



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 11. Issue.2. 2024 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

A STUDY ON THE INVASION OF WESTERN SPACE BY
INDUSTRIALIZATION IN *ALL THE PRETTY HORSES* FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF LEFEVRE'S SPATIAL THEORY

JIAOJIAO WANG

MA Candidate, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University,
Beijing, China.

Email: Wangjiaojiao565@163.com.

doi: 10.33329/ijelr.11.2.91



Article information

Article Received:13/4/2024
Article Accepted:05/05/2024
Published online:08/06/2024

ABSTRACT

All the Pretty Horses is the first volume in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy, which is fascinating in its broad canvas, legendary hues, distinctive customs, exhilarating cowboy encounters, ill-fated love narrative, and profound life philosophy. Based on Lefevre's spatial theory, this paper investigates the invasion of western space by industrialization and the unpredictability and bitterness of human beings in the relentless change of history in the novel in the three dimensions of natural space, social space, and mental space, demonstrating McCarthy's humanistic concern for the history, changes, and present of the American West as well as his plea for human to rediscover the true nature. In the meantime, it aims at contribute to the spatial study of the novel.

Keywords: Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, Spatial Theory, Western Space

1. Introduction

Cormac McCarthy (1933-2023) is a novelist, playwright, and short-story writer from the United States. He has written ten novels, three short stories, and several screenplays in genres ranging from Southern Gothic to Western to post-apocalyptic. He is well renowned for his graphic images of violence as well as his distinct writing style, which is distinguished by a lack of punctuation and attribution.

After its release in 1992, *All the Pretty Horses* won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, bringing McCarthy considerable acclaim. *All the Pretty Horses*, the first volume in the Border Trilogy, was his first New York Times bestseller, granting him a broader readership. USA Today deems the novel as "surely one of the great American novels". Besides, *The New York Times* regards it as "a major achievement". Part bildungsroman, half horse opera, part meditation on courage and loyalty, this brilliantly crafted novel chronicles the story of a 16-year-old boy, John

Grady Cole, the last of a long line of Texas ranchers. Across the Rio Grande into Mexico beckons -- gorgeous and barren, rugged and cruelly civilized, he embarked on an idyllic, sometimes comic odyssey, to a place where dreams are paid for in blood after World War II, accompanied by his pal Lacey Rawlins and Jimmy Blevins.

As a result of his dedication to portraying the experiences and emotions of lower and middle class people in the United States and Mexico, Cormac McCarthy is one of the most well-received and highly regarded Western frontier novelists of today. One of the most prestigious works in the Border Trilogy is *All the Pretty Horses*, which at the time of its publication sparked intense discussion in the literary community. The novel has been the subject of rigorous and systematic studies, which has examined it from a variety of angles, including existentialism, reflection of historical events, deconstruction of western myths, and comparative analysis. What's more, the researches of the novel has progressively grown to cover topics like frontier theory, eco-criticism, masculinity, and identity selection in recent years.

Lefebvre asserts that "we are confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, and global" (8). Industrialization has infiltrated rancher life in the American West, resulting in the collapse of the original western space and the emergence of new spatial connotations. Thus, by applying Lefebvre's spatial theory, this paper examines the protagonist's quest for the spirit of the West and its representative imagery, as well as the disintegration of traditional American western space and the attitude of the new generation of cowboys to achieve self-redemption.

2. Natural Space

McCarthy, regarded in the United States as the sole heir to Hemingway and Faulkner, was a genius of thinking as well as a master of language. Nature is always the greatest being in his works, which he gives a full and vigorous life. His prose-poetry is a marvelous portrayal of horses, deserts, steppes, rivers, condensing winds, remote villages, and materialistic cities. "Whether in terms of style or literary vision, *All the Pretty Horses*, a masterpiece of passionate heroic legend and spectacular natural beauty, will be a breathtaking read", wrote by the U.S. National Book Award committee.

Natural space depicts the outside world where the novel's tale takes place, emphasizing an objective depiction of the natural world against which the story is set. Furthermore, the natural space also clearly shows the characters' range of activities as well as their trajectory and the dynamic changes in their psychological activities. "The forward leap of productive forces, and the new technical and scientific capacity to transform natural space so radically that it threatens nature itself" (Lefebvre 65). In the mid-twentieth century, the pastoral economy and herders' lives in the western United States reflected the demise of the traditional economy and the devastation of the natural environment, as well as the rise of contemporary large-scale industry and the growth of urbanization. People had little choice but to stray in quest of their own personal "paradise". As a result, the western United States is also painted with "ethereal, esoteric, and elusive" hues, saturated with melancholy.

2.1 Mountains and Rivers -- Freedom and Bumpy

The novel's settings, (southern Texas and northern Mexico) are inspired by the lengthy heritage of American Westerns, which include cowboys and gunfights on wide-open countryside. Mexico had become a myth after World War II, one filled with tremendous ideas of freedom and honor, which John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins go out to pursue in Mexico -- but what they find is a much grimmer, rougher world.

On the one hand, Grady and Rawlins "rode all day the day following through rolling hill country, the low caprock mesas dotted with cedar, the yuccas in white bloom along the eastfacing slopes" (38).

They traversed the expansive stretches of rivers and the high plains of the highlands on horseback. On the other hand, on the way they met Blevins, a chivalrous man, and the three of them traveled through the mountains to get rid of their adversaries. They passed through at a hard gallop and rode up into the low hills (87). Similarly, as the Mexican captain prepares to shoot Blevins in private, the scene still shifts to a wide expanse of mountains with “the truck laboring over a dirt track across rolling fields” (176).

Mountains and rivers are vast and rough landscapes. Their exploration of nature and life, as well as their honest feelings of the bitterness, joy, and happiness of youth, are all reflected in this adventure, as their hopes and expectations for the future. McCarthy’s lush descriptions of the plains and vistas of Mexico only further the boys’ mythical perception of the nation, which is influenced by physical attractiveness, gorgeous girls, freedom of movement, and a simpler way of life. Despite being thrilling, their conception of the American (or more specifically, North American) West is mainly because it’s a location where they may hone their feelings of independence and uphold a worldview of respect and dignity. The lads don not realize until it is too late that the stakes are larger than this and that the mythical values they are seeking in Mexico have a dark underbelly of misogyny, corruption, and violence. Despite the fact that Mexico aspires to the ideals of the Old West, it also suffers from severe inequality, widespread poverty, and abhorrent corruption. By seeing this side of Mexico for themselves, the lads become disillusioned, seeing the myth of the West for what it is: just a myth.

2.2 Night -- Throbbing and Violence

In addition to its chronological characteristics, night is a recurrent occurrence in literature. Its spatial dimension gives characters, events, and narratives more significance. The novel is readable, audible, and visual due to McCarthy’s masterful use of words which is like a panoramic movie with a great orchestra. The happenings are given a second dimension of time and place by the night’s backdrop, which bring the drama to a climax of various ramifications. As night falls, nature returns to serenity, despite the excitement of first love between a man and a woman, the brutality of battling with others. The darkness appears to offer people a different kind of fortitude than the daylight, allowing those obviously “unseemly” objects to have a sensible existence.

Grady falls in love with her at first sight, and the two start dating right away. Of course, they are aware that Alejandra’s family will not approve, hence they express their affection for one another in private in order to avoid being revealed. Despite having a wealthy upbringing, Alejandra maintains a rebellious attitude. She seeks out Grady at night to confess her love and engage in sexual activity. “When they wound back up out of the glade it was already evening and the sun lay long in the grass and across the shallow swales where the land dipped in pockets of darkness” (179). As they share a bed or a horseback ride, the night allows them to shed their disguises and return to their actual selves. Naturally, everything reverts to its natural state as the sun rises. Additionally, in the West, the night represents a perpetual reflection of good and evil as well as an endless setting for bloodshed and death. In order to create a horrifying and scary environment that emphasizes the fear and vulnerability that are so pervasive in human’s hearts in today’s society, McCarty exploits the mystery and the sense of the vast unknown of the night itself. “That night they lay in their cell on the iron racks like acolytes and listened to the silence and ... each other breathing in the silence both still awake” (186). The unusually peaceful night seems to portend strife, and Grady struggles with the other inmates, inadvertently resorting to barbarism.

Human blood, of course, is linked to the issue of violence, as well as the notion that nothing can be proved for many Mexicans if it is not forced to bleed, as Alfonsa remarks about her fellow countrymen. However, blood also represents the attempt to prove oneself, to embrace courage, and to craft one’s own identity. Rawlins is concerned that his blood infusion will make him part Mexican—a hilarious moment that also highlights how easy it is for the characters to link blood to national and

personal identity. In jail, Grady recognizes that blood must be shed and that his only option is to kill or be killed. Grady's conflicted decisions in the face of violence and morality also bear witness to the misery of those trapped in the stream of history who, in the end, cannot avoid the blowback of violence in their life.

3. Social Space

Lefebvre contends that "where natural space exists, and even more so where social space exists, the movement from obscurity to enlightenment - the process of decipherment - is perpetual" (192). He proposed the idea of "social space" and investigated the connection between space and social life in *The Production of Space* with the intention of creating a "unified theory" that would connect the numerous fields that were theoretically and practically distinct. "Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity - their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder" (Lefebvre 81). Grady no longer has a ranch to call home due to modern industrialization, which also caused his family's primary source of income to disappear. Grady and Rawlins share a social space that includes both the prison and the ranch, where Grady has lived both the pleasant rancher's life and the life of an outlaw at the point of a knife.

3.1 Ranch -- Memory and Order

Although Grady is desperately trying to keep the family ranch going, he is too young to take it over at the beginning of the book when his long family line of ranchers has started to unravel. Grady had great hopes and memories for the family ranch, but when he lost it, he headed off in search of another "paradise". At a time when the United States is becoming more industrialized in 1949, Mexico appears to be a place where Grady may preserve a way of life that is vanishing at home.

The Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, where Grady and Rawlins have come, is full of natural springs and streams teeming with fauna and bordered by desert. The hacienda is described as a kind of oasis within the nation, lush and greener than the rugged terrain Grady and Rawlins have become accustomed to since leaving the United States. Don Hector, unlike other hacendo families, does not appear to have abandoned the primitive ranch life. Instead, he has embraced country life and his role as ranch owner, actively participating in the property. This decision stands in stark contrast to the breakdown of Grady family's ranch.

They are quite experienced with ranch work, assist ranchers in purchasing horses, chose and tame horses on the ranch, and live a quiet and steady existence. In contrast to the deadly, disorganized world beyond the ranch, the ranch is a well-ordered, stable, and peaceful social space, a symbol of civilization on the US-Mexico border and a source of romanticism for the American Westward Movement. Indeed, this hacienda appears to be just what Grady has been striving for by idealizing the American West.

3.2 Prison -- Disorder and Bloodshed

The United States had exited the Great Depression and entered a period of strong economic expansion by 1949, the year the novel takes place. This industrialized economy was spreading across the nation with significant homogenizing effects thanks to new technology and improved transportation, particularly the Eisenhower interstate highway system that was expanding to span the country. Ranches run by families, like Grady's, were more likely to be sold off. It is plausible to assume that Grady and Rawlins might have easily found employment in Mexico, which was at the beginning of the "Mexican Miracle", a roughly thirty-year period of economic expansion and low inflation that lasted until the 1970s.

The western world created in the novel is a gloomy place where law and order are nonexistent, morals have been abandoned, individual adventurism is rampant, and there is a complete lack of rule

and order. Instead, the second social space outside the ranch, the prison, is a site of disorder, fighting, and death. While Grady and Rawlins are sentenced to prison for Blevins's "horse-stealing incident", and their time in prison irrevocably alters the course of their lives. They watched as Blevins was instead shot in private in Mexico, where the death penalty does not exist, and chose to kill his cellmate in order to survive, and even break off his ambiguous relationship with Alejandra..... Prisons, which are supposed to be a place of justice and the rule of law, have become a dark place where the rulers run amok, completely ignoring the law and disregarding the interests of the people.

In addition, the prison serves as a venue for class distinctions and financial dealings as well. The inmates' commander, Emilio Pérez, owns the cooks and bodyguards, and has complete power over the others. "If you don't have no money how can you be release from your confinement...Without money you can do nothing" (Lefebvre 189). Grady and Rawlins were warned by the prison's captain that they would not be released if they failed to make bail. It is difficult to comprehend that the prison, which ought to be a courtroom, is the institution where they nearly perished.

4. Mental Space

"The fact is that Chomsky unhesitatingly postulates a mental space endowed with specific properties - with orientations and symmetries" (Lefebvre 5). What's more, "the quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other" (Lefebvre 14). Lefebvre's spacial theory is concerned with both the material and mental components of space. Although mental space is abstract and challenging to express and modify through objective existence, it is unquestionably influenced – either directly or indirectly – by natural and social space.

Grady wns while traveling south to Mexico in search of the new idyllic life he has imagined. Eventually, he has found redemption and continues on his journey. Alejandra and her great-aunt lead a luxurious lifestyle, yet they are confined to their own inner worlds despite constantly harboring a spirit of defiance. Although Alejandra eventually leaves up Grady due to class and familial issues, she has the courage to seek her own love while saving Grady from the darkness of prison. Alfonsa, Alejandra's great-aunt, has been manipulated like a puppet her entire life and is similarly an absent presence.

4.1 Women -- Absence and Bondage

Without a doubt, traditional male ideals have always dominated western literature, which have always been full of manliness and in which women have never played a significant role. Women are excluded from the story and placed in uncomfortable situations throughout, such as Grady's mother, Alejandra and her great-aunt, who have little choice over their own fate and are completely absent.

Grady's dramatic love story with Mexican adolescent Alejandra is one of the most fascinating and moving stories of his trips down south. Alejandra, Don Hector's daughter, is bored with society and prefers to spend her time on the ranch. She is strong-willed and self-assured, riding Grady's horse despite her father's desires and boldly knocking on Grady's door, sleeping with him. Alejandra, on the other hand, is extremely loyal: she refuses to flee with Grady in the end because she makes a promise to her great-aunt and fears losing her father's love.

Alejandra not only risks to ride alone on a wet night, but also crawls into Grady's bed for nine nights in a row, reflecting her efforts to defy class and race in the domain of love. The love story of a young lady from the Mexican high class and a poor white cowboy from the United States is both moving and terrible, as it was never authorized at the period. Alejandra is powerless to upset the established order and must instead bury her love for Grady forever in her own mental realm. Standing on the train, waving farewell to Grady, "I saw you in a dream. I saw you dead in a dream" (Lefebvre 250). Alejandra's dream when she first met Grady foreshadows the end for both of them.

Alejandra's great-aunt Alfonsa, the hacienda's matriarch, is also a female character in the narrative who cannot be ignored. She was a bookish child with radical, free-thinking thoughts. Alfonsa, like Alejandra, was always haughty and uncompromising. Additionally, she is an admirable example of a lady who was ahead of her time in many ways. She informs Grady that it is his ability to influence Alejandra's honor through his involvement with the law, not his poverty or status, that she is concerned about. She admits that there are parallels between her character and teenage experiences with Alejandra. Although in the novel McCarthy devotes a good deal of ink to her conversations with Grady and her past experiences, she remains, in essence, absent. "The societies to which I have been exposed seemed to me largely machines for the suppression of women" (Lefebvre 229). She is also constrained by an ethereal frame, powerless to escape what seems to be a preordained destiny.

Alfonsa's exact intentions, however, are still unclear. It is hard to determine whether she is actually acting in Alejandra's best interests or merely utilizing her appealing story to support more selfish interests. Moreover, her speech on fate and destiny is equally ambiguous. "It's not so much that I don't believe in it(fate). I don't subscribe to its nomination" (Lefebvre 239). She swears she does not believe in destiny, yet she is firmly in its clutches. When Alejandra comes into touch the underlying order, she shifts from "victim" to "perpetrator" without hesitation.

4.2 New Generation Cowboy -- Destiny and Redemption

Grady, who is forced to leave his hometown due to industrialization, goes through some of the physical and mental hardships and tribulations of growing up, thus ultimately becomes a model of the Western hero's spirituality: independent and self-confident. However, he experiences two female betrayals while doing so. His mother first sells the family ranch in order to fulfill her ambition of becoming an East Coast actress. Secondly, due of their differences in class and ethnicity, Alejandra, his girlfriend, breaks off their relationship. It is worth noting that Grady takes love and affection seriously. He holds that "if she would trust her life into his care he would never fail her or abandon her and that he would love her until he died" (Lefebvre 251). Even though his good friend Rawlins believes that "She aint worth it. None of em are" (Lefebvre 13).

With his parents separated and his ranch sold, Texas is no longer a true home for him – he even admits Rawlins at the end of the story that it is "alien country" for him. Nevertheless, Mexico is also foreign to him, especially when Alejandra declines to stay with him, there is no place for him there either. Instead, Grady carves out a place for himself by remaining faithful to his friends and his horse. Grady requests the captain for his three horses back at the end of the novel, hence continues to embark on his journey, this time genuinely becoming a budding cowboy of the American West.

The novel draws on the theme of growth to tell the story of two maturing protagonists who try to find their place in a rapidly changing Western world, while retaining their own views on traditional Western values and rewriting the image of manhood in traditional Western fiction. Grady and Rawlins are two completely different white cowboys: one is a mythical cowboy with instinctive loyalty to the vanishing way of life; the other is a practical cowboy who seeks to strike a balance between the realization of his ideals and the pressure of reality. Nevertheless, they are on the same path toward the end of the new generation of cowboys in the middle of the 20th century, in the face of changes in the homeland, the desire to re-find themselves in this region of Mexico, and the mystery of the cab land. They are not giving up because of the obstacles in their way; rather, they are on a path to redeem themselves and aspire to find the independence of their former life on the frontier and personal freedom.

5. Conclusion

In the time period in which the novel is set, the growth of contemporary large-scale industry has caused the once-thriving western ranching industry to gradually decline and the ecological

environment to deteriorate. The age of large-scale machinery has also invaded the Texas ranch, competing with the cowboys for space in the west. Cowboys had to abandon the simple lifestyle they had lived for generations, leave their country of origin, and travel abroad in search of their new "paradise". The novel beautifully depicts the freedom and uninhibitedness of the American West with its realistic cowboys, the suffering and sound of the mountain roundup, the love tale of life and death, and the lonesome walk beneath the dome of the sky.

The novel ends with Grady, the protagonist, once again on the road chasing his heart towards the unknowable world of the future. John Grady clings to the idea that devotion should come before everything else as a means of escaping the unending, unpredictable cycle of fate and duty. From the beginning, it is clear that Grady is fiercely dedicated to his ranch. Therefore, he makes numerous attempts to save it from being sold until determining that he must leave rather than allow his family to part with the ranch. While expressing his avoidance and opposition to industrialization, he has a strong commitment to his faith.

McCarthy explores philosophical ideas about the nature of life, the interdependence of man and nature, and the nature of religion through the novel. He laments the invasion of western space and the lonely fate of the next generation of cowboys, while also anticipating the overall atmosphere of industrialized development. In actuality, the essential approach to cope with historical changes is to look inward, rather than outward, in order to actualize one's own inner progress. There is no doubt that the true spirit of the West sought by McCarthy is continuously evolving, constantly washing the space residues of the old things, keeping to the heart, fighting the challenges, adjusting to the evolution, and daring to start off.

6. Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by the NCEPU "Double First-Class" Graduate Talent Cultivation Program (XM2312716).

Works cited

- Estes, Andrew. Keller. *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces*. Rodopi, 2013.
- Henri, Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991.
- Owens, Barclay. "Cormac McCarthy's Western Novels." *The University of Arizona Press*, 2000.
- Philip, Wagner. "Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, place and Textuality." *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces". Trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16(1986):28.
- Soja, W. Edward. *Thirdspace*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publisher, 1996.