The Same Old Dog and Pony Show: Animal Imagery and Thematic Expression in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy

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Life's a bitch and then you die,/nothing
you can do about it./ Anything you steal or buy,/
you're gonna be leaving here without it.[1)]

Unfortunately, I ran into my friend Damian yesterday at the Blue Mountain Café. I don't really not like Damian, a lot, but he reads too much. He spends an ungodly portion of his life reading and he burns his remaining midnight oil asking me questions about the book he has perused most recently. Today he burst through the doors of the coffee house as though his bowling shoes were seven-league boots. Damian had no difficulty spotting me--my head snapped up with the same spooked-rabbit motion as everyone else's when he Schwarzeneggered into the shop--and he turned toward my table.

He seven-leagued across the room, making enroute a weary, one-fingered, "the usual" motion to Shelly, the espresso girl behind the counter, and finished with a deft two-point crash into the chair across the table. It's a novel, I thought. I wasn't too far from the mark: I've been reading Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy, he told me. Has the third book gone to print already, I asked. Well, no, he

1) Jackson, Joe. "Survival"

admitted, but the first part, *All the Pretty Horses*,[2] impressed me so much that I bought the second volume, *The Crossing*,[3] and read it also. The patron saint of beleaguered café sitters was smiling on me: I had also recently read those books. Damian shed his coat, sat for a moment, and began to shake his head.

They sure don't seem to be from the same trilogy. I had to nod in agreement. Yes, stylistically speaking the two novels are worlds apart, aren't they. Damian shook his head again, slower this time. I'm not talking about style, he told me. Stylistically, both books have the same mix of presentation: the brusque brevity of Hemingway and long Faulknerian narrative sentences, some of which contain misplaced modifiers which create surreal effects. Well, I guess that's true, I ceded. His coffee came and while he stirred milk into his Ethiopian Harrar, he continued.

The stories are almost the same. *All* takes place a short time after World War II, *The Crossing* shortly before. In *All*, a 17-year old American, a Texan named John Grady Cole, loses his family ranch. He loves ranching, so he rides with his friend Lacey Rawlins to Mexico to look for a job as a ranch hand. Near the Mexican border, the pair are joined by another youngster named Jimmy Blevins who rides a magnificent horse. The pair suspect that the horse is stolen. In Mexico, Blevins loses his horse, but finds it in the town of Encantada several days later. Blevins steals the horse but becomes separated from Rawlins and Cole during his escape from the owner and townspeople. The two find work on a Mexican ranch. Cole's love and knowledge for horses quickly raises him in

2) McCarthy, Cormac. *All the Pretty Horses*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1993. Hereafter *All*.

3) ---. *The Crossing*. Picador: London, 1994. Hereafter *Crossing*.

the esteem of the owner. Cole meets Alejandra, the lovely daughter of the owner, and although the girl's great-aunt explicitly warns Cole otherwise, the youths engage in a love affair. Damn, this is hot coffee, Damian put his hand to his lips for a moment, but only a moment.

The owner finds out about the affair; the two Texans are arrested. The pair spends a horrific period in the hands of the authorities: they are reunited with Blevins, who returned to Saltillo and killed a man while trying to reclaim the remainder of his possessions. Shortly, while Cole and Rawlins watch helplessly, the captain of police unceremoniously walks Blevins into a grove and executes him. The police incarcerate both Americans. In prison they fight incessantly with the other inmates; both are stabbed. Only the bribe of the great-aunt saves the pair from dying in prison. Rawlins returns to America, but Cole returns to find Alejandra. He meets her but finds that Alejandra bought his release by agreeing never to see him again; both are devastated. Cole decides to return to America. Enroute, he stops at Saltillo, kidnaps the chief of police, and retrieves his horse as well as those of Rawlins and Blevins.

Cole is shot and loses the police captain but escapes across the border with the three horses. He returns Rawlins' horse and begins to trek westward looking for the original owner of Blevins' horse. Damian's coffee was a good deal colder after his epic synopsis. He took a long sip and pinched his lips shut thoughtfully. I waved to Shelly behind the bar for another cup of Java. She held up two fingers in reply—I would have to wait for two other orders first. And *The Crossing*, I asked.

The protagonist of *The Crossing* is also a young man, a 16-year old New Mexican named Billy Parham. A she-wolf comes up from

Mexico into the valley where Billy's family lives on a cattle ranch. It pulls down several calves and heifers. Billy traps the wolf, muzzles it, and making an instant decision, leads the wolf by a rope leash back into Mexico to the Pilares mountains. At the foot of the Pilares mountains, the local authorities capture Billy and the wolf. The *aguacil* releases Billy but uses the wolf for pitfighting against a number of fighting dogs. Unable to save the wolf, Billy shoots it while it is in the pit. Afterwards, he buries it in the Pilares. He wanders for some time in the mountains where he meets, among other people, two prophetic figures, an indian chief and an ex-priest. Then he returns to America. Billy discovers that while he was gone, a wandering indian murdered his parents and stole the family's horses. Billy finds his brother Boyd who survived the attack, and the two of them set out for Mexico to retrieve the horses and find the indian.

In Mexico, the two find first their father's horse then the ranch which has bought three other horses from their family homestead. They also find time to rescue a Mexican girl from a pair of highwaymen. Although the chief foreman gives the two brothers permission to take their horses, a lesser *jefe* tries to retrieve the horses; in the ensuing struggle, the Mexican leader falls from his horse and breaks his back. The Parhams flee with their horses, but vengeful ranch hands ambush the pair and Boyd is shot. While escaping, the pair separate; Billy leaves Boyd in the care of several Mexican workers. Afterwards, Billy wanders for several days during which period he meets another prophetic figure--a blind man-who relates his life story. Billy locates his brother, brings a doctor to help him, and stays with him until he is well. Soon after, Billy locates the Mexican girl enamored of Boyd. After Boyd recovers enough to ride, he

and the girl abandon Billy one early morning. Billy tries to locate his brother, fails, and returns again to the United States.

When he returns, the United States are at war. Billy tries several times to volunteer for the Army, but a heart murmur disqualifies him. Parham wanders from ranching job to ranching job in Texas and New Mexico for several years, then returns to Mexico a third time in order to find his brother. In Mexico, Billy discovers that Boyd had turned outlaw and was shot down in a gun fight the previous year. Billy excavates Boyd's bones and returns to America. En route, robbers waylay him and stab his horse; in the scuffle, Billy and the highwayman trample Boyd's bones. Later, a passing band of gypsies stop to help Billy's horse. Once in America, Billy reburies his brother, then begins to wander north and west. Damian paused to sip his coffee. He didn't look at me, but out the door. He cocked his head waiting for me to comment. It was a ritual.

So how do you figure the two books are similar, I asked. Just because there are two young boys that both cross the border and become adults? *All* seems to be primarily a love story; *The Crossing* appears to be a tragedy. Damian tilted his cup and drained his coffee. No, he said firmly. Those are the story lines; both stories are about loss. Well, that is true, I admitted. Cole loses Alejandra, and Billy loses about everything but his tooth fillings. Are you saying that the moral is that if you become a man, you will lose that which you hold dearest? No. I glanced quickly and a tad irritably toward the bar, but Shelly was fiddling with the Cappuccino machine. Are you saying that the moral is that Mexico is a losing proposition for personal advancement? Damian smiled and emphatically denied that.

I think that the losses fall into separate categories, he decided,

nodding to the coffee cup in his hands. But I'm not sure what those categories are. It can't have anything to do with what was lost. Why is that? I asked. Parham and Cole both lost people and relationships, both lost belongings. Both lost family members to circumstances beyond their control: Cole's father died from the trauma of his stay in a P.O.W. camp during the war; an indian killed Parham's parents while he was in Mexico. Both lost a loved one when the loved one chose to leave: Alejandra promised not to see Cole again if her great aunt would pay for Cole's release from prison; Boyd chooses to leave Billy. I was beginning to understand Damian's point about the similarity between the stories.

Then, obviously, the similarity of the protagonists would indicate that the reader should probably contrast the reactions of the protagonists to these losses rather then the losses themselves. So you're saying that McCarthy is dealing with two halves of some celestial argument by presenting two types of characters faced with similar losses. We both paused for a moment as Shelly put down my Java. Damian caught her sleeve. May I have another and a large glass of water, please, he asked. Water for me, too, please. Shelly scratched on her order pad, nodded, and left. But if both novels conclude with the protagonists wandering and homeless, how could they be different? Well, for one, Cole wasn't wandering, Damian pointed out. He is looking for the owner of Jimmy Blevins' horse. Okay.

Now, Parham, Damian poked the air as he spoke, he's wandering at the conclusion; Damian paused—but he was wandering earlier in the book, between his second and third trips to Mexico and during his first trip after the she-wolf was killed. In fact, I pointed out, during Billy Parham's first trip to Mexico, he met an indian shaman

who called Billy "orphan" and specifically warned him not to continue his wanderings or it would become a habit (134). Yeah, I remember the old man, Damian agreed, I thought of him as a sort of prophet-figure; I mean, the man knew about the death of Billy's parents, right? Yeah, but Billy was pretty much wearing rags, too; it's not a difficult leap of imagination to assume he is an orphan. Shelly brought our glasses of water and we thanked her.

The indian also said something else, something about God or reality, Damian began tapping his spoon against his water glass trying to remember. Everybody in that book said something about God, I told him, but if it helps, the indian said that if he continued to wander, it "would become a passion and by this passion he would be estranged from men and ultimately from himself .... the world could only be known as it existed in men's hearts" (134). Damian blinked. You remembered that pretty well. Well, the fact that the old man called Parham "orphan," a prophecy that quickly comes true, gives special strength to his words. So you think that Billy Parham becomes a desperate drifter at the finish of *All* because the indian prophesied it? No, that would leave no room for individual choice, and *Crossing* wouldn't be a novel--it would be a Kevin Costner movie. Damian began tapping his spoon again. Well, I shrugged, if there was an alternative choice offered, it would probably be pretty close to the indian's statement, since the foreshadowing of the indian's prophecy makes that section particularly memorable.

Damian stopped his tapping. Ahh, of course, soon after Billy departs from the indians, he met the priest in the ruined village. That's right, I agreed reaching for my coffee, what did the priest say about reality? The priest was telling Parham about the life of a man who wandered for the majority of his whole life after various

disasters killed both his parents and child. The man became convinced that his survival proved that he was especially destined--thus separating himself from other men; the wanderer decided from the "multiplicity of its [the world's] instancing" (154) that without a witness there was no existence; therefore, his role in life was to be a witness against God, "as only the witness stood firm" (154). This is an opinion with which the priest comes to disagree. The priest offers that God, the primal reason behind all reality,[4] is not to be confused with reality "for the passing of armies and the passing of sands in the desert are one" (148). "The truth," the priest feels, "is rather that if there were no God then there could be no witness for there could be no identity to the world but only each man's opinion of it" (158).

I see it now, Damian, I affirmed. The conflict of *Crossing* is the struggle between Parham's desire to believe that there is a reason for his disasters (like the man in the priest's story) or his desire to become lost in the conflicting opinions and events of the world around him. Damian scowled into his glass of water, then sipped at it. I don't know, man. I think that if that is the novel's main conflict, there sure isn't a whole lot of conflict. It appears to me that Parham pretty much holds the latter view. I scowled too; this novel discussion was beginning to coalesce into its own poorly-written fictional conversation. I sipped alternately at my coffee and water.

I think that there is a similar conflict in *All*, I proposed. But it's not internalized, Damian was quick to point out wielding his coffee spoon like a conductor's baton. That would explain why the

4) Küng, Hans. *On Being Christian.* Trans. by Edwin Quinn. Image Books, Double Day: New York, 1984. 72.

tension of *All* lies primarily/between Cole and society rather than inside Cole. Yep, when Rawlins suggests to Cole that "'Ever dumb thing I ever done in my life there was a decision I made before that got me into it. It was never the dumb thing. It was always some choice I'd made before it'" (79), Cole agrees with him. Yeah, in *All*, Cole never makes any statement near Parham's admission to his brother Boyd that "'I know that you are [fine] ...But I ain't'" (330).

But if you want to talk about the protagonists of All and *The Crossing* acting as foils for each other, you have to prove that there is a similar split between totality (reason) and fracturization (meaninglessness) in *All* and that Cole falls on the opposite side from Parham. Oh, that's easy to do, I told Damian. Have you ever read "Fall of the House of Usher"? Uh, no, he picked up his water and took a sip, I'll stop by the University library on the way home. That is a good idea, I told him half-heartedly; I continued. The ranch for which Rawlins and Cole work has two leaders, each with one of the two world views. The Ranchero and the...Stop, stop, stop, Damian held out his hand.

Why go to all that dubious effort? Do you remember when Cole is being interrogated by the police captain in Encantada? Yeah. Well, the captain accuses Cole and Rawlins of being horse thieves. The captain had already beaten the "truth" from Rawlins. Cole, however, refuses to accept the captain's assertions that he is also a murderer and a thief and accomplice to Blevins' actions. Trying to wheedle a confession from Cole, the captain tells him that the two of them can make the truth there, in the interrogation room. Cole insists that "' [t] here aint but one truth ....The truth is what happened. It aint what come out of somebody's mouth'" (168) Yeah, I guess that quote makes his position pretty obvious. You got a pret-

ty airtight theory there, Damian, I said. He shrugged and seemed entirely unconvinced by his own hypothesis. I reached for my water. This was going to take some time yet.

Still and all, if you want to talk about a consistent world view, you need more than one perspective. The ball is round, I replied. Eh? What does that mean? I shrugged it's an Italian football maxim; they use it a lot during the World Cup. I didn't know that the Italians had a football team, Damian remarked thoughtfully. When did they start throwing the pigskin around? I paused. I'm not quite sure, I told him, but I think I can answer your multiple perspective question. What if you compare McCarthy's use of identical animals in the two works? Damian frowned thoughtfully then began to twirl his head as though centrifugal forces would pull an idea out of him. Then he stopped.

That's a great idea. Since both Cole and Parham claim to be vacqueros (*All*, 164; *The Crossing*, 131) animals in McCarthy's semi-civilized border world delineate both social and personal relationships for the protagonists. Since animals tend to have a consistent nature, let's see how they are used in the two novels. Let's try the most obvious—horses. Okay, *All the Pretty Horses*, is a novel that is pretty much horse-infested; let's start there.

Horses in *All* are continually entangled with and synonymous of human relationships. When Rawlins and Cole meet Blevins for the first time, their disbelief that such a young boy would own such a fine horse drives a wedge between the three. The dispersal of the three after Blevins steals the horse in Encantada illustrates the division most pointedly. Likewise, Alejandra and Cole's common admiration for and desire to ride the ranch's new thoroughbred stud brings the pair together. Right, I agreed.

Also, horses are an absolute that binds people as well. When Rawlins and Cole break the 16 wild horses in 4 days, fellow ranch hands, their families, and people from neighboring villages all come to watch and admire their work. The acceptance of the crowd is indicated by the number of men who offer the two lads mescal as they leave the corral. True, true. Cole is first mentioned by the foreman to the owner of the ranch as a man who "'understand [s] horses'" (113). The depth of Cole's knowledge of horses, the fact that he had read Wallace's *The Horse of America* "'front to back'" (116), and his ability to name a number of famous horses, their owners, breeders and the races in which they competed, impresses the owner. The haciendado asks Cole to move out of the bunkhouse and into his own room in the barn. *All* unfolds in a world where horses and men are inseparable. When Cole meets the old caretaker of the barn, the man looks over Cole's horse, then Cole, then departs, evidently having no need of mere words (117).

The horses are omnipresent aren't they? Damian mused. Since horses are the absolute that bind everyone in the novel, I suppose that makes the final image of Cole searching for the owner of Blevins' horse snap into focus. After Cole returns to America, his conscience continues to bother him about two particular events in Mexico: when he stabbed and killed a man in a knife fight in prison (291) and his passiveness when the police captain marched Blevins to his death (293). Since horses are absolutes, it would make sense (considering his world view) that although the court had declared Blevins' horse his that Cole would nonetheless attempt to mend his relationships and seek forgiveness from the absolute by returning Blevins' horse to its initial and rightful owner. Damian took a sip of water.

In *The Crossing*, however, horses are entirely dominated by men. They are merely property. Early in the novel, Billy suggests that Boyd punch the air out of his horse so that he can finish tightening the latigo of the saddle more quickly (15). When an interested bystander asks Billy how he expects his horse to tolerate being so close to a wolf, Billy replies that "'If I can get him caught, he wont have a whole lot to say about it'" (59). In Mexico, people are always asking for facturas and papers for horses. When Billy loses a horse which his papers describe, he says that he will find "'a horse that fits them'" (265); it's as though horses are an abstraction that exist only on paper. Later in the novel, he and his brother go to Mexico to search for their family's horses. When Boyd asks Billy if he thinks the horses know where they are at, Billy only replies, "'They dont know nothing'" (189). Damian, I stopped him. If Parham doesn't revere horses as much as Cole, that doesn't necessarily prove that Billy honors nothing, that he doesn't believe in the existence an absolute.

Well, of course not, Damian told me as though I were a waiter who had brought him decaffeinated coffee. When he takes the wolf back to Mexico, he seems to have the view that there is a grand unity. He speaks in Biblical terms of his journey. When he meets a group of armed men who want to buy the wolf, he tells the men that he cannot sell the animal; he insists the wolf is not his but belongs to "a great haciendado and that it had been put in his care and that no harm come to it" (90). When the men ask him if this great landlord lives in the colony of Morales, he answers "there and in other places as well" (90). After he shoots the wolf, however, Parham takes the opposite approach. I think that when Billy Parham replies to the Mexican girl who was speaking about the all-

embracing love and justice of God, his quote that he has "'no such idea of God'" (325) pretty much tags his position on the matter. I just want to point out that each novel provides an animal that enables the reader to compare or measure the protagonists and their contemporary societies. These images allow the reader to see the similarities and differences continuously and ultimately to weigh the differences between the two protagonists.

Well, what about the incident in which the robber stabs Billy's horse? Why does Parham bother to try to save his horse? When the gypsy offers to buy his horse, Billy refuses because the horse belonged to his father, that quote makes one think that Parham recognizes that the horse has a value beyond its ability to transport him from place to place. Well, he mentions his father only as an excuse not to sell the horse. He did not believe the horse would live until the gypsy offered to buy it (402). But Billy offered the horse as payment to the doctor who cleaned out his brother's gunshot wounds. That's true.

I think that you're getting to the rub of the different uses of the horse in the two books. Horses in *The Crossing* relate to the protagonist as a symbol of the past. The narrative opens with Billy riding a horse with his brother into the valley which would become home for the Parham family. After he buries the wolf, he rides through the mountains for some time searching for wolves, or wolf howls, both occurrences which fascinated him during his childhood. Perhaps the image of Billy dragging the wolf back to the Mexican mountains with the horse is symbolic of his forced attempt to recapture or recreate his childhood. He uses the horse to try to pull his brother's coffin from the ground. When the coffin splinters, Billy packs his brother's bones and ties them onto his horse.

Damian ruminated on this for a moment and swished some water about in his mouth. I see what you are saying about the horses. Actually, now that you've mention the horse as history, I think that you can probably can't compare the meanings of the animals across the two novels. I guess that you paid a lot of attention to the animals in the books. I looked some. Well, let's look at the major animals in each. What's your opinion about the dogs in the two novels? Dogs? I never thought too much about them. Well, yeah. If horses are the omnipresent symbol in *All* then surely you must consider dogs as the counterpart animal familiar in *The Crossing*. I finished the last of my coffee and swirled the grains around the bottom. I think you should explain your great dog theory to me a little.

In *The Crossing*, dogs are used to illustrate the workings and misfirings of human society. Whoa, there's a suspect theory; prove that one, I challenged Damian. Damian shrugged. Basically, whenever human beings treat each other like animals in *The Crossing*, there is a horrific dog image attached. When the indian kills Billy Parham's parents, he also slits the throat of Boyd Parham's dog (167). The indian failed to kill the dog, however, and the battered and scarred dog continued to follow the sullen, vengeful Boyd and Billy about in Mexico. When the blind man's wife tells Billy her life story, beginning with the day when the government troops shot all of the men in her village, she also points out that during the executions the town dogs engaged in a dogfight (287) and that later the dogs returned to eat the blood-soaked sand at the execution site (288). Likewise, the surviving women also dip their clothing into the pools of blood (288). When the drunk Mexican that Billy meets early in his third trip to Mexico was shot while in Zacatecas during the Mex-

ican Revolution, the dogs came at night to lap up his blood (358-9). Okay, Okay, I think you're right, now please tell me about the connection between the protagonist and the prevailing dog image.

Billy is not a dog; he is a wolf. In the beginning, Billy Parham's love for wolves sets him apart from human beings. When he was young child, he sneaked out of the house to watch the wolves return from hunting antelope on the plains; it was an experience which he never told anyone about (4-5). When he steps into the dog-fighting ring to save the wolf, he retrieves the chains of the pitdogs and hands them to two Mexican pit handlers while he himself takes up the collar of the wolf and faces them. Later, he rides away from the pit with the dead wolf slung across his horse. Billy finds that the taste of the wolf's blood is "no different" from his own (125).

I posit that Billy's character is by nature more like that of a wolf rather than that of a dog and that he will automatically gravitate away from the company of men. Because of this, Billy will not naturally want to know the world "'as it existed in men's hearts'" (134) which the indian shaman declares is necessary to alleviate his passion for wandering. It is this same difference of heart-his "heart murmur" (339) and the "irregularity" in his heartbeat (340)--which keeps Parham from the army and removed from World War Two. Notice how often and instinctively he drives dogs away from him: when he first meets the mute family dog after his first return from Mexico (170); when his brother's dog watches the doctor heal his brother (312); when the dogs watch him dig up his brother; ultimately, when he drives the pitiful wreck of a hunting dog into the rain (424). We both took another sip of water.

Billy then has more in common with the people who feel themselves elect from the rest of the human race by grace of their sur-

vival of a disaster (146). Billy falls closer to the man about whom the ex-priest spoke, the man who felt himself compelled to search for a God which is perceived neither in the ancient or modern manner, a God visible only in the uncertain natural happenings of the world. Billy then assumes the madman's mantle of "'witness'" (154). He is a despairing-prophet figure like the blind man whose spittle cost him his eyesight (276).[5] Like Parham, the blind man finds himself removed from both human and canine dogfights (278). Damian stopped his description and we both looked at each other then across the empty and half-full containers strewn about the table.

So the two protagonists do take the measure of Cormac McCarthy's world view--the construction or measure of character against the everyday coexistence of moral absolutes and human limitations. In addition, each book uses a dominant animal figure to depict the socio-moral assumptions of the protagonist. There was another long pause. Sounds a lot like naturalism to me, Damian offered, it has the determinism, survival, violence and taboo.[6] Yep, I agreed with him, both novels can be read as determined storylines or as the results of human choice and freedom. Well, that's easy to see in *All*, Damian confirmed, because the choice of Rawlins and Cole to help Blevins steal the horse in Encantada leads to their later arrest, but the direct links betwen events in *The Crossing* seem a little vague. I put down the water from which I was drinking. Well, Billy chooses his reactions when he meets the indian at the begining of the novel; likewise, he decides not to tell his father about meeting the indian. Moreover, when he leaves for Mexico, he takes the family's only gun

5) Cf. Gospel of Mark 8: 23-25.

6) Walcutt, Charles Child. *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream.* Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1956. 20.

with him, a decision which leaves the family helpless against the indian's shotgun. Of course, the will to freedom of action also makes the novels naturalistic: Rawlins' assertion and Cole's agreement that trouble was caused indirectly by a decision made at some earlier point which governed all further choices as well (79) and Parham's assertion that "'men shape their own lives'"(380). Damian finished his water and set his glass down gently.

But there are differences between McCarthy's naturalism and that of a classical, turn-of-the-century naturalist writer like Dreiser. How's that? For example, in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, characters seem to be either in an upward or downward movement in levels of society which are measured by material posessions. Likewise, characters are also moving upward or downward on a moral scale which has a direct relationship to the first. To move upward on the social scale involves a corresponding degree of loss in moral position. In neither McCarthy novel, though, does a shift in social position necessitate a loss or gain of moral mettle. I finished my water also; you're right, I told him.

The titles of the two books, *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*, are indicative of states of being and observation--the former suggests a totality, the latter a process. Although Cole's notions of reality never appear to change throughout *All*, Parham's waffle back and forth. Cole believes whole-heartedly in the Platonic concept of unseen absolutes: he asserts his belief in heaven (91)--an absolute that creates meaning in the real world; his life reflects this same belief when he raises horses to the status of demi-diety and dedicates his life to that absolute. Parham, on the other hand, during his third trip to Mexico, encounters the Mexican man from whom he and Boyd rescued the girl. They briefly discuss life and death, and Billy

tells the man that "'whether a man's life was writ in a book somewhere or whether it took its form day by day was one in the same for it had one reality and that was the living of it'" (381). His statement is one that divorces all absolutes from the realities and decisions of a person's life. McCarthy's naturalism is one in which the decisions and uncontrollable events of life continually create a dialectic question of absolutes for the individual to face. Well, I have a question about your last statement, Damian said.

What do you mean that Parham "'waffles back and forth'" if *The Crossing's* narrator insists after the death of the wolf that " [d]oomed enterprises divide lives forever into the now and then" (129)? After the death of the wolf and his family, Billy seems bent toward the rejection of absolutes. True, I admitted, but I took the final image of Billy's failure to face the dawn on his own terms as perhaps the breakdown of his insular world view. Yeah, Damian nodded slowly, I can see that. What do you think that the dialectical conflict between totality and fragmentation will produce in the third novel, he asked. That, I said and waved for my check, would take a paper.