

WRITTEN ON THE BODY:  
A THIRD SPACE READING  
OF LARRY MCMURTRY'S  
*STREETS OF LAREDO*

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"Come and sit down beside me and hear my sad story.  
I'm shot in the breast and I know I must die." ...  
When thus he had spoken, the hot sun was setting.  
The Streets of Laredo had grown cold as the clay.

—"Streets of Laredo," song, ca. 1860

*Streets of Laredo* (1993), the final and darkest installment of Larry McMurtry's saga of the North American West that began with the publication of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lonesome Dove* (1985), is a novel of fragmentation and loss.<sup>1</sup> The grave irony in the novel is manifest in the journeys and physical crossings made by major characters. These movements parallel broader ideological shifts to expose a borderlands text that disrupts a traditional frontier mythology. A postmodern work in which McMurtry effectively deconstructs the Western genre by virtue of its many inversions, reversals, and symbolic "cuts," *Streets of Laredo* emphasizes a plurality of voices. As subjects transgress existing borders, they expose hybrid spaces of resistance to denote a third space, a meeting point where they may effectively disrupt outmoded ideologies and forge new connections. Throughout the novel, hierarchical frameworks shift; in turn, so do systems of signification. With this in mind, the ethos of *Streets of Laredo* appears centerless. Metonymic fragmentation is a stylistic feature of the novel that "marks" the bodies of various characters to underscore a continuous whole-to-part association: characters serve as a function of a southwestern setting in flux.

The novel opens in the last decade of the nineteenth century, during a period when the bulk of Texas ranchlands was being cleared to make room for farmers and a growing multitude of agricultural workers. The frontier has been pushed to its southern and western limits, the Mexicans have long accepted the Rio Grande as the US-Mexico border, and the Comanche have for the most part been relocated. Ranging and cowboying as ways of life have lost their footings and have given way to farming, ranching, and a more fixed urban structure, as evidenced by

the railroad, which is central to the novel's action. Bodily mutilations that occur throughout the novel are initially associated with Mexicans, possibly reflecting the fragmentation of a culture, a people disenfranchised by the effects of a westward movement. In time, however, maimings, cuts, defects, and missing body parts equally assault whites, indicating McMurtry's commitment to chop away at the frontier myth and its accompanying western hero. Such ironic turns are indicative of McMurtry's ambivalent stance. *Streets of Laredo* is characterized by the same ambiguity that drives McMurtry personally, and although much has been written about the author's ambivalence toward his home state of Texas and the myth of the West he grew up both idolizing and disdaining, little has been written about the postmodern elements of his texts.<sup>2</sup> This essay will focus on the postmodern nature of the novel to underscore a multivocal discourse. By engaging aspects of border theory, which foregrounds physical and psychological borders and terrains to encourage us to rethink history in ways that are transformative for those who have been excluded from history, I situate *Streets of Laredo* within broader issues of cultural politics and identity formation. This stance allows me to position the novel as a borderlands text of translation, transformation, and accommodation that overturns traditional frontier mythogenesis to point toward a more inclusive, bordered consciousness—a place that accommodates the often neglected voice of the Other.

*Streets of Laredo* is a long, complex novel that encompasses the lives of many characters and ideas central to the themes of the West, and specifically in light of the many border crossings that structure the novel, the Southwest. Entwined within the themes of loyalty, responsibility, and what William T. Pilkington calls “ends and beginnings” are the journeys through Texas and Mexico taken up by Woodrow Call, Pea Eye and Lorena Parker, and Maria Garza (3). Importantly, these journeys are literal *and* metaphorical. The central action of the novel begins with a quest, the hunt for the vicious young outlaw and train robber Joey Garza, Maria's son. Although Call, a Texas Ranger, is nearing seventy, he still takes on occasional assignments to bring in petty criminals to make his living. However, the nineteen-year-old Joey Garza—who learned his vicious ways from the Apache—is no petty criminal. A postmodern villain who smiles as he kills, Joey has a “cold nature” that there is “no accounting for” (404).

As a boy, McMurtry and his eight brothers caught sight of the last of the great cattle drives from their barn-top vantage on Idiot Ridge, on the fringe of the plains in Archer County, Texas. His earliest recollections form the stuff of his creative concerns, and they are suffused with memories and impressions of the borders between frontier and civilization, myth and reality, past and present. As the descendant “of a people who had lived for years on the fringes of civilization, who could see both into the vastness of the plains and into the culture of the East,” McMurtry

straddles the boundary between divergent worlds (Lich 13). Born in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1936, as the son and grandson of frontier cattlemen, he is a writer who speaks the native language of his frontier soil and generates characters as functions of their setting. Scholars Mark Busby, William T. Pilkington, and Lera Patrick Tyler Lich concur that McMurtry combines elements of anti-myth alongside mythic elements of a cowboy god whose home was the frontier and who celebrates the ideals of freedom and adventure appropriate to the boundless spaces found there. This is especially true in *Streets of Laredo*, as the novel's action is seeded in the author's deep ambivalence toward a shifting landscape that is quickly moving from an agrarian, rural way of life to a more urban one.

McMurtry has asserted that all of his novels begin with a "culminating scene" that illustrates a closure of sorts: "I don't know exactly what's ended, and the writing of the novel is a process in which I discover how these people got themselves to this scene" (in Bennett 13). Part 1 of *Streets of Laredo*, titled "A Salaried Man," underscores a shift in the relations of space and power on the southwestern frontier. Captain Woodrow Call, "the most famous ranger of all time," has been hired by the eastern robber baron and railroad president Colonel Terry to hunt the notorious Joey Garza (132). To track down his quarry, Call must travel by train from Amarillo to South Texas, where, on horseback, he will proceed into Mexico. Keeping the rail lines running and money in the pockets of the "gringos" that Joey steals from is the catalyst for the novel's action. Well before Call embarks on his journey, however, he laments the transforming landscape and the situated knowledge required of earlier times. He tells Charles Goodnight, his sometime friend and the owner of the cabin in Quitaque Call sometimes occupies, that "traveling by train weakens the memory. ... A man that travels horseback needs to remember where the water holes are, but a man that rides in a train can forget about water holes, because trains don't drink" (17). This exchange indicates a passing way of life as well as hints at the necessity of a new character needed to function in the modern world. More important, it reflects a postmodern structure that underscores fragmentation and loss. Call must first travel by train and then by way of horse, his preferred method. Additionally, Call admits, "what they were doing was only the shadow of rangers, anyway" (38). From the onset, McMurtry positions him as a decentered subject, "using a metaphor of physical fragmentation to allegorize the unreasonable paradigm that result[s] from the beloved myth" (Nickell 12). Call, long a symbol of the ranger and adventuring cowboy on horseback who protects pioneers and settlers, is now a salaried man, hunting not the Comanche or Kiowa but protecting the interests of corporate empires. In this regard, he is aligned with Colonel Terry's stalwart minion, the railroad accountant and Easterner Brookshire.

When Euroamericans moved westward into the already occupied spaces of the American Southwest, the geography did not categorically shift from an agrarian, premodern society to a more cosmopolitan one. On the contrary, the narrative space of the novel evinces the affective and symbolic capitalization of the border, a palimpsest that can be read in terms of shifting claims to power inherently tied to what Mary Pat Brady discusses as the production of space and subjectivities on the border (52). In *Streets of Laredo*, this geographical palimpsest may be read on the body, as McMurtry's use of the loss of body parts is a metaphor for human loss and an increasingly obsolete frontier mythology. The theoretical trajectory I take in this essay follows the course taken by Emma Pérez in *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999). I do this for two reasons. First, Pérez employs a Foucauldian archaeology to challenge the politics of meaning enmeshed within the "enunciative moment[s]" of history (xvii). Such a course allows Pérez—who moves beyond "official" histories to probe the discursive fields that shape Chicana stories—to explore a genealogy that "recognizes how *history* has been written upon the body (xiii, xvi). For Pérez, Foucault's archaeology is a methodological tool to uncover a line of descent, a genealogy imprinted on the power/knowledge paradigm as well as on the body. Such a course is integral to the present study because it "acknowledg[es] that 'things said' are always an inscription upon the body" (Pérez xvi). As we will see, "things said" by major characters in the novel—Lorena, and more significantly, Maria, and Call—are precursors to third space movements first enunciated and then enacted. These movements, performed within the gaps, comprise the "interstitial moments of history," which unmask and ultimately expose a time-lag of sign/symbol between the colonized and the colonizer, or, in postcolonial terms, the first space (the indigenus) and the second space (the colonizer) (Pérez xvi).

Historical gaps, for Pérez, Chela Sandoval, Homi Bhabha, and other third space theorists, lay bare the third space as a contact zone of opportunity, translation, and negotiation. A third space reading of subjective movements between and among the various power bases represented by Call, Maria, and Lorena reveals *Streets of Laredo* as a borderlands text, as the third space foregrounds the situated historical experiences of a plurality of voices rather than the single colonialist project that has often dominated frontier scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on the methodologies of the above scholars allows me to do two things: privilege a postmodern historical consciousness that reconceptualizes a spatial paradigm in favor of a more inclusive poetics of place and interrupt a Euroamerican linear model of time within a frontier paradigm.

Drawing from third space theories allows me to expose what I call the "bordered frontier" in the American Southwest, a term I use to denote the dialogic nature entwined within the complex ideologies that comprise the intrinsic connections between border and frontier para-

digms. Only a course that considers the possibilities inherent to border discourse *and* a frontier paradigm is suitable to deconstruct McMurtry's postmodern trajectory in *Streets*. As we will see, the novel complicates oppositions of space and place that are intrinsic to a frontier mythology. Such conflicts are based in the historical prioritizing of vast, open spaces that tied men like Woodrow Call to a life of journeying and the search for fixity, or rootedness. At the novel's conclusion, however, McMurtry merges the dualities inherent in the bordered frontier to produce a synthesis grounded in the domestic imperatives of place. In so doing, he prioritizes the feminine alongside new approaches to a cultural politics of difference.

If the frontier in the United States is historically associated with growth and expansionist aims, as a generation of scholars generally agrees, then works that focus on societies and cultures in borderland landscapes often revise earlier frontier narratives and repopulate those narratives with "missing" players. In *Streets of Laredo*, Lorena and Maria upstage Call's actions. Although Joey hates his mother, Maria, and considers her a whore simply by virtue of her sex, Maria nonetheless undergoes a long search for him in hopes that she can save him from Call. Joey is a static character who "belongs to death" from the start. Joey's vicious hatred, moreover, is a thing wholly unaccountable: "His hate was just there, as fire is there, as blood is there, or desire, or sorrow, or sadness, or death. For her [Maria], the fact that Joey hated her was one more painful sorrow, like Teresa's blindness, or like Rafael's poor sheep's mind" (487–88). Maria's three children are all "damaged" in some way (95, 96). Like so many in the novel, her children are not absolutely whole but function as part of a unit, a collective ultimately bound to Maria. Teresa is blind; Rafael is soft in the head—"Teresa thought for Rafael"—and Joey has a "sick" soul (95). It is said that Joey, who "steal[s] money from Americans," learned his passion for violence and stealth from the Apache to whom he was sold by a stepfather at the age of six (191). Joey is an enigma, a striking, blond Mexican who is described as the devil in the novel:

The *Federales* had killed all the Apaches in Mexico, and those in the United States had been removed to Indian territory. Many people on the border had even forgotten the Apaches, and what they did to people. When Joey left the dead cowboy's brains in the jail in Presidio, people began to talk about him as if he were the devil, not just a *güero*, a Mexican boy who was almost white. Only some of the older men and women remembered Apaches, and how they cut. (183)

With regards to his unaccountable malevolence, Joey is linked to the "devil pig" that terrorizes the inhabitants of Crow Town, an oasis of vice and depravity, a place "where life was so cheap that the law wouldn't

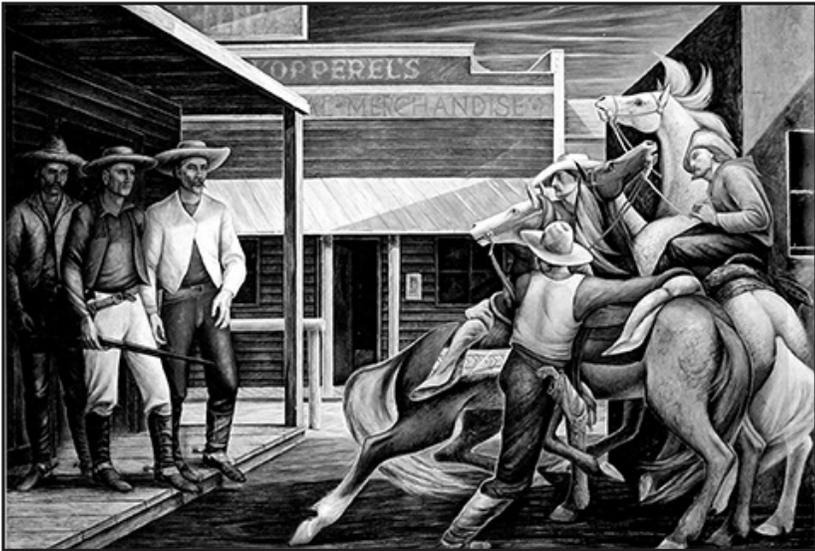
bother trying to preserve it" (89, 90). And in Crow Town, "the most superstitious of the poor people believed the pig walked down to hell to receive instructions from the devil" (89). Maria is linked to Joey and the devil pig, and this linkage emphasizes an ironic reversal in which Maria undermines the myth of the frontier and, more important, an inherited discourse of gender roles and traditional power relations. Maria's initial act upon entering Crow Town for the first time is to kill the devil pig with one shot—a feat hundreds of cowboys had attempted but none had been able to perform. Some "thought the woman must be a witch, to be able to kill the great pig" (259). Additionally, Maria's tactical salvation of all of Crow Town's women—all but the old Comanche woman Naiche, who refuses to leave—foreshadows the collapse of the outlaw haven. After Maria kills the pig, she is transformed; she is "a new woman," and her strength and courage become almost as legendary as her son's heinous deeds (261). Her final transformation comes with her death in part 3 of the novel.

Lorena, whom we first meet as a young prostitute in *Lonesome Dove* is now a schoolteacher, a mother of five, and Pea Eye's wife. In *Streets of Laredo*, she saves Call from death when she saws off his leg with a nicked knife blade in the wild, a symbolic act rife with "Freudian implications of castrating the man and the myth" (Nickell 68). McMurtry, in effect, foregrounds the feminine in *Streets of Laredo*: Lorena, Maria, and Teresa (Maria's young daughter) all act as saviors, pushing the limits of inherited patriarchal codes. By according the women such power, McMurtry breaks open the boundaries of a southwestern mythology in ways that presage what Gloria Anzaldúa has called a *mestiza* consciousness, a "consciousness of the Borderlands" that embraces nonbinary modes of thinking and a tolerance for contradictory states of being and knowing (99). Call's and Maria's actions subvert dominant frontier ideologies; with Call, these are subtle movements couched in McMurtry's own sense of ambivalence, with the end result revealing not stasis, but a mythos that privileges transformation. Maria's movements, seeded in loyalty and responsibility for her murderous, spiteful son, Joey, ultimately imbue her with ironic connections to the tale of *La Llorona*, connections that McMurtry explodes.

Ultimately, it is Maria—along with Gordo the butcher, a minor character—who finishes the job of killing Joey that Pea Eye (not Call) began; this final act effectively overturns the myth of *La Llorona*. Significantly, Joey's death is left entirely ambiguous, further underscoring the postmodern nature of the novel. In the end, no one is quite sure who exactly struck the final blow that ended Joey's life, and the deed becomes the stuff of rumor ... and legend. In part 3, the novel's final section, when Joey stabs Maria, who is also midwife to the town of Ojinaga, old Estela, who had borne thirteen sons and daughters to outlive them

all, hears Maria talking to her dead children. Although the river “swirl[s] her blood away,” Maria does not die (513). More important, her part in the death of her son engenders an alternative legend. In having Joey commit matricide rather than Maria commit infanticide, McMurtry overturns the ideology associated with the legend of *La Llorona*, ideas “about women being punished for the rest of their lives for some sin that happened somewhere in our [women’s] collective history” (Moraga 145). Significantly, Maria and Joey stab *each other*, effectively recentering the story in such a way that the mythology encompassing *La Llorona* is not “monolithic,” or “uni-directional,” but suggestive of the notion that borders of meaning and intention are not contained by hierarchical structures that ostensibly bind them (Swyt 191).<sup>4</sup> Maria, like Lorena, and, more significantly, Call, undergo transformations that posit what Chela Sandoval terms a third space tactical subjectivity. Sandoval discusses differential modes of consciousness as fluid means of enacting recoveries and reparations to produce justice. She writes that liberation, freedom, and change among subordinated subjects become possible within the workings of differential consciousness, wherein self-conscious agents “recognize one another as allies, countrywomen and men of the same psychic terrain” (15).

Transformation is a key element in *Streets of Laredo* that allows characters, in Pérez’s words, to “remake and reclaim another story—stories of love, of compassion, of hope” (127). If we look at the novel through the lens of border theory, we see how McMurtry’s ambivalent stance



Frank Mechau. *THE TAKING OF SAM BASS*. 1940. Oil on canvas. 8'×11'6". Federal Courthouse, Fort Worth, Texas.

serves a broader historiographic function. Ideological transformations in the novel are written on the body, and they take place alongside shifts in power relations that arise from the questioning of male-dominant cultural practices. Lorena as well as Maria and Call renegotiate the politics inscribed on their bodies in such a way that conflict and control yield to negotiation and compromise. Lorena has transformed herself from prostitute to wife to schoolmarm and, finally, to savior. Lorena does not just physically accompany Call on his quest; her earlier transformation signals Call's path to consciousness.

When Lorena first speaks with Charles Goodnight about Joey Garza and, more specifically, Mox Mox (the "manburner" and second killer/villain introduced in part 2 of the novel), she reiterates that Goodnight is needed in Quitaque. She says, "This whole part of the country needs you. You're the man who built the school. ... You brought the doctor here. You paid for the courthouse." In contrast, she says, "nobody needs Captain Call" (242). By the novel's end, however, Call is needed—by Teresa, Maria's blind daughter. When Call first rides into Ojinaga, he finds the old scout Billy Williams caring for Teresa and Rafael, Maria's two children. Although the young Teresa cannot see Call, she "thought the man might be a king, from the way he made the air different when he looked at her." She is soothed by Call's voice and she hopes that he will stay with them for a while. Call, too, is drawn to Teresa, as he discerns "something in her quick expression that was unusual" (289). He muses about the child, wishing he "had a bauble to give her, a ribbon, or a locket, or some such trinket" (290). This scene foreshadows a reconciliation of forces, of ideological struggles on the borderlands. In time, Call will move from "ruling" the frontier to reigning a young girl's heart.

Call and Lorena embody Sandoval's ideology that endeavors to identify "forms of consciousness in opposition" by self-consciously opposing a dominant social order with the end result of breaking with prevailing, hierarchical forms of ideology (2). Before she embarks on her journey with Captain Call to find her husband, Pea Eye, Lorena tells Goodnight, "Mox Mox is a killer, and so is Captain Call. Send a killer after a killer" (242). We know that she harbors a strong dislike for Call, yet once she's traveled with him for several nights and is forced to amputate his leg in order to save his life, she tells him that what is written on one's body is not written in stone. "If you live," she says, "you oughtn't to stay a killer. I didn't stay a whore!" (437). Earlier in the novel, Goodnight also reflects upon the nature of change on the frontier when he says, "Lorena did not stay a whore; no more did her husband have to stay a Texas Ranger" (363). Indeed, Lorena's unbounded movement through the social/class hierarchy foreshadows Call's transformation, his "call" to consciousness.

The Texas Ranger is not the novel's hero; the transference of power from the ranger/cowboy to the female body signals a shift from wil-

derness to civilization, a transposition of masculine aims to domestic pursuits. More important, the narrative turns in the novel disrupt the frontier mythology to reveal accommodation—and possibly a reconciliation—of ideological struggles on the borderlands. In the opening pages, Pea Eye, who has ranged with Call for over thirty years, initially refuses his order to accompany him in the search for Joey. As Pea Eye has always proved loyal before, Call determines that “the woman had won. In the end, it seemed they always did” (38). Indeed, Pea Eye is deeply conflicted at the prospect of leaving his family’s farm in Quanah. After weighing his loyalties to Call against those to Lorena and his growing family, he decides to stay in Quanah. Later, when Goodnight admonishes Pea Eye for not accompanying Call, Pea Eye decides his choice was made in error. Lorena acknowledges that his history is the culprit: “She could change her husband’s habits, and she had, but she couldn’t change his history, and it was in his history that the problem lay” (162). She recognizes that Pea Eye’s history is mired in a hierarchical binary that bisects an outmoded ideology and the ongoing production of the border as place: “That was what it was, too: woman against man. Her body, her spirit, her affection and passion, the children she and Pea shared, the *life* they shared on the farm that had cost them all her money and years of their energy. It was that against the old man with the gun, and the way of life that ought to have ended” (160–61).

*Streets of Laredo* presents an alternative western ethos in which the shifting landscape, together with the female body, serves as the catalyst for the destruction of the western myth. As Lorena muses on the effects of the myth, she alludes to the transformation of vast spaces into occupied places—settlements with histories and memories of their own. Such places are not so easily displaced by incursions wrought by the mythic ideal. This scene anticipates the uprooting of Lorena’s dualistic thinking. Like Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*, Lorena “undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” which inverts or resolves an earlier ambivalence (Anzaldúa 100). In time, she, like Call, will “break down the subject-object duality” to work out a synthesis that transcends old paradigms (Anzaldúa 102). Lorena’s remark presages loss, but it is a loss marked by renewal, most notably for Call.

The novel begins with a decentered Call, but this turn does not mean his death. Rather, it suggests his inevitable metamorphosis alongside a transfigured landscape and the reshaping of a way of life in the Southwest. This illustrates how a third space conceptual framework is key to emerging frontier scholarship that underscores the border of the Southwest as a dialogic site, an area of inherent discourse that accounts for memory, history, and racialized, gendered subjectivities in process. This is the discourse at work in *Streets of Laredo*. The material marker of the border in the Southwest—the Rio Grande—furnishes the geo-

graphical fragmentation in the novel; the many crossings illuminate the Southwest as a fragmented space. Border theory and third space technologies furnish a discourse to examine subjectivities in process.

The expansive southwestern landscape is a repository of memories in *Streets of Laredo*. First, Call and Goodnight muse about it: "Often the two men would sit, largely in silence, looking down into the canyon until dusk and then darkness filled it. In the dusk and shadows they saw their history; in the fading afterglow they saw the fallen: the Rangers, the Indians, the cowboys" (16). Yet, always, McMurtry's ambivalence remains. The "old ones" of the West, as Captain Call refers to them, are vanishing, their diminishing attire evidence of loss. Goodnight thinks about his cowboys, who "wore the[ir] guns from wistfulness. ... [T]hey wanted to feel that they were living in a West that was still wild" (362). For Call, however, it is not diminished attire, but a diminished sense of self that he grapples with throughout the novel. Furthermore, although the vast southwestern landscape inherently counteracts the idea of borders, its location on the edge of southern and western culture along the Rio Grande and the border of Mexico necessitate an awareness of place and borders. McMurtry writes:

I grew up in a post-frontier mentality in Archer County in the 30's and 40's, ... and yet my grandparents were among the very first white people in my county; and I knew, as I was growing up, numerous people who had been really, literally, in the first generation of white people in West Texas and who settled the land, and who, in settling the land, had acted upon and developed a set of values, a set of beliefs, a set of traditions and customs that really went with the frontier way of life and that were designed to insure certain things, namely ... survival of the settlement. ("The Southwest as Cradle" 27-28)

Importantly, physical borders in the novel evince mythological borders: Call moves from a "shadow" of his former self to an echo to an "impostor" and, finally, to an "absence" (38, 574, 583). As a subjectivity in process, Call's ideological repositioning is marked by the many "cuts" to his physical being. As we will see, in the space of the novel, his body becomes a testament, a marker of what I term "ambivalence in the flesh." Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), refer to a "theory in the flesh" (23). Anzaldúa, in particular, stresses how the body serves as an interface between different layers of experience and consciousness. A theory in the flesh, then, seeks to transcend dualities found on the physical, spiritual, and psychical planes to fuse a politics born of necessity and grounded in lived experiences. A theory in the flesh works "to bridge the contradictions in our experience" (23).

The guiding principle of the frontier, to "deplete and leave" (Cook 199), is deeply at odds with border theorists and US third space feminist

views such as Anzaldúa's, Pérez's, and Sandoval's, that take a postmodern approach to examining the gaps and specific moments of history from various points of view in efforts to interrupt linear, Eurocentric models of thinking and, consequently, writing history. US third space feminists attempt to meet on a "broader communal ground" (Anzaldúa 109) that accounts for history, memory, and place such that movements forward become crossings whereby individuals are not simply located within one time period, but an encompassing "historical sequence" (Soja, "History" 116). This "topospatial" stance, to borrow a term put forward by José David Saldívar, "strips off layers of time and memory to disclose the unsaid, the repressed history hidden under the weight of ignorance, propriety, or shame" (75, 80). Edward Soja clearly refers to this stance when he draws upon the theories of C. Wright Mills, who stresses a "historical imagination" as not simply central to critical social theory but "the search for practical understanding of the world as a means of emancipation versus maintenance of the status quo" ("History" 117). When we consider these ideas alongside Pilkington's claim that McMurtry's "ambiguous love affair with his homeland" stems from ideas surrounding "the birth and the death that he is most concerned with," we can conclude that McMurtry's ambivalent stance in *Streets of Laredo* synthesizes into a fledgling third space consciousness (174).

Larry Goodwyn, Pilkington, and Busby all write about the Texas border as a space of transition where the known and the unknown—for frontiersmen and women—come together. Settlers who "conquered" nature and incorporated its primitivism set in motion the psychic landscape that Larry McMurtry confronts and dramatizes in *Streets of Laredo*. Because the Southwest is a land of borders, it is also, as Pilkington has suggested, a land of "ends and beginnings," a place of "transition where the known and the unknown merge" (3). According to *The Texas Tribune*, the Texas border makes up 1,254 miles of the 1,900-mile-long US-Mexico border. What sets Texas apart from the greater West is the border itself, which lends one a "feeling of existing on the outer limits of something" (Pilkington 3). The ends and the beginnings, the known and the unknown in Pilkington's equation must be sought in the landscape itself, for it is the vast spaces of the southwestern landscape that engender and perpetuate the mythology. Busby concludes that McMurtry "acknowledges the oppositions" inherent in a southwestern frontier mythology and "merges the dualities" to produce "a gestalt that is larger than the two forces by themselves" (48). I believe that what these scholars are hinting at is a third space that emerges when we conceptualize a discourse that engages border theory *within* a frontier mythology. Only when we view the southwestern frontier through the lens of border theory can we problematize inherent, contending discourses of power to examine, indeed, relocate shifting centers as the space between center and margin shifts and crumbles. This stance allows us to explore what

Amy Kaplan sees as “the conceptual limits of the frontier, by displacing it with the site of the borderlands” (qtd. in Saldívar xiii).

*Streets of Laredo* is characterized by McMurtry’s self-reflexivity, by its many references to its historical location in a time of profound transformation, and by the cognitive disorientation experienced by the main characters. Its setting and scope are postmodern; but it distinctly foregrounds a postcolonial landscape that enables a theoretical space for a discourse of Otherness. For Bhabha, the politics of postmodernism are inseparable from the politics of postcolonialism, as “the former both makes way for and is inscribed by the latter” (Stoneham 238). From this vantage point, and within a frontier ideology, we may move amid the vastness of space to configure how borderlands peoples resist, and ultimately oppose, colonialist structures to create what theorists such as Pérez, Anzaldúa, and Sandoval call a liberating third space.

Woodrow Call suffers from a diminished sense of self throughout the novel. Situated on the borderlands of experience, his fragmented psyche mirrors McMurtry’s resolve to chop away at the myth Call wholly represents. By the end of the novel, Call’s transformation is all but complete. Along his quest to find and kill Joey, he acknowledges that “never before had he followed his instincts and come up totally empty” (371). His arthritis at one point becomes so bad that several “days passed without his even unsaddling his horse. He was afraid he might not be able to pull the saddle straps tight again, with his sore hands” (372). Additionally, he begins to second-guess his decisions. Lorena entreats Call to let her ride with him to search for Pea Eye, but Call tells her, “I don’t know that I can protect you. ... I let the Garza boy slip right by me and kill Roy Bean. Then, I let Mox Mox get away. That’s two poor performances in a row” (390–91). Call has never failed before, for he is well aware of the



Ward Lockwood. *TEXAS RANGERS IN CAMP*. 1942. Fresco secco (tempera on dry plaster). 5'9" × 11'. Post Office, Hamilton, Texas.

“way of the frontier. If you failed in vigilance, you usually died. Rarely would the frontier permit a lapse as serious as the one he had just made” (422–23). Call’s lapses, his failures, however, are not tests, as he has proved himself many times throughout his long career. Rather, they are “cuts” to his psyche; McMurtry’s diminishing of Call’s emotional state foreshadows his physical fragmentation, which evinces a hewing of the myth. In “*La conciencia de la mestiza*,” Anzaldúa’s culminating chapter of *Borderlands/“La Frontera”* (1987), the author writes:

Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (109)

Postmodernism is profoundly “attentive to language as the legitimizing agency of self and culture” (Fullbrook 72). McMurtry’s narrative destroys the semiotic framework and thereby the ideological balance of a western mythology by effectively breaching the space between colonizer and colonized. This space is first represented by a physical location, Maria’s house in Ojinaga. Early in the novel, before she embarks on her quest to find Joey in Crow Town and inform him of Call’s manhunt, Maria’s home is revealed as a site at the intersection of a jousting for authority. Maria’s home—the place that ultimately serves as a haven for Joey, Pea Eye, and, finally, Call—is aligned with the Southwest as space when the “gringos” violate her: “Maria didn’t believe in hell. If there was a hell it came to you in life. The Texans brought it. They had evil in them and they had exercised their evil on her, when they caught her in her house. That was hell, and it had happened to her in her own house” (97). This narrative interplay of space and place signifies McMurtry’s most significant reversal in the novel, that of Call. In an ironic reversal of space, Maria’s home is redefined both spatially and temporally. Her home becomes a site of “in-betweenness,” a “ground of discussion, dispute, confession, apology and negotiation” through which Maria and Call confront the inequities and asymmetries of the societal trauma the myth of the West has wrought (Bhabha x). More to the point, Call’s torn body signals a third space as it represents the materialization of a dialogical site “between the violent and the violated, the accused and the accuser, allegation and admission” (Bhabha x).

Call, seriously wounded by Joey Garza, suffers a bullet lodged close to his heart, has one leg amputated by Lorena, and is facing the loss of his left arm. Yet he still lives, and Lorena cannot imagine what will become of him:

Even if she wrestled him onto his horse and got him to Presidio and they found a doctor, what could the doctor do? And what would there be left for him if he did live? He couldn't hunt men anymore. He wasn't a rancher. He didn't farm. He had lived all his life by the gun, and now no one would ever want him for his fighting abilities again. Better that he had died—he wouldn't have this suffering, and he wouldn't have to live as an old cripple. (454)

When Lorena rides into the village of Ojinaga with a wounded Call in tow and tied to his horse, Maria, having endured an earlier transformation of her own flesh, demonstrates a radical shift in consciousness. Call killed Maria's father and her brother during his early days as a ranger:

The name sent a chill through her. She had loved her father and her brother. They had done no more than take back horses that the Texans had taken from them. No living man had caused her as much grief as Woodrow Call: not the four husbands, three of whom beat her; not the gringos, who insulted her, assuming that because she was a brown woman, she was a whore. (61)

Although she holds a newly sharpened knife in her hand (she and Billy Williams were preparing to kill a goat), Maria "didn't raise the knife and she didn't strike" (458). Call's wounds, his torn flesh, now marked by Lorena's cutting off of his left leg and by Joey's bullets, signal to Maria an alternative ethical and political authority against the dogmatism of power once held by Call. Although he is still Other, the encounter signals a moment of alterity:

Though he bore the name of the man who had killed her father and her brother, Maria knew he was no longer that man, the one she had wanted to kill. ... To stab him now would be pointless—for she would not be stabbing the Captain Call she had hated for so long, but only the clothes and the fleshy wrappings of that man. (459)

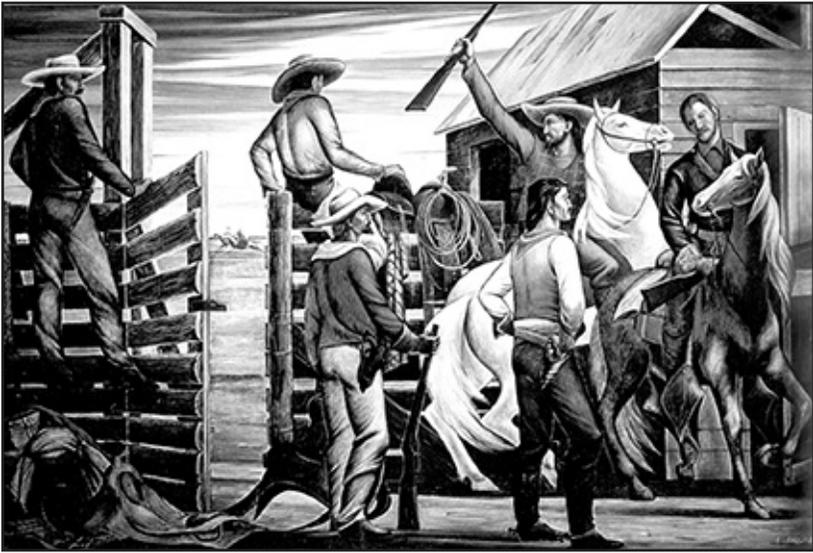
Her acknowledgement of Call as a man "not-Call" signals the third space as "a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience" (Bhabha xiii). Not a killer any more, not a Texas Ranger, and certainly not the "salaried man" who was hired to kill her son, Call now emphasizes what semioticians call the "emptiness" or "arbitrariness" of the sign (Bhabha xi). As the arbitrary sign shifts across the open frame of signification, it marks the distance that lies between Maria's familiarity with the man hunter and the unknowability of the new man, "the old, sick man on the black horse" (459). As such, Maria can more easily approach him. McMurtry, narratively and ideologically, has shrunk the ethical and moral proximity that lies between Maria and Call. Notably, this meeting represents the first time Maria physically casts eyes on Call, though she has known, and indeed

has felt the repercussions, of his deeds for many years. When Maria finally does perceive with her own eyes the man himself, he has ceased to signify the myth. The moment is anticlimactic. Call is only an old man dressed in the torn wrappings of the myth. The man Teresa's ears once perceived as a "king" has ceased to exist. Call no longer acts as signifier of the colonizer. He has become *empty* in Bhabha's terminology. And it is this "'emptiness' of the signifier—the untranslatable movement between the intended object and its mode of intention—that enables a speech-act to become the bearer of motivated meanings and deliberative intentions, *in situ*, at the moment of its enunciation" (Bhabha xi). Call's body as colonizer, Call as man hunter and supreme performer/executor of the myth is now a marker of the distance between an earlier, outdated history and a new narrative of accommodation. McMurtry has effectively removed Call from an outdated mythology, an outdated narrative. It is somewhere between the distance, somewhere within the shift across the open frame of signification that now marks Call's body where Call and Maria meet in new flesh. This meeting marks a third space of enunciation. This moment in time and space is a bridge. The moment was first signaled by Lorena, who was made aware of it when she sawed off Call's leg. The moment of recognition by Maria represents an "open" contact zone, an instance in time that enables other subject positions to emerge; Maria enunciates the time lag at the moment she understands that Call is not the same man. Ultimately, Call is able to return Lorena's initial gaze and Maria's later gaze to the construction of his body, his torn flesh, which, when healed, will cover a new man. All has been leading to this moment in time and space. It is this historical moment that we must read semiotically.

In the long epilogue that follows the novel, Call's transformation is complete, as he turns the painful gaze of his history to his body. This ushers his emerging desire to connect with and ultimately carve what Sandoval calls an oppositional consciousness; he has broken with an outdated ideology and is well on the way to realizing an alternative to his bloody, violent history. Call concludes that on the morning of his injuries, the morning he wounded Joey—but did not kill him—it was his "untrustworthy eyes" that had "cost him himself: that was how he came to view it. Because of his untrustworthy eyes, he had been reduced to what he was now, a man with two crutches, a man who could not mount a horse" (544). Ironically, however, Call, in the end, has eyes only for the Mexican child, Teresa. Lorena and Clara Allen acknowledge Call "wouldn't last long without Tessie" (577); she remains his "sole attendant" (543). Only when he looks at Teresa is he even alive: "Except for Teresa, he had no one. Even looking at the Captain, unless he was with Teresa, was painful. Often when he was looking at Teresa, Call had tears in his eyes. But otherwise, there was nothing in his eyes—he was an absence" (583). Call is an empty vessel. Having been stripped of

the mythology, he remains only when his presence is mirrored back to him in the eyes of young Tessie, “who had not only Maria’s look, but Maria’s strength” (583). Significantly, when we engage border theory while deconstructing the relationship between Call and Teresa, we must acknowledge that their bond demonstrates a synthesis. This synthesis is physical and psychological and embodies a tactical subjectivity of cultural accommodation that serves to demythologize Call’s history in a way that suggests a postcolonial imaginary *within* a decolonial imaginary as suggested by Pérez. This stance challenges the written history—the myth—of the southwestern frontier. Call’s reintegration with the Other is further evidenced by his suggestion that the “little money” he has managed to save be used to pay for Tessie’s education at a special school for the blind (580). His future is now marked by the responsibility, indeed, the love, he feels for Teresa.

Upon her deathbed, after having been stabbed by Joey, Maria asks Lorena to care for Teresa and Rafael; Lorena agrees to raise them on the farm in Quanah. Captain Call, too, having lost both an arm and a leg in the fight against Joey Garza, at the novel’s end, makes his way to Pea Eye and Lorena’s farm. Despondent at first, Call later traverses the juncture between past and present. Crossing this point in time necessitates union with the Other, in this case, Teresa. Their attachment represents reconciliation. It is this bond that Teresa and Call equally feel that finally gives Call the freedom to dissociate from the deep-seated, vast entailments of a southwestern mythology, a space the Easterner Brookshire describes as “beyond a world of ledgers ... a world of space and wind, of icy nights and brilliant stars, of men who killed with bullets and men who burned dogs” (343). In the end, there is “a crack, a kind of canyon between the Woodrow Call sitting with Teresa on the train and the Woodrow Call who had made the campfire that morning. ... [H]e could remember the person he had been, but he could not become that person again. ... That person—that Call—was back down the weeks, on the other side of the canyon of time. There was no rejoining him, and there never would be” (565–66). Call, a man who “lived somewhere back in memory, across a canyon, across the Pecos; that man had been blown away, as Brookshire feared he would be, on the plains of time,” is reduced, but not to a shell of his former self (574); rather, throughout the novel, the many cuts and fragments that mark Call’s body highlight a subjectivity-in-process, a process of “becoming.” Indeed, “birth and death,” those aspects of the mythology that Pilkington argues to be major facets of McMurtry’s ambivalence, become synthesized in the body of Captain Woodrow Call. By the conclusion of *Streets of Laredo*, the limitless spaces of the Southwest have vanished, as have most of the men who shaped the myth. What is left in the stead of open spaces is place and a “shutting out” of the wild. The final line of the novel focuses on a life of domesticity: “Pea Eye shut the door of the oat bin, to keep out mice and snakes,



Frank Mechau. *TWO TEXAS RANGERS*. 1940. Oil on canvas. 8' x 11' 6". Federal Courthouse, Fort Worth, Texas.

and, at moments nervous, at moments relieved—at least she had called him *honey*—he followed his wife back to their house” (589).

McMurtry’s ambivalent stance in *Streets of Laredo* allows that the medial sites between domesticity and the vastness of the frontier—between place and space—collapse to produce a synthesis, a compromise. Acknowledging and understanding this movement, however, requires us to not simply prioritize race, gender, and ethnicity but to accommodate contending, bordered discourses that cannot be resolved into one voice, but, rather, plural voices that contain and are contained within Other realities. Captain Call’s severed body—once wholly representative of the colonizer—does not remain simply as a symbol of impotence. At the novel’s end, he is more than the sum of the severed parts we externally “see.” Call, instead, represents disconnection, or an interruption of an earlier identity. We feel that Call’s body is yet in the making. McMurtry has effectively decolonized Call’s body, and in so doing, he prioritizes a multivocal discourse that is, in fact, written on the body. As such, Call’s orientation at the conclusion of the novel points toward a more inclusive, bordered consciousness—a place that accommodates an often neglected Other voice.

McMurtry’s use of the loss of body parts throughout *Streets of Laredo* is a metaphor for human loss—Call has an arm and a leg amputated; Pea Eye has toes shot off by Joey; Joey Garza cuts off the hands and feet of one of his stepfathers, Benito; Billy Williams shoots an ear off of Deputy Tom Johnson; the Easterner Brookshire continually fears that he will blow away in the gusty Texas wind; and when we finally meet

Colonel Terry, we find that he has lost an arm to the war. Maria's children do not lose body parts, but, rather, they are born into such losses: Teresa has no sight, Rafael has no mind, and Joey has no soul. All of these characters are, in a sense, diminished. Yet, what we are left with in Call is much more than "an absence" (583). A close reading of Call's movements from an "echo" extant in a southwestern landscape and mythology to his strategic positioning not alongside, but contained *within* Teresa's own blind eyes, her own psyche, obliges us to acknowledge transcendence and a new proposition. Call's "absence" reflects a negation of space. Call's attachment to Teresa underscores fixity, but more important, it represents a redefining of boundaries. No longer is Call bound to a vanishing mythology or to the vast, unsettled spaces of the frontier; instead, he will live out his days in the shelter of a secure domestic space, Pea Eye and Lorena's home. Not a home of his own, but a start.

### NOTES

1. The novels that comprise the tetralogy were published over a period of thirteen years. In order of publication, they are *Lonesome Dove* (1985), *Streets of Laredo* (1993), *Dead Man's Walk* (1995), and *Comanche Moon* (1998). The novels were not published in the order in which the story occurs. *Dead Man's Walk* and *Comanche Moon*, respectively, are prequels and *Streets of Laredo* the sequel to *Lonesome Dove*.

2. Pat Smith Nickell's dissertation (see Works Cited) provides a solid postmodern reading of all four novels in the tetralogy; Mark Busby, in *Larry McMurtry and the West: An Ambivalent Relationship* (1995) touches on the postmodern aspects of McMurtry's corpus; Deborah L. Madsen discusses postmodern aspects of McMurtry's first novel, *Horseman, Pass By* (1961), in "Postmodern Westerns: Larry McMurtry and the Poetics of Nostalgia," in *Postmodern Subjects/Postmodern Texts*, ed. by Jane Dowson and Steven Earnshaw (1995); Pauline Sarll touches on postmodern aspects in *Horseman, Pass By* in "Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers: A Revisionary Reading of Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By*" in *Journal of Popular Culture* 28.1 (Summer 1994): 97-110.

3. Among others, Latino/a and Chicano/a authors such as Américo Paredes (*With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, 1970), Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/"La Frontera": The New Mestiza*, 1987), David Montejano (*Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, 1987), Armando Alonzo (*Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas: 1734-1900*, 1998), Daniel D. Arreola (*Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province*, 2002), and Emma Pérez (*The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, 1999) have written about Texas history/historical actors in the vein of the early border scholar Herbert Eugene Bolton, who discussed colonial and precolonial contexts of the US borderlands and strove in his work to incorporate Other voices into his frontier histories and analyses.

4. For more on the legend of *La Llorona* as a female-centered legend, see Jeannie B. Thomas's "Woman and the Wilderness Legend: An Intolerable Margin of Mess" in *Pacific Coast Philology* 26.1/2 (July 1991), Ana Maria Carbonell's "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros" in *MELUS* 24.2 (Summer 1999), Norma Alarcón's "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" in *Cultural Critique* 13 (Autumn 1989), and Domino Renee Perez's *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* (2008).

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