

# All the pretty horses by cormac mccarthy. a literary review

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## **All The Pretty Horses**

Chronologically speaking, All The Pretty Horses is quite an interesting book. It was published in 1992, is set in 1949, and often seems like it is set in the 1800s. Despite being set in the relatively modern timeframe of the late 40s, McCarthy nevertheless uses deliberately rustic ideas like horseback travel and cowboys to convey an idea that has lasted throughout the ages: the frontier/settler spirit, briefly filtered through a Mexican lens.

John Cole Grady is young. Very young, for what he went through. 16 years old is more or less a child functionally speaking if you're talking in terms of horseback rides to Mexico and violent gunfights. He's young and he has nowhere to go. His grandfather dies, and his ranch is to be sold off. His entire life is in turmoil. So he sets off into a land of opportunity, just as immigrants to America and settlers in the Frontier did all those years ago.

However, here's a twist: he goes to Mexico, of all places. Why? Well for one, John Grady speaks Spanish (he was raised bilingual), but for another it's where, he believes, the spirit of ranching survives. He could go into the city, learn a trade, and join the rest of the world in the 40s. But he doesn't want to. John Grady Cole wants to be a cowboy. Ingrained deep within his psyche is a desire away from modern things.

How can it be that he be following that spirit if he's leaving America? Well, he's following the spirit in its 19th century style more than anyone who would stay in that day's America. He's running from an orderly world that he

knows but does not want into a frightening yet enticing unknown, which to him appears to be free and prosperous.

However, John Grady's frontier spirit falls apart. It's more or less ripped to shreds, actually. Grady discovers that Mexico is actually a rather harsh mistress. His love is spurned, he is wrongfully arrested, and he even gets shot. Mexico is revealed to be not at all like the old Frontier Grady seemed to imagine.

John Grady ultimately has to go back to America. He understands this, on some level. He must join modern America and join the 40s. It's worth noting that the style McCarthy uses in his own writing is often hard to quantify. It's rather unique, and one of the more distinctive elements is how he uses dialogue. He uses no quotation marks, and often has long stretches with only dialogue; there's commonly no other text for five to ten lines. I mention this because a lack of details regarding the surroundings leads to necessarily imagining the surroundings. And the events that happened often led me to imagining something akin to a mid-1800s American Frontier.

However, after Grady must return to America, and McCarthy does describe clear as day the pickup trucks and radios that he left behind. He must confront his past. But John Grady wishes not to do this. He watches his dead father be taken away in a hearse. John Grady still does not wish to join the modern day.

He shouldn't go back. But he can't stay. Not like this. John Grady Cole said a last goodbye to his best friend, got back on his horse and rode away. To

somewhere? To fate, essentially. But mostly away. Away from his dead father and grandfather. Away from that world of modernity that he did not wish to be a part of. Away from the present and into the past.