

# Cormac mccarthy's all the pretty horses: dreams and hero's journey

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## **Dreams and the Hero's Journey**

The book *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy follows the boy, John Grady, throughout his travels in Mexico. The story is a bildungsroman, or a story about a hero who matures with the experiences gained during the adventure to ultimately become a fully developed individual. The methods McCarthy uses to effectively create this bildungsroman story can be found in his uses of diction, imagery and language in the motif of dreams found in multiple parts of the novel.

The diction used by McCarthy in several of Grady's dreams build on the emphasis of the heroes journey. When Grady has the dream about horses on the peaceful field, he feels at peace:

THAT NIGHT he dreamt of horses in a field on a high plain where the spring rains had brought up the grass and the wild-flowers out of the ground and the flowers ran all blue and yellow far as the eye could see and in the dream he was among the horses running and in the dream he himself could run with the horses and they coursed the young mares and fillies over the plain where their rich bay and their rich chestnut colors shone in the sun and the young colts ran with their dams and trampled down the flowers in a haze of pollen that hung in the sun like powdered gold and they ran he and the horses out along the high mesas where the ground resounded under their running hooves and they flowed and changed and ran and their manes and tails blew off of them like spume and there was nothing else at all in that high world and they moved all of them in a resonance that was like a music

among them and they were none of them afraid horse nor colt nor mare and they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken but only praised.(135)

The words chosen by McCarthy are distant from the words used during Grady's journey. There is no mention of vaqueros, pursuers nor troubles. The dream's diction is completely detached from the heroes journey, and indicate the Grady's desire to return home. The home being his family's ranch, or somewhere he will not be bothered by society. Positive words such as " rich" and " praised" show his yearning for a calmer environment.

The imagery found in the dream lacks the color red, which represents blood imagery in the novel. Blood imagery is a signal of violence, or turmoil in a relationship. Blood imagery is a recurring theme and can be identified as a signal at many points. When John and Alejandra meet for the last time, Alejandra " took his hand and held it in hers and touched the veins" (210). The veins represented the blood imagery, but this reference to Grady's veins shows that the conflict is not external, but internal. This example of blood imagery is one of many found throughout the novel, but this dream lacks any mention of blood or even the color red. The blue and yellow fields with horses gracefully passing through dominates the image. Because the image has no negative influences, it can be assumed that this dream is Grady's most peaceful desire.

The language used in Grady's dream contains some cowboy terms, and the sentences run on longer than they should. The run on sentences and jargon

most likely represents the informality, and personality of Grady. This personal touch added to Grady's dream by McCarthy accentuates the assertion that Grady heavily desires these experiences to be the fruits of his journey. The lack of punctuation makes this dream a very fast pace and exciting moment in Grady's mind, but makes it seem short lived. This brief glimpse into Grady's subconscious reflects his hopes of a reward for his journey and sorrows in Mexico.

The dream of horses reflects John Grady's reasoning to persevere through the journey of a hero. The bildungsroman structure is enhanced by the underlying motive for adventure exhibited in Grady's dreams of horses and reflect what Grady really is pursuing. For a hero, it is

easy to get sidetracked by love interests and obstacles that allies may be facing. For a reader it also may be hard to discern what the hero really is after, but Grady's dreams help to clarify that

he is after a peaceful life away from the struggles of his boyhood. The dreams provide the reader, and John Grady a refresher on what the journey really is meant to be; a transition from his boyhood strife to an enlightened, content manhood.