Use Of Contemporary Westernism By Cormac McCarthy In All The Pretty Horses

Cormac McCarthy uses Contemporary Westernism in All the pretty horses through the main characters; John Grady Cole, Lacey Rawlins, Jimmy Blevins, and Alejandra in cooperation with colloquialism to develop a theme of loyalty and a loss of innocence. Fed up with the direction that American society is taking, two young men run away to mexico to be cowboys. They run into a younger boy who tags along, and sets up trouble for them later down the road. The two young men, John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins, begin working on a ranch as horse breakers. Where John Grady falls in love with the daughter of the boss. Right as things are beginning to look up for the two boys, they are arrested in connection with crimes that jimmy blevins has committed and sent to prison. Alejandra, the ranch boss's daughter, pleads with her great aunt to buy the freedom of the man she loves. She agrees on the condition that Alejandra must not see John Grady anymore. When he is released from prison he seeks out Alejandra. He pleads with her to run away with him to America, only to have his heart broken by the realization that she will not break her promise to her Aunt. He then returns to America a broken man. The author, Cormac Mccarthy, uses colloquialism in the form of diction and metaphors to immerse the reader in the setting of south Texas and Mexico. As shown by The New York Times critique of All The Pretty Horses “the extraordinary quality of his prose... Powered by long, tumbling many-stranded sentences.” McCarthy uses this as an effective colloquial to immerse you in not only the culture of the southwest but as well as the breathtaking landscapes in which his adventures occur. “His descriptive style is elaborate and elevated, but also used effectively to frame realistic dialogue, for which his ear is deadly accurate. He's acclaimed for using language that is so old, and almost unrecognizable, that many mistake them for relatively new or isolated terms.” These “archaisms” seem like they are outdated terms but in reality they are still commonly used diction in The southwest, especially in the nineteen fifties. His diction and phrasing come from all different time periods of English and combine into a prose all its own. That seems to invent itself as it unfolds, resembling Elizabethan language in its flux of remarkable and endless possibilities.” His remarkable use of language in highly unusual combinations is what makes his diction so unique, he then puts it through a screen of southern twang to create the prose for which he is so widely acclaimed, and known.

One of the he uses of a colloquialism in the form of diction through metaphors that Mccarthy demonstrates is by Lacey Rawlins to show the lack of trust that is afforded to strangers out on the prairie. Lacey Rawlins and John Grady Cole have just crossed into Mexico and are having a conversation with a young boy they have run into named Jimmy Blevins. “youre name aint blivet is it? Its Blevins. You know what a blivet is? What. A blivet is ten pounds of shit in a five pound sack.”(McCarthy pg.46) Lacey Rawlins lack of trust is warranted due to the environment they are in, and his choice of metaphor is a product of the environment in which he was brought up. His definition of the word blivet while not technically wrong it does point to a southern raising. The real definition of blivet is simply something that is overfull. And so the diction with which he phrases this metaphor is very obviously an attempt by mcCarthy to westernize, and westernize this definition. You can see aspects of Contemporary Westernism in his choice of metaphor, and the style of writing, in the way that he uses improper grammar and misspelled words in an attempt to immerse you in the environment of 1950’s South Texas.

The diction of Texas and the southwest as a whole is completely unique and this is showcased by Rawlins, John Grady, and Jimmy Blevins throughout the novel. Jimmy Blevins was asked why he was running away, and he responds for the same reason as Rawlins and Grady Cole. They then ask what reason that is. His response is a perfect example of southern colloquialism through another metaphor. “Cause you knowed they’d play hell sowed in oats findin your ass down here.”(McCarthy pg.64) This is an extreme case of American regional colloquialism for which the diction is highly unusual to most people. This phrase essentially means that they would react violently like oats burning in hell. This is a good example of the diction that is endemic to the South and specifically Texas and helps to immerse the reader within that setting and the Contemporary Westernism of the novel.

Another good example of colloquialism through diction within a metaphor that epitomizes southern culture, and diction is when Blevins horse is stolen by some mexicans. Rawlins is talking to John Grady on whether or not they will attempt to get it back. And Lacey Rawlins says that “A goodlookin horse is like a goodlookin woman, he said. They’re always more trouble than what they’re worth. What a man needs is just one that will get the job done.” Rawlins first says goodlookin which is another example of mcCarthy misspelling a word to show the unique diction that is present within the culture of southwestern America. He also compares horses to women, another thing that I would consider a western colloquialism. Most people might consider that an insult, to be compared to horse, but I see it as a compliment. Historically horses have played a very vital role in American culture, especially in the plains of southwest and central United States. As well as the fact he said “just one that will get the job done” which is a staple in southwestern American culture. Just getting the job done, with no need to be excessive or flashy. This was epitomized by the cowboys of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who simply made due with what they had. Which was never much. These examples support my thesis that McCarthy uses colloquialism through diction and metaphors to immerse the reader in the culture of southwestern America, and continues a trend in the genre of contemporary westernism all the while blazing a trail of his own.

Cormac McCarthy epitomizes the genre of contemporary westernism through his use of colloquialism, metaphors and building upon the existing genre of the western, and possibly foreshadows its eventual demise. Also described in the crticism by the New York Times. “The decay of Western civilization throws a long shadow over all his work.” At one point John Grady’s father even remarks 'We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago'. 'We dont know what's goin to show up here come daylight. We dont even know what color they'll be.' The novel opens and closes with eerie images of American Indians that suggest our civilization may be swallowed up as completely as theirs.” “McCarthy once reflected on the powerful workings of narrative, 'The ugly fact is that books are made out of books. ... The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written' (qtd. in Woodward 31). Just as John Grady and Rawlins depend on a tradition of popular Westerns and Hollywood films to act the part of westerners, so McCarthy is dependent in All the Pretty Horses on previous western novels. In this sense, we can read John Grady as a direct descendant of Wister's western hero in The Virginian. Figured as the classic cowboy updated for a post-World War II West, John Grady follows all the codes and conventions of the genre except that he doesn't get the girl or the ranch. Like Wister in The Virginian, McCarthy engages myths of the cowboy. All his fondness and all the leanings of his life were for the ardenthearted and they would always be so and never be otherwise' (6). In breaking the wild horses on Don Hector's ranch, John Grady ends up sowing the seeds of his own destruction, bringing an end to the mythic landscape of his dreams.” This proves my thesis of All the pretty horses epitomizing a contemporary western in that he doesn't get the girl and

there is no happy ending for John Grady.