Relocating the Cowboy: American Privilege in "All the Pretty Horses"

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Humanities

Maia Y. Rodriguez, Pepperdine University

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American novelist Cormac McCarthy published the first installment of his Border Trilogy, a novel entitled All The Pretty Horses, only a decade before the turn of the 21st century. Within a few months, essays by Alan Cheuse and Vereen M. Bell would set the tone for scholarship on McCarthy's work for the decade to follow. However, in 2012 Jordan Savage revolutionized the conversation on the concept of "border" within the Border Trilogy, identifying it as an ideological myth. This paper will further Savage’s analysis using Jacques Derrida’s Deconstructionist theory in order to analyze the binaries created by the border myth and its principal binary of AMERICA/Mexico, and particularly Derrida’s renunciation of the hierarchical nature of the binary in order to renounce the very premise of American exceptionalism.

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All the Pretty Horses is a novel by American author Cormac McCarthy published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1992. Its romanticism (in contrast to the bleakness of McCarthy’s earlier work) brought the writer much public attention. It was a bestseller, and it won both the U.S. National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. It is also the first of McCarthy’s “Border Trilogy”. The book was adapted as a 2000 film, starring Matt Damon and Penélope Cruz, and directed by Billy Bob Thornton.