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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the tension between the written word and the world of the ineffable in three brief and enigmatic visions of horses in the works of Heinrich von Kleist, Franz Kafka, and Cormac McCarthy. Examining these authors' engagement with and overcoming of a kind of *Sprachkrise*, or language crisis, the study establishes each text as an exemplary encounter with the sublime at a given historical moment: Kleist's Romanticism, Kafka's modernism, and McCarthy's ambivalent postmodernism. Tracing the heritage of Kleist's Romantic nostalgia into Kafka's America obsession and McCarthy's ecopastoral visions of the American landscape will give insight into how these authors each endeavor to expose and to explode the limits of language—indeed, the very limits of the human—so that the necessity of saying might transcend itself and be transformed into an ethically productive ecstasy of being.

KEYWORDS: Kleist, Kafka, McCarthy, Romanticism, modernism, postmodern, sublime, language crisis, horse

At what might well be the pivotal moment of Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), young cowboy John Grady Cole has a dream. He and his companions have just been jailed for horse theft and for an inadvertent murder, and as they sit in silence, in the dusk, they hear noises—they hear music—from afar:

They sat. No one spoke. Soon it was dark. The old man on the other side of the room had begun to snore. They could hear sounds from the distant village. Dogs. A mother calling. Ranchero music with

its falsetto cries almost like an agony played out of a cheap radio somewhere in the nameless night.¹

But in his wordless captivity, John Grady dreams of freedom, of running with the horses on an endless and unbounded, sunlit plain. If this dream dissolves the darkness of the cramped prison cell, opening it instead, to borrow a phrase from former poet Laureate Robert Hass, to a “world / of undivided light,”² then the evident eloquence of the *naming* of this “nameless night” also appears to promise its own opposite: a world that would exist beyond the prison-house of language.

Thus this nameless night recalls the final stanzas of another, much earlier poem—Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s early “Ballade des äußeren Lebens [Ballad of the Outer Life]”—where a veritable crisis of faith in the meaningfulness of (human) existence is ultimately overturned by a single word that seems not to *signify*, per se, but rather to *mean* much more than its mere denotation ever could: “Und dennoch sagt der viel, der ‘Abend’ sagt, / Ein Wort, daraus Tiefsinn und Trauer rinnt [Yet he says so much who utters ‘evening,’ / A word from which grave thought and sadness flow].”³ The recuperative power of the word is all the more striking from an author who, just a few years later, will inaugurate the traumatic *Sprachkrise*, or language crisis, that so profoundly marked German-language letters of the turn of the century: here it appears to be not *what* the word signifies that is essential but rather the very *word itself*—an acoustic image approximating a musical figure.⁴ What Hofmannsthal’s *evening* and McCarthy’s *nameless night* have in common, then, across the centuries, this *Trauer* or this *agony*, is an incantatory capacity to grant access, through their being spoken, to a world *unspoken*.

In what follows I intend to trace this interrogation of the tension between the spoken or the written word and the world of the ineffable through three brief and enigmatic visions of horses in the works of Heinrich von Kleist, Franz Kafka, and, finally, Cormac McCarthy. Exposing and exploding the limits of language and the limits of the human, it is this world unspoken that these three authors long for: not merely an unspoken world or a world unspeakable but rather an imagined paradise that is urgently and actively *unspoken*, undone by the very language that would otherwise describe it. And yet it is through this unspeaking, through this casting off of the constraints of language, that Kleist, Kafka, and McCarthy attempt—however, briefly and precariously—an opening unto the noumenal, that the necessity of saying transcends itself and is transformed into an ecstasy of being.⁵

In a sense, then, all three of these texts are an engagement with the *sublime*: with that which exceeds the human power of perception, defying

both the faculty of the imagination and, more importantly for present purposes, conceptual (re)presentation. For if beauty is all about form, the sublime results from formlessness: from our encounter with an object whose apparent boundlessness becomes a threat to our cognition if not our very selves. What constitutes the beautiful, in Kant's account, is an appreciation of apparent purposiveness without purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*): the appreciation of a well-formed form in the absence of a discernible function. But in the particular case of the horse, we are confronted with a particularly contingent appreciation of merely adherent beauty (*bloß anhängende* or *bedingte Schönheit*) indeed dependent on how well the particular horse in question accords to a preconceived concept or ideal determined by utility, by how well its form conforms to its implicit function. (The horse is, in fact, one of Kant's three explicit examples of adherent beauty—the others being man and building.) It may be for this reason that the horse and horseback riding, almost emblematic of what Erik Baker calls the apparently "anthropological orientation" of nature, become the topos through which Kleist, Kafka, and McCarthy will explore this problem.⁶ If the beautiful, in Kant's description, appears to corroborate the suspicion that humanity is harmonious with nature, allows us to behave *as if*—and this hypothetical, as will hopefully become clear, is essential—we were allied with the orientation of the world around us, then the sublime confronts us, at least initially, with the inadequacy of our modes of perception, imagination, and representation when faced with the totality of being. In short, I am suggesting that we see the sublime itself as both a kind of language crisis and as an occasion for its overcoming.

It may be helpful, along these lines, to think with Jean-François Lyotard through his sustained engagement with the Kantian sublime and specifically with regard to his coinage of the notion of the *différend* (or differend) as the figure through which the agonizing ineffability of sensation is sublimated into a pleasure in the invention of new modes of making meaning:

Dans le différend, quelque chose « demande » à être mis en phrases, et souffre du tort de ne pouvoir l'être à l'instant. Alors, les humains qui croyaient se servir du langage comme d'un instrument de communication apprennent par ce sentiment de peine qui accompagne le silence (et de plaisir qui accompagne l'invention d'un nouvel idiome), qu'ils sont requis par le langage (. . .) pour reconnaître que ce qu'il y a à phraser excède ce qu'ils peuvent phraser présentement, et qu'il leur faut permettre l'institution d'idiomes qui n'existent pas encore.⁷

(In the *differend*, something “asks” to be phrased, and suffers the wrong of not being able to be phrased. So humans, who thought they used language as an instrument of communication, learn by this feeling of pain which accompanies silence (and of pleasure which accompanies the invention of a new idiom) that they are the object of language’s demand (. . .) they recognize that what is to be phrased exceeds what they can phrase at the moment, and that they must allow the institution of idioms which do not yet exist.)⁸

The *differend* is that unstable interval in which the painful recognition of an experience beyond language is alchemized into the pleasure of inventing new forms of expression adequate to this experience. And it is for this very reason that Lyotard identifies the task of both philosophy and literature as bearing witness to the differend by finding it an idiom. Through careful attention to not only the thematic but also structural similarities of these three texts by Kleist, Kafka, and McCarthy, we can begin to isolate just such an institution of an idiom: a coherent grammar of unspeaking, as it were. It is through this unspeaking that these authors attempt to transcend a language bound to the utility of (adherent) beauty and to achieve instead a language of the sublime.

It will be clear by now that what I am describing is what we might term an aesthetic of immediacy: an attempted escape from the symbolic into an unmediated or rather demediated contact with the real. The problem with the Kantian account of the sublime is that it resides not so much in the object as in *us*: “es ist ein Gegenstand (der Natur), dessen Vorstellung das Gemüt bestimmt, sich die **Unerreichbarkeit** der Natur als Darstellung von Ideen zu denken [it is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think of the unattainability of nature as a presentation of ideas.]”⁹ Confronted with something so overwhelming that it first causes us the pain (Kant calls it *Unlust*) of incomprehension, we then find pleasure in the reassertion of the power of our reason over nature—a movement comparable, Kant tells us, to *vibration* (*eine Erschütterung*): a quickly alternating attraction toward and then repulsion from the object. Unlike Edmund Burke, for whom the sublime makes available for our reflection something of our primal, *animal* nature, for Kant an experience of sublimity becomes sublime precisely because it makes us more aware of own rationality—which is to say: of our *humanity*, of that which makes us *human*. The feeling of the sublime comes not from the outside but rather from within: it is projected by our faculty of reason onto the object under observation. But nature *in itself* remains unreachable; the split between the subject and the world remains intact.

The Romantic, modernist, and, perhaps more surprisingly, postmodernist poetics to be examined in what follows will attempt, albeit in distinctly different paradigms, to overcome this binary, to transcend Cartesian subjectivity and communicate an experience that takes place not strictly in ourselves but in the world (as well). If Kleist's text posits (and calls into question) the possibility of this transcendence as a hopeful hypothetical, Kafka will attempt to realize it in prose. For Kleist, writing in the wake of Kant, the exile from the noumenal is a crisis that initially appears perhaps beyond all reconciliation. But for Kafkan modernism, moving quickly past a properly Kantian paradigm, this painful and nostalgic failure will become the occasion for a celebration of unbridled expression as a point of contact with the real. And yet, concomitant with Kafka's modernist insistence on reality is a surprisingly *postmodernist* assertion of the *reality of text*. McCarthy goes then even further—demonstrating that this *celebration* of expression can continue, even after faith in that objective, extratextual reality has been rescinded. If Kleist's Romanticism is an early iteration of an aesthetic of immediacy, Kafka's modernism is both its apogee and also its undoing. In McCarthy's ambivalent postmodernism (an ambivalence to be explored in due course), we can observe the afterlife and implied ethic of this aesthetic.

Kleist

Wenn ich dich nur hätte, sagte der Mensch zu einem Pferde, das mit Sattel und Gebiß vor ihm stand, und ihn nicht aufsitzen lassen wollte; wenn ich dich nur hätte, wie du zuerst, das unerzogene Kind der Natur, aus den Wäldern kamst! Ich wollte dich schon führen, leicht, wie ein Vogel, dahin, über Berg und Tal, wie es mich gut dünkte; und dir und mir sollte dabei wohl sein. Aber da haben sie dir Künste gelehrt, Künste, von welchen ich, nackt, wie ich vor dir stehe, nichts weiß; und ich müßte zu dir in die Reitbahn hinein (wovor mich doch Gott bewahre) wenn wir uns verständigen wollten.¹⁰

(If only I had you, said the human to the horse, which stood before him with its saddle and its bit, and which wouldn't let him mount it; if I only had you as you were when you first emerged from the woods, an untamed child of nature! I would like to lead you, lightly, like a bird, there, over mountain and glen, however I fancied; and you and I would both be well. But they have taught you arts, arts, of which

I, naked, as I stand before you, know nothing; and I would have to visit you at the racetrack (God keep me) if we were to understand one another.)

—Heinrich von Kleist, *Fabel ohne Moral* (1808)

As frivolous as it may initially appear, the brief text quoted (in its entirety) here calls into question the very project of Romanticism writ large: which is to say, it complicates the quest for a return to man's imagined unity with nature, problematizing the possibility for a postlapsarian oneness with the world. Much has been made of Kleist's purported "Kant crisis" of 1800 and 1801, and it is still debated to this day to what extent his letters to loved ones on this subject were mere romantic posturing—he writes to his fiancée: "mein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, ich habe keines mehr [my highest aim has fallen, I have none left]"¹¹—indeed whether Kleist ever actually *read* Kant is still a matter of debate. But the worry that the world *an sich* may be unavailable to us as thinking, speaking subjects is made evident throughout Kleist's work. Unlike in his essay on marionette theater, where Kleist expresses tempered faith in this return to innocence through *knowledge*,¹² in the text at hand the accoutrements of human understanding, those arts (or *Künste*) that the horse has learned, are said definitively to preclude all hope for this homecoming. And yet just as the conclusion to *Über das Marionettentheater* (*On Marionette Theater*)—first published two years later—paradoxically proposes *recognition* itself as the sole viable solution for the problems it presents, Kleist's fable, also, will subvert itself, disrupting its own neatly ordered discourse with intrusions of a meaning well beyond what well-ordered discourse would be able to express. To this extent, we may ultimately choose to speak with Andrezej Warminski, and Carol Jacobs before him, not of Kleist's Kant crisis, but rather of Kant's Kleist crisis.¹³ It will be his subtle but significant refutation of the Kantian perspective that marks Kleist's Romanticism for our considerations: Kant's epistemological concerns have been taken at face value as an *ontological* challenge.

Fable without a Moral: the title of the text is telling. What is a fable, after all, without a moral? Through his playful parody of this didactic mode of writing, a pet genre of the German Enlightenment, Kleist tests the limitations not only of the fable as a form but of moralizing literature more generally: elaborating a self-conscious parable while refusing to provide the maxim it traditionally promises, Kleist toys with the idea of a literature for which the anticipated allegorical content is ultimately (or at least ostensibly)

absent. And yet what could be more obvious than what this text is meant to mean? What is perhaps most striking about Kleist's fable is the deictic directness with which it addresses its subject: in no uncertain terms, the human speaker informs the horse of its own symbolic significance and of its disappointment of the expectations associated with the same, of its utter incapacity to symbolize the freedom and the unity with nature it is intended to represent. This, then, is less an allegory, less a narrative, than an argumentation—organized discursively or even dialectically; but as an argument it is ironic insofar as it is not intended to succeed: if it is a fable without a moral, then it is an argument without an end.

In an article on what might otherwise seem peripheral reflections on the example of the horse in selected texts by Kant, Schiller, and Kleist, Eric Baker reveals the profound philosophical stakes of this seemingly light-hearted fable, insightfully situating it within the problematic of the sublime. Summarizing the movements of Schiller's thinking through this illustration, for instance, Baker maps "three stages of the horse, as it moves from a state of pristine nature, to domestication, coming to rest in a violent overthrow of servitude," which

can be read as an allegory of the successive stages through which the human—both the individual as well as culture as a whole—moves on its way to the freedom of the aesthetic state: from a pre-symbolic, paradisiacal unity, to the fall into consciousness of self, to the unity of being and consciousness, nature and culture, *form and content*, spirit and matter.¹⁴

But it is, as Baker notes, precisely this third stage—renewed unity, the liberation of the horse from its anthropologically oriented exploitation and reduction—that appears lacking in Kleist's fable: "The entirety of Kleist's text, as announced in the title, stands under the sign of loss, of 'ohne' [of 'without']."¹⁵ Baker therefore reads the fable as a felicitous failure: "the sublime can be represented only in the *failure* of its representation."¹⁶ Still, for all its perspicacity, perhaps this reading too readily passes over some of the subtleties of the composition of Kleist's short text: if this lack, this *ohne* (this *without*), is indeed a marker of a certain formal openness—the formlessness of the sublime, for instance—then perhaps it points not only to this failure of expression but rather also to the nascent potential for an expression of the inexpressible. To wit: by highlighting what language lacks, Kleist also opens it to what exceeds it.

That Kleist's text is concerned with language is evident from the outset: it is manifest already in the cartoonish premise of a human speaking to a horse—which, in another ironic reversal of a genre defined in part by speaking animals, remains perfectly mute throughout, giving utterly no sign of understanding. Both would-be interlocutors are identified by species only, *der Mensch* (the human) and *das Pferd* (the horse), and yet the guiding supposition, the condition upon which the fable's narrative content would be predicated, is that both share the very faculty that distinguishes man from beast, the capacity for language—inasmuch as this, more than the trip to the racetrack threatened at the tale's conclusion, is what would be necessary, “wenn wir uns verständigen wollten [were we to understand each other].” It is in this manner that Kleist compares his own *Kunst*—the art of poetry, the art of language—to the *Künste* (or arts) that the horse has learned. “If I only had you,” the fable begins, immediately phrasing this hypothetical in terms of possession and domestication that render impossible the longed-for liberation; the remainder of the text then logically proceeds to outline not only the conditions necessary for this emancipation but also, more importantly, the impossibility of their fulfillment.

But despite its thoroughly discursive ordering, the fable also hints at its own fecund breakdown. The text is organized into three seemingly straightforward sentences, each divided symmetrically by a semicolon. The excessive cumulation of multiple appositive clauses is typical of Kleist; what is *not* is just how short the sentences here are: it is as if the author wants to emphasize the clarity of this well-crafted, level-headed rhetorical reflection. And yet, these appositions also inevitably produce a stuttering effect amplified by the poetic repetition of the first phrase (*wenn ich dich nur hätte* [if I only had you]) and, later, of the word *Künste* [arts]—then brought together by the similarly subjunctive half-rhyme of the final *müßte* [would have to]. While the rhythm this produces is slow to take form, it eventually develops, at the conclusion of the final sentence, into a galloping anapest (“und ich müßte zu dir in die Reitbahn hinein”) at the very moment that the horse's running is evoked. While not particularly pronounced, indeed almost repressed, these intrusions of poetic language, this incongruously rhythmic lyricism and the expressive exclamation point at the conclusion of the first full sentence betray the persistent presence of the *semiotic* in the fable, in this archetypically symbolic form: the spikes of the Kristevan *chora*, of the *real*, in the symbolic order.¹⁷ Kleist's text is indeed dialectical. Thesis: unity with nature; antithesis: self-consciousness, domestication. That a synthesis does not occur—is, in fact, explicitly rejected—on the level of discourse does not mean that it is not present: it takes place instead not in the (anti-)fable's content but its form.

Kleist's insistent subjunctive (the repeated *hätte, wollte, dünkte, sollte, müßte*, and the final *wollten*) consistently moves toward the redeeming synthesis it refuses to provide—equally insistent in its admission of the absence of its own conditions for fulfillment. That the loss at issue here is irrecoverable is, of course, the overt message of the text, its *argumentum*. But if the fable's signifieds concede that what is lost, this rift with the world, cannot be made good again, this does not necessarily diminish the promise of its play of signifiers: the galloping of the horse is *rhythmically* present, after all, at the very moment it is discursively denied. This rhythmic quality aims to make experience available not through but rather *as* language. There is a variety of Romantic irony at work here: not an eradication of the division between subject and object—a dissolution, for instance, of the distinction between man and horse—but rather what Friedrich Schlegel would call a constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction (“der stete Wechsel zwischen Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung”¹⁸) akin to the sublime vibration between attraction and repulsion. Perhaps, then, the most central moment in the text is that which would appear the most peripheral or seem merely an (equally anapestic) aside: the parenthetical prayer “(wovor mich doch Gott bewahre) [(God keep me)]” of the final lines. If this prayer betrays the speaker's panic about the possibility of his own domestication, it also emphasizes that he has not *yet* been tamed: it is, after all, the human, here, who stands naked and unbridled before the dressed-up horse.

Kafka

Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferde, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf.¹⁹

(But if one were an Indian, instantly alert, and on a running horse, leaning in the wind, trembling again and again over the trembling ground, until one shed one's spurs, for there no were spurs, until one cast off the reins, for there were no reins, and hardly saw the land ahead as a heath shorn smooth, already without horse's head and horse's neck.)

—Franz Kafka, *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* (1913)

Kafka will transform Kleist's prayer for preservation into an optimistic wish: the *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* (*Wish to Become an Indian*). Although Kafka's veneration of Kleist (specifically his admiration of the earlier author's most widely read novella, *Michael Kohlhaas* [1810]) is well known and frequently acknowledged, I have only rarely seen Kleist's *Fable* and Kafka's *Wish* compared, more or less in passing.²⁰ Like Kleist's, Kafka's single-sentence invocation begins with an *if only*—almost instantly beginning to transform this *if* into an *is* (or rather, as we shall see, into a *was*). The main thrust of the text can be interpreted as a move from the conditional mode (*wäre*) to the indicative (*es gab*), hinging, as David Wellbery has noted, on the temporal conjunction *bis* (until), which marks “the transformation from the subjunctive wish to the imperfect of its fictional realization.”²¹ Slowing down the text, we trace this subtle shift from the initial *wäre* (were) into the ambivalent *erzitterte* (would tremble/trembled: the German could be either subjunctive or indicative, either present or past tense) and finally into the definitive, if incompatible, past indicative in which the remaining phrases are written (*gab, warf, sah*, etc.). We can therefore translate and distill the sentence into that collapse of the subjunctive into the indicative, abbreviating it accordingly into an *If one were . . . until . . . it was*. Careful attention to this hidden grammar reveals the wish to operate a quasi-Kantian heuristic—the same *as if* of the categorical imperative or of aesthetic judgment itself—but Kafka's text goes further, literalizing this subjunctive into its indicative fulfillment. What began as just a thought experiment has quickly taken on the full weight of reality. Each clause in fact performs the last—if “gleich bereit [instantly alert]” is an illustration of the *if only* of the first clause, then “auf dem rennenden Pferde [on a running horse]” instantly realizes this readiness—steadily blossoming into an effusion of poetic language which is, on careful listening, not only alliterative but also, more pointedly, dactylic (another acoustic approximation of the horse's gallop): “erzitterte über dem zitterden Boden [trembling over the trembling ground]”. Quickly, spurs and reins are cast aside, with human and horse increasingly becoming one. The text thus builds from the doubt of its hypothetical beginning into a definitive letting go: “bis man die Sporen ließ [until one shed one's spurs].” The author has now done away with those harnesses that would prevent the concert with the equine (and with the world) that is desired. Kafka's text makes good, it would appear, on the promise of its opening gambit: realizing its wish as a reality.

It is not, though, only spurs and reins that vanish, but indeed the horse itself, or at least its upper half: “schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf [without horse's head and horse's neck].” In the process, the rider is transformed into what Wellbery identifies as a variety of centaur figure (a horse's

body with a human head) that he reveals to be a quilting point in Kafka's work—related to grotesque apparitions like the *ungeheures Ungeziefer* of Kafka's most iconic tale; to the *Pferdeknecht*, perhaps, of *Ein Landarzt*; and especially to young Karl Rossmann, the protagonist of the author's first unfinished novel, the only one to have a name at all save K., and whose surname is "untranslatable otherwise than as horse-man."²² As Walter Benjamin has commented on the relationship between these texts: "Vieles ist in diesem Wunsche enthalten. Die Erfüllung gibt sein Geheimnis preis. Er findet sie in Amerika. Daß es mit 'Amerika' eine besondere Bewandtnis hat, geht aus dem Namen des Helden hervor [A great deal is contained in this wish. Its fulfillment, which he finds in America, yields up its secret. That *Amerika* is a very special case is indicated by the name of its hero]."²³ The rider and the horse have melted one into the other into this *Rossmann*—a far cry from Kleist's horse, which wouldn't even let itself be mounted. And in this context we should note that the Naturtheater von Oklahoma, where Karl Rossmann ultimately makes his home, holds its auditions, as it were, at the *racetrack*: after a short hesitation, Karl Rossmann heads off to the derby, finding reconciliation between nature and culture precisely where Kleist's everyman, *der Mensch*, refused to venture. The art of the Nature Theater, proposes Benjamin, works not through symbolic language but rather through allusive gesture, an almost animalistic *gestus*: "Darum also kann es nur eine Rennbahn sein, auf der [Karl Rossmann] ans Ziel seiner Wünsche gelangt [Thus it can only be a racetrack on which he attains the object of his desire]."²⁴

As in this theater of gestures (Benjamin calls it a *Gestik*), in the present text, as well, Kafka has cast off the harnesses of *language* through his erasure of discursive structures, syntax, even sense. The repeated "bis [until]" and the repeated "denn es gab keine [for there were no]" recall the repetitions of Kleist's text, but here Kleist's systematic syntax is dissolved into a single run-on sentence: just as bodies (man and horse) begin to blur and blend into each other, here language also ceases to constrain the speaker. The emancipatory "ohne [without]" of the final line—the absence of the spurs, reins, horse-neck, and horse-head—is the selfsame open-ended *ohne* of Kleist's title: a kind of wound within the work that allows it access to a realm beyond the reach of denotation, to a meaning deeper than the meaning of symbolic structures. I say *wound* because there is a certain violence to this procedure: if the mirroring of the trembling rider and the trembling ground, for instance, which serves (through its ambivalent, dactylic *erzitterte*) as a pivot between the wish and its fulfillment, implies a harmony with nature, it also ineluctably suggests a danger of disintegration. It is none other than the brief *vibration* (or *Erschütterung*), I would contend, of the Kantian sublime.²⁵

This variety of formal openness is not only a persistent feature of Kafka's fiction, it is, for Lyotard again, the very hallmark of a distinctly *modernist* sublime—more specifically: what he dubs a *melancholic sublime*, a nostalgia for presence and an enhanced Romantic yearning for an invisible absolute that is alluded to (or, rather, *evoked*, called forth) by the formlessness, by the abstraction of the text.²⁶ We would seem to have achieved at last a true poetics of immediacy. But here comes the surprisingly *postmodern* twist: by its bewildering shift into the preterit, the conventional temporality of literary fiction, Kafka's sentence has not only removed this lived experience to the past tense, it also celebrates its own aestheticization and begins even to work backward—erasing, as it were, the world: the reins, the spurs, the horse that once were. It has reduced the desired oneness with the world to a past event and to a *fictional* one at that. There is something threatening—something once again *sublime*—to this erasure: even the landscape, the *glatt gemähte Heide*, has been razed, or perhaps, rather, plowed, as if this were a draft horse. The modernist attempt at immediacy has not so much dissolved the text as it has recuperated the lived reality of this landscape into a fiction. The “real world”—to borrow a phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche—has finally become a fable.

McCarthy

That night he dreamt of horses in a field on a high plain where the spring rains had brought up the grass and the wildflowers out of the ground and the flowers ran all blue and yellow far as the eye could see and in the dream he was among the horses running and in the dream he himself could run with the horses and they coursed the young mares and fillies over the plain where their rich bay and their rich chestnut colors shone in the sun and the young colts ran with their dams and trampled down the flowers in a haze of pollen that hung in the sun like powdered gold and they ran he and the horses out along the high mesas where the ground resounded under their running hooves and they flowed and changed and ran and their manes and tails blew off of them like spume and there was nothing else at all of them in a resonance that was like a music among them and they were none of them afraid horse nor colt nor mare and they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken but only praised.²⁷

—Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992)

Thus, we return to John Grady's jail cell dream, which I promised at the outset. One ought to recognize the Kleistian overtones to the theft of horses, retaliatory violence and ensuing incarceration against which this dream is set—made more explicit by the similarity between McCarthy's John Grady *Cole* and Kleist's Michael *Kohlhaas*. Throughout the Border Trilogy, McCarthy's plots repeat the structures and motifs of Kleist's novella: the wrongful loss of property, specifically of horses, and the ensuing violence of the protagonists' attempts to right this wrong. While Kleist's book famously provides the basis for E. L. Doctorow's historical novel *Ragtime* (1975), this equally important American intertext in McCarthy has never, to my knowledge, been explored. This may be in part because what distinguishes McCarthy's particular postmodernism from our habitual associations with this term—playful pastiche, narrative fragmentation, ironic or unreliable narration—is the earnestness with which he treats his sources and materials: he adopts and adapts these worn-out metanarratives with an uncommon tenderness and appreciation, I am tempted even to say with reverence. In this context, before finally turning to the dream above, one is obliged to read the discussion of a different dream—an exercise in hermeneutics (not unlike the debate over the parable “Before the Law” in the final chapters of Kafka's *Trial*) with which McCarthy's trilogy concludes—as a commentary on the status of postmodern literature and thought:

It is senseless to claim that things exist in their instancing only. The template for the world and all in it was drawn long ago. Yet the story of the world, which is all the world we know, does not exist outside of the instruments of its execution. (. . .) This life of yours is not a picture of the world. It is the world itself and it is composed not of bone or dream or time but of worship. Nothing else can contain it. Nothing else be by it contained.²⁸

If we hear distant echoes in this account of Kant's attempted reconciliation of empiricism (the instancing) and rationalism (the template), it must be admitted that they are brought together here into a decidedly postmodern paradigm: “the story of the world, which is (. . .) the world itself.” Recognizing that there are no longer any credible metanarratives, that there is no place outside of discourse, McCarthy nonetheless resists temptations to deny this world, discursive as it may well be, its essence—and a worshipful essence at that. If Kafka has unwittingly transformed the world into a fable, McCarthy has transposed it once again into a hymn. And this is why I am arguing for a romanticism *after* postmodernism—or, as I am tempted to phrase it in

my title: *postmodern romanticism*. This is, after all, the very consummation of Romantic irony, which, as Schlegel has it, must ultimately *become sincere*: “Die vollendete absolute Ironie hört auf Ironie zu seyn und wird ernsthaft [Perfected, absolute irony ceases to be irony and becomes sincere].”²⁹ This recalls the earlier distillation of Kafka’s wish: *If one were . . . until . . . it was*. It is an *aesthetic stance* that comes proffer the *ethical* engagement that Kleist’s fable missing any moral refuses to provide.

“John Grady has moments of transcendence in which the earth itself becomes an animate being, like the horse he rides,” writes Edwin Arnold in an article on dreams and visions in McCarthy’s fiction;³⁰ the blissful reverie cited above is one such oceanic moment (note the choice of the word *spume*: the foam or froth on waves, for instance) as the colors “run” together like the horses: “ran all blue and yellow far as they eye could see.” Throughout the Border Trilogy—of which this novel is the first installment—John Grady is repeatedly presented as the consummate horseman, and much of the text is dedicated to his complicity with horses and his taming of these wild animals. In contrast, then, to those protracted passages describing an interaction of which the objective is to *break* the horse and render it obedient, here John Grady is not riding nor does he intend to: “he was among the horses running and in the dream he himself could run with the horses”. This *could* is not subjunctive, but we *could* well choose to read it that way—which is to say it hints at a wish akin to Kafka’s and apparently at odds with the protagonist’s vocation: it is a desire not to dominate the horse but to become one. Here, finally freed of its anthropological exploitation, the horse has been granted the status Kleist’s parable denied it. But that fable’s irony is that its apparent abdication was the answer all along: the surprisingly simple solution to the dilemma was never to attempt to ride but rather, along with Kleist’s would-be rider, *not to*.

In keeping with his oeuvre on the whole, McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses* is, before all else, a reckoning with violence that cannot be contained. Fittingly, here too—even in what might otherwise appear to be a straightforwardly pastoral passage, a celebration of an unadulterated natural experience—the ground, like Kafka’s, is trodden and the flowers trampled underneath the horses’ hooves, giving off a haze of golden pollen itself almost indistinguishable from the golden sunlight that permeates the description. But despite this imagery and its obvious lyricism, McCarthy’s Border Trilogy is no more an unironic and naïve pastoral than it is a straightforward Western. Rather, it is the melancholic celebration of a vanishing world threatened by encroaching civilization. And it is for its awareness of this vanishing, of the shared fate of humanity and nature, that Georg Guillemin has aptly dubbed

McCarthy's method one of *ecopastoralism*. Moreover, in Guillemin's account: "Being an animal half domesticated and half wild, the *horse* incarnates the mediating worldview of [this] *ecopastoralism*"³¹—which abandons the traditional distinctions between nature and culture. In John Grady's dream all such distinctions are suspended—most pertinently the distinction between the human and the horse. Gail Moore Morrison has identified John Grady as "half-man, half-horse"³² and Guillemin calls him "centaur-like,"³³ but, significantly, nowhere in this band of horses can the (human) self be located: the mares and fillies, colts and dams are all described, but not the hero running there among them. Within this context, his dream becomes the illustration or, rather, the realization of the opinion, expressed some pages earlier, that "the horse shares a common soul and its separate life only forms it out of all horses and makes it mortal (. . .) if a person understood the soul of the horse then he would understand all horses that ever were."³⁴ In a strictly Dionysian ecstasy, the horse has become the emblem not of mankind's mastery of nature, but rather of that transcendent suspension of the very principle of individuation. In his dream, John Grady is truly of a piece with his surroundings—has, in fact, dissolved into the world around him.

McCarthy's language, also, delights in dissolution. The author's prose, here, operates by erasure, without any punctuation to retard its freely flowing forward motion: what we have instead are key repeated phrases ("in the dream" or "in the sun") marking each new clause as variations on a theme, competing drafts of the same phrase, as if each variant corrects, replaces or *undoes* the previous iteration. And as each breathless phrase of this extended run-on sentence vanishes without pause into the next, mimicking what McCarthy refers to in another novel as "the endlessly articulating legs of the horses,"³⁵ these horses also undergo a transformation in an accelerating and ecstatic polysyndeton: "they flowed *and* changed *and* ran *and* their manes *and* tails blew off of them like spume *and* there was nothing else at all of them (. . .) horse *nor* colt *nor* mare"—recalling the erasure, piece by piece, of Kafka's horse, of both its body and its tack. These *manes*, it might be noted, are an anagram of *names*; it is through this *endless articulation* that McCarthy achieves access to the *inarticulable*, a naming by *unnaming* that recalls the "nameless night" in the passage immediately preceding this vision.

But this unnameing is not unique to the expression of John Grady's dream. In an unpublished screenplay, McCarthy muses on language as an impediment to such an immediacy of experience:

More and more language seemed to me to be an aberration by which we had to lose the world. Everything that is named is set at one

remove from itself. (. . .) Language is a way of containing the world. A thing named becomes that named thing. It is under surveillance. We were put into a garden and we turned it into a detention center.³⁶

Just as the dream provides an imagined escape from John Grady's incarceration, this passage, then, provides a way out of the habitual confinement of language. In the place of punctuation or constraining syntax McCarthy subtly employs a rhythmic assonance, again almost an anapest ("on a high *plain* where the spring *rains*" and "*ran* with their *dams* and *trampled*") culminating in "the *ground* *resounded*"; through this ruse the author aspires to dissolve referential language in favor of an essential (in the strictest sense) musicality: "a resonance that was like music (. . .) that resonance which is the world". As Arnold describes John Grady's dream:

Here we have an example of an experience beyond words (. . .) the dream offers the direct, unmediated moment, the physical, fundamental awareness of the world's 'resonance.' The term refers to the intensification or enrichment of a sound or feeling. In physics, it describes the effect one vibrating body has on another body: the movement of the first is translated to the second so that both bodies come to move together. In this sense, the (. . .) dream (. . .) provides [John Grady] with the momentary escape from the 'detention center' in which he now finds himself.³⁷

This resonance is, once again, sublime vibration. The bodies dissolving into one another recall Kafka's centaur-like oneness with the horse, and in order to achieve this unity, McCarthy suggests it is necessary to abandon any attempt at mastery—both of the horse and of well-ordered discourse. This "pastoral harmony between man and nature," concludes Guillemin, "cannot be spoken' and is thus discursively unattainable."³⁸ It is for this very reason that McCarthy's prose, here, must consist of its own undoing, of its own unspeaking.³⁹

Conclusion

To think of this unspeaking, though, exclusively in terms of language *crisis* would be to be misled. Although indeed unattainable through discourse, through linguistic *representation*, such experience is not, in the end, unattainable through language, and it is possible, as I hope has become clear, to

read these three texts as a progressive evolution of this productive poetics of unspeaking. My passing evocation of Robert Hass's "Meditations at Lagunitas" in my introduction is motivated not only by the conviction that his "world /of undivided light," with its provocative enjambment, seems so apt a description of the landscape of the hero's dream in *All the Pretty Horses*, but also because these meditations provide such a fitting companion piece to Hofmannsthal's *ballad*—less a poem than a *song*: like Hofmannsthal, Hass meditates on meaning, loss and "the other notion that / because there is in this world no one thing / to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds, / a word is elegy to what it signifies."⁴⁰ And just as Hofmannsthal concludes his poem with the almost inexplicable profundity of the word *Abend* (*evening*), Hass ends hopefully with a nearly liturgical repetition: "There are moments when the body is as numinous / as words, days that are the good flesh continuing. / Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings, / saying *blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*."⁴¹ It is hardly incidental, then, that this poem would first appear in a volume appropriately titled *Praise*: the desire here is for a language more liturgical than referential—for, as McCarthy puts it: "the world itself (. . .) cannot be spoken only praised." This is his conclusion, his prayer akin to Kleist's. These authors do not abandon hope for language, they rejoice in it—in the creation of an idiom of the sublime. The impossible Romantic wish for oneness with the world has been first realized, then revoked, then reasserted. What is suggested by this passage through these passages is this: by witnessing this differend (this transformation of the pain of the ineffable into the pleasure of its eventual expression) we might well find a way to live within the world, as part of it—and even if it is a fiction.

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Notes

I am grateful to Thomas O. Beebee, Thomas Herold and Pascale LaFountain for their feedback on drafts of this article and for inviting me to present it as lectures at the Pennsylvania State University and Montclair State University. In addition to helpful discussions following those talks and one at the University of Pennsylvania, this work has benefited especially from the feedback of Samuel Frederick, John Hamilton and Oisín Keohane.

1. Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 160.
 2. Robert Hass, "Meditations at Lagunitas," in *Praise* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 4.
 3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Ballade des äußeren Lebens," in *Gedichte*, vol. 1 of *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Eugene Weber (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 15. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

4. As Rainer Nägele points out: "die Antwort auf alle diese hoffnungslosen Fragen ist ein einziges Wort—'Abend.' Und es ist nicht etwa der Abend als Gegebenheit, sondern ausdrücklich das Wort, das *gesagt* wird. Das Wort mit allen seinen möglichen Beziehungsfeldern und Assoziationen (. . .) wird zur magischen Formel, die über aller Beziehungslosigkeit der Realität steht [the answer to all these hopeless questions is a single word—'evening'. And it isn't evening as a thing but rather explicitly the *word spoken*. The word with all of its potential references and associations (. . .) becomes a magic formula that stands above all of the incoherence of reality]." Rainer Nägele, "Die Sprachkrise und ihr dichterischer Ausdruck bei Hofmannsthal," *The German Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1970): 720–32, 727.

5. There is certain resemblance here, undeniably, to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of a necessary *unsaying* (*dédire*) through which an ethical *saying* (*le dire*) resists thematization and reduction into an ontological *said* (*le dit*). Here I aim to demonstrate how, for the authors under consideration, an *ethic* of oneness with the world comes to replace the question of reality itself. For Levinas, who sees ethics as the first philosophy and primary even to ontology, the task is similarly to interrogate an *otherwise than being* (*autrement qu'être*) that would not immediately be subsumed into the (already ontological) question, to be, or not to be. This is, Levinas admits, also a "problème méthodologique": "Il consiste à se demander si le pré-originel du Dire (. . .) peut être amené à se trahir en se montrant dans un thème (. . .) et si cette trahison peut se réduire; si on peut en meme temps savoir et affranchir le *su* des marques que la thématisation lui imprime en le subordonnant à l'ontologie. Trahison au prix de laquelle tout se montre, même l'indicible[,] et par laquelle est possible l'indiscrétion à l'égard de l'indicible qui est probablement la tâche même de la philosophie [A methodological problem arises here, whether the pre-original element of saying (. . .) can be led to betray itself by showing itself in a theme (. . .) and whether this betrayal can be reduced; whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks that thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology. Everything shows itself at the price of this betrayal, even the unsayable. It is through this betrayal that indiscretion with regard to the unsayable, which is probably the very task of philosophy, becomes possible]." Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: La Haye, M. Nijhoff, 1974), 8; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: La Haye, M. Nijhoff, 1981), 7 (translation modified). Unsaying is thus a necessary tool for what Levinas designates an indiscretion toward the ineffable: the (philosophical) attempt at conceptualizing the inconceivable and expressing the inexpressible.

6. Eric Baker, "Fables of the Sublime: Kant, Schiller, Kleist," *Modern Language Notes* 113, no. 3 (1998): 524–36, 528. Consider also, Derrida's commentary on Kant's exclusion of the horse from the realm of errant beauty (of beauty bound neither to telos nor to purpose): "On devrait pouvoir faire abstraction de la finalité interne du cheval et le considerer (. . .) comme une beauté sauvage et errante de la nature. Mais c'est de sa finalité externe que Kant ne fait pas abstraction. Et c'est dans sa finalité externe qu'il identifie sa finalité interne: le cheval est *pour* l'homme, au service de l'homme et perçu seulement par l'homme dans sa beauté adhérente. Telle est sa destination interne: l'externe. Pour l'homme, pour un être qui ne peut lui-même tenir à son adhérence. La subjectivité est l'adhérence." Jacques Derrida, *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 122; and Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 107.

7. Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), 29–30.

8. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 22–23.

9. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. Otfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 5: 268; and Immanuel Kant, "First Section, Second Book: Analytic of the Sublime," in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 151.

10. Heinrich von Kleist, "Fabel ohne Moral," in *Sämtliche Erzählungen, Anekdoten, Gedichte, Schriften*, ed. Klaus-Müller-Salget (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2005), 353.
11. Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 2: 634.
12. Heinrich von Kleist, "Über das Marionettentheater," in *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, 555–63.
13. Carol Jacobs, "The Style of Kleist," *Diacritics* 9, no. 4 (Dec. 1979): 70–78; also discussed in "Appendix 1: A Question of an Other Order: Deflections of the Straight Man" of Andrzej Warminski's *Ideology, Rhetoric, Aesthetics: For de Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 203–14.
14. Baker, "Fables of the Sublime," 531, my emphasis.
15. *Ibid.*, 534.
16. *Ibid.*
17. For Julia Kristeva, particularly in her *Révolution du langage poétique*, the semiotic represents those more musical aspects of language not restricted to signifying function, it operates a prosody rather than a denotation; the *chora* is the interval of this presignifying state. The psychoanalytic implications of the semiotic are not irrelevant here: insofar as it precedes the Lacanian *stade du miroir*—the moment of self-recognition—the semiotic represents an undifferentiated state of being, a loss of self at once desirable and terrifying, not dissimilar to the unity Kleist seeks. Julia Kristeva, *Révolution du langage poétique: L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).
18. Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäums-Fragment 51," in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958), 2:172.
19. Franz Kafka, "Wunsch, ein Indianer zu werden," in *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2002), 32–33.
20. Gabriele Schwab, for instance, in her recent *Imagined Ethnographies*, positions Kafka's text within the European cultural imagination and its fantasies of the American Indian other, pointing out that Kafka's trooping on the Romantic notion of the *noble savage* mobilizes an established cliché of unbridled (the pun is hers this time) desire and connection to the natural world. Gabriele Schwab, "Restriction and Mobility: Desire, Transference, and the Cultural Imaginary," in *Imaginary Ethnographies: Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Oliver Simons briefly draws a parallel between the two texts on the basis of their *Wenn-Dann-Sätze* (if-then sentences) in a chapter on Kafka and Deleuze. Oliver Simons, "Diagrammatik—Kafka mit Deleuze," in *Die Räume der Literatur: exemplarische Zugänge zu Kafkas Erzählung "Der Bau"*, ed. Dorit Müller and Julia Weber (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 107–24.
21. David Wellbery, "Kafka's Wish," podcast lecture, Master Classes in the Humanities, Indiana University (Bloomington, Nov. 4, 2011). It would be difficult to surpass Wellbery's astute and exuberant reading of Kafka's single-sentence text, and I would like to him here for his generosity many years ago in sharing with me an earlier version of his piece on Kafka's wish.
22. Wellbery, "Kafka's Wish."
23. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka—Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), part I: 417; and Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 119.
24. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka—Zur zehnten Wiederkehr," 418; and Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth," 120.
25. What I am describing here is similar to what Timothy Morton might call a *critical ecomimesis* (as opposed to the more naïve variety his work seeks to deconstruct): "If atmosphere is a function of rhythm then it is literally a vibe: a specific frequency and amplitude of vibration. What remains (. . .) is the fragility of an 'I' that we can't quite get rid of, but that at least can be made to vibrate, in such a way that (. . .) dissolves its form, however momentarily." Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 168. Morton's larger project, which I have explored and critiqued elsewhere, also attempts to reconceptualize a postmodern (or perhaps, more accurately,

posthumanist) sublime, specifically within the emerging discourses of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism: “we badly need an upgraded theory of the sublime, which deals in scary and unknowable things. And if we’re going to do that, we might as well take on the whole issue of rhetoric as it pertains to objects.” Timothy Morton, “Sublime Objects,” *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism* 2 (2011): 207–27. See also Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2013) and Ian Fleishman, “The Rustle of the Anthropocene: Kafka’s Odradek as Ecocritical Icon,” *The Germanic Review* 92 (2017): 40–62.

26. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979); and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

27. McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 161–62.

28. McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain* (New York: Vintage International, 1999), 287.

29. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 16: 144.

30. Edwin T. Arnold, “‘Go to sleep’: Dreams and Visions in the Border Trilogy,” in *A Cormac McCarthy Companion: The Border Trilogy*, ed. Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 37–72, 51.

31. Georg Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 136.

32. Gail Moore Morrison, “All the Pretty Horses: John Grady Cole’s Expulsion from Paradise,” in *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, ed. Edwin T. Arnold (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 9–199), 173–93, 181.

33. Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, 133.

34. McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 111.

35. McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 196.

36. Quoted in Arnold, “‘Go to sleep’: Dreams and Visions in the Border Trilogy,” 32.

37. *Ibid.*, 53.

38. Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, 124.

39. Guillemin therefore also phrases the matter in terms of Kristevan *jouissance*: “the therapeutic effect of melancholy discourse to restore a sense of the lost self through the very performance of its discursive lamentation (. . .) Melancholy allegoresis reveals the affirmative flipside to its own sorrow whenever the allegorization of unspeakable loss ‘endows the lost signifier with a signifying pleasure, a resurrectional jubilation even to the stone and corpse, by asserting itself as coextensive with the subjective experience of a named melancholia—of melancholy *jouissance*.” Georg Guillemin, *The Pastoral Vision of Cormac McCarthy*, 99. The quotation here is from Kristeva’s *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). This is, for good reason, a popular lens for readings of McCarthy. Christine Chollier, for instance, thoroughly addresses narratological questions of intertextuality and autotextuality in the *Border Trilogy* as well as providing a detailed summary of previous scholarship on the subject. Christine Chollier, “Autotextuality, or Dialogic Imagination in Cormac McCarthy’s Border Trilogy,” in *A Cormac McCarthy Companion*, 3–36, see especially 33, notes 4–6. Linda Townley Woodson also identifies intertextuality and an interrogation of the relationship between language and reality as the basis for the novel in her Kristevan reading of McCarthy’s border fiction: “Having laid the foundation for exploring the relationship of language to reality in *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy continues the exploration of how language transforms reality, of how reality transforms language, and of the nature of truth in *All the Pretty Horses*.” Linda Townley Woodson, “Leaving the Dark Night of the Lie: A Kristevan Reading of Cormac McCarthy’s Border Fiction,” in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions*, ed. James D. Lilley (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 267–84, 271.

40. Hass, “Meditations at Lagunitas,” 4. A fuller comparison of these two poems (and these two poets) is certainly in order, but unfortunately beyond the scope of the present study.

41. Hass, “Meditations at Lagunitas,” 5.