

OPERATORS AT THE BORDERS: THE HERO AS CHANGE AGENT  
IN BORDER LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

JONATHAN HANDELMAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2003

Major Subject: English

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## ABSTRACT

Operators at the Borders: The Hero as Change Agent  
in Border Literature. (May 2003)

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This study of borders in literature investigates the ways the frontier and then the border entered the national consciousness and developed into the entities they are presently. The focus here on the border in literature is organized around the role of border heroes as they bring instability and change to the geographic border region and to more metaphoric border regions. This study not only addresses the individual border hero's role and attributes, but also focuses more generally on the border hero's role as an emblem of the struggle for change. Toward this end, I support the importance to border criticism of border agents by showing their presence and essential participation in the work of Américo Paredes, some of the earliest writing on borders and border agents.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Ellen. Without the support and assistance she provided I never would have been able to begin or finish this undertaking.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all, I am most grateful for the patience and effort shown by my wife Ellen and my son Simon in helping me complete this project. I am pleased to thank my parents as well as Matthew Layne who all provided invaluable encouragement and useful advice at every step of the way. For assistance with my research and writing I thank my adviser Janis Stout.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the United States, the attention of historians and to some extent the general public as well was focused on understanding the meaning of the America's vanishing frontier. As the country became more thickly settled, more thoroughly mapped, more completely tamed, the frontier was vanishing in reality but still strong in the mind of a nation that had defined itself in terms of the frontier for so long. Westward expansion caused the frontier—that imaginary line on a map conceived as the place where civilization confronts the unknown and the wild—to move and to shrink and to vanish so much so that by 1893, on the basis of the 1890 census, the frontier was officially declared closed.

By the end of the twentieth century, borders became a significant and growing area of study, essentially replacing all but revisionist study of the frontier and incorporating a multiplicity of voices and a significantly altered directional axis. Today we hear little of frontiers but much of borders. The entire concept of the frontier has been critiqued and in the United States is associated with the growth of the nation in the past and the exploration of space in the future. Borders replaced the frontier for a great many reasons, one of which was the growing awareness that the traditional discussion of the frontier had operated in a unidirectional way, from the single perspective of the Euro-

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This dissertation follows the style and format of the *MLA Handbook*.

Americans who moved from east to west, appropriating land and organizing social institutions in ways that reflected those they had known before. While now the focus on frontier has been supplanted by that of border it is important to realize that the unfolding story beginning with frontiers proceeds to borders, and a product of that process in literature is the development of the border hero, or emblem of change in the borderlands. Moreover, the process through which this character emerges is itself a kind of change agent in literary consciousness where the focus of literary studies expands to include a wider variety of voices. I use the phrase “agent of change” to describe characters who bring about a variety consequences in the border region. An agent is one who acts or has the power to act, one who marshals a force that causes a change. In the case of border agents, often the change is less an immediate transformation, but instead is a more gradual adoption of less-racist or restrictive attitudes. The force these agents of change wield is often the power of showing others how the systems of power and control in their lives operate. Writers of border literature bring about change when they demonstrate, through the characters in their fiction, that there are a variety of options available for how one may choose to live.

When in 1893 in his address to the American Historical Association meeting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago Frederick Jackson Turner took the closing of the frontier as the starting point for a sweeping reinterpretation of American history, he was thinking of an imaginary line stretching from north to south across the North American continent (or at any rate, across that portion of it that we understand to constitute the United States). That north-south line moved from east to west, representing the boundary of the westward advance of “civilization.” What had lain to the west of this

moving line—or actually, by the time Turner spoke, what had lain in a space between the original line of frontier and a line moving back in the other direction from the Pacific Coast—had been generally regarded by (white) Americans as essentially empty and certainly unknown territory. That the persons who in fact inhabited that territory and were being deprived of it by conquest might regard the other side of the advancing line—the pioneering side, the side Euro-Americans thought of as civilization—as equally unknown or savage seems not to have occurred to many, if any, citizens of the expanding United States as the nation pursued what it thought of as its Manifest Destiny. That is, in Turner’s argument, subjecthood is assumed solely for those inhabiting the spaces to the east, or “settled,” side of the line. What lay on the other side was, in his celebrated Thesis, of enormous importance to the formation of what he and many other Americans have thought of as national character, as well as national history. But it was of importance only in relation to the shaping and the advancement of white America.

With the shift to a discourse of borderlands, the geographic axis changes from a north-south line (the “frontier”) to a more nearly east-west one—or, in fact, a pair of east-west lines: the roughly parallel national borders between the United States and Mexico to the south, and between the United States and Canada, to the north. For the most part, the discourse of the border and borderlands has focused on the southern border, the United States border with Mexico. To be sure, with the surge of the discussion of borders, borderlands have also become frequently invoked in the metaphoric sense. Gloria Anzaldúa states, for example, in the frequently cited preface to her 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera*, that “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under,

lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (19). Such figurative borders will, of course, be important to this study. But my interest originates chiefly in the encounters located in actual, spatial borderlands, primarily the Southwestern borderlands. I will argue that the United States–Mexico border provides a useful paradigm for examining other, less concrete borders. In literature as well as in geographical reality the borderlands have become a topic replete with heroes, villains, and political struggles. The last half century has seen study of the Borderlands gain a position of importance in academia. This study will show how the origins and development of the Borderlands in literature came about concurrently with the decline of the long-held beliefs about the frontier, will do so through the lens of the struggle for change along the border, and will use the figure of the border hero to focus that study. The very fact that universities now offer fields of study in border literature is testimony to the power of the Borderlands and the ability of the border agent to bring about change—the literature itself has become a destabilizing agent. I use the word “change” here to mean more than simply causing things to be different. When I discuss border characters who struggle to bring about change, I mean that they seek to lay aside one organizational or belief system for another.

The change from wide acceptance of the paradigm of the frontier to a now widely accepted understanding of the Borderlands is more than a semantic difference or fad. Patricia Limerick asserts that “an unthinking reliance on the idea of the frontier almost ruined Western American history” by limiting the scope of what was included in that history (75). Additionally, if the frontier is, as Limerick claims only somewhat facetiously, “the place where white people got scared because they were scarce” (73) and

became, in popularly sanctioned legend and history the place where white people became brave and faced their fears, then there is no voice for the source of the fear. The shift from frontier to border is an important one because it paints a more complete picture, recognizing more perspectives, than the one which held sway for so long. And it is the border hero, the marginalized member of society, in a certain ironic sense the idealized American, who brings about the instability that leads to this recognition of multiple subjectivities.

Americans have come to understand their history and their national character because of the way the nation's frontier and later, borderlands, were presented. The borderlands in literature is an undeniably important field of study because it is more inclusive of a variety of voices. At the same time, it maintains continuity with earlier ideas in that much of the way the complex history of the borderlands manifests itself in American culture is bound up with the notion of a lone hero—a figure celebrated by, for example, R. W. B. Lewis in *The American Adam*. By the time frontier has been surpassed by border in the historical and literary world, the border hero has firmly established a place as a figure operating between two opposed systems that comprise the two sides of the border. In opposing these systems, the destabilization wrought by the hero brings about change and perhaps forges a third, hybrid system.

The centrality of the frontier to American experience and its celebration is associated primarily with the influential "Frontier Thesis" enunciated by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."<sup>1</sup> There Turner lays out a thesis based upon the idea that the unique American psyche was formed by the ever-changing Western frontier of the nation. As this frontier

moved farther and farther west it both distanced the settlers from the influences of European society in the East and forced them to assimilate into their own character, and hence their social structures, part of the wildness of the wilderness in the midst of which they were living. “This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish forces dominating the American character” (Turner 2). In discussing the American frontier, although Turner makes mention of “primitive society” it is clear he is not speaking of the Mexicans or native Americans who were to be found on the continent. Rather, he means the primitive society the settlers forged which can be read as a rejection of the culture of the civilized East coast.

Turner’s thesis is filled with words like “wilderness” and “primitive.” He describes the frontier as “the outer margin of the ‘settled area’” and as “the line of most rapid and effective Americanization [where] the wilderness masters the colonist” (Turner 3). He makes it clear that the changes that happen to the colonist at the frontier are essentially acts of nature or acts of the colonists themselves as they confront raw nature and their own isolated condition, for in the wilderness there can be no society. It remains for the colonist to create that society. Obviously, for Turner, there was no civilization and essentially no human life on the continent before Europeans arrived.

The concept of a continent vacant except for the European transplants who were in the process of becoming changed by the very land they were settling is illustrated when Turner states that “the most significant thing about the American frontier is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land” (Turner 3). By “free” Turner means unoccupied and uncharted. At least the U.S. Census Bureau defined the frontier as being the region of the

country where there averaged fewer than two people per square mile. Turner and the Census Bureau completely disregarded, however, the indigenous, non-white population of the country and their “primitive society.” Despite this disregard, his Frontier Thesis, as Limerick observes, was so influential and was afforded so much respect that “to many American historians, the Turner Thesis *was* Western history” (*Legacy of Conquest* 20).

Turner’s Thesis was popularized and developed in Walter Prescott Webb’s *The Great Plains* (1931). Webb, one of the historians Limerick alludes to, was a major influence on how white America understood the Borderlands and Mexican-American relations in the region. Much of what Turner wrote in his Frontier Thesis was taken to heart not just by historians, but also Americans more broadly in how they imagined themselves and their country.<sup>2</sup> While the theories Turner expounds were widely accepted well into the 1950s (indeed, as late as 1973 when President Nixon echoed them in his dedication of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame) and have been hotly debated since then, it is generally accepted that North America was not the implicitly empty environment Turner assumes created the rugged American character. His theories do not take into account the fact that there were people on the continent besides the Europeans who “settled” the land.

Building on Turner’s Frontier Thesis, Walter Prescott Webb’s *The Great Plains* addresses the pioneer experience on the plains and contrasts it, in the chapter “The Physical Basis of the Great Plains Environment,” with the “humid” and “timbered region” of the East where Webb argues the national character was not brought out in its strongest manifestation as was the case in the more arid, flat plains (*Great Plains* 11). Believing that the environment was to a large degree responsible for bringing out the

nature of the strong American frontier settler, Webb sought to differentiate the essence of the Plains settler from those who came before when the frontier was east of the Mississippi River. Webb chronicles the changes necessitated by moving from settling the East to settling the plains and argues that the unique demands made by the plains upon the settlers created a new sort of American who made important breaks with the past and the East in forming a fresh and vigorous character. By comparing the Spanish failure to settle the Great Plains with the successful American effort, Webb shows his belief in the adaptability and ruggedness of “Anglo-Americans,” not to mention his belief in a hierarchy of races which plays such a large role in his later writing (*Great Plains* 140).

Easterners, Webb argues, did not even have a suitable vocabulary to talk about the plains and what was found there when they first arrived, so accustomed were they to streams, rivers, and forests (*Great Plains* 42). This attitude changed with the settlers as they became more at home in their new environment and cast off the trappings of their old one. At times Webb’s prose reads as if American settlers are evolving from one state to another more advanced one as they move out of the wooded regions, learning how to survive and ultimately thrive on the open plains. Regardless of whether Webb was correct in his assumption that the new land both required and created a new sort of settler who became the archetype for a popularized rugged, strong, individualistic American, the idea was extremely compelling. The second chapter addresses in more detail how Webb’s frontier hero, glorified in this popular history of the West, is at times strikingly similar to the border hero investigated here who through bravery and independence begins dismantling the very origins of the theory that was instrumental in creating and, frequently, marginalizing him.

Mary Lawlor, in *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West* (2000), describes how with the closing of the frontier in the late 1800s came a greatly romanticized perception of the region and its inhabitants. Based in part on the historical interpretation/presentation of the West, the frontier region was believed to be “a border zone that harbored mystery and danger...[where] the desires of common citizens, if they were diligent and brave, might be richly fulfilled” (2). Combine this enticing image of possibility for the average person Lawlor presents as springing up in the first half of the twentieth century with the established American belief that the nation is composed of rugged individualists, and the essential, central place of the frontier hero is established. As early as 1902, Lawlor shows, writers were bemoaning the loss of the frontier and all it represented at the same time as they argued that “Western character” demonstrated by early explorers and settlers was retained in the people living in what was no longer the frontier. So although the action was gone, the essence of the lone brave hero remained (14). Citing examples in Daniel Boone biographies, Lewis and Clark expedition writings, and James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* novels, Lawlor identifies a consistent set of identifiers for the hero in a Western narrative. The idea that frontier heroes in literature were adopted as representatives of what Americans hoped was their own nature had earlier been enunciated by Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973). “The image of Boone was made to serve as the embodiment of local values or cultural assumptions and as the vicarious resolver of the dilemmas that preoccupied the culture” (Slotkin 313). Through Boone, Slotkin asserts that “we can trace the emergence of American national consciousness” (313). It is not only Boone who mirrors national consciousness, but frontier heroes in general who reflect and influence the way

Americans define themselves. With the closing of the frontier, however, frontier heroes no longer had a role to play in taming the perceived wildness of the nation. Although their myth and reputations lived on, actual frontier heroes vanished. Into this void grew the border hero, bringing change to the region where systems were in conflict. Where the frontier hero's role was to settle the frontier's space (and the natives in that space) the role of the border hero plays is to cause instability and change through resistance of established systems. The frontier led to the frontier hero. With the closing of the frontier and the attendant vanishing of the frontier hero, there remained a historical memory of a rugged frontier where in its place a structured, frequently rigid society had taken root. But another, and conveniently western, line remained between Americans and the supposedly "unknown" or "other": the geopolitical border between the United States and Mexico. It is this space on the border between the cultures of the United States and Mexico which gives rise to the border hero representing resistance of the hegemonic structures.

Historians like Webb helped promote the spread of Turner's Thesis in both scholarly and more general circles through their acceptance of the Thesis despite the absence of any non-Anglo perspective and despite the presence of many omissions and contradictions. The popular view of the Southwest does not include much discussion of fishing, logging, tourism, or, as Patricia Limerick points out, "enterprises resting on women's labor" (*Legacy of Conquest* 75). The point is that the commonly held view of how the West was settled tells, at best, only an incomplete story of how a few proud men fought and mined and ranched. The Thesis presented an America populated by Americans who were brave, strong individuals—a flattering image, to be sure, and one which was repeated in countless ways in American media, literature, and art. Despite its

glaring omissions and biases, in a very real sense, the Turner Thesis is in a way the earliest progenitor of modern border study and border literature because the aggressive resistance voiced in critiques of the Thesis led to the growth of border studies. The Thesis shaped border study, first in the work of historians like Webb, and later in more culturally inclusive work of writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Limerick, José Limón, Américo Paredes, José David Saldívar, and a growing field of others who aggressively resisted the dominant Anglo-centric paradigm represented in Turner's Thesis.

In literature where the appealing image of the wild frontier is embraced, Turner's Thesis defines a struggle in which the isolated, usually male, almost invariably Anglo individual is tested by a harsh and unrelenting environment. Certainly, popular Westerns in film and print generally rely on the images of rugged individuals struggling in the dangerous world framed by Turner's Thesis. But more resistant, self-aware works of literature which find themselves in the shadow of Turner's work often confront the very assumptions that held sway for so long in privileged versions of history and literature about the region. It is this latter set that is the focus of this study—the books that attempt to change the perception of the borderlands (the successor of the frontier) are the ones reacting to Turner's Thesis so many years after it was written.

This study of borders in literature begins by investigating the ways the frontier and then the border entered the national consciousness and developed into the entities they are presently. My focus on the border in literature is organized around the role of border heroes as they bring about instability and thus change in the border region, and secondarily in more metaphoric border regions. This study not only addresses the individual border hero's role and attributes, but also focuses more generally on the border

hero's role as an emblem of the struggle for change. Toward this end, I support the importance to border criticism of border agents by showing their presence and essential participation in the work of Américo Paredes, some of the earliest writing on borders and border agents.

Chapter I begins by showing how Paredes both challenged the hegemony of Anglo scholars represented by Webb when both were faculty members at the University of Texas—thus becoming himself a hero in the borderlands—and provided a model of a literary border hero. Gregorio Cortez, whose story is both studied and retold in Paredes's hybrid text *With His Pistol in His Hand*, was an actual Mexican American whose resistance of arrest by Anglo lawmen produced documentable changes in Texas and propelled him to a quasi-fictional status as legendary hero. Thus his story, like Paredes's own, exists both at the geopolitical border and at the metaphysical border between fiction and nonfiction. With his writing of *With His Pistol in His Hand* and his real-life challenge of Anglo academic authorities, Paredes initiated the field we call border studies.

In considering the nature and functioning of the border hero, subsequent chapters take this opening chapter's groundwork on the shift in thought, development of borders in literature, and the role of the border agent and apply it to a series of significant test cases. Chapter II demonstrates the mechanisms by which border literature acts as resistance by turning preconceptions and stereotypes around and using them to illuminate the flaws inherent in the long-held views of Borderlands and Borderlands residents. Focusing on the fiction of R. G. Vliet and on *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya allows for the study of border agents from the perspective of both Anglo and Latino authors by foregrounding

a pair of authors who use their work to subvert conventions and stereotypes commonly found in Borderlands literature.

Chapter III is an investigation of the methods used by Chicana Borderlands writers to break free of the restrictions placed on them by their own traditional cultural systems. Resisting established, hegemonic structures is the primary result (if not conscious goal) of the border agent. The forms that hegemony takes vary greatly depending upon the specific border being addressed. A growing and important force in border literature, Chicana authors have had to struggle for the same recognition won, decades earlier, by their male counterparts as they fight the double battle against racism and sexism. The battle at the national border shifts to take place at gender borders as well. Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros were the vanguard of Chicana authors to make their way onto the national stage in the 1970s and 1980s; by now their work has become essential reading on college campuses across the country. This chapter addresses ways Chicana writers, acting as border agents, bring about the change they seek in their society. The publication and study of the works of Chicana writers is a manifestation of border hero(ines) creating an important instability which brings about change.

Chapter IV returns to what might be called an Anglo perspective to examine the border agents created by Cormac McCarthy in his popular and critically acclaimed Border Trilogy. McCarthy's border heroes conceptualize the borders they cross, what they expect to find on the other side, and how they conduct themselves in pursuit of their goals. McCarthy's dark, postmodern *Border Trilogy* provides a set of border agents who naïvely view their border-crossing as adventures into a primitive terra incognita and

personal freedom, but who find their assumptions called into question as they develop (perhaps) a more sophisticated understanding of what the Borderlands actually hold. On the surface these heroes seem to be a return to an earlier frontier hero because they view the United States–Mexico border as a boundary between civilization and terra incognita. However, McCarthy’s novels ultimately cast doubt on the hero’s ability to bring about any change at all in the world.

With one exception, none of the literature included in this study was written in a language other than English. While many authors employ code-switching in their work and others, notably Cormac McCarthy, include long passages in Spanish with no translation, the primary focus is on works written in English. As mentioned earlier, the fiction included is not intended to imply a complete survey of borderlands literature. On the contrary, it is selected to show representative examples from a variety of origins. Rudolfo Anaya is paired with R. G. Vliet to show how the stereotypes which were common in popular culture made their way into literature produced by Anglos and Chicanos. The Chicana writers included in Chapter III represent the major early forces active in redefining the role of Chicanas and Chicana writers. Finally, Cormac McCarthy’s trilogy, while not the most well-known literature addressing the cowboy myth, is representative of the complex, conflicted nature of the cowboy along the border. What all of the fiction and poetry addressed in this study share is authors whose writing either describes the struggle for change represented by individual border characters, or authors whose writing is, in some way, a part of that struggle for change.

I have selected for emphasis a group of authors that supports my construction of an argument that follows a generally chronological path from Paredes’s challenge of the

orthodoxy represented by Turner and Webb to contemporary postmodernist reflections on the significance, or lack of ultimate significance, of the geopolitical border between the United States and Mexico. In the course of tracing this path, I have sought to show the inconclusiveness that is one of the main defining attributes of border scholarship and border literature by devoting major attention to the works of both female and male, both Mexican-American and Anglo writers. Other writers who are importantly pertinent to this unfolding, but who were not selected for major emphasis, have been included for comparative purposes. In each case, these writers invite further study. The important work of Rolando Hinojosa, in particular, needs to be examined from a historicist perspective in relation to border culture and postmodern genre theory, but that examination would be a project in itself. The role of the border in Larry McMurtry's work needs to be considered in relation to popular culture and McMurtry's own awareness of textual precursors. And the important but less well known work of Harriet Doerr, as well as that of Laura Esquivel, would lend itself to comparative study in relation to border theory.

## CHAPTER II

## AMÉRICO PAREDES AND THE CRITIQUE OF THE FRONTIER THESIS

For the most part, American literary border theory has focused on the United States-Mexico border. Both the terms of this body of theory and the primary attributes of border literature were set in 1958 with the publication of a book about a hero who becomes a change agent in the Texas-Mexico borderlands: Américo Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand*. In this hybrid book—not a novel, not exactly a theoretical work, not exactly a history, not merely a summary of a folk story—Paredes examined the story of an underdog struggling against nearly insurmountable odds because of a misunderstanding brought on by his presence in a border region. The book has at its heart the *corrido* (a folk ballad often chronicling the woes as well as the heroes of displaced or immigrating Mexican-Americans [Herrera-Sobek xxiii]) based on the true story of Gregorio Cortez, a Mexican living and working in the Austin, Texas area at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When an Anglo sheriff comes to his home looking for a horse thief, a series of misunderstandings and miscommunications brought on, in part, by a Spanish/English language barrier leads Sheriff Morris to shoot Cortez's brother and prompts Cortez to shoot and kill the sheriff in self-defense. Fully aware that his life is in peril, because the social power structure will be entirely supportive of the sheriff, Cortez begins a lengthy flight which eventually takes him tantalizingly close to the United States–Mexico border. Along the way Cortez impresses his supporters and his enemies alike as he evades hundreds of Texas Rangers who are searching for him. He also demonstrates his excellent horsemanship and shows tremendous stamina and creativity as he repeatedly eludes his

pursuers. In all of these respects, the story told in the *corrido* follows the outline of what actually occurred from the Mexican point of view. Cortez is caught only when a Mexican who was providing him a safe place to hide turns him over to the Rangers. Paredes reports that a *corrido* about Cortez was being composed and performed immediately after his arrest near the United States–Mexico border in 1901, so compelling was the story of Cortez’s flight and eventual capture (*Pistol* 109). Paredes’s work in *With His Pistol in His Hand*, then, is an investigation into the history of the region which created an environment in which Cortez’s flight could take place, a study of the many versions of the legend about Cortez, and an amalgamation or fabulation of the various versions of the story into one unified tale.

José Limón, who firmly establishes Paredes’s place as a forerunner to the border theorists and Chicano activists who would follow him, also clearly asserts Paredes’s status as a border hero in his own right:

In offering Cortez as a refutation of such racist characterizations [as those of historian Walter Prescott Webb], in standing up as an assistant professor to his powerful senior Anglo colleagues at Texas in the late fifties and early sixties, not to mention the Texas Rangers, Mr. Paredes and his book become like a *corrido* and its hero for a new generation of Chicano social activists of the sixties, who recognized the legendary fighting qualities of the two men, Cortez and Paredes. (*Devil* 82)

Following the watershed publication of Paredes’s most influential and well-known work, other border theorists began producing their own perspectives on literature of the

Borderlands. Where Paredes focused his studies on folklore of the region and eventually went from being a disruptive force in academia to, by the time of his death, an internationally recognized scholar, other writers have taken the idea of a non-white voice in the Borderlands to a variety of different ends. José David Saldívar, Leticia Garza-Falcón, Arnoldo De León, José Limón, and Raymund Paredes all concentrate more or less on breaking down racial stereotypes both by dismantling the flaws in the dominant perspective and, more constructively, by addressing and supporting the previously overlooked writing of non-whites. They are among a group chronicling the emergence of a strong, vocal Chicano/a identity in both fiction and criticism of the Borderlands. Paredes, then, created both literary and political empowerment. “Paredes and his text,” Limón claims, “may have played an important part in producing the form and character of the Chicano movement” (“Return of the Mexican Ballad” 191). Limón explains how he and many others read *With His Pistol in His Hand* as a powerful influence on their political lives. A self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, the more these writers recognize and address the importance of Chicano writing, the more weight and importance that writing is afforded by others.

Another scholar who views Paredes’s work as having both a literary and a political impact is Leticia Garza-Falcón. In *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance* (1998), Garza-Falcón interprets the legend Paredes presents as a response “to the dominative, ideologically tainted histories of the Southwest” which exposes the power of Anglos as it was used to control and subjugate the Mexican labor force (161). She goes on to explain how, although part of it is legend, Paredes’s work gives voice to “the bitterness and resentment, the displacement, the racism, the

lynchings” experienced by Mexican-Americans in real life, not just literature (162). Octavio Romano, as well, implicitly addresses the dual nature of the impact of Paredes’s work when he talks about the political implications of Mexican-American writers’ literary choices. Romano was, like Paredes, an active force in Chicano cultural awareness and literature in the 1960s. *El Espejo*, edited by Romano, was the first anthology of modern Chicano/a literature, published in 1967. In addition to his work publishing Chicano/a literature, Romano’s scholarship provided an additional voice among early Chicano/a theorizing of the movement’s cultural impact. as Gloria Anzaldúa would later, Romano addresses the *mestiza* or *mestizo* model. “This concept holds that culture change is a bi-cultural, multi-linear and synthesizing process in which the ultimate end is the incorporation of cultural differences while the original forms pursue their own multi-cultural diversity.” But he goes on to show that *mestizaje* is not necessarily an easy or natural choice. “Simply put, Chicana and Chicano writers, whether academic or not, ultimately are faced with the need to choose either the conqueror's linear and evolutionary paradigm, or the cyclical mestizo-multi-cultural-diversity view of their social history and their present cultural universe” (Romano 4). Romano is aware that adopting a mixture of cultures is a conscious and often difficult choice for Chicanos/as because of the pressure from Anglo culture to accept a more linear approach to history and identity.

*With His Pistol in His Hand*, then, a retelling and study of Mexican-American ballads about folk hero Gregorio Cortez, occupies a position of primacy in border literature. Paredes’s book can and certainly has been read as a revelation of the racism and violence of the Texas-Mexico border at the turn of the century. As María Herrera-

Sobek makes clear in her investigation of Mexican ballad and song, *Northward Bound* (1993), the *corrido* took its origins in the “cultural conflict between encroaching Anglos who took possession of the Mexican territory in 1848 after the Mexican-American war and the Mexican folk who had been living there since the early 1700s” (xxiii). In his later book *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* (1993), Paredes explains that despite its similarities with the much older form, the Spanish *romance*, *corridos* of the type he studies in *With His Pistol in His Hand* appeared in the Rio Grande valley only as recently as the mid 1800s. Perhaps more significantly, Paredes identifies “rural areas” as the site where *corridos* originated (*Folklore* 138). Like the border heroes they often celebrate, *corridos* spring from the lower classes. Furthermore, like the border hero, the *corridos* were most evident, active, and popular during times of turmoil (137). Whether or not the *corrido* fomented unrest or merely reflected it, it is clearly an indicator of disruption in the status quo.

José David Saldívar’s “Chicano Border Narratives” takes the position that because Paredes’s *With His Pistol in His Hand* is written “to an oppositional audience” (*Dialectics* 49) and is a serious cultural critique of the dominant discourse, it has been overlooked or resisted by a wider, whiter audience. While he convincingly shares and supports the view that Paredes’s work had “momentous impact” on Chicano scholarship, he is very caught up in the significance of the resistance to Paredes’s work (56). Although Saldívar is most certainly correct that what Paredes wrote was tremendously disruptive, he views the progress made by Paredes (and others he singles out) as significant but overlooked. My own perspective is more optimistic. Considering the daunting odds faced

by Paredes, the fact that his work has reached the wide audience it has is a major accomplishment.

*With His Pistol in His Hand* operates in several distinct and significant ways. First, it provides a social and cultural history of the Texas-Mexico border at the turn of the century through its extensive factual and ethnographic component. But through the very fact that it presents material usually ignored by dominant (Anglo) historians of the United States, and presents them from a Mexican-American perspective, it also provides an argument of social and intellectual resistance. Because of its thorough attention to a group of variants of the Gregorio Cortez folk ballad, their variety, and the significance of the differences Paredes cites, it is also a significant folklore study. Paredes points out that “the Cortez legend” is made up of stories that “are anecdotal for the most part” (*Pistol* 108). Paredes’s work is a fabulation, a coherent or fiction-like retelling of folk material that exists in multiple versions. In his book he combines study of “an idealized, formal version of the legend” and “the facts of the life of Cortez as far as they are known” (108). Finally, it is also a work of literature, a prose narrative itself. As José Limón points out, Paredes’s study of the *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez “blurs genres” and becomes a work of poetry in its own right at the same time as it analyzes the poetry of the *corrido* (“Return of the Mexican Ballad” 184-5).

Again, we see in Limón’s assertion the dual nature, both literary and political, of Paredes’s impact it has had on the field of border studies.

In part, *With His Pistol in His Hand* holds a place of importance because it is the first account written in English chronicling the Mexican views of the United States/Anglo attitudes toward them in the Rio Grande Valley. That is, Paredes’s work provided an

alternative to the dominant point of view. Arnaldo De León sees the sort of rethinking Paredes offered as part of “a complete and necessary re-evaluation of many aspects of Texas history, especially as it relates to nonwhite cultures in the state” (De León x). Before Paredes, there was no scholarly, non-white voice that addressed the border region in Texas. But by making the story not just one of good vs. evil or right vs. wrong, but instead a study of border conflict and the elements which are always present in liminal spaces, *With His Pistol in His Hand* becomes a text relevant to the study of all borders in literature. Both the content of Paredes’s book and its bold artistic and political form lend it power as a model for literary border study and political activism. The debt owed by border theorists who followed its publication is acknowledged, for example, by José David Saldívar, in *The Dialects of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991). Contextualizing the publication, Saldívar explains the book was published into an atmosphere where “the ideological rhetoric of white supremacy dominated Southern and Southwestern politics and eventually became institutionalized in state discourses, laws, and narratives regulating relations of whites with nonwhites” (51). Walter Prescott Webb was, in Saldívar’s words, “one of the leading spokespersons of his period’s institutionalized racism” (51). In view of the fact that Webb was teaching at the University of Texas at the same time as Paredes, it becomes even more noteworthy that Paredes’s book was published at all, much less by the University of Texas Press.

Paredes’s retelling of the *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez serves to define the fundamental character of the border hero as I will examine that figure through a succession of variants: a man or woman who challenges and unsettles the status quo and whose geographic movements serve as a figurative expression of fluid identity. That

fluidness of identity itself captures the liminality of the border zone. Mary Lawlor recognizes geographic movement, the hero's escape and settlement, as an identifying characteristic. This movement in a border hero is a rejection of a system that does not work and is a search for one that does. The border hero's search results as much in changing identity and self as it does changing the geography and political environment.

One of the ways people define themselves, or one of the ways identity is formed is when, as Judith Butler states, one identifies and incorporates "acts, gestures, and desire [to] produce the effect of an internal core or substance" but does so in an externally apparent manner (*Gender Trouble* 173). By, in effect, adopting new external identity traits, the process of identity formation results in a new core for the individual as well. This identity definition helps explain the transference of this heroic ideal from myth and fiction to the relative reality of national consciousness by indicating a method individuals use to change themselves and potentially, their environment. Turner sought to break free from an East coast idea of what it meant to be American. For him a quasi-European stateliness was neither sincere nor the ultimate expression of the promise he saw in Americans. In looking to the West, Turner saw a landscape which would bring out the ruggedness and strength he identified in the American culture. The landscape created enough distance from all that the East represented to cause the older model to fall away and be overtaken by what Turner saw as the essence of America. This view of the national character was appealing enough that people began to identify with it and adopt its traits. The elements seen in the mythical and fictionalized heroes in American literature began to be emulated in the population. Although Judith Butler's definition is applied to gender formation, it is relevant to identity formation in general. She adroitly

addresses identity as authenticity by claiming that the “inner truth of a gender is a fabrication,” that gender is instead “inscribed on the surface of bodies” (174). Butler effectively excuses gender (and identity) formed through this putting on of borrowed robes from being false because by definition identity is a creation.

The nature of the western hero is an important focus not merely because of the frequency with which this sort of hero appears in literature of the frontier, but because this hero is the manifestation, in writing, of the way Turner and Webb influenced Americans to imagine themselves. They both continued the cycle of art imitating life and life imitating art. The western hero of the frontier ideal possesses “solitude and self-reliance” (Lawlor 16) and often finds himself in opposition to both a hostile and violent natural world and a corrupt society. Even without the essential struggle with untamed wilderness Turner and Webb claim forged the unique nature of Americans, Lawlor argues, writers still claimed individualism as a fundamental attribute of the people. It certainly fits the American psyche shaped by Turner’s thesis that the important personality traits forged in the wilderness would remain for future generations to inherit, even without the trials that brought them out in the first place. Summarizing Turner’s view of American history, Kerwin Klein says that “the history of America is the development of human consciousness in the colonization of the Great West” (Klein 238). For Turner, at least, history was not about what happened where and when and why; rather it was how the nobility in American spirit developed in the face of conflict.

It is clear that in Lawlor’s study of the romanticized version of the West found in literature, the solitary hero is the important, recurring element. “The weight of character in the balance of Western narrative designs is simply too overt to be overlooked in a

description of the genre,” Lawlor claims (16). And this “weight of character” finds its way out of the literature and into the nation’s consciousness; how Americans define their history and by extension themselves can be read in literature of the West. This “weight of character” and the oppositional nature of the lone western hero modulated, with differences, into the border hero. If the key factor in the life of the Western hero is violence, as Lawlor proposes, the key factor in the life of the border hero is evasion of established structures of authority, sometimes rising to direct opposition to hegemonic structures (16). Ironically, the border hero sometimes seems to carry traits similar to those of the Texas Rangers, the last vestiges of the frontier hero and a group who often find themselves greatly at odds with the Mexican-Americans of the border.

Violence—apparently an essential part of the representation of the American Borderlands, both in fiction and in reality—seems to dog his path. Thus the border hero is an essential part of interpreting and understanding what happens in the Borderlands. By investigating the different ways these solitary heroes react to and change their environment, we find new and important ways of understanding the Borderlands.

Paredes, in *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* (1993) describes one of the many ways the identity of the border hero evolved in the Borderlands. The idea of the American cowboy, Paredes claims, drew upon the established elements of Mexican ranching. “Cattle and horses, as well as land, were Mexican to begin with; and when the Anglo took them over he also adopted many of the techniques developed by the *ranchero*” (22). What was done by Turner, and Webb, in particular, to the image of the cowboy is well known; the cowboy became the idealized American frontier hero. What Paredes is claiming is that the cowboy became the idealized border hero as well when

Mexicans reclaimed the figure they had created and unwittingly shared with the Anglos. The image of border hero seen in the *corridos* Paredes studies in *With His Pistol in His Hand* is a reclaimed version of the original cowboy.

In the realm of border studies, Paredes is the touchstone for later writers and activists because his work both typifies (in the elements of his retelling of the *corrido*) what border fiction<sup>1</sup> is about and demonstrates how border fiction is to be interpreted. *With His Pistol in His Hand* is both a study of the elements influencing the creation of a legend and a study of the more formal ballad, and at the same time an example of the kind of story that Paredes sees as quintessential border fiction. It opens the field of border studies by addressing, in a thorough, academic way, the non-white side of the Borderlands struggle. This struggle is fought by Gregorio Cortez, a typical border hero.

Gregorio Cortez was forced into his role as folk hero because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time in two different ways.<sup>2</sup> He was personally, specifically, the man confronted by the sheriff; he was home when the sheriff came looking for a horse thief, was home when the job of translating the sheriff's questions went awry, was home when gunfire was exchanged. But more significantly for other Mexicans in Texas, he was racially and culturally in a position where the sort of violence he was subjected to was commonplace. He was in a Texas ruled by the Texas Rangers and an Anglo prejudice against Mexicans who were hated and feared, among other reasons, for crossing the border and working and settling in Texas—a territory that had, of course, belonged to their ancestors long before the coming of the Anglos. It is this second set of circumstances which engendered the first. And it is the fact that so many others like Cortez shared the second set of circumstances that made his story so compelling to so many people so

rapidly. Furthermore, what gives the text its lasting relevance is the fact that the essence of borders in literature—cultural overlap where conflict occurs—is a root cause of Cortez’s story. So although it was accident that pushed Cortez into the limelight, for Mexicans hearing the *corrido* the conflict was universal and inevitable. Equally universal and inevitable are the traits of this border hero; he was a man from the lower classes, he was dissatisfied (to say the least) with the morality and legal system with which he found himself in conflict, and he attempted to escape to a place where he could live according to his own set of rules.

Taking the concept of the border hero as emblem of the Borderlands a step further, the hero can be conceptualized as what Peter Stern calls a “marginal.” Stern’s *New Views of Borderlands History* (1997) presents marginals as “people who inhabit the Borderlands, those who could not fit neatly in either European or Native American culture” (157). These marginals are people who either chose to leave their traditional society (whether it was European, Native American, or Anglo American in origin) out of a preference for the solitary life, or people who were cast out of their society because of their inability to fit in.

More often than not, these marginals come from the lower class or at least become members of it. Consequently, an important component of the solitary border hero is a connection to the ordinary people. It is logical that someone who is an agent of destabilization, primarily of structures of power and property, would be a common man/common woman since the thing they are fighting is often a controlling or oppressive force in their lives. The fact that the Borderlands between the United States and Mexico is the primary focus of American border studies takes on important meaning when it

becomes clear that the resistance springing from the region is not only ethnic in nature, but also a struggle between the haves and the have-nots. That the have-nots as a group were created, marginalized, when they found themselves unwelcome or unable to live among the haves makes perfect sense in this context. The idea that border heroes often spring from the less privileged classes and are created out of conflict in a border zone is by no means solely an American idea. The most influential early novelist to address the struggles of border heroes in his work is Sir Walter Scott, known for his “enormous output that deals with the heroism and humanity of common people” (Mayhead 3).<sup>3</sup>

Just as Lawlor asserts that the solitary hero is created and shaped by the violence that defines his/her environment, Stern helps further explain why those heroes are solitary and why they act in opposition to established societal structures. Often it is society that creates the marginal. In the twentieth century, the Great Depression, wars, changing politics have all driven people out of their homes, towns, livelihoods, and into a non-traditional, non-sanctioned way of life. In literature the borderlands between the United States and Mexico are home to a collection of solitary heroes who by choice or force find themselves unable to live in mainstream society. Stern identifies the marginal as “a threat to the peace and stability of the Borderlands” at the same time that they provide “a bridge between radically different cultures and ways of life” (183). It is in the role of bridge that the border hero creates instability, for without contact there can be no change. One of the ways the border hero functions is as a conduit between cultures.

Lawlor and Stern address the border hero’s role as agent of instability. They address the border hero’s reactions to a society that more often than not does not accept either the hero’s goals or methods. Lawlor finds this in the violence directed towards

society and in the self-sufficiency of the solitary border hero. Stern's marginals function as a way to connect cultures which would otherwise be completely separate—the marginal fills an otherwise unfillable chasm between societies.

The legend of Gregorio Cortez captures this wide range of attributes of the border hero. It held and continues to hold tremendous appeal because it concerns a hero fighting, by extension, in the name of all oppressed listeners, against established power structures. The specifics of the story are less important than is the fact that the general circumstances Cortez lived in are so familiar to the listeners. As Texas writer Katherine Ann Porter points out in her essay "Corridos" (1924), a work written in Mexico thirteen years after Cortez was pardoned and eight years after he died, the majority of Mexican *corridos* were passed on orally and were not written down. They were composed to be heard, and they were listened to eagerly because "they celebrate heroes" and bravery (Alvarez and Walsh 196). This fact emphasizes how rooted the *corridos* were in the concerns of the Mexican-American people of the border region.

The overarching border conflict in *With His Pistol in His Hand* involves the perception of border violations. Ironically it is the Anglos in Texas who see the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who live and work in Texas as encroaching on land owned by whites. This perception is ironic because, despite claims of Anglo manifest destiny long rooted in the national consciousness of the United States, the Mexicans were there first:

It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a dividing line. Men were expected to consider their relatives and closest neighbors, the people just across the river, as foreigners in a foreign land.

A restless and acquisitive people, exercising the rights of conquest,  
disturbed the old ways. (*Pistol 15*)

In addition to making relatives across the river into people from a different country, the Treaty also made the Mexicans living to the north of the river into foreigners despite the fact that they or their families had lived there for years. In late 1835 one of Mexico's northern states revolted against the centralist Mexican government of Antonio López de Santa Anna. Shortly thereafter Texans declared independence and claimed land belonging to the northern Mexican state Coahuila-Tejas. In 1845 the Texas Republic was annexed by the United States and the U.S. government sent troops to protect its new southern border from Mexico. After two years of battles between the United States and Mexico, a peace treaty was signed in Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty declared that, among other provisions, Mexico was to give to the United States land that now comprises Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. Thus emerged the region known as "the border." It is the zone where the two political systems meet, where much movement back and forth occurs, and where many inhabitants are descended from people who had lived in the same place under the previous nationhood, before 1845.

An interesting parallel raised by Paredes's *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* arises in the book's title itself. With so much attention paid to labels and nationality in the Borderlands it is curious that the title is not *Texas-Mexico*, two nouns, but instead pairs a noun with an adjective. Sensitive to the fact that the border moved beneath the feet of people living in the region after the Treaty of Guadalupe, Paredes

seems to make a political statement that Texas, a place, borders Mexican, a descriptive word for many of the people living there. So the border discussed in the book is not necessarily a political one, but instead is a cultural one. Paredes broadens the discussion of borders by breaking free of strictly geographic, literal definition.

Obviously, if a border is defined as a boundary between two systems, it is necessary to understand which systems are separated if one is to understand the region's conflict. Of course, as Paredes's title illustrates, the Borderlands are not as simple as two countries butting up against one another as a map showing the United States–Mexico border would imply. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo split communities by using the Rio Grande as a boundary marker it created a border which was both geographic and, gradually, more cultural:

Generations of Mexican descendants in the United States began to distance themselves from the parent country economically, politically, and culturally, while increasing their identification with the United States. (Mogen 161)

In this sense, Mexicans “relocated” by the new border became American and tried to act American to some extent, but the environment of cultural difference worked against them as well:

Because they did not easily assimilate into the Anglo scheme of things, and tended to stay in familiar territory, their culture remained concentrated in whole counties, even significant portions of entire states—areas nonetheless controlled politically or economically by an Anglo minority. Thus we can conceive of a kind of invisible edge between the territory where Chicanos were in the majority—the

poor but stable backwater area we will call *Chicanaía*—and the rest of the country where they felt unwelcome—*Gringuía*. (Mogen 161)

Despite the fact that, politically, they became Americans, Chicanos maintained a strong cultural identity within the Anglo country. This is one explanation of why issues concerning, for example, the adoption of a macho, cowboy, hero self-image took a circuitous route to get back to the Mexican consciousness at the border. The fragmentation caused by the redefined borders and nationalities and political allegiances threw the process of identity formation into turmoil.

When Mexicans, after 1848, were considered border dwellers and minorities in an Anglo nation, conflict and misunderstanding became the obvious results of the geographic and political turmoil imposed on Mexicans living along the border. This turmoil was further increased by the influx of impoverished Mexicans from the south during the Diaz regime, in the latter years of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, Anglos in the region came to view Mexicans and Mexican–Americans as people who did not belong on the land regardless of their history there or their United States citizenship. Viewing them as undesirables and an underclass allowed the Anglos and specifically the Texas Rangers to dispense whatever law best suited their needs:

The Rangers and those who imitated their methods undoubtedly exacerbated the cultural conflict on the Border rather than allayed it. The assimilation of the north-bank Border people into the American commonwealth was necessary to any effective pacification. Ranger operations did much to impede that end. (*Pistol* 32)

It was in this environment of fear, violence, and suspicion that Gregorio Cortez came face to face with Sheriff Morris. Less a factor of Cortez's skill with a gun, his nobility in protecting his family, or Morris's zeal to dispense justice, an inevitability of the Texas culture brought about the ensuing violence. Cortez's story captured the imagination of the Chicanos/as who heard it not so much because it was the story of an unusual man as because it was the story of everyman. Chicanos/as found it easiest to put themselves in the shoes of Cortez, and Anglos more readily sympathized with the plight of their sheriff. For some, identification was with the outlaw, the underdog. For others it was the macho heroism of the sheriff which held great appeal. Gregorio Cortez's fight and flight came at the end of "a time of intense frontier strife" (De León 63).

Addressing the issue of change brought about in the Borderlands, it is of course important to understand how respected historians and mainstream culture understood the Borderlands and developed their history of the region.<sup>4</sup> The same year President Nixon dedicated the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame, an influential yet more critical critique of Turner's thesis was formulated by Richard Slotkin. Slotkin addresses what he calls "the myth of the American frontier" created by the argument in Turner's frontier thesis. "In American mythogenesis the founding fathers were not those eighteenth-century gentlemen who composed a nation at Philadelphia. Rather, they were those who (to paraphrase Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*) tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness" (Slotkin 4). Slotkin's critique moved the discourse of the frontier from Turner's idealized view of it as the edge of an unpopulated wilderness which shaped the vigorous spirit of the nation to a far more critical assertion that the frontier was often

little more than an excuse for “rogues, adventurers, and land boomers; the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers, and hunters” (3) to take from the land whatever they could by whatever means they could. Although Slotkin removes much of the nobility and high-mindedness from those frontier adventurers, he nevertheless reinforces the claim that, regardless of the particular allegiances, the border agent is motivated by violence. Slotkin’s view of frontier history thereby provides an enabling step toward reconceiving the discourse as one not of a frontier, but of a border—or indeed, multiple borders where the role of solitary hero remains consistent. This step was facilitated by Slotkin’s recognition of the West as a place with indigenous peoples living in it, not as an empty space waiting for Anglo civilization to claim it. The recognition of this essential difference between “frontier” and “border” allows Slotkin to address the treatment of the land and its people by the white settlers. Slotkin’s indigenous peoples are Stern’s marginals, Lawlor’s Western adventurer, in short, border heroes.

A frontier approach, as opposed to a border one, sees no native people on the land and therefore has no reason to address them or their treatment, or else sees them only as impediments. In *They Called Them Greasers* (1983), his study of violence along the Texas-Mexico border, De León asserts that the stage set by Turner and Webb for interpreting the interactions between Anglos and people of color has been followed by “other historians [who] have uncritically followed their mentors’ paths, overlooking a long racist and ethnocentric tradition toward blacks and Indians that was transposed upon native Texas as a matter of course” (De León ix). De León, along with Patricia Limerick, recognizes the long shadow cast by the immensely popular Frontier Thesis, and provides an alternate version.

In their introduction to *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream* (1989), David Mogen, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant join in this critique by echoing Slotkin's assessment of the creation of an American sense of the frontier. They assert that the *idea* of the frontier, as much as any real frontier "has generated in the American literary imagination a set of images, attitudes, and assumptions that have shaped our literature" (Mogen *et al.*3). Further, these scholars see a dialogism in current discussions of the American frontier where the primary voice is a male, Anglo one which eventually "called forth responses by women, minority writers, and others" (Mogen *et al.*4). It is both this imagination of the frontier and the responses to it which make up the heart of a study of borders because the responses are the voices from the other side of the border, which the imaginary frontier all too often ignores.

In "The Formation of Frontier Indigenous Communities: Missions in California and Texas" Robert Jackson labels the United States-Mexico border "the frontier of Northern Mexico" in his table of contents. The title provides an important way of looking at the United States that, while obvious, is often overlooked. For if Mexico can call the United States a frontier that means Mexico is civilized and the United States is the raw, violent, dangerous, sparsely settled region. Mexico's northern frontier was the same so-called empty or wild land marking the edge of the United States Western frontier. Clearly Jackson's rhetoric is designed to make the reader aware of this different perspective on the region. It effectively brings the reader to the realization that terms like frontier and border are useful for defining oneself and others. Borders and frontiers are very subjective and are employed as means of exerting power and control.

While it is logical that if there is a boundary there must be something on both sides of it, the definition of a frontier does not take this bilateralism as a given. Slotkin dissects the formation of the Anglo myth of the American frontier which allowed settlers to approach the land with an attitude that would have been seen as unworkable and inappropriate had the country been viewed with a recognition that borders have people and cultures on both sides. Instead, Slotkin argues, the Anglos went at their westward expansion as if they were the manifestation of the limit of knowledge, culture, and civilization in their new world (Slotkin 5). They proceeded as if they were the only people on the continent. Believing that the continent had been granted to them by God and that it was inevitable that they would settle all the land between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, Anglo settlers were the carriers of Manifest Destiny.

When the politics of the region defined a border where there previously had been none, struggle naturally ensued and an artificially-defined and newly-created border-underclass wrestled with existence. Paredes (15) ringingly announces that “out of the conflict that arose on the new border came men like Gregorio Cortez” an example of the kind of border hero Limón describes, in *Dancing with the Devil*, as a “heroic male resistance fighter” or “warrior hero” (82). The subject of Paredes’s study is presented not as an unusual or rare individual. On the contrary, the *corridos* sung about Cortez invariably begin with a description of the hero as a sort of everyman. Similarly, rather than portray Cortez as a man unlike the listeners, the legend as Paredes constructs and presents it in the first chapters of *With His Pistol in His Hand* emphasizes his role as the representative of his culture. He is the quintessential border man. “He was a man, a Border man. What did he look like? Well that is hard to tell. Some say he was short and

some say he was tall; some say he was Indian brown and some say he was blond like a newborn cockroach...He was a peaceful man, a hard-working man like you and me” (*Pistol* 34). The various versions of the Cortez *corrido* reinforce this concept that Cortez was just like the listener. Laborers, Paredes reports, sing ballads where Cortez is a laborer; ranchers call him a cowboy. “A short, dark man told me,” Paredes says, “that Cortez had been just a little dark man,” and, “a fair, blue-eyed Anglo-American who as a little boy once met Cortez, and who admired the man, remembers him as fair” (*Pistol* 111).

Paredes notes that a recurring theme reinforces the point “that Cortez was peacefully minding his own business when the sheriff or other American showed up and committed some outrage...in all events the peaceful man minding his own business is essential to the concept of the Border hero” (111). This fundamental conception of Cortez, Paredes points out, persists despite the “different characteristics” of the man that appear in different parts or versions of the story: “he continues to be the peaceful man driven to violence and finally brought to bay” (*Pistol* 119). Although he would not have considered himself a marginal, events drive Cortez to become one. He, like many border heroes, was marginalized and pushed out of a culture in which he could not live in peace. This is perhaps one of the main distinctions between the frontier hero and the border hero. Although both are associated with violence, the frontiersman brings violence while the border hero has violence thrust upon him.<sup>5</sup>

One of the reasons Cortez moved north into Texas and settled with his own and his brother’s family on a piece of land they leased from a landowner was that he was able to earn more money and enjoy more freedom there than he was in Mexico. Cortez’s

history before the action of the *corrido* embodies the escape and settlement cycle of the border hero as much as it does after the shooting begins.<sup>6</sup>

In his escape and settlement Cortez is an emblem of disruption. Nearly every aspect of his life from the time he begins his flight south through Texas results in a disruption in the way people think about their interactions with one another. During his flight, the entire state is thrown into turmoil with Chicanos/as secretly and not so secretly assisting him and wishing him well while Anglos are frightened, mobilized, and angry. “The country is stirred as it perhaps never was before. In many places business has been practically suspended and all the men are out scouring the country [for Cortez]” (*Pistol* 74). If the border hero is subjected to estrangement and alienation, his actions serve as an unsettling example.

After his capture Cortez continues to disrupt the way people think and behave towards Mexican-Americans. Having described the prejudices and double standards Mexican-Americans faced in the early 1900s, Paredes describes the then remarkable and remarkably fair treatment Cortez received at the hands of the judicial system. Although the first jury found him guilty, that conviction was eventually overturned. The Ranger who captured him spoke of his respect for Cortez and refused to accept any reward money because he admitted that Cortez essentially surrendered to him (*Pistol* 82-83). Furthermore the San Antonio judge in the case refused to return Cortez to Karnes County where the original shooting took place despite the strenuous and “almost indecent” insistence of that county’s officials that he be returned (*Pistol* 88). The judge recognized the likelihood and disapproved of the lynching that would have taken place if Cortez had

been returned. Even more compelling than the official response, however, is the general Anglo population's eventual reaction to this man they at first vilified:

Not all people who came to Cortez's aid were of Mexican descent. A curious ambivalence developed in the Anglo-American attitude toward him, even while the chase was on. Many people found it hard not to admire the courage, skill, and endurance of the hunted man. And after the excitement died down, some Texans changed their opinions about the case...there were many Anglo-Americans among the people who contributed to Cortez's defense. As the pardons committee would later note, the sheriffs who had Cortez in custody began by hating him as a sheriff killer and ended by becoming his friends. (*Pistol* 89)

Cortez's flight led to changes in a directly political, real-world sense. At his first trial, Mexicans were included in the jury pool and although none were chosen to serve on the jury, one African-American was. While a mixed-race jury was not unknown at the time of the Cortez trial, it was unusual enough to receive comment in the press of the day. A verdict from a later trial (Cortez was tried on one charge or another in nearly every county he rode through) was reversed on appeal "on the grounds of prejudice" (*Pistol* 92). After being pushed into violence by a double standard in the application of the law, Cortez was eventually pardoned on the basis of the very same prejudices that started his troubles. The pardon was granted, in part, because the many people who wrote to Texas Governor O. B. Colquitt on his behalf were of the opinion that "the prosecution on the part of the Sheriffs Association . . . at the time [of the arrest] amounted to practical

persecution” (*Pistol* 99). In the end, the injustice of the stereotyping which put Cortez in prison played a part in his release. By the end of his twelve-year series of trials, the pardon was greeted enthusiastically by Mexican-Americans. Paredes asserts that Cortez’s trials can be seen as marking the beginning of the end for the double law in Texas and the beginning of a more equitable treatment of Mexicans in the region (*Pistol* 93). While it is unclear that any direct, concrete change in race relations came about because of Cortez’s trials, the subject of racial injustice was at any rate brought very directly and boldly to the public’s attention.<sup>7</sup>

What is particularly significant about these reactions to Cortez (in addition to the fact that they took place at all) is that they developed over time and across racial, economic, and political lines. Eventually even the Texas Secretary of State brought his influence to bear on Cortez’s behalf (*Pistol* 89). The actions of the border character brought about the change in opinion of those who at first were most vehemently against him. This change was gradual but significant. The fact that Cortez is never described as a superhero, but instead as an earnest, hardworking man allows his positive attributes to be extended beyond his immediate admirers to people in general. But if opinions about Cortez himself eventually changed, it is clear that those about Mexicans and Mexican-Americans did so at a significantly slower rate. Nevertheless, one of the border character’s major attributes is the disruption of systems of power. This disruption happens politically, as it did through the publicity surrounding Cortez’s series of trials, and it happens within the literary community when border literature is read as an empowering example to others. In this respect as in others, by tracing, retelling, and

critiquing the story of Gregorio Cortez Paredes established the defining traits of the border protagonist.

*With His Pistol in His Hand* is a unique text because within the covers of one book Paredes presents the legend of Gregorio Cortez, its origins, and the impact the events inspiring that legend have had on the people who hear it. In presenting the legend, the criticism, and the response to both, Paredes opens the field of border criticism by dissecting the roots, the impact, and the significance of border struggle. By the 1960s, Limón asserts, *With His Pistol in His Hand* was no longer merely grist for the scholarly, academic mill, but rather had “found a sociopolitical context and a wider audience of socially-designated perceiving subjects that gave it a far more global meaning” (“Return of the Mexican Ballad” 189). It had been adopted by Mexican-American youth who were the first in their families to attend college. The book was being embraced as an emblem of “political protest and cultural rebellion” (190).

In studying the environment in which Paredes wrote, the environment created in part by historians following in the footsteps of Turner and Webb, it is evident that Paredes’s own activities are those of a border character who creates a great deal of instability and change in the Borderlands.

In addition to providing a model and inspiration, Paredes was moving against a trend Limón identifies as “pro-American, assimilationist rhetoric” (Limón 84) among Chicano/a scholars. By sharing an academic environment at the University of Texas with Webb, the very historian whose ideas he was critiquing, Paredes participated in the same sort of border resistance as Cortez; both Paredes and Cortez offered resistance to the Anglo establishment. In choosing to study and teach at the University of Texas, Paredes

was working within the Anglo system Octavio Romano describes as being in opposition to the system represented by a mixture of cultures. The resistance and animosity Paredes met from Webb was palpable:

On numerous occasions, Paredes has recalled the looks Webb gave him as their paths crossed almost daily on the West Mall of the University of Texas at Austin campus during the years when they both taught there. “I didn’t expect for him to like me, but if looks could kill,” he has stated, “I would have been dead a long time ago.” (Garza-Falcón 38)

Webb was opposed to Paredes’s book for several reasons. The criticism Paredes leveled at Webb in the book was severe and called into question issues such as racism in Webb’s work. “While Webb glorifies the Texas Rangers, Paredes shows them to be instruments of cruelty and injustice, usurpers of land rights” (158). But Paredes, unlike Webb, was a newcomer, an outsider without significant scholarly reputation. Furthermore, Webb was writing “for a very receptive audience” while Paredes was writing material which ran counter to everything the establishment believed and wanted to believe. As a result of his unpopular opinions and theories, Paredes faced a great deal of institutional criticism and resistance. Nevertheless, “despite this discouragement from the administration...Paredes continued to record what he had observed around him, more specifically what he saw happening to his people in relation to dominant socioeconomic and political systems of the past” (Garza-Falcón158).

His own paralleling of Cortez’s acts as an agent of destabilization and change in the literature about the Borderlands was in fact perhaps the most significant contribution

Paredes made with the publication of *With His Pistol in His Hand*. Where Cortez brought Anglos and Mexicans face to face with the violence and inequity in the Borderlands, Paredes brought similar concerns to light in academia. For Paredes the Borderlands were not the plains and chaparral between Austin and the Rio Grande, but the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. His publication of *With His Pistol in His Hand* did not cause change in the way Mexicans laboring on farms and ranches were treated or the way their treatment was perceived, but it did influence the “Borderlands” of historical and literary studies of Texas. José Limón believes that Paredes’s story is spoken of in the Chicano movement as “an unsung proto-ballad-legend” where he assumes the same kind of heroic status as Cortez in the *corridos*.

Cortez arouses the consciousness of his community by riding and shooting his way toward them and receiving their help. Similarly, Limón says, the hero Paredes and his community struggle in mutual support around issues such as the farm workers, Mexican-American studies, and increased political representation. With this social activism, the dissemination of his book, visits to other campuses, the hero’s legend continues to develop (“Return of the Mexican Ballad”199).

From the outset, Paredes refused to give in to Anglo efforts to silence his voice. When the University of Texas Press declined to publish *With His Pistol in His Hand* unless “Paredes deleted all critical references to Walter Prescott Webb, J. Frank Dobie, and the Texas Rangers,” Paredes threatened to have the book published by another press (“Return of the Mexican Ballad”198). It was the University of Texas Press, not Paredes, which eventually relented. In addition to his willingness to stand up to institutional forces, Paredes made his presence known through his work as founder of the Center for

Mexican American Studies and the Center for Intercultural Studies of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at Austin, and as a major force in helping strengthen positive cultural identity for Chicanos. By the example of his own struggle to be published and through providing an avenue for others' study, Paredes helped the voices of Chicanos/as be heard in the halls of academia. Where Cortez eventually disrupted the functioning of the Texas political system to the point that the Secretary of State came to his aid, Paredes disrupted academic conventions by becoming an accepted and respected professor at the University of Texas. As border heroes, these two embody the potential for bringing about dramatic change.

Paredes's struggles with the University of Texas are an important example of border instability. The first change this instability wrought is that it presented a new voice, technique, and perspective to the study of Texas history. The second change is that Paredes paved the way for other border writers to write their resistance work as well. In her chapter "Paredes's Narratives of Resistance" Garza-Falcón chronicles the many examples of "Américo Paredes's spirit of resistance and his 'Speaking power' [which] stemmed from the spirit of the Borderlands" (Garza-Falcón 159). In so doing it is clear that Paredes is an inspirational figure not just to the audiences to whom he spoke but also quite directly to Garza-Falcón herself. In his writing, Paredes both brings about a greater understanding of the conflicts he describes and provides a model for such works as Garza-Falcón's *Gente Decente* (1998) and the watershed *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987, 1999) by Gloria Anzaldúa. Limón asserts that without Paredes, the tide of Mexican scholarly assimilation into the Anglo world would not have turned when it did (*Dancing with the Devil* 84).

While Anzaldúa is also able to “recover a memory erased from the official story” (Anzaldúa 3) she expands on the techniques found in *With His Pistol in His Hand* when she too “offers a new way to write History” from a multivocal perspective which consciously and aggressively challenges the Anglo story of Mexican history at the border.<sup>8</sup> In this way Anzaldúa follows the lead of Paredes while bringing a dramatically new approach to the retelling of history with her technique of feminist personal narrative.

It is important to understand how Anzaldúa imagines border dwellers in the Southwestern United States. Like Paredes, she describes the way native Americans and Chicanos/as in the border region were used as pawns in the international task of border definition practiced by Mexico and the United States. From this background of domination and expropriation Anzaldúa shows how history “is not a univocal discursive exercise” but instead can be “a moving personal narrative”(3). Anzaldúa focuses on what she calls a “third country” of border dwellers who currently are welcomed and at home in neither Mexico nor the United States. This third country is, of course, another way of categorizing the marginals and lone border heroes. Paredes presents these people at the beginning of the twentieth century as having a proud and self-sufficient heritage. By the time they are addressed by Anzaldúa they have become the underdogs and outcasts also identified by Stern.

The heritage of change and cultural understanding which the ballad of Gregorio Cortez promises towards the end of Paredes’s study has not yet come to fruition. Anzaldúa predicts this understanding will come about with the birth of her new *mestiza*.<sup>9</sup> This *mestiza* is a hybrid individual formed by mixing the best and strongest aspects found in all the cultures of the Borderlands. From her anchorage in the literal Borderlands,

Anzaldúa extends the metaphorical range of the border hero to perhaps its furthestmost extreme when she describes the plight of and hopes for the voiceless to include “everybody who inhabits the world, whether these bodies reside near geographic borders or not” (Michaelsen 11) and extends to them the hope of a new cultural understanding.

What border literature does is create instability just as its characters do; authors of border fiction are the agents of change as well as their characters. And that is why the study of borders in literature matters. It brings fresh opinions to a formerly univocal world. Without the work of scholars like Paredes, Webb would reign unchallenged. And without *With His Pistol in His Hand* and Paredes’s tenacity as a Mexican-American scholar, there would have been no strong voice in the 1960s for Mexican-Americans at the University of Texas, no model for the work of Anzaldúa to build upon.

The retelling of the “*Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*” by Paredes has been seen as “its maximum expression” (Herrera-Sobek xxiii). Paredes’s groundbreaking work prepared the way for the great outpouring of fiction and criticism centering on border conflict along the political boundary between the United States and Mexico that we have seen in the past several decades. The work is archetypal because it serves to define the ways in which scholars since its publication have addressed border conflict. Paredes identifies and describes elemental aspects of border conflict and by doing so he sets out the language which later writers use to analyze border concerns. Furthermore, Paredes himself, through his writing and the disruption it caused to the established modes of addressing borders and marginals in the Borderlands, is a border hero who exhibits many of the identifiers found in literary border heroes.

The features of border heroes seen in *With His Pistol in His Hand* remain consistent in other border literature and provide an effective lens for assessing and understanding the changes brought about by the destabilization border heroes bring about. While Paredes was not running from the Texas Rangers as Cortez was, he was seeking a nurturing environment for his theories and his teaching. Both men fought against Anglo institutions aimed at crushing their beliefs and freedoms, and both persevered and eventually brought about change because of their tenacity and the instability they caused in their respective border regions. Paredes changed how Chicano/a scholarship was perceived by Anglos, how it was pursued by Chicanos/as, and how each group thought about the other.

Having opened up the realm of border study, Paredes prepared the way for other fiction writers and critics to follow. This study, too, will move on to apply the features of border characters identified in Paredes's work to other types of borders and border concerns. Addressing borders in fiction, I will investigate the conflict engendered by stereotypes arising from a difference in understanding of what makes a region a border or a frontier, the role of women as agents of change at the border, and rootlessness and the activity of the border crosser.

### CHAPTER III

#### WHO'S WHO: THE BORDER AGENT AS EVADER OF DEFINITIONS

One of the most important social functions of border literature as a force for destabilization and change has been the disruption of racial stereotypes—rigid and almost always demeaning generalizations or preconceptions uninflected by understanding of individual differences and life circumstances. In the borderlands, this means stereotyping of Mexicans. Arnoldo De León, in one of the most influential of the critical reassessments that have come to be called border studies, *They Called Them Greasers* (1983), identifies overt stereotyping as the essence of the Anglo perception of Mexicans in the Border zone. Among the stereotypes De León enumerates and defines are the “greaser,” referring to the Mexicans’ supposed greasy food and poor hygiene, the laziness of Mexicans, and the cowardice of Mexicans. All of these conceptions—in the typical way of stereotypes—flatten the humanity of the Latina or Latino into a kind of demeaning caricature. This chapter will use Américo Paredes’s fabulation of the Gregorio Cortez *corrido* as a basis for examining these established definitions and assumptions about who the Anglo is and who the Mexican is in the Borderlands. Finally, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) and R. G. Vliet’s novels *Rockspring* (1973), *Soledad* (1977), and to a lesser degree *Scorpio Rising* (1985) will demonstrate how these stereotyped definitions are evaded or undermined.

Borderlands stereotyping in the early to mid-twentieth century was elevated to the level of respected scholarship in the writings of noted historian Walter Prescott Webb

whose version of the frontier, the Texas Ranger, and the “greaser” (though he did not use that term) was the generally accepted view at the time Paredes wrote. In a passage describing the character of Mexicans, Webb asserts, for example, that the typical Mexican “carried the lance for show, and was most skillful and devastating with the knife.” After this doubtful bit of praise, Webb continues with less favorable observations when he adds of the Mexican that “the whine of the leaden slugs stirred in him an irresistible impulse to travel with rather than against the music . . . for making promises—and for breaking them— he had no peer” (*The Texas Rangers* 14). The choice of “leaden slugs” evokes images of violence as well as laziness—two stereotypes applied most frequently to Mexicans. In addition to the unfavorable surface meaning of Webb’s description, a deeper-rooted prejudice is inherent in the very word choice. It was Webb’s work specifically and the attitude it represented in general that Paredes set out to challenge when he wrote his groundbreaking *With His Pistol in His Hand* in the late 1950s.<sup>1</sup>

Paredes was the first of a wave of border theorists and fiction writers who challenged the entrenched beliefs about the nature of Mexican people in the United States. It has taken the better part of the twentieth century for the emptiness of these preconceptions to make its way into fiction about the region. In her essay investigating trends in Western literary criticism, SueEllen Campbell reminds us that “every story, of course, is multiple, or can be told in many ways, read in many more. Every version is partial, shaped by the teller’s partiality” (3). That is, no one version of history can be read as the definitive one. Even so, there are certainly voices now being heard which were muted on the subject of their own history for much of the last century. These voices, too,

inevitably reflect their own “partiality,” but the very fact that they are being heard is corrective. Thanks, in part, to Paredes’s work in giving early voice to a side of history not presented in dominant, Anglo accounts, the way was cleared for fiction to follow which further tears down established notions of race and racial relationships in the Borderlands— notions clearly displayed in the accepted and influential writings of Walter Prescott Webb.

Webb’s family had migrated to Texas in the early 1880s from Mississippi. Webb, who was born in 1888, after the move, grew up in a culture of “functional Protestantism” (Furman 21). As a young boy he was part of a society where “Old Testament orthodoxy” had a particular relevance. The settlers among whom he lived saw parallels between “their arid environs and the biblical land of Canaan,” and they cast themselves as latter-day “children of the Israelites, beset with heathen enemies” (Furman 21). These conceptual underpinnings manifested themselves in a set of demonizing, racially-defined views of the Native and Mexican people they encountered in their pioneering.

From his own undergraduate years at the University of Texas at Austin, Webb regarded Mexicans and native Americans negatively and with suspicion. Biographer Necah Stewart Furman attempts to excuse Webb’s “strong prejudice” by explaining that Webb was a product of “the Alamo-Texas Ranger chauvinistic myth” as well as religious myths that demonize people of dark skin (Furman 48). Regardless of its source, Webb’s firmly-held belief that Mexicans were treacherous and cowardly and native Americans were cunning and crafty amounts to systematic racism. These stereotypes are especially telling when juxtaposed with Webb’s beliefs about Anglos, and Texans in particular.

In his extremely popular and influential book *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (1935)<sup>2</sup> Webb contrasts the pointedly Catholic and “cruel” Mexican’s “ignorance” and “superstition” to the Texan’s “Protestant,” “democratic,” “individualistic,” and “intelligent” attributes (14). Not only does his account betray religious hostility, but it in effect makes of religion a racial characteristic. Immediately after his dim depiction of Mexicans, Webb describes the character of the Texas Ranger. The Ranger, Webb asserts, was a “leader,” an “idealist,” and an “adventurer . . . capable of sustained endurance and suffering” (14). In identifying Mexicans as a race, Webb implies that Texans are one as well, indicating that he believes an individual’s lineage or “blood” can be used to predict and explain that person’s behavior and character. In fact, this simplified way of viewing people as either Anglo or some other, non-American race ignores the reality that many people thought of as Mexican were in fact American. Vliet’s *Soledad* addresses just such a situation when the main character encounters a Mexican-American woman who neither looks nor acts like the stereotypical Mexican he imagines. Rigid definitions, upon scrutiny, do a tremendous disservice by neglecting the many overlaps between Anglo and Mexico. These overlaps ultimately result in a multitude of terms for Mexicans of mixed ancestry, Mexicans who are citizens of the United States, and the like, each of which attempts to categorize what is ultimately a mixture of Anglos and others.

The popularity of Webb’s ideas as expressed in his writing propelled him to national prominence and ensured his place in the University of Texas history department (Furman 78). Hired in 1918, Webb and his ideas were to shape the course of the

department and how it presented American and especially Texas history for decades to come.

Webb's notion of pure blood can well be seen as an echo of the discourse of nativism that dominated American thinking about the ethnic otherness of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe in the years leading up to the Immigration Act of 1924. In his study of the period, Walter Benn Michaels sees the mass immigration into the United States as a serious concern in the minds of nativists who felt that minorities could never become truly American because to be American was something inherited from a parent and not adopted, learned, or assimilated (2). Furthermore, concerns that the nation was being overrun and diluted with foreigners weighed heavily on the minds of those who considered themselves true Americans. The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 marked the point at which "the tradition of unrestricted European immigration" was brought to a close and indicated the aggressiveness of the population's anti-foreigner sentiments (Michaels 30). Most significantly the Immigration Act restricted immigration based on the country an immigrant came from. The Act used ethnicity and race as the basis for exclusion or inclusion in a political identity (Michaels 30).<sup>3</sup> Such an exclusion based on race and country of origin had been directed against the Chinese since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Now, for the first time, it was applied to Europeans. Webb applied nativist discourse to the racial and social structures he experienced in the Southwest. In an atmosphere of racial and ethnic discomfort and distrust Webb's views found receptive audiences.

Webb describes a system which valorizes the Anglos' struggling for survival in an "extraordinarily harsh environment" (Garza-Falcón 36). In addition to enumerating the

geographic and psychological difficulties encountered by the settlers who pushed their way beyond the familiar forests of the East and onto the broad, flat, arid, treeless plains, Webb also describes their unique cultural adaptation to the task. He explains that for a number of reasons, the Spaniards who attempted to settle the plains region (between 1528 and 1848) were unsuccessful. Although he says the Spanish failure to settle the region was “attributed in large measure to the nature of the problems found within the country,” it is clear that he also sets the American settlers above the Spanish because the Americans were successful where the Spanish failed (*Great Plains* 85). While Webb concedes that the Spanish did not successfully colonize very far into North America in part because they were searching for gold and believed there was none to be found there, he also attributes their failure in part to something lacking in the character of their explorers who entered the region. The Anglos who succeeded did so because they adapted their colonization techniques to meet the new environment. They learned new ways to find water when it was scarce, to make fences when there was no wood to be found, to provide for themselves in a different and more harsh environment than the one they knew from the eastern end of the continent. It is the successful struggle against the environment, Webb asserts, that defines the American settlers.

Webb valorizes what he considers to be another significant part of the environment resisting these brave settlers. This opposition was composed of the Mexican and the Plains Indian. De León seems to fight stereotypes with counter-stereotypes when he summarizes, in *They Called Them Greasers*, what is becoming a more common academic perspective on Anglo settlers in the Borderlands. “Cultural heirs to Elizabethans and Puritans, those moving into hinterlands sensed an ‘errand into the

wilderness' and felt a compelling need to control all that was beastly—sexuality, vice, nature, and colored peoples. Order and discipline had to be rescued from the wilds in the name of civilization and Christianity” (De León 1). Set in opposition to the heroic Anglos, these darker-skinned people are presented by Webb as being of lower caliber in their honor, “blood,” and physical makeup. One of Webb’s bedrock theories in his earlier study *The Great Plains* (1931) supports the idea that the environment played a significant factor in shaping the Anglo settlers. Reading a report about the United States desert regions “confirmed his suspicions regarding the inhibiting effects of climate and terrain” (Tobin 96). And with this realization in place, Webb was free to populate the harsh environment with brave settlers well suited to the task of mastering it and the native people found there.

Thanks in part to the impact of histories like Webb’s, a heroizing version of the process of Anglo settlement still prevails in most Americans’ minds. In the words of Kent Steckmesser, “The far Western frontier of the nineteenth century still exists—in the American imagination. And it is the hero of that frontier, the trapper, outlaw, soldier, and gunfighter, who personifies the period and the place. In his biography Americans have found all the action and color needed for a great national myth” (Steckmesser xi). All too often that hero in the American imagination is an Anglo fighting against Mexicans and Native Americans. With respect to literature, this dominant Anglo narrative served to silence Chicanos/as in the telling of their own stories (Padilla 3).

In his preface to *The Texas Rangers* Webb describes the subject of his study as “a man standing alone between a society and its enemies . . . It has been his duty to meet the outlaw breed of three races, the Indian warrior, Mexican bandit, and American desperado,

on the enemy's ground and deliver each safely within the jail door or the cemetery gate" (*Rangers* xv). In so doing Webb clearly shows both the danger he believed surrounded the Rangers (and by extension all law-abiding Anglos) and the tremendous nobility and bravery of those lawmen. He goes on in an utterly serious explanation to state that "the real Ranger has been a very quiet, deliberate, gentle person who could gaze calmly into the eye of a murderer, divine his thoughts, and anticipate his action, a man who could ride straight up to death" (*Rangers* xv). It is no wonder Webb implies that the Rangers were a "race"; they certainly do not sound like mortal men. Without a doubt, Webb believed in the need for the Rangers; they protected the whites in Texas from what they imagined were dangerous and violent Indians and Mexicans living around them. The most significant result of the ways Webb conceptualized the respective roles of Anglos and Mexicans is that he helped to institutionalize and cement these biases in the minds of his readers. In describing the Native Americans found in the plains region, Webb puts them in a subhuman category when he comments that "the Indians form the connecting link between the natural environment and the civilization" brought by Anglos (*Great Plains* 47). Webb's descriptions of nature indicate, most broadly, the way he understands the North American landscape as it appeared before Europeans arrived. This landscape, which includes physical features as well as the weather and animals, is seen as a wild place which challenges Anglos to tame it. Although the Native American connection to the environment could be viewed as not necessarily negative, it is nevertheless not a statement of equal footing with Anglos. While there is little doubt that such ideas were in place in the culture before Webb wrote his influential books (he acknowledges nineteenth-century historians who "distinguish clearly between 'civilized' Indians...and

‘wild’ Indians”) the result of those books was a further and official reinforcing of the prejudices (*Great Plains* 59).

This reinforcement of prejudices served not only to crystallize Anglo beliefs about Latinos/as but also to shape the way Latinos/as expressed their own history. Genaro Padilla sees Latino narrative struggling “to reconcile the personal life with historical disjuncture” brought about by political change and cultural preconceptions (Padilla 42). Padilla finds in speeches and journals written by Mexican-Americans after 1848 (the year of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo) an “articulatory schizophrenia” where expressions of loyalty to Anglos are bracketed by contradictory statements of ambivalence, brought on by conflict over how Mexican-Americans were treated and described compared to how they felt about themselves. This schizophrenia stemmed from the way Anglos behaved toward Mexican-Americans. Obviously they rejected and condemned any lingering loyalty to Mexico, even though that had been these people’s own country until the United States took over vast territories under force of arms. But even though many Mexican-Americans had proven that they had shifted their loyalty to America and Texas, many Anglos still believed they wore “the semblance of friendship—with a slight peeping out of the cloven foot now and then” (Padilla 66). It is no wonder there was identity confusion among Latinos/as; not only did they confront the need to shift their patriotism and loyalty, but even when they did so the very people among whom they lived harbored suspicions about them and behaved as if they were in fact devils.

Leticia Garza-Falcón, one of Webb’s most cogent critics, observes that his “brand of history serves as an excellent example of how scholarship considered academically

sound during a particular epoch can be revealed as a justification for racism and serve to anesthetize a national consciousness” (Garza-Falcón 1). Garza-Falcón identifies the long-term harm done by attitudes like Webb’s helping form and solidify negative racial stereotypes. José Limón similarly points out that “lurid descriptions” of Mexican ranchers as violent, lawless bandits in south Texas in the 1840s do not coincide with the fact that they were land owners with families to support and protect. Instead, Limón says, “these allegations are more likely psychological projections—displacements—of the outrageous conduct of the American force as it crossed then Mexican south Texas and into Mexico” in 1846 under the leadership of Zachary Taylor (Limón 23). Asserting that the “total warfare” waged by the intruding Anglos “included wanton killing of civilians, raping, plundering and desecrating churches,” Limón charges that the Texas Rangers, whom he calls “a paramilitary unit created by the new Republic of Texas,” played a “leading role in these atrocities” (Limón 23). In Limón’s re-reading, the heroes of Anglo Texas history, perhaps in an effort to assuage guilt or turn away any blame, needed to transfer the odious nature of their own feared qualities from within onto their enemies. Thus the Mexicans are described as the barbarians and the Rangers as the saviors. And official accounts of Ranger actions spread by authorities like Webb resulted in an elevation of this shift of blame to the status of “fact.”

Instrumental in this transference of guilt was the need to vilify non-Anglos. And in his role as historian, Webb helped spread what Limón classifies as misconceptions. As he sets out the conflict among native Americans, Mexicans, and Anglos in Texas, the prejudices Webb developed living in Texas and put into his histories become clear in both subtle and overt ways.

In describing the state of the continent during the early nineteenth century Webb states that “the Indians held undisputed possession of the Plains” (*Great Plains* 11) while the Mexicans maintained “their line of occupation.” The rhetoric of this territorial description hints at the hierarchy which is later explicitly laid out; in Webb’s view native Americans are noble and have a historical right to the land while Mexicans are a mixed-blood people who are merely squatters. Webb seeks to “understand” the “Indian warrior” and in so doing betrays his fascination with what seems like a sort of noble savage to him.<sup>4</sup> The native Americans were certainly uncivilized in Webb’s mind, but they still lived according to a system of order and honor.

When Webb states “there is a cruel streak in the Mexican nature,” he betrays his powerful prejudice toward Mexicans (*Great Plains* 14). He goes on to explain that because of the mixing of his blood, the Mexican is far inferior to the native American. In contrast to both groups, only the idealized Anglo can claim racial purity and superiority based on the northern-European ancestry Webb emphasizes. Far from being merely the views of one person graced with a forum for expressing them, such refrains become a constituent part of the dominant order against which the border hero becomes an agent of change.

Often attributed to a clash of cultures, the prejudices espoused by Webb were in no way created by him. He merely gave them a respectable, scholarly, and influential outlet for expression. Webb’s depiction of Texas appealed to readers as influential as President Lyndon Johnson, who wrote the foreword to the second edition of Webb’s *The Texas Rangers* (1965). It was into this environment of institutionalized racism that Paredes brought *With His Pistol in His Hand*.

Discounting the “conventional wisdom” that holds that a major source of anti-Mexican prejudices in the United States springs from cultural differences and misunderstandings between Anglos and Latinos/as, Raymund A. Paredes (a former student of, but no relation to, Américo Paredes) in “The Origins of Anti-Mexican Sentiment in the United States” claims it is Anglo-American attitudes and not cultural conflict which lie at the root of the prejudices:

Americans had strong feelings against Catholics and Spaniards and expected their evils to have been fully visited upon the Mexicans; after all, had not the Mexicans been subjected to nearly three hundred years of Catholic-Spanish oppression? The logic may have lacked a certain finesse but the fact of its application is inescapable. (Raymund Paredes 139)

The language Webb uses feeds the prejudice, for there is no implication that Americans here are either Catholic or Spanish. Webb’s writing reflects his investment in the sort of Anglo-American attitude Raymund Paredes describes. What Paredes calls “sixteenth century hispanophobia” (140) seems to have been inherited by Anglo settlers and directed toward Latinos/as. Location, too was a factor. As far back as the eighteenth century, historian William Robertson concluded in 1777 that Native Americans living in the north were “more robust, more active, and more courageous than those in the southern regions where the sultry climate had stifled the native molecules into a perpetual lethargy” (quoted in Raymund Paredes 155). This interesting connection linking climate and character is employed in *The Great Plains* when Webb explains the differences between settlers who succeeded in the timbered and humid East and those who thrived in the arid

plains of the West. And these views were held and manipulated for generations; “old images received new justifications and lived on. Some are with us still” (Raymund Paredes 158). Regardless of whether one subscribes to the theory that cultural differences and cultural misunderstandings led to widely held prejudices on both sides or that primarily Anglo preconceptions about Mexicans were the root of prejudice, it is clear that the stereotypes and prejudices in opposition to which Américo Paredes was writing had been firmly entrenched in the minds of Anglo-Americans for generations. Webb took up these ideas of “pure blood” and racial categorizing as assumed truths, gave them a scholarly patina, and, because he was a persuasive writer, earned them widespread acceptance as “truth.”

Another of the reasons Webb’s depiction of the West was so eagerly and readily accepted by most Anglos who read it, according to Garza-Falcón, is that “language servicing a dominant ideology accomplishes the task of confirming particular viewpoints by repeating similar constructions” (Garza-Falcón 37). So Webb was telling white America what it already believed by retelling familiar stories of struggle with new characters and locations. The long history of racist attitudes in this continent certainly did not begin in the Southwest in the nineteenth century and in some ways Webb was simply playing a familiar and comforting refrain in his histories.<sup>5</sup>

Against this background of a “dominant ideology” Garza-Falcón goes on to describe the world presented in Webb’s histories and the attendant achievement of Webb’s writing:

The success of Webb’s histories is to a certain degree due to his exclusion of certain people from the history of the West on the basis of racist

premises. Webb distorts historical reality by homogenizing the “West” as the land of the pure Americans, the white settlers, provided they were of English, Scots, or Scots-Irish descent. All other humans are deemed foreigners, inferiors, or wild animals. (Garza-Falcón 37)

In his chapter on “The Plains Indian” Webb makes it clear that although he is fascinated by their skills as warriors and their way of life on the plains, he believes the Indians are not quite human. In addition to relegating them to a category below that of the Anglo civilization which moved into the plains, Webb further dehumanizes them by putting them in the same category as other natural forces like rivers or mountains which thwarted the settlers. Like the lack of water, the wild animals, “the Plains Indian constituted...the most effectual barrier” to colonization (*Great Plains* 48).

In marginalizing non-whites in the West of his histories, Webb struck a responsive chord in the minds of his readers and fellow-scholars, who elevated him to a position of pre-eminence. While the publication of *The Great Plains* and *The Texas Rangers* predates Paredes’s *With His Pistol in His Hand* by twenty years, their impact and influence shaped the intellectual climate in Texas well beyond the 1950s in much the same way *With His Pistol in His Hand* still influences thought and scholarship nearly half a century after its publication. Furthermore, although Webb’s books were published well before Paredes arrived at the University of Texas, Webb was still teaching there after Paredes arrived. It was an academic environment ruled by theories and world views similar to Webb’s that Paredes was resisting. This resistance to the dominant myth of the American West marks Paredes as the author of what would grow to become a major

schism between newer critics of regional culture and long-dominant views held in the academy as well as by people in the region generally. One could well (though somewhat ironically) regard him as a pioneering agent of change.

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto states in his essay “The Chicano Movement and the Emergence of a Chicano Poetic Consciousness” that the activism of Chicanos in the 1960s “was not the ‘first stirrings of a restless minority,’ nor the ‘end of a long siesta,’ nor the rumblings of ‘a sleeping giant that slowly rears its head,’ as represented by the media, but rather the continuation of a long historical process of militance and resistance” (Ybarra-Frausto 81). He draws a line from the turn of the nineteenth century political activism and labor movements among Latinos/as to the militancy of the middle of the twentieth century. Ybarra-Frausto sees the Chicano Movement paralleling the rise of the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s and as a logical development of decades of less dramatic Latino/a activism, this growth of cultural strength and a reclamation of an active place in the community can be seen as the actions of border agents attempting to bring about change.

Yet despite all the social and political activity Ybarra-Frausto describes in the years leading up to the 1960s, there was little Latino/a literary production paralleling the political consciousness that became read and known among a wider—that is to say, Anglo—readership. To be sure, the *corridos* were powerful and significant folk materials and had their role often as rallying cries among farm workers. But they were far from widely accepted literary works.<sup>6</sup>

Although a number of literary journals in the 1960s (and a few in the decade earlier) published poetry and stories of a decidedly Socialist bent (Ybarra-Frausto 84),

until Paredes published *With His Pistol in His Hand*, before the late 1950s no organized Chicano/a literary scholarship appeared which challenged mainstream views in the Borderlands. By the 1960s Octavio Romano was publishing *El Espejo*, which served as an outlet for the work of Chicano/a writers. Additionally, Romano's scholarship theorizing the Chicano/a movement's cultural impact added a voice to the growing cultural awareness. Paredes's early work was much less about labor reform than it was about unsettling the way all border people were understood. Ramón Saldívar claims it "is a masterful work of intellectual intervention decades ahead of its time in its resolve to undo the narrative clichés and historical commonplaces through which Chicano life had been formerly represented by Anglo writers and historians" (Saldívar 36). He goes on, in "Lyrical Borders: Modernity, the Nation, and Narratives of Chicano Subject Formation" (1993) to describe the dominant voice in Borderlands history prior to Paredes's arrival: "Before Paredes, the cultural politics of Texas and the Southwest were produced singularly by the Anglo American imagination responding exclusively to the hegemony of Anglo American material interests" (Saldívar 36). *With His Pistol in His Hand* presented a different view, essentially making possible multicultural discussions of the region which de-legitimize the dominant voice. Novels like Rudolfo Anaya's and R. G. Vliet's take up this de-legitimization.

In his historical novel *George Washington Gómez* (1990) Paredes shows exactly how aware he and other Latinos/as were of the dominant culture around them.

Furthermore, Paredes describes what behaviors that culture brings out:

From the Anglo point of view, the Texas-Mexican was a lawless character who used intercultural conflict to excuse his natural bent for violence and

disorder; and it must be admitted that the average *mexicotejano* of those days tended to see almost any act of resistance against the law as a protest against Anglo oppression...If people are not allowed to share in their own destinies, if they feel they are being governed from above by an alien group, then the 'law' is not considered their law, and flouting it becomes one more way of protesting against their inferior status. (*Gómez* 34)

Paredes describes an important Latino/a attitude towards the Anglo system and most importantly he explains motivation and justification for resisting that system. In addition to "flouting" the law they do not consider their own, Latinos/as applied more conventional, legal means of resisting what they experienced as a system of inequality. It is the *literary* resistances that are of prime interest here. Writing has a long history of being used to comment on and resist systems of power as well as sustain it (as with Webb).

The results of this institutionalized oppression and stereotyping were not only that Latinos/as were demonized and marginalized, leading to wholesale violations against them, but also that this violence served a more concrete political end than simply manifesting a fear of the "other." Violence, human rights abuses, and Anglo policy were systematically and regularly used to move Anglo settlers into land otherwise occupied.

Following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 many long-time Mexican residents who lived north of the new border sold their land and went to Mexico out of fear of "the new conquerors" (*Garza-Falcón* 100). Further "pressure to sell" their land to commercial farmers encouraged still more Latinos/as to leave.

In addition to “encouraging” Latinos/as to leave their land, Anglos also employed a system of domination which converted the formerly independent land owners into a cheap labor force. Garza-Falcón describes how in many counties in south Texas “social, political, and economic relationships” were employed to guarantee a labor force “dispossessed of a land they once owned, forced into servile, humiliating roles to survive” (Garza-Falcón 171). Clearly it was not simply prejudices that were being resisted, but also, significantly, the result of those prejudices, the large-scale destructive impact upon Latino/a society. In order to fully understand the impact of his writing it is necessary to understand what prejudices were at work, what their sources were, and what their devastating impact was on the Latinos/as living along the Texas-Mexico border. *With His Pistol in His Hand* is about Texas at the beginning of the twentieth century, yet it is written in the climate of the 1950s. The turn of the century saw the tail end of widespread Ranger violence while what Paredes faced fifty years later was more subtle prejudice—his was the first Ph.D. awarded to a Latino scholar at the University of Texas. Paredes saw a dearth of writing about his people and provided their first institutional voice.

It is against this dominant conception of social structure in the Texas Borderlands that critics Garza-Falcón and Limón follow Paredes a generation later in launching their revisionist interpretations of history. From the fountainhead of Paredes’s resistance to the dominant discourse spring other writers and critics who add their voices in challenging the established views of border society and the preeminence of Anglo values. The version of society in the Borderlands the critics envision is depicted in the fiction of writers like Rudolfo Anaya and R. G. Vliet. Anaya is of significance in study of the Borderlands

because he has become so widely read, especially in schools. Critic Robert F. Gish claims, “Rudolfo A. Anaya has come as close to canonization in the mainstream of American authors as any Chicano/a or regional writer” (Gish 532). His wide impact is significant and demands attention and analysis. Vliet, by contrast, has had very little readership or impact. Yet those who know his work often regard him as “one of the Southwest’s most talented and original writers,” under-appreciated, in part, because his career was cut short by cancer (Martin 563). His importance here lies in his combination of a sparse, clear style with the freshness of perspective that comes from his being an outsider. Vliet can be considered an outsider because in addition to being white, he also moved to the Southwest later in life, rather than having been born and raised there.

As one of the many writers who follow the lead forged by Paredes, Rudolfo Anaya resists stereotypes in his border fiction by employing border heroes as agents of change. These border heroes, while bringing about little change within the novel, illustrate the inherent contradictions and simplifications found in the region’s stereotypes. Published in 1972, Anaya’s novel *Bless Me, Ultima* was a “key text” (Tonn 59) in the “gradually emerging canon of Chicano literature” (Kanoza 61). Anaya became an important voice in what was then a very small chorus of Latino/a writers (Tonn 59). It is easy to see why. By engaging significant issues in the Latino/a community, which Tonn identifies as “identity formation, mediation of conflict, and utilization of the past for exigencies of the present” (60), the novel echoed its Chicano readers’ “common experience” and enlisted their identification (Kanoza 62). Anaya himself has said that when he wrote the novel he was “still tied to the people and the earth of the Pecos River Valley” and its “mythic element” is “a reflection of the world I knew” (Anaya, “Mythical

Dimensions” 27). In the wake of *With His Pistol in His Hand* the voices of Chicanos began to be heard in the literary interpretation of their own experience, and as books such as *Bless Me, Ultima* gained readership (especially in the schools) they gave rise to alternate ways of understanding the history of the Borderlands region.

*Bless Me, Ultima* is at its heart a story about a boy, Antonio, caught between old ways and modern ways. Set in New Mexico during World War II, the story revolves around the conflict Antonio is drawn into between modernity, which threatens to pull him away from family, land, and tradition, and the rich culture, religion, and magic of his family’s ways. Anaya sets up in the novel what seems like a straightforward dichotomy between magic or superstition and modern education. Antonio is drawn to Ultima, an old woman who is teaching him the traditional secret magic arts of a *curandera*. It is a spiritual calling Antonio feels, and the apprenticeship he undertakes with Ultima will lead to a respected position of power within the community. Likewise, Antonio also feels the attraction of the Anglo school where he finds some success and self-confidence at his ability to succeed in the world of white America.

In addition to stereotypes relating to religion and superstition, another set of stereotypes Anaya approaches involves those of the Mexican cowboy and the farmer. Antonio’s father grew up as a cowboy and still pines for his life of freedom on the plains. But Antonio’s mother comes from a family of farmers who are more rooted, are more in touch with the cycles of the earth, and seem to have greater patience for the struggles with which life presents them. Much of the novel is devoted to Antonio’s struggle as he tries to reconcile these two parts of his nature by attempting to choose first one then the other. Ultimately Anaya exposes the unsuitability of either choice as a life for Antonio

when he has him reject both. Antonio recognizes the flaws and restrictions inherent in the choices presented to him. He learns to adapt and redefine himself in order to live in the reality of his world. While Anaya never explicitly critiques the life of the cowboy and the life of the farmer, their representatives are presented as flat stereotypes. Antonio, unwilling and unable to choose either, demonstrates that neither is a viable way of life for him. In each case their way of life is more a set of memories and associations than it is one that is actually practiced by them. Antonio is a border hero caught among a multitude of borders. He must negotiate the pulls and attractions of the modern world, the world of magic and tradition, the world of Christianity, the world of a settled agricultural tradition, and the world of a rootless existence on the plains. All of these metaphoric borders are located in the literal borderlands of the Southwest. Ultimately Antonio attempts to synthesize a new way of living at this perplexing crossroads. This is his burden as the agent of change.

*Bless Me, Ultima* favors resistance against narrow, limiting roles by mixing traditional roles into something new and more viable. “Historical continuity and spiritual harmony are recurrent strains in much of Anaya’s work as he often laments man’s weakened connection to the earth, to the past, and to the myths that reveal the proper balance of the cosmos” (Kanoza 151). Yet Anaya’s novel does not reject modernity outright; instead it calls for its integration into the older system. The advocacy of “a measured application of modernization” (Kanoza 151) to revitalize traditional communities is part of *Bless Me, Ultima*’s strength in exposing preconceptions about border people and providing those people with the ability to create a new tradition.

The community Anaya presents in his novel is for the most part closed to Anglos, where Anglos are “of little consequence to its strong Chicano characters” (Kanoza 152). When the action takes a violent turn, Antonio’s family first attempts to solve its problems without seeking help from the white sheriff. For Anaya, his characters’ impulse to react within their community before turning to Anglo law is less a display of what Anglos versed in *The Texas Rangers* might automatically expect and call lawlessness and more an example of a close-knit community policing itself as it always has.

Anaya has his protagonist look at the lives around him from which he is expected to choose his own role in society and declare them shallow and insufficient for a healthy, satisfying existence. The father’s yearning to travel, the mother’s ties to land and religion, even Ultima’s powers stemming from the supernatural are individually not enough for Antonio. Only by combining traits from the incomplete lives around him does Antonio develop into a complete character. In using Antonio’s movement between the world of his home and the world of school, Anaya is able to critique traditional roles in the Latino/a community. “Ultima refutes his [Antonio’s] parents’ false and limiting dichotomies to reveal an underlying mystical holism” in which “Christianity and native mythology are compatible” (Kanoza 166).

In the end, Anaya refuses to choose a “best” way of life when he has Antonio also refuse to choose any one of the options with which he is presented. Antonio realizes that his father’s ideal life of working on the *llano* is outdated and impossible in the modern world. Ultima is killed when her magic becomes so powerful a force it brings on the jealousy and rage of others. And Antonio's brothers, who run away from their home, family, and community after seeing the modern world, also represent an unfulfilling

destiny. Instead of choosing one side which would leave the rest of his identity so vacant, Antonio fulfills his role as border agent when he chooses to synthesize and not merely select from among the choices he is given. He incorporates elements from each facet of the world that at first threatens to wipe out all but one side of him. Antonio concludes with the promise that he is stronger and more prepared to meet the challenges of the world than any one of the parts that combine within him:

In a week I would be returning to school, and as always I would be running up the goat path and crossing the bridge to go to church.

Sometime in the future I would have to build my own dream out of those things that were so much a part of my childhood. (Anaya 248)

Antonio's daily walk to school shows him moving from one world to another as he travels from the traditional Mexican-American world evoked by the goat path to the more Anglo one of the church. The bridge serves to span the gap between the two.

Kanoza has observed that the young hero's reconciliation of "a host of opposites" in *Bless Me, Ultima* is a direct reflection of Anaya's own "literary multiculturalism" (Kanoza 168). Anaya's *Albuquerque* (1992) is another useful example of this multiculturalism through a plot of investigation of identity. The novel focuses on a young boxer, Abrian Gonzales, who discovers that his biological parents are not the people who raised him. Abrian struggles with concepts of identity, race, and culture as he searches for his father. Abrian is forced to reconcile the conflict that although he thinks of himself as Hispanic, his mother was white. Less concerned with stereotypes applied from the outside and used to define others, Anaya's fiction deals with the ways a Latino/a

community redefines itself in the face of a multitude of pressures brought on by the encroaching outside world. These conflicts, like the identity conflicts in *Bless Me, Ultima*, are set in the geographic borderlands of New Mexico, a state whose history has been centered in cultural conflict (or perhaps cultural blending) of Native, Hispanic (both Spanish and Mexican), and Anglo traditions.

Another writer of novels in which characters living near the United States–Mexico border confront preconceived notions of the Anglo and the Mexican and call them into question is R. G. Vliet. In *Rockspring* and *Soledad*, novels whose dark vision places them among the more searching critiques of Border culture by Anglo writers, assumptions and conflicts between Anglo and Mexican or Tejano characters lead to violence and a recognition of the difficulty of making change in a society based on entrenched preconceptions.

Vliet himself, unlike Anaya and Paredes, was not a native of the region but a temporary transplant into the border territory his novels address. This distance allows him objectively to investigate the people and themes he writes about in the region. After a rootless childhood spent moving frequently to follow his father's military career, Vliet settled in Texas, "obsessed with the harshly beautiful landscape that would furnish settings for his drama and fiction" (Martin 223). As an outsider Vliet was able to bring a fresh perspective to his interpretation of the region. His work at first glance seems to be part of the sort of stereotyping against which modern border theory is fighting. There are bad Mexicans and good Anglos behaving just as Webb's Rangers would have predicted. But the strength of Vliet's work lies in its ability to take what seem to be stock or stereotyped characters and show how they resist and ultimately reject the stereotyping

forces they seem to represent. Although his books are usually called Westerns, William B. Martin argues that Vliet “wasn’t trying to write Westerns at all. He subverted the Western by contradicting the stereotype of the ‘worthless Meskin’” in “his serious purpose...to discover and project truths” (Martin 567). Martin concludes his biographical sketch of Vliet by claiming that because of the way he addresses preconceptions about the Borderlands, Vliet’s work “deserves a wider public and closer reading than it has so far received” (Martin 569). I would second that view.

Vliet’s *Rockspring* and *Soledad* present valuable opportunities for study of stereotypes of the border region and how border characters bring about change. Like Webb, Vliet felt that environment had a good deal to do with the behavior of Texans. But rather than glorifying the abilities of the Anglo settlers, Vliet focuses instead on their aggression. Although Vliet’s last novel, *Scorpio Rising*, is primarily a study of the dark secrets lurking in several generations of Texas ranchers, it presents a curious echo of the Gregorio Cortez story. In a side-plot shedding light on the more central conflict of Victoria Castleberry’s confusion about whom she loves, a Mexican ranch hand is falsely accused of murdering her fiancé. (Actually, it is Victoria’s Anglo lover who commits the murder.) The Mexican, never named, is chased through the countryside by a posse of lawmen and vigilantes. Ultimately captured, like Cortez, as he sleeps in a barn, the man is taken from the sheriff by a lynch mob and is burned alive. The brief story of the Mexican scapegoat shares elements with that of Cortez. Whether the striking parallels to the famous *corrido* are intentional or merely coincidental is less important than the fact that the idea that a Mexican was an obvious scapegoat when an atrocity was performed on an Anglo and was not entitled to due process is so prevalent in Borderlands literature. Vliet

uses this unfortunate convention to cast an ironic pall upon the actions of the main character who is seen by her entire community as a pure, sweet, honest woman.

Set in Texas in the mid-1800s, *Rockspring* addresses treatment and perceptions of Mexicans in the region. *Rockspring* begins with an abduction scene of a young white girl, Jensie. Her abductors are two Mexicans and one Nahuatl Indian. The reader follows Jensie as she moves through fear, disgust, and hatred toward her captors. Over the course of a year, the two older captors, Toral and the Nahuatl, are killed and Jensie is left with the younger of the two Mexican captors, Bernardino.<sup>7</sup> She grows to love Bernardino and weaves fantasies of a life of happiness ahead as the two make their way back to Jensie's family on the banks of the Nueces River.

At this point the novel seems to have fallen into wishful romanticizing. But Vliet actually uses the appearance of trite sentimentalizing to set the reader up for an abrupt drop into reality. Just before reuniting with her family, Jensie suffers two emotional blows. First Bernardino tells her (realistically enough) that there is no point in his seeking acceptance from her family. Then, as he turns to go, Jensie watches in horror as a local farmer shoots and kills Bernardino because the farmer sees no reason to let a Mexican ride off on a perfectly good mule. What begins as a story heavily laden with racial stereotypes ends with a statement about what a conflict the formation of one's racial identity can be. In the killing at the end of the story, Vliet also ends with the acting out of the implications of stereotyping—the denial of a stereotyped person's humanity. While Jensie learns that Bernardino, a Mexican, is fully and appealingly human, the reader realizes that the farmer, representing most Anglos of his time and region, neither knows nor cares, but regards him as subhuman.

Jensie, the protagonist in *Rockspring*, is first presented as a sort of ultra-white Anglo settler in south Texas. Vliet bestows upon Jensie “the prettiest hair...” and goes on to explain that this is because it was “pure white” (Vliet 9). She is strong-willed and attractive. The first few pages of the story are filled with examples of Jensie’s thoughts about her clothing, the new dress she hopes for, even her image in the mirror. Vliet presents Jensie as the pure Anglo girl on the brink of womanhood. In fact it is as she is bathing in the river that Jensie is taken away by Toral and his men. This description works well both to draw the reader’s sympathy and to contrast Jensie with the dirty, smelly men who abduct her.

When Jensie is abducted it is by three men who are at first indistinguishable from one another because we view them through her eyes—that is, in terms of stereotypes. These stereotypes held by “ultra-whites” eradicate individual identity. To be sure, the men are immediately distinguishable from Jensie and any other Anglos in the book; these three men are dark. Skin color and hair color play a crucial role in the novel as well as in the minds of Texas’ Anglos. They are a means of identifying who belongs to which racial group, and nothing else matters. But these stereotypes are set up so that they can be overturned. Vliet would again invert this type of stereotyping when, in *Soledad* (1977), it is the Mexican who is described as sophisticated and cultured while the Anglos are the dirty, amoral bandits. In both novels, the individuals transcend the typical stereotypes of their groups.

At first the words Vliet uses to describe Jensie’s impressions of the men who abduct her are extremely negative and convey her disgust. Toral is called “the fat one” repeatedly (Vliet 12). When he kisses her and rapes her, he smells and tastes of grease,

animals, and smoke. Toral wears a “bloody, dark, and greasy jacket, open, showing his chest and belly” (Vliet 18). Vliet clearly intends to identify him as a “greaser.” With multi-sensory descriptions Vliet depicts Toral as a filthy barbarian with little humanity. More than once, scenes of the men eating reinforce the perception that they are barely human. The rabbit they eat is “half-raw”; they sit in the dirt and eat the meat with their hands. In a final act of degradation they wipe their hands on pages torn from a book of Mexican law (Vliet 18). In addition to flouting Anglo law (by kidnapping, raping, murdering, and stealing) just as turn of the century Anglos would expect, the men also symbolically degrade the laws of Mexico; they alienate themselves from all established systems of law. This alienation reinforces the dominant idea of the lawless Mexican. Everything Jencie, an Anglo girl, has been raised to value—manners, cleanliness, rule of law—is cast aside by the dark, filthy men who abduct her. Soon after she is kidnapped, Jencie attempts to save a bear from being killed by the men. Her sympathies reside not with fellow humans, but with a bear. Under different circumstances the bear would have been her mortal enemy, but alongside Toral, Bernardino, and the Nahuatl, the wild beast seems more like Jencie than the humans she is with.

Part of the irony of Vliet’s work is that ultimately it is Jencie’s nature, not Bernardino’s, which is changed. It is the white character who is improved and broadened by her contact with the Mexican. The Mexican teaches the Anglo—a complete reversal of expectations in part because Mexicans were thought to have nothing to teach. Through his emerging kindness he broadens her conceptions of humanity; he frees her from her initial restriction by stereotyping. It is Bernardino, too, who realizes Jencie’s dream of easy accommodation will not work—her society will not accept him. When Jencie and

Bernardino return to her home and encounter a white man, Bernardino knows they should not reveal their relationship. “‘Do not touch me,’ Bernardino whispered. ‘He is watching us...I cannot go home with you’” (*Rockspring* 116). Clearly, Bernardino has serious doubts about his ability to integrate himself into Jencie’s world, yet even so he does not fully anticipate the depth of Anglo society’s prejudice against him, but turns his back to the farmer with no apprehension that he will be shot.

Bernardino unconsciously parallels the actions of Gregorio Cortez when he turns away from Jencie, the farmer, and the Anglo world in a brief attempt to ride for the border. Both Bernardino and Cortez attempt to escape the violence of the Anglo world, and both fail in their flight when they are shot or captured by the more powerful Anglos around them. But although both men fail to escape Anglo violence, the legacy each border hero leaves is the same; through their actions they modify the way some Anglos are willing to conceptualize Mexicans and Mexican Americans. While there is no major change enacted by the individual here, the character functions as an emblem of change in the borderlands.

The action of *Rockspring* is very much like an inverted fairy tale where the princess kisses the frog and he turns into a handsome prince. This conventionalized plotting brings the reader to the point where he or she must confront the operation of stereotypes in the Southwest. The moment Bernardino is shot, brutal reality intrudes on the fantasy and forces the reader to acknowledge the tremendously destructive nature of stereotypes. Although Bernardino begins by being one of the characters in the fairy tale (he is the prince the frog turns into) he ends by operating almost as a reader of the story when he realizes that Jencie’s fantasy of living happily ever after with him will not work.

Bernardino's attempt to leave Jensie with her family and return alone to Mexico can be seen as his awareness of how the world really operates, that the fantasy must end.

Although Bernardino's perspective is far more realistic than Jensie's, both he and the reader are shocked by the farmer's gunshot. Even with his realistic perspective, he had not foreseen the full brutality of the farmer's stereotyped and prejudicial views.

*Rockspring* depicts many of the same stereotyped character types common in the dominant, Anglo culture. In the beginning of the novel the lines are clear; there are the hard-working settlers struggling against a difficult environment and surrounded by hostile Mexicans and Indians. There are greasy, illiterate, lawless Mexicans who steal and rape and kill. And there are wily, vicious Indians prowling the region like mercenary devils. Vliet's strategy is to begin his novel by adopting a perspective that agrees with popular perception and only gradually move from that position in an effort to expose its weakness. Vliet's characters ultimately resist stereotyping as they show the complexity and depth that forms them. By the end of the novel, it is the Mexican, Bernardino, who teaches valuable lessons about survival, about family, about the future, to the Anglo. It is the Mexican who expresses a desire to study. "I would like to learn to read...They say there are many fine things in books" (*Rockspring* 101). Jensie admits she can not read either, but she demonstrates no interest in learning. Vliet has reversed cultural expectations with the depth and humanity he instills in his characters. In writing fiction where the characters appear to reinforce the preconceptions which are firmly established in their culture and then fly in the face of these preconceptions, Vliet's characters resist and call into question stereotypes and limitations. In doing so they perform one of the important roles of the border agent, that of bringing instability to the border region.

Vliet's second novel, *Soledad*, continues with themes of inverted stereotypes developed in *Rockspring* and enriches them with additional complexity. In this novel the protagonist, an Anglo cowboy, has his perception of Mexicans darkened and confused by his guilt and, ultimately, what he experiences first hand. *Soledad*, another novel set in south Texas, chronicles the quest of a young cowboy and cattle rustler, Claiborne, as he searches for Soledad, the granddaughter of a Mexican rancher he has murdered.

Clabe and several other cowboys are rustling cattle when they are interrupted by an elegantly dressed older Mexican man. After first sharing breakfast with him, Clabe shoots the man because the rustlers are unwilling to let him depart and risk having their enterprise exposed. The killing is casual; none of the men place any value on the life of the unknown Mexican. The only character who appears to give the murder any thought at all, Clabe justifies it to himself thinking "Hell, shuck it off. It don't matter. He weren't nothing but a Meskin...They're all alike. A Meskin don't count for much" (*Soledad* 21). Clabe's thoughts show both the disregard he knows he is supposed to feel for the life of a Mexican, as well as the fact that his feelings are far more complex and conflicted. Finding a photograph of a beautiful woman in the dead man's coat pocket, Clabe becomes obsessed with finding who she is and what her relationship is to the dead man. Ultimately, although in the photograph Soledad "looks to be a white woman. Purty, too" (27), Clabe finds Soledad to be an intelligent, wealthy, strong woman of Mexican ancestry. Her name is apt, for solitude seems to be one of the defenses she uses to protect herself from the pain of her grandfather's murder. This realization runs counter to Clabe's prejudicial instinct that tells him Mexicans are none of these things. When he first sets eyes on Soledad's Mexican grandfather, Clabe's reaction is immediate and powerful.

“The hair lifted on Claiborne’s neck. He hated the dark sonofabitch. Them fancy duds. That blooded horse. The Sharps Creedmore. He’d likely shot them off a white man. Claiborne shivered with rage” (12). Although Clabe instinctively identifies the man’s dark skin as one of the reasons for his hatred, it is also jealousy which drives his anger. The irony, of course, is that Clabe, a white man, is a poor, cattle-rustling thief and it is his Mexican victim who is wealthy and respected. It is Clabe who goes in search of a woman he can not imagine is anything but white, rich, and beautiful. Vliet uses his fiction to undermine entrenched stereotypes. While change is never easy and often is not realized at all, the potential for bringing it about is raised by the border characters in Vliet’s work.

Despite his strong racist feelings, Clabe is a character with a great deal of complexity and conflicting elements. Immediately after committing murder, Clabe goes to a prayer meeting and finds himself at the front of the congregation confessing his sins. Curiously, he confesses to “his pride, his laziness, his taking the Lord God’s name in vain, his drinking, his gambling...his general disrespect of things religious,” but not to the murder (31). While Clabe certainly would not want to announce a murder in front of the congregation, it is just as likely that the murder of a Mexican does not even register with him as a sin any more than the cattle rustling. Having confessed, Clabe shows the conflict within himself when he proceeds with an interior monologue where he states, “to hell with the Lord Almighty” (32) in his disgust with what he sees as a simplistic piety in religion that does not jibe with a real world he sees which can not be painted strictly in black and white, good and bad.

Adding further complexity to Clabe’s character, at the beginning of the novel he courts a Cherokee woman. While Clabe’s descriptions of people, like those in

*Rockspring*, revolve around perception of and judgments about skin color, he does not seem to have the same feelings of disgust for his girlfriend Johnny Lee that he does for Mexicans. Johnny Lee, in fact, goes out of her way to make some of her already dark features darker. “Johnny Lee had darkened her eyebrows with a burnt match” (31) and the effect is a decidedly positive one on Clabe.

While Johnny Lee purposely accentuates her dark features, Soledad is painfully aware that, regardless of her wealth and power, she is often perceived as “merely” a Mexican. “Grandpapa’s a Mexican–Meskin to them...I’m part ‘Meskin’ myself” (151). In this sense she and Clabe share the same stereotypes about Mexicans, although what Clabe believes is true Soledad is simply aware of as an unfortunate misconception held by the Anglos around her. In Vliet’s characters these differences between how the Native American and Mexican Americans conceptualize their skin color parallels the way the Webb presents the Anglo community’s perception of each group. Native Americans were believed to be more akin to noble savages, thus their darkness was not as offensive as that of the Mexicans who had none of those redeeming qualities. In undermining stereotypes of the darker races, Vliet was undermining a kind of thinking that, as utilized by Webb, had academic validation.

With regard to the resistance in Vliet’s novel, *Soledad* inverts a number of conventions about race relations. Most importantly for Clabe’s development and understanding, he realizes Mexicans are not at all as he imagines. In his pursuit of Soledad, Clabe finds a job on her hacienda and watches, often in confusion, as Soledad runs her affairs with confidence, authority, and grace. Used to working with stock, Clabe is hired to tend the fruit trees. (The stock figure of the cowboy, then, is also being

unsettled.) Unused to working with plants, Clabe questions Soledad's request that he work in the garden. Her response is unlike any he expects from someone he would call a Mexican and considers an inferior: "I think you'll do what work I tell you" (165). While this sort of treatment, combined with a realization of the tremendous wisdom and strength Soledad's grandfather wielded does not have Clabe renouncing his racist ways, he does temper his tendency to jump to conclusions about a person's character based solely on their skin color. By the end of the novel Clabe is again working on a ranch, this time one owned by native Americans. Although the novel does not develop this point, it is yet another inversion of convention. What Clabe learns is less clear than what Vliet shows, that identifiers of race and color are firm in the mythology people believe but are meaningless in the complexity of the real world.

Clabe is an excellent example of a border agent because he, like Anaya's Antonio, moves freely among a number of worlds defined by race. As he passes among these different groups of people, Clabe brings about change by causing the reader (and occasionally himself) to examine preconceptions about what it means to be an Anglo or a Mexican. In the process the traditional definitions, demonstrably lacking in depth and complexity, are shown to be of little use. Vliet's novels are written to change readers by narrating changes in characters. An interesting point to consider regarding Clabe is that while he operates as a change agent, he does not do so with the intention of bringing about change. His motivations are more self-centered. Clabe's impact, however, is greatest outside the boundaries of his own story. Clabe goes about his business with little regard for the impact of his actions in the world, his thoughtlessness serving as example for the reader. Clabe does not, for the most part, realize the shallow nature of his belief

system, but without Clabe and that system, the reader would not be able to respond to it either. While the novel certainly does not leave Clabe a changed man with a new, unprejudiced outlook on the world, it does open his eyes to the possibility that the world is not as he initially imagines.

By resisting stereotypes, border fiction shows a much richer picture of the world than one which embraces easy and oversimplified definitions of people as “types.” A more complex fictive world which is more open to fluidity and change is both a more interesting one and one which more accurately reflects a reality which is increasingly unbounded. This world allows for fragmentation even as it becomes smaller and in some ways more knowable. In part, the world reflects a resistance to the idea that any subject can be bounded, permanently identified, or static. Resistance to stereotypes by writers of border fiction, the instability caused by the border heroes in the fiction, results in a more varied means of understanding and relating to the world and thus one that is at least potentially more fair. Anaya shows the struggles the modern world causes within a traditional culture and shows how a mixture of traditions is ultimately the most viable way of life for Antonio. Vliet challenges the reader’s expectations by showing the depth and complexity of his Mexican characters and by showing the uselessness of the stereotypes held by his Anglo ones.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE FEMALE BORDER AGENT: BORDERS, RESISTANCE, AND SELF-NAMING

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is to a generation of border theorists and fiction writers active since the late 1980s what *With His Pistol in His Hand* was to the earlier-established fields of folklore and border studies. While several influential Chicana<sup>1</sup> authors published work before *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa's work codifies the behavior of the Chicana border agent in a more academic (although certainly not conventional) form. In addition to its role as inspiration, *Borderlands* also clearly states the border as a place of inclusion and synthesis rather than opposition and exclusion and in doing so signifies an important development in how to understand border regions and the change that happens there. While Anzaldúa was not the first Chicana writer to embrace the idea of the border's additional meanings of political distinction, of economic distribution, of cultural difference, of sexual power-distinctions, her book has become the influential manifesto articulating the Chicana's place as border agent.

To appreciate the importance of Anzaldúa's work we must see it within the context of the Chicano Resistance of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The Chicano Resistance movement constituted change and growth in recognition and impact for Chicano writers, yet the new blossoming of Chicano literature remained predominantly masculine.<sup>3</sup> Seen from within the movement as an attempt to embrace long forgotten or ignored elements of Chicano/a culture found in the mixture of native American cultures and European cultures, and to reaffirm a sense of a Chicano/a homeland in the American Southwest, the

Chicano Resistance raised the consciousness of a generation of Chicanos/as (Davis-Undiano 118). However, despite the fact that the movement's aims were, in Tey Diana Rebolledo's words, to "establish an identity that defined the Chicano in...social, political, and cultural ideological terms," many Chicanas felt it was still a system that limited their self-expression. The heightened sense of "group solidarity" came at the expense of any real attempt to address the specific needs of women who were "effectively removed or distanced . . . from full-scale participation in the Chicano movement" and left in a position not very different from the traditional one in their fathers' houses (Rebolledo 95). Still defined and judged by the men making the rules, Chicanas chafed at their restrictions. What was happening in the movement was really a continuation of male-defined roles in the community. Although the Chicano movement aimed at gaining Chicanos a position of power, respect, and influence in larger United States society, the structure by which it went about making these changes was still a patriarchal one. Chicanas felt themselves marginalized within the very movement that was supposed to address issues of Chicano/a marginalization.

With Chicanas beginning to resist the limited roles afforded them by their traditional patriarchy, they began a struggle for self-definition both in terms of ethnicity and in terms of gender, "from their own perspectives on the social and political situation" (Rebolledo 97). Often Chicanas who questioned the absence of a real attempt to give them recognition within the movement were branded traitors who were not supportive of a greater good. Tey Diana Rebolledo, herself one of the leading voices of these so-called traitors, sees Anzaldúa's importance as her clear definition of both "the historical oppression that made women feel they couldn't cross the borders, and the empowerment

that occurred when they realized it was their choice” (Rebolledo 103). With the acknowledgement of a “*mestiza* consciousness” Chicanas abandoned a movement that did not fully represent their goals and needs for self-expression and embraced, instead, a dual struggle for definition as women and as Chicanas—the struggle to form what Anzaldúa calls the new *mestiza*. The strength of the women writers and women characters who resisted the continuation of stereotypes from within their own cultural group and from the larger Anglo society all around them adds an important new dimension to the border hero and pushes the concept of border still further from the geographic fact. Because of the impact on those who read Chicana fiction, the changes brought to readers who found a new world of possibility in the writing of Chicana authors has been dubbed “voyeuristic extension” by Ellen C. Maycock. Readers identify with the characters they read about and take on many of their attributes once they are exposed to the options which exist for them.

This is the process by which Chicana writers perform as border agents. As border agents, they bring instability and change to the borderlands of Chicana identity when communities read the fiction and poetry of Chicanas who refuse to follow a rigid set of gender roles. In this instance it is the literature far more than the characters which is the agent of change. The result is a wide scale exposure of the control exerted over Chicanas and what comprises their full set of choices for self-definition (Maycock 223). In an attempt to define the struggle’s essential elements, Deborah A. Dessaso’s study of identity formation concludes that a Chicana “finds herself caught between the Mexican world that she hates and the white world that hates her” (Dessaso 47). While hate may be too strong a word, it certainly represents the fear, oppression, and limited choices faced

by Chicanas as they attempt to live their lives not only in Mexico, but often in America as well.

Clearly, then, the struggle faced by Chicanas is more complex than simply a rejection of one culture and an inability to assimilate into another. Chicanas are faced with “the dilemma of whether to ignore their own individuality, identity, self, and voice or to yield to the roles prescribed by patriarchal societies” (Weddle-Mulholland 68). Their patriarchal society is not structured to provide women with enough variety and choice in their lives, and when they do choose to deviate from their societal norm, Chicanas often face tremendous community censure. It is in this difficult space that Chicana writers perform the vital role of border agent when they bring about change to their metaphoric landscape.

Anzaldúa’s subtitle “The New Mestiza” is significant for several reasons. Anzaldúa takes the idea of a mixture of cultures and influences, something which has been present in Hispanic culture for generations, and reinterprets and popularizes it. Embracing her mixture of cultures and influences is certainly a crucial element of the *mestiza* because she includes in her self-definition elements of her geographic nature, her ethnic background, and her sexual/gender identity. But what is of equal importance to the idea of a character defined as a mixture is the sense that this border character is new because she defines herself as mixed. It is not enough to be a mixture, the conscious embracing of that mixture as a definition is the key to the *mestiza* and is what makes her new. Arguably most definitions of self would have to include a mixture of some sort or another because identity is comprised of many different attributes and is influenced by outside sources. The *mestiza* is new because she acknowledges, seeks out, and identifies

herself as a mixture, even of elements which might ordinarily be ignored or denied. She does not take for granted the myriad of influences, good or bad, which combine to form her identity; she is the center and at the center of the mixture. to Anzaldúa, the mixture is an advantage.

Sonia Saldívar-Hull introduces the 1999 edition of *Borderlands* by admitting that “while border studies certainly were not invented by Gloria Anzaldúa,” the book’s tremendous value stems from the way it “signaled a new visibility for academic programs on the study of the U.S.-Mexico border area” (Anzaldúa 12). Saldívar-Hull lists a number of important works that followed the publication of *Borderlands*, all of them written about issues relating to Chicano/a literature and the place of women within that field of study. Rebolledo, in her valuable study of Chicana literature *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995), characterizes the impact of *Borderlands* on Chicana writers as the articulation of “the tensions, the conflict, the shiftings” they had felt before it was published (Rebolledo 103). Thus, she argues, the book gave Chicana writers a sense of relief and emboldened them to feel positive about their impulse to go against the grain of both their culture and the larger Chicano movement.

Like Paredes, Anzaldúa assumes the mantle of the border agent through the very act of her writing. Such border characters, defined by the search for a safe environment for their family, their rootlessness during the search, their struggle to cross a border and reach a safe haven, act most importantly in their roles as agents of instability in the borderlands. Anzaldúa searches for a safe environment primarily for herself and others like her. What she needs is an environment where she can exist in peace as an individual and not as a woman defined by a male-dominated culture. Certainly when she wrote

*Borderlands* Anzaldúa was not surrounded by a supportive literary community, coming as she did from “a culture that taught . . . to survive, you should not speak out” (Rebolledo x). It is less clear that she desires to cross a geographic border and return to a safe place, but a similar wish can be seen in her struggle to carve out a figurative space for Chicana writers despite resistance from all around. Without a doubt, Anzaldúa is an agent of change. “Writing is a subversive act,” Rebolledo claims, because the writing can be used to inspire readers to undermine the institution being critiqued (x), and Anzaldúa’s subversion is demonstrated most clearly when she tackles the collection of male-dominated views about how a Chicana should define herself. Although the two words are related, subversion differs from resistance in key ways. Subversion implies an act of destruction or ruin where the goal is to corrupt or overthrow whatever system or concept is being targeted. Resistance, on the other hand, denotes more of a struggle of the oppressed. Resistance implies actions taken in opposition to something and for the purpose of attaining freedom. In assailing these views she leads the way for other Chicana writers who follow. Anzaldúa brings gender to the mix of issues addressed in border theory and creates an interpretive framework for the borderlands in which women are seen as agents of change.

To be sure, Anzaldúa does maintain a literal and historical geographic reference in her work as she locates it in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico (and more broadly, Central America). At the same time, by insisting on multiple meanings of the word “border,” she incorporates a strong metaphoric import which removes the discussion slightly from the physical borders addressed so often in border studies. This metaphoric remove allows writers like Sandra Cisneros to speak to the issues of a

Chicana girl in Chicago as border concerns despite the fact that she is over two thousand miles from the Rio Grande Valley. There is of course no physical United States–Mexico border in Chicago, but the cultural issues seen along the international border far to the south exist, to a large extent, in the community Cisneros writes about in Chicago.

Cisneros addresses the different “country” her characters live in with poems like “Those Who Don’t” where she describes how her neighborhood is “all brown all around” and seems threatening and foreign to outsiders who are white (*Mango Street* 28). More than just issues of color and language, Cisneros shows that even in Chicago the struggle to form a healthy Chicana identity must deal with many of the same pressures as are found along the geopolitical border far to the south.

Another significant innovation wrought by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, made possible by Paredes’s example, is her articulation of a direct call to action, as when she claims that speaking “Chicano Spanish” is a form of “linguistic terrorism” directed against those who would otherwise force her to accommodate English speakers (Anzaldúa 81). *With His Pistol in His Hand* makes it possible for later writers not just to address inequities in the perception of Chicanos/as but also to make clear and bold statements about how those problems should be remedied. Paredes shows that resistance to the dominant culture is both possible and fruitful. Anzaldúa makes her own call to create the new *mestiza* consciousness; it is a way for Chicanas to construct personal identities that incorporate strong, positive elements from non-European historical and mythical sources. A plan for personal power is provided by Anzaldúa allowing Chicanas to define themselves in terms not dictated by other cultures or by other genders.

An important distinction between Anzaldúa's work and Paredes's is form.

Although Paredes's approach is by no means traditional, it is nevertheless more so than Anzaldúa's mixture of expository prose, anecdote, myth, and poetry as a means for addressing her concerns. No longer confined by conventions of writing that do not suit her message, Anzaldúa lets the medium partake in the meaning of what she has to share when she creates a work that is part anecdote, part history, part poetry, part fiction, part academic essay. Her text is a new mixture of conversation, scholarly study, and poetry. In its form, it demonstrates one of the ways the new *mestiza* will look because the writing itself is a mixture of English and Spanish, research and personal experience, ancient myths and argumentation. In the first chapter, a mixture of third-person essay, first person narrative, and second person storytelling, Anzaldúa ends with a piece of a poem. Writing about the life of a Chicana living as an undocumented, or illegal, immigrant in, for example, Chicago, Anzaldúa sums up the dangers of such a life: "This is her home/this thin edge of/barbwire" (35). By addressing her topic from a variety of angles Anzaldúa presents her scholarship in a more fulfilling and accessible mode for many of her readers than if she settled on a less fluid, more traditional models. Her writing itself enacts this fluidity as it selects from disparate sources and freely crosses boundaries of genre. Anzaldúa the *mestiza* creates a piece of writing that is also "*mestiza*," or mixed, when she refuses to use just one form and instead lets each part of her argument adopt the new and necessary shape she feels will best present her meaning.

*Borderlands* addresses the physical United States-Mexico border (specifically the Texas-Mexico border) and from there expands border theory outward to include sexual, psychological, and religious border conflict. Anzaldúa defines a border as the place

where “cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 19). In this charged space, Anzaldúa describes both the need for change, especially in how Chicanas view the options they are presented with in the world, and the way to achieve that change through self-definition.

Although she often focuses on south Texas, Anzaldúa expands the site of border residents and border conflict to wherever people find themselves living between two or more cultures, forced to create an amalgamation in order to have a healthy self-definition. In the geographic borderlands this means recognizing the strengths inherent in earlier, pre-colonial cultures which Anzaldúa sees as having been subverted and often forgotten. It also necessitates recognizing the value of both sides—that is, rejecting the dichotomy of the dominator and the dominated. Anzaldúa shows how patriarchal culture has pushed aside mythical images of strong, independent women and replaced them with female figures more suited to a subservient role in society. She points to Coatlolopeuh, a descendant of an early Mesoamerican fertility goddess/creator goddess capable of creating and destroying, pushed out of favor by “the male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture” (Anzaldúa 49). Anzaldúa claims Coatlolopeuh was further subjugated when the arrival of Catholicism in Mexico gradually changed the once-powerful goddess into the Virgin of Guadalupe/Virgin Mary, two “chaste virgins” (50). By reclaiming the power of the serpent goddess Coatlolopeuh, Anzaldúa takes a strong image from her deep cultural background and integrates it into her own image of self. In so doing she recaptures sexuality as a major source of strength to be used by Chicanas. Anzaldúa incorporates into her own persona the power and violence she finds in her distant past, taking further

strength and inspiration from the fact that Coatlolopeuh was subverted by later male-dominated beliefs.

These reclaimed ancient cultural ancestors, along with others influencing and defining the border resident (Anzaldúa also addresses the strengths of previously ignored groups of people including Mexicans, Native Americans, homosexuals, etc.) combine to form a vibrant, healthy mixture termed the new *mestiza*. Faced with resistance all around her, from men who wish to keep her uneducated and subservient to Anglos who do not pay her a fair wage, Anzaldúa's *mestiza* gathers strength from a multitude of sources to become stronger than the sum of her varied parts. "The spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and a piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world" (Anzaldúa 45). Calling on the strength she finds in the spirit of her history, the narrator fights for a place where she can, with strength and independence, face the world on her own terms.

After the first part of *Borderlands*, a prose description of the *mestiza*, Anzaldúa moves on to the book's second half where her poetry describes change in the borderlands. She writes of the gradual movement from the tradition which limits the full growth of Chicanas into an empowering depiction of strong, often female characters. "*El sonavabitché*"—its very title an example of border xix in language—tells the remarkable story of a Chicana woman extracting "blood money" from a grower who has been exploiting migrant Mexican workers. The narrator provides an excellent example of Anzaldúa's hybrid because she defies the stereotype in that she is educated and brave as well as female and Chicana. Anzaldúa sees this hybrid as possessing the strength and honesty necessary to overthrow older, more rigid cultural types in favor of a more free,

healthy, and vibrant mixture. Reading “*El sonavabitché*” with “Don’t Give In, *Chicanita*” (another poem about standing strong against the forces blocking a woman’s attempts to free herself from a limiting, patriarchal society) provides inspiration that Chicanas should take heart from the prediction that “Like serpent lightning we’ll move” and become empowered with the strongest elements of the cultures around them (225). In this way Chicanas become powerful border agents as they break free of stereotypes and take on new roles previously unavailable to them.

The poem “*Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone*” recounts the battles fought by the narrator as she resisted the hands, figurative and literal, of the Church, her parents, and men in the community. Her resistance results in her freedom: “I remain who I am, multiple/and one of the herd, yet not of it. I walk/on the ground of my own being” (Anzaldúa 195). The narrator is a true *mestiza* because she acknowledges that her strength and her individuality are formed from a multitude of sources. And by drawing on the power of her ancestors she is able to create her own secure place in the world. This image of a person creating her own physical ground from which to relate to the world is a recurring one for Anzaldúa and it shows the importance of relating to the world on terms of one’s own making.

“Culture forms our beliefs,” Anzaldúa begins her section in *Borderlands* titled “Cultural Tyranny” (38). She describes the bitter irony of a culture where “mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them” and states that the system “is made by those in power—men” (Anzaldúa 38). This is an example of hegemony where the oppressed women of one generation collaborate to oppress the women of the next. Explaining that the pressure to be an obedient wife, a good mother to

the children, a competent housekeeper leaves no room for women “wanting to be something other than housewives,” Anzaldúa shows how the tremendous force the Chicano culture puts on women to conform leaves no opportunity to break free (38). “Women,” Anzaldúa explains, “are made to feel total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (Anzaldúa 39). Describing her options growing up, Anzaldúa explains she had only three choices: she could become a nun (or another subcategory of the permanent virgin, the daughter who stays at home to care for her parents—the expectation at the center of the conflict in Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*), a prostitute, or a mother. Her options show how deeply embedded in her culture the traditional Chicano triad of virgin/whore/mother actually is. Rebolledo explains, “The Virgin of Guadalupe represents characteristics considered positive for women: unselfish giving, intercession between earth and spirit” (55). The Virgin represents “the passivity” (56) required of women in a patriarchal society. If a woman is not going to be a good mother and wife, modeling her life on the Virgin’s positive attributes by becoming a nun is an acceptable option. Short of wife or virgin (and certainly until a woman becomes a wife she must remain a virgin in Chicano society) one is left with the choice of becoming a whore. Daughters were raised with the understanding that a choice that does not include being a good mother and wife or being devoted to God’s (or parents’) service is the equivalent of being a whore. This is a severe sentence for a woman like Anzaldúa who chooses to seek the freedom to write instead of attachment to a man.

Despite the cultural censure faced by Anzaldúa, her poetry shows women unwilling to follow in the footsteps of their mothers and grandmothers. In so doing, as we will see, she strikes a note also being struck about the same time in the fiction of Julia

Alvarez and Sandra Cisneros. “Immaculate, Inviolable: *Como Ella*” is written from the point of view of a granddaughter assessing the hard life of her grandmother. “Once I looked into her blue eyes, /asked, Have you ever had an orgasm?” (Anzaldúa 132). The narrator links the absence of freedom and pleasure in her grandmother with the influence of a man. Implicit in the poem is the understanding that the narrator does not want the kind of life lived by her grandmother and her aunts. In her role as a border agent, the narrator attempts to shake up the conventions which ruled her grandmother’s life by calling to attention the limitations she recognizes and refuses to accept for herself. The border is not a geographic one, of course, rather it is one made up of polite conversation, respectability, sexual taboos, the authority of elders.

To desire something other than the triad was nearly unthinkable for Anzaldúa growing up. She was not offered options like an education, a career, a different sexual preference. “In the borderlands of Anzaldúa’s youth, ‘selfishness’ includes anything women want to do to improve their lives,” Saldívar-Hull explains (Anzaldúa 5). The act of leaving home and not marrying was completely unacceptable, almost unthinkable. Although it does not fit the third option of whore, leaving home unmarried but not associated with the Church was nearly as shameful. Having made the decision to break from convention, Anzaldúa found herself exposed to severe censure from her community. Comparing herself to the *nopal de castilla*, a cactus that has no spines, Anzaldúa felt she had no defenses. As a result, she says, “I cultivate needles, nettles, razor-sharp spikes to protect myself from others” (Anzaldúa 67).

In a bold and decisive move of self-definition, Anzaldúa writes that she is not ashamed to be associated with the third, shameful piece of the triad. She takes the image

of Malinali, the woman who translated for Cortés and the Spanish as they moved in conquest over the Aztec, and changes it from that of a traitor into one of strength. Malinali both translated for Cortés and became his lover. Both actions cement her status as one of Chicano culture's greatest traitors. Her name is frequently transformed into Malinche, the Bad one. Anzaldúa chooses to focus on Malinali's ability to translate, "seen also as the ability to move easily between multiple cultures as well as languages" (Rebolledo 64). This translation skill fits perfectly with the new *mestiza* consciousness Anzaldúa promotes. Anzaldúa manages this transformation by associating the negative images of Malinali and *la Llorona*, the figure "tied up in some vague way with sexuality and the death or loss of children" (Rebolledo 63), with "*Cihuacoatl*, Serpent Woman, ancient Aztec goddess of the earth, of war and birth, patron of midwives, and antecedent of *la Llorona*" (Anzaldúa 57). By transferring the strengths of the formerly negative and giving them credibility by association with the powerful and dangerous *Cihuacoatl*, Anzaldúa demonstrates exactly what the new *mestiza* is supposed to accomplish. She rejects the definitions and connotations thrust upon her by the male world and instead fashions them into a mantle of power she is proud to wear. No longer ashamed to be called Malinche, Anzaldúa embraces the power the image carries.

Although Anzaldúa does not address Chicanas exclusively and her book of theory and poetry can certainly be read as a means for all people to understand the power of anyone who, like the new *mestiza*, operates in a situation of multiple identities and multiple demands, it speaks most directly to Chicanas and specifically to Chicana writers, who, Rebolledo says, "recognized Anzaldúa's description of the multiply voiced, shifting subjectivities and ideologies as our own" (2). From this origin as a sort of manifesto for

Chicana writers, *Borderlands* represents a new way of living and writing in Chicano/a society. Consequently it is the Chicanas most affected by *Borderlands* or whose work most clearly anticipates the elements in *Borderlands* who comprise the border agents under scrutiny in the remainder of this chapter. How they employ Chicana border agents to represent change and options for Chicanas in their fiction and what form that change takes is the foundation of this investigation.

Using the new *mestiza* described by Anzaldúa as a lens through which to read the writings of authors such as Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros, it becomes clear that the nature of the change brought about by women in the borderlands is distinctly different from that of the men. Where Paredes was fighting from the outside, struggling to gain acceptance into a system that had rejected his views and the views of his culture for years, Anzaldúa advocates a shift in how people internalize their identities, in the options they allow themselves to choose, rather than attempting to change how others perceive them. Anzaldúa is a proponent of this internal, personal change rather than a revision of the views others have. When she looks to her roots in her chapter “Entering Into the Serpent” and pulls influence and inspiration from strong ancient deities, Anzaldúa shows her willingness to embrace power wherever it originates, even if it is the “dark, chthonic (underworld)” (61). She rejects the images of women which her culture has presented her and chooses instead to find icons from before their power was muted by men and Western religion.

A key element of this type of change is found in how it is achieved by the border agent. In many works about Borderlands women, significant emphasis is given to naming. Characters repeatedly focus on what others call them and how their own names

differ from what the rest of the world uses. Simplifying the emphasis on naming and renaming, Ellen Maycock sees the struggle within the Chicana novel revolving around attempts to answer the questions, “who am I? how have I been named? and why?” (229). When the answer to these questions is not a satisfying fit with the characters’ understanding of who they are, often they create a new name and new identity for a better fit. Rebolledo devotes much of a chapter to describing the creation of identity. She explains that Chicanas realize that “to name something...is to have power” but this power comes at a cost because “to name is often to accept” (103).

Alvarez fits into this project as a border writer because she, like so many border characters and border writers, moves among a variety of different worlds, on various sides of a number of different geographic and cultural borders. Having recently immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic, Yolanda in Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) is faced with just such a conflict when she realizes that in America if she wants a personalized key chain, she must settle for “Joey” because “Yolanda” is never among the offerings (*Garcia Girls* 68). Aware that this choosing a name from a set of limited options offered by others is not a true expression of free will, Rebolledo describes methods Latinas use to change the rules of the game and provide their own choices beyond those traditionally available to them. All too often, she explains, Chicanas do not have the opportunity to determine who and what they will be; their culture often sternly dictates a woman’s role and does not provide them with a variety of options. Chicanas repeatedly present characters unable to even think of roles for themselves beyond those of wife and mother. In this way, through the

example of their writing, Chicana authors perform a crucial role as border agents similar to that of their characters who break free of the restrictions placed upon them by society.

In *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* Alvarez shows how four sisters from the Dominican Republic who move to New York City with their parents ultimately break free from limiting and controlling traditional female roles. One way this control manifests itself is in the way the girls are assigned identities by their parents rather than being allowed to develop their own personalities. Instead, for simplicity's sake all four are dressed alike, and each is given a "signature color" to differentiate her from her siblings. Ultimately, all of the sisters rebel and forge their own identities once they break free from parental control. As Maycock notes, Alvarez shows the importance of identity formation in her novel in its very structure (223). Because the novel is told from most recent events to those in the distant past, the reader is able to see how the Garcia girls identify themselves as adults and then trace the development of those distinct personalities. In the novel, the identity each girl is assigned changes how she sees herself. In some of the girls, this identity is one they adopt and internalize. In others it is a source of constant distress and eventually causes a break when the character creates an identity more comfortable and appropriate to her self-image. "Displacement...has produced a tension between the culture of the country of origin and that of the adopted homeland, one representing the past and the other the future of the immigrant," William Luis writes about *Garcia Girls* (839). These juxtaposed contrasts of place and of time are, in Anzaldúa's terms, borders, making the Garcia girls, in their resistance, border agents. Because the novel progresses backward in time, the reader first sees the end result of that tension as it manifests itself in the *mestiza*-identities of the main characters. The novel

provides an example of how Chicana border agents are able to develop from their traditional roles as obedient young women into their new and empowered ones as grown women in a foreign country. Employing the theory of “voyeuristic extension” the Garcia girls serve as inspiration and example for the readers within the Chicana community.

Yolanda, arguably the main character of the novel, is renamed with a series of nicknames (*Garcia Girls* 47) which display her status as *mestiza*: “Yolanda, nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo*” (68). More wrenching for Yolanda than the fact that her real name fades as an option in America is her realization that as a *mestiza* she does not fit in America because she sees it as a country having no mixtures, nothing but cultural absolutes. “I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles” (99). When Yolanda writes a note to her husband she finds that living in America married to an American has robbed her of her true identity. Although the theory of a *mestiza* is that it is a mixture of a variety of cultures, the character feels she has lost something of herself rather than gained it in America. This apparent contradiction of Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* betrays the possibility that the theory may not hold up as well in practice as it seems. “Her real name no longer sounded like her own, so instead she scribbled his name for her, *Joe*” (79). It is not until she names herself “Yo” that she becomes a fully independent character. Joan Hoffman points out that “yo” in Spanish means “I” and is a forceful means for Yolanda to assert her sense of self (Hoffman 23). Furthermore, Hoffman’s belief that Yolanda’s interest in words and, ultimately, in becoming a writer stems from her immigrant status. Because Yolanda is forced to resettle in the often hostile environment she encounters in America, she finds

peace in language where she eventually learns to control who she will be known as and how she interacts with the world. Her eventual command of both English and Spanish allows Yolanda to take comfort and strength from the two worlds the languages represent. As border agent, Yolanda must first break free from her parents through self-definition; then she struggles to maintain the mixed identity which gives her freedom to move about in a world which does not understand the importance of the mixture. In the novel, familial borders are often just as clear and rigid as cultural or geographic borders. Certainly once the family has moved to the United States, family borders function as a sort of surrogate geographical border.

In contrast to Alvarez's characters, Anzaldúa does not rename herself in her poetry so much as she simply rejects the names and categories traditionally used to describe women. Her poem "To live in the Borderlands means you" lists the things Borderlands people are not. They are not Spanish, Indian, Black, or Hispanic (216). For Anzaldúa as well as many others, renaming ultimately becomes the act of claiming the title of *mestiza*.

This resistance to societal, especially male, restrictions and expectations is much the same effect Ana Castillo uses in *So Far from God* (1993), a novel of Chicana struggle incorporating the desire to create a unique version of self through naming. In a 1993 interview with Chicano writer Simon Romero for the Albuquerque, New Mexico magazine *NuCity*, Castillo stressed the importance to Chicanas of writing about "all the issues that affect Latina women, from Catholicism to incest to patriarchy" (7). She indicated that she saw a vacuum in Chicano literature that she felt her work needed to fill. Her voice, she felt, was not being represented in the literature. Her novel recounts the

story of a Mexican-American family living on the New Mexico–Mexico border in the small town of Tome and struggling to survive in the face of tragedy and hardship. *So Far from God* addresses a multitude of conflicts between Anglos and Mexican–Americans, individuals and corporations, men and women.

Sofia, the main character, lives more than twenty years of her life believing her husband left her. She raises her daughters and lives in her community known as “La Abandonada,” the abandoned one. Because of the limited roles she believes are available to her, Sofia is unable to process accurately what truly happened between her and her husband and instead believes that he must have left her since the husband was the one who traditionally held the power in the marriage. Although the title is one of pity—“there was almost nothing more pitiful to her than to be called an abandoned woman”—Sofia accepts her sad role because it is one expected and understood by her society (*So Far From God* 215). It is not until her husband reappears and tries to reassert his role as head of the family that Sofia remembers what made Domingo leave decades earlier. “Just like that, she said, ‘Go, hombre, before you leave us all out on the street!’ Yes! It had been Sofia who had made Domingo leave” (214). Feeling the threat of poverty from the traditional bread winner, Sofia did what she could to protect herself and her children. But this act of self-preservation runs counter to cultural traditions about a husband’s role. Initially unable to accept the revolutionary thought that a woman could take command in a marriage, Sofia had blocked that fact out and accepted a version of events which more completely fit her inculcated world view. As she begins to develop an identity for herself which is independent of societal expectations of what a Mexican-American woman can do, Sofia begins to remember the past more accurately and is able to realize the strength

she has always had. By doing so, she draws strength from sources more akin to Coatlatlopeuh than to the Virgin Mary.

An essential part of Sofia's new identity comes when she decides to take action to improve her community. Rather than accept such things as poverty, drug use among the youth, and corporate control over her life, Sofia runs for mayor and starts a food co-op. Running counter to the traditions and beliefs of her community, Sofia fashions herself into a strong, independent leader of her people. In this role she becomes a true agent of change and brings about that change not only for herself, but by extension for many of the previously powerless people in her community as well.

At the end of *So Far from God* Sofia forms an organization called M.O.M.A.S., Mothers of Martyrs and Saints, after the deaths of her daughters. The formation and naming of the organization are another example of the power of names in controlling one's own identity. Sofia creates an organization and names it using the word "Mothers" which previously would have signified a powerless group. Instead, under her new direction these "mothers" become a group with political influence in the country. The novel's final chapter goes on to discuss the organization's rules in an effort to show that they are applied fairly and evenly to both men and women. The discussion shows how the naming and management of the organization is an empowering act. The women who are M.O.M.A.S. members create for themselves a group representing their interests on their own terms. Self-naming as a generative act is an integral part of the organization's power. On its surface, the chapter deals with concerns about double standards regarding the group's recognition of male martyrs and saints. At its heart, the chapter is a commentary on those double standards in broader Chicano/a (and U.S.) society and how M.O.M.A.S.,

an organization run exclusively by women, is able to avoid the sexist pitfalls found in the society that brought about the need for the group in the first place.

Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) shows the importance of forging an identity determined not by the dictates of tradition but instead by the hopes and desires of the individual. In this collection of short stories, Cisneros anticipates, through the actions of her protagonist Esperanza, many of Anzaldúa's themes of resistance to stereotypes, struggle against a male and Anglo world, and creation of a new pattern to live by. Cisneros does not advocate a complete rejection of the system she is struggling against. Instead she works with the elements she finds value in, whether those elements are from a Chicano, Anglo, or feminist perspective. In that way, she also anticipates Anzaldúa's emphasis on hybridity.

In *The House on Mango Street*, a collection of short stories describing the life of a young Chicana growing up in Chicago, Cisneros early on provides a chapter where the protagonist describes and explains her name. The character, Esperanza, discusses the history of whom she was named after and what her name means. Then she moves on to tell how in school "they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth" (*Mango* 11). Cisneros comments on how the use of one's name is not evenly applied; in the wrong hands, or in unappreciative hands, a name can be made to hurt. This hurt reflects back upon the name's owner, building resentment for a name that is ill-fitting or restrictive. Reflecting the fact that her name means "wish" in Spanish, Esperanza wishes she could change what she is named and why. Ironically the hope the name is supposed to evoke becomes bittersweet in practice when Esperanza wishes she could change her name entirely to more accurately reflect who she hopes to

become. She recognizes the power of a name and of choosing one's own name when she decides, "I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees" (*Mango* 11). Alvina E. Quintana, in her study of "Chicana literary voices" *Home Girls* (1996), shows how "within a male-defined world, women challenge tradition in order to survive," and the challenge comes "in terms of fashioning a specific identity" (Quintana 35). When Esperanza asserts her wish to re-baptize herself she shows that she knows the importance of this sort of self-definition. By beginning this change with her desire to rename herself, Esperanza demonstrates that a comfortable image of self is the first step toward independence and freedom. She can be seen as a representative of all border women struggling to name themselves rather than allowing themselves to be categorized by others.

Esperanza's choice—"Lisandra or Martiza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (*Mango* 11)—demonstrates another significant connection with Anzaldúa. Esperanza makes it clear that although she shares a name with her great-grandmother, she does not want to share that woman's fate as a person whose wildness was smothered by her husband. "I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (*Mango* 11), Esperanza says, remembering how her great-grandmother spent her days staring out the window, pining for a stolen past. The window is an emblem of a liminal space functioning as a border. That window separates the great-grandmother from the world she used to inhabit and the one she endures. Zeze the X is a choice Esperanza creates for herself; it is not merely one from a set of options offered to her by her culture. Giving herself the last name X allows Esperanza to cast off the idea that she is anybody's daughter. This act echoes that of Malcolm X, who rejected a surname he associated with

slavery. In creating her own name Esperanza is a borderlands character engendering change by defining who she is. Her borders are a mixture of family borders, cultural borders, and gender borders. She shows a new *mestiza* consciousness when she makes that new name a combination of new and old elements of her nature.

Although Esperanza does not want her entire life to be like her great-grandmother's, she does want to claim part of that ancestor's wildness. Esperanza knows that her great-grandmother was "a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry" (*Mango* 11). And it is clear that this aspect of the great-grandmother is what appeals to Esperanza when she says she wishes she had known her. This wish relates to the core of Anzaldúa's concept of the new *mestiza*—the idea that the new cultural creation arises from a mixture of all the components that influence the modern Chicana by drawing heavily upon Aztec, Indian, Mexican, Spanish, and even Anglo roots and influences. Cisneros's Esperanza, too, although she christens herself with a new name, incorporates elements from her own ancestry in her identity. "Zeze" contains an echo of "Esperanza" within it, and that echo resonates back to the great-grandmother who gave the name. The compulsion for renaming as an act of self-creation does not necessarily result in a complete rejection of one's heritage. Instead, a *mestiza*, created by carefully and consciously choosing names and elements will combine to make a whole, healthy, strong person. The new *mestiza* means "the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails" (Anzaldúa 44). Cisneros shows how a *mestiza* comes about in writing when she describes the conflict between traditions and aspirations in the characters of her fiction and poems.

Cisneros advocates the use of renaming as a route to self-definition. This self-definition, an essential element in Cisneros's writing, becomes an act of resistance. Self-christening is, for Cisneros, closely tied with her desire to be a writer. When writing about one of Esperanza's earliest experiences as a poet, Cisneros titles the chapter "Born Bad." She has been told she was born bad, Esperanza explains, by her mother. The chapter describes how when Esperanza shares her writing with an aunt, the aunt tells her, "You must keep writing. It will keep you free" (*Mango* 61). The connection, made stronger in Cisneros's later poems, between Esperanza's writing and her mother's disapproval, is an important one. Esperanza wants to break free of the family traditions which threaten to tie her down with a husband and children. Her acts of creation, in writing, in naming, allow her to avoid that restricting life.

One of the ways Cisneros's book following *The House on Mango Street* can be read is as a description of the life Esperanza sets herself up to flee, another case where the future is shown first (in *Mango Street*) and then the path which led to that future is revealed later. Throughout *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), Cisneros presents episodes cataloging the disappointments of Chicana life. She shows the irony of Mexican-American girls who play with dirty, broken, blond, pale Barbie dolls. She describes the seduction of an eighth grader by a vagrant who turns out to be a serial killer. In "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" Cisneros presents, among other things, a woman looking for an educated Chicano who speaks Spanish and knows how to cook—in short, a man unlike any of the ones available to her in San Antonio.

In the title story of *Woman Hollering Creek* Cleófilas finds herself trapped in an abusive marriage, unable to leave her neighborhood in south Texas much less return to

the safety of her father's house across the border in Mexico. Fantasizing about the lives of the women she sees in the *telenovelas*, Cleófilas wishes she could "change her name to Topazio, or Yesina, Cristal, Adriana, Stefania, Andrea, something more poetic than Cleófilas. Everything happened to women with names like jewels. But what happened to a Cleófilas? Nothing. But a crack in the face" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 53). Identifying even her name as a source of her unhappiness, literally, at the hands of men in the world, Cleófilas is not a woman who has her own piece of ground to stand on. Everything about her life and her identity comes from an external source. If she could rename herself, Cleófilas thinks, she could change her fate, escape her husband's control. Unfortunately Cleófilas is born with the name of "one of those Mexican saints, I guess. A martyr or something" (54) and not the name or the life of a TV star or jewel.

It's no accident that Cleófilas finds a savior in the form of another woman when a nurse at the doctor's office calls her friend Felice to take Cleófilas to the bus station so she can return to Mexico. The creek running past the house where Cleófilas and her husband live in the United States is called Woman Hollering Creek, a name that evokes images of *la Llorona*, a character from Mexican-American folklore so called because of her mournful wailing but adopted by Cisneros as a representative of the potential strength women possess.<sup>4</sup> In "Woman Hollering Creek" the only successful resistance any woman shows to the men controlling her is done with the help of other women. Felice liberates Cleófilas by being liberated herself. Felice has no husband, owns her own truck, talks and swears as freely as a man.

The origin of the creek's name has fascinated Cleófilas for years but nobody is able to tell her anything about it until she meets Felice. Throughout the story Cleófilas

sits by the creek and thinks of *la Llorona* and the things that could drive a woman to kill her children and herself. She wonders if the woman hollers because of anger or pain. Felice, who yells when they cross the creek, shows her that a woman can holler for the sheer joy of freedom and strength. Proud and amused that the creek is the only thing named after a woman who is not a virgin (and thus defined and weakened by patriarchal regulations), Felice draws power from the image of this type of freed woman. Truly a border agent, Felice is a mixture of man and woman, American and Mexican. And by her unfettered example she begins a crucial change in Cleófilas: “Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn’t Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water” (56). Felice, through the sound of her laughter, personifies the strength and freedom she draws from the creek and all she takes it to represent. Cleófilas, taking her cue from Felice’s example, begins to capture for herself some of the strength embodied in the water of the creek named for a woman of strength. In the name of the creek, the woman *hollers* rather than weeps.

Exemplifying the work of a *mestiza*, Cisneros (like Anzaldúa) employs code-switching throughout her writing. This mingling of Spanish and English words and phrases shows her awareness that a mixture of the cultures and languages makes the strongest impact. Nevertheless, she uses the mixture to critique both the Anglo and the Chicanos she writes about. “Never Marry a Mexican” critiques Mexican men as husbands and then goes on to critique the idea of marrying in general. “I’ll never marry. Not any man. I’ve known men too intimately. I’ve witnessed their infidelities, and I’ve helped them to it” (*Mango Street* 68). Broadening her theme, the narrator describes her role as the lover of a married Anglo man. She reports how his appreciation of her dark skin made

her feel beautiful at the time, but in retrospect she finds more value in feeling a sense of beauty and worth from within without needing it from others. What her lover, Drew, sees in her is her difference, her exotic character. Ultimately it is this very difference which forces him to admit he will never marry a Mexican woman just as the narrator will, for different reasons, never marry a Mexican man. She recognizes this refusal to marry because of the very exoticism that attracted her lover as a cheapening of her inherent value.

The combination of struggle and disappointment depicted in *Woman Hollering Creek* is not without its beautiful, redemptive moments. In the context of identity-formation and resistance to restrictions and borders, the collection provides compelling reasons for a Chicana to want to break free.

Ultimately, when Cisneros's character does leave home, the terms she uses to describe her independence are either negative ones or terms borrowing images from Anglo, not Chicano/a culture. She writes in this way because within Chicano/a culture, there are no positive ways of describing what she does. "I left my father's house/before the brothers,/vagabonded the globe/like a rich white girl" (*Wicked* xi). For the narrator to leave before her brothers do is an inversion of the traditional pattern; the men are supposed to leave the father's house while the young daughter stays until she is married. That is exactly the pattern in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1988) where Antonio's two sisters Deborah and Theresa are not afforded the freedom of their brothers.

Similarly, in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989, in English 1992) the daughter is supposed to stay at home unmarried and care for her aging mother, living her life a permanent virgin.<sup>5</sup> Esquivel's main character Tita carves a space for herself not

as a writer as is so common with other Chicana border agents, but as a master chef. The life Tita wrenches free from the strict control of her mother's insistence upon tradition is forged in the kitchen instead of the college campuses and bedrooms employed by the heroines of Alvarez, Castillo and Cisneros. Ksenija Bilbija identifies the kitchen in Esquivel's writing not as the place that "has come to symbolize the world that traditionally marginalized and limited a woman" (147) but as a site of creativity and strength wielded by Tita as she ultimately controls her family and her lover from her seat of power. Significantly, though, *chicana* rebellion is demonstrated in a different and more flamboyant way by one of Tita's two sisters, who joins a band of revolutionary fighters and becomes an officer. By taking on this conventionally masculine role and by living a sexually fulfilling life, she freely crosses gender borders as well as the international border between Mexico and the United States.

The desire to leave home despite the wishes of the father is a recurring theme in Cisneros's collection of poetry, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1995). Perhaps more significant than just going against her father's wishes, the speaker in several of the poems is aware that she is breaking a major societal taboo. When she lets her parents know she wants to write poetry, the poet states, "Mother warned I'd never wife" (*Wicked* x). The implication is that a woman who gets an education and shows interest in literature will never attract an acceptable husband. The narrator knows she does not have an interest in marrying, but her parents can not understand that choice. Bound up with the concern that a daughter will never marry is the fear that should she eventually marry, she will not have the necessary skills to perform as a "good" wife. This fear also appears in Alvarez's poem "Dusting" (1984) where the narrator, helping her mother dust, refuses to remain an

anonymous servant in her own house and instead insists on writing her name in the dust she is supposed to be wiping away (*Homecoming* 9).

Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) provides another opportunity to observe the life of a Chicana woman who chooses the path of independence over the traditional and to her, limiting route of marriage. In a novel paralleling the patterns seen in Cisneros's stories about independent, strong Chicana characters, Castillo presents an intimate look at the joys and concerns experienced by women on their own. By presenting letters from only one of the characters in the novel, Castillo sheds light on the confusion and struggle endured by a character attempting to be understood and accepted by someone who does not always behave in as forthcoming a way as is ideal. In this search for acceptance and understanding, the narrator Teresa writes of the freedom and the dangers she encounters after leaving her husband and setting out to travel through Mexico. She also describes the often scornful or pitying reaction her family shows toward her choices in life. Nevertheless, like Cisneros's narrators, she remains convinced that her freedom from the controlling and stifling atmosphere of marriage is the best choice for her.

In "Against Cinderella" Julia Alvarez writes of a woman who refuses to marry because she is unwilling to give up the independence she enjoys as a single, liberated woman. The character does not believe that her prince will come for her with the missing glass slipper. She states that "some of us have learned to go barefoot / knowing the mate to one foot is the other" (*Homecoming* 53). For Alvarez's and Cisneros's narrators to set out on their own means they are neither wives nor virgins. "Vagabonding the globe" shows they certainly are not nuns. And to vagabond "like a rich white girl" demonstrates

that the characters are grasping at an outside cultural identity for options not available from their own and are capable of crossing cultural borders. These actions of the narrators leave only the label of “whore” under the traditional Chicano/a choices available to women. But because they are defined in a new way these Chicana characters are not defined by any of the three traditional options. The reader is presented with border agents who combine elements from more than one culture in an effort to become the fully developed, self-determined people they were previously restricted from becoming.

It is a combination very much like the gathering of disparate sources of power and inspiration that Anzaldúa describes. This act of self-definition represents a dramatic borderlands change in the way women allow themselves to behave. Rather than focusing on what her parents or her larger community think of what she has done, the Chicana on the border is primarily focused on how her choices are personally liberating. As Rebolledo puts this aspect of Chicana rebellion, “Chicana heroes desire freedom to be themselves, in all of their abilities and aspects, a freedom often denied by a culture that would have them toe strict norms of behavior for young women” (Rebolledo 111). One of the legacies of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* is that it gives Chicanas the authority to resist “the norms of a strongly traditional family and male-oriented society, and an often-oppressive religious structure” (111) by rejecting the very narrow set of options presented to them. While similar to the struggles of adolescence, the Chicana struggle is less about creating a sense of independence and adulthood than about forging a space where the traditions and society Chicanas operate in never allowed for one before. Chicana border agents wrench apart their communities and force the recognition of an entirely new role. *Borderlands* provides a plan for how to fashion a new identity and, as we have seen with

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, a frame within which to read Chicana texts retrospectively.

Cisneros's *Wicked Wicked Ways* includes in the preface a poem explaining what those wicked wicked ways are. "I chucked the life my father's plucked for me" Cisneros claims. After her father attempted to choose a life for her, she "chucked" that life by becoming a writer. In the title poem of *My Wicked Wicked Ways* Cisneros describes the life of disappointment and betrayal her parents lived and uses it as an explanation for why she left home (*Wicked* 23). In a series of poems following this explanation, Cisneros shows the life she avoided, the life she made for herself, and the struggle she has with her feelings about it all. "The Poet Reflects on Her Solitary Fate" depicts the loss she feels because she abandoned her family in order to become a poet (37). The poems in this collection all point to the struggles faced by a Chicana who decides to make her own life for herself. And they poignantly demonstrate the act of will necessary for an individual to come to the realization that she has more choices available than her environment presents. Cisneros writes about the difficulties and rewards faced by a woman who breaks through the expectations her culture places on her and redefines her life in the face of resistance and criticism.

The change that takes place in the lives of Cisneros's characters parallels the change within the culture, brought about by the power claimed by the character engaged in self-determination. Once the Chicana border agent realizes she does not need to follow in the strict route mapped out for her by society, she becomes an example and inspiration to others, thereby helping others skip over the most difficult step of discovering alone that there are other options available. Felice, in "Woman Hollering Creek" shows

Cleófilas things she never imagined a woman could do. Presumably when Cleófilas returns to Mexico it will be with the knowledge that she has other options available than the ones she believed she had when she left. Zeze the X does not look to others to tell her who she is or what she can become; she decides these things on her own. The means to make this type of dramatic change in one's life is articulated clearly and powerfully in *Borderlands* as theory and autobiographical and cultural reflection. Cisneros's writing shows in practice the way a Chicana character takes the same important steps breaking free of societal restrictions and growing into an independent yet culturally aware woman. There is a strong element of resistance to societal norms inherent in the liberating, rebellious act of casting off the controls of father, husband, and family that these Chicana border agents bring to their communities.

While traditional Chicanas who did not find any of the virgin/mother/whore options appealing could only suffer in silence (as Sofia did until she realized she could create a fourth option for herself), Rebolledo states that the "young heroines" of new Chicana fiction find themselves asserting their own options in the struggle for survival. The change in culture comes from within, from the impulse to name one's self instead of allowing the dominant forces in one's culture provide the choices. The change makes its way out of the literature and into culture at large because, as Rebolledo shows, "writing, after all, is naming, mapping, and leading, as well as creating" (117). The lead shown in the literature written by Chicanas becomes inspiration for the readers. In this way, borderlands change is ultimately brought about by the act of self-naming. Deborah Dessaso identifies the dangers inherent in the Chicana search for identity. She recognizes the importance of self-naming instead of the assimilation into dominant culture which is

often the easiest route for a Chicana to take once she breaks free from her family. The attendant “loss of culture” assimilation forces often leaves “the modern approach of establishing identity through literary texts [one of the] most favorable methods to assure the continuity of a legitimate Chicano/a culture” (52). Dessaso neglects to mention that in addition to preserving Chicano/a culture, the establishment of strong Chicana identity in literature provides an example which allows other Chicanas to move down the path taken by the strong examples which appear in literature.

The move from the word on the page out into the community is accomplished by Chicana authors who Rebolledo feels are “very much linked to social and political concerns within their community” in their position “as bitches, a role not viewed as negative since it [is] a form of resistance” (145).

Beyond the fear and shame typically associated with being labeled “Malinche” comes the struggle Chicana border agents must engage in to both use the term as one of empowerment without succumbing to its common meaning. Jean Wyatt identifies the special role of the borderlands in helping this empowerment take place. Because the borderlands is the place where cultures confront each other, meaning for people on one side of the border is not necessarily shared by those on the other. But because it is also the place where cultures overlap, meaning may become plural for those who participate in both. Having more options unsettles the truths of one culture and gives the individual more room for choice. When Chicanas are aware of their options beyond the limited scope their tradition affords, they are able to develop a variety of responses beyond the culturally prescribed ones. And the border agent can move back and forth, exploiting the fluidity of meaning. In “Woman Hollering Creek,” Wyatt notes, Cleófilas hears the sound

of the water in the creek only as *la Llorona*, an expression of her guilt at her perceived failure as a wife. On the other hand “Felice interprets the creek’s sound...as a ‘Tarzan hoot’” (Wyatt 245). When Felice shows Cleófilas a second way of understanding the meaning of the creek’s sound, that meaning will be taken, literally and figuratively, back over the border into Mexico where it will enrich and empower how Cleófilas sees her place in the world. Rather than see her role as a “model of pain and suffering” because she is a woman in a world dominated and defined by men, Cleófilas finds in Felice something she has never imagined before, “a positive role model” in a strong woman (Wyatt 257). The example Felice sets through her non-traditional actions “opens a new range of female possibilities” (Wyatt 258) to Cleófilas and she, presumably unlike Felice, did not have to struggle to realize on her own that these possibilities exist. Felice shows that when a woman hollers it does not have to be because she is *la Llorona*.

In her analysis of Chicana literature, Rebolledo describes the cultural forces against which Chicanas must struggle as they attempt to forge their own identities. Her evaluation of folktales collected as part of the New Mexico Federal Writers’ Project<sup>6</sup> shows how many of the stories were “tales aimed at regulating female behavior—stories with a moral or describing some punishment if the female steps outside prescribed boundaries” (Rebolledo 15). As Anzaldúa points out, the boundaries were prescribed by men and were used to control and define women. These boundaries defined by gender roles are not physical in the sense of geographic borders, but like those borders, gender boundaries limit choices and even physical movement.

The option is a new one for several reasons. The most obvious is that traditionally, it was very difficult for Chicanas to write at all if they were occupied with

the requirements of being capable mothers and wives. That freedom simply was not typically available. Secondly, the representations written by Chicanos of Chicanas in literature did nothing to improve Chicana self-perception. “With few exceptions,” Leticia Garza-Falcón writes in *Gente Decente* (1998), “Chicano writers have produced literary works which are almost completely male centered” (Garza-Falcón 217). To cite one influential example, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima* is a Chicano text that has become canonical and although it has female characters, they are either weak like Antonio’s mother and sisters or they are powerful but marginalized like Ultima who lives alone and is feared and avoided by the rest of the community until her assistance is needed. Antonio is presented as the novel’s truly strong character. The future rests in his hands, especially after he has completed his apprenticeship with Ultima. It makes sense, then, that in a male-centered culture the literature would reflect that fact. Consequently, according to Garza-Falcón, the bulk of Chicano literary production concerns itself with “the young man’s struggles with his world as he comes into his manhood, on war experience and readjustment to communal life, or on what his very important destiny might be” (217). All of these are aspects of culture closed to Chicanas. When women do appear in Chicano fiction, Garza-Falcón explains, they do so in relation to the male hero; “his sisters and his mother are relegated to very specific, narrowly defined roles, often just filling in the background of main plot lines” (217).

Unlike Gregorio Cortez whose interactions with Anglos as he moves through society cause many to reassess how they think of him, Chicana border characters first move within themselves creating change. Part of the reason it is difficult for Chicanas to create change is that they first need to awaken within themselves to the idea that they

have more choices than the ones with which they are presented. Without role models for this awakening, the process is a tremendously difficult one. Before they can go out into society as representatives of a *mestiza* consciousness, they must first come to the realization that they are able to choose a life beyond the virgin/mother/whore triad. What Anzaldúa and other Chicana writers like Castillo and Cisneros accomplish in their writing is to show ways of breaking from tradition that can not easily be labeled. While the virgin/mother/whore tradition presents extremely limited options, the freedom found in the *mestiza* of Anzaldúa, the M.O.M.A.S. of Castillo, and the single woman writers of Cisneros is difficult to label, much less contain or control. It is a new way of thinking about a woman's role that leaves those bound by tradition struggling to understand. The nature of borderlands change that Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* engenders is in the internal empowering it provides.

## CHAPTER V

THE SELF-DECEIVED BORDER HERO: CORMAC MCCARTHY AND THE  
TRAGEDY OF THE CROSSING

The development of identity is of course not limited to groups seeking to redefine themselves as they, and not others, wish. Education about the self comes as the protagonist, on a literal or figurative journey, experiences life with its crises and conflicts. With respect to borders, the work of Cormac McCarthy in his Border Trilogy offers fertile ground for investigating the nature of the individual border-crosser and how the search for a sense of self leads these border agents to bring about a kind of change not yet seen in this study. The novels of the trilogy—*All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998)—describe the lives of characters forming identities as they make their way through a world they attempt to understand. Unlike agents of change studied earlier here, McCarthy's border agents do not change the attitudes and behaviors of others around them. Unlike Rudolfo Anaya's Antonio, McCarthy's characters are unable to adapt to the realities of their world. Nor do they, like the Chicana writers, change the way they are allowed to operate and conceive of themselves within larger society. On the contrary, McCarthy's border agents ultimately fail to bring about change within themselves as they learn that the way they want to live is not compatible with the way the world works. Where other border agents change the way the world around them works, McCarthy's border agents do not; their borderlands activity does not change the world, it changes the way the border agents must approach that world. In a

much larger sense, what McCarthy's border agents accomplish is to illustrate, through their frequent failures at integrating themselves into the world, the bleak reality in McCarthy's system that a character's beliefs about his own goodness and morality are usually ill-founded and whatever goodness he does possess usually has no impact on the world and is unrewarded.

In McCarthy's Border Trilogy the westward-moving frontier defined and celebrated by Fredrick Jackson Turner is turned southward and reconstituted as the border between Texas and Mexico, and the cowboy heroes of familiar Western fiction become bewildered border-crossers. Unlike most of the texts considered here, where Mexico plays a role as a point of origin (either directly or more remotely through cultural heritage) in the lives of border agents, McCarthy's Border Trilogy centers on border agents who are Anglos from the United States for whom Mexico is a foil against which to measure themselves and their expectations about the world. These border-crossers are not inhabitants of a bicultural borderlands like that of Anzaldúa or Cisneros (or, as we shall see, Valley novelist Rolando Hinojosa) but singlemindedly naïve Anglo Texans who envision Mexico as a place uncorrupted by the kind of modernity they have experienced in the United States. In each case this assumption proves false; Mexico does not turn out to be the uncorrupted country the border agents hope it will be. Neither does it turn out to be the utterly corrupt one they at first encounter. Nor, ultimately, do the characters reveal themselves to be, after all, good-hearted innocents,. Mexico does prove to be a country playing by a different set of rules than the one the border agents assume they will find. In that sense it fulfills their expectations of unfamiliarity and thus of adventure. But the

complex nature of Mexico's otherness tests the border agents with unexpected, ironic, and ultimately ambiguous approaches.

This chapter will focus on the border behavior of McCarthy's two protagonists in the three novels—John Grady Cole and Billy Parham. John Grady is the main character in *All the Pretty Horses*, Billy is first found in *The Crossing*, and the two are brought together for the final novel of the trilogy, *Cities of the Plain*. Both characters are, most broadly, looking for a way to continue (or commence) their lives as cowboys in a modern world where the cowboy is rapidly becoming a relic from the past.

In McCarthy's twentieth century, the characters no longer look to the West for open spaces and a loosening of society's restrictions as those who embodied Turner's frontier thesis in the previous century did. Furthermore, gone is the pioneers' mission of nation-building. Assuming the pioneers ever really had that mission, its absence in the twentieth century renders the goals of McCarthy's characters either trivial or far more sinister (depending on one's perspective) when compared to the pioneers'.

McCarthy's characters look to Mexico for adventure, but in practice their travel through Mexico can be read as a journey of colonization. They seek wildness and personal freedom in a Mexico where they think they can live the lives they choose, but to achieve that goal would mean in essence taking possession, imposing their will on others. Instead, they come to grief, either running headlong into defeat or wreaking havoc or both.

Américo Paredes realized that people like John Grady and Billy conceive of Texas as a place and Mexican as the description of the people living on the other side of the border. (This is indicated in the wording of his book title *Folklore and Culture on the*

*Texas-Mexican Border*.) It is as if there is a country to the north and a way of life, but not another country, to the south. This is borne out in the actions of McCarthy's characters when they head south looking for something they think is missing in the United States. In a sense, they are looking for the long-closed frontier. John Blair argues that John Grady does not go to Mexico to revive or repeat the past; rather he goes to find new meaning. "He simply moves to another part [of the world] where he can live his life in a way that gives it meaning by his own terms" (302). Rather than attempt to deepen his vision of the world, John Grady looks for a place where he can employ a vision which is unworkable in the United States.

This change, from Americans looking west for their freedom to their looking south did not, of course, begin with McCarthy. In Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Sal and Dean's final trip together is south, to Mexico. They go south in search of a freedom they are unable to find on either coast of the United States. Like Turner and those who subscribed to his Frontier Thesis, characters like John Grady and Billy seek something that exists primarily as a construct, in the minds of those who believe in it. John Grady and Billy are more like Sal and Dean, however, than they are like Turner and "his" pioneers. The differences between these groupings—the nineteenth-century pioneers and the twentieth-century freedom-seekers—can be said, perhaps, to come down to the presence or absence of a larger purpose. If Kerouac's or McCarthy's wanderers' travels are seen to be without a purpose larger than their own individual fulfillment, the pioneer, in the mind of the nation, at least, was working toward a greater national good. Set along the United States-Mexico border just before and directly after World War II, the novels of McCarthy's Border Trilogy address issues associated with modernity—a sense of the

pointlessness of life, a fear of the randomness the world exhibits, and an absence of any sort of grand narrative. But these issues, too, are not only very timely in terms of the sentiments of popular culture but, despite their emptiness, of at least a great significance as the nationbuilding motivations of the pioneers.

One way of considering what the boys seek in Mexico is to ask what they think they are leaving behind in the United States, what they think is missing from their lives. For John Grady in *All the Pretty Horses* that can be summed up as a life of horsemanship within the economic structures of ranching. The novel focuses on John Grady's travels through Mexico after he learns that his family's ranch in Texas is to be sold. He feels that it will now be impossible for him to live the life he expected the ranch to provide for him, the only life he ever wanted. On his journey through Mexico, he eventually finds work at a ranch there that he considers to be paradise: the *hacienda* de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. The name of the hacienda is indicative of the perfection John Grady thinks he finds there, of a kind of blissful purity he is seen as threatening, and of the ultimate unattainability of that life for him.

On the *hacienda* John Grady proves his mettle both as an expert horseman and as a lover of the *hacendado's* daughter Alejandra. As a horseman he is respected and trusted by the *hacendado*, but as a seducer he can only be seen by him as an interloper and a threat to family integrity. To a reader mindful of American history, his adventure may appear more like colonization than innocence. When Don Héctor (Alejandra's father) learns of the romance between his daughter and John Grady, he has John Grady and his friend Rawlins thrown in not only because of this betrayal of his trust but because of an

earlier betrayal that carried legal consequences. At their first meeting, John Grady had lied to Don Héctor. The two were discussing horses, travel, youth, and, obliquely, honesty. When Don Héctor asked John Grady if he and Rawlins were traveling alone, John Grady hesitated and said that they were. His motives for this lie are obscure, but apparently sprang from his wish not to risk the good reputation he was cultivating at the *hacienda* by acknowledging an association with the criminal acts of a boy named Blevins he and Rawlins had met on their trip south. He proves to be not so honest a cowboy as wants to think he is.

John Grady is unprepared either for the restrictions of class, nationality, and wealth he faces or for the fierceness with which those things are protected. After being forced to kill a man in self-defense in prison (yet another example of the violence beneath the surface of the cowboy), John Grady is freed on the condition that he leave Alejandra forever. On his last night with Alejandra, having learned that good intentions and love will not secure for him the life he wants, having been forced to kill a man whose name he did not even know, now painfully aware that the life he wants is forever barred to him, John Grady “saw very clearly how all his life led only to this moment and all after led nowhere at all. He felt something cold and soulless enter him like another being and he imagined that it smiled malignly and he had no reason to believe that it would ever leave” (*Pretty Horses* 254). At long last, John Grady’s optimism has given way to the realities of the world McCarthy has created for him. In addition to recognizing the true nature of the world—its ultimate resistance to human desire—John Grady has shown the reader a great deal about his own, corrupted nature. John Grady returns alone to the United States. But without land or family he has no reason to stay there either. The novel ends with his

lonely southward journey back again to a country that holds neither love nor family for him.

McCarthy's second novel in the Border Trilogy, *The Crossing*, follows the movement of Billy Parham as he traps a wolf which has been killing stock on his father's ranch and then travels south to Mexico with the wolf, planning to free it in what he believes to be a wild, untamed country. When he returns home after failing to successfully free the wolf, which he has in fact shot after it was captured and used for dog baiting, Billy learns that his parents have been killed and their horses stolen. He finds his brother Boyd living with neighbors and with him returns to Mexico in search of the horses. Boyd separates from Billy (who crosses back to the United States) and is eventually killed in Mexico. Billy then returns to Mexico a third time to find his brother's grave and bring his remains back to the United States for burial. Like John Grady, Billy also eventually returns to the United States but without clear purpose. He tries to enlist in the Army but is turned down repeatedly. At the end of the novel, Billy faces the bleak prospects for a cowboy of the nuclear age in America. A recurring theme in McCarthy's Trilogy, the advent of modernity as represented by the nuclear age, which can be read as an opposition to everything the heroes associate with being a cowboy.

The final novel of the Border Trilogy, *Cities of the Plain*, unites John Grady and Billy on a ranch after World War II. Seeing in John Grady elements of Boyd, Billy tries to give his younger friend some of the guidance he wishes he had provided his brother. Nevertheless, John Grady falls in love with a Mexican prostitute and dies trying to bring her across the border to a small house he has prepared in the United States. John Grady is killed in his failed attempt to liberate Magdalena from the pimp who owns her. John

Grady learns once again, before his death, that the world is resistant to his wishes and does not operate according to his ideas of justice and honor. And the reader sees again that although John Grady believes he is operating according to a high moral code, from the perspective of the Mexicans he is no more than a thief or a marauder. Billy, bereft of a second brother, spends the rest of his days a rootless wanderer in the increasingly industrialized Southwest.

The life and place McCarthy's heroes seek does not exist where they are looking, across the border in a Mexico they mistakenly imagine to be empty and amenable to their wishes, at the time they are seeking it. Or it may never have existed at all. The wide open West of the growing United States was as much of a myth after the closing of the frontier in 1893 as the sort of romance and freedom the boys seek in Old Mexico. It is this inability to develop or revise their expectations, a search not for growth but for a place or manner in which they can satisfy their already established desires, that results in the boys' inability to ever find a place and way of life that suits them (Blair 302).

If McCarthy's twentieth-century cowboys are failed border agents they are also, in their clinging to the defunct role of the frontier hero, illustrations of the failure of a nineteenth-century American ideal. Ironically, they demonstrate the flaws inherent in the popular image of the frontier hero even as they seduce us with the romance of the cowboy myth. In a lush language holding before his reader's eyes the beauty of the cowboy myth, McCarthy shows that myth's hollowness.

McCarthy is not alone in romanticizing and at the same time debunking the Western hero of cowboy myth now rendered as a border hero. Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* trilogy—consisting of *Lonesome Dove* (1985), *Streets of Laredo* (1993),

and *Dead Man's Walk* (1995)—provides useful perspective on McCarthy's trilogy. Both writers employ a sense of the cowboy myth and an American ideal in their writing. Both authors attempt to fashion their characters in the mold of the Western hero of popular culture, but then call that model into question. And in both trilogies the characters set out to change their lives by finding something unavailable to them at home.

In *American Adam*, R. W. B. Lewis points out the Adamic ideal of a new frontiersman searching for a new home has been repeated endlessly, the “vision of innocence and the claim of newness” being “almost perilously misleading” and persistently repetitive (Lewis 9). But he goes on to reflect that “the illusion of freedom from the past led to a more real relation to the continuing tradition.” His observation is especially apposite to the idea of a society in which individuals regularly seek to return to a cowboy ideal from the past which is more imaginary than real. This revisiting of history—or imagined history—inevitably leads to a painful repetition of its conflicts and discoveries. This myth-adventure has produced and shaped a literature of tests and ordeals such as that of McCarthy and McMurtry who organize their trilogies along the broad outlines familiar from adventure novels. Both authors create characters forced into Western landscapes that consist of fluid and ambiguous forms in which the heroes must survive a succession of trials. But despite adopting the trappings of the Western adventure novel, which customarily has a triumphant ending, neither McMurtry nor McCarthy writes a narrative where the hero is successful in the end. On the contrary, in the hands of both authors, the adventure leads to pain, dissipation, and death.

McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* trilogy does not merely show Texas as a promised land of independence, adventure, and profit. In addition, it shows characters dealing with

two worlds: a fantasy world of cowboys, Indians, rich oilmen, and loving women as well as the real world of hardship, subsistence, betrayal, and aging.

In *Lonesome Dove* change takes the form of transformed expectations. McMurtry uses the characters of his former Texas Rangers, McCrae and Call, as well as Newt, Call's illegitimate son, to demonstrate both how the legend of the Rangers is supplanted by reality and how expectations about Mexico are transformed by a midnight raid across the border.

McCrae and Call earned their good reputations through their deeds as Texas Rangers. As Rangers they were known for their bravery and fierceness in protecting the lives and property of Texans from Mexican and Native American attack. In their retirement, in addition to enjoying the afterglow of their fame, the men lead lives in opposition to how they earned their reputations. Finding themselves in need of a herd of horses with which they hope to start a ranch, McCrae and Call set out into Mexico to steal some. Their lawlessness is not an issue to the Rangers, but McMurtry clearly highlights the irony of this midnight raid when he has characters refer to Call by his military rank, "Captain" throughout the illegal raid.

Newt, who has never ridden into Mexico to steal horses, finds things south of the border quite different from what he is used to in the United States. Ironically, because it is a dark night, he can see very little of Mexico. What Newt does notice about Mexico is that it is more dark and empty than he imagined it would be (*Lonesome Dove* 113). Based on the stories the other men have told him about bandits and rugged terrain, Mexico seems unpopulated and the ride seems easy and gentle.

Returning from the raid, Newt loses sight of the other members of his band and for a moment imagines that he is not a lone American heading north with stolen Mexican horses, but is instead “riding into Mexico with Pedro Flores’ *vaqueros*” herding stolen American livestock (135). Newt’s identity, divorced from any reference point as he rides alone in the dust and dark, is able to change freely from American to Mexican and back again, such is the impact of the darkness and emptiness McMurtry has him find in Mexico. Furthermore, if Rangers can cross the border as horse thieves, Newt seems to show there is no real way of differentiating American lawmen from Mexican bandits.

What the rustlers do find in Mexico, contrary to their expectations of finding Mexican horses they can steal, is stolen American horses as well as, even more incongruously, two destitute Irishmen. McMurtry transforms what begins as a stock scene from the wild west—horse thievery—into an ironic statement on expectations about Mexico when what the men find is nothing like what they imagined would be there.

The men do not initially find what they are looking for and instead come away with an inversion of their inverted purpose. For Rangers to go about stealing horses from Mexicans is an ironic twist on the official role of Rangers as protectors of American life and property. For them to find themselves faced with the prospect of returning stolen American horses to their rightful owners (one of the legitimate roles of the Texas Rangers) rather than stealing Mexican ones for their own profit, causes the reader to reassess beliefs about the nature of Rangers, Mexico, and identity.

McMurtry, who was raised in Texas, developed early on a mixed view of the legitimacy of the cowboy myth he grew up hearing from friends and relatives. This led, inevitably, to an ironic remove:

The ambivalence of McMurtry's attitude toward Texas begins here in an admixture of attraction and scorn for the cowboy uncles who were his archetypes for both heroic and villainous characters. Despite the dramatic aura of their lives, the values manifested in these uncles were not "wholly admirable" to young McMurtry. While he grew older and listened year after year to their tales of fearless and free cowboy days, he realized the inconsistency of the McMurtry situation. (Lich 10)

McMurtry found that family would gather at reunions for the purpose of revitalizing the myth, and he grew to understand the inconsistencies and contradictions of those stories. McCarthy, who came to Texas from Tennessee after establishing himself as a Southern, rather than Western writer, has also shown cowboys as being conflicted and ineffective. Both depict cowboys who illustrate John Edward Weems's characterization of non-heroic cowboys: "selfish, occasionally selfless, strong but frequently weak; intelligent but sometimes bumbling; capable, but often overconfident" (Weems 265) or Richard Etulain's description of doubtful, rueful, erring, aging humans who show the Western hero to be merely human (Etulain 194).

McMurtry's novels, however, investigate the landscape and place importance on the concerns, traditions, and physical aspects of the region and depend on the setting. His characters are not only victims of this landscape but also of time and place because they deal with a world in transition, one with few guides and little control. His characters have conflicts formed by the collision of divergent worlds:

Nonetheless, his primary creative impetus comes from borders between frontier and civilization, normality and absurdity, past and present, myth and reality. Not surprisingly, then, *Lonesome Dove* begins on an American border, in a hot, ragged hamlet on the banks of the Rio Grande. (50)

*Lonesome Dove* is an ironic look at the cowboy myth in its comparisons and parodies of more typical Western novel conventions. In *Lonesome Dove* Call and McCrae herd stolen cattle and horses across the country. With *Lonesome Dove*, McMurtry refuses to glorify the West, instead he shows its contradictions. McMurtry, like McCarthy, evokes the spirit of the West but refuses to glorify that spirit. In recognizing both the mythic and the darker, antimythic qualities of the stories they tell, McCarthy and McMurtry are able to operate within the broad outlines of the cowboy story while at the same time acknowledging the hardness of the life and the compromises the cowboys must make in their moral codes.

Former Texas Rangers, contrary to Webb's idealization go into Mexico to steal cattle. McMurtry sees the "frontier myth" as "a vapid, hollow illusion that is in the final analysis more destructive than useful" (Reynolds 11). *Lonesome Dove* first appears to be "a return to the frontier myth" but its relation to that myth is "far more tenuous than it appears at first" (16-17).

McCarthy's Border Trilogy is a perfect emblem of the shift from frontier myth to the ambiguities of borders. Not only is its directional orientation that of north-south rather than east-west movement but often the Border Trilogy presents a false or simplified binary system for interpreting the world—for example, that America is a land of wealth,

Mexico is a land of poverty, that the powerful are corrupt and heartless while the poor are kind and giving—that ultimately leaves the border agents with immature and impractical views of their world. While some of these binaries are proven invalid within the novels (for example, John Grady’s father dies a painful death, alone and poor in the United States), others are supported throughout the trilogy. The poor and uneducated in Mexico never fail to provide sage counsel, practical aid, and sympathy to the heroes. The way McCarthy’s heroes’ experience the kindness of the poor does nothing more than provide the boys with false hope because the weight of the world’s indifference far outweighs the kindness they are shown. Where Fredrick Jackson Turner theorized the United States’ westward expansion, McCarthy moves away from the mere closing of the frontier and mythologizing of its meaning and instead shifts the movement both to the south and the past. Neither of which, as it happens, really exists for his characters in the ways they expect. Realizing that Manifest Destiny is no longer the major motivation for his restless characters (there is no territory for McCarthy’s protagonists John Grady Cole and Billy Parham to “lite out” for), the border agents can no longer move westward in search of the freedom and moral code they believe they need. Instead McCarthy has his characters move southward into Mexico on their quests. This turn to the south is an impulse toward what seems more primitive, less civilized, and thus a remnant of the past that has vanished from the United States. In another break from Turner, the movement is not confined to one direction, south, as it was westward for Turner. McCarthy’s characters zigzag back and forth across the border almost compulsively throughout the trilogy as they try to find in Mexico what is lacking in the United States, and vice-versa.

In this repeated and futile crisscrossing of a border that they try to regard as a clear demarcation line, McCarthy's border characters form a sharp contrast to those of the more conspicuously postmodernistic Rolando Hinojosa. In a series of loosely linked short novels called the Klail City Death Trip series, far less well known than McCarthy's or McMurtry's novels but celebrated by critics, Hinojosa writes of characters who do not so much cross the border as inhabit the border zone, incorporating its contradictions and nuances into the fabric of their lives. Speaking of his own life growing up in the border town of Mercedes, Hinojosa has said that the border "wasn't paradise . . . it was home" (97). This sense of the border, so different from McCarthy's sense of the entry into the unknown, gives Hinojosa's work, with its shared and repeated oral stories of past neighbors and family members and its sense of solidarity against both Mexico and the more northerly United States, a far more domesticated atmosphere than McCarthy's, despite the greater unfamiliarity of its forms. Hinojosa's work crosses genre borders as readily as McCarthy's does the geopolitical border. The greatest difference between the two is that Hinojosa writes mainly of Mexican-Americans who inhabit what Tom Miller has called "a third country, two thousand miles long and twenty miles wide" (104) while McCarthy writes of Anglo cowboys who cross a line. Yet both are postmodern, Hinojosa most conspicuously in his forms, McCarthy in his darkness and inconclusiveness.<sup>1</sup>

An irony inherent in McCarthy's trilogy is the idea that Mexico is somehow a place where the moral code from America's cowboy past can be found. That past was more of a myth than reality in America in the first place, and the belief that Mexico is somehow a repository for romantic ideals becomes, often tragically, the source of much grief, confusion, and violence in McCarthy's literature. The characters seek a place where

they can live according to a code of ethics they believe has vanished from the United States. Evidence of an attempt to create this place can be seen in John Grady's efforts to refurbish the little cabin in the woods where he hopes to bring Magdalena once he takes her out of Mexico. In setting up this home, John Grady chooses a location away from other people, where the closest outside influences come from the ranch where the people he trusts and respects the most can be found. In fact, the only other person who ever appears at the little house is Billy, John Grady's best friend. This moral code, however, is not as strong within the characters as they believe. McCarthy shows their expectations of Mexico to be false and, by extension, their beliefs about what existed in their own country. Furthermore, having his characters seek in Mexico what they think is missing in the United States is an oversimplification of both countries. Blair sees the United States and Mexico as undifferentiated in McCarthy's trilogy. Despite the characters' expectations, "the same unpleasantness is everywhere," he observes (301). While unpleasantness may well exist everywhere, the differing manifestations north and south of the border serve to convince the boys that Mexico will be different. Although Mexico as it exists in the minds of these border agents is not the Mexico they encounter, they are unable to see there really is little practical difference between the Mexico they find and the United States they are trying to escape. This disparity between expectation and reality serves to disable their plans and invalidate their system of conduct. For if Mexico is not the place they can live according to their cowboy ideal, there is no place for them because what they are really searching for is "consistent and clear-cut attitudes and values" in a world that has none (Blair 301). And if their code can find no home, perhaps it is the code which is inappropriate for the world. What is most unsettling about this conclusion drawn

from McCarthy's writing is the fact that the code seems so worthy yet is rendered meaningless in the face of a powerful yet detached world. The realities of the world, coupled with the idealism of the moral code, results in characters behaving in ways which are at odds with the morality they think they possess. Ultimately both the moral code the characters hope to live by and the morality of the characters themselves are shown to be illusory. McCarthy's heroes ultimately prove themselves just as compromised as the world they live in. McCarthy's depiction of the ideal cowboy ultimately shows even this idealized cowboy to be filled with contradictory impulses, not simply straightforward noble, moral impulses. While the boys believe they are operating morally, their actual behavior, certainly from the perspective of the Mexicans, is often far more antagonizing and colonial than innocent.

In addition to the obvious connection to the United States-Mexico border the novels of the Border Trilogy share in their subject matter, they all also describe characters who for one reason or another are outsiders from Anglo society. These outsiders inhabit another kind of border as they move among the different cultures to the north and south of the United States-Mexico border searching for a place where they can truly feel at home. In investigating the alienation these exiles feel in their social disconnection and through an understanding of the way they alter their world-views it becomes clear that these agents of change bring about important, subtle differences in the way the reader relates to and understands their world. Unfortunately this change is not the often positive, generative sort seen in earlier examples. It is unfortunate for the characters, of course, because they find themselves bereft of hope for a way and place they can live according to what is clearly an idealistic world view. The way the boys

hope to live—believing their good intentions and good deeds will be sufficient to overcome the evil in the world at least enough for them to live in peace—not only disappoints them, it also leads them into a great deal of trouble. And it is unfortunate for the reader because if, as McCarthy’s view of the world shows, we live in an ultimately uncaring world which takes no notice of the struggles of the people inhabiting it, a new and less innocent way of approaching the world is needed not just for the characters, but for the reader as well. If the innocents are both unable to find a place for themselves in the world and proven to be just as corrupt as the world they flee, there is not much purity in the world.

In addition to more general connections between borders and Mexico, Cormac McCarthy’s Border Trilogy has been linked more directly to other border literature investigated here. Tom Pilkington sees in R. G. Vliet’s fiction, for instance, “a fictional precursor to John Grady Cole, the protagonist of *All the Pretty Horses*” (Pilkington 313). Presumably this protagonist takes the form of the many idealistic or naïve characters populating Vliet’s Borderlands writing. More significantly, Pilkington points out that Vliet and McCarthy share an existential vision of the Southwest, believing that “nature is chaotic, meaning and order must be forged from within the individual” (Pilkington 321). It is the formation of the individual’s way of finding meaning in the world that is the essential struggle of McCarthy’s border agents. The border agents in the Trilogy, despite the time in which their novels are set, are the most up-to-date representations of change agents in the borderlands because their world is a postmodern rendering of the Borderlands, reacting ironically to the conventional understanding of the cowboy myth. Their struggle has transformed dramatically from that of the minority seeking legitimacy

in the world. These postmodern border agents do not come up against a world they understand but are not a part of; instead they are able to operate freely within a world they do not understand. Their struggle, what they must change, is with how they are able to live in a world that does not fit their system of beliefs and presumed morality. In this way the struggle to change is more universal than any other studied here. The world the characters think they inhabit is in opposition to the vision of the *mestiza* shown in Gloria Anzaldúa's work where the world is not at all neatly divided like the good and evil one found in McCarthy's work. The very fact that Anzaldúa calls upon the spirit of her ancient Mayan goddesses stands in stark contrast to a character like John Grady Cole, who begins the trilogy almost entirely alone in the world and in search of a culture which, if it ever did exist, certainly can not for him. John Grady lives in a world he thinks is black and white but which does not support that belief.

We can see a clear contrast with the Anglo border-crosser Susanna Ames of Harriet Doerr's *Consider This, Señora*, a novel published in 1993, thus directly between *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*. In the novel Sue Ames moves to Mexico and buys land on the outskirts of La Luz, a remote town. She does not move to Mexico, however, in the hopes of recapturing a mythic past unavailable to her in the United States. Although like McCarthy's characters Sue Ames goes to Mexico because the United States no longer offers her what she wants, she does not expect to reclaim in Mexico what was lost. On the contrary, she moves to Mexico with the half-formed expectation that she will find peace and quiet in which to pursue her painting and forget her failed relationship in the United States. This expectation of peace in Mexico is, ironically, the one similarity to McCarthy's characters' expectations that Ames shares.

The boys treat Mexico as an empty vessel into which they can pour out their hopes. Ames does the same, only her expectations are less detailed and less innocent. Sue Ames goes to Mexico hoping to lose herself there; McCarthy's boys go expecting to find a life they feel they have missed by being born too late. Both authors present characters whose travels are what Janis Stout, in *The Journey Narrative in American Literature*, calls the "limitless journey of wandering without clear direction or destination" (Stout xi). In contrast to other types of travel where the traveler is exploring (the kind Turner addresses) or escaping (the kind Paredes writes about) or returning home (arguably what Chicana writers are engaged in doing when they define themselves in their own terms), the wanderer has either unformed or ill-formed expectations about what their travel and border-crossing will lead them to.<sup>2</sup>

John Grady and Billy (and Sue Ames, to a lesser extent) provide an important contrast in this study of borders and border-crossers precisely because they do not share the marginalization by race or nationality common to the other figures we have examined. Instead, they are marginalized by their desires and dreams. Characters that fit in with the dominant culture where they live would not qualify as border characters regardless of where they lived. They would be centered and not marginal. (Hinojosa's characters, for example, are centered in the border.) John Grady and Billy differ from those who subscribe to Turner's Frontier Thesis in that the boys are looking for something that the dominant culture no longer provides, while the Frontier Thesis was a manifestation of the hopes and expectations held by the dominant culture. It is in the role as outsiders from the dominant culture that McCarthy's boys operate as border characters. These characters are seeking something from the past that they hope to find

across the border instead of seeking the future at the edge of the frontier. For John Grady and Billy the goal was something that did not really exist anyway. And for both boys it is they, the border characters who suffer from the misconceptions about what is to be found on the other side.

An important distinction between Doerr's and McCarthy's border-crossing characters is that Sue Ames does not wander once she crosses the border into Mexico. While she does travel, she has her home, her community, her base in La Luz. Brian Evenson labels John Grady and Billy "unfortunates" who are unable to secure a place within society (Evenson 41). Although Evenson's choice of the term "unfortunates" overlooks the fact that McCarthy's protagonists are not meant to be seen as unique individuals to be pitied as much as they are people who are struggling to discover an sustainable way to live in an uncaring world, he does provide insight into an important distinction between the way they go about their lives in Mexico as compared to Doerr's protagonist. Perhaps a simpler way of explaining the movement displayed by McCarthy's characters is that, unlike Ames, who finds (to a degree) what she is looking for in Mexico, their expectations send them on a quest for something they will never find.

While John Grady and Billy can be seen as outsiders (unfortunate or not) it is important to recognize that they are also, at the same time, in some ways insiders. The geographic border that they cross in search of a place and a way for them to live also defines them as belonging to, or at least originating on one side and not the other. They may feel out of place in the United States, but they are still Americans who cross into Mexico in search of something, and in this role they are privileged and empowered more than their Mexican counterparts.

Despite their inability to lead the lives they aspire to, John Grady and Billy are border crossers as they search for their idealized world. For both characters, family figures strongly in that search. John Grady, in both of the novels he appears in, seeks a wife. In *Cities of the Plain* he most clearly shows the sort of family and home he desires when he repairs and outfits the little house on the outskirts of the McGovern ranch where he works. John Grady cleans and paints and prepares the little house until it is a cozy space waiting to be made a home. (The fact that the enterprise is doomed both by the odds against his rescuing Magdalena and by the Government's impending takeover of the land for use as a nuclear test site serves to strengthen the irony of John Grady's resistance to the realities of his world. Even if John Grady were successful in bringing Magdalena across the border, the home he dreams of creating will be destroyed by the very progress which makes the cowboy myth so obsolete.) Billy, while he at first abandons his family, comes back in *The Crossing* to reclaim his brother Boyd and to avenge the murder of his parents by also reclaiming his father's horses in a belated and futile attempt to bring what remains of the family together.

On the second trip to Mexico when Billy and Boyd find their stolen horses, the brothers are separated as they flee from the men who had their property. In the struggle to get their horses back, the leader of the Mexicans who have the horses is gravely injured and Boyd is shot as well. Distraught at the thought that Boyd may die from the gunshot wound, Billy shows the importance he places on family when he laments, "Dont be dead...You're all I got" (*The Crossing* 274). The story of the brothers' actions takes on mythical qualities and soon Boyd is known throughout the countryside as the *güerito*, the little warrior who killed a reviled traitor. The brothers are separated and Boyd lives the

life of a revolutionary until he is killed. When he learns that Boyd is dead, Billy again makes the tortuous trek into Mexico, this time to find his brother's remains and bring them back to the United States for burial. Although it is too late to do any real good, Boyd is all that matters to Billy and Billy's gesture is one of taking care of what little remains of his family.

Boyd, yet another agent of change in the borderlands, epitomizes the life of disruption. As a revolutionary fighting for the common people, Boyd fits the pattern set by Américo Paredes, Gregorio Cortez, R. G. Vliet's Bernardino, and many others. Yet in stark contrast to these border agents who in one way or another bring change to their worlds, Boyd's activities, after their initial notoriety, are largely forgotten. By the time Billy searches for Boyd's grave, even its location has slipped into the realm of rumor and myth although the myth of Boyd remains.

Where other border agents bring about change, with varying degrees of success, these border agents do not. Instead of putting up a resistance to the dominant culture they find around themselves and into which they do not fit, these boys opt to leave in one form or another. John Grady's death in the slum can be read as a sort of suicide; after Magdalena is murdered, John Grady admits, "When I seen her layin there I didn't care to live no more. I knew my life was over. It come almost as a relief to me" (*Cities* 259). Not only because of the loss of the woman he loves, John Grady loses his will to live because he once more realizes that all his beliefs about what is right and wrong have no relation to the world he inhabits. As he is dying he speaks with Billy about God and forgiveness, believing good intentions and a will to do the right thing ought to have counted for something. Yet after John Grady's death, McCarthy makes it clear that Billy no longer

shares those views. He angrily calls on God “to see what was before his eyes. Look at this, he called. Do you see? Do you see?” (261). By repeatedly asking if God can see what has become of John Grady, Billy demonstrates his belief that God can not see, because Billy is unable to comprehend a God who would allow such tragedy and pain to exist in the world. For Billy, God, like the natural world in McCarthy’s writing, is aloof to the actions of humans.

John Grady attempts to resist the world around him, but instead of causing disruption and bringing about change, the resistance destroys him. Attempting to marry Magdalena, a woman utterly unattainable to him (for reasons nearly the opposite of those which made Alejandra unattainable) is the act of a border agent ignoring the constraints of society. Certainly seeking revenge on Eduardo for the murder of Magdalena is an act of resistance, yet ultimately these acts of resistance have no effect on the world. When Billy searches for John Grady, he speaks with the Mexican police captain and realizes that while Eduardo may be directly responsible for Magdalena’s death, there is another more powerful man wielding power over him. This man owns the prostitutes and the brothel, and while both Billy and the captain consider him a pimp as well, they also know he is untouchable although he may be ultimately culpable.

After John Grady dies, Billy realizes yet again the futility of living a moral existence in a world which does not take notice one way or the other. He becomes a nomad, distancing himself from people and their moral codes because he realizes there is no connection between one’s deeds and the way the world responds. Billy spends the remainder of his days wandering through a changed landscape. “He moved on. There was no work in that country anywhere. Pasture gates stood open and sand drifted in the roads

and after a few years it was rare to see stock of any kind and he rode on. Days of the world. Years of the world. Till he was old” (*Cities* 264). Rather than bring about change, McCarthy’s border agents repeatedly come up against the realization that there is no disrupting a world that takes no notice. Consequently, they either destroy themselves or withdraw from society.

The attribute of a border agent which inadvertently leads to change and disruption is the desire to return home, to recross the border. This movement, to borrow Gloria Anzaldúa’s imagery, abrades the edges of the two systems defined by the border and by doing so causes tension in the region. This impact of the border agent is demonstrated repeatedly in John Grady’s movement. Once he learns, in *All the Pretty Horses*, that his paradise in Mexico will not stand, that Alejandra can not marry him and that he can no longer work on her father’s ranch, he returns to the United States with his horses. While John Grady did own the horses, in the process of reclaiming them he committed a host of violent, illegal acts. He is still without family. His father dies in his absence, he is estranged from his mother, and the woman who raised him, a Mexican woman he affectionately calls his *abuela*, has died as well. (His *abuela* is another example of a simple, poor person who provides John Grady with comfort and safety. That she is from Mexico fits perfectly with the binary John Grady believes in.) He knows that there is nothing left for him in the United States, yet he makes at least a gesture of trying to return. In the course of that return he is nearly killed, he kidnaps a Mexican police Captain, and is ultimately assisted by the mysterious “men of the country.” In *Cities of the Plain* he crosses the border into Mexico fourteen times as he attempts to rescue Magdalena. His ultimate goal is to bring her across and live with her in the wilderness

Eden he has constructed in the little house out on the ranch. But the results of his activity are far more violent; by the end of the book three people are dead because of John Grady's border crossings.

The violence that follows in the wake of each of these border agents because of his searches is evidence of the instability they bring about. John Grady's disruption of the lives of Alejandra and her father in *All the Pretty Horses* leads to two murders. Alejandra describes how the affair has destroyed her relationship with her father, "I didnt know that he would stop loving me. I didnt know he could. Now I know" (*Pretty Horses* 252). Once again John Grady's overt motives seem harmless yet they leave a great deal of destruction and sorrow in their wake.

Billy suffers through the death of the wolf, the death of Boyd, and repeated acts of violence because of his searches in Mexico. But although they cause instability, the boys' actions ultimately do not bring about the world in which the boys dream of living. Perhaps it is because their goals are based on a dream that is ultimately unrealizable, essentially oversimplified. No change will come from Eduardo's or John Grady's death. Although McCarthy's Border Trilogy seems built on an Edenic vision of cowboy life, McCarthy's fatalistic view of the world ultimately dominates. The tensions central to McCarthy's earlier Southwestern fiction continue in the Border Trilogy. In *Blood Meridian* (1985), the theme of inevitable violence is not masked at all. When the Kid walks into the outhouse, into the arms of the Judge and violent death, it is a continuance of the inescapable, unchanging universe McCarthy creates. While the Kid's amoral, violent, rootless life is the antipode of John Grady's earnest code, the worlds they inhabit

are not so different at all. John Grady's death is just as inevitable, and the uncaring world goes on afterward just as it always has.

Like the Chicana writers who forge their own identities with their writing, John Grady and Billy, less consciously perhaps, attempt to find a place in the world where they can live the way they want. Beyond seeking a place where they can live among horses and beautiful, unspoiled landscape, they are looking for a place where the people conform to their ideas of goodness. The times when John Grady and Billy are most at peace are the times when they are surrounded by good people. For them, good means honest, hard working, and loyal. McCarthy provides the boys with several places where the people meet these requirements and in each case he creates a short-lived idyll. In *All the Pretty Horses* John Grady finds part of his paradise on the road south when he travels with Rawlins. But this paradise is incomplete because despite the pleasures of the road, John Grady is most at peace when he has a home. In *Cities of the Plain* he builds his dream of a settled and happy family life as he rebuilds the house where he hopes to live with Magdalena. It is ironic that the disruption to the status quo John Grady engenders is done in an attempt to participate in his own interpretation of that society. The world John Grady tries to forge is similar to the one he imagines surrounds him when his life is settled in one of its idylls. McCarthy makes clear that these oases of peace and purity are fleeting and rare in the world. McGovern's ranch, for instance, will soon become part of a nuclear test site.

Billy is less drawn to a home; *The Crossing* begins when he chooses to leave his family's home to find one where he fits and to provide a safe "home" for the wolf. Perhaps this is why John Grady and Boyd end up dead while Billy finishes his days alone

and disillusioned. He spends much of *The Crossing* trying to make things right, trying to find and return to their proper place elements of his life which have gone astray. First he attempts to “repatriate” the wolf, then to reclaim the horses (that is, to return them to their proper home), then to return Boyd’s remains to the United States. In *Cities of the Plain* he tries to help John Grady get what he wants. He travels to Mexico to ask Eduardo if he can buy Magdalena’s freedom on John Grady’s behalf. And each time he crosses the border, Billy finds that the distinctiveness signaled by the political border is irrelevant. He confirms, even if he does not understand, Edward Abbey’s assertion that “here on this international boundary, in this neutral zone, one's actual citizenship makes little difference” (Abbey 151). When John Grady spends long hours preparing his house, Billy helps him paint as well. Once he loses the family he finds in John Grady, Billy forsakes this last home and wanders. At the end of the novel he is once again temporarily in the heart of a surrogate family, helping the children learn to care for their horses. “Home seeking in novels...sometimes dissolves into wandering” Stout claims (58). For Billy, his attempts at home-building fail and at the end of the Border Trilogy he is an old man who has spent his days wandering aimlessly. These border agents are seeking a way to fit in the world. When their search proves futile they find themselves alone in the world armed only with the realization that they can find no lasting home.

John Grady and Billy ultimately fail to bring about change because they are unwilling or unable to adapt themselves to the environments in which they find themselves. McCarthy’s natural world is unable to change as a result of the boys’ activities because it is aloof. And human society in McCarthy’s system is largely resistant to the kind of idealism shown by these border agents as well. When the border agents

resist these unpleasant realities, holding out for the environment they want instead of the one they have found, they are destroyed. The ultimate example of John Grady's unwillingness to meet the world on any terms but his own comes in his fight with Eduardo. John Grady does not beat Eduardo because he learns to fight the way the pimp fights. Instead, he stands with his arms at his sides, a martyr to his misbegotten love, bleeding to death, and kills Eduardo instead of defending himself. He does not play by the rules which would have him try to fend off Eduardo's mortal blow. He receives the fatal cut so he can get close enough to kill Eduardo with his only successful attempt with the knife.

Yet John Grady and Billy must try to live in a world filled with corruption and compromise. McCarthy underscores this point about the corrupt world repeatedly when he describes the senseless loss of good people in the novel. Mac McGovern mourns his wonderful wife who dies young. Mr. Johnson recalls his young love who married someone else and then died in childbirth. Billy pines for Boyd, "He was the best...I'd give about anything to see him one more time" (*Cities* 291). Although the reader can see that the protagonists are too idealistic or too rigid to survive unscathed in such a capricious and dangerous world, John Grady and Billy forge onward in their ignorance, looking for the place where they will be surrounded by people like their ideal selves. Their inability to adapt or compromise dooms McCarthy's wandering boys to failure. They are struggling to bring change to a world which can not and will not change.

McCarthy's characters are successful in earning reader sympathy because, despite their unrealistic goals and despite their self-deception as to their own motives (John Grady, for example, feels his journey to Mexico in *All the Pretty Horses* is innocent, yet

it ultimately reveals itself to be a failed attempt at colonization), the reader is seduced by the cowboy myth. The boys are cowboys in a sense not generally associated with the term. They are not the idealized heroes of Webb's Rangers even though their flaws are presented within the framework of the familiar cowboy type.

The characters John Grady and Billy are significant as border agents not just because of their singular, flawed way of approaching the world. They are also linked to other border characters by their activity along the border. One of the attributes that links Boyd Parham, and by extension, Billy and John Grady to the important border figure Américo Paredes is the *corrido*. One of the things Paredes's study of folk ballads about Gregorio Cortez shows is that the *corrido* is a powerful expression of public interest in a person. The songs written describing the flight of Gregorio Cortez were composed almost immediately after his journey began and are still being sung. The songwriters and listeners respond to the power and inspiration in Cortez's ride, to the statement he made as a border figure.

Similarly, Boyd Parham becomes a figure of revolutionary interest. In *The Crossing*, *corridos* are sung about him and his deeds. It is remarkable that a *corrido* springs up in Mexico celebrating a gringo. Boyd submitted himself to the condition of the country and achieved at least this measure of reconciliation. These songs become a factor in Billy's search for Boyd's body because the variants tell of a number of ways Boyd died and describe several places where he might be buried. Like Cortez, Boyd and his activities as a border figure are elevated to hero status in the *corridos* retelling his story. Edwin T. Arnold links, albeit loosely, John Grady with Boyd's heroic status in the *corridos*. He claims the ditty Billy sings, "John Grady Cole was a rugged old soul....With

a buckskin belly and a rubber asshole” (*Cities* 76) is actually “comically elevating the boy to folk status, much as his brother Boyd earlier became a figure of peasant story and song” (Arnold 229). Regardless of just how elevating the song is, it certainly points toward the heroic status shared by Boyd and John Grady.

Boyd is more closely allied with Cortez than Billy or John Grady because both heroes of the *corridos* are examples of resistance against an entrenched power system while John Grady and Billy do not really represent any group. Boyd and Cortez actively resist and struggle; they represent or inspire others on behalf of the same cause. Billy and John Grady do not have any sort of political affiliation or revolutionary appeal. They do not represent any group besides the very large group of people who feel detached from modern society—the group addressed by and in much postmodern fiction. Regardless of which characters figure in the *corridos*, the fact that the *corridos* exist in *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain* at all brings the characters full-circle to Paredes, the archetype for modern border theory.

McCarthy, however, takes the border hero he creates in various guises in John Grady and Billy and shows its hollowness. Neither of these characters, ultimately, brings about any change. All eventually show the reader the idealism of their world view and how the world renders it pointless. McCarthy’s interpretation of the border hero is a bleak one; the appeal of the character draws the reader in, but the result is a border character unable to function in, much less change his world.

At the end of their quests for the “last good country,” John Grady and Billy are nowhere they want to be. John Grady is a homeless wanderer cut off from his family at the end of *All the Pretty Horses* and at the end of *Cities of the Plain* he bleeds to death

alone in a Mexican slum, having realized that once again his love is star-crossed and fatal. Billy, at the close of *The Crossing*, is alone and without family. In perhaps the ultimate statement about his status as a border dweller with no permanent home, even the Army will not take him. After John Grady's death Billy lives out the rest of his life wandering, never again finding even the brief paradise he found on McGovern's ranch. McCarthy's heroes present the reader with a postmodern conclusion of endless process; the border agent's quest for change is futile. Instead of the life-affirming possibility of change, the bleak view that "there is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (*Cities* 45) is held up as an essential truth. Having reoriented Turner's westward-moving frontier, McCarthy shows that the direction of travel has become irrelevant in this postmodern world.

The boys search for a place where they can continue trying to live a history that never actually existed. In *The Crossing*, Billy and Boyd get directions from some men in rural Mexico but are told that maps are useless because "the world has no name" (*Crossing* 387). Just as the wolf does not know when she is in the United States or in Mexico because the distinctions are arbitrary to nature, the names people give things in the world are arbitrary and meaningless. Commenting on the mapping and naming impulse displayed by McCarthy's characters, Jarrett expands the concept to include ideas of home and self, placing the Border Trilogy firmly within postmodernism's evacuation of subjecthood:

In McCarthy's border fiction, identity at first appears to be an inheritance of family, culture, and history. But such a historical identity is lost all too easily in the postmodern present of *The Border Trilogy*. Crossing the

border allows Cole and the Parhams to strip away the layers of the historical, the familial, and the person, only to discover that on the border authentic identity can only be lost, not found. (Jarrett 120)

Identity is lost on the border because that is where concepts like nationality show themselves to be arbitrary and meaningless in the face of a natural world whose rhythms and fertility exist in disregard of such things. What this aspect of the border teaches is that identity can never be found anywhere because there is no such thing as authentic identity to be found in the flux of the postmodern world. McCarthy's fiction argues that the border is not the only site where identity has no solid meaning, but rather that the border shows us clearly and with emphasis what is always and everywhere true. It is the world in general which shows the ebb and flow of identity. For John Grady and Billy this means that their search is based on terms and concepts that simply do not apply to the world in which they operate.

McCarthy challenges the idea that humans can name and change and control the world. His characters show that no matter how appealing their attributes, humans have no more impact on the fate of the world than anything else. When Billy and Boyd in *The Crossing* try to get directions from a group of Mexican men who begin drawing maps in the dirt, they are mocked by another man who laughs at them, stating that the map "es un fantasma," is an apparition (*Crossing* 184). Billy questions him further and the man explains that "it was not so much a question of a correct map but of any map at all" (*Crossing* 185) because a map can not represent a world where all sorts of natural events and disasters can take place along the route. He compounds a map's unreliability by

explaining that the map-maker had not made the trip for many years and when he did make the trip, his circumstances were different from the boys'. Ultimately his memory is of a completely different journey. The most compelling argument McCarthy provides about the impact people have on the ways of the world comes later in *The Crossing* when Billy, speaking to a man about his plans to bring Boyd's body back to the United States, is told:

The world has no name . . . The names of the *cerros* and the *sierras* and the deserts exist only on maps. We name them that we do not lose our way. Yet it was because the way was lost to us already that we have made those names. The world cannot be lost. We are the ones. And it is because these names and these coordinates are our own naming that they cannot save us. (*Crossing* 387)

Billy learns that people try to find their way in the world by assigning names to things which have no intrinsic names of their own. And because these names are applied by people who have lost their way in the world (and thus realize the need for naming) they have no merit. They are of no more use than a map drawn by a man who is lost. The message is bleak; the world does not know about our troubles and it does not care. John Grady and Billy, initially unaware of this state of affairs are unable to change the world; all they can do is try to understand how it works. John Grady learns how the world works in *All the Pretty Horses* and at the end is "a historical figure locked into the past, unable to move into the 'world to come'" (Jarrett 106). In *Cities of the Plains* he is again forced to realize his way of living his life is unique and does not fit with others' when Eduardo

kills Magdalena rather than let her go, yet he continues to operate according to his own set of idealistic rules. When Billy finds out how the world operates he withdraws from the dealings of people and wanders for the rest of his life.

In addition to showing a world where things resist being colonized and named, McCarthy describes a world utterly ignorant of the rules and distinctions people place on it. When Billy returns to the Mexico-United States border with Boyd's body, he sees the tracks of birds, cattle, antelope, and coyotes in the dried mud. The tracks, described by McCarthy as "runes," go off in all directions (*Crossing* 420). This is McCarthy's manifestation of the indecipherable language of the natural world. For McCarthy this language can never be translated and has no connection to the language of people except to demonstrate the artificiality of human-defined borders. The natural world has no understanding of or interest in the border across which Billy feels he must bring Boyd's body. Billy is lost in the world and can bring himself no redemption or peace simply by crossing a "coordinate" of his own making.

McCarthy's characters encounter a form of the past when they cross the border into Mexico. Alarcón sees the past in the topography of Mexico. "As the boys cross over into Mexico, they not only cross into a foreign country, but they also cross into the past, as well as into a picturebook landscape" (Alarcón 64). The landscape is less ideal for travel on horseback on the United States side, as John Grady and his friend Rawlins find when they must cut their way through a series of fences as they head south in *All the Pretty Horses*. In Mexico the travelers encounter no fences, "the farther into Mexico the Americans ride, the farther back in time they ride as well, culminating [in *All the Pretty Horses*] with their arrival at the *hacienda*, encompassing wild, primordial horses that

have never seen a man on foot” (Alarcón 64). While Alarcón goes on to implicate John Grady as “an agent of colonization [who transforms] his wilderness refuge into that very thing he had sought to escape” (64), his observations about what the boys expect to find in Mexico are sound. It is perhaps too severe to burden John Grady with the label of “colonizer” because colonization is neither the purpose of his trek nor the result.

Although Don Héctor may have legitimate fears about John Grady’s intentions toward his land, there is no evidence that John Grady imagines himself as the *hacendado* some day. It is an open question as to whether or not he sees himself as a part of the family on *La Purisima* or if he sees himself taking it over. Regardless of John Grady’s intentions he does not change the Mexican people or landscape as Alarcón attests. Instead they both show John Grady that his expectations about the world are ill-founded. One of the most powerful messages John Grady’s life brings to its reader is that the natural world does not know or care about the humans who move through it.

As border agents who fail in their role as catalysts of change John Grady and Billy find themselves unable to change the status of the Mexico they enter; it is unmapped and essentially unknowable to them when they first arrive and it remains that way when they leave. The boys encounter a polarized world where the rich and the powerful are often cruel and capricious while the common people show extraordinary generosity and kindness. Yet armed with this information they are still unable to reconcile their idealism with the random and heartless world they find. Mexico is not the only place where the world is uncaring, but the unfamiliar setting is stripped of the veneer in the United States which helps obscure the cold facts of the world.

For John Grady in particular, the selling of the family ranch by his mother is a clear indication that the life he wants to lead is no longer available to him. *Cities of the Plain* has as a subtext the knowledge that McGovern's ranch will soon be taken over by the United States Army to use as a nuclear testing site. This impending takeover is among the clearest statements in the Border Trilogy that modern life is overrunning the ranch life. While it is fairly obvious that John Grady's plan to save Magdalena is doomed from the start, the undercurrent throughout the novel is that his life on the ranch will be horribly disrupted one way or another even if he does manage to bring her to the home he created. And as a self-deceived border agent, John Grady allows himself to grasp at straws in an attempt to save himself from the world.

Tom Pilkington, in "Fate and Free Will on the American Frontier: Cormac McCarthy's Western Fiction," shows that despite what the boys hope to find in Mexico, be it a ranch that can no longer exist in the United States or a wilderness where the wolf can run free or a sense of justice and closure when they reclaim their horses, Mexico does not provide it. Pilkington states that Mexico in McCarthy's work represents fate. When John Grady kills the man in the Mexican prison, he "had accepted the act without much thought; it seemed fated, part of a predetermined destiny" (Pilkington 321). In contrast to how McCarthy shows Mexico, "in the U.S.—the land of freedom—accountability and responsibility are the necessary complements of free will and volition" (Pilkington 321). Pilkington has it half right; Mexico can represent fate in McCarthy's work. Ultimately the distinctions between Mexico and the United States drawn by the characters are shown to be meaningless and artificial. The two countries, with their arbitrary border, are essentially no different from one another. Where Pilkington interprets Mexico as the land

of fate and the United States as the land of freedom and accountability, it may be more revealing to see land with no distinction. Ultimately neither country can be distinguished from the other.

Eduardo declares during the knife fight that he understands why American boys come down to Mexico. “They drift down from your leprous paradise seeking a thing now extinct among them. A thing for which perhaps they no longer even have a name” (*Cities* 249). Eduardo is correct; John Grady and Billy represent a shift from searching in the West along the frontier for unclaimed land and people to looking to the south for a place where they hope a glorified and mythical past can still be found. None of them, American or Mexican, are able to see that the difference between the countries is superficial at best. Eduardo’s characterization of the United States as a “leprous paradise” is one McCarthy’s heroes would most likely agree with. The freedom the country offers them is spoiled by a society which is at odds with the ways they want to enjoy that freedom. But Eduardo is as mistaken as McCarthy’s heroes when he claims that what is sought in Mexico is extinct in the United States. McCarthy, at least, does not think it ever existed in either place

Daniel Cooper Alarcón specifically addresses John Grady’s impulse to go to Mexico, but his description is also applicable to Billy in *The Crossing* and John Grady again in *Cities of the Plain*:

Why do the boys go south instead of west? Nostalgia. They can’t go west because the industrialization that followed on the heels of westward expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century has placed too many obstacles in their path and erased the storybook Wild West... That romantic, storybook landscape needs to be relocated in Mexico, where McCarthy’s literary

predecessors have established a formulaic tradition perfectly suited to his narrative designs. (Alarcón 64)

Reinforcing this point about the past and myth, McCarthy dispenses with the idea that the past has one form and it is what the listener expects. One of Billy's several encounters with improbable, emblematic figures in *The Crossing* is with a group of men moving a wrecked airplane along a road in Mexico. Billy asks the history of the airplane and is told that there are actually two planes and three histories. When he asks the gypsy to tell him the true history his request is met with amusement: "the gypsy pursed his lips. He seemed to be considering the plausibility of this" (*Crossing* 404). Directly after meeting the gypsies, Billy encounters an American and experiences a very different kind of discussion about truth. Billy asks the man, "You think most of what a man hears is right?" and is told "That's been my experience." Billy replies that "it ain't been mine" (*Crossing* 418). Although this exchange perfectly reflects the differences McCarthy sets out between Mexico and the United States, it serves to further confuse the differences when the man admits that he lied to Billy almost immediately after meeting him when he said he had served in World War II. The stranger goes on to tell his version of the airplane's history and it is entirely different from all of the other truths Billy has heard about it. Once again the differences between the two countries are rendered indistinct. It is no wonder that in this borderless borderland the change brought by border agents is ineffectual.

If there is a message to be learned from Billy's exchange with the stranger it is simply that the world is not what people expect it to be and is essentially unknowable.

Systems aimed at making sense of the world are rendered useless. “The world will never be the same, the rider said. Did you know that? I know it. It aint now” (*Crossing* 420).

The world is not the same as what we expect it to be and the world did not used to be the way we think it was. This unknowability, far from being an exciting mystery, is for McCarthy’s characters a source of the violence, pain, and sorrow in their lives. Billy’s resigned awareness in *The Crossing* comes at the high cost of his parents, his brother, and the wolf.

McCarthy’s wandering boys find only one thing in Mexico to be as they expect it and that is horses. Although the ways of people are different from what they hope to find, horses are a constant example of how the world should be. Perhaps it is this simple constancy in horses which allows the boys to continue their search for the place where the people are as good as the horses. “McCarthy’s horses...represent the vital life force of the universe. They stand for what *is*, pristine and unfallen nature in its most elemental form” (Pilkington 319). Pilkington goes on to assert that at the end of *All the Pretty Horses* when John Grady reclaims his horses from the men who stole them, he does so in “an attempt to impose order and justice on a world in which there is no inherent order or justice” (Pilkington 321). Although he has recently killed a man in prison, been forever barred from the paradise he finds on the *hacienda*, and forever separated from the woman he loves, John Grady turns to horses because he knows there he will find the idealized sense of honor and loyalty lacking in the rest of the world. He has already learned the lesson the pimp later tries to explain to him in *Cities of the Plain*, that the world, and not just the United States is corrupt. But he returns time and time again to Mexico because it is the only way he knows to search for the purity he wants to believe is there. By the end

of *Cities of the Plain*, John Grady has realized that the purity he seeks is unlikely to come from anywhere but nature. The home he makes for himself is on a remote hilltop on McGovern's ranch because he has no interest in living his life surrounded by other people. This lesson is one he learns from horses—that purity is to be found in nature. Billy learns from his experience with the wolf that the integrity found in nature is elusive and rare in people. Yet even armed with this one bit of reassurance in the world, neither border agent is able to change his own expectations of the world enough to do anything but invite more misery and violence.

Jarrett states that the endings of the Border Trilogy novels are postmodern because they are “inconclusive conclusions” which point towards “a principled refusal of the totalizing...master narratives” (Jarrett 106). McCarthy's novels end with their heroes “trapped between the historical and the contemporary” (Jarrett 107). The historical is the past which no longer exists for them, and the contemporary is a world in which they are unable and unwilling to live.

Charles Bailey echoes this belief that McCarthy's characters lose control of their identities at the border when he states that “the crossings obliterate all of Billy's childish attempts to envision and control his life” (“Doomed Enterprises” 61). Bailey goes on to stress the existential nature of life depicted in the Border Trilogy by describing the view of the world Billy eventually settles on in *The Crossing*. “Billy's insight is clear. Nothing in the world is predictable or knowable...it is in unstoppable flux. All heroic enterprises—past, present, future— are doomed” (“Doomed Enterprises” 62). Nevertheless, despite realizing the “doomed” nature of his actions, Billy continues to support what he sees as right, moral, and good. He does so in large ways when he (grudgingly) supports

John Grady in his hopeless cause to rescue Magdalena. And he does so in countless small ways when he helps John Grady rescue a wild puppy, when he stops to help the group of Mexicans stranded by the side of the road with a flat tire, and at many other points. Despite coming “to know that he does and can know nothing” (“Doomed Enterprises”<sup>62</sup>) about the world, Billy soldiers on, attempting to make his world one where he can continue living according to principle.

It is this stubborn adherence to a life of principle which dooms McCarthy’s wandering boys. Finding that borders created by men are meaningless to the world, the lesson the boys learn is a bleak one. Although they come to find the true, chaotic nature of the world in which they live, they are unable to change or accommodate it just as the world does not alter its ways for them, and they end up broken on the road that they hoped would lead them to the paradise held in their minds.

McCarthy’s novels and characters illustrate the complete failure of the ideal of the border hero which is held so dear in American culture. Historians, presidents, the media, and popular perception all base their beliefs on the successful image of the brave, lone hero. McCarthy’s boys show the hollowness of that perception.

The tragedy of the crossing (from the United States to Mexico) ultimately comes down to misplaced expectations and an inability to move beyond them. McCarthy sets up characters with idealistic, naïve visions of the world and puts them into his postmodern landscape where there is no value placed by the world on any human activity, much less high minded, moral endeavors in an utterly uncaring world. The tragedy for the characters is obvious. For the reader the tragedy depends upon how McCarthy’s vision is received. For some it is a liberating vision. Jacqueline Scoones sees an environmentalist’s

call to arms where she reads a challenge from McCarthy encouraging the reader to “turn the page” (*Cormac McCarthy Companion* 2) and establish order in the world by taking action against the world on fire seen in the Border Trilogy. While this view is certainly a positive one, ultimately it seems to try to wrest meaning from the bleakness of the novels in much the same way as the border agents turn to Mexico for comfort which is not there in reality, only in their dreams. Touching closer to the tragedy of the crossing, Brian Everson sees in McCarthy’s heroes wandering characters who are “moving into closer proximity with society and, concomitantly, to firm morals and values” (47). So while there are hard lessons to be learned when the characters find the world has no ultimate moral code, they or at least the reader, can find a reason to create a workable code by coming together with other people in this harsh environment. However positive the larger movement in McCarthy’s work may be—from immoral characters operating in an amoral world in *Blood Meridian* to highly moral characters in the Border Trilogy learning the realities of the same amoral world—in the end we are left with the same world, one that neither understands or concerns itself with the cares of human beings. But it is a world within which simple, poor people sometimes achieve a willingness to care for others and to ponder philosophical questions. These figures leave us without a world to call our own, just as John Grady Cole found himself bereft of a country at the end of *All the Pretty Horses*. The tragedy is the poor showing McCarthy’s reality makes when held up to the dream within his brave, idealistic, and ultimately disillusioned characters.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

From historians to authors, from politicians to cowboys (and occasionally both at once) Americans have long been fascinated and guided by the westward moving frontier. Over the course of the past century, however, attention has shifted from the frontier to borders. For the public at large this means that the frontier has become a topic for romantic nostalgia, as we enjoy thinking of frontier days as a time of boldness, independence, and virtue, but borders have become a major concern linked with worry about illegal immigration. For historians and literary scholars the frontier has become a topic of revisionist interpretation—for example, in the work of Richard Slotkin and Patricia Limerick—while a new body of scholarship centering on borders has grown up. Much of this scholarship relates to geopolitical borders or contact zones, especially between the United States and Mexico, but attention has also been extended to more metaphoric or even abstract borders. With the growing interest in borders, once they have supplanted the frontier in both literature and in the public mind, comes a desire to define what becomes, ironically, less and less concrete the closer one looks. With the scrutiny that is focused on borders comes an impulse to understand the mechanics of borders, what they do, how they foster change, who is impacted by that change, and who is bringing that change about.

This investigation ultimately concerns itself less with borders, although their ascent to a place of prominence in history and in literature is a crucial element, than it

does with change and the agents of that change. By harnessing the power Anzaldúa describes as making one's own piece of earth, people are able to define themselves in terms of their own choosing and thus oppose established forces which would otherwise limit their freedom. It would be wonderful to be able to say that the positive change brought about by the historical figures Gregorio Cortez and Américo Paredes set the pattern for borderlands change which later figures and literature upheld, but this is not always the case. Certainly for writers like Vliet and Anaya, resistance to the dominant paradigm has been a major focus and has also paid dividends in terms of acceptance of the literature and, to a degree, the political agenda of the writer. For these authors, the pattern of resistance set by Paredes holds true and is used to bring change to the Borderlands. For Chicana writers as well there is no doubt that struggling in the role of border agents has brought a wider variety of options and a greater degree of freedom than their world afforded before they began writing—and naming—their own stories. But as the previous chapter shows, for some border agents, in particular ones without a firm cultural attachment or political agenda, the shift from frontier hero to border hero leaves them nearly powerless to change their worlds. For them change is elusive. This last group of border agents whose futile quest for change is the result of idealism running up against the rock of a postmodern world leaves a great deal of doubt about the possibility for change in the hands of this type of individual when faced with the realities of the world. It is ironic indeed that postmodernism, so long associated with fluidity and resistance to the solidity of a grand narrative would, in this instance, be so unaccommodating.

The significance of studying border agents is of course bound up in the importance of studying borders. Borders are regions filled with energy and change. They

are where different systems or cultures or countries or individuals come into contact with one another and interact, sometimes violently. Because borders are regions known for conflict and change brought about as a result of that conflict, it is important to understand the mechanisms for that change. It is not enough to merely acknowledge that the change takes place. Border agents act in a multitude of ways to bring about change. One reason for this variety is the fact that there are a multitude of borders that these border agents inhabit.

The beginnings of the border hero can be traced to Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis even though the frontier produced a hero whose motivations and expectations were different in important ways from those of the border hero. Although the frontier hero brought a different kind of change—the taming and settling of a land understood to be empty—and did so for a different reason, the very act of settling the land by definition led to the closing of the frontier and the growth of the active border region in its place. Along this border where cultures meet, the border hero operates. If the frontier hero was the idealized American, the way Americans liked to think they appeared, then the border hero is a new kind of American. Perhaps not the vision mainstream America has of itself, this new hero is just as vigorous a force as the pioneers and just as significant in determining the future of national identity.

When Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand* was published it did not rewrite history so much as it presented a version of it which had been silenced or overlooked. The events reported by the *corridos* about Gregorio Cortez were not fiction, but they were, in effect, news to the academic community. Paredes disrupted the expectations of what borderlands scholarship studied and by doing so showed others that they could do

the same. Where the univocal expression of the frontier and then the border gave way, a more inclusive and varied discourse moved in. The combination of the closing of the frontier and, much later, the opening of a more multi-vocal borders approach to the region led to the description and acknowledgment of a new kind of hero who by disrupting entrenched systems brought about change.

Having helped define the way borders are discussed as they appear in literature of the American Southwest, Paredes cleared the way for writers of border literature to address the stereotypes pervasive along the border and then explore how they are able to be twisted and subverted. By first recognizing what the border literature struggles against and then showing ways in which it participates in the struggle, borders become more understandable as sites of resistance and change. Perhaps most importantly, the literature of borders can be recognized for the place it takes and the role it serves as an active literature of change. Where the frontier was unable to recognize an interaction of cultures, borders see groups in conflict. Paredes expanded the ways in which that conflict and those groups could be represented and critiqued in literature.

As is the case with Américo Paredes in his life when he struggled to make a voice for Latinos/as heard in the halls of academia and in his writing where he describes the popular reception of both Gregorio Cortez's life and his myth, the struggle along the border is often that of the oppressed. Fighting an entrenched and powerful way of thinking about minorities in the Borderlands, Paredes' voice was heard and eventually widely respected. His struggle produced true change when it helped define the way borders in literature are addressed, both through his writing and the example of his career.

More than just a space where political borderlines exist or even more abstractly, where cultures meet and interact, borders are important places of conflict where groups or individuals with less power and authority resist the restrictions of those with greater power. Having defined the environment in which Paredes presented his work, this dissertation investigates the sources and nature of the prejudices and misconceptions surrounding the inhabitants of the Borderlands. Through a combination of historical and cultural factors these prejudices became ingrained in the Anglo culture of the region. In the years following the publication of *With His Pistol in His Hand* a number of voices challenging the status quo began to be heard. Two important examples of fiction where literature focuses on those with less power and uses them to show inequities and misconceptions inherent in the Borderlands can be seen in the writing of Rudolfo Anaya and R. G. Vliet. The fiction of Anaya and Vliet serve as strong examples both describing prevalent stereotypes and inverting them. It is this inversion which is so crucial to the work of the border agent. Through instability, which often comes about when an inequity is exposed or simply described, attention and disturbance are brought into play.

As is often the case with border characters, Anaya's Antonio finds himself struggling to break free from limiting, outdated prescribed roles. Set against the backdrop of the racism ingrained in the Anglo culture around him, Anaya's characters struggle to find a place for themselves in the modern world without losing all touch with the best elements from their traditions. *Bless Me, Ultima* works with the conventions and stereotypes which limit primarily from within the group living in the border region. While there is ample interaction between Mexican-Americans and Anglos in the novel,

the heart of the conflict revolves around issues of tradition and modernity in the Latino community.

Looking outward as much as inward, Vliet's fiction concerns itself with conflict caused by the interaction of cultures and groups in the border region. Vliet's characters struggle less with who they want to define themselves as and are most instructive when viewed as examples of the hollow stereotypes in the region. By repeatedly showing the flaws in the misconceptions the settlers and cowboys have in his novels Vliet makes a clear statement about the absurdity of so many long-held beliefs. He also sets the tone for ideas further developed by Cormac McCarthy about the realities and myths of the American cowboy. These challenges to the generally accepted version of frontier heroes and Anglo border heroes which grew from the rhetoric of Turner and Walter Prescott Webb.

One of the most compelling examples of border literature which can be seen as emblem and means of social/political change comes in the Chicana community where the literature is used to fight against both the larger Anglo culture and the limitations of the Chicano culture which often dominates and defines the women in the community. The changes brought about by the ways of addressing the border and border heroes which Paredes ushered in did not fully extend to Chicanas. Ironically, although Chicano authors like Anaya were breaking new ground for under-represented voices in the Borderlands, they did little to help Chicanas. Through determined acts of self-definition, Chicanas have been able to wrench themselves free from stifling cultural restraints which limited their choices. Border heroes took on a different form, struggled against a new obstacle, and did so in a different, less geographically rooted manner in the hands of Chicanas. In

an effort to wrest control of their stories and their lives from those around them, a key feature of Chicanas who write border fiction is the impulse of self-definition. This renaming is a logical progression from the stereotyped way people of the borders are seen by others, and from the tendency of border writers to break with those stereotypes and subvert them in an effort to gain control. Rather than accept the definitions of who they are, Chicanas name themselves and take control of their own identity and lives.

Sounding a clear call to change the way Chicanas identify themselves and their options, Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of the *mestiza* provides a clear description and provides powerful inspiration for Chicanas to take control of their history and identity. *Borderlands/La Frontera* functions very much like *With His Pistol in His Hand* in its presentation of a new way of approaching borders and border agents. In so doing their authors created a body of fiction, criticism, and poetry which provides a strong example for others who desire to travel a path and understand their world differently from the way it was presented before.

The focus on individual heroes in this study is a conscious one because in several significant ways individual heroes possesses a tremendous potential for impact. In the case of Gregorio Cortez and Américo Paredes, their actions led to major changes in the way the Borderlands were conceived, studied, and taught. The individual Chicana writers who broke free of the limitations placed on them by their culture also made a major changes as trailblazers and examples. It is not until the postmodern heroes of Cormac McCarthy that the acts of the individual become futile and impotent.

Understanding the status of the border crosser is a sensible next step having come to grips with the nature of borders themselves. Having devoted so much time to

understanding the historical context of change and change agents in the Borderlands, we can see in McCarthy's Border Trilogy how the myths and misconceptions pertaining to the United States-Mexico border have created a false impression of the region. The Border Trilogy contains important insight into the reasons characters cross into Mexico. The characters crossing the border are the ones who do not find their lives fulfilled on the American side of the border. They go to Mexico seeking a completeness they can not find in their own country. Billy Parham goes to Mexico his first time in an attempt to return the wolf he captures to a land where he believes it can be free to live how wolves did before settlers changed the nature of the Southwest. That the wolf can not survive in Mexico is emblematic of the split between the perception McCarthy's characters have of Mexico and the reality they find there. Mexico may not be the modern, industrialized society the characters flee in the United States, but neither is it exclusively a wild, untamed land where nature is unchallenged by the actions of humans. Billy's and John Grady's false expectations reflect romantic nostalgia.

More significantly than simply demonstrating the rather shallow understanding his heroes have of Mexico, McCarthy broadens the concept of borderlands change agents when he shows how the world is unaffected by the kind of disruption brought to it by border agents. The borders recognized by people in McCarthy's fiction are not ones respected by the natural world which has no use for treaties and boundaries. This message of the irrelevance of human deeds in the face of a world which is ignorant of our dreams and fears is not unique to the United States and Mexico.

This dissertation should be seen as a tool to be used to interpret other borders and their border agents into the same system used to embrace the various elements studied

here. By looking at how border agents bring about change, the definition of what is appropriate to consider a border is developed. I have included not only physical borders generally understood to fall under the umbrella of border studies, but also have stretched the topic to include gender and to dismantle, as is the case in Chapter IV, rigid definitions about geographic borders. McCarthy, at the very least, shows the flawed thinking that results from placing too much emphasis and reliance on the significance of national boundaries. Border zones can reasonably be expanded to include places where political, cultural, social systems come into conflict through the activity of border agents who fight against the limitations these systems impose.

Where this study points, having followed a path tracing the development of border agents from early appearances in border literature, through a twisting of the standard definitions of border agent, into the empowering strength provided to Chicanas, and finally to the postmodern vision of Cormac McCarthy, is to a further dissolving of expectations of the border. Fredrick Jackson Turner's idea of a frontier has changed dramatically. It is unlikely that Turner considered cultural boundaries in American cities to be border zones shaping the nation as much as his frontier did yet that is one of the important sites of current border studies. Less absurdly, but no more likely, it is doubtful Turner gave the United States–Canada border much thought either. But both of these expanded border regions point to the fact that culture and literature are being changed in dramatic ways by activities taking place on new or often under-studied border regions. By setting the stage for less concrete borders and by using border agents as the ticket into these regions, the next logical step will be to push further from the mainstream of what is considered border study by looking north to Canada. There is no reason to assume that

the literature of the northern border is somehow less relevant to border theory than that of the south. The United States has moved from imagining the Western frontier as the one where the action takes place toward a more clear understanding of the importance of the southern border and other cultural borders. The reason these sites are so crucial is that it is along these edges that border agents move and bring change, through disruption, to their worlds. The next step to a more fully-realized sense of relevant, active borders must include attention to the northern border as well. There are differences in how the north is conceived compared to how the south is conceived in both literature and criticism.

Although border characters perform much the same activities along the northern border as they do in the south, the way Canada is conceptualized, by Canadian and especially by American characters, differs in significant ways from the way Mexico is perceived. It is in these differences in how Americans perceive Canada as compared to Mexico that the nature of how the two borders appear in literature can be compared.

Ultimately the study of border heroes is valuable because it is a way to more fully understand the world of the border. Without an awareness of border agents and border change, we are left with a flat, less realistic system which is not flexible enough to provide an accurate representation of the world it is supposed to interpret. Through understanding the border we are able to grasp the changes taking place in the vibrant, culturally active sites in our world.

## ENDNOTES

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> The importance of the frontier to the American identity has been developed by a number of writers since Turner. Significantly, Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* builds upon Turner's work. Furthermore, Webb's *The Great Plains* holds an important place in American thought because it was instrumental in helping more thoroughly spread and form the mindset it sets out to theorize.

<sup>2</sup> At least two Presidents, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, publicly embraced the ideas about rugged Western individuals presented in Turner's Thesis and later, more explicitly, in Webb's *The Texas Rangers* (1935). Speaking at the groundbreaking for the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame in 1973, President Richard Nixon thanked the Rangers for 150 years of "relentlessly serv[ing] the best interests of both their state and nation" and went on to comment on their "splendid reputation ever since our frontier days" (Samora, Bernal, and Peña 5). President Lyndon Johnson went even further in showing his support of the Rangers in general and Webb's theories in particular when he wrote the foreword for the 1965 edition of Webb's *The Texas Rangers*.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> I am using the word "fiction" with regard to Paredes's work in the sense that he collected elements of the *corrido* legend into one coherent narrative. This structured narrative with consciously and artfully developed significant elements is by no means the "correct" version of the events. Treating the narrative as fiction does not deny its roots, whether they lie in folklore, history, or invention. The value of the fiction is to bring the narrative, whatever its origins, into the literary field of discourse.

<sup>2</sup> While the specific acts of violence Cortez suffered were directed against him personally, at the time, Anglo violence against Mexicans and Mexican Americans was less particularized against an individual than it was a general attitude towards the group.

<sup>3</sup> In *Waverly*, Scott presents border heroes from the lower classes engaged in rebellion against an entrenched hegemony. This pattern of disruption and resistance along border regions, then, has a long pedigree in literature. In American literature James Fenimore Cooper is dubbed "the American Scott" by George Dekker because Cooper's focus on the effects of the advancing white civilization on Native American culture and the resulting conflict share much with the attention Scott pays to the "primitive" Scottish resistance to English imperialism. For both authors, heroes spring primarily not from the wealthy and educated classes, but from more common people. This pattern of heroes who operate in the borders between English and Scottish settlement and Anglo and Native American settlement in colonial America is echoed by Gregorio Cortez in *With His Pistol in His Hand* when he finds himself resisting Anglo domination of Mexicans in Texas.

<sup>4</sup> Both the “official history” of the scholars and the popular history found in cultural beliefs have powerful influences on what people believe is true. The overlap between scholarly and popular beliefs informs how people understand their world. Both have great impact on what is understood to be “real” or “true.”

<sup>5</sup> In this as in other ways Cormac McCarthy’s heroes bring the old frontier traits into their borderlands lives.

<sup>6</sup> Cross-border migration was common in the late nineteenth century as Mexicans sought to exchange the uncertainty and political turmoil they experienced in Mexico for greater economic opportunity north of the border.

<sup>7</sup> Paredes cites contemporary newspaper accounts of the Cortez trial which comment on the satisfaction the Anglo community felt upon hearing of the acquittal. Beyond the obvious benefits to Cortez, “the verdict was a victory . . . for all Mexicans in Texas” who for decades had been demonized as outlaws (*Pistol* 93).

<sup>8</sup> In her introduction to the second edition of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull points out the connection between Paredes and Anzaldúa. Paredes’s work, reclaiming the story of a Mexican border hero and bringing it into the realm of literature, provides the prototype for later border studies.

<sup>9</sup> Anzaldúa writes of the *mestiza* in female form only but it is not unreasonable to broaden her concept to include both females and males. Anzaldúa treats the term as exclusively female because her theory revolves, in large part, around the need for women to free themselves from the control men exercise over them. Many of the mythical figures Anzaldúa draws inspiration from are female ones. Nevertheless, broadly applied, the theory supporting the *mestiza* is effective for both men and women.

## CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> A number of critics comment on Paredes's explicit challenge to the status quo represented by Webb. Part of the reason for this conflict may be attributed to the fact that both men were working at the University of Texas, but much more rests on the content of each man's work. José David Saldívar comments that Paredes believed that the "consensus rhetoric of American studies" which Webb represented needed to be "negated and replaced with a more sophisticated sense of 'culture' as a site of social struggle" (*Border Matters* 40). Renato Rosaldo is even more direct when he calls Paredes a "warrior hero who battles against Anglo-Texan academic opponents" and specifically cites Walter Prescott Webb (Rosaldo 154).

<sup>2</sup> Webb's title demonstrates the prevailing Anglo attitude towards the West as a frontier. The subtitle betrays the belief that this "frontier" needed to be defended. The irony of settlers moving into an uninhabited region and then needing to defend it from the people who lived there originally seems not to have occurred to Webb.

<sup>3</sup> Michaels's study of nativism and the Immigration Act of 1924, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, describes the rise of Modernism in connection with the changing national identity in the years after World War I.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of a noble savage who lived close to a state of nature is central to a nineteenth century concept, formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of what creates person's happiness.

<sup>5</sup> In his introduction to Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, editor Neal Salisbury comments on "the English antagonism towards the Indians" (3) in the colonies in 1676. The English treated the Indians as an underclass, and "underlying these policies and practices was a European belief that human beings were divided into 'civilized' and 'savage' peoples" (3). Colonists were unsure if the Indians could ever be made "civilized." It is clear that the English belief in their superiority to people of other races is one they brought with them to the New World and did little to hide throughout the Conquest. The attitude of the Spanish who colonized Mexico was similar to that of the English who colonized the continent farther north. Beginning in the 1500s, for the Indians of Mexico, "the arrival of the Spanish was a nightmare" (Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest* 224). Whole regions of Indians fled to the mountains, fearing the arrival of Christians from Spain.

<sup>6</sup> While the *corridos* are not formal literature and are primarily an oral tradition, they were, in fact, also a written form of literature. Katherine Anne Porter reports, in her

essay “Corridos,” seeing printed versions of popular corridos sold on street-corners in Mexico during her visit in 1924 (Alvarez 196).

<sup>7</sup> Although Jense eventually falls in love with her captor and sides with him in a symbolic conflict over her new love vs. her old family, the story avoids becoming an example of the Stockholm Syndrome (where a victim emotionally bonds with his or her captor) because Jense’s change is brought about through her growing understanding of Bernardino’s plight and how it is similar to her own, not because of his psychological manipulation of her.

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Chicano/a refers to Mexican-Americans and is considered by some to be a political charged term. Latino/a refers to people from Latin America. Hispanic, the broadest of these three terms, refers to all Spanish speakers and emphasizes the common denominator of language among communities.

<sup>2</sup> The Movimiento Artístico Chicano (MARCH) was founded in the mid-1970s to promote Chicano and Latino literary and visual arts. MARCH/Abrazo Press is the publishing arm of MARCH dedicated to the publication of Chicano, Latino and Native American literature.

<sup>3</sup> *El Grito*, a Chicano magazine, first published Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima*. *El Grito* was a valuable outlet for Chicano writers unable to get their works accepted by Anglo presses. Aztlán, another influential Chicano press, was also instrumental in providing a forum for Chicano writers. Continuing the tradition of helping younger writers get their work published, The Aztlán Prize is sponsored by Rudolfo and Patricia Anaya and the University of New Mexico and is given each year for the best work of fiction in English by an emerging Chicano writer in a work that explores aspects of Chicano culture.

<sup>4</sup> *La Llorona*, a woman who drowns her children after she finds out her husband has been having an affair, “is known to appear to young men who roam about at night. They believe she is a young girl or a beautiful young woman, but when they approach her (with sexual intent in mind), she shows herself to be a hag or a terrible image of death personified” (Rebolledo 63). Again, the adoption of this figure as one of power allows Cisneros to strike a blow against the restrictions of male-dominated society. Quite the opposite of the didactic folktales telling women how to comport themselves, here *la Llorona* is a warning directed at the men. More typically *La Llorona* is interpreted as a warning to women and to children not to stray beyond the boundaries set by men.

<sup>5</sup> Although this study focuses on literature written in English, *Like Water for Chocolate*, originally written in Spanish, finds its way in as an important exception both because of the appropriateness of the novel's content and because with the novel's translation and its subsequent adaptation to a movie it enjoys wide readership in English and is often included in discussions of other well-known works by Chicanas.

<sup>6</sup> The Federal Writers' Project was established in the 1930s as a New Deal program aimed at collecting oral histories and culture in an attempt at preserving what was seen as a vanishing resource. Many of the interviewees in New Mexico were Hispanic, making the NMFWP a valuable source of women's voices of the time.

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> Hinojosa's Klail City Death Trip Series is comprised of 14 short loosely-linked sequential novels set in fictional Klail City, located on the Texas-Mexico border. The events of these novels take place from the 1700s through the twentieth century and chronicle more than 250 years of Spanish-Mexican presence in southern Texas. The novels show the complex evolution of bicultural and multicultural issues in America. They detail Texas lore, assimilation to the American dream, isolation within rural living, as well as addressing people from different races, classes, ethnicities, and nationalities. Hinojosa's work deals, to a great extent, with suppressed Mexican oral history. Whether poetry or prose, Spanish, English, Chicano idiom, or a mixture, Hinojosa's fiction displays an acute understanding of the interactions among people from different races, classes, and nationalities. Hinojosa's Klail City in Belken County has been compared to Faulkner's South with its complex multi-generational communities and relationships.

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting study of wanderers, nomads, and tramps, see Brian Everson's essay "McCarthy's Wanderers: Nomadology, Violence, and Open Country" where he addresses the phenomenon in McCarthy's work that nearly all the main characters are ones who inhabit society's edges. He breaks down the group by defining "tramps" as wanderers who, while rootless, maintain both a moral code and a connection to society and its codes. "Spirited unfortunates" operate outside society until they are able to reconcile their troubles and reenter the mainstream. Finally "nomads" are the group most detached from society's ethics and codes. John Grady Cole begins the series as a tramp and seems to shift back and forth between that designation and spirited unfortunate. Billy Parham ends the series a nomad. Having seen what the world can do to a person, he chooses to remove himself from the center of society.

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