections of this paper, this section will not develop an exclusively theoretical discourse, but a close-reading of crucial passages of Cole's psychological journey. Thanks to this, the reader will be able to understand how the mythological matrix is deconstructed in a progressive manner, how this affects John Grady and how, in the end, the great myth of the global is no longer valid.

i. The journey

Most of McCarthy's novels, despite their apparent episodic organization, involve both metaphoric and literal journeys which bring their voyages inevitably into a series of conflicts and confrontations with themselves as well as with the various communities intersected by their wanderings (Arnold & Luce 176)

As Morrison suggests, here and in the second footnote of this project, *All the Pretty Horses* is the narration of Cole's round trip to Mexico and back, a journey which is not only physical, but metaphorical in the sense that the "conflicts and confrontations" with himself and with the Mexicans he encounters stretch the "idealized" frontier more and more to the point that, in the end, Cole ignores which is his nation, his home, and which is "the other". This can be easily perceived in this dialogue between Rawlins and Cole, who speak in that order:

You could stay here at the house. / I think I'm goin to move on. / This is still good country. / Yeah. I know it is. But it aint my country [...]/ Where is your country? he said. / I don't know, said John Grady. I don't know where it is. I don't know what happens to country. (299)

However, this is the end of the journey, the result of the contact with other communities, mainly the Mexican, which modify the American tale about Mexico, and, therefore, the image Cole has of his own nation. This is because:

[...] human beings take their understanding of the world from the cultural matrix formed by the limitless range of tales, and that, since all tales find a place in this matrix, “Rightly heard all tales are one”. (Cant 11)

Thus, we should identify which are the main events of this transformation and how McCarthy depicts them.

The first of these events take place when Cole and Rawlins start their journey south and the narrator describes the map they are using in order to go to Mexico:

It was an oilcompany roadmap that Rawlins had picked up at the café and he looked at it and he looked south toward the gap in the low hills. There were roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map as far south as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white. (34)

The map is a crucial symbol in *APH*, as it is a fundamental part of the myth surrounding Mexico. The first thing that we must notice is that it is an “oilcompany roadmap” and, therefore, its production is prompted by economic interests of exploitation of the land, so that we already know that the map will only show a capitalist territory, stipulating, once more, what is the global, understood as everything that is valuable for their capitalist system (the “roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map [...]”), and what is the other: “[...]and beyond that all was white.” This, however, does not only mean that Mexico is outside the “border of economic interest”, but this whiteness also represents the myth inserted in Cole and Rawlins’ psychology; that is to say, at the beginning of their adventure, both youngsters escape from Texas, on the one hand, prompted by the “failing laws of primogeniture, a disappointment in the bourgeois regulations of private property (quoted by Holloway 20) and on the other by a search for unfenced, uncommodified landscape that might be ridden with a freedom ‘lost to all history and remembrance’ ” (quoted by Holloway 20). Therefore, the naivety of both cowboys is depicted as the “tabula rasa” of the oilcompany map because, at that point, without any kind

of experience of Mexico, they are trapped in the “projection of the cowboy lifestyle onto what they (erroneously) assume to be raw space” (Estes 46).

This idea becomes even clearer in another dialogue between the protagonists as they talk about Mexico in the following terms, thus transforming Mexico into a sort of Eden:

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 do you reckon that paradise is at? said Rawlins.[...]

You cant tell what’s in a country like that till you’re down there in it, he said.

There’s damn sure a bunch of it, aint there.

John Grady nodded. That’s what I’m here for. (59)

McCarthy, however, does not give any clue to the naïve readers in order to enable them to break the spell of the Eden-like image of Mexico produced in America. Instead, he focalizes nature and the landscape from Cole’s perspective, making us participants of this ideal construction unless we are conscious about the fact that he wants to delve into that image in order to destroy it:

[...] the ranch [the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción] occupied part of the broad barrial or basin floor of the bolsón and was well watered with natural springs and clear streams and dotted with marshes and shallow lakes or lagunas. In the lakes and in the streams were species of fish not known elsewhere on earth and birds and lizards and other forms of life as well all long relict here for the desert stretched away on every side. (97)

Here, however, Cole has not yet perceived the real Mexico, he is still a victim of the delusion of the American myth that depicts Mexico as the other: “In the lakes and in the streams were species of fish not known elsewhere on earth [...]”. Thanks to this line, it becomes clear

that McCarthy portrays the Hacienda in a hyperbolic way and, as a result, the reader should become aware of the fact that Cole's vision is not reliable. It is not only that Mexico is a blank space ready to be discovered and exploited, but it is also an Eden-like place where even the rules of nature are different to those of America, which in our case is the representative of the global. Nevertheless, as Estes (2013) affirms: "The spaces beyond the line of the frontier were not empty, unchanging topographies waiting to be discovered by whites; this was only a perception created by the dominant culture" (44). As a result, John Grady and his friends will soon discover the reality of Mexico. As Estes puts it:

The two young protagonists flee an over-civilized Texas for a place that lives up to their dreams of what the frontier was like. In Mexico, however, the two boys are exposed to evils springing from a lack of civilization including lawlessness, hunger and exposure to the elements. (40)

This descent from heaven into hell becomes a reality when John and Rawlins are arrested, for they will be introduced to a society in which many of the evils of civilization are present, just like in America. This deconstruction had already begun when the difficulties of the romance between Cole and Hector's daughter started, as the presence of elements such as the airplane reveal that technological progress had already reached Mexico, making it even more difficult to characterize the country as "the other", especially when the plane allows long-distance connections and communications. In addition to that, Cole will soon discover that even the way of life he is pursuing is plagued by the effects of globalization, as the payment of the magnificent horse that don Héctor buys and that Cole admires is described in the following way: "[in a] brown bank envelope tied with a string in which was a great deal of money in both dollars and pesos together with sight-drafts on banks in Houston and Memphis" (125). Thus, we could affirm that: "By locating Don Hector's bank accounts in Texas and Tennessee, this passage ties John Grady's new Mexican Eden, and the horse as fantasy object from an idealized

past, tightly into the international marketplace of his own day” (Holloway 2002). Even so, I consider that we should interpret this scene at the same time as another, which anticipated it:

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. But nothing else matched and no such horse ever was that he had seen and he'd once asked his grandfather what kind of horses they were and his grandfather looked up from his plate at the painting as if he'd never seen it before and he said those are picturebook horses and went on eating.

(16)

On this occasion, McCarthy, through Cole's words, had already given us clues about the deconstruction of the myth of otherness using, once more, the crucial image of the horses. Here, we see that the pictures are of horses with some “Andalusian” characteristics, so that it is impossible to affirm that the American cowboy's lifestyle is entirely American because many of the products used in that business, including horses and cows, had their origins somewhere else and, consequently, the painting, which represents the idea that Cole has of that lifestyle, is just a stereotype that can only exist as an empty image. In fact, according to Allen Billington and Martin Ridge (2001):

the giant industry had its beginnings in southern Texas. Cattle introduced there by Spaniards in the eighteenth century —scrawny, tough beasts bred by Moorish herdsmen— multiplied rapidly [...]” and “Some southern intruders were ranchers whose practices as well as animals contributed to the growth of the infant Texan cattle industry. Their eastern farm animals, breeding with the Mexican herds, produced a variety of strains more suitable to a commercial market than the original Moorish type. One clearly distinguished breed was the “Texas-Mexican” [...]. Another was the “Spanish” [...]. (321-322)

Thus, when Cole's grandfather affirms that "those are picturebook horses" is stating a reality, that neither the American "global", nor the Mexican "otherness", exist, not even in the ideal and agrarian form of life that Cole is looking for; but at the same time he constructs a new picture in which the notion of transnationalism is the key, as each country contributes to the transformation of the other, importing and exporting certain elements (cultural, economic, linguistic, etc.) without becoming an homogenous unity, which would respond to the notion and myth of the global. The horses, in this sense, play a crucial role due to their nature as free beings that resist classification in contrast with the protagonist, who must escape from a nation that does not allow him to fulfil his goals and who, afterwards, is labelled as a thief and as unsuitable for the young Mexican woman he loves. Therefore, it would not be strange to affirm that Cole identifies that freedom that he is seeking with the mystified image of the horses, an idea that would explain the book's melancholic title.

Nevertheless, as we already know, myths are not immovable, which is their key to success. This is so because myths are, after all, symbolizations, a process which implies the distortion of the item (human or not human) that is being transformed into a symbol through the association of certain characteristics to it. As a result, it provokes its transformation into something less diverse, because the myth subsists at the cost of contingent, individual nuances that it cannot account for in favour of the common characteristics that have not been symbolized out of existence. All these are the consequences of Slotkin's precepts about the myth. However, we must also know that the properties of the myth are usually presented as a social narrative so that this group accepts and adopts, consciously or unconsciously, those characteristics as a result of social interactions, as refusing to do so would lead to being "the other". This concept, in any socio-cultural system, is essential and unavoidable, because it functions as the counterpoint that allows the definition of the "global" and, as a consequence, every social narrative provides a place for alterity, a construct that resists being universalized.

In our case, we can easily acknowledge that Cole accepted the idealized version of the “Mexican otherness” as depicted by the American mythology, as this is why he leaves Texas searching for that blank space in which he could continue with a lifestyle that was disappearing in Texas. Nevertheless, he will find that what he encounters is truly “other” in another sense. Therefore, when he reaches Mexico and observes that it is no “Big Rock Candy Mountain”, he adapts his version of the myth thinking that his promised land must be further south, and he identifies it with the Hacienda in spite of the presence of the plane, which distances him from his lover; the Arabian horse that she rides, and the horse that don Héctor bought, which is a product of an international transaction.

Nonetheless, when the protagonists are captured by the police officer the myth is no longer valid, as Cole discovers that Mexico was not that virgin paradise, but a society with its advantages and disadvantages, as can be seen in the description of the life in prison, which is made in very negative and violent terms:

The prison was no more than a small walled village and within it occurred a constant seethe of barter and exchange...Underpinning all of it like the fiscal standards in commercial societies lay a bedrock of depravity and violence where in an egalitarian absolute every man was judged by a single standard and that was his readiness to kill. (182)

Nonetheless, we should be very careful when reading this passage because we could think, as some authors like Estes (2013) do, that this description shows how, “in Mexico, however, the two boys are exposed to evils springing from a lack of civilization including lawlessness [...]”. However, Estes’ interpretation does not respond to McCarthy’s aim, especially if we continue with the interpretation of the book from a transnational point of view. Then, although it is true that the prison is located in Mexico, McCarthy signals that it “was no more than a small walled village and within it occurred a constant seethe of barter and exchange...”, thus blurring the geographical referents. As a consequence, this description could

relate to any small village in which commercial exchanges take place; that is to say, one located in any capitalist society. In addition to that, the author signals: “Underpinning all of it like the fiscal standards in commercial societies lay a bedrock of depravity and violence where in an egalitarian absolute every man was judged by [...] his readiness to kill”. Consequently, here we have a parallelism between the fiscal standards of capitalist societies and the “readiness to kill”, a comparison that does not depict Mexico positively, but that contains a strong criticism of those commercial societies because the sole difference between these two communities is the basis of their commercial activity, which is violence in the case of the prison and the fiscal standards in America. However, the existence of those standards does not mean that the commercial society is ‘more civilized’, because, through the parallelism, the author tries to explore a constant theme in his narrative, our inner nature. This last term refers to the basic principles coming into play when functioning as human beings both on an individual or collective scale and whose study should reveal what set us apart from the rest of beings of our planet (horses, for example). In this case, and in many of McCarthy’s novels, this inner nature seems to be characterized by violence. As a result, here we have another perfect example of the invalid nature of the myth of Mexico: it cannot be the “other” because it functions similarly in commercial terms. In spite of that, it does not become the same as the archetypical “commercial society”, so McCarthy does not present it as a global homogeneity either, principally because the financial standards have not been adopted yet due to cultural, historical and political reasons. These motives will be explained by Alejandra’s aunt to Cole from page 231 to page 239. Nonetheless, it is in this last case when this character will give Cole the key to understand everything in the form of a metaphor:

When I was in school I studied biology. I learned that in making their experiments scientists will take some group— bacteria, mice, people—and subject that group to certain conditions. They compare the results with a second group which has not been disturbed.

This second group is called the control group. It is the control group which enables the scientist to gauge the effect of his experiment. To judge the significance of what has occurred. In history there are no control groups. There is no one to tell us what might have been. [...] It is supposed to be true that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. I don't believe knowing can save us. What is constant in history is greed and foolishness and a love of blood and this is a thing that even God [...] seems powerless to change.

The first thing that calls our attention is that the aunt talks about “greed”, which could stand for commerce; and “a love of blood”, which clearly means violence; and, consequently, we can perceive how the frontier between the society of the prison, meant to represent Mexico according to some authors, and the commercial one is being blurred once more, because all societies share those characteristics according to the old woman. Moreover, we could say that the mythological interpretation of the relationship between Mexico and the United States corresponds to that description of the scientific experiment in the sense that the perception of Mexico as unchanging, uncivilized, a projection of the cowboy lifestyle the protagonists are looking for, is constructed on the basis that the United States, as a society, be considered the control group. Nevertheless, this strong female character states what we are also trying to demonstrate in this paper: that there is no such thing as the “universal” or “global”, the “American universal” in our case, and the “Mexican otherness”. What we have is a new culture created through a transnational relationship, which is associated with a permeable frontier that belongs neither to the United States nor to Mexico. Then, she is right when affirming that “In history there are no control groups and that “There is no one to tell us what might have been” because, as we do not have control groups, it is unavoidable to always take into account local conditions and circumstances. Consequently, as the United States and Mexican histories and contexts are not a homogeneous, global entity, their comparison is disabled, thus provoking the deconstruction of the American myth about Mexico adopted by Cole at the beginning. Finally,

the sentences “It is supposed to be true that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. I don’t believe knowing can save us” hold a very special meaning because, in fact, Cole will die as a result of another impossible love affair in the last book of the trilogy, meaning that he was not able to live with the complete destruction of the myth.⁷

In this section of this paper we have been able to interpret this journey as a stylistic device meant to deconstruct the American myth of (and about) Mexico. It starts with a clear opposition between the United States (as the global, the control group) and Mexico (as the other), which is defined in contrast with the former. Then, as the plot develops, John Grady Cole is more and more conscious of the falsity of this image of Mexico, which enables him to build “transnational bridges” between both nations. Finally, as we saw at the beginning of this section, Cole is not capable of perceiving the United States or Mexico as his nation as a consequence of this process. This is not because they become a “global unity”, but precisely because the myth is no longer valid from the point of view of transnationalism and, consequently, his “American logos” (which we could identify with the Western) is destroyed:

[...] Deconstruction concludes that the Western logos, far from carrying any determinate insight into the workings of the world, connotes instead an arbitrary system of values that orders the world hierarchically, empowering certain peoples, histories, or practices in a privileged central position while relegating others to a deprived, relatively disempowered, or otherwise marginal status. (Holloway 15)

ii. The usage of Spanish

Until now we have only analysed the journey in broader terms, paying attention to how this stylistic resource of the bildungsroman is adapted to McCarthy’s critical position. However, there are more concrete elements that acquire major importance in *APH*’s discourse against the

⁷ In that sense, Cole shares his fate with another fundamental character in the history of literature, Don Quixote, a parallelism previously signalled.

myths of globalization and otherness. One of these is the usage of Spanish, as languages are fundamental constituents of any culture and, at the same time, they are the vehicle for other myths.

Languages are one of the key elements of any community, as they are considered vehicles for a particular vision of the world and for an entire cultural system. Consequently, it is understandable that many nationalisms such as the Galician in the 19th century, the Spanish in the 15th (when the “Reconquista” took place) and in the 20th centuries (with Franco’s dictatorship) based a great part of their policies on their respective languages.

This idea of language going hand-in-hand with the culture and identity of a country, nonetheless, is not only a thing from the past, as it is a powerful political tool even nowadays in countries like America. Such is Trump’s case with English and his efforts to eliminate the Spanish version of the official White House’s webpage. Nevertheless, this decision ignores not only the reality, 50 million people in the United States speak Spanish (Moreno-Fernández 2018), but also the history of that nation: Texas, New Mexico and even California (among others) were Mexican territories until the 19th century and, consequently, Spanish was (and is) the mother tongue of many U.S. citizens living in those regions. Therefore, although some authors have seen the usage of Spanish in *APH* as a stylistic device that provides realism to the novel, we could state that McCarthy goes beyond mere realism: he uses both languages almost indiscriminately in order to deconstruct another American myth, the myth of the English language. This, at the same time, has also repercussions for our reading of *APH* as a transnational novel.

You could ride clear to Mexico and not strike a crossfence. He carried Boyd before him in the bow of the saddle and named to him features of the landscape and birds and animals in both Spanish and English. (3)

In this passage of *The Crossing* it is possible to identify the language as another mythological frontier due to the fact that the romantic and nationalistic idea of the one-to-one relationship between language and nation never existed. The same deconstruction takes place in *APH*, in which Cole mixes Spanish and English without any problem due to pragmatic reasons. Nevertheless, to affirm that pragmatism is the only reason for that usage is utterly false because, as we claimed at the beginning of this paper, the contact between different communities is a fundamental element in *APH* and of McCarthy's discourse.

Thus, we can find examples in which Spanish is used for practical reasons such as on page 51 and, even on such occasions, we can find the cultural matrix behind it. In the following example, both protagonists are drinking and they want to know how much money they owe. However, John Grady does not only communicate with the bartender and understands the process. He is also able to make the conversion between the two different currencies, the Mexican and the American. This, just like the previous quotation from *The Crossing*, should help the readership to understand that the use of Spanish is not functioning as a mere method of communication in which an English-speaking character translates his thoughts into another language, because the truth is that there are some realities such as the currencies or the animals (among others) that can only be expressed and understood in a specific language.

They set their glasses down and she refilled them. What do we owe? Said Rawlins.

She looked at John Grady.

Cuánto, said John Grady.

Para todo?

Sí.

Uno cincuenta.

How much is that? said Rawlins.

It's about three cents a glass.

This, can be also perceived at the abuela's funeral. However, we should analyse this episode carefully, as it can be interpreted in such a way as to offer the reader a better understanding of our subject matter. This is so, because it conveys an attachment between John Grady, the representative of America, and the abuela, a Mexican and user of Spanish, which can be easily understood as a symbolic relationship between both cultures:

He stood and crossed the road and walked up into the cemetery past the old stonework crypt and past the little headstones and their small remembrances, the sunfaded paper flowers, a china vase, a broken celluloid Virgin. The names he knew or had known. Villareal, Sosa, Reyes. Jesusita Holguín. Nació. Falleció. A china crane. A chipped milkglass vase. The rolling parklands beyond, wind in the cedars. Armendares. Ornelos. Tiodosa Tarín, Salomer Jáquez. Eпитacio Villareal Cuéllar.

He stood hat in hand over the unmarked earth. This woman who had worked for his family fifty years. [...] he stood holding his hat and he called her his abuela and he said goodbye to her in Spanish and then turned his wet face to the wind [...]. (301)

In this fragment, John Grady recognises the existence of a whole community of Spanish-speaking people living in his hometown through the enumeration of their names. However, he focuses particularly on "his abuela" and acknowledges her efforts in the nurturing of his own family during an entire lifetime by saying "goodbye to her in Spanish". Thanks to this, Spanish is depicted as a more powerful element than before because, it not only allows one to communicate with other people, but it is also the language used by a Mexican community settled in the United States, a community that helped to construct that nation. This is conveyed by the presence of the Spanish names in the graveyard, which could represent one of the symbolic elements underlying the U.S.' identity. In this sense, this community has become a component of the substratum of the nation, they were part of the workforce that transformed

the U.S. into what it is today and, now, their names are in the graveyard while their bodies are, literally, part of the land. Moreover, those names have a symbolical continuity in the present, which is characterized by a racially-mixed North America, as many Americans such as John Grady's mother and himself are the result of the care of the Mexican old woman, who is a descendant of these founders. Furthermore, it is also said that "[...] she had worked for his family long before his mother was born [...]" and, consequently, the Mexican influence is linguistic, but also cultural because, even if we interpret that the linguistic sway is only valid in the case of the nurturing, we know that the Mexican woman worked for the family even before she started to raise the children, John among them.

In this sense, the language is functioning as a denunciation of "the expulsion of the other", an idea formulated by Byung-Chul Han that can be applied in our case. This is so because Spanish, in the context of America, was (and still is) considered as the other in a society that values the global, homogeneity, to the point of "[...] considering its plenitude only in the identical: when the conducts are unified, the ideas are similar and the languages resemble each other" (Moreno-Fernández 2018).⁸ As a result, Spanish is being expelled from many backgrounds in the United States, while English is being imposed in order to create a unified society in every aspect in spite of the rich history of the Spanish presence in North America and the presence of those 50 million speakers. Here, once more we can see the effects of globalization, which imposes the idea of the universal and attacks the other so that it becomes part of that whole.

Nevertheless, McCarthy, in *APH*, fights this tendency by depicting a sort of linguistic transnationalism in the sense that the Spanish language is made part of the origins of the United States, through the Spanish names in the graveyard, and of its present, through the crucial role

⁸ Translated from the Spanish

of the abuela in the nurturing of Cole's family. Moreover, the fact that neither Spanish, nor English, can convey every reality is fundamental in order to understand how this linguistic transnationalism functions in a symbiotic way: none of the languages "steals" spaces from the other, but they coexist while influencing both communities. This becomes even clearer when we perceive that John Grady, in opposition to Blevins or Rawlins, is the only one who has all the information given to them when they reach Mexico due to the fact that he is the only one who understands Spanish. In this sense, he is given more importance by McCarthy by being depicted not only as a translator for the rest of the Americans, but also as a transnational mediator who has the power to interact with the new culture in ways in which the other characters cannot, and who can decide what information he gives (and how) and what he chooses to hide:

Quién es [Blevins]? said the man.[...] / Un muchacho, no más, he said./ Algún parentesco? / No. [...] / No one spoke. The man in the vest studied John Grady and he looked across the clearing at Blevins. Then he asked John Grady if he wished to sell the boy. / [...]. No, he said. / Qué vale? said the man. / John Grady stubbed out the cigarette against the sole of his boot and rose. [...] / What did they say? said Blevins. / Nothing. (75-76)

All in all, I consider that McCarthy's novel is extremely rich for several reasons. The author wants to convey the main idea that we have discussed here, the invalid nature of the myth of globalization and the pertinence of a transnational approach to acquire a complete understanding of our reality, but he does so by presenting several levels of signification to the reader. Consequently, the reader who is searching for pure entertainment will find a western with a protagonist who responds to the pattern of the classic romantic knight. Nevertheless, the readership with a more complete literary background will be able to spot biblical references, characteristics that are typical of the bildungsroman and influences from *Don Quixote*, elements

that enrich the interpretation of the book while problematizing fundamental ideas in the North American literary tradition such as American exceptionalism or the frontier. However, by comparing the conclusions reached by the scholars we will find that the author goes beyond the construction of a mere collage of several traditions in order to deconstruct the North American mythology.

This is when McCarthy's mastery becomes more evident, as he is capable of creating a complex world, which is alive culturally, economically and politically, and to which we, as readers, can relate thanks to the presence of Western myths as well as of elements of the literary traditions that we recognize. Moreover, the author narrates in many different ways, from the most lyrical one to the soberest, and he adds contrasts between the action and the style, thus providing further meaning to sequences without being obliged to lessen the importance of Cole's perspective in favour of the one of an impersonal narrator. In addition to this, he populates his world with many characters like John Grady, local individuals who face the unknown (Mexico) from a limited point of view (the American) that they try to apply to every aspect of that new world in order to survive, thus understanding the reality as a global phenomenon. However, McCarthy shows us that the rigidness of Cole's American global point of view is not valid, thus demonstrating that the book is not only about the American myth, but about the undermining of the notion of "globalization" in general terms and the necessity of a transnational approach. In that sense, Cole becomes the hero and the antihero at the same time, because, although he can identify the problems and adapt to the new realities that he encounters by, for example, using the Spanish language, in the end, he is not able to assume his transnational experience and, consequently, he feels lost in a world that has become, suddenly, too big due to the deconstruction of the traditional notion of the frontier.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As foregrounded at the beginning of this study, the definitions of terms such as globalization / universalization, otherness and transnationalism are very complex and diverse. Nonetheless, in this paper we have tried to provide the reader with the simplest version possible in order to reach our goal: to read *All the Pretty Horses* from a transnational point of view.

We started this analysis of the book prompted by the numerous studies about the text, which acknowledged the existence of several myths such as the frontier or the notion of American exceptionalism, but which avoided the greater myth, the one of globalization from an American point of view. Consequently, we decided that a reading of the book from a transnational point of view would allow us to present McCarthy's discourse from a new perspective that would restate that the: "frontier was the imaginary boundary (for whites) that demarcated the turning of space to place and McCarthy's texts explore the power of this thought in American society, a power which extends far beyond the material demise of the frontier" (Estes 43). Moreover, it would enable us to redefine the relationship between Mexico and the United States in transnational terms, thus rewriting the characterization of both nations. Moreover, this reading is not contrary to those developed by other authors such as Estes or Cant, but complimentary in the sense that their interpretations, together with more theoretical approaches such as the ones by Allen, Fehrenbach or Slotkin, can offer a more complete understanding of the novel in terms that can be applied not only to the United States/Mexico case, but to the process of globalization worldwide.

Consequently, here we have offered a pilgrimage through McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* focusing our attention on the journey and the language as two of the most important stylistic and thematic strategies used by the author to provide the reader with the opportunity of taking a closer look at the mythological processes taking place in Cole's world and psyche

as well as their deconstruction. As a result, we expect that the reader will become aware of the necessity of this transnational reading that, in contrast with Cole's final status, will allow them to face and understand this demystified, transnational reality.

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