

Catherine Cornelius

Ms. Cornelius

AP Literature p. 3

8 February 2013

Literary Device One - Symbol

A symbol is “a setting, object, or event in a story that carries more than literal meaning and therefore represents something to understanding the meaning of a work of literature” (Jago, et al. 1506). The term symbolism refers to the use of symbols or to a set of related symbols.

The following demonstrates the use of a symbol in Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*. “Like him she was left handed or she played chess with her left hand . . . He leaned forward and moved his bishop and mated her in four moves” (McCarthy 133-137).

This chess game between John Grady and Alejandra’s godmother symbolizes the competition that they are in for Alejandra herself. This game of chess, which takes place as John is trying to gain approval of his relationship with Alejandra, represents the greater chess game between these two competing characters. Although John Grady wins the first couple of games and seems to be well on his way to achieving his goal, in the end it is the godmother who triumphs. This directly mirrors John Grady’s and the godmother’s lives: although John Grady wins Alejandra’s affections initially, in the end he loses her. When he takes “her queen” (133) he is literally winning the chess match by taking the queen, but he is also on a symbolic level attempting to take the godmother’s true “queen,” Alejandra, whom the godmother is determined to keep from suffering the same misfortunes she endured. The lack of dialogue between the characters during the match further reinforces the quiet competition they are engaging in; one that is not violent but is indeed fierce. The intellectual nature of the chess match also enhances

the choice that Alejandra ultimately makes near the end of the novel: leaving John and opting instead for the security and wealth of her family. This choice reflects the cool and calculating logic of a chess match rather than the passions of the heart.

Works Cited

Jago, Carol, Renee H. Shea, Lawrence Scanlon, Robin Dissin Aufses. *Literature and Composition*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. Print.

McCarthy, Cormac. *All the Pretty Horses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, inc. 1992. Print.