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Faulkner, McCarthy, and the Arthurian Tradition

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Pessimism and confusion pervade 20th century literature. Reflecting the feelings of the population at large, 20th century authors wrote about the crumbling social structure they observed around them. While technological developments constantly raised hopes of a perfect world, the misuse of technology quickly dashed those hopes. Visions of utopia were difficult to maintain amidst two worldwide conflicts, the Nazi holocaust, and the threat of nuclear annihilation. The formerly widespread belief that good things happened to good people seemed outmoded, outdated, and laughable.

The great work of Western literature has always been the Bible. A work whose intention was to bring its audience to righteousness, the Bible is naturally moralistic. Virtuous characters are usually rewarded, while wicked men are usually punished. God watched over his creations, and ruled as the ultimate arbiter.

The bulk of literature followed the same rules. Arthurian knights helped the downtrodden, protected maidens, and had faith in their king. They had a sense of community and religion, and experienced strong ties of brotherhood. Because they adhered to the prevailing social order, these men were rewarded. They were victorious in battle, married beautiful women, and earned the respect of their peers. Beowulf, Robin Hood, and the classic American cowboy are others who fit this mold.

On the other hand are characters who try to subvert society in some way. By breaking society's rules, these characters sealed their fate. Oedipus, Macbeth, and Ahab exemplify archetypal over-reachers. These men lost sight of their values, tried to become larger than life, and were inevitably crushed. The moral lesson was clear.

The 20th century changed everything. T.S. Eliot was quick to point out the differences between chivalric knights and the pathetic losers of 1920's London. "The Waste Land" drew heavily, according to Eliot himself, upon the Grail legend. Contrasted to bold heroes on an epic adventure was the carbuncular young man having a cheap sexual encounter, and others of his ilk. Other authors followed Eliot's lead. Hemingway's Jake Barnes is completely isolated from the world, unable to find meaning in religion or human relationships. J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield is unable to mature, and ends up institutionalized. Joyce's Stephen Daedalus is wracked with guilt over his trips to the brothel. Fitzgerald's Gatsby builds his entire life upon an impossible illusion, an attempt to reverse time.

These men are not destroyed in the traditional sense. (Gatsby was ruined long before he was murdered.) The true sadness of these men is that they don't even approach greatness, much less fail in their attempt at it. They are so confused

that they never even recognize a cause worth fighting for. The 20th century gave birth to multitudes of this kind of man, whom Nicholas Urfe terms antiheroes. Urfe, the central figure of John Fowles' *The Magus*, says of himself and others like him: "The smallest hope, a bare continuing to exist, is enough for the antihero's future; leave him says our age, leave him where mankind is in its history, at a crossroads, in dilemma, with all to lose and only more of the same to win; let him survive, but give him no direction, no reward" (657).

Two authors who have run counter to the grain of cynicism and pessimism are William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy. Faulkner's Isaac McCaslin, and McCarthy's John Grady Cole and Billy Parham share many traits with Arthur's knights. These men believe in honor, bravery, and justice. They are willing to stand up for what they believe in, even at the risk of severe personal loss. They inspire respect and admiration.

Critics are quick to point out the heroic qualities - or lack thereof - of Ike, John Grady, and Billy. "Isaac McCaslin is sufficiently ambiguous that commentators continue to disagree as to the implications of his rhetoric and behavior" (Wittenberg 49). In other words, some see Ike as a hero, a man of epic proportions, able to live peacefully amidst the chaos of the modern world. Judith Bryant Wittenberg mentions Ike's spiritual education in the wilderness, and how these experiences purified

him (63). Cleanth Brooks specifically mentions Faulkner's indebtedness to the chivalric tradition. These critics recognize Faulkner's attempt to create a viable modern hero.

Other critics, especially modern ones, lambaste Ike for being racist and sexist. Minrose Gwin attacks "Ike's inability to envision the Africanist female narrative" (87). John T. Matthews finds fault with Ike's close connection to the outdoors, the very quality which other critics praise. Matthews claims that Ike is linked with the destruction of nature, and has distilled the "essential relationship" to one of domination (35). In Matthews' vision, Ike McCaslin does not live peacefully with nature, but struggles mightily against it. Finally, Isaac is sometimes faulted for being antisocial. Matthews ponders what "Ike's ascetic renunciation of social responsibility and his retreat into the big woods" mean (21). Thadious M. Davis is even stronger about Ike's antisocial tendencies. "Ike's rejection of his inherited right … is also a rejection of his right to the masculinity and the heterosexual prerogatives" of his grandfather (146).

John Grady Cole and Billy Parham have been more warmly received. Christian Kiefer compares Billy to legendary Western heroes like Jack Schaeffer's Shane. "Billy acts, does not back down from his actions, and does not shirk his responsibilities even when faced with dire consequences" (3). Kiefer stresses

the importance of a value system to such a hero. "He is a man with a code of conduct and action which guides him and informs his actions" (1).

John Grady is also widely lauded. Gail Moore Morrison contrasts him with the typical modern antihero. "John Grady does not fall prey to existential despair in an irrational and indifferent world. Nor does he withdraw from that world in bitterness, in unforgiving judgment, in self-pity" (189). Herbert Mitgang also refers to John Grady's code of honor when he mentions that the boy "cannot abandon" Jimmy Blevins (2). Mitgang also writes of John Grady's rise in status on the hacienda, and his affair with the hacendado's daughter, as if they are the just rewards of a great hero.

The critics who look favorably upon Ike, John Grady, and Billy cite their great heroism. Often, these protagonists are compared to heroes of old. What is not usually mentioned is the stiff price these men pay for upholding their beliefs in the chaotic modern world. The critics who fault Ike usually do so for reasons totally alien to the era he lived in. Branding Ike a racist, even though he spent much of his own time and money seeking justice for his black relatives, is hard to defend. Calling him a sexist is equally puzzling, considering that the women's movement barely existed for most of Ike's life. The truth is, Ike, John Grady, and Billy are so anathema to the 20th

century it is difficult for most critics to accurately judge them.

Because his stories often depict the decay of Southern society, many critics erroneously lump Faulkner with his pessimistic contemporaries. Such is not the case. Faulkner's literature is a testament to the endurance of the human spirit. In his acceptance speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony of 1950, Faulkner uttered the immortal summary of his philosophy: "I decline to accept the end of man … I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail" (Hoffman and Vickery 348).

It is true that Faulkner created ruthless characters like Thomas Sutpen and Flem Snopes, and directionless misfits like Joe Christmas. But he also created the humble, decent, righteous figure of Isaac McCaslin. Ike stands as a tribute to the theory that an old-fashioned hero, a man with values much like those of the Round Table knights, can survive in the 20th century. (Ike's life spanned both the 19th and 20th centuries. He is a 20th century hero in the sense that Faulkner created him in the 20th century.) He also shows the heavy price a man pays for sticking to his beliefs in the modern world.

While lecturing at the University of Virginia, Faulkner was twice asked what his favorite book was. Both times his list began with *Don Quixote* (Gwynn and Blotner 50, 150). In order to appreciate a spoof of a genre, one must first understand the

genre itself. Therefore, it seems safe to assume that Faulkner was familiar with the Arthurian saga. Early in *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy refers to the grail. This thread unites the works of Faulkner and McCarthy. The tales of Arthur, Ike McCaslin, and McCarthy's heroes are all connected; they share a common sense of ideals and values.

Isaac McCaslin is the central figure of William Faulkner's short story "The Bear." He also plays an important role in "The Old People." Both of these stories are from the *Go Down, Moses* collection. Ike is very much a legendary figure, a man's man, a hero for the ages. In two ways Ike strongly resembles King Arthur. First, he has a guide and mentor, a male father figure (but not his father) to show him how to conduct himself as an adult. Secondly, both Arthur and Ike have a great sense of fairness and equality. Neither man can sit by and watch others mistreated.

"King Arthur is the greatest of British literary heroes, celebrated by poets and writers for over a thousand years. From the twelfth century to the twentieth, his exploits have been celebrated" (Barber 1). Any story which survives as long as the Arthur legend is bound to have variations. For the sake of simplicity, this paper uses Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* as the source of Camelot legend. While Malory is by no means the ultimate source (in fact, he did not write the story; he merely

translated it from French sources) of the saga, he is a fair representation. The important characters and events are contained within his two volumes.

Arthur's biological father is of course Uther Pendragon. From the beginning, however, Merlin is the one who raises the boy. In fact, Uther even needed Merlin's help to bed Igraine, Arthur's mother, in the first place. Merlin agreed to use his sorcery to satisfy Uther's lust; in return, he got to keep the offspring. Because Uther was not married to Igraine, Merlin arranges for a wet nurse.

> 'Sir,' Merlin tells his king, 'ye must purvey you for the nourishing of your child. … I know a lord of yours in this land … Sir Ector; let him be sent for, for to come and speak with you, and desire him yourself, as he loveth you, that he will put his own child to nourishing to another woman, and this his wife nourish yours.' (13)

Surprisingly, Uther agrees. It is important that Arthur was genetically the son of a king. Otherwise he never would have been accepted as his nation's leader. But in a practical sense, Merlin is Arthur's true father.

Arthur is unformed potential, and Merlin is what shapes him into something. The two not only compliment each other, they need each other. Simply put, Arthur needs someone to teach him how to be a man, a warrior, and a king. The death of his

father, and Arthur's lack of knowledge as to even who his true father was, left him needing guidance. Merlin, on the other hand, needed a nobleman to assist. He could never be a king, only the counsel to one. It is no accident that Merlin asked for the child of Uther Pendragon and Igraine.

From the beginning, Merlin is always the one who guides the young Arthur. Just after the coronation, Arthur convenes his loyal lords and discusses how to deal with the kings who do not recognize his authority. None of these loyal lords have much to say on the subject. "I thank you for your good courage, but will ye all that loveth me speak with Merlin? Ye know well that he hath done much for me, and he knoweth many things, and when he is afore you, I would that ye prayed him heartily of his best advice" (24). This is a crucial statement. Among all of his friends, Arthur makes no secret that Merlin is the most important. Whenever Arthur is in a really tough situation, Merlin's counsel is that which he will seek.

In this instance, Merlin advises Arthur to forge an alliance with King Bors and King Bans, and thus defeat his enemies. It turned out to be sound advice, as was always the case. Being a magician, it is difficult to say just how Merlin arrived at his conclusions. Perhaps he could see the future; perhaps he could actually control the events on the battlefield. Maybe sorcery had nothing to do with it, and Merlin was merely a

shrewd judge of people, situations, and military tactics. In any event, Merlin's advice was constantly sought and always correct.

Later, Merlin tells Arthur how to get the sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake.

> In the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand. 'That is the Lady of the Lake,' said Merlin; 'and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any on earth, and richly beseen; and this damosel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her that she will give you that sword' (55).

No one ever seems to question just how Merlin knows these things, but he does. Of course all turns out as Merlin predicted, and Arthur gets the sword. What's more, Merlin had to explain to Arthur the sword's powers.

> 'Whether liketh you better,' said Merlin, 'the sword or the scabbard?'
>
> 'Me liketh better the sword,' said Arthur.
>
> 'Ye are the more unwise,' said Merlin, 'for the scabbard is worth ten of the swords, for whiles ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood be ye never so sore wounded, therefore keep well the scabbard always with you.' (57)

This is of major significance. Excalibur is the talisman most widely associated with Arthur. It is what allows him to be victorious on the battlefield, and something which separates him from other monarchs. Possessing Excalibur is a coming of age for Arthur.

In one instance Merlin even saves Arthur's life. A certain knight, Pellinor, challenges Arthur to a joust. There is no animosity between the two men; it just so happens that Pellinor challenges everyone who rides by. They take a few turns, and the results are basically a tie. The third time they charge at each other, however, Arthur is clearly bested. "Therewith they ran together that Arthur's spear all to-shivered. But the other knight hit [Arthur] so hard in the midst of the shield, that horse and man fell to the earth" (53). Furious at having been over-matched, Arthur draws his sword; Pellinor comes down off his horse and the two begin fighting.

> And there began a battle with many great strokes, and so hewed with their swords that the cantels flew in the fields, and much blood bled both, that all the place there as they fought was overbled with blood … So at the last they smote together that both their swords met even together. But the sword of the Knight smote King Arthur's sword in two pieces. (54)

This is a fascinating scene for several reasons. First of all, one does not usually think of Arthur as being the loser of a fight. Malory knew that even a great hero like Arthur could be bested on a given day. Secondly, it is not a lucky blow which allows Pellinor to defeat Arthur. Essentially, Pellinor defeated him twice. Thirdly, it should be noted that even defeats are fortunate for Arthur. Arthur fought the good fight, but he was no match for the giant. Because Pellinor smashes Arthur's sword, Arthur winds up with Excalibur. Finally, this scene is mesmerizing because Merlin has to intervene to save his king's life. "Then would [Pellinor] have slain [Arthur] for dread of his wrath, and heaved up his sword, and therewith Merlin cast an enchantment to the knight, that he fell to the earth in a great sleep" (54). As Merlin and Arthur ride away from the slumbering giant, the sorcerer mentions that in the future, Pellinor will be the king's ally. What's more, Pellinor will be the one who tells Arthur "the name of your own son begotten of your sister that shall be the destruction of all this realm" (55).

With all of the help and tutelage Merlin gives Arthur, there is one more thing which must occur: Merlin must die. In order for Arthur to be the supreme ruler of Britain, he must not play second fiddle to anyone -- not even his mentor and guide. As long as Merlin is around, Arthur will always be thought of as

an apprentice. He will never be the king, merely the king in training. It is not enough for Merlin to go away; he has to die, making it clear that he will not be back. (Malory avoids the trap of making the teacher and student turn against each other, and having the student prove his worth by defeating his former master. Such plot twists debase both characters, and seriously undermine the entire relationship between the guide and the guided.) It is difficult to conceive of any way a magician of such great power can wind up dead; perhaps that is why the tale of Merlin's death seems so dull. Basically, Merlin falls in love with the Damosel of the Lake, named Nimue. She is not particularly interested in him; in fact, she looks for every opportunity to leave Merlin. When Merlin shows her a stone, "by her subtle working she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he come never out for all the craft he could do" (118). It isn't clear why Merlin thought Nimue would be interested in a rock; this isn't much of an exit for the chief counsel of a king.

Isaac McCaslin shares similar experiences with his spiritual guide, Sam Fathers. Just as Arthur is only nominally connected to Uther Pendragon, Ike has only a slight connection with his biological father, Theophilus "Buck" McCaslin. Because he married so late in life, Buck died when Ike was young. It is

not clear what happened to Ike's mother, but she is not significant. "The father was dead by the time Isaac was ten years old. The evidence would suggest that Isaac's mother died earlier. She simply does not figure at all in the story of Isaac's growing up" (Brooks 72-73). Therefore, most of Ike's childhood memories center around his cousin McCaslin Edmonds. Ike's true father figure, though, is the part black, part Indian Sam Fathers. Sam's last name was derived when an Indian chief impregnated a slave woman, and then sold her to another man. Sam's full last name is Had-Two-Fathers. The shortened form of his name emphasizes the paternal nature of his relationship with Ike.

Just as Arthur asked Merlin's advice on the most important endeavor of his day -- war -- Ike received instruction from Sam on the most important aspect of his life: hunting. From the beginning, it is Sam who teaches Ike how to track animals, find his way through the woods, and safely handle a weapon. When Ike gets lost in the woods, he "did as Sam had coached and drilled him" (199). When a deer approaches Sam and Ike, but not closely enough to shoot, Sam tells the boy how to respond.

> Slant your gun up a little and draw back the hammers and stand still.
>
> But it was not for him. … The instant had passed. It seemed to him that he could actually see the deer, the

> buck, smoke-colored, elongated with speed, vanished. … 'Now let your hammers down,' Sam said. 'I want you to learn how to do when you didn't shoot. It's after the chance for the bear or the deer has done already come and gone that men and dogs get killed.' (188)

Sam is the one who associates morality with knowledge of the wilderness. The main thrust of "The Bear" deals with a group of hunters trying to slay an enormous bear called Old Ben. Ike is fascinated by the bear, but has mixed feelings about killing it. His humility is such that he knows he will not be the one to shoot Old Ben. "That wouldn't be me. It would be Walter or Major, or--" Ike says of the idea of killing the bear (193). Instead, Ike is more interested in seeing the bear, actually encountering it. So Ike sets off into the woods, but is unable to come across the beast. Without being told a thing, Sam immediately knows what the boy has been up to. "You ain't looked right yet. It's the gun. You will have to choose" (197-198). Sam knows that Old Ben is wily, and can avoid people who might harm him. He also knows that Ike wants to meet the bear on even terms, and that the only way to do so is to leave behind the trappings of civilization. If it is to be a meeting of equals, Ike must shed his advantages. Later, when Ike has gone looking for the bear without the gun, he realizes that he has not done enough. "Then he relinquished completely to it. It

was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of the one and the looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush" (199). The word 'tainted' is paramount; Sam has filled Ike's head with the notion that the wilderness is beautiful and civilization is not. Lewis M. Dabney refers to Sam as "Ike's instructor-priest" (120). The religious references continue. Dabney later refers to Sam as "forest priest" and the embodiment of "all the priestly figures of his ancestors" (145). Merlin did not only instruct Arthur as to facts, but opinions as well. Sam Fathers taught Ike both how to live in the woods and how to respect the woods.

David Spangler says of Merlin: "He is not one who acquires and wields power for its own sake, but one who uses whatever power or resources are available to bring something new into being, and to guard and nourish it until it is able to take its rightful place in the scheme of things" (12). The exact same words could be used in regard to Sam Fathers.

The importance of Sam Fathers to Ike's development cannot be overestimated. Sam does not posses the magical powers of Merlin, but his outdoor skills do at times seem otherworldly. Sam is the end of a genetic line, the descendant of not only a Chickasaw Indian, but a chief. He assigns supreme importance to the transfer of knowledge -- knowledge of the woods, knowledge

of animals, and knowledge of how people fit into the universal scheme of things -- to Ike. Ike eventually does absorb this knowledge, and he becomes the last of a dying breed. Faulkner comments on the role of Sam Fathers in Ike's education. "If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the back yard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college" (201).

When Merlin presented Arthur with Excalibur, it was as if he anointed him an adult. He gave Arthur the tool he would need to be a successful king, warrior, and man. Sam Fathers performs a similar initiation rite for Isaac McCaslin. The scene where Ike kills his first deer is referred to in "The Bear," but is more fully described in "The Old People." After shooting the buck, Sam tells Ike how to put the animal out of its misery. "The boy … drew the head back and the throat taut and drew Sam Fathers' knife across the throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face" (158). This seems grotesque, but it is really a baptism for Ike. Sam marks the boy as being a worthy hunter, a quality woodsman. Ike repeatedly finds Sam's approval a source of inspiration. "I done taught you all there is of this settled country. You can hunt it good as I can now," Sam tells him (167). Ike himself harkens back to his initiation, remembering "the blood with which Sam had marked him forever one

with the wilderness which had accepted him since Sam had said that he had done all right" (171). Two things emerge from this statement. The first is that the effects of Sam's actions were permanent; Ike did not cease to be a worthy woodsman when he washed the blood off his face, or at any other time. Secondly, Ike is admitted into the elite company of genuine outdoorsmen because Sam Fathers willed it so.

Just as Arthur needed to be rid of Merlin to truly be king, Ike had to separate himself from Sam. He could never be the premier woodsman as long as Sam was around. Actually, it was Sam who initiated the separation, suggesting to Major de Spain that he live in the hunting area year round. It is interesting that other characters view this change in terms of how it will affect Ike. "What about Isaac here? Are you going to take him with you?" McCaslin Edmonds asks (166-167). Ike himself, a mere boy at the time, understands what Sam is doing.

> Since he was nine now, he could understand that Sam could leave him and their days and nights in the woods together without any wrench. He believed that he and Sam both knew that this was not only temporary but that the exigencies of his maturing, of that for which Sam had been training him all his life to some day dedicate himself, required it. (167)

In other words, Ike recognizes that he no longer needs Sam's guidance to hunt squirrels in his backyard. He knows that he is progressing to the point where he will not need Sam at all.

After he starts going to the Big Bottom -- the wilderness -- Ike does indeed become a master outdoorsman. Before the hunt for Old Ben, General Compson tells Cass Edmonds, "I want Ike to ride Katie. He's already a better woodsman than you or me" (227). Such rapid progress by Isaac renders Sam's tutelage obsolete. The final severance between the two comes with Sam's death. Not coincidentally, Sam dies around the same time that Old Ben was finally killed. It was as if one could not survive without the other. Both symbolize the fading power of the wilderness, man's encroachment upon nature, and the wisdom and strength which can be gained from the outdoors. Sam's death marks the end of an old era, and the beginning of a new one -- an era where Isaac McCaslin is the greatest hunter of a rapidly shrinking wilderness.

Isaac and Arthur share other important qualities. Both are remarkably humble, despite their stature; both have a wonderful sense of equality among their fellow men. Sam Fathers and Merlin were instrumental in developing these traits. Ike constantly had drilled into his head that the most important attribute of a quality woodsman was humility. Judging from the upbraidings Merlin gives his king, it seems safe to assume that

Arthur never became conceited. From this humility flows the sense of equality. Because Arthur and Ike view other people as their friends, not their servants, they treat them fairly. It takes a great hero to be able to sympathize with ordinary folks.

One of the basic tenets of Camelot was equality. After all, the Round Table was round so that no one sat at the head and no one at the foot. Chivalric knights are a bit paradoxical. On the one hand, they are constantly questing for personal glory. They admire the exalted. On the other hand, they always seem to be fighting for the oppressed and helping society's underdogs. Arthur's knights stood for equality by empowering the disenfranchised and righting as many wrongs as they could.

There are many examples of this. In one instance, Sir Launcelot slays a knight who has a history of tormenting women. When he is told of such a person, Launcelot is immediately offended. "What? Is he a thief and a knight and a ravisher of women? He doth shame unto the order of knighthood, and contrary to his oath; it is a pity that he liveth" (210-211). Many details are important. First, the rogue knight is picking on women. On average, women are less able to defend themselves than men. In the chivalric era, they would not be expected to. To abuse a woman was not only to abuse an exalted member of society, but a defenseless one. Secondly, it appears that the

knight sneaks up on the women; he is described as coming "out of the wood" (211). Not only is he facing weaker opponents than himself, he is not even facing them fairly. Finally, the man is a knight. This type of behavior would be egregious for anyone. A knight takes an oath not only to not act this way, but to fight against people who do. Launcelot was right to be displeased.

Sir Gawain and Sir Uwain act similarly. When they hear of a knight -- Sir Marhaus -- who mistreats ladies, they immediately challenge him. "It beseemeth evil a good knight to despise all ladies and gentlewomen," Gawain says (144). The concept of going against an oppressed group of society is not only distasteful, it is sacrilegious. Gawain describes it as evil; Launcelot speaks of breaking an oath. In a time when faith and religion were far more important than they are now, these words should not be taken lightly. They are proof that Arthurian knights took seriously their responsibility of treating others fairly.

As the leader of Britain, Arthur was also the moral center. Therefore, he had to lead by example. In one adventure, Arthur encounters a group of incarcerated knights. An evil character named Sir Damas has usurped his brother's house and lands, and shanghaied any neighboring knight who might oppose him. Partly seeking glory but mostly offended by the injustice, Arthur

battles and defeats Damas. Sir Ontzlake, the younger brother, is reconciled with Damas, and the imprisoned knights are freed. Arthur gains nothing from this except a boost to his reputation and the satisfaction that fairness has ruled the day. In another scene, Arthur grants the wish of Aries, a poor cowherd, and knights his son Tor. Again, equality and fairness reign. In Arthur's world, a man should not be denied his chance at greatness just because his parents are poor.

Ike McCaslin is another crusader for justice. The fourth chapter of "The Bear," easily the most difficult part of the work, chronicles Ike's struggle to correct the injustices inflicted upon his grandfather's slaves. According to Faulkner, the fourth section should be skipped when reading only "The Bear" (as opposed to *Go Down, Moses*); this would be a great loss, however, since it sheds so much light on Isaac's moral content.

For much of this chapter, Ike sits in the plantation storehouse, discussing family history with his cousin Cass. Specifically, they refer to the ledgers which detail the family history from Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin (Ike's grandfather) to Theophilus and Amodeus (Buck and Buddy -- Ike's father and uncle). The argument between Ike and Cass is because Ike will not accept his inheritance, the family land.

Because chapter four is written in stream-of-consciousness style, as well as its profoundly philosophical nature, many people find it difficult to understand. One of the major thrusts of the section is Ike's realization of just what a scoundrel his grandfather was, and then his attempts to rectify those evil actions. In one ledger entry, Ike learns that Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin purchased a female slave named Eunice in New Orleans, 1807. The ledger also tells Ike that Eunice had a daughter, and drowned herself in a creek on Christmas day, 1833. Tomasina, Eunice's daughter, was born in 1810, three years after her mother was brought to the McCaslin plantation; she died while giving birth, 1833.

At first these ledgers seem a bit tedious. Written in the bad spelling and grammar of Buck and Buddy, they are even a little childish. Eventually, however, the true horror of Lucius McCaslin dawns on his grandson. First of all, the idea of owning, buying, and selling human beings is completely distasteful to Ike. The only thing which made his father and uncle's tenure as slave owners palatable to him was that those men treated the slaves fairly. They let them live in the big house, and -- as long as the work in the field got done during the day -- let them roam freely at night. Ike's grandfather, on the contrary, was much more vicious and selfish.

The purchase of Eunice was what first tipped Ike off. Why would a man need another slave, when his plantation was running smoothly? Surely all of the necessary work was getting done. Ike concludes that his grandfather, "(not even a widower then) who never went anywhere … and who did not need another slave, had gone all the way to New Orleans and bought one" (259). The obvious answer is that Eunice was meant to satisfy Lucius' sexual needs. When there is a master/ slave relationship, there can be no such thing as consensual sex. Eunice simply wasn't allowed to say no to her owner. The only word to describe this situation is rape. So not only is Ike's grandfather an adulterer, but a rapist as well.

Occurrences of white men raping slave women were not rare. While the frequency of the event does not make it any less despicable, it does make it less remarkable. Ike's family history doesn't contain anything a dozen or so other Yoknapatawpha families also contain. Unfortunately for him, his grandfather didn't stop with Eunice. It is no coincidence that Tomasina was pregnant and that Eunice killed herself in the same year. Lucius Quintus Carothers lusted after Tomey, and raped her as well. Upon discovering that her daughter was pregnant by her father, Eunice commits suicide. "His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him," Ike thinks (259). As proof of the deed, however, Ike has his own memory. "He knew from his

own observation that there had already been some white in Tomey's Terrel's blood before his father gave him the rest of it" (259).

To make matters worse, Lucius is completely unrepentant. In fact, he even seems a bit contemptuous. When he dies, he leaves Terrel -- Tomey's son -- the sum of one thousand dollars.

> [Lucius Quintus Carothers] made no effort either to explain or obfuscate the thousand dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave girl, to be paid only at the child's coming of age, bearing the consequence of the act which there was still no definite incontrovertible proof that he acknowledged, not out of his substance but penalizing his sons with it, charging them a cash forfeit on the accident of their own paternity; ... flinging almost contemptuously ... the thousand dollars which could have no more reality to him under those conditions then it would have to the negro, the slave who would not even see it until he came of age ... So I guess that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger [Ike] thought. (257-258)

Certain critics have confused Ike's motivations, claiming that he rejected his inheritance out of guilt. "He was driven to repudiation by the guilt inherited from the McCaslin sin against the Negro," says Melvin Backman. "Isaac was seeking to atone for the inherited sin" (168, 171). Herbert A. Perluck is

even harsher. In his view, Isaac is not only guilty about the South's history, but unable to cope with reality at all. His repudiation allowed Ike to "think he had freed himself from what being human and alive in time imposes on a man" (178). In other words, Perluck feels that the rejection of the family land is merely one aspect of Ike's rejection of life in general.

These critics are too steeped in cynicism to recognize magnanimous deeds. Nowadays, anyone who gives selflessly is assumed to have some psychological problems to work out. In fact, charity is a well-established institution. Instead of finding fault with those who are overly generous, perhaps it is time to start faulting those who are not. If Ike is consumed by guilt, why does he abandon his search for Tennie's Jim? Why does he claim that Sam Fathers 'set him free'?

There are numerous reasons why Isaac will not accept his inheritance. First of all, the family money came from his grandfather, whom Ike wanted no part of. Secondly, the entire social system which allowed Lucius Quintus Carothers to become rich was unjust. It allowed one group of human beings to be bought, sold, flogged, or raped, with impunity for the whites, and no possibility of recourse for the blacks. Thirdly, there were people who had been wronged, and Ike wanted to rectify what he could. Finally, there are more direct descendants of Lucius Quintus Carothers than Ike. Ike is his grandson, so he is two

generations removed. The three children of Terrel are also his grandchildren; but because of what was done to Eunice and Tomey, they have more of the old man's blood than anyone else. Not only does Ike repudiate his inheritance, he tracks down Terrel's children and gives money to them. Just as Arthur and his knights did, Ike McCaslin quested for justice. He didn't care what it cost him, or what danger his life was in (travelling to strange areas with large amounts of cash), as long as he was assisting those who needed help.

William Faulkner was not the only author to model characters on Arthurian figures. Cormac McCarthy emerged as a major force in American literature with the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992. The book won the National Book Award for Fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. It also introduced the world to John Grady Cole. John Grady, like Isaac McCaslin, is a modern character who contains the essential qualities of a classic hero. The follow up to *All the Pretty Horses* was 1994's *The Crossing*. John Grady does not appear in this book; part two of the Border Trilogy chronicles the life of Billy Parham. Like John Grady, Billy is a young man with a clear sense of duty, and a person who is willing to sacrifice for what he believes in. The end of the saga is *Cities of the Plain*, published in 1998. This volume features

John Grady and Billy working together on a ranch in New Mexico in the early 1950s.

McCarthy is consistently compared to Faulkner. "Cormac McCarthy must be acknowledged as a talent equal to William Faulkner, but whatever he may owe to Faulkner's style, his substance could not be more different," says Madison Smartt Bell (2). Richard B. Woodward concurs. "McCarthy's style owes much to Faulkner's -- in its recondite vocabulary, punctuation, portentous rhetoric, use of dialect and concrete sense of the world" (5). McCarthy himself does not deny his debt to the Southern legend.

Like Faulkner, McCarthy is often misinterpreted. Bell claims that both John Grady and his creator "seem to hold a higher opinion of horses" than people (3). Later, Bell says that "in McCarthy's work human thought and activity seem almost completely inconsequential when projected upon the vast alien landscapes where they occur" (2). How then, does one explain John Grady's guilt over the man he killed in prison? Or his response to Rawlins, who tells him not to get upset over his ex-girlfriend, because women aren't worth getting upset over. "Yes they are" (10). Robert Coles, quoted by Woodward, correctly pointed out that McCarthy's fate "is to be relatively unknown and often misinterpreted" because of his refusal to mold himself to the modern world (6). Woodward agrees, commenting that --

like Flannery O'Conner -- McCarthy "sides with the misfits and anachronisms of modern life" (7).

In the beginning of *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady is presented as a doomed young man, much like the characters Hemingway often gives us. Everything in his life seems to be falling apart at once. The second scene in the novel is that of John Grady's grandfather's funeral. The death of the old man, for whom John Grady had much love and respect, triggered an abrupt change in the boy's life.

Even nature itself seems to pay no heed to John Grady's feelings. At a time when he most wants things to be solemn, the weather wrecks everything.

> A norther had blown in about midmorning and there were spits of snow in the air with blowing dust and the women sat holding on to their hats. They'd put an awning up over the gravesite but the weather was all sideways and it did no good. The canvas rattled and flapped and the preacher's words were lost in the wind. When it was over and the mourners rose to go the canvas chairs they'd been sitting on raced away tumbling among the tombstones. (4-5)

God is not benevolent towards good people, like in much pre-20th century literature. He is not even indifferent; in this scene, God appears to be overtly malicious, and at a time when compassion is most needed.

The death of John Grady's grandfather accents many other difficulties the boy is living through. For one, his parents are already separated, and are in the process of getting divorced. In the 1990s, divorce is common; in 1949, however -- the time of *All the Pretty Horses* -- such was not the case. It was a far more scandalous and traumatizing experience. The reasons for the divorce are never spelled out, but two things are abundantly clear. The first is that John Grady's father was never quite the same man after being held in a Japanese prison camp; the second is that his mother is a passionless, uncompromising woman. Since his parents had been apart for so long, the actual finalization of the divorce had little impact on John Grady. What really shocks and upsets John Grady is how the divorce affected his grandfather. In a conversation with Mr. Franklin, a local attorney, John Grady discovers that the paperwork has been finalized.

They aint divorced.

Yes they are.

The boy looked up.

It's a matter of public record so I don't guess its out of confidence. It was in the paper.

When?

It was made final three weeks ago.

He looked down. Franklin watched him.

It was final before the old man died. (17)

The timing of the events is what really hurts John Grady. First of all, he cannot help but see the incidents as cause and effect. That the anxiety caused by his daughter's divorce hastened the old man's death seems obvious. Also, when John Grady's father was in the prison camp during the war, his father-in-law was the one who believed Mr. Cole would return home. Old man Grady never lost faith that Mr. Cole was still alive. "He never give up. He was the one told me not to. He said let's not have a funeral till we got somethin to bury, if it ain't nothin but his dogtags. They were fixin to give your clothes away" (12-13). John Grady senses a spiritual link between the two men. To have his parents separate is painful; the death of his grandfather is tragic. To combine the two makes the pain nearly unendurable.

The truth of the matter is that John Grady has had anything but a pampered, sheltered childhood. The death of his grandfather and the divorce of his parents accentuate the fact that John Grady has no real grounding in life, and no emotional anchors.

Later, it is revealed that John Grady's father is dying. A casual reader might miss this, but this fact greatly shapes interactions between John Grady and his dad. During the previously mentioned conversation with Mr. Franklin, the lawyer

mentioned that Mr. Cole is no longer going to the doctor. At first glance, this seems a harmless enough statement. Lots of people go without medical care. On further reflection, however, it is apparent that Mr. Cole no longer sees a doctor because there is no use. Whatever he has is terminal, and John Grady knows it.

This knowledge permeates everything John Grady and his father say to each other, even though the subject is never directly broached. When John Grady and his father meet at the Eagle Café, the father lights a cigarette. John Grady tells him that he's "got no business smokin them things"; at first Mr. Cole bristles at the prospect of being reprimanded by a teenager. Then he realizes all of the pressure John Grady is under, and relents: "You can say whatever's on your mind. Hell. You can bitch at me about smokin if you want" (8-9). Despite the invitation, John Grady and his father never do discuss the father's obviously smoking-related illness.

The scenes with John Grady and his father are filled with doom; Mr. Cole's imminent death hangs over both of them like a toxic cloud. In a perfect evocation of Mr. Cole's despair, McCarthy describes him stirring his coffee.

> His father stirred his coffee a long time. There was nothing to stir because he drank it black. He took the spoon and laid it smoking on the paper napkin and raised

> the cup and looked at it and drank. He was still looking out the window although there was nothing to see. (24)

Mr. Cole stirs nothing and stares at nothing because he is frustrated and scared. He knows he doesn't have long to live, and he knows his son is in a fragile emotional state. If it is difficult for Mr. Cole to face up to the harsh reality of his condition, it is doubly difficult for his teenage son.

John Grady is much closer to his father than his mother. Probably because they are both males, John Grady and Mr. Cole share common interests. The primary of these is of course a tremendous love of horses. They also like chess and cards. On the other hand, Mrs. Cole is something of an artistic spirit. John Grady goes to see the play she is acting in, but has no idea of what any of it means. Their encounters are painfully brief and icy.

> She came down the stairs and stood in the office doorway and turned on the wall switch light … He looked at her and looked out the window again.
>
> What are you doing? she said.
>
> Setting.
>
> She stood there in her robe for a long time. Then she turned and went back down the hall and up the stairs again. When he heard the door close he got up and turned off the light. (11)

It doesn't seem like either John Grady or Mrs. Cole are nasty people; they just don't have similar values. McCarthy mentions that when Mrs. Cole is away, John Grady eats with the Hispanic servants in the kitchen. When she is home, he eats with her in the dining room. This is a perfect summary of how the two people's lifestyles are mutually disruptive. It can't be anything but difficult for a sixteen year old boy to lose one parent; but for John Grady's father to die, and for him to have to live in a city with his mother, is especially difficult. He simply could not endure such a life. From the instant it became clear that Mr. Cole was terminal, John Grady was essentially homeless.

As if all of this weren't enough to break the toughest spirit, two more catastrophes befall John Grady. The first is that his girlfriend leaves him. McCarthy describes this in his wonderfully dry manner. When Mary Catherine meets John Grady on the avenue, she tells him, "I don't have any bad feelings against you." He replies, "You got no reason to" (29). Previously, Mr. Cole asked his son about the relationship:

> You still seein that Barnett girl?
>
> He shook his head.
>
> She quit you or did you quit her?
>
> I don't know.
>
> That means she quit you. (24)

Although it is told in a comedic fashion, it must be remembered that John Grady is only sixteen years old. A broken heart, especially when jilted for someone else, is a difficult thing to overcome. Compared to the more serious tragedies in his life, this seems like a minor affair. But all of the misfortune at once has a cumulative effect.

The final issue which pushes the boy to the brink is the divorce settlement. The ranch was owned by the Grady family so the grandfather willed it to his daughter. Mrs. Cole, an aspiring actress, has no desire to live on a ranch in Texas. The family homestead is put up for sale, leaving John Grady completely isolated from everything he has ever known and wanted. John Grady goes to San Angelo to watch the play his mother is in, but the events on stage mean nothing to him. He cannot comprehend why his mother would abandon her roots and pursue such a lifestyle. He desperately pleads with his mother, trying to work out an arrangement so he can stay on the ranch. But as the lawyer Mr. Franklin puts it,

> Son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven. She don't want to live out there, that's all. If it was a payin proposition that'd be one thing. But it aint. … She's a young woman and my guess is she'd like to

have a little more social life than what she's got used to. (17)

All of this happens within the first thirty pages of the novel. In the hands of a lesser author, John Grady's plight would come across as a cheap shill for sympathy. But that is not McCarthy's intention at all. The avalanche of misfortune which crashes down on John Grady serves to prove a point. Jake Barnes was dealt a cruel blow by life, and he chose bitterness and cynicism. Jay Gatsby tried to reinvent his persona, and pass his new self off on an unsuspecting society. John Grady Cole did none of these things; he did not let serious misfortune change how he treated and viewed other people. He had a clear enough understanding of his own values to not let his core beliefs be dictated by outside forces. Instead, he chose to go to Mexico and start fresh.

According to Gail Moore Morrison, "John Grady confronts [adverse circumstances] with a courage, strength of character and grace that seem to emanate from an unwavering commitment to a set of significant values he has internalized" (175-176).

Consciously or not, McCarthy created John Grady in practically the exact likeness of an Arthurian knight. It is difficult to place a 20th century American cowboy in a similar situation as a medieval British knight; other than the fact that both men ride horses, Arthur and John Grady led vastly different

lives. But while the situations they encounter are different, the underlying behavior patterns are the same.

Compare the events of Malory's episode about Arthur's battle against a particular giant to the horse breaking scene from McCarthy's novel. The details are extremely important, because that is how the authors create the character type they have in mind. The presentation must be a cumulative effect.

Both stories start out with the hero being faced with a daunting task. In the Arthurian tale, the king receives news of

> a great giant which had slain, murdered and devoured much people of the country … in so much that all the children be all slain and destroyed; now late he hath taken the Duchess of Brittany … for to ravish and lie by her to her life's end. (173-174)

Arthur immediately leaps at the chance of facing such a powerful foe and righting such a monumental wrong. When Arthur approaches the giant, in order to fight him, the giant is busy with dinner. "He sat at supper gnawing on a limb of a man, baking his broad limbs by the fire, and breechless, and three fair damosels turning three broaches whereon were broached twelve young children late born" (175).

At first glance, the details of the giant's cruelty seem to be overly graphic, perhaps even superfluous. But Malory knew exactly what he was doing. He needed Arthur's enemy to be the

very essence of evil. By opposing such an evil creature, Arthur immediately appears more virtuous. Just in case anyone in the audience was rooting for the giant, Malory had to change that opinion. No one is going to want to associate himself with a monster who rapes women, kills and eats children, and enslaves people. The more fearsome the enemy, the more glory is to be had from conquering that enemy.

Of course John Grady Cole didn't do battle against any giants, but McCarthy did present him with an equally intimidating task. The owner of a Mexican ranch called Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Conception herds sixteen wild colts into a corral. There were not enough broken horses on the ranch for all of the laborers, so wild ones from the hills were needed. Working as a cowboy on the ranch, John Grady volunteers to tame the animals. Just as Arthur was warned of the frightening characteristics of the giant, John Grady is reminded just how wild the horses are. "That's as spooky a bunch of horses as I ever saw," comments Lacey Rawlins, John Grady's best friend (98). Later, Rawlins adds, "I'm goin to tell you right now, cousin. This is a heathenish bunch" (103). Even the impersonal narrator agrees. "They did not smell like horses. They smelled like what they were, wild animals" (103). No self-respecting cowboy can take pride in the fact that he has broken a group of enervated animals. Just as Arthur only achieves glory by

defeating a truly monstrous giant, John Grady gains notoriety by breaking a pack of almost rabid colts.

This thread is carried even further in both stories. For dramatic effect, Arthur is told of how many other people tried to rescue the duchess, only to fail. The man who tells Arthur about the giant in the first place mentions this. "More than five hundred, but all they might not rescue her" (174). It isn't clear if the giant defeated an army of five hundred men, or if he did battle against several smaller groups, totaling five hundred. Either way, he has proven himself to be a formidable foe. Undaunted, Arthur sets off anyway. In the giant's camp, one of the captives warns Arthur again. "If ye were such fifty as ye be, ye were not able to make resistance against this devil" (175). A few minutes later, she adds: "[The giant] hath vanquished fifteen kings" (175).

These comments are important for a couple of reasons. First, they reinforce the giant's reputation for ferocity. Again, the greater the opponent one vanquishes, the greater the hero. Secondly, it is significant that other royalty tried to rescue the duchess with no success. Arthur lived in a society divided between peasants and nobles. No details are given about the five hundred would-be rescuers; no king could be proud about winning where only mere peasants had lost before. A king's

competition must be other kings. To be truly glorious, Arthur must succeed where other noblemen have not.

John Grady receives similar warnings. He takes Rawlins with him to meet the hacienda foreman -- the gerente -- and tells him they can break all sixteen horses in four days. Because the conversation is in Spanish, Rawlins does not understand everything. After leaving, he asks John Grady, "What did he say?" "He said we were full of shit. But in a nice way" (102). Besides being funny, John Grady's response says a lot. The task that he and Rawlins have volunteered for is so massive that a seasoned rancher cannot even take seriously the thought of two teenagers accomplishing it.

Another key ingredient which both stories incorporate is the presence of one or more partners. A great hero does not usually act alone; camaraderie and a sense of equality are part of what makes a great hero so majestic. When Arthur goes to fight the giant, he takes two friends with him -- Sir Kay and Sir Bedevere. This was fortunate, for while Arthur did defeat the giant mostly on his own, he did need a little help from his companions. After killing the giant -- by throttling him, and then wrestling him down a steep hill -- Arthur is pinned down by the giant's carcass. Apparently Arthur was strong enough to toss about the living giant, but too tired to wriggle from underneath the corpse. "It fortuned [Arthur and the giant] came

to the place whereas the two knights were and kept Arthur's horse; then when they saw the king fast in the giant's arms they came and loosed him" (176).

Having his friends at hand allows Arthur a chance to display his magnanimity. He immediately orders Sir Kay to bring the giant's head to Sir Howell, the unfortunate husband of the duchess. Then he tells Kay and Sir Bedevere to help themselves to the giant's possessions. On a practical level, Arthur is inspiring loyalty by making his followers rich. In terms of creating a heroic legend, Arthur is doing the lion's share of the work and then spreading out the rewards.

John Grady Cole also functions as part of a team. Just as Kay and Bedevere are not the ones who kill the monster, Lacey Rawlins is not breaking the horses. Despite this, his presence is as integral to the scene as John Grady's. First of all, a second character allows the obvious plot device of dialogue. Without someone to talk to, the audience wouldn't know what John Grady is thinking or doing. Secondly, Rawlins serves as a measuring stick of John Grady's greatness. Lacey Rawlins is a person most readers can probably relate to; he is more than adequately skilled at most tasks he puts his mind to. He is no mythic figure, but nor is he a clownish buffoon. The fact that John Grady is doing most of the work -- far excelling even a hard worker like Rawlins -- proves beyond doubt that John Grady

is made of special stuff. Finally, just as Arthur needed someone to share his glory, so do all true heroes. For John Grady, to break all sixteen horses alone would defeat the purpose of the scene. In one way, it might make him look even more impressive. After all, this would mean he did the entire task instead of merely most of it. On the other hand, though, to act alone would undercut John Grady's greatness. If he's such a terrific guy, how come he doesn't have any friends?

The final component of doing the impossible is the glory one receives. Since Arthur is one of the most celebrated figures in the Western world, Malory does not dwell too much on this. Most of it goes without saying. Still, there is a little bit of boasting from the king. "This was the fiercest giant that ever I met with, save one in the mount of Araby, which I overcame, but this was greater and fiercer" (176). Arthur's fractured logic aside, one should note that false modesty is not a trait of the classic hero. False modesty is a kind of misrepresentation; in Christian theology, it is considered pride, since through this modesty one attempts to bring attention to oneself. Impurities of this sort run counter to the grain of Arthurian myth.

Anyway, after Arthur brags on himself, he gets some accolades from others. "And anon [his feat] was known through all of the country, wherefore the people came and thanked the

king" (176). As stated earlier, Arthur's greatness is well established. Therefore, Malory does not spill a lot of ink on descriptions of him being congratulated. Understated as it is, there can be no doubt that Arthur has won the respect of his countrymen.

On the contrary, John Grady Cole is a relative unknown. After all, he is only a sixteen year old kid recently arrived in Mexico. But the celebrity he earns from breaking the sixteen horses is substantial. Before noon of the first day of work, John Grady and Lacey have developed something of a fan club.

> By the time they had three of the horses sidelined in the trap … there were several vaqueros at the gate drinking coffee in a leisurely fashion and watching the proceedings. By midmorning eight of the horses stood tied. The entire complement of vaqueros had come from the bunkhouse to watch and by noon all sixteen of the mestenos were standing about in the potrero sidehobbled to their own hackamores. (104-105)

This raises a question. Why are the heroes tackling these chores with such limited manpower, while other able-bodied men stand idly by? A seemingly appropriate answer for the instance in *All the Pretty Horses* would be that the gerente needs the other men for other tasks. Considering that the other cowboys watch John Grady and Rawlins work all day, this can not be true.

In King Arthur's case, he had an entire army amassed, ready to do battle with the Romans. It would seem utter foolishness to risk the leader's life on such a frivolous sideshow. The reason is, once again, glory. There is nothing to be proud of in defeating a giant with an entire army, or breaking sixteen horses with fifty men.

John Grady's legend continues to grow. "When [John Grady and Lacey] went down to the bunkhouse for dinner the vaqueros seemed to treat them with a certain deference but whether it was the deference accorded to the accomplished or that accorded to mental defectives they were unsure" (105). McCarthy humorously comments on the state of heroes in the 20th century. When a man of true greatness presents himself, those around him can't be sure if he is a legendary character or touched in the head. By the time lunch is over, there are twenty spectators around the corral. By nightfall, there were around one hundred, many from miles away. Such respect from common, working folks was also common to King Arthur.

Just as the King of the Britons is called a worthy, imbued with almost divine power, John Grady is also likened to a god. A few days later, dining in the bunkhouse, John Grady asks for the tortillas. "There came hands from both sides of the table to take up the dish and hand it down in this manner like a ceremonial bowl" (110). The only appropriate word to describe

this is reverence. It is not merely one or two lackeys sucking up to the American; this is a spontaneous, universal gesture. While breaking the horses, McCarthy says that the animals had "the voice of the breaker still running in their brains like the voice of some god come to inhabit them" (105). John Grady Cole has definitely moved beyond the arena of normal human beings, into the realm of the worthies.

Most 20th century literary characters do not have this ability to perform superhuman feats. During the war, Jake Barnes, far from winning the day for his side, winds up wounded and mutilated. Holden Caulfield can't even pass high school classes, much less accomplish something grand. His dream -- to keep children from plummeting over a cliff -- is noble, but remains only a dream. Gatsby's vision of grandeur leads to his own self-destruction. For most of these characters, just making it through the day is victory enough. The prospect of achieving anything spectacular is unfathomable.

John Grady Cole is not the only Arthurian hero Cormac McCarthy created. *The Crossing* introduces Billy Parham. If John Grady stands for someone who can not only do the impossible, but make it look easy, Billy stands for someone with clarity of focus. Billy always knows the proper path to take. Oftentimes what Billy feels is right is something he knows will cause him a lot of sorrow. Yet he continues on. He is a man of

principles, and he cannot break the rules of his own conduct. This is a most definite Arthurian trait.

20th century characters do not often have such a code of honor. Morality is usually so confused that such ideas seem antiquated and ridiculous. Jake Barnes respects the purity and dedication necessary to be a good bullfighter, yet he does nothing to stop Lady Brett Ashley from corrupting Pedro Romero. Holden Caulfield is distraught when his classmates are less than chivalrous with their dates. But besides complaining about it, Holden does little to actually change anything. Gatsby is so confused that he genuinely believes that if he can amass enough wealth he can reverse time and win Daisy's love. Gatsby knows she is married to a philandering brute. The appropriate thing to have done would be to have spoken with Daisy and Tom. Instead, Gatsby carried on with Daisy behind her husband's back, almost reducing her to Tom's level. Gatsby is the most complex of these characters. He at least tries to achieve a commendable goal. Unfortunately for him, he doesn't have the moral grounding to know how to accomplish it.

The problem with these characters is that they refuse to take a stand; they see an injustice, it bothers them, but they do nothing about it. Perhaps they lack the physical or mental capacity to change the circumstances. More likely, they lack the confidence in their own sense of right and wrong to try to

impose their view on others. Today such behavior is considered politically incorrect, but in Arthur's time it was considered a good thing to fight for God and king and the honor of fair maidens.

A good summary of the importance of a code of honor is given by Atticus Finch, Harper Lee's lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Atticus explains to his son his definition of courage.

> I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do (116).

The core of what Atticus is getting at here is that a person has to have a belief system. The problem with many modern characters is that they don't know what to believe; they either believe in nothing, or something not worth believing. Like the chivalric knights, Atticus has a fundamentally optimistic and worthwhile belief system. In this regard, Atticus is very much the same type of character as Ike McCaslin, John Grady Cole, and Billy Parham.

Malory's tale is full of men who stand up for what they believe in. The knights of Camelot are of course famous for being followers of the chivalric code. One example of a knight

who has great faith in the rules of chivalry is Beaumains, also known as Sir Gareth of Orkney.

One of the rules of the code is that a young, untested knight must prove his worth before he attempts to take any position of honor. (As already demonstrated with Arthur, there are no restrictions on a proven warrior boasting of his prowess.) Beaumains goes so far as to hide his true noble identity from the court at Camelot. When he first arrives, he presents himself as little better than a beggar. In fact, Beaumains even needs help walking.

> Right so came into the hall two men well beseen and richly, and upon their shoulders there leaned the goodliest young man and the fairest that ever they all saw, and he was large and long and broad in the shoulders, and well visaged, and the fairest and the largest handed that ever man saw, but he fared as though he might not go nor bear himself but if he leaned upon their shoulders. (231-232)

The description seems contradictory. On one hand, Beaumains seems like a fine physical specimen; on the other hand, he can't even move without assistance.

It is later revealed that this is part of Beaumains' master plan. He wants to make himself appear lowly, even though he is the son of a king. It doesn't take long before the next part of Beaumains' ploy is enacted. As it happens, Beaumains presents

himself to Arthur on Pentecost, the very day the king is accustomed to grant one of his subjects three wishes. When Beaumains is chosen by Arthur, even his wishes are humble. "This is my petition for this feast, that ye will give me meat and drink sufficient for this twelvemonth, and at that day I will ask mine other two gifts" (232).

Beaumains is ridiculed for his humility. Arthur chides him for not asking for something more impressive; Sir Kay, always a trouble maker, is much harsher. "I dare undertake he is a villain born, and never will make man, for and he had come of gentlemen he would of asked of you horse and armor" (233). Kay even gives the young man his name, which is meant to be a sarcastic reference to Beaumains' job as a kitchen worker. Beaumains puts up with all of this, never complaining, and never revealing his true origins.

A year later, when his other two wishes are to be granted, Beaumains continues his dedication to the chivalric cause. Beaumains' remaining wishes were to represent in battle a certain lady who had presented herself to King Arthur, and to be knighted by Sir Launcelot. The final wish is an obvious show of respect, as Launcelot is widely considered the greatest knight in the world. The second of Beaumains' desires at least shows him moving towards becoming a hero. Unfortunately for him, the lady he has been appointed to defend is unimpressed. "Fie on

thee. Shall I have none but one that is your kitchen page?" she asks Arthur (235). As the two set off the find the Red Knight of the Red Launds -- the lady's oppressor -- Beaumains is constantly harassed. "Thou smellest all of the kitchen. Weenest thou that I have joy of thee?" (239) Later, she tells Beaumains that he is only defeating his jousting opponents because of luck, not skill. "I see all that ever thou dost is but by misadventure, and not by prowess of thy hands" (241). Just as when Sir Kay mocks him, Beaumains offers little protest. He must remain humble. He must not flaunt his affluence and expect people to revere him just because of his family name. Beaumains wants to earn a name for himself.

During the course of the journey, Beaumains does battle with numerous knights -- most of them named after colors. After every battle Beaumains is victorious. The custom of the day was for the defeated party to become liege to the victor. Beaumains is so dedicated to the chivalric lifestyle that he commands his opponents to pledge allegiance to Arthur, not himself.

> The Red Knight came before Beaumains with his three score knights, and there he proffered him homage and fealty at all times, he and his knights to do him service.
>
> 'I thank you,' said Beaumains, 'but this ye shall grant me: when I call upon you, to come afore my lord King Arthur, and yield you unto him to be his knights.' (249)

The point of all of this is that Beaumains believes in things. He has faith in the social order, he has faith in God, and he has faith in himself. He wouldn't put himself through such privation if he didn't. Such faith is essential for someone who puts so much credence in a code of conduct. Without these beliefs, Beaumains' entire system would collapse. As it stands, however, Beaumains is willing to sacrifice for his cause. He is willing to lower himself in the eyes of others, as long as he is doing what he believes to be right. It is this self-confidence, mixed with humility, which makes Beaumains and his Round Table brethren so appealing and enduring.

Billy Parham is another character with an outstanding sense of purpose. Like John Grady Cole, Billy has had a horrible life. He summarizes some of it at the end of the *The Crossing*.

> My mama was from off a ranch in De Baca County. Her mother was a fullblooded Mexican didn't speak no English. She lived with us up until she died. I had a younger sister died when I was seven but I remember her just as plain. I went to Fort Sumner to try and find her grave but I couldn't find it. Her name was Margaret" (419).

This matter of fact delivery says a lot about Billy; he's not complaining or looking for sympathy. He's just saying how things are. When first his parents, and later his brother are killed, Billy is saddened, but he moves on. Like John Grady, he

has plenty of opportunities to choose doubt and despair. Instead, he remains true to himself.

Billy is not as capable as John Grady, but is by no means deficient. Like John Grady, Billy has an inner sense of right and wrong. The opposite of Hamlet, he simply cannot prevent himself from doing what he must. He is truly driven. John Grady, for example, could not abandon Jimmy Blevins, even though Rawlins encouraged him to do so. Also, John Grady felt compelled to return to the judge and explain that he had killed a man in the Mexican prison. Billy Parham is similar in this regard -- when he gets an idea into his head, there is no deterring him.

The first time this quality is seen in Billy is when he catches a wolf which has been killing his father's livestock. The normal thing to do with a wild wolf would be to kill it; Billy takes a notion to return the wolf to the wilds of Mexico, where she belongs. No matter who tells him he is being crazy, and how many times he is told it, Billy does not let anyone stop him. It is so important to him that he doesn't even return home to tell his family what he is doing. He simply heads south.

After tying the wolf's mouth shut and creating a kind of leash, boy and wolf set off. It doesn't take long for Billy to find opposition. On the road, a man in a truck approaches Billy.

That's a damn wolf.

Yessir it is.

Boy what's wrong with you? That thing comes out of that rigging it'll eat you alive.

Yessir.

What are you doing with him?

It's a she.

It's a what?

A she. It's a she.

Hell fire, it don't make a damn he or she. What are you doin with it?

Fixin to take it home.

Home?

Yessir.

Have you always been crazy?

I don't know. I never was much put to the test before today. (58-59)

This is the same sort of comic style McCarthy used *in All the Pretty Horses*. Despite the fact that the scene is funny, Billy is deadly serious. No matter what anyone says, he is taking the wolf to Mexico.

Later, Billy is invited to eat with a ranch family. Naturally, the man is puzzled at the sight of a teenage boy on a horse leading a wolf. The man even mildly mocks Billy for

inflicting a wolf on the Mexicans, people who seem to already have enough problems. "I aint takin her to give to nobody. I'm just takin her down there and turnin her loose. It's where she come from" (68).

This is a wonderful summary of the type of personality Billy has. He is not profoundly philosophical about things. He is not well educated, nor is he well spoken. He does not do things because he read in a book that this thing or that thing is the proper action to take. What he does have is an incredible instinct, an uncanny ability to tell right from wrong. On top of that, Billy has the fortitude and persistence to follow through on his feelings.

A bit later in the meal, the rancher evokes another key ingredient of Billy's character. "You a very peculiar kid. Do you know that?" "No sir. I was always just like everybody else far as I know" (68). Humility is essential to the heroic figure. If Billy were to be bragging about his exploits, or showing off his captured wolf, one would begin to doubt his motives. Is he really releasing the wolf for the wolf's sake, or to bring attention to himself?

The derision Billy encounters in New Mexico turns to outright hostility south of the border. One of the first Mexicans he meets tries to buy the wolf. Billy politely but firmly informs the man that she is not for sale. Later, he

encounters two quasi-military figures who are not as willing to take no for an answer. Basically, they harass Billy over technicalities, interrogating him about where his passport is, and why he doesn't have papers proving the ownership of the horse he is riding. During the interrogation, the wolf is taken from Billy. After the soldiers are finished questioning him, Billy waits outside the building where the wolf was incarcerated.

> He sat by the door of the house all through the noon … In the afternoon the mozo appeared at the door and said that he'd been sent to ask what he wanted. He said that he wanted his wolf. The mozo nodded and went back in again. When he came out again he said that he'd been sent to say that the wolf was seized as contraband but that he was free to go thanks to the clemency of the alguacil who had considered his youth. The boy said that the wolf was not contraband but was property entrusted to his care and that he must have it back. (98-99)

This is classic Billy. He has just been manhandled by soldiers who obviously have no respect for the law or human life. As a stranger in a strange land, he could be beaten, imprisoned, or even killed. An American without paperwork, he falls into the category of 'someone who will not be missed.' Most people would count themselves lucky to be alive, and quickly ride out of

town. Billy, on the other hand, does not think twice about risking his own life to complete his mission.

Unfortunately for him, there is little Billy can do against so many armed men. The wolf winds up being taken to a travelling fair, where it is chained in a pit. Varying numbers of dogs are released, and the animals fight to the death while the audience members wager. Before this bloody ritual begins, Billy tries one more time to rescue his animal. He tells the Mexicans that he cannot sell the wolf, since she is not his. (Even though Billy's story that the wolf has been entrusted to him is only a cover, in a sense it is true. Fortune has put the wolf in his possession.) He tells them that if he has broken any laws, he will gladly pay the appropriate fine. But he cannot part with the wolf. The men only snicker at him, and begin their gruesome sport.

Unable to watch, Billy throws himself bodily into the ring. He pulls the dogs away, and unchains the wolf, holding on to her collar. One sentence speaks volumes about Billy's motivation. "He had no way to know if she would bite him or not" (117). Many people rush into a situation not knowing what may happen to them. There is nothing heroic about that. On the contrary, there is something rather foolish about a man who plunges into danger, not knowing what he is doing. But this does not describe Billy. Billy understands full well that he is

navigating dangerous waters, yet he goes in anyway. He is prepared for the worst, and that takes courage.

Ike McCaslin performs a similar act. A small dog charges Old Ben, thinking that it can actually defeat the enormous bear. "Then [Ike] realized that the fyce was actually not going to stop. He flung the gun down and ran. When he overtook and grasped the shrill, frantically pinwheeling little dog, it seemed to him that he was directly under the bear" (202-203). Like Billy, Ike is willing to risk his own safety to preserve the animal's life. He will not stand idly by and watch something be destroyed.

Once again, however, the wolf is taken from Billy. The hacendado's son points a gun at the wolf. Knowing that the young man is cowardly enough to kill the beast to prove himself in front of his workers, Billy relinquishes. He leaves the barn where the dogs are fighting, and rides away, but quickly returns. This is perhaps a moment of doubt, perhaps not. Even if it was, it did not last long. Billy returns to the barn, shoots the she-wolf dead, and swaps his rifle for the carcass.

It might seem like Billy was defeated. After all, his purpose was to free the wolf. But the events which kept this from happening were beyond his control; he did everything which could reasonably be expected of him. If the wolf had to die, Billy would not let her be killed by dogs, or shot by some cocky

stranger. Considering the circumstances, Billy ended the wolf's life with as much dignity as possible. Just as Beaumains humbled himself to the cause of being a chivalric knight, Billy dedicated himself to the just and humane treatment of a noble animal.

This incident proves that Billy has the tenacity to dedicate himself to a cause. Later in the novel, Billy dedicates himself to an even more somber task: finding, exhuming, and returning to America the bones of his brother.

Boyd Parham entered Mexico with Billy. When Billy, the older of the brothers, returned from Mexico after his trip with the wolf, he found his home abandoned. As it turns out, his family ranch had been robbed; his parents were killed and the horses stolen. Billy and Boyd immediately head south to recover their property. Boyd falls in love with a Mexican girl, becomes something of a revolutionary cult hero, and dies in a struggle against the Mexican government. In a conversation with a prima donna, the differences between Billy and Boyd are accentuated.

> For how long will you seek these horses? she said.
>
> Ever how long it takes.
>
> Long voyages often lose themselves.
>
> Mam?
>
> You will see. It is difficult for even brothers to travel together on such a voyage. The road has its own reasons

> and no two brothers will have the same understanding of those reasons. If indeed they come to an understanding of them at all. … The shape of the road is the road. There is not some other road that wears that shape but only the one. And every voyage begun on it will be completed. Whether horses are found or not. (230)

What the singer is saying, in her cryptic way, is that Boyd does not have the same focus as Billy. As his folk legend status testifies, he obviously has the stuff to inspire others. What he does not have is clarity. He went to Mexico to find his family's horses and wound up getting distracted. Billy went to Mexico for horses, and didn't go back to America until he found them. That is why Billy, not his brother, is a hero of epic proportions.

Billy's dedication to the cause at hand is sorely tested when he determines that his brother should be buried in his native country. Again, no one tells Billy to do this. He feels in his heart that this is how things should be, so he does what he can to make it so.

First of all, Billy has to find the location where Boyd is buried, which is not an easy task. Finally he meets a man who tells him that Boyd is buried in San Buenaventura. So Billy travels there, finds the grave, and starts digging. "Midafternoon the blade struck the box. He thought maybe there

would be none" (391). This statement is similar to the one where it is revealed that Billy didn't know if the wolf would bite him or not. Billy is not recklessly jumping into anything; he sees that he only has one hope, so he takes the chance. Many a lesser man would have quit before even starting, knowing full well that there probably wasn't a body there.

After exhuming his brother, Billy puts the remains in his blankets, and rides north. On the way, he encounters a group of men who rob him, ransack his possessions, and stab his horse. A typical person would have run like the wind, abandoning any thought of Boyd's remains. Billy remains steadfast. Even when one of the banditos has a gun pointed as his head, Billy refuses to budge.

> [The bandolero] stepped across the wreckage of the bones unshrouded from out of the soogan and cocked the pistol and put it to Billy's head and demanded his money. Billy could feel his hat going warm and sticky with blood where he held it to the horse's chest. The blood was seeping through the felt and running on his arm. You go to hell, he said. (397)

Billy went to considerable length to find his father's horses. Besides being good animals, they were also a link to his dead parents, a symbol of the way life used to be. He also went to considerable trouble to dig up his brother. The only

way he was going to leave these things in Mexico was if someone killed him.

After the robbers leave, Billy re-gathers his brother's bones, and his belongings, and starts to care for the wounded horse. He is happened upon by a small band of gypsies, who help him heal the horse. These gypsies are in the midst of a task as monumental and difficult as Billy's -- they are pushing a World War I plane on a cart through the mountains. Even the man who is paying them to transport the plane marvels at the persistence involved. "I never would of thought about them gypsies stickin the way they done. I had my doubts about em" (415). The task of the gypsies validates Billy's courage. Pushing an airplane over hills, through woods, and across streams is a difficult task, but can hardly be considered a noble one. The gypsies are to be congratulated for keeping their promise of delivering the plane, but the bottom line is that they're in it for the money. If they weren't being paid, they wouldn't be doing it. Billy's motives are impossible to define. Of course he loves his brother, but there is more to it than that. The moral conviction required to dig up and transport one's dead teenage brother is why Billy is a hero and the gypsies are not.

All of this shows that Faulkner and McCarthy, consciously or unconsciously, drew upon Arthurian legend when creating characters. Part of Faulker's and McCarthy's genius is that

their characters are not cliched. It seems hard to believe that the image of a man refusing his inheritance because of family atrocities, or a boy returning a wolf to Mexico, are going to be often imitated. The other part of their genius is that they adapted the classic hero to 20th century situations. No one wants a hero who is holier than thou or self-righteous. Faulkner and McCarthy were able to integrate the old-fashioned men of action and values into the post-nuclear era.

The way this is done is by controlling the mood of the novel. The mood is often made clear by the position the main character is in at the end of the story. Classic heroes are rewarded for their virtue. Those who overstep their bounds are crushed. Stereotypical 20th century characters end up as confused and bitter as they began. Hemingway's Jake Barnes, for example, utters one of the most famously cynical lines of all time. When Lady Brett tells him that they can be happy together, Jake says, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (251) Holden Caulfield is in an insane asylum. Jay Gatsby is dead, shot for an incident he was not directly responsible for. Clearly these men have not been rewarded. The negative or confused outlook they have adopted does not serve them well. The modern world tramples men like Ike, John Grady, and Billy, but it cannot break their spirit.

As one might expect, the Arthurian legend ends differently. Everyone knows that Arthur dies in the end, but his death is not a crushing, depressing death. It is certainly a sign that no human life or endeavor lasts forever, but it does not eliminate the hope that another Camelot might someday arise.

First of all, the battle which led to Arthur's death was started by mistake. Arthur's party and a group led by Sir Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son, were meeting to try to settle various differences. The level of distrust between Arthur and Mordred was so great that each man gave specific orders to his followers: if any opposing soldier draws his sword, begin fighting immediately.

> Right soon came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on one foot. And when the knight felt him stungen, he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams, trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together. (513)

The lack of blame assigned by Malory is conspicuous. It is not even made clear which side the soldier who drew his sword was fighting on. The similarities between the Biblical story of Genesis are apparent. Human beings have achieved paradise,

either Eden or Camelot. Through the treachery of a serpent, humanity is forced from that paradise into a fallen world.

After slaying Mordred, and at the same time being mortally wounded by him, Arthur makes a unique request of Sir Bedevere: he asks him to cast the sword Excalibur into the water, and then report to the king what he sees. So Sir Bedevere went to the lake and "then threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water" (517).

Upon hearing this, Arthur immediately knows that it is time for him to die. Apparently, had Arthur been meant to live, the hand would have somehow rejected or given back the sword. The arm in the water represents a divine acceptance of Arthur's passing. There is nothing really sad about Arthur's death. He lived to be an old man, accomplished many things, and died when he was meant to. Ultimately, Arthur was rewarded for having lived a virtuous life.

Contrast Arthur's death to that of John Grady Cole. First of all, both men are doomed from the start. For anyone who didn't already know how the Arthurian saga ends, the title of Malory's work translates to "The Death of Arthur." Even at the peak of his glory, it can never be forgotten that no man lives forever. From the opening of *All the Pretty Horses*, John Grady

is equally marked. The already enumerated personal tragedies which befall him prove that he is not a man whom fortune smiles upon. In *Cities of the Plain* John Grady continues to suffer for what he believes in, to the point where he fights a pimp in an alley over an epileptic prostitute. Besides the fact that both men are on an obvious collision course with death, there is little similar about their fate.

For one thing, Arthur's death is not a tragedy. It is a necessary end to a good life. John Grady's death, on the contrary, was utterly senseless. When he dies, John Grady is only nineteen years old. While working on a ranch in New Mexico, John Grady falls in love with a Mexican prostitute. He plans to bring her to America so they can marry. Naturally her pimp -- Eduardo -- strongly objects to this potential loss of revenue. He keeps the girl from leaving Mexico the only way he can -- he kills her.

Infuriated, John Grady tracks down Eduardo, and the two proceed to have a knife fight in an alley. John Grady might be good with horses, but is clearly outclassed in this type of struggle. Eduardo toys with the American, making several cuts, mocking John Grady all the while. John Grady knows that he is injured severely and has bled too much to last much longer. His only hope is for a quick knockout blow.

> He felt Eduardo's blade slip from his ribs and across his upper stomach and pass on. It took his breath away. He made no effort to step or parry. He brought his knife up underhand and slammed it home and staggered back. … [Eduardo] walked away and turned and leaned against the warehouse wall. Then he sat down. He drew his knees up to him and sat breathing harshly through his teeth. He put his hands down at either side of him and he looked at John Grady and then after a while he leaned slowly over and lay slumped in the alleyway against the wall of the building and he did not move again. (254)

Since John Grady dies shortly after this fight, it can be compared to the fight between Arthur and Mordred. The differences are more striking than the similarities. For one, Arthur is defending himself and his kingdom against a traitor. This was the same type of battle which had brought Arthur glory so many times before. John Grady, on the other hand, was fighting for a lost cause. Magdalena was already dead; nothing he could do to Eduardo would change that. John Grady wasn't really protecting the woman he loved, because she was already beyond his protection. He simply let his emotions get out of control, and it cost him his life.

There is a certain school of thought which says that John Grady's actions were the definition of heroism. In fact, what

he did was romantic, not heroic. A true hero would not let a situation get so out of control, nor would he lose his temper. John Grady in this scene calls to mind King Lear in the storm, uselessly expending energy. It is commendable that John Grady felt so strongly about Magdalena; it is unfortunate that he plunged headlong into a situation which could not possibly be improved.

Even the details of the battle make Arthur appear more heroic and John Grady less so. In Arthur's death scene, he was clearly the superior warrior. He rushed Mordred, soundly thrashed him, and fell victim to one lucky blow from his opponent. "When Sir Mordred felt that he had death's wound he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the bar of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote his father Arthur" (514). In *Cities of the Plain*, the roles are reversed. John Grady is clearly being outmanned; only one desperate blow allows him to defeat his opponent. Both Arthur and John Grady led virtuous lives. The pre-20th century icon died a noble death; he was rewarded for his goodness. The modern world remorselessly chews up and spits out people who dare to stick to their values. Morrison points out that all of John Grady's talents and qualities in no way guarantee him a long and happy life.

If John Grady Cole's fate is senseless, Billy Parham's is far more tragic. Billy does not die at the end of *The Crossing*.

He is left to stumble through life, without his parents or his brother. Unable to join the Army due to an irregular heartbeat, Billy drifts from ranch to ranch. After burying his brother, Billy becomes a nomad.

> Days to come he rode north to Silver City and west to Duncan Arizona and north again through the mountains to Glenwood, to Reserve. He worked for the Carrizozos and for the GS's and he left for no reason he could name and in July of that year he drifted south again to Silver City and took the road east past the Santa Rita mines and on through San Lorenzo and the Black Range. (422)

Billy has not become cynical or bitter, but his lack of direction is genuinely sad. The man who once showed so much firmness of mind now can't stick to one job for more than a few months. The constant loss of the past few years has left him listless. Arthur's knights were constantly looking for new adventures; lethargy and inaction were their biggest enemies. It's not so much that Billy has lost his sense of purpose in life; he just no longer has any causes left to fight for.

At the end of *The Crossing*, Billy is anything but victorious. "He sat in the road. He took off his hat and placed it on the tarmac before him and bowed his head and held his face in his hands and wept" (426).

His friendship with John Grady Cole briefly renewed Billy's sense of purpose. Billy seemed to see in John Grady a younger brother, a reincarnation of Boyd. The struggle to wrest Magdalena from Eduardo gave both Billy and John Grady something to be passionate about. When John Grady asks for help, Billy's big brother attitude is apparent. "My own damn fault. I never should have took you down there," Billy says of the brothel where John Grady first saw Magdalena. "Never in this world. It's my fault" (119). Later, Billy helps John Grady fix up the house where he intends to live with his wife. When both John Grady and the girl end up dead, Billy is once again disillusioned. The end of the novel projects forward to 2001, where Billy is a homeless old man. He was never able to find peace again.

Probably the greatest sense of foreboding the story has to offer is something the characters are unaware of. Casual references are made to the fact that the military is purchasing large sections of land in New Mexico. What John Grady and Billy don't know is that the government is going to use this land for atomic bomb tests. When Eliot wrote "The Waste Land," he was referring to the moral vacuum created by the First World War. "Cities of the plain" is a phrase lifted from the Bible, where it is used to describe Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah are of course the two cities known for their licentious living,

and were eventually destroyed by God. It seems that McCarthy agrees with Eliot that a lack of values creates a sterile environment.

Like John Grady and Billy, Ike McCaslin pays a terrible price for maintaining his beliefs. In his case, his wife leaves him. Since the day they were married, Mrs. McCaslin would never sleep with -- or even appear naked before -- her husband. She is using what leverage she has to force her husband into accepting his family plantation. In a calculated ploy, she finally appears nude in the bedroom, offering to exchange her body if Ike will move them out to the farm. "No, I tell you. I wont. I cant. Never," Ike tells her (300). She does have sex with him the one time, but mocks him with it. "That's all. That's all from me. If this don't get you that son you talk about, it won't be mine" (300-301). Ike's beliefs cost him his wife, his pride, his chance to carry on his family name, and his companionship. Knowing all this, Ike still cannot choose any differently.

Faulkner and McCarthy conceded the popular 20th century notion that even good people often fail. They differ from their contemporaries, however, because they do not see this as a cause for despair. As Atticus Finch said, just because someone knows he is going to lose doesn't mean he can't try to win. It was easy for Arthur to be virtuous, because all around him he could

see virtue being rewarded. Ike, John Grady, and Billy need to have great faith in themselves. Despite being crushed by an uncaring society, these men remain true to their code. This makes them even more heroic than the chivalric knights. Other writers would do well to take note of this new archetype for the 21st century. Characters like Ike, Billy, and John Grady will not merely endure; they will prevail.

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