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Harbingers of Death

In *All The Pretty Horses*, McCarthy uses Don Hector's greyhounds, Perez, and Duena Alfonsa as harbingers that carry images of death to foreshadow danger for John Grady. McCarthy uses this foreshadowing to create momentum in the novel and to give the reader a sense of impending doom for the boys, which ultimately allows the reader to feel emotionally connected with the novel's main character.

John Grady and Rawlins are on what they suspect to be their last journey into the mesa when "three greyhound's [trot] into the light and [circle] the fire" the young men are sitting around (McCarthy 149). The "pale and skeletal" dogs are disturbingly out of place on the peaceful mesa, the first of the harbingers carrying images of death to John Grady (McCarthy 149). The mere presence of greyhounds, which are traditionally hunting dogs, puts the readers and the young men in a state of unease. It is obvious that these dogs are trained, and it is obvious to the readers that they belong to Don Hector, which immediately forces the question, "Why is Don Hector hunting the boys?" into the readers mind. McCarthy further demonizes the dogs by describing their eyes as glowing "red in the firelight" and their skin "taut over their ribs" like sentinels at the gates of a much darker place, the underworld the boys will soon be forced into (149). McCarthy uses these dogs in the image of Cerberus to foreshadow the grave danger that John Grady and Rawlins will soon face in prison, or as McCarthy implies with the dogs, their own Hell. The two boys are heading to the worst of their destinations, and as such McCarthy

uses the most haunting of guards to give the audience insight to the scope of their danger. McCarthy uses the foreshadowing generated by the dogs to give the story momentum by generating suspense that the reader seeks to resolve. In other words, the reader knows something is coming, but doesn't know exactly what.

Similarly, McCarthy employs harbingers of death in the Mexican prison when John Grady goes to speak to the infamous Pérez. In their conversation, Pérez tests to see how much good is left in John Grady. He asks what John Grady has done and will do so that “[the world] can decide [his] price” (McCarthy 193). However, John Grady decides that he cannot be bought, and implies that he himself does not “have a price” and wonders what his fate will be. Pérez replies calmly that “[John Grady will] die” (McCarthy 193). Inherent in this short remark is the sense of impending doom that awaits John Grady, drawing the reader to question whether the main character will even live through this encounter with a harbinger in the image of Hades himself. Through the brief, intense dialogue and the thinly veiled threats on John Grady's and Rawlins lives, the reader understands that Pérez is not only carrying an image of death, but specifically the death of John Grady. The intense foreshadowing of John Grady's death is only heightened by Pérez telling him to “take care with whom [you] break bread” (McCarthy 196). True to the harbinger's promise, the boy with whom John Grady “break[s] bread” is the very person who tries to kill him. The outright threatening of John Grady's life gives the novel an aura of suspense that the reader seeks to resolve. McCarthy's creation of Pérez as a harbinger of John Grady's death gives the novel newfound momentum as the reader seeks to know John Grady's future.

Finally, McCarthy figures Duena Alfonsa as a harbinger of death during the scene in which she reveals her life story. In this scene, she informs John Grady that “in the end[,] we will

all come to be cured of out sentiments,” something that is not only relevant to her life story, but to John Grady’s as well (McCarthy 238). Alfonsa knows that John Grady loves Alejandra. Moreover, she knows that he leads his life with his sentiments. His heart is his guide; his sentiments are his compass. However, Alfonsa tells John Grady that his feelings and emotions are not guiding, but are a disease “to be cured” through the hardships of life or the early death those sentiments will bring (McCarthy 238). In this way, Alfonsa is the harbinger carrying the image of emotional death for John Grady, foreshadowing the danger he will face to uphold his sentiments. Correspondingly, the reader immediately begins to wonder, “Will John Grady die to uphold his sentiments, or live and be cured of them?” Alfonsa’s words make the reader desire to discover whether John Grady is a man whom “death will [cure]” or if life will (McCarthy 238). This final harbinger is the one who readers most want to be wrong, which gives the novel a different kind of momentum, fueled not only by the reader wanting John Grady to live, but to live and remain the moral man he has become. Through Alfonsa’s image of death, the reader discovers his or her need for John Grady to remain the man he is, and McCarthy uses that need to push the novel toward its end.