



US-MEXICO BORDERLAND NARRATIVES: GEOPoETIC REPRESENTATIONS

FROM THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR TO THE PRESENT

by

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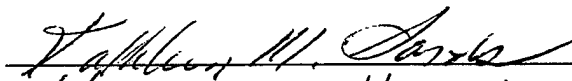
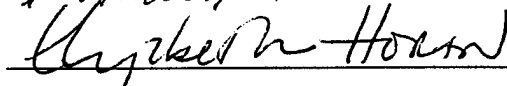
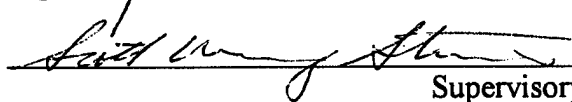
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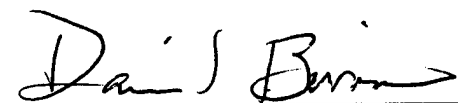
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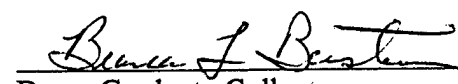
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## ABSTRACT

For over 150 years, borderland authors from both Mexico and the United States have developed novels which owe their narrative power to compelling relationships between literary constructions of space and artistic expressions of conflicts, characters, and cultural encounter. This study explores those relationships by analyzing representations of the spaces in which characters function—whether barrio, ballroom, or border city—as well as the places characters inhabit relative to the border—occupying native or foreign territory, traveling temporarily, or settling permanently. Concomitant with close attention to the conceptualization of space in border literature is a foregrounding of the genres that border writers employ, such as historical romance and the Hispanic bildungsroman, as well as the literary traditions from which they draw, such as travel narratives or utopian literature. Assessing geopoetics in border writing from the Mexican American War to the present, including writers such as Helen Hunt Jackson, Jovita González, Ernesto Galarza, Américo Paredes, Harriet Doerr, Cormac McCarthy, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Miguel Méndez provides a paradigm for tracing the development and changes in individual responses to this space as well as a broad range of responses based on class and gender. This corpus of literature demonstrates that the various ways in which characters respond to cultural encounter—adapting, resisting, challenging, sympathizing—depends on artistic rendering of spaces and places around them. Thus, the central argument of this project is that character responses to cultural encounters arise out of geopoetics—the artistic expression of space and place—from the earliest to the most recent border narratives.



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## INTRODUCTION:

### BORDERLAND NARRATIVES AS GEOPOETIC EXPRESSIONS

The US-Mexico borderland generates a variety of geopoetic representations. For over 150 years, borderland authors from both Mexico and the US have developed novels which owe their narrative power to compelling relationships between literary constructions of space and artistic expressions of conflicts, characters, and cultural encounter.<sup>1</sup> This volume explores those relationships by analyzing representations of the spaces in which characters function—whether barrio, ballroom, or border city—as well as the places characters inhabit relative to the border—occupying native or foreign territory, traveling temporarily, or settling permanently. Concomitant with close attention to the conceptualization of space in border literature is a foregrounding of the genres that border writers employ, such as historical romance and the Hispanic bildungsroman, as well as the literary traditions from which they draw, such as travel narratives or utopian literature. Assessing geopoetics in border writing from the Mexican American War to the present, including writers such as Helen Hunt Jackson, Jovita González, Ernesto Galarza, Américo Paredes, Harriet Doerr, Cormac McCarthy, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Miguel Méndez provides a paradigm for tracing the development and changes in individual responses to this space as well as a broad range of responses based on class and gender. This corpus of literature demonstrates that the various ways in which characters respond to cultural encounter—adapting, resisting, challenging, sympathizing—depends on artistic rendering of spaces and places around them. Thus, the central argument of this project is that characters' responses to cultural encounters arise out of geopoetics—the artistic expression of space and place—from the earliest to the most recent border narratives.

Geopoetics offers a model for understanding border writing because it emphasizes the importance of the geopolitical US-Mexico border, the primary agent of ideological difference in the borderlands, while at the same time revealing how borderland space shapes authors' genre choices and central narrative conflicts. The border "orders" the geography of place and space in this region because it is the site where the national territory of the US and Mexico abuts. At this nexus, cultural difference is codified by the two nations' governments as they endorse official languages, enforce immigration laws, and reify different interpretations of history. As a result, cultural differences in the borderlands are acute. Geopoetics thus informs how Jovita González portrays the conflicts between a Mexican family and encroaching Anglo squatters shortly after the creation of the border in Caballero; how José Villarreal depicts the challenges to Juan Rubio who, after crossing the border, is unable to adapt to Anglo culture in Pocho; or the ways that Carlos Fuentes constructs Harriet Winslow's retreat across the border after confronting her own Anglocentrism in Old Gringo. Writers who are drawn to the US-Mexico borderlands necessarily depict how characters react to cultural difference, a dominant theme in border fiction. Central to this project is the idea that the effect of the geopolitical border on the region as an agent of cultural difference influences the ways writers construct narrative space and the ways their characters negotiate those spaces, whether landscape, domestic sphere, national territory, public school, or utopia. The way that space is rendered aesthetically in border literature shapes characters' experiences most acutely when they are confronted with the realms of otherness that the literature exposes. For example, Helen Hunt Jackson represents the space of Señora Moreno's home in the historical romance, Ramona, as a domestic sphere in which Mexican heritage and the Catholic faith are preserved and protected from an

outside world corrupted by Anglo culture, members of which are intent on displacing, disenfranchising, and dispossessing the existing *Californio* elite. As this example illustrates, borderland fiction is valuable precisely because it constructs believable experiences and whole worlds in a geopolitical setting that tends to produce fragmented and conflicting reports.

This study analyzes border narratives from the imposition of the US-Mexico border following the Mexican American War of 1846-48 to the present day in order to reveal the progressive development of authorial strategies for depicting the significant relationships between political geography and artistic expressions of cultural contact in the borderlands. The body of literature selected to demonstrate the intimate linkage between narrative style and concepts of the border extending from barrier to bridge includes texts that range in publication date from Jackson's Ramona (1884) to Silko's Almanac of the Dead (1991). Although a seemingly wide net, these works are connected by the master trope of the US-Mexico border and organized roughly through a chronological series of frameworks in which characters "claim space," "move in space," "make space," and "re-claim space" in the borderlands. In Ramona, The Squatter and the Don, and Caballero, Mexican and Indian characters struggle to "claim space" for themselves in early border narratives by fighting to retain ownership of land they have occupied for decades preceding the Mexican American War. In Stones for Ibarra, Old Gringo, and All the Pretty Horses, Anglos "move in space" by traveling in Mexico during and following the Mexican Revolution. Fleeing the Revolution, Mexican and Hispanic characters figuratively "make space" for themselves in the US by carving out new identities that allow them to draw on Mexican/Indian heritage and Anglo culture in Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez. Finally, Chicano/a and Indian

characters literally “re-claim space” by fighting for the land rights of homelands stolen by the US government in Pilgrims in Aztlán and Almanac of the Dead. Ordering the chapters of this volume to trace how authors conceptualize the conflicts inherent in the changing ideology of the borderlands elucidates the ways in which border writers represent the effect of political geography on cultural encounter.

In order to conceptualize borderland fiction as geopoetic representation, it is useful to understand the historical antecedents of the US-Mexico border in order to emphasize that the region is a space of contested territory with overlapping cultural traditions.<sup>2</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, the US and Mexican government fought for ownership and control of Mexico’s northern territories. Anglo expansionists in the US Congress embraced the concept of Manifest Destiny and exercised a policy of “dollar diplomacy” in repeated efforts to buy northern tracts of land in Mexico, offers that the Mexican government flatly refused (Martínez 12). Meanwhile, the region was increasingly characterized by people in flux. Because the Mexican government was having trouble populating this region (since the time of independence from Spain 1821), it allowed foreign settlers to claim land in the uninhabited area (Skidmore 228). However, the policy backfired because the Anglo squatters became a dominant majority who increasingly ignored the dictates of a far-away Mexican government. Also in this era, the US and Mexican governments relocated thousands of Indian tribes to the region, settling them on nearly uninhabitable land, in an effort isolate them from large concentrated population centers. Anglos, Mexicans, and Indians struggled to co-habitat in the region. In 1835, Texas declared its independence from Mexico and the US annexed the state ten years later, acts that Mexico considered to be an invasion of sovereign territory. Shortly thereafter, the Mexican American War broke out in 1846

(Skidmore 228). By 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had solidified the national— but not the cultural—geography of the borderlands which, as this brief background illustrates, has been a contested site where people from different cultures have historically claimed borderland spaces.

The literary paradigm of geopoetics emerges not only in relation to the historical antecedents of the borderlands, but also from the critical work of and in response to the scholarship of Américo Paredes and Cecil Robinson, co-founders of border studies in the late 1950s.<sup>3</sup> While acknowledging the contributions of these individuals, this volume moves beyond their critical work on several levels. Paredes and Robinson most popular studies, With a Pistol in His Hand (1958) and With the Ears of Strangers (1963), argue that the culture of the borderlands must necessarily include Mexican and Anglo influence. Appropriate as this argument continues to be, it overlooks the contributions of other minorities in the region, most notably that of Border Indians. To correct this omission, I include in this study Almanac of the Dead by Silko, a Laguna Indian, and Pilgrims in Aztlán by Méndez, a Mexican Indian, as well as literature by non-natives about Indians such as Ramona by Jackson. I also assess writing by Anglos, Chicanos, Mexicans, Mexican Indians, and Hispanics in order to be as inclusive as possible of the many hybrid cultures in the borderlands.<sup>4</sup> Among these authors is Paredes himself, writing as a novelist rather than a folklorist, in the relatively unknown bildungsroman novel titled, George Washington Gómez.

This study also challenges a notion set forth by Paredes and Robinson that the borderlands and its culture are situated in a well-defined “third country” sandwiched between the US and Mexico.<sup>5</sup> I define the borderlands more broadly to include the fringe area of the southwestern US and northern Mexico that extends the length of the 2,000



mile geopolitical border as well as ethnic enclaves that exist in cities geographically removed from the border, such as Los Angeles or La Paz. What is significant in this expanded view of the borderlands is that this definition is based on the premise, contrary to Paredes's and Robinson's work, that culture is not limited to nationally defined territory, a notion confirmed by some anthropologists and affirmed in border writing. Because people move constantly to acquire resources, interact with other groups, create new alliances, or claim new spaces, for example, anthropologists like Michael Kearney and James Clifford aver that culture cannot be confined to a single, coherent, isolated area.

The literature too suggests that borderland culture may be identified in locations far from the supposed "third country" along the border. In Pocho, for instance, protagonist Richard Rubio is steeped in border culture in Santa Clara, California, a town in which Villarreal depicts many overt "examples" of culture—pachuco gangs; Mexican festivals. In addition, works like Barrio Boy and George Washington Gómez illustrate migration and movement of people that Kearney and Clifford argue reconfigures the spaces of culture in literature that shows Mexicans fleeing the hardships of the Mexican Revolution. Culture has become increasingly deterritorialized through modern processes of transnationalism, migration, technology and communication in a world where "people, capital, commodities, driven by global political-economic forces, do not stop at national borders" (Clifford 330). This fact is highlighted in Silko's rendering of the US-Mexico border as porous and permeable membrane across which Latin American refugees travel in Almanac of the Dead. In addition to the arguments already presented, I reject the term "third country" because it bespeaks of nationhood and nation-states, characteristics notably absent in a borderlands. None of the literature of this region, for example, depicts

a central government or political leader governing the borderlands. Thus, this study expands Paredes's and Robinson's idea that border culture is limited exclusively to a "third country" along the border.

Finally, this volume re-defines Paredes's and Robinson's assumption of culture as more heterogeneous than homogeneous. Their work, for instance, does not address how borderland fiction depicts US culture as often fragmented into multifaceted discourses, a point underscored by the variety of ethnic labels that identify American citizens of Mexican decent. The border literature I study is replete with such examples: Villarreal describes characters as "pachucos/as," "pochos/as," and "Mexican American" and Galarza uses terms like "Chicanos/as," "*mestizos/as*," and "Hispanics." Such labels represent people with different, even competing, discourses yet who are simultaneously considered part of US culture based on citizenship or as residents, temporarily or permanently, in Mexico. In *Pilgrims in Aztlán*, Méndez includes numerous illustrations of the way that people's lives counter the simplification of culture as homogeneous (26, 139, 170). A conversation between father and son demonstrates this notion:

Papá, what are we?

Mexicans, son.

Mexicans and we don't live in Mexico. Are we Americans then?

Yes, my son, we are also Americans.

Then why do the Mexicans call us Pochos and here [the Americans] call us Mexican greasers?" (Méndez 170)

The author also defies the notion of culture as monolithic by labeling himself simultaneously a "Chicano, Mexican Indian, and wetback" (Méndez 2). A similar diffusion of culture is identifiable in the US with labels such as "gringo/a," "North

American,” “Anglo,” “American,” or “EuroAmerican” that represent different experiences among groups of people. Indians offer another example that culture is not homogeneous. Indian culture is not only nuanced by gender and language, but also by tribal affiliations. Silko underscores such differences between tribes in her novel. In one scene, for example, a Marxist rebel urges members of the Hopi, Yaquis, Apache, Plains, Mohawk, and Laguna tribes to subordinate their differences in order to unite for the purpose of reclaiming land.

Moving beyond the early scholars of border studies, this project builds on a theoretical framework that is particularly useful to a study of borderland literature by drawing on terms that facilitate an understanding of the relationship between cultural encounter and geography. In the context of this work, culture is defined as “the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into *contact* with and observes another one . . . . Culture must always be seen as a vehicle or a medium whereby the relationship between groups is *transacted*” (Italics added; Jameson 34). This definition intimates that culture is a fragmented, fluid, and multifaceted entity that spills beyond national borders and, most importantly, is born in relation to otherness. This notion is confirmed in border literature through the theme of migration in Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez in which Mexican families leave their homes and settle permanently in the US. Such travel results in contacts with others that enable the protagonists in these works to identify both Mexican and Anglo cultural practices. Stones for Ibarra provides another example of the way culture is conceptualized in relation to the Other. Only after being immersed in a culture other than her own does Sara Everton gain insight into the way Anglo culture has blinded her to an appreciation of Mexican culture.

Understanding culture as relational is of particular use to a geopoetic examination of borderland narratives when it is made clear through the useful concept of “contact zone,” a term coined by comparative literary theorist Mary Louise Pratt. She defines this zone as a “space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt, Imperial 6). In this conception of space as an area of cultural mixing and competition, she emphasizes the importance of initial contact between peoples traditionally separated from one another. She notes that “cultures were created literally at the moment of colonial contact” and that in borderland zones, the ideologies of colonizing and colonized cultures directly impact one another (Pratt 34). Caballero and Ramona represent the borderlands as a site of initial contact between people in their depiction of the cultural clash between Anglos, Border Indians, and Mexicans following the Mexican American War of 1846-48. In particular, González narrates the effect of cultural contact between the Mexican Mendoza y Soría family and encroaching Anglos, such as Texas politician, Alfred “Red” McLane, and US soldier, Lt. Robert Davis Warrenner in south Texas. Similarly, Jackson portrays southern California as a contact zone through the initial encounters between the Mexican Moreno family, Border Indians like Alessandro and Ramona, and Anglo squatters. These historical romances depict colonial conditions of contact that include descriptions of the impact of the Secularization Act of 1834, Land Act of 1851, and Homestead Act of 1862 on the Mendozas and Morenos, laws that allowed Anglos to usurp land owned and occupied by Mexicans, Hispanics, and Indians. Pratt’s concept of the contact zone provides a vehicle to understand early literature of the borderlands in particular because it addresses the epoch of the border’s origin when territorial changes begat severe cultural

tension. Understanding the setting of these works as a contact zone, a territory of radical imposition of alien culture and resistance to colonial intrusion, bridges together the two elements of geopoetics—a contested division of land and authorial representations of that conflict—to clarify the complex relationships between spatial dynamics, authorial choice of genres, and initial cultural contact among Mexicans, Anglos, and Indians.

José David Saldívar, a theorist of the borderlands, expands Pratt's notion of "contact zone" by redefining the borderlands as a "transfrontera contact zone." In Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies (1997), he explains: "This zone is the social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geographically forced to separate themselves now *negotiate with one another to manufacture new relations*, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (Italics added; 13-14). Such negotiation is illustrated by the stormy affair of an Anglo governess and macho Mexican general in Old Gringo, a romance between a Texas cowboy and the daughter of a Mexican *hacendado* in All the Pretty Horses, or the marriages joining Mexican women and Anglo men in Caballero. For instance, Fuentes illustrates the "manufacture of new relations" in Old Gringo. Immersed in a culture that she is unfamiliar with, Harriet slowly recognizes her paternalistic treatment of Mexican people when her efforts to "civilize" the children backfire as when she gets mad at school children for supposedly stealing pearls although, in reality, the kids take the necklace to adorn the Virgin Mary during a saint's feast day. Harriet's love affair with Arroyo also gradually convinces her that she knows too little about Mexican culture to try to "improve" it. She ultimately "manufactures new relationships" with the Mexicans around her, particularly Arroyo, recognizing that she is no longer teacher but the one being taught. Thus, Harriet re-shapes her relationship to the Other according to Saldívar's

definition of a transfrontera contact zone. She recognizes her difference from Mexican identity but also comes to temporarily incorporate elements of that culture into her ideology and behavior. However, she does not experience an actual lasting change in identity, a notion illustrated by the next concept salient to this study, cultural hybridity.

Drawing on Edward Said's ideology of difference, post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha describes cultural hybridity as a process that emerges from the interaction between the colonized and colonizer in which a subject adopts and thus displaces the hegemonic discourse(s) of a dominant culture.<sup>6</sup> Because colonized subjects mimic but can never identically replicate the mores of a dominant culture, they produce new, hybridized identities that ultimately challenge the hegemony of the subjugating society. In this framework, Bhabha notes that border zones are particularly fecund regions for cultural hybridities because they are transitional, provisional spaces that offer "the negotiation of incommensurable differences" among divergent cultures (Location 218). He writes of all international borders:

These 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. . . . The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (italics in original; Bhabha, Location 2)

Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez offer examples of authors developing environs and characters that cultivate hybridity in which difference is codified at the US-Mexico border in accordance with Bhabha's theories. In these Hispanic bildungsromans, the protagonists struggle to "articulate a strategy of selfhood" as they negotiate, collaborate, and contest the hegemonic influence of Anglo culture that threatens to negate their individuality or devalue their Mexican heritage. Ultimately, Richard, Ernesto, and George re-define their relationship with society permanently by acculturating, assimilating, or transculturating, thus demonstrating varying degrees of cultural hybridity as understood by Bhabha.<sup>7</sup>

Anzaldúa's definition of cultural hybridity is also useful to this project because, unlike Bhabha, she addresses the US-Mexico borderlands in particular. She develops the term "cultural hybridity" through her borderland experience with the process of *mestizaje*. In The Borderlands/La Frontera (1987), she writes:

It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element that is greater than the sum of its severed parts. The third element is a new consciousness—a mestiza consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (Anzaldúa 79-80)

Anzaldúa illustrates cultural hybridity by describing how a "tolerance for ambiguity" enables the confluence of her Mexican, Chicana, and Native heritage to synthesize in the fluid, improvisational space offered within the US-Mexico borderlands (79-80).<sup>8</sup>

*Mestizaje* is a particularly salient theme in Almanac of the Dead (1991). In this epic

novel, Silko depicts the US-Mexico borderlands as a site where individuals from multiple cultures—among many others, Clinton, an African American Indian; Sterling, a Laguna Indian; Angela, a Mexican Indian—come together to create a social milieu characterized by the hybridization of language, identity, and culture. This confluence of “mestizo/a consciousness” enables some of the differences that alienate characters from each other to be overcome so they may work together to build a borderland utopia.

Interpretation of border narratives as geopoetic representations facilitates an understanding of the many ways that artistic renderings of space and place inform the various ways characters react to cultural encounter and the resultant adaptation or reassessment of identity that grows out of their borderland experiences with otherness. Each chapter of this study offers a close analysis of space and its impact on character definition in various works of border literature that emerge from different literary traditions closely connected to the politics of the borderlands in its evolution over more than a century. The first chapter, “Claiming Space: Domestic Places, National Divides” explores the ways that historical romance centers on place as a symbol of cultural tradition and security in Jackson’s Ramona: A Novel (1884), Ruiz de Burton’s The Squatter and the Don (1885) and González’s Caballero: A Historical Novel (1996). The thesis of this chapter is that these authors use the absolutist conventions of historical romance—well-defined roles of hero and villain or clear-cut forces of good versus evil—to articulate the inflexible Anglo/Mexican divide of the newly created US-Mexican border in the domestic spaces of haciendas. The Alamar ranch in The Squatter and the Don represents open land ripe for westward expansion from the perspective of Anglo squatters. Caballero depicts Rancho de la Palma as a pure Mexican site from the perspective of Don Santiago, who challenges Anglo encroachment on his land. The



writers offer little if any neutral ground in these novels. Space, place, and poetics come together in these early border novels to undermine the once culturally stable geography and call into question the validity of nationality and identity in a territory of contested politics. Ultimately, the heroes in these novels become those who can bridge the Anglo/Mexican divide by negotiating cultural difference to “claim space” for themselves within the bifurcated spaces of the novels.

This chapter further demonstrates that The Squatter and the Don and Caballero are incomplete representations of border experience because they omit the role of Border Indians and female claims on land, salient themes in Ramona. Jackson represents space in an absolutist sense as does Ruiz de Burton and González: in Ramona, the Moreno ranch becomes a symbol of Mexican space because of Señora Moreno’s embrace of a Spanish heritage and Catholic faith. However, Jackson’s portrayal of Alessandro’s and Ramona’s disenfranchisement and dispossession of land complicates a bivalent representation of the nascent borderlands solely as a site of Anglo/Mexican conflict. Furthermore, Ramona decenters the male-male relations prevalent in The Squatter and the Don and Caballero by highlighting the agency of female characters like Señora Moreno, who battles Anglo squatters to preserve what is left of her dwindling estate. Exploring the geopoetics of historical romance and the conflicts and characters shaped by historically determined place affirms the important role of Ramona among other early border narratives.

“Moving in Space: Southern Journeys of Transformation” transitions from novels depicting the formation of the US-Mexico border in the mid-nineteenth century to events set during and following the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. Doerr’s Stones for Ibarra (1978), Fuentes’s Old Gringo [Gringo viejo] (1985), and McCarthy’s All the Pretty Horses (1992) emerge from literary traditions—travel writing and the Western novel—

that share a “colonial legacy.” I use this term to refer generally to accounts in which a white English-speaking traveler, whether an *exploratrice sociale* or an American cowboy, imposes her/his values on the Other.<sup>9</sup> The central argument of this chapter is that Fuentes, Doerr, and McCarthy weight their Anglo characters with a colonial legacy that precludes them, in varying degrees, from perceiving spaces and places in Mexico as do the native inhabitants; instead, Anglos try unsuccessfully to reshape their environs according to their own values. In Stones for Ibarra, for example, Sara Everton initially sees the countryside and the central plaza as devoid of human life even though there are Mexicans all around her. She also tries to encourage women’s suffrage in Ibarra when voting is moot—a point literally inscribed in the space of a hillside overlooking the village, where the ruling political party has constructed a sign informing the village of the name of the next president of Mexico. In Old Gringo, Harriet is insensitive to her surroundings. She interprets the Mexican Revolution as a “misguided” effort at reform and advocates social change through education rather than violence, trying to swap rifles for the reading, writing, and arithmetic that she teaches in school. She also fails to see the significance of the ballroom mirrors in the Miranda hacienda, a site representing class oppression to the Mexican revolutionaries, until General Arroyo points out the way they figuratively and literally reflect her white privilege.

Geopoetics provide the authors of Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo with a different colonial legacy in which their female protagonists initially refuse to recognize but which later affects their responses to otherness. I argue that Harriet and Sara are ultimately able to empathize with members of another culture because their role as women is less engaged in the explicit conquest of Mexico. In contrast, John Grady Cole’s role in the colonial drama is more active and violent in All the Pretty Horses than his

female counterparts, and as a result, he is unable to appreciate or absorb any of the values of Mexican culture. Drawing on the conventions of the western novel, McCarthy makes Cole a good cowboy wherever he is—he can tame mustangs equally well in Texas or Coahuila. His skills translate well in Mexico, but his understanding of cultural values does not. He crosses the border into Mexico like a “marauder” conquering new territory and attempts to live the American mythos of westward expansion in the “empty” space in Mexico as represented by a “blank” map of the region. Thus, geopoetics in All the Pretty Horses is represented in McCarthy’s revisionist western approach to the ideological differences in US and Mexican culture; as a result, the novel functions as an American confessional of a colonial legacy, a drama enacted by a cowboy who is ultimately driven out of Mexico.

In “Making Space: Northern Migrations in the Hispanic Bildungsroman,” I turn the gaze north of the border to discuss Villarreal’s Pocho (1959), Galarza’s Barrio Boy (1971), and Paredes’s George Washington Gómez (1990). Geopoetics in these texts center on the spaces of home and school to illustrate the ways Mexican and Hispanic characters adapt to permanent residence in the US. These bildungsroman texts portray places of protagonists’ childhood in telling the story of their maturation to adulthood. Pocho is an autobiographical novel that tells us that where one is born makes a difference: Mexican father, Juan Rubio, is not able to adapt to life in the US while American-born son, Richard, does so. Juan’s strong attachment to the Mexican homeland cause him to reject and isolate himself from Anglo culture. He re-creates a mini-Mexico in the spaces around him by hosting, for example, fiestas for Mexican migrants on his property. In contrast, Richard alternates between the Mexican spaces that his father cultivates and an outside, public world of Americanism in school and in his

neighborhood. This causes a troubled liminal period from which the youth ultimately achieves a rite of passage; he transculturates by “making space” for himself as a pocho and writer in the US. The construction of space is more explicit in Barrio Boy. Galarza celebrates the communal spaces in his native Jalcoctán, the diversity in various US barrios, and the respect for ethnic heritage encouraged in public schools. This autobiographical work shapes such environs in a way that affords Ernesto an opportunity to painlessly adapt to American life. George Washington Gómez, a bildungsroman novel, counterpoints the private spaces of home to the public spaces of school. The protagonist develops a “checker-board consciousness” alternating between loyalty to his Mexican heritage and his American citizenship as a way to cope with cultural encounter. Ultimately, the significance of these private and public spaces clash and cause George to assimilate into Anglo culture, a transition facilitated by his Anglo features. Geography in Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez informs the way the authors’ determine characters’ adaptations to permanent life in the US; each writer focuses on the places and spaces of their transitions to create intimate coming of age portraits for youthful Hispanic protagonists.

“Reclaiming Space: Dystopias and Utopias in the Borderlands,” is an exploration of Méndez’s Pilgrims in Aztlán (1974) and Silko’s Almanac of the Dead (1991) which call for the dismantlement of the US-Mexico border created a century and a half earlier. Writing from a tradition of utopian literature, Méndez and Silko offer cautionary tales that depict border cities like Tijuana and Tucson as amoral dystopias in which members of capitalistic society squelch anyone inhibiting their quest for endless profit or self-gratification. Méndez illustrates this by personifying the “Republic of the Despised” in which the border city of Tijuana speaks a “language of business” from which the poor are

excluded and thereby disenfranchised. The power of the wealthy accrues unabated on both sides of the border forcing the impoverished to migrate between the US and Mexico in search of their own space, a place with ample food and water and where their voices are not muted. However, they journey to the Sonoran and Yuma deserts of the borderlands only to find that the natural landscape has turned on them as well: the sand, bush, and cacti prevent the migrants from reaching the utopic mirage of Aztlán, Méndez's allusion to the Chicano homeland from *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969-charter of the Chicano Movement).

In this chapter, Silko's portrayal of space is similar to Méndez's: the borderlands in Almanac of the Dead are a chaotic wild zone where "destroyers" barricade themselves from others by building "closed systems" to protect their possessions and *sangre pura*. From this dystopia, Silko offers a glimpse of "One World, Many Tribes" as Native characters and their allies work together in the spirit of mestizo/a consciousness to reclaim sacred Indian lands stolen by the US government. In this chapter, geography and the utopian literary tradition provide readers with a warning about borders—ethnic, geographic, linguistic, and otherwise—that inhibit the creation of utopias. The evil that characterizes the borderlands at the end of the twentieth century generates a literature of chaos where cultural conflict is subordinated to issues of self-indulgence, economic ruthlessness, and personal depravity.

The conclusion of this study, "Geopoetic Representations in the Twenty-first Century," draws together the ways that geopoetics operate in the literature of the borderlands over time. I compare geopoetic representations of space between early border literature and more recent writing to study the evolution of contact and conflict evoked by artistic renderings of the borderlands since the imposition of the US-Mexico border. The

chapter particularly queries how writers expose character identity as the product of geographic location and human interaction or how authors define ethnicity in a text relative to a character's positionality in a contested landscape and among multiple cultures. I inquire how the binary construction of space which dominates historical romances such as that of Ruiz de Burton is similar to the seemingly rigid, exclusionary borders of destroyers' closed-systems that characterize Silko's post-modern work. Further, I question how the geopoetics of Mexicans adapting to US culture within the Hispanic bildungsroman tradition in a work like Pocho is different from a writer's construction of space in a coming of age tale for an Anglo cowboy, as occurs in All the Pretty Horses. I answer these questions by arguing that borders, in their myriad representations, are important foci and that geopoetics is a valuable model for studying cultural contact in literary works set in other borderland regions.

Clifford writes, "We need to conjure with new locations, such as the 'border.' A specific place of hybridity and struggle, policing and transgression . . . the border experience is made to produce powerful political visions: a subversion of binarisms, the projection of a 'multicultural public sphere'" (37). Similarly, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo writes, "borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation" (208). These and other authors support not only the value of analyzing US-Mexico border literature but of searching for equally unique expressions of cultural contact generated by other border zones.

This study provides the most comprehensive examination of borderland narratives to date. It offers an interpretation of borderland literature since the inception of the US-Mexico border approximately 150 years ago, keeping the focus on that primary agent of

ideological difference—the geopolitical border. This project further takes advantage of newly published works such as Caballero (1996) and George Washington Gómez (1990), both written in the 1930s but recently recovered. It also includes literature by male and female writers of Mexican, Anglo, and Indian ethnicity in a variety of genres. In an effort to move past the foundations set by Paredes and Robinson, pioneers whose work is now dated, this study also combines the nascent field of border theory with the existing contributions from post-colonial and anthropological theory.<sup>10</sup> What ultimately emerges from this concentrated engagement with border writers is a model that offers insight into the ways words and space combine and recombine over time to create geopoetic representations of the borderlands as a site where places and cultures continue to generate powerful narrative.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The editors of Critical Inquiry (Winter 2000) recently coined the term “geopoetics” as “the way geography, memory, and politics intersect in a globalized world” [www.uchicago.edu/research/jnl-crit-inq/main.html (31 Jan 2000)]. According to Chambers Dictionary of Etymology (1988), “geo” means “earth” from the Greek word “*ge*” (428). “Poetics,” traced through the root word “poetry,” refers to “creative literature” and is derived from the Latin word “*poetria*” and Greek word “*poietria*” (811).
- <sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of the events of the Mexican American War, see the following sources: Enrique Krauze’s Mexico: A Biography of Power (1997), John S.D. Eisenhower’s So Far From God (1989), Ramón Alcáraz’s et al. Apuntes para la historia de la guerra entre México y los Estados Unidos (1977), and Thomas E. Skidmore’s Modern Latin America (1984). For an overview of the role of US and Mexican Indians in the nineteenth century, see Edward Spicer’s Cycles of Conquest (1981) Oscar J. Martínez’s Troublesome Border (1988) (especially the chapter titled, “Border Indians).
- <sup>3</sup> For biographical information on Paredes, see Richard Bauman’s introduction in Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border (1993) and Chicano Literature: A Reference Guide (1985). Biographical information on Robinson is less easy to find. For a brief overview of his life and work, see the forward and introduction to No Short Journeys: The Interplay of Cultures in the History and Literature of the Borderlands (1992).
- <sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this project, I will use the label that an individual chooses to self-identify to the greatest extent possible. According to my research, González does not specify a label for herself and therefore I refer to her as “Hispanic.” Ruiz de Burton was



born in Mexico but she became a refugee after the Mexican American War and moved to the US as a North American citizen. However, according to archival work by Aranda, Ruiz de Burton self-identifies as Mexican, the label I have adopted for her (562).

<sup>5</sup> Robinson refers to the borderlands a “third culture,” a fusion of Mexican and American traditions, in No Short Journeys (1992) (129). Although Paredes did not use the term verbatim, his scholarship laid the foundation for this concept by constantly re-emphasizing the binary nature of the region as a site where “two” cultures meet. For example, in the introduction to With his Pistol in his Hand, Paredes repeatedly emphasizes the importance of viewing the region as the zero sum gain of two severed parts “half in Mexico” and “half in the US” (n.p.). Similarly, he begins one of his better known essays, “The Problem of Identity in a Changing Culture” with a binary model: “If we view a border not simply as a line on a map but, more fundamentally, as a sensitized area where two cultures or two political systems come face to face, then the first border between English-speaking people from the US and people of Mexican culture was in the eastern part of what was now Texas” (20). Contemporary ethnographers such as Tom Miller in On the Border: Portraits of America’s Southwestern Frontier (1981) and Alan Weisman in La Frontera. The US Border with Mexico (1986) use “third country” to denote the borderlands.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (1994) and Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978).

<sup>7</sup> Acculturation implies that characters morph into a hybrid identity by borrowing elements from many cultures. This term is dated and has since been replaced by the notion of transculturation coined in 1940 by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortíz (Pratt 228;

Saldívar 204). According to Pratt, transculturation is an ethnographic term used to describe “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (6).

<sup>8</sup> As this example with Anzaldúa shows, I will identify authors using the labels they have chosen to represent themselves throughout this project. When authors do not self-identify, I will use the following labels for the purpose of consistency: “Mexican Indian” to refer to indigenous people such as the Yaqui of Sonora who reside in Mexico; “US Indian” to identify tribes such as the Apaches or Papago living in the US; “Border Indians” to refer to Mexican Indians and US Indians; and “Indians” to describe all pre-contact inhabitants of the Americas. Additionally, I label a US citizen of Mexican or Spanish decent “Hispanic.” Finally, I use the term “Anglo” to refer to North Americans of European ancestry. For information on the power and problems of labeling groups of individuals, see Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the US (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Pratt defines “*exploratice sociale*” in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1995), a global study of travel writing in which she assesses the narratives of Europeans who lived in Latin America in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Among these travel writers were “*exploratrices sociales*” [“social exploratresses”] such as Flora Tristan, who lived in Peru from 1833 to 1834 and Maria Graham Callott, who lived in Chile in 1822. Pratt identifies the *exploratrices sociales* as predominantly urban, white middle-class women on a civilizing mission in which they impose their own values on another culture (Pratt 160). While abroad, the *exploratrices sociales* assume it is their duty to perform charity work, such as visiting prisons,

orphanages, and hospitals. Their writing contains suggestions for pragmatic reform and political change in what they believe to be altruistic behavior. I address the application of this term to Old Gringo and Stones for Ibarra in chapter two of this study.

<sup>10</sup> Clifford testifies to the nascent status of border studies, explaining that “the US/Mexico frontier has recently attained ‘theoretical’ status, thanks to the work of Chicano/a writers, activists, and scholars: Américo Paredes, Renato Rosaldo, Teresa McKenna, José David Saldívar, Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Emily Hicks, and the Border Arts Project of San Diego/Tijuana” (37). Clifford’s assertion is backed by the growing number of publications dedicated exclusively to border theory such as Scott Michaelsen/David Johnson’s Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics (1997), D. Emily Hick’s Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text (1991), and as discussed, Saldívar’s Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies (1997).

## CHAPTER 1

### CLAIMING SPACE: DOMESTIC PLACES, NATIONAL DIVIDES

Character responses to cultural encounter arise out of the relationship between genre and geography as is illustrated in Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona: A Novel (1884), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's The Squatter and the Don (1885), and Jovita González's Caballero: A Historical Novel (1996).<sup>1</sup> These authors use formulaic conventions of historical romance to articulate the inflexible bivalency of the newly created US-Mexican border—an Anglo/Mexican divide. Examining occupation and displacement of the land, Jackson, Ruiz de Burton, and González shape domestic spheres into spaces claimed as either Anglo or Mexican but excluding claimants of Indian descent. The writers offer little if any neutral ground in these novels as Anglo, Mexican, and Border Indian characters battle to retain or acquire possession of land. Spatial displacement and romance quest come together in these early border fictions to call into question the validity of nationality and identity in territory contested by the US and Mexico. Ultimately, the heroes and heroines of these works are those characters who try to claim space for themselves in a world bifurcated by the US-Mexico border. In Ramona, Alessandro and Ramona, abused protagonists who vivify Jackson's call to reform US land legislation that dispossess Indians, unsuccessfully attempt to own and occupy US land. Mercedes and Clarence in The Squatter and the Don as well as Susanita and Robert in Caballero build homes and request entrance into both the Mexican and Anglo communities, showing Ruiz de Burton's and González's allegory of US nation building through the unions of a Mexican woman and Anglo man.

Ramona, The Squatter and the Don, and Caballero represent spatial dynamics through conventions of historical romance, a genre that hybridizes the romance novel and

historical novel.<sup>2</sup> These novels render space using a dialectical structure of absolute polarity between good and evil, hero and villain. For instance, aggressive, greedy Anglo squatters threaten to evict the stately Don Mariano from land that he and his ancestors have occupied for decades in The Squatter and the Don. In all of these border narratives, the artistic expression of place creates obstacles to the heroes and heroines. But ultimately, the romance quest is achieved through inter-cultural marriages among Mexicans, Anglos, and Indians.

Attention to geopoetics in these narratives articulates a romance literary tradition in which domestic spaces have always been important topographical sites, particularly in the genteel tradition of the novel written by women and for women in the nineteenth century (Kelly 1126-7). Domestic spheres are often the foci of the romantic novel as a site where a character seeks protection from a hostile outside world. According to this formulaic, the outside world intrudes into the private sphere of the home “destroying the domestic affections and dividing families or driving them into some kind of exile” (Kelly 1128). In each of the works under consideration, the domestic site literally takes primacy above other settings in the novels. Over half of Ramona and The Squatter and the Don is set in Señora Moreno’s and Don Alamar’s ranch, respectively, and almost the entire plot of Caballero is set in Don Santiago’s hacienda. All three novels portray an Anglo world invading the private spheres of Mexicans and Indians at a time when white westward expansion flooded the nascent borderlands in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Jackson, Ruiz de Burton, and González also use elements of the historical novel in their rendering of space and place. The historical novel places emphasis on antiquarianism by attempting to capture “authentic” details or the “common place” as illustrated by Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley novels (1814-1840) or James Fenimore

Cooper's Leather Stocking Tales (1823-1826). The author of Caballero, for example, states in the introduction that her objective is to provide a "correct and exact atmosphere of the people and the period it deals with" and subsequently apologizes for the stilted and artificial style of dialogue in the text (n.p.). The historical novel also represents past events in a way that inherently calls attention to geography because history in the Western tradition is contextualized by location—the past generally happens at a specific geographical site. This point is salient to an exploration of authorial choices regarding place and space. For example, in Mexico, Heriberto Frías's Tomochic (1893) is a historical novel whose title reveals the importance of geography as the author reconstructs the Mexican Army's attack on the Indian village of Tomochic.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the authors of Ramona, The Squatter and the Don, and Caballero employ the aforementioned emphasis on geography during an historical era characterized by tensions over the acquisition of land, money, and power. The setting of these texts employs historical events ranging from the early 1830s to 1880s. This was a period of immense change in the US that included the acquisition of over half of Mexico's northern territory as well as the US Civil War from 1860-65 that radically polarized the nation.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the historical context of the books includes the creation of the US-Mexico border vis-à-vis the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the Mexican American War. Historical material also includes US land laws enacted after the war, such as the Land Act of 1851 and Homestead Act of 1862, which favored Anglo settlement in the contested region of the nascent borderlands.

While all three authors draw heavily on such historical context, Jackson draws particular attention to US land legislation that affected Indian property rights, such as the Secularization Act of 1834 that dispossessed Mission Indians from their homelands in the

American Southwest. Exploring geography and genre in Ramona elucidates the way that Jackson inscribes space as a binary configuration of Anglo or Mexican influence in the domestic spheres of the Moreno hacienda, Alessandro's and Ramona's temporary homes, and in Felipe and Ramona's Mexican retreat. Genre conventions and historical fact combine to create a portrayal of the newly created US-Mexico borderlands that, according to the author, affords no place for Border Indians. Jackson's novel thus calls for reform of US policy that institutionalized injustice against Indians by legitimizing Anglo usurpation of their land, a cause that Jackson pursued in her life and work.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ramona: A Novel**

Ramona takes place in southern California, the twilight era of *Californios'* rule, around the 1880s. From the opening pages, Jackson sets up an antagonistic relationship between Anglos and Mexicans indicating that the competition over dwindling amount of land open for settlement underlines the conflict. This is especially evident in her depiction of the land holdings of Señora Moreno, an elderly Mexican woman who was once part of the powerful landed elite that constituted the ruling *Californio* class:

When the house was built, General Moreno owned all the land within a radius of forty miles . . . . It might be asked, perhaps, just how General Moreno owned all this land, and the question might not be easy to answer. It was not and could not be answered by the US Land Commission, which, after the surrender of California undertook to sift and adjust Mexican land titles; and that was the way it had come about that the Señora Moreno now called herself a poor woman. Tract after tract, her lands had been taken away from her . . . No wonder she believed the Americans thieves, and spoke of them as hounds. The people of the US have

never in the least realized that the taking of possession of California was not only a conquering of Mexico, but a conquering of California as well. (Jackson 12)

The authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator makes clear early in the novel that the villains of the romance include Anglo “thieves” and “hounds” who steal land from the Morenos “tract by tract,” and US land laws that legitimate such dispossession by favoring Anglo squatters. This passage foregrounds the prevalent spatial relations in the novel as a battleground between Anglos and Mexicans that excludes Border Indians like the hero and heroine, Ramona and Alessandro.

The author reminds us that competition for land fails to recognize a shared victimization and oppression between *Californios* and Border Indians, both groups increasingly marginalized by Anglo domination. Jackson’s intention is to demonstrate the dispossession of Indians who are unable to claim land in the US on which to settle. Historically, treaties signed by the US government and Mission Indians illustrate Border Indians’ dispossession. A treaty with the Luiseño tribe (to which Alessandro belongs in Ramona) declared “indigenous lands public domain” ready for Anglo settlement (Haas 58) thereby ignoring the fact that Natives had inhabited this land centuries. This phenomenon is especially evident in Jackson’s depiction of Alessandro’s father’s loss of village property in Temecula.<sup>6</sup>

Jackson represents the Moreno ranch in a way that borrows from such historical background to accentuate the “us/them” dynamic between the Anglo and Mexican communities and to dismiss the property rights of Indians. The absolutist conventions of the romance novel favors neatly delineated forces that either help or hinder the romance quest. This combination of geography and poetics renders the Moreno ranch as a symbol of the *Californios*’ once-powerful presence in the region; figuratively, the domicile



forbears Anglo expansion by privileging Mexican heritage exclusively. Jackson accomplishes this on one account by personifying the *rancho* as an icon of Mexican defiance to Anglo encroachment. When the US Land Commission builds a road running behind Señora Moreno's home (in stead of in front), she is pleased that the Anglos never have the satisfaction of looking at her front door. The house figuratively turns its back on US westward expansion:

Whenever she saw, passing the place, wagons and carriages belong to the hated Americans, it gave her a distinct thrill of pleasure to think that the house turned its back on them. She would like to always be able to do the same herself; but whatever she, by policy or in business, might be forced to do, the old house, at any rate, would always keep the attitude of contempt—its face turned away.

(Jackson 13)

Even if Señora Moreno is unable to continue resisting Anglo encroachment, the house will do so through its "attitude of contempt" toward the westward migrants. In this expression of space, the road becomes a synecdoche for the border itself, metaphorically placing the Moreno home in Mexican territory. Anglo settlers become wayfarers who must travel further to find land on which to settle because they are not welcome in the Mexican space that comprises the Moreno estate. This interpretation is reinforced in the fact that no Anglos enter the Moreno home at any point in the narrative. In addition, Jackson represents the Moreno estate as a place signifying exclusive Mexicanness through her inclusion of details of a traditional hacienda conveyed through lengthy descriptions of the floor plan and layout.

The *rancho* also represents a space that privileges Roman Catholicism. Engaging elements of the romance novel that call for clearly articulated and unambiguous

conventions, Jackson builds the Moreno estate as “one of the last sure strongholds of the Catholic faith left in the country” (Jackson 37). Among the many examples of this, the Señora has erected enormous white crosses on every hill of her property as a sign that “heretics” should convert to Catholicism (Jackson 14). She also fills each room of the hacienda with religious statues rescued years ago from the San Luis Rey Mission when it was occupied by US troops (Jackson 17). Finally, the matriarch continues practicing *El Alabado*, the sunrise hymn of her ancestors sung by “all devout Mexican families” (Jackson 47). Roman Catholicism figures into Jackson’s construction of border spaces by affirming the Moreno estate as a space that honors the national religion of Mexico.

Threatened outside this domestic sphere by a world that condones usurpation of Mexican lands, Señora Moreno uses the one domain over which she has control to preserve values and practices of Mexican culture that would otherwise be consumed by Anglo culture. Her exercise of authority in the home offers an example of *hembrismo*, the female counterpart of *machismo* that privileges women with power in some Hispanic traditions. Jackson’s characterization of the Señora projects her as a strong willed and stubborn female figure. She is unafraid of engaging in the battle with men over a division of land. Further, she clings tenaciously to fading tendrils of power rooted in this Mexican tradition by cultivating a machiavellian and manipulative ability to make people do what she wants without them knowing, a classic technique of *hembrismo*. For instance, the Señora makes most of the financial decisions on the estate while making her son, Felipe, think that he does (Jackson 11). In one scene, the Señora uses the power of suggestion on him to defer sheep shearing several weeks until the arrival of Father Salvierderra. In another, the matriarch manipulates Felipe into believing that Ramona is disobedient and willful when she tries to learn more about her biological mother.

Jackson uses *hembrismo*, again engaging elements of the romance tradition, to characterize the Señora as absolutely uncompromising: from the Mexican woman's perspective, the battle for land is a fight for survival between Mexicans and Anglos. The more life and land that Anglos take from Señora Moreno, the more passionately she identifies with Mexico. The Señora is driven by a litany of losses—the death of her husband in battle against Anglos, dwindling acreage on the estate, and the Catholic Church's loss of land—that cause her to internalize the Mexican/Anglo battle for land. Jackson writes, "Through wars, insurrections, revolutions, downfalls, Spanish, Mexican, civil, ecclesiastical, her standpoint, her poise, remained the same. She simply grew more and more proudly, passionately, a Spaniard and a Moreno; more and more staunchly and fiercely a Catholic, and a lover of the Franciscans" (21).

There are no challenges to Señora Moreno's domestic sphere of power as long as Ramona and Alessandro fit into the symbolism of the home by privileging Spanish heritage and Catholic practices. Prior to falling in love, the heroine and hero are seemingly ideal occupants because they are devout Roman Catholics. They both speak in religious phraseology ("May the saints bless you"), know all of the religious hymns by heart ("Beautiful Queen"), and are often portrayed on bent knees praying (Jackson 103, 49, 126). By highlighting the devotionals and rituals within the Moreno household, the author makes her predominantly Protestant US readers aware of the Christian tradition they share with Catholics, creating common ground between readers and Indian characters.

Because of their Indian ancestry, however, Ramona and Alessandro are less able to conform to the Señora's staunch adherence to Mexican culture—a loyalty affirmed by the Moreno's pure blood ties to Mexico and Spain. Señora Moreno tries to negate

Ramona's mixed blood heritage (half Indian and half Scottish) by ordering her not to discuss the origins of her biological parents in a sharp exchange that occurs when Ramona is a young child. This suppression of Ramona's Indianness not only makes her feel unloved by Señora Moreno, who repeatedly berates "impure" mixing among races, but also causes Ramona to feel like an outsider in the home. She walks softly in the house and lowers her eyes subserviently, careful never to challenge the Señora, and Ramona offers to clean and sew, roles that position her more as servant than as stepdaughter. All are able to maintain the facade of Ramona's identity as a non-Indian because she can pass as white because of her fair-skin and blue-eyes. Jackson makes Ramona "physically whitened," according to literary critic Davis Luis-Brown, as a way to "invite white readers' identification" (827).

The Señora overlooks Alessandro's Indian heritage by perceiving him as a noble savage rather than base Indian. She does so because of Alessandro's magnanimous conduct that elevates him to the status of gentleman as if he were a member of the upper class. Señora Moreno also overlooks his Indian ethnicity because he is useful—he runs the estate in an efficacious manner that increases her material wealth, and he heals her son Felipe when ill. Señora Moreno is thrilled by Alessandro's contributions and pays him the ultimate "complements" by exclaiming, "[h]ow the boy makes one forget he is an Indian!" and "I never saw an Indian who had such behavior" (Jackson 101, 88).

All is, given the historical circumstances, relatively well in the Moreno home prior to the love affair between Ramona and Alessandro. At that moment, Jackson employs those self-same qualities of *hembrismo* that give Señora Moreno strength of purpose against Anglos to depict her as a villainous step-mother toward Indians. She forbids Alessandro and Ramon's love because it makes visible the hero and heroine's

Indian ancestry and lower class standing. In Señora Moreno's perspective, Alessandro transforms into a base Indian who threatens the pure Spanish lineage of the Moreno and Ortega families because of his race and class. She admits that she loathes the notion of interracial mixing implied by the union of Alessandro and Ramona: "I like not these crosses. It is the worst and not the best of each, that remains" (Jackson 30). Almost in direct contrast to Señora Moreno's earlier "complements," she begins to refer to him in a derogatory tone as "the Indian Alessandro" or "that Indian" (Jackson 131, 150, 129). Additionally, her praise of his gentlemanly behavior changes into a threat to set the dogs on the "beggarly Indian," now a lowly laborer of poor class standing (Jackson 132). Thus Jackson sets up the barrier to marriage that is typical of the romance genre.

The Señora's hatred of miscegenation changes Ramona's status in the home: she is accepted when her identity is white, yet ousted from the house when her mixed blood status is raised due to her love of Alessandro. A pivotal scene involving Ramona's inheritance confirms the virtue of the heroine and the villainy of the Señora as a racist. Their argument reflects Jackson's broader representation of space as racialized along the border because of tensions between Anglo and Mexican communities vying for limited land resources. Within this framework, the Señora cannot accommodate Ramona's Indian heritage and continue to maintain a pristine Mexican space from which to battle Anglos. In the scene, Señora Moreno shows Ramona her inheritance, a dowry of jewels left by her biological father. The matriarch assures the girl that she will not receive a single pearl if she marries the Indian Alessandro. However, the dowry does not tempt virtuous Ramona, who uses the confrontation to find out more information about her real parents. Because these queries make more visible her mixed blood ancestry in a space privileging pure Mexican identity, Señora Moreno treats Ramona like a pariah in the

household. Her “alien position” in the home is defined not only in her newly visible status as part Indian, but as a member of the lower class (Jackson 155); the jewels had represented Ramona’s means to enter the upper class—but she refused them. Ultimately, Ramona and Alessandro flee from the Moreno ranch.

Ramona and Alessandro enter a world that repeats—in extreme—the pattern of space and place that Jackson has heretofore established at the Moreno estate. The insurmountable obstacle—Señora Moreno’s refusal to incorporate them as a couple into the hacienda—that prevents the happiness of the lovers generates the impossible task of finding land on which to settle permanently. Their travels lead them to Temecula, San Pasquale, Saboba, and the San Jacinto Mountains where, at every stop, Anglo settlers force them to a retreat into increasingly remote regions. At these sites, Jackson draws on historical background, a mechanism common to the genre of historical romance, to create a fictionalized account that confirms the geopoetic representation set forth in the novel. Jackson’s rendering of space and use of historical events seek to generate sympathy for the disenfranchisement of Indians through the drama of a popular literary form.

Jackson’s novel continues the themes of Indian disempowerment set forth in the Jackson-Kinney Report and My Century of Dishonor. Critic John R. Byers, Jr. traces the villages in the novel to the Jackson-Kinney Report, written six months before Ramona. He confirms that events in the novel are grounded in the author’s governmental study of the Mission Indians in southern California. He writes, “Alessandro and Ramona are made to represent not simply individuals or even tribes of Indians, but all Indians. In their trials, they become the personification of all the unfortunate wards of the government” (344-5). In addition to the Jackson-Kinney Report, My Century of Dishonor (written three years before Ramona) also testifies to the discrimination of existing land laws against Indians.

That work focuses particularly on “the conflict between Hispanic colonial society and the increasing flow of American immigrants into the area,” a theme reflected in the Mexican/Anglo division of space in the novel (Dorris x). Ramona thus continues the general appeal set forth in Jackson’s earlier non-fiction works; her goal is to raise awareness about Indian dispossession.

Space in Ramona confirms the message that there is no home for Indians on US soil. The novel personalizes and dramatizes this larger problem through Ramona and Alessandro, refugees in a land they consider home.<sup>7</sup> For example, Alessandro is cast as an individual victim trying to escape a massive social movement of Anglo migration. In this incident, Anglos appropriate Temecula, the village that Alessandro’s father governs and, traumatized by the affair, Alessandro’s father dies. Alessandro loses both his father and his rightful inheritance as village leader. To further personalize such loss, Jackson repeatedly depicts Anglos occupying homes formerly owned by Alessandro. Such an expression of space makes literal the author’s larger message that the US is no longer home to Indians. In the search to find their own land, Ramona and Alessandro leave Temecula.

They relocate to San Pasquale. Jackson uses this village as a contrast to the Moreno estate; it is a space of acceptance, empowerment, faith, and prosperity—until Anglos arrive. In San Pasquale, Ramona does not hide her mixed blood ancestry as required in the Moreno household. The Indians acknowledge her ancestry and accept her into the community even as a “racially ambiguous” member (Luis-Brown 827). She has complete control over her the domestic space of her house, a traditional site of female empowerment in the romance novel (Jackson 250). That is to say that Jackson depicts the home as a place over which Ramona is freed from the Señora’s domineering

*hembrismo* that rendered her powerless. The heroine embraces a new found autonomy that takes precedence over material wealth and offers access to a Victorian/late Victorian role of “housekeeper” that is esteemed for women.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Ramona and Alessandro’s home is that Jackson represents their bedroom with unmistakable connections to Eve and Adam’s bower in the Garden of Eden. Jackson writes, “The Madonna shrine in its bower of green leaves, the shelves on the walls, the white-curtained window” coupled with wild cucumber plants “which wreathed and re-wreathed,” make the niche “look like a bower” (250-3). The site becomes a “shrine for the whole village” (Jackson 250). Representing Ramona and Alessandro as symbolic edenic figures reflects Jackson’s repeated efforts to appeal to her non-Indian readership. The author posits that an audience might embrace and Indian hero and heroine if they are represented as practitioners of Christian traditions rather than Native spiritualism.

Just when Alessandro and Ramona begin to prosper, the Indians are assailed by Anglos who want to settle in San Pasquale, as Jackson again incorporates the history of the region to depict the usurpation of lands deeded to the San Pasquale Indians. As the hero temporarily waivers in the face of displacement, however, Ramona’s unflagging optimism gives him the courage to “go out into the world again,” so that they can “find a place the Americans do not want” (Jackson 258, 263). Hero and heroine move to Saboba.

Jackson constructs the spaces of Saboba in a way that continues the Mexican-Anglo contest for dwindling land resources to the exclusion of Indians. Experiences in Saboba illustrate how the Indian couple lives too far from white settlement to benefit from medical advances, but too close to Anglos to be free from encroachment. This



spatial relationship shows that the US government only tenuously supports Alessandro and Ramona place in the nation as citizens deserving of full public services. Specifically, their child gets ill in Saboba. The Indian Agent doctor refuses to travel sixty miles to administer medical care and, ultimately, the baby dies. Added to this tragic circumstance, the threat of white encroachment now comes from all sides of the town. Anglos upstream plan to divert the water sources from the town; the Ravallo brothers (who hold the land deed to the town) sell it to a large company; and "white ranchmen" fence off private lands preventing the free running of stock (Jackson 304). With no legal protection, the Indians are driven out of their homes, thus repeating the evictions at Temecula and San Pasquale. In addition to the death of the lovers' baby, Jackson further points out the genocide experienced by the Temecula Indians, writing that the "Temecula Indians had disappeared that was all there was of it" (Jackson 268). The handling of space in the novel intimates that such genocide of Indians will be repeated across the country.

Ramona and Alessandro retreat to the isolated San Jacinto Mountains where they vow to "hide forever" from Anglos (301). The author writes, "There, at least, they could live and die in peace—a poverty-stricken life, and the loneliest of deaths; but they would have each other" (304). There are no descriptions of the home, but instead depictions of the vegetation and geography of the mountain to convey its isolated locale. These naturalist descriptions suggest that the only place available for Ramona and Alessandro is in the wilderness. Jackson thus seems to suggest that noble Indians like Ramona and Alessandro are forced onto land on which they are destined to die. This message is conveyed again through the Christian imagery of Ramona's feelings when she reaches the mountain hideaway:

From this day, Ramona never knew an instant's peace or rest until she stood on the rim of the refuge valley, high on San Jacinto. Then, gazing around, looking up at the lofty pinnacles above, which seemed to pierce the sky, looking down on the world—it seemed the whole world, so limitless is stretched away at her feet—feeling that infinite unspeakable sense of nearness to Heaven, remoteness from earth which comes only on mountain heights, she drew a long breath of delight, and cried, “At last! At last, Alessandro! Here we are safe! This is freedom! This is joy! (309)

In contrast to the rendering of space throughout the novel vis-à-vis land that dwindles and recedes about the Indians, this passage depicts space as boundless, infinite, and expansive on the high mountain plateau. The one place that such space exists for Indians in the world, according to Jackson's vision, is in heaven. That all the Temecula Indians have vanished makes sense in a spatial rendition where they are doomed to extinction if Anglo expansion continues at pace. In this manner, “Ramona takes seriously Indians' struggles for rights in its portrayal of the consequences of Anglo expansion for the Indian Alessandro and his mestiza lover Ramona” (Luis-Brown 822). Through the death of the hero, Jackson reinforces the tragic consequences of failing to reform the unjust treatment of Indians. Alessandro, already driven crazy from the life of a refugee, is killed on these mountains in a violent exchange of gunfire with an Anglo.

The death of the hero in the romance is highly significant because it proves the point Jackson has advocated over the course of the novel: there is no US land available for Indian settlement. With Alessandro's death, Jackson radically shifts geographical perspectives in the novel by turning to Mexico as Ramona's place of refuge. Felipe reappears in the narrative to rescue the now bereft heroine. He declares his love, he

marries Ramona, and they retreat to Mexico. Felipe becomes the mouthpiece vocalizing the shared oppression of *Californios* and Indians in the end of the novel, a point that his mother refused to acknowledge in the opening pages. He is thus a counterpart to the Indian characters in that he too feels unwelcome in the US nation. He senses there is no place for him as he grows “more and more alone in the country” as “[l]ife under the new government grew more and more intolerable to him” (Jackson 359). Crossing the US-Mexico border confirms that no more land will be “legally” stolen from the Moreno estate vis-à-vis unjust American land laws.

Cuban writer and nationalist José Martí acknowledges such shared victimization in labeling Ramona a *mestiza* to include both Mexican and Indian ancestry. In his introduction to his 1888-translation of Ramona, Martí praises the novel for its political significance in depicting the discrimination against Indians and Mexicans (10-12). He calls Ramona “*nuestra novela*” [our novel] which is a foreshadowing of his similarly named, best-known essay, “*Nuestra américa*” (1891). By claiming “nuestra” Ramona for Spanish-speaking America, Martí speaks to a spirit of pan-Americanism in which he urges Latin American nations to unite against the North American “giant” that threatens to envelop its weaker neighbors to the south (“*Nuestra*” 149-151). This claim reflects on Jackson’s depiction of spatial relationships of the division of land within the US to the greater American continent. According to Martí, “*los pueblos viriles . . . aman, y sólo aman, a los pueblos viriles*” [strong countries . . . love, and love only, strong countries] (translated by Juan de Onís; “*Nuestra*” 125). Ramona’s story parallels the history of Latin American nations such as Mexico. Just as the US took half of Mexico three decades before the novel was written, the American squatters slowly invade (and eventually take over) Moreno property. The couple’s move south of the US-Mexico

border suggests that Mexico offers a place for people of mixed Indian and Hispanic origin. Felipe and Ramona's return to Mexico signifies their desire to unite with fellow *mestizos*, a notion that Ramona heartily endorses for the welfare of her children. In fact, Ramona welcomes the move to Mexico so her second-born (another daughter conceived with Alessandro) might be spared the "burden" of race that she "heroically bore" in the US (Jackson 359). In Mexico, Ramona's *mestiza* daughter shares a common Indian heritage with Mexican citizenry, borne from Spanish and Indian progeny, that is dissimilar to the ethnic status in the US where socially acknowledged roots are traced to EuroAmerican immigration.

Martí praises Ramona as a political work that calls for reform of existing stereotypes of Indians as uncivilized people. He does so by recognizing an inherent strength of character in the *mestizo* race that is different from the Anglo race. Martí calls Ramona "*la mestiza arrogante*" [the arrogant *mestiza*] implying that she is "the ideal subject of the revolutionary interracial movement he calls 'our *mestiza* America'" (Luis-Brown 814). She is a heroine who, when Alessandro flags in the search for land, pushes to new locations in an effort to claim space for her family. Her strength of character represents Martí's concept of a people of mixed race origin who are more civilized than the civilized man ("*Nuestra*" 119-120). His emphasis on the importance of Indian identity is thus a significant differentiation between Latin America and North America as he suggests that the supposedly "civilized" US look to the noble *mestizo* as a model of the natural man ("*Nuestra*" 119-120).<sup>8</sup>

Jackson's construction of space in the novel helped achieve legislative reform of unjust property laws governing Indian land at the end of the nineteenth century. It did so through a sentimental appeal to the hearts of readers through formula romance and

historical context that called for reform in a manner similar to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Jackson states, "If I can do one-hundredth part for the Indians as Mrs. Stowe did for the Negro, I will be thankful" (Bienstock 151). Jackson further claims that she wrote Ramona as a way to "arouse the conscience of the American people" to the realization that unless unjust governmental land laws and overt racial discrimination are stopped, there is literally and figuratively no future for Indians in the burgeoning American nation; they will be driven to extinction (Bienstock 151). Ramona's appeal was successful; it led to the passage of the Dawes Act of 1887 and advocated "civilizing" US Indians through property ownership (Dorris xvii). If the Indians were responsible for their own land, reasoned Congress, they would more readily assimilate into an Anglo capitalistic culture (Spicer 347-8).

Jackson's coupling of geography and genre in Ramona spurs legislative reform for the treatment of Indians. As a geopoetic representation, it portrays the nascent borderlands as including Indians and female land claimants. Other historical romances of the epoch, such as The Squatter and the Don, omit such representations because their purpose is to call attention to the ways in which US land laws and courts institutionalized Anglo oppression against Mexicans and Hispanics in the border zone. Ruiz de Burton's text combines spatial relations and conventions of historical romance that inscribe an allegory of US nation building in the marriage of a Mexican heroine and Anglo hero.

### **The Squatter and the Don**

Because Ramona (1884) and The Squatter and the Don (1885) were published within one year of each other and depict conflicts over land acquisition in southern California during the Gilded Age, it is not surprising that Jackson and Ruiz de Burton offer similar geopoetic representations of cultural encounter in the region.<sup>9</sup> However,

interpreting the novels as geopoetic representations shows that each of these writers expresses those conflicts through space and place differently. Ruiz de Burton's artistic expression of place—primarily at Don Alamar's ranch, secondarily the city of San Diego—is developed through stratifications among Anglos and Mexicans based on classism and the US legal system. In addition, The Squatter and the Don sets forth an allegory of nation building that is not addressed in Ramona. Ruiz de Burton fashions that allegory in a manner that resolves land conflicts and fulfills the lovers' quest using absolutist conventions of historical romance and polarized depictions of space.

The US legal system in the novel is an important mechanism in Ruiz de Burton's depiction of place, particularly relative to the text's engagement with history. The creation of the US-Mexico border meant that newly designated American land fell under the purview of US law. Land titles from Spain and Mexico were generally not recognized by US land courts that viewed Mexicans as rightly subjected to the laws of the US, the military victor over Mexico in the Mexican American War. Don Mariano Alamar, a landed *Californio* elite, explains:

How could Mexico have foreseen then that when scarcely half a dozen years should have elapsed the trusted conquerors would, '*In Congress Assembled*,' pass laws which were to be retroactive upon the defenseless, helpless, conquered people, in order to despoil them? . . . There was, and still is, plenty of good government land, which anyone can take. But no. The forbidden fruit is sweetest. They do not want government land. They want the land of the Spanish people, because we 'have too much,' they say. So, to win their votes, the votes of the squatters, our representatives in Congress helped to pass laws declaring all lands in California open to pre-emption . . . (Italics in original; 67)

Ruiz de Burton depicts space using historical background to represent a battleground between an Anglo-elected Congress and disenfranchised Mexicans as “conquered people.” Don Alamar notes that a democracy effectively uses the power of its citizens to disempower him; the collective voice of Anglo squatters enacts legislation that legalizes and institutionalizes their acquisition of private land, such as property belonging to the Don. He thereby reverses the traditional interpretation of a democracy as a form of government designed to protect individual rights from tyranny of the majority.

The court battle between the squatters and Mariano over land and a title that suggests a polarization between the squatters and the Don further engages the US legal system in a way that shapes the central plot of the text between Anglos and Mexicans. The premise of the text is based on US laws and land courts that complements Ruiz de Burton’s use of absolutisms associated with the genre of historical romance. The author’s use of historical background confirms that the US legal system functions through clearly designated parties, defendants and plaintiffs, and it renders an unambiguous verdict identifying winners and losers. Even if a decision is appealed or counter-appealed repeatedly, as occurs in the Alamar suit, a judge’s decision ultimately produces a definitive ruling. Furthermore, women in this era were generally excluded from legal battles, sites of male-male negotiation. Ruiz de Burton uses the Alamar court battle to designate clear polarities between men supporting or challenging the Don’s land title.

Ruiz de Burton defines the conflict over private property between Anglos and Mexicans through an individual’s status relative to the land as a “squatter” or “settler.” In the novel, settlers pay for the land they occupy and squatters do not (Ruiz de Burton 57). This distinction has class implications because it posits squatters as members of the lower class who either cannot afford to buy land or selfishly refuse to pay for it; the former

confirms lower class status and the latter represents ungentlemanly behavior of a lower class member. In contrast to squatters, settlers are considered members of the upper class in the text. This is confirmed by the marriages between several of the Alamar children and Anglo settlers. The conflict that complicates the lovers' quest to marry occurs when Doña Josefa Alamar, Mercedes's mother, refuses to permit a low class squatter from marrying her daughter. The Doña incorrectly assumes Clarence is a squatter rather than a settler. An altercation between William and Don Mariano also reinforces Doña Josefa's belief that Clarence belongs to a family of lower class squatters. However, Clarence is actually a settler because he had secretly purchased the Darrell family plot early in the narrative. Clarence's ambiguous status becomes an obstacle to his marriage. Thus, geography and an essential convention of the romance merge in the novel.

Spatial relations that pit Anglo and Mexican men against one another are reinforced by the fact that the Don is a rancher and the Anglos are farmers. This prevents any form of compromise between the estranged communities. For example, the squatters flatly reject the Don's proposal that the Anglos join him raising cattle instead of harvesting wheat. One squatter states, "I don't want any cattle. I ain't no '*vaquero*' to go '*busquering*' [sic] around and *lassoing* cattle. I'll *lasso* myself; what do I know about whirling a *lariat*?" and other adds, "Perhaps you understand *vaquering*; we don't (Italics in original; Ruiz de Burton 94-5). The author creates an "us/them" mentality that delineates the squatters from the Don because the Anglo community has little experience with stock (as their tortured Spanish suggests), an economic enterprise historically controlled by the local Mexican community. Whether one farms wheat or raises cattle makes a difference in the novel as it did historically in 1870s when the local economy of southern California was changing from cattle ranching to agriculture-based capitalism.



The Don mounts a class-based argument to encourage the Anglos to join the ranching enterprise, appealing to their class prejudice. He tells them, "You will not have to be a *vaquero* . . . You can hire an Indian boy to do that part," but the squatters are not swayed (Ruiz de Burton 89). They dismiss the Don's proposal because they recognize that US land laws favor squatters' rights over a Mexican community legally considered a "conquered people," a group with whom they will not join. They dismiss Mariano's proposal as not "practicable" while endorsing "rational" laws passed by Congress.<sup>10</sup>

To complement a plot revolving around litigation, the author introduces a subplot in the second half of the novel that briefly turns to San Diego. Attention to this city space expands the author's geographical perspective beyond conflicts between Mexican landholders and Anglo squatters in rural regions to include the powerful owners of monopolies in urban settings. This shift broadens the identification of victims in the novel from the *Californios* as a conquered people to Anglos who are exploited by the robber barons of the Gilded Age. The author accomplishes this through a change in narrative voice and by foregrounding what she calls "historical fact" (Ruiz de Burton 343). At the end of the novel, she directly criticizes the major capitalist invaders of California through an omniscient narrator whose voice becomes synonymous with that of the author. In addition, Ruiz de Burton indicts the "Big Four," railroad barons Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins (Sánchez 27) through an inclusion of historical "evidence." This includes letters and newspaper articles that testify to charges of corruption by the Big Four as well as their unbridled power as financial giants. Critics Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita write that "[t]he Big Four will prove to be a destructive force ruining the lives of many a farmer and investor. This ruin and dispossession of North American citizens mirrors the ruin of the *Californios*" like

Mariano (30). The chapter titles alone, “The Sins of Our Legislators” and “Out with the Invader,” highlight Ruiz de Burton’s call to action: “It seems now that unless *the people of California take the law into their own hands*, and seize the property of those men [Big Four], and confiscate it, to re-imburse the money due *the people*, the arrogant corporation will never pay” (Italics in original; 366).

Ruiz de Burton completes the romance with a fairytale ending achieved through the death of the Mexican male and the reappearance of the Anglo hero. In the novel, Mariano dies an early death precipitated by the financial fiasco in San Diego just as Clarence returns from self-appointed exile and a bout with typhoid fever. The Anglo entrepreneur, who is now worth twelve million dollars garnered from the stock market, mining, and other investments, rescues the nearly bankrupt Mexican family through his marriage to Susantia. In this way, the author provides a traditional romance ending. Clarence’s money assures the Alamars continued membership in the upper class. He buys the Alamar ranch, reimburses the family for the dead cattle, and hires Mercedes’s brother, Gabriel, to run a new bank in San Francisco. Clarence replaces the Don as the financial power in the family and thus, in Ruiz de Burton’s representation of space, an Anglo takes possession of the Alamar Ranch. In return, Clarence is afforded a sense of respectability—achieved by marrying into one of the established families in the region—that his status as *nouveau riche* would otherwise deny him.

Ruiz de Burton’s employment of a traditional resolution to the romance combined with a re-designation of the Alamar space from Mexican to Anglo ownership is an allegory of US nation building. Comparatist Doris Sommer explains the relationship between the genre of historical romance and an allegory of nation building positing that historical romance emerged in the Americas as a “national novel” in the mid-nineteenth

century based on the premise that “the country and the novel practically gave birth to one another” (12). The national novel functions as an allegory—a narrative in which literal characters/events take on symbolic meanings—in which romantic love and political interest form an “interlocking . . . relationship between erotics and politics” (Sommer 12, 42-3).

Ruiz de Burton employs historical context, an element within this hybrid genre, to develop the allegory of nation building. After the Mexican American War, the future of the American republic depended on the peaceful settlement of the newly acquired territory.<sup>11</sup> In this era, marriages between Mexican women and Anglo men reflect the “degree of blending and assimilation” that occurred between elite families from different ethnic groups in California (Limerick 231). “These marriage ties encouraged economic and commercial relations between Mexicanized Anglos and Hispano/Mexicano elites, who together formed networks of cultural, property, and class interests,” explains Historian Carlos Véllez-Ibáñez (59). Ruiz de Burton marks the emergence of a new elite class in the burgeoning American nation in the novel by integrating the land wealth of Mercedes’s family with business skills of Clarence, a proven entrepreneur.

Within the allegory of nation building, Ruiz de Burton also redefines space through the transfer of title from a Mexican to Anglo man. Ironically this transaction involves the self-same land title that the Don defended from Anglo squatters in a legal battle throughout most of the novel. The author’s reformulation of land ownership is another example of how she draws on history within the genre. In the Gilded Age, explains Véllez-Ibáñez, “Anglos assumed more and more control of land, resources, and labor [such that] an inverse relationship between Mexican and Anglo marriage emerged” (68). That inverse relationship means that Anglos were growing increasingly wealthy while

the financial resources of *Californios* such as Don Alamar were flagging. Furthermore, recasting land ownership from Mariano to Clarence confirms a legal transaction exclusively among males. US land laws and courts, a space dominated by men, call for an absolute male victor in legal battle over land: Alamar ranch is a Mexican space prior to the marriage and an Anglo space thereafter. Through the marriage to a Mexican woman, Clarence gets the legal title to land that would have otherwise belonged to Mercedes in accordance with Mexican law.

The Squatter in the Don lends itself to allegory based on a literary poetics within the genre that includes unambiguous character loyalties and little moral ambiguity. Theorist Angus Fletcher explains that all forms of writing demonstrate allegory, but some genres are more overt in the way they encode a narrative to make clear a larger message (1-23). Romance is such a genre because it polarizes all elements of a narrative around the facilitation or inhibition of the lovers' quest. For example, early in Ruiz de Burton's novel, William Darrel is portrayed unambiguously as obstacle to the marriage of Clarence and Mercedes; his tirade against the Don and his role as leader of the squatters aligns him against the romance quest. The author's use of such bivalent poetics are salient in her engagement with allegory creating people and spaces that are clearly identified; Sánchez and Pita concur, "each family or character represent(s) a particular ethnic collectivity, class, subclass, or remnant of a class" (6). As these examples suggest, geopoetics is useful, necessary, and inevitable for understanding such allegories concerning battles over land.

In total, Ruiz de Burton's representations of the space of the Alamar ranch exposes the US legal system for its institutionalized discrimination against Mexican people and privileging of male-male negotiations. She uses an allegory of nation building

to criticize the ways in which Mexican people were subsumed into Anglo culture. Additionally, her portrayal of the city space of San Diego becomes a direct exhortation to readers to reform monopoly capitalism in the new nation. Moreover, Ruiz de Burton conveys such criticisms through the popular form of historical romance that might reach more readers, particularly women, than non-fictional accounts.

Writing approximately forty-five years after the publication of Ramona and The Squatter and the Don,<sup>12</sup> Jovita González uses geography and genre poetics in Caballero in a fashion similar to Jackson and Ruiz de Burton. However, González creates this effect through an explicit competition among Mexican and Anglo men for patriarchal power. In Caballero, that conflict takes place in south Texas along the newly created US-Mexico border between 1846 and 1848, the years spanning the Mexican American War.

### **Caballero: A Historical Novel**

The conventions of romance and the history of the Texas region appear in Caballero's depiction of the Mendoza y Soría family hacienda as a zone contested via US/Mexico military conflict. In this zone, a Mexican *caudillo* fights to claim land as a way to shore up a failing patriarchal authority that posits place and people as either Mexican or Anglo. This sharp delineation of space resembles the geopolitical border itself, with its militarized space, in the course of the novel. The author's artistic expression of space in the novel allegorizes cultural clash in the form of male-male struggles for control of territory and an exchange of patriarchal power.<sup>13</sup> The union of hero and heroine appears, in González's text, as an allegory of US nation building, much like that of Ruiz de Burton. As do Jackson and Ruiz de Burton, González fashions the Anglo/Mexican competition for control of land as the central conflict that prevents the union of lovers from different ethnic backgrounds—heroine Susanita Mendoza, the

Mexican daughter of Don Santiago and hero Robert Warrener, a lieutenant in the US Army.

The book opens with González's fictional "Forward" that narrates the migration of Santiago's family to the outlying regions of Old Spain (what is now Texas) in the mid-eighteenth century. The tone glorifies the family as valiant, independent settlers, who migrate north for the worthy purpose of preserving their heritage. Santiago's great grandfather, Don José Ramón de Mendoza y Robles, builds "Rancho La Palma de Cristo" after envisioning the great hacienda from a bluff: "Here he would create a new empire, and his place the finest of them all. Here he could rear his family and keep the old ways and traditions, safely away from the perfidious influence of Mexico City and the infiltration of foreign doctrines; not only for himself but for generations to come" (González, xxxvi). For generations, the Mendoza family passes responsibility for the hacienda—for preserving their way of life—through a patriarchal system that privileges the eldest son. When Santiago inherits Rancho La Palma, his mother tells him to be worthy of the "doctrine of traditionalism" that it stands for: "religion, gentility, family rank, patriarchy" (21). These short passages are meant to show that Santiago is a man who inherits much: the *rancho* as a symbol of the "old ways and traditions"; a social structure that makes him the most powerful member of the family; and responsibility for passing on the hacienda to future generations. Santiago's power is derived from the tradition of the rural *caudillo*: "the strongmen, the new *condottieri*, the chieftains, the masters of 'lives and haciendas,' the inheritors of the Spanish and Moorish archetype of the warrior" (Italic in original; Krauze 87).

Following the "Forward," the novel begins with the Mendoza family facing the encroachment of Anglo settlers in a region that they have inhabited without question and

ruled with exclusive privilege for over one hundred years. As Santiago guards himself and his family against the “infiltration” of North American culture, he clings tenaciously to Mexican customs. González uses historical context to portray the ways that encroaching Anglo settlers challenge Santiago’s authority by claiming control of the region through military conquest. She employs the military conflict of 1846-48, years that span the novel, to foreground the representation of domestic space as stratified between the Anglo and Mexican communities. She sets Rancho La Palma between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, territory that is claimed by both the US and Mexican governments.<sup>14</sup> The author repeatedly depicts the borderlands as a zone of conflict that becomes increasingly violent over the location of the “bloody border” (11, 22, 54, 124, 135, 307, 331).

Even as Anglos squatters try to settle on his ranch, US laws require him to register his land, and the US army takes control of Matamoros, Santiago refuses to acknowledge that such conflicts signal change in the once-isolated borderlands. Ignoring such signs of change, he heeds the advice of his father to build “a wall between them and what is yours” (González 19). Santiago does this on a literal level; he sequesters his family within the thick walls of the hacienda and away from outsiders. Santiago’s “policy of isolation” is further illustrated through González’s use of the architectural spaces of Rancho La Palma (112). The walls and a palm tree in particular show the hacienda to be a Mexican space where the *caudillo* tries to protect his power and possessions from Anglos. This policy prevents his daughters from interacting with the US military men stationed in Matamoros; thus, it inhibits the romance quest of hero and heroine, Robert and Susanita.

In González's configuration of space, Santiago internalizes the significance of the hacienda as a Mexican place; his internal embrace of external spatial dynamics shapes the loyalties and allegiances in the novel in such a way that Santiago believes an acceptance of any thing or one Anglo as a rejection of himself and his authority. The author writes, "Serene in the belief that his heritage of conquest was a sort of superbravery which he must, inevitably, conquer again, he built a wall against the Americans—against everything American—and excluded himself within it" (23). Border critic Leticia Magda Garza-Falcón summarizes his actions in *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance* (1998): "Don Santiago had taken on the burden and obligation of upholding the old ways at the cost of isolating himself from the important events in the lives of the remaining members of his family" (120).

Not only does he sequester himself and his family within the walls of the hacienda, Santiago also internalizes his role as a pillar of the traditional Mexican community. The author achieves this through overt symbolization in which both Santiago and the hacienda represent stalwart Mexican traditionalism:

Don Santiago put his hands against the rough bark of the palm tree, and it felt strong against his back, like a firm pillar, for it was a symbol. There could be no compromise, neither for himself nor for those over whom he was master. What he had was his and his it would remain. Only so could the good things be preserved.

He would have to hate the *Americanos*, for they were evil. (González 21)

According to González, Santiago is uncompromising in his determination to preserve Mexican values and repel Anglo culture. Use of architectural space combined with Santiago's characterization as unyielding, a depiction consistent with the absolutisms in historical romance, creates the rancho as distinctly Mexican.<sup>15</sup>



Whereas González renders Rancho La Palma a space controlled by the Don, she represents Matamoros and the outlying areas as lawless, wild regions. Matamoros, the location of Santiago's winter home, is a site that the US military has acquired in its military fight with Mexico. Matamoros, amid the presence of so many soldiers, is a violent zone where men aggressively compete with each other for control, as illustrated by the Texas Rangers' pillaging the town, destroying much Mexican property. Such violence reveals the Rangers' hatred of Mexican power in the region. However, they do not defile the chapel even though it was built by the original Spanish inhabitants. Furthermore, the Rangers' spare the bar and brothel. This represents their value of such institutions as neutral space. The secular spaces they spare, where men from different ethnic backgrounds share in activities that subordinate women, such as prostitution, contrast sharply with the suggestion of a shared respect for sacred spaces. Beyond Matamoros and Rancho La Palma, González configures the outlying countryside as a chaotic wild zone where highway robbers and Indians, portrayed as barbaric savages, attack indiscriminately for material gain. Such a construction of space inhibits the romance quest to unite the lovers, for the latter operate in distinct worlds with little intermixing among ethnic groups and traversing them is difficult and dangerous. Susanita is sequestered at the *rancho* and Robert inhabits Matamoros. Their potential for interaction seems impossible.

Yet González unites hero and heroine following an act that disrupts male-male competition for control of space via Susanita's transgression of women's roles. In this scene, Susanita rides a horse to Matamoros in order to plead to US troops to spare Alvaro, who has joined Mexican guerrillas fighting the US army. While she considers the act a brave one, Santiago interprets the act as ignoble. González writes, "Don

Santiago would have preferred his son to be hanged rather than have his daughter do what Susanita had done, even though her motive was completely unselfish" (280). Susanita's act challenges male-male relations in the novel by intervening in the competition between Mexicans and Anglos men for power. Ultimately, she leaves the family, marries Robert, and lives in Matamoros estranged from her family. Shortly thereafter, her sister Angela also marries an Anglo, Alfred "Red" McLane.

In comparing Santiago and Red, the author shows how Anglos are empowered and Mexicans disempowered over the course of the novel. She does so by revealing Anglo primacy based on accomplishment rather than *sangre pura*, a changing social dynamic that contributes to Red's political success and Santiago's gradual disempowerment. The Anglo ideal of male power based on achievement represents an affront to Santiago because it negates the importance of *sangre limpia*, blood lines that are theoretically imbued with superior human qualities and that are reflection of God's favor. Compared to Santiago who has inherited his wealth and position, Red is a self-made man. He was born into a poor family but had worked his way to political and financial success by the time he marries Angela. According to González, Red is "a true Texan . . . a certain breed of men different from any other" (71). The emphasis on "breed" in this passage contrasts with Santiago's pure Spanish consanguinity and aristocratic ancestry, a source of power for the Mexican patriarch that defines male authority by birth rather than achievement. The quote also connects Red with future leadership of the nascent nation. In contrast to Santiago's source of power in the past, Red's proven abilities suggest that he will earn his place as the next governor of Texas confirming that his power within the US political and socio-economic structure is tied to

the success of the nation. In contrast, the Mexican *caudillo* has no future in the American nation.

Shortly after the marriages of the Anglo men to Mexican women in the closing chapters of the novel, González narrates the end of the Mexican American War and the death of Santiago and Alvaro, markers that signify a shift in patriarchal power from the Mexican to Anglo communities at the moment when the contested territory between the Nueces River and Rio Grande—the site of Rancho La Palma—is declared officially US territory. Alvaro's death literally takes place on the newly created US-Mexico border when he attacks and is killed by an Anglo soldier in the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, “the river that was so mighty it cleft a nation in two” (González 304). His death means that there is no heir to Rancho La Palma (Santiago has banished his other son, Luis Gonzaga) and thereby represents an irrevocable break in the chain of *sangre pura*. Similarly, the newly ratified Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo confirms that Rancho La Palma is in US territory, and therefore it will be impossible for its Mexican master to maintain the “doctrine of traditionalism” espoused by the Mendoza ancestors. Santiago's death also signifies a transfer of patriarchal power to Anglo men. He dies while standing on the high bluff of Rancho La Palma and Robert discovers his body. Atop the bluff is the location where Santiago's forefather first envisioned the *ranchito*, and it is a place where Santiago confirms that he is lord of all he surveys. He has often returned to the high bluff to exclaim “mine, mine” over everything from the peons who work for him to the acreage of the hacienda his exclusive property (González 33).<sup>16</sup>

González's geopoetic representation of cultural conflict between Santiago and the encroaching Anglo community articulates an allegory of US nation building much like that in The Squatter and the Don in which “the romantic affair needs the nation, and the

erotic frustrations are challenges to national development” (Sommer 50). Just as Ruiz de Burton draws on a historical background that records the integration of Mexican women and Anglo men, González employs a similar mechanism. Montejano explains the history of integration through marriage among Mexicans and Anglos in Texas: “For individual families of the Mexican elite, intermarriage was a convenient way of containing the effects of Anglo military victory on their status, authority, and class position. For the ambitious Anglo merchant and soldier with little capital, it was an easy way of acquiring land” (34-5). In the novel, the dual marriages of Susanita/Robert and Angela/Red in Caballero are an allegory in which land controlled by a Mexican patriarch is finally won by Anglos and codified through the official peace treaty of the Mexican American War.

Also within the allegory, the Anglo male must replace Santiago because there is no place for a Mexican *caudillo* in a newly forming US nation.<sup>17</sup> Garza-Falcón explains: “In the end, the battle to preserve the old ways and the autonomy of the region is of course lost. The novel in many ways presents a tragic tale of the decay of an old regime, either because it could not compromise or because it *does* not compromise and make concessions” (Italics in original; 120). In the spatial dimensions of the allegory, Santiago’s death means that there is no place for the Mexican male in newly-designated US territory or within the burgeoning US power structure.

While González makes it clear that there is no future for the *caudillo*, she also assures the reader that there is a prosperous future for the newly weds. For example, Robert is presently a penniless soldier, but his purchase of land around Fort Brown guarantees him a future of great wealth as Brownsville develops into a thriving trade center. Red, already a wealthy man, is also assured of success in the US political system in part due to his wife’s charity work in which she becomes the “Angel of Good” to both

the Anglo and Mexican communities in San Antonio. Finally, both Susanita and Angelita give birth. Their babies' mixed heritage marks a figurative reconciliation between Mexicans and Anglos and signifies the end of an era where the US and Mexico fought in military battle for control of borderland territory.

Analysis of artistic expressions of place and space in Ramona, The Squatter and the Don, and Caballero demonstrates the value of geopoetics as a model for understanding cultural conflicts over the division of land as Mexicans, Anglos, and Border Indians fight to claim space in the newly formed US-Mexico borderlands following the Mexican American War of 1846-48. In the subsequent chapter, I turn from events set the second half of the nineteenth century to literature addressing the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. The central conflicts in these novels involves Anglo characters traveling in and around Mexico. These authors show how their Anglo protagonists do not perceive their new environs in Mexico like the native inhabitants. Such doubled viewpoints on spatial depictions combined with elements of travel writing and formulaics of the Western novel create a body of fiction that replicates and responds to a US colonial legacy in Mexico.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have selected Ramona, The Squatter and the Don, and Ramona for several reasons.

First, these works represent the nascent borderlands from different perspectives—Jackson is Anglo, Ruiz de Burton is Mexican, and González is Hispanic. In addition, these novels have not received the critical attention they deserve because of their recent “recovery” or “rediscovery.” Caballero was published by Texas A&M Press in 1996, having been unearthed from the author’s family archives by Mexican American scholars, José Limón and María Cotera. Similarly, the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Project re-issued The Squatter and the Don as recently as 1997.

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I refer repeatedly to absolutist elements of the genre of historical romance. These conventions originate in medieval romance concerned with “knightly adventure, courtly love, and chivalric ideals” (“Romance” 345). By the seventeenth century, romance narratives perpetuated a morally unambiguous world and generally involved the varying motifs of journey, quest, rescue, and the eventual union of lovers. Conflicts preventing lovers’ “wish-fulfillment” pit hero verses enemy, a polarity around which all characters gravitate in a world devoid of moral ambiguity (Frye 186).

“Characters tend to be either for or against the quest” to unify hero and heroine such that those who assist the lovers’ wish-fulfillment are heroic and those who inhibit it are villainous in a tale that (Frye 195). The absolutist world of romance emerged in the form of sentimental novels in Mexico from 1810 to 1869 (Martín 546). Out of this period come works like Ignacio Altamirano’s El Zarco: episodio de la vida mexicana en 1861-63. [El Zarco: Episodes of Mexican Life in 1861-1863] (1901) that depict the melodramatic love affair of Manuela and El Zarco in a setting with well-aligned forces such as highway

bandits verses honorable citizens and a selfish, powerful sister against her meeker, nobler sibling. Two other novels demonstrating the genre of romance and salient to a study of Mexico include William Montgomery Bird's The Infidel, or The Fall of Mexico (1835) and Calavar: Or, The Knight of the Conquest: A Romance of Mexico (1837). For more information on historical romance, see Northrop Frye's "The Mythos of Summer: Romance," in Anatomy of Criticism (1957), Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (1984), Verity Smith's Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature (1997), The Encyclopedia of the Novel (1998), The Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory (1992), The Bedford Glossary of Critical Literary Terms (1997), and The Feminist Companion to Literature in English (1990).

<sup>3</sup> The tradition of the historical novel in Mexico is shared among both the historical and costumbrista narratives that emerged as popular forms in the nineteenth century. The former is defined by its proclivity toward overt political messages and the later defined by its depiction of the common place in works like Fernández de Lizardi's El Periquillo Sarniento [The Itching Parrot (1816)].

<sup>4</sup>The Civil War radically divided the US nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such polarization is similar (though less well known) to the sentiments that divided the Mexican inhabitants in the borderlands and Anglo settlers who migrated to the region. Of the novels that I address in this chapter, only The Squatter and the Don addresses the Civil War. Ruiz de Burton does so in the final paragraph of the novel in a way that groups the oppression experienced by *Californios* with that of Southern Plantation owners. She he calls for a "Redeemer who will emancipate the white slaves of California" (343-4). For more information, see Luis-Brown's article, "'White Slaves' and

the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in The Squatter and the Don and Ramona."

<sup>5</sup> See the following sources for biographical information on Jackson: Ruth Odell's Helen Hunt Jackson (1939), Evelyn Bannin's Helen Hunt Jackson (1973), the 1987-edition of the Western Writers Series (1987), Valerie Sherer Mathes's Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy (1990), and volumes 42 and 47 of the Dictionary of Literary Biography.

<sup>6</sup> Following the Mexican American War of 1846-8, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the existing US-Mexico border, an absolute division of national territory between the US and Mexico that, in theory, left no terrain in ambiguous or questionable ownership status. Subsequent land laws strove to accomplish the same effect—to establish clear title and rightful ownership to land—and resulted in creating a confrontational and competitive environment between Anglos and Mexicans. In Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936 (1995), historian Lisbeth Haas explains that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo required Mexicans to declare US or Mexican citizenship and either remain in the US or relocate in Mexico within one year. The Treaty also claimed to recognize lands grants made by the Spanish Crown and Mexican government, but US land laws ratified thereafter assumed such titles were illegitimate unless proven otherwise (57). For example, the Land Act of 1851 required Spanish and Mexican property owners like the Morenos to defend their land titles by submitting their land grants to the US Land Commission (Haas 77). Meanwhile, Anglo squatters could legally encroach upon *Californios*' private property under the law while the claim was under review, a process that averages seventeen years and nearly bankrupts Señora Moreno (Haas 64). Few US



courts allowed *Californios* to keep their land; those that upheld Spanish or Mexican grants often bankrupt the Mexican estates due to the cost of prolonged litigation. Thus, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and subsequent US land laws created an antagonistic relationship between Mexicans and Anglos over the division of land in the nascent borderlands.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not offer US citizenship to Indians but, instead, treaty language labeled them “savage tribes” (Haas 57). The US government assumed responsibility for “policing and controlling those tribes, preventing their raids into Mexico and their warring against citizens of the US,” a strong provision of the peace treaty that the Mexican government conceded as the only benefit they gleaned from it (Haas 57). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo also posits that all Indian lands on conquered Mexican territory now belong to the US government, the “sole and absolute sovereign” owners of the land formerly belonging to the conquered “republic of Mexico” (Haas 58-9). See Haas’s Conquests and Historical Identities in California (1995) for a detailed overview on US government policy toward Indian land in the nineteenth century (especially pages 56-63) and Spicer’s Cycles of Conquest (1981) for a history of the Spanish Crown’s program of “civilization” of Indians through mission activity (especially pages 288-298).

<sup>7</sup> In broad, theoretical terms, the concept of “home” implies a place of origins. It is a site with a known past or shared, communal history of ancestor’s relationships to the land. It may also be a site with a future; home is where one is settled and expects to stay permanently.

<sup>8</sup> According to Martí, the Indian represents the “natural man” while the Hispanic carries the burden of culture and civilization. In his understanding of mestizaje, the Indian is mute, devoid of language, but present corporeally.

<sup>9</sup> Ruiz de Burton was born in Mexico and became an American citizen when Baja California signed articles of capitulation that granted US citizenship to Mexicans who agreed to travel north to Alta California. Although she is technically American, Ruiz de Burton identified as a Mexican most of her life according to various biographical sources. Also, the novel reflects Ruiz de Burton’s first hand experience battling for land against Anglo squatters and robber barons, as evidenced by her financially draining legal battles to retain ownership of property that she inherited, Rancho Jamul in Baja California and Rancho Ensenada in Alta California. For biographical information, see Kathleen Crawford’s “Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton: The General’s Lady” as well as Rosaura Sanchez’s and Beatrice Pita’s introduction to the 1997-edition of the novel.

<sup>10</sup> Those laws include the No Fence Law that gives squatters the right to shoot cattle that wander into their fields, a practice that nearly depletes the entire Alamar herd, as well as the Homestead Acts of 1851 and 1862 that permitted squatters to obtain land by homesteading on 160 acres of public or private land (even if in litigation) for five years as long as they were US citizens (Zinn 174). These laws also force land grant holders like the Don to pay property taxes on land used by squatters (who were not required to pay him rent for the land they occupied).

<sup>11</sup> For years the *Californios* had a land monopoly and were able to manipulate the local economy to favor the cattle businesses (González, “Romancing” 31). With the encroachment of Anglos, however, *Californios* lost control of the region because Anglos

voted for policies that gave advantage to squatter and settler rights. Literary critic John González summarizes: “the pauperization and proletarianization of the Californio population . . . occurred over a period of three or more decades (approximately 1846-1881) during which the relative political and economic strength of the landed Californio elite ebbed away” (32). For an detailed overview of the status of the borderlands following the Mexican American War and the role of American nation building therein, see Montejano’s Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1996 (1987), especially “Part I: Incorporation.”

<sup>12</sup> In “Mexicans, Foundational Fictions, and the US: Caballero, A Late Border Romance,” Limón posits that the novel simply could not have been written earlier than the 1930s because “Had it been published then, Caballero would have asked a nineteenth-century reader to view its happy marriages as a plausible projection of the future based on contemporary social relations” (346-7). More specifically, he argues that the novel could not have been published in the time of its setting (1846-8) due to the acrimonious and racially charged social climate that characterized the Mexican and Anglo communities in South Texas. Limón continues: “But between 1920 and 1945, Caballero could and did occur; indeed, it became viable as a foundational fiction for resolving Anglo-Mexican conflict” (“Mexicans” 347). Sadly, González and Eimer never saw Caballero published in their lifetime; Macmillan, Houghton-Mifflin, and Bobbs-Merrill rejected the offer to publish it (Limón, “Introduction” xix). Texas A&M University Press published Caballero in 1996 and Arte Público Press working in conjunction with the project known as “Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage” published Dew on the Thorn in 1997.

<sup>13</sup> I refer to the author of Caballero as González solely rather than as both González and Eve Eimer (alias “Eve Raleigh”) because the original correspondence between the two women suggests that Eimer’s role primarily included typing the final manuscript and sending it to publishers (“Introduction” xviii-xxi). For more information on the “recovery” of the manuscript by Limón and Cotera, its circumstances of publication and González’s biography, see the introduction to the text and Leticia Garza-Falcón’s chapter, “The Historical Fiction of Jovita González,” and appendix, “Biographical Outline of Jovita González’s Life” in Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance (1998).

<sup>14</sup> According to Howard Zinn’s The People’s History of the US, the US and Mexican governments did not agree on Texas’s southern border at the time of annexation in 1845 (113-5). Prior to this time, both nations informally recognized the Nueces River as the dividing line between the US and Mexico. After the US annexed Texas, President Polk relocated the border approximately 150 miles south at the Rio Grande/Río Bravo and deployed troops to the region to police and protect US soil. The Mexican government, however, maintained that the border resided in its historical place at the Nueces River (Zinn 113-4).

<sup>15</sup> When Santiago’s son, Luis Gonzaga, demonstrates disloyalty to the Don by refusing to stay on the ranch, Santiago banishes him in an act designed to expel anything “foreign” to the Mexican estate. However, Luis Gonzaga refuses to be defined by the space of the hacienda. He thinks of himself and Captain Devlin as “neither Mexican nor Anglo Saxon but artists” and leaves Rancho La Palma permanently (González 156). In return, the Don thinks of his son as a traitor and disinherits him. Because Santiago forces his children to

chose between himself and Anglos, his children feel like traitors when they buy into his manichean construction of “us/them.” When Susanita sends a note and snip of hair to Robert, for instance, she calls herself a traitor to her father because she has not kept her promise to him (González 114). Similarly, Luis Gonzaga calls himself a traitor to his father and country when he spends time drawing with the Anglo artist, Captain Devlin. Even Santiago thinks himself a traitor to his people when he considers Red’s offer to become a magistrate in the new political order, a leadership position among the local *hidalgos* (González 181). In addition, the author frequently ascribes the epithet of traitor to General Santa Anna in the novel because of the military failures and political concessions he makes with the American government (González 124, 203).

<sup>16</sup> According to a facsimile of the original title page of the manuscript, the authors proposed various titles for the novel to include “Mine, Mine!” (González n.p.). Santiago echoes this mantra at the end of the novel when Alvaro dies. Holding his dead son in his arms, he tells a Texas Ranger coldly, “Will you go, and leave me with—what is mine?” (González 307).

<sup>17</sup> For additional information on allegory, see James Clifford’s “On Ethnographic Allegory” in Writing Culture (1986).

## CHAPTER 2

### MOVING IN SPACE: SOUTHERN JOURNEYS OF TRANSFORMATION

US colonialism in Mexico becomes increasingly evident in border writing set around the time of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17, such as Harriet Doerr's Stones for Ibarra (1978), Carlos Fuentes's Old Gringo [*Gringo viejo*] (1985), and Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses (1992). These works emerge from literary traditions of travel writing and the Western novel in which white English-speaking travelers, whether *exploratrices sociales* or American cowboys, impose ethnocentric values on Mexico and Mexicans. Fuentes, Doerr, and McCarthy weight their Anglo characters with a colonial sensibility that precludes them from acknowledging that space and place in Mexico is conceived differently depending on one's cultural viewpoint. This is reinforced as the travelers try to reshape their environs in Mexico according to Anglo values thereby perpetuating a US colonial legacy. Stones for Ibarra and All the Pretty Horses, works by US writers, are apologies for such a colonial mindset, while Old Gringo, a text by a Mexican author, directly challenges colonialism. Examining Doerr's, Fuentes's, and McCarthy's geopoetic constructions also reveals how Anglo intervention is nuanced by gender—men's roles are more active and violent than women's.<sup>1</sup>

Inscription of Mexican territory and people by outsiders stretches through its history as a colony, empire, and emergent nation. Travel writing begins as early as Fray Marcos de Niza's accounts of the search for the Seven Cities of Gold in New Spain, extends to Richard Henry Dana's record of life among the Spanish *hidalgos* of Old California and to John Lloyd Stephen's diary-based journalism recounting his archeological "discoveries" in the Yucatan and Chiapas. As these examples suggest,

“local color” representations by foreign writers range widely in form. What they hold in common is that all such representations of unfamiliar peoples and places are unavoidably filtered through travelers’ cultural viewpoints. These attempts to catch the “essence” of a place or people depend on realist portraits that are based on visual observation and first hand experience of Western travel-narrators (Clifford 3-13). European and Anglo literature of travel includes Western perspectives on native inhabitants and local places that are inextricably intertwined with ideologies of colonialism and imperialism. In recent decades, this notion has been made clear by post-colonial and cultural theorists, such as Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt.<sup>2</sup>

In Orientalism (1978), Said argues that Eurocentric representations of non-native peoples and places that occurs in travel writing as well as in novels results in an exoticization of other people, a notion he illustrates using through the traditional Western perspective of the Orient as a strange and mysterious place. The power of travel writing is that it authorizes an interpretation of other cultures “describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 873). Similarly, Pratt argues in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1995) that various forms of travel writing produce images of non-European people and places for readers who have never traveled beyond Europe (5). European travel writing of the nineteenth century in particular espouses an ideology that endorses capitalist expansion and benefits colonial powers on a material and moral level. Western writers depict themselves, others, and fictional characters gaining material wealth through the exploitation of natural and human resources in Latin America while occupying the moral “high ground” associated with the belief that they are “civilizing” primitive cultures (Pratt 1-11).

Like European travel writing in the nineteenth century, Anglo chronicles of the US-Mexico border region of the same period contain colonial messages.<sup>3</sup> Early Anglo border writers describe Mexico and Mexicans as inferior subjects. They use narrative techniques that are molded in the crucible of warring nations and depict the need to survive in disputed frontier territory, or the desire to open new markets. For instance, soldiers such as Colonel George Turnbull Davis or Private Samuel Chamberlain, frontiersmen like George Wilkin's Kendall or J. Ross Browne, and tradesmen like George W.B. Evens or Richard Dana justify racism, thievery, and murder as the cost required to impose an Anglo way of life (Robinson, Mexico 33-68). "However naïve and ethnocentric, the early accounts of Mexico written by Americans mark the opening phase of a lasting cultural involvement," writes early theorist of the borderlands, Cecil Robinson; "[a]n attitude toward Mexico frequently expressed by these writers and one with which we are still familiar in America's response to alien cultures is one of contempt" (Mexico 33).

Literary traditions of European and Anglo travel writing are marked by authors' use of a variety of techniques that includes erasing the presence of natives from the text *en toto* or registering their brief appearance only in service to Anglo travelers; objectifying local inhabitants through a singular, limited gaze that negates how natives perceive outsiders; and justifying intervention or imposition of ethnocentric values on a host people through expressions of Manifest Destiny. Doerr and Fuentes replicate and refute these techniques in their novels as a means of critiquing colonial ideology. Added to such poetics, Doerr and Fuentes use spatial configurations to demonstrate how US travelers achieve moments of realization of complicity in a colonial drama. How Anglo protagonists see different sites in Mexico exposes rather than veils ethnocentrism.



Set during an intense epoch of migration in the US-Mexican borderlands, Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo emerge from a tradition of travel writing generated in an era when Anglo and English authors, such as Jack London, John Reed, Katherine Anne Porter, Ambrose Bierce, Graham Greene, Malcolm Lowry, and D.H. Lawrence were flocking south to witness the social consequences of the Mexican Revolution. Taking up similar travel themes in their works, Doerr and Fuentes bring to their travel based novels the effect of initial contact and eventual immersion in Mexico, a country previously inscribed in colonialist terms. While McCarthy's novel primarily engages and responds to the Western novel rather than travel writing, it also illustrates how cross-border encounters produce a sophisticated consciousness of the impact of colonial ideology. The complexity of all three authors' characterizations and critical stance toward US attitudes of political and cultural superiority are most effectively understood by again examining how landscape and language shape the borderlands experience during and after a political crisis that challenges the power structures of Mexico's ruling elite.<sup>4</sup>

### **Stones for Ibarra**

Stones for Ibarra begins with the travels of Sara and Richard Everton, two fortyish Americans, driving from San Francisco to Ibarra. The Anglos plan to reopen Richard's grandfather's copper mine and to refurbish his adobe home, both abandoned after the Mexican Revolution of 1910.<sup>5</sup> To describe the Evertons's impressions of the Mexican landscape, the author engages elements of nineteenth-century travel writing typified by the work of German adventurer Alexander von Humboldt. In View of Nature (1808), Views of the Cordilleras (1810) and Personal Narrative (1814), he represents South America collectively as a "non-human world" (Pratt 125). These travel chronicles erase the native inhabitants so that "the only 'person' mentioned in these 'melancholy and

sacred solitudes' is the hypothetical and invisible European traveler himself' (Pratt 125). Such blindness to native inhabitants illustrates a colonial ideology set forth in Humboldt's writing that is complimented by another feature of his work: when he does briefly describe a local inhabitant, it is the "immediate service of the Europeans" as servant, guide, or slave (Pratt 130). Doerr engages this tradition of travel writing vis-à-vis a construction of travelers' cultural blindness framed in an artistic expression of place and space in Mexico, including the Mexican countryside and the *plaza mayor*; in this way, Stones for Ibarra couples language and landscape in a geopoetic representation that critiques a colonial legacy of European travel writing.

The most significant aspects of the Evertons's trip to Mexico are both what they fail to see—their own limited perceptions—and how they see the Ibarrans—as subordinate to them. The Evertons cannot see people in the open plains of the Mexican countryside. Rather than acknowledge this limitation, they conclude that the Ibarrans are capable of materializing in an "empty" landscape. The perceiving two American subjects regard themselves as the only living inhabitants of a foreign, unfamiliar place. Figuratively, this position affords the Anglos a "godlike, omniscient stance" over Mexico, a characteristic blindness by travelers also evident in Humboldt's writing (Pratt 124). For instance, when the Anglos get lost on their drive, help suddenly arrives from what seems to be a vacant and vacuous landscape: "from the east, where a moment ago there was nothing, runs a boy, and, for the first time, the Evertons witness a recurring Mexican phenomenon: the abrupt appearance of human life in an empty landscape . . . Now, out of a vast unpopulated panorama, here, close at hand, is a boy" (Doerr 6). Among the author's other examples of the travelers' inability to see are their difficulty

finding the “invisible track” Domingo, their Mexican guide, points out and their failure to see the main road to Ibarra (2, 8, 6).

Also like Humboldt’s work, Doerr’s narrative suggests the way that the Evertons see the villagers as well as Domingo is telling: yet again, the Anglos attribute qualities to the Ibarrans they meet, rather than reflect on their own limited perceptions. As an example, Sara interprets the villagers she sees in the *plaza mayor* as ghostly apparitions because their countenances are undecipherable to her; she cannot read the facial expressions and nonverbal communication of a people with whom she is unfamiliar; “[w]e have come to live among specters, Sara tells herself. They are not people, but silhouettes sketched on a backdrop to deceive us into thinking that the stage is crowded. She searches for an expression, any expression, in their eyes” (Doerr 11). The allusion to Macbeth’s speech<sup>6</sup> metaphorically sets the Evertons apart from their Mexican peers by suggesting the Anglos exist as substantive, living beings foregrounded on center stage while the Mexicans are dead shadows skulking in the background.

As this catalogue of first impressions suggests, Doerr taps into a primacy on visual observation common to Humboldt’s travel writings. She creates a poetics in which Anglo travelers either ignore the presence of local inhabitants or exoticize the Ibarrans as magical or ghostly; the author literalizes Sara’s figurative blindness through a register of all that is unfamiliar and inexplicable to her. Added to that, the Evertons “explain away” their inability to comprehend the Ibarrans by giving them traits they do not have. This reaction signals the Anglo’s own culturally-specific point of view, a perspective that obfuscates Anglo and Mexican cultural difference. Thus far in the novel, Doerr’s expression of poetics and places makes visible the colonial implications of the Evertons’s limited perceptions that subordinate Mexicans to them.

The author continues to use spatial representations and elements of travel writing to show how, even as Sara begins to learn incremental lessons on cultural difference during her stay in Mexico, she can never escape her own cultural positioning. Nor can she avoid the complicity with colonial legacies that position her. Doerr's representation of the big adobe home and the Malagueña mine make the Anglos the wealthiest people in Ibarra. This situates them within a larger history of conquest and imperialism. The Evertons' purport, quite naively, to seek out the "family's Mexican history" (2-3). Occupying the biggest house, operating the largest business, and acknowledging their family history in the community, there is no avoiding the fact that they are active participants in a colonial legacy. In the past and from the outset of Sara and Richard's arrival, the Everton's investments in the local economy are seen as a boon that makes the village priest boast, "Don Ricardo is restoring Ibarra to prosperity" (163). The Anglos figuratively become *patrons* of Ibarra, a tenuous position for outsiders unfamiliar with Mexican cultural codes; in time, becoming a patron evokes guilt in Sara.

Sara's guilt for the privileges she inherits is represented in Doerr engagement and critique of that singular, one-way visual perspective common in travel writing: European subjects objectifying native inhabitants. European ethnographers, naturalists, and geographers (15-37) codified this perspective, according to Pratt, in eighteenth-century travel narratives. Employing a scientific method that privileges observation, these science-writers are "seeing-men," who, in their quest to describe local inhabitants, gather specimens, and chart coast lines, produce images of South American for a European audience (Pratt 7). For example, writings such as Charles de al Condamine's Brief Narrative of Travels through the Interior of South American (1745) or History of the Pyramids of Quito (1751) employ a male gaze "whose imperial eyes passively look out

and possess" (Pratt 7). As the text progresses, however, Doerr exposes the colonial implications of "seeing-men" by reversing the gaze, switching subject and object. This stylistic tool effectively conveys Sara's realization of her complicity in a colonial legacy through the story of Kid Muñoz.

Sara observes Kid Muñoz and the blind man figuratively sees her too. Sara takes on a sense of responsibility and shame for how her country is seen as having a culture of materialism identifiable to Mexicans when they observe a wealthy Anglo sitting in a luxurious restaurant. In "Kid Muñoz," she watches the blind lottery vendor from the comfortable restaurant in the Hotel París and learns that he lost his sight in an Olympic boxing match in the US. Doerr writes, "Sara added this tragedy to the accumulating burden of guilt that with each passing month in Mexico weighted more intolerably upon her. Now, to the guilt of having too much food, too many dresses, she added the guilt of seeing" (37). She is uncomfortable that even a blind man is capable of focusing on her; she gains new found knowledge from the discomfort by realizing that as an Anglo, one of the richest people in Ibarra, she is part of a larger colonial history representative of the asymmetrical power dynamics and economic status between the US and Mexico.

As the narrative develops, the author reverses the gaze of the travel writer and recasts Mexicans as seeing men and women who observe Sara and Richard through the front window of their home. This configuration of space reverses the novel's first impression of the Ibarrans as shadows in life's drama; in contrast, the Evertons's big adobe home is a stage on which the Anglos play for the benefit of a Mexican audience. In one scene, villagers such as Remedios Acosta, Paz, and María de Lourdes watch the Evertons and conclude that their behavior is irrational: the Anglos burn candles on the dinner table when they do not need extra light; they rebuild a stone fountain twice to get

the design right even though it has no practical utility; they bring back from outlying regions exotic plants that may not grow in Ibarra; and they feed stray cats and dogs that do not belong to them. Remedios tells her neighbors that the Evertons's habits appear extravagant and wasteful because they "buy special food for three dogs and a cat that are not theirs. Will those animals remember how to hunt mice and hares if they are fed on plates at the door? The *señor* and *señora* are preparing them to starve" (Doerr 16). As stories of Sara and Richard's seemingly scatter-brained behavior spread throughout Ibarra, the villagers explain the Anglo's odd conduct by labeling the Evertons "*mediodesorientado*" or half-disoriented (Doerr 24).

Fashioning space in a way that objectifies the Anglos and draws on elements of travel writing, specifically visual observation, the author generates a geopoetic expression of both the Anglos and Mexicans failures to comprehend one another. The villagers are "as mysterious to the Evertons as the Evertons are to them" ("Doerr," *Gale* n.p.). The Anglos are slightly disoriented in Ibarra because their previously-learned codes of behavior do not apply. Similarly, the Evertons label the Mexicans "magical" because of their ability to travel across great distances (a common occurrence in the novel). In some respects, the Ibarrans ability to travel afar is magical in a village devoid of railway or airport, technology facilitating rapid transportation. The labels "*mediodesorientado*" and "magical" suggest that both communities misunderstand each other because of their own cultural paradigms—what is common sense to the Anglos is nonsense to the Ibarrans and vice versa.

Doerr's presentation of dual cultural perspectives relies on how common sense operates relative to different cultures. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz argues that what appears to be common sense in one culture may not be so in another because common

sense is a socially constructed system whose authority resides in “mere matter-of-fact apprehension of reality” or “down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom” (Local 73-8). He also notes that while an individual can never obviate one’s own cultural positioning responsible for shaping common sense, one can learn to recognize a range of possible common sense practices. Common sense is a social construct that Doerr’s novel makes visible through cultural difference; indeed, what appears to be a rational act to the Evertons, such as sharing the last beer in the refrigerator, is considered nonsense to the Ibarrans because beer costs only three pesos in Mexico. Conversely, feeding stray animals seems inhumane to the Ibarrans but humane to the Evertons. Geertz’s theory on common sense is useful to an understanding of the novel because it explains how Sara enters Ibarra much like any other foreign traveler in a strange land—with little ability at the outset to decipher the cultural codes of the native inhabitants.

Consistent with Geertz’s assertion that it is only by witnessing the “common sense” of another culture that an individual may recognize it in her own culture (78-84), Sara gradually becomes more able to understand her Mexican neighbors’ points of view. Doerr accomplishes this through a literary technique of doubling that involves “linked stories.” In a 1999-interview, Doerr says linked stories describe a single event or shared anecdote from different cultural perspectives and, taken together, comprise the novel (“Doerr,” Gale n.p.). Depictions of daily life in Ibarra, whether buying a coffin or attending a picnic, make clear “common sense” practices of both the Evertons and Ibarrans. Furthermore, linked stories resemble yet refute manners-and-customs writing or travel narratives in which European traveler-narrators describe “normal habits” of natives (Pratt, “Scratches” 120). By including the “normal habits” of the Evertons and those of the local inhabitants, the author challenges the colonial implications of limited,

one-way portraits of a people set forth in customs-and-manners writing. Further, linked stories of the novel shape a poetics that shows Sara's ability to experience moments of heightened consciousness in which she gains empathy for Mexican cultural practices.

In separate but parallel stories, for example, Doerr describes the process of buying a coffin, engaging first the perspective of Chuy Santos, a local entrepreneur, and then the Evertons. Doerr's technique of doubling demonstrates that what appears to be inappropriate to the Anglos is actually common sense to the locals and, conversely, what seems logical, even generous, to the Anglos is considered improper by the Mexicans (Doerr 183). In "The Red Taxi," Chuy buys cheap coffins for his friends who die in a mining accident and charges expensive coffins to Richard. Chuy invests the difference in a red taxi which the three friends had formerly agreed to buy. This anecdote shows the reader that Chuy's investment in cheap coffins is acceptable in Ibarra based on the cultural codes of the local inhabitants. Chuy believes, like the fellow Ibarrans, the deaths were fated. Furthermore, because the friends had already agreed to purchase the red taxi, Chuy feels justified in investing the extra money in his business.

In another chapter, Doerr describes a similar transaction performed by the Evertons. They purchase a cheap rather than expensive coffin and altruistically plan to give the balance to his surviving relative, the town beggar Inocencia. However, family and friends of Inocencia reject the "pauper's coffin" and the Anglos are forced to exchange it for the pricey one (176). Shortly thereafter, Inocencia dies and the town discovers that she is "the second richest woman in Ibarra" (177). Sara "revises her image" of the beggar woman and realizes why the Ibarrans considered the cheap coffin disrespectful: the Mexicans correctly recognize that the Anglos purchased the



inexpensive coffin based on the presumed poverty of Inocencia. What Sara had considered an act of generosity, she learns, is an act of pity (Doerr 177, 183).

Another example of Sara's changing behavior occurs when she begins to question her objective to "improve" women's rights in Ibarra. Engaging the figure of the *exploratrice sociale*, Doerr illustrates that Sara gains an awareness that this intention reinforces her role within a larger colonial drama. *Exploratrices sociales* were female European travelers (or temporary residents) who visited in Latin America in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Pratt 147). Pratt analyzes the travel writing of *exploratrices sociales*, in a tradition that includes texts by Flora Tristan (who lived in Peru from 1833 to 1834) and Maria Graham Callott (who lived in Chile in 1822) (155-164). While abroad, such women assume a duty to perform charitable work and introduce pragmatic reform measures to a host country that they perceive as less advantaged or backward. This colonial mindset reflects a "sense of personal independence, property, and social authority" where the *exploratrices sociales* demonstrate "female imperial intervention" in a foreign nation as a way to debunk constrictive gender roles in their native countries (Pratt 157, 160). They assert themselves primarily in the private, domestic sphere of house or hospital, where their role is especially critical: "If the men's job was to collect and possess everything else, these women travelers sought first and foremost to collect and possess themselves. Their territorial claim was to private space, a personal, room-sized empire" (Pratt 160). What the *exploratrice sociale* fails to appreciate is that her benevolent "civilizing missions" (Pratt 160) translate to a paradigm of superiority and paternalism—a realization that Sara slowly grasps in Stones for Ibarra.

Doerr clearly establishes Sara as a fictional *exploratrice sociale*, but simultaneously undercuts that role in the domestic space of their home. Sara builds a

“room-sized empire” in the private sphere of their adobe home motivated by an intense need to “collect and possess” herself because of Richard’s imminent death (Pratt 160). The author’s construction of domestic space and Sara’s relationship to it shows she is trying “to understand a world in which people seem to believe in a ‘relentless providence’” (“Doerr,” *Gale* n.p.). In this way, Doerr uses mortality, specifically the difficulty of coping with her husband’s coming death, to show how Sara experiences a shared sense of humanity with the Ibarrans. Sara’s status as an *exploratrice sociale* is illustrated by the author’s descriptions of Sara decorating the adobe home with Mexican religious relics. However, even as she tries to make their home an oasis for their final six years together, she admits that she cannot prevent Richard’s illness: neither her sheer act of will power nor God’s act of grace will save him:

If we were to be born again, she thought, we would choose to be born in this house, in that bed that is still unmade. Born to work this mine, whose name should be *Quien Sabe* [Who Knows], and to live in this mountain town of one thousand souls. . . . All we would want out of being born again is this place to live and die in, as we are living and dying now. Then she amended her words. As Richard is dying in it now, in spite of the hematologist’s pills, in spite of me.

(182)

Acknowledging the villager’s belief in fatalism, a perspective the Mexicans repeatedly demonstrate to her, Sara comes to understand that regardless of how hard she works to “collect” herself and her husband, Richard will die “in spite” of her efforts. This is a new perspective for Sara, a woman previously convinced that medical science would prolong Richard’s life beyond the six year diagnosis. Rendering the spaces of the home in a

manner that highlights yet troubles Sara's role as an *exploratrice sociale* illustrates a moment of the protagonist's heightened awareness.

Doerr also mobilizes her protagonist to realize that the reform measures she propounds in Ibarra are both folly and egoism—Sara's campaign to encourage women's suffrage, for example, is a guise to impose her values.<sup>7</sup> Sara encourages the Ibarra women to vote in upcoming Mexican presidential elections rather than let their husbands vote for them. When Ibarra women shrug off her suggestion, Sara asks a village man why he voted for his wife. Pointing to a hillside sign, he responds, "You are forgetting, *señora*, that when we voted we already knew the name of the next president of the republic" (Doerr 18). Months before the election, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) constructed ten foot high letters spelling the next president of Mexico. Sara realizes that her efforts are impractical because women's suffrage does not matter much in a pre-determined election. She also realizes that she had incorrectly assumed that the voting process in Mexico is similar to US when, in fact, the PRI has governed Mexico's single party system for decades. Sara's "civilizing mission" is moot—a point that Doerr literally inscribes in the space of a hillside overlooking the town (Pratt 160).

When Sara reflects on this experience, she discovers a commonality with the Mexican women around her in their shared status as wives. Sara achieves cross-cultural awareness through gendered status because the role of wife transcends cultural barriers. This point may highlight Doerr's belief that patriarchal power structures in the institution of marriage supercede ethnic barriers that separate women from different cultures. Sara thinks, "They are good wives . . . not like me. They have handed over their suffrage to their husbands without argument, as they might hand over a plate of food or an ironed shirt" (Doerr 18). Sara no longer sees the Ibarra women as specters or apparitions; instead, she

sees them as living people—wives like herself—with rational reasons for not casting their own votes. In this moment of “higher consciousness,” Sara gains “an awareness of her common humanity with the villagers of Ibarra” (Alarcón 97).

Sara’s moments of “higher consciousness” illustrate Clifford’s notion of travel as a translational process, a means of exploring cultural difference, of exposing hitherto hidden or unquestioned beliefs and norms. Clifford explains, “In the kind of translation that interests me most, you learn a lot about peoples, cultures, and histories different from your own, enough to begin to know what you’re missing” (39). In the novel, Sara learns enough to realize what she had been missing—that social norms within the contexts of marriage and local electioneering have radically different meanings depending on whether the locale is Ibarra or San Francisco. Crossing the US-Mexico border matters in Doerr’s construction of space. Clifford’s theory, moreover, suggests that travel affords the potential for individual transformation and translation based on an increased self-awareness that comes out of a recognition of cultural difference, a process that slowly unfolds for Sara in Stones for Ibarra. He writes: “One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes. In successful translation, the access to something alien—another language, culture, or code—is substantial. Something different is brought over, made available for understanding, appreciation, consumption” (Clifford 182). The “specific location” that Clifford refers to is one’s own positionality or, in the novel, Sara’s rootedness to the US. Crossing borders, Sara “brings over” a recognition that she has blindly imposed her values in Mexico without regard to the wishes of the locals. Such use of geography and travel, plus Doerr’s revision of the *exploratrice sociale* as a woman who becomes aware of, rather than entrenched in, her

ethnocentricity produce a geopoetic articulation of Sara's cognizance of her role within a larger colonial drama.

In the final chapters, Doerr completes the circuitous travel loop for the Evertons with Richard's death from cancer. Sara packs the adobe home so she may return to the US. Doerr affirms how far Sara has come in her ability to understand the Ibarrans when she figuratively joins a village tribute to Richard, a pile of stones at the end of the driveway. Before leaving Ibarra permanently, she imagines herself crying out to her neighbors to "Remember the place. Bring stones" (214). The scene is a moving portrait of a woman seeking solace among her neighbors by participating in a local custom to honor Richard's life.

The separate moments of heightened consciousness she has experienced thus far culminate in Sara's profound shared expression and acceptance of Richard's death. This act cuts across cultural barriers as the Anglo woman shares a living memory of her husband with the Ibarrans, a memory that, according to the village priest, "neither rain nor wind can sweep away" (212). In a review of Stones for Ibarra, Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko writes that "each stone marks a recalling, a remembering" that every inhabitant of the village, regardless of nationality, acknowledges in Richard (8). Sara identifies a shared humanity with the Ibarrans in dealing with the inevitability of death, a commonality that transcends those cultural barriers that separate the Anglos and Mexicans.

Stones for Ibarra challenges travel accounts by ending on the withdrawal, rather than expansion, of the Anglo presence in Mexico. Everything—a fully refurbished house, blooming gardens, and a new vein of copper—is sold to a Mexican miner as Doerr's way of ending the colonial legacy which Sara slowly came to recognize and struggled to

reconcile. The author is not discouraging travel or residency abroad, but her point in this final act—transferring the adobe and mine to a Mexican owner—is that Anglos should not occupy Mexico as the most wealthy and powerful inhabitants. The journey that began with Richard’s grandparents ends in Richard’s death so that there is “no North American left in Ibarra” (2).

Through the lens of geopoetics in Stones for Ibarra, cross-cultural experience appears as enabling the protagonist to recognize the limitations of her own culturally-situated perceptions and to gain respect for those of others. Where Doerr implicitly exposes the colonial legacy of nineteenth-century travel writing through her novel, Fuentes is engaged in an explicit critique of that legacy in Old Gringo. Fuentes’s depiction of space combined with his engagement with travel writing creates in Old Gringo a geopoetic expression yet again illustrative of how an *exploratrice sociale*—aggressively trying to reshape environs in Mexico according to precepts of Manifest Destiny—becomes capable of acknowledging her contributions to a colonial legacy.<sup>8</sup>

### Old Gringo

The opening pages of Old Gringo represent an Anglo character’s first impression of Mexico using third person omniscient narration to register the distance between the author’s ubiquitous perspective and the protagonist’s limited degree of cultural awareness. Harriet Winslow begins her stay into Mexico around 1913, only three years after the start of the Mexican Revolution. She watches soldiers set fire to the Miranda hacienda where she had been hired to work as a governess.<sup>9</sup> Fuentes immediately casts Harriet as the quintessential ugly traveler: her first words are haughty demands for the Mexican revolutionaries to cease destroying the estate; her commands are based in her claim that, as an employee, she is responsible for the property. Her comments disturb

another Anglo in Mexico, the old Gringo, as well as the Mexican troop leader, General Tomás Arroyo. But, Harriet is so caught up in her own world that she is blinded to the symbolic significance of the burning hacienda. From Arroyo's perspective, however, that burning equates to the overthrow of an oppressive socio-economic system and a personal victory over an upper class family that discriminated against him as a child. In all, Harriet's petty tirade appears trivial and absurd set against the gruesome spectacle of the hacienda and the bodies of federal soldiers hanging from telegraph poles.

Fuentes engages travel writing much like Doerr through the figure of the *exploratrice sociale*, a nineteenth-century female traveler intent on implementing a "civilizing mission" among a "backward" people (Pratt 155-164). Compared to Sara in Stones for Ibarra, however, Harriet is far more aggressive in her goal to reshape the spaces of Mexico and the Mexican people who inhabit them. Taking up residence in the soldiers' camp, Harriet imposes her ethnocentric values literally and figuratively, attempting to clean up the hacienda and scrub the revolutionaries clean of their own culture. "What these people need is education, not rifles," Harriet mutters condescendingly, "A good scrubbing, followed by a few lessons on how we do things in the United States" (Fuentes 41). Believing herself to be the linchpin of this effort, Harriet tries to achieve "social authority" in Mexico, or improved individual agency and decision making power that may be a response to gender restrictions in the US (Pratt 159-160). Fuentes writes, "And she, Miss Harriet Winslow, would set the example; she would be the symbol around which all the work of restoring the hacienda would resolve" (93). Fuentes renders the immediate spaces around Harriet, the camp and hacienda, as site where she tries to create her a "room-sized empire" much like previous travel writers' depictions of the *exploratrice sociale* (Pratt 160). Such a combination of poetics and

places sets up the protagonist for a later transformation in which she will realize her ethnocentrism.

Fuentes's poetic expression of a fictive *exploratrice sociale* also draws on a colonial legacy of travel writing via "female imperial intervention" in Mexico (Pratt 159). Sara is not simply intent on cleaning up the domestic sphere. Her real goal is to subordinate Mexican to US culture through an "English language" education that places primacy on a Protestant work ethic "today" rather than "*mañana*"; "What she had on her mind was to establish a basic schedule for the elementary instruction of the children. Today—not *mañana*—the children would start learning the basic skills, the three Rs of English language instruction: reading, writing, and 'rithmetic" (Fuentes 93). She believes that she is right to educate a "primitive" neighbor, a prevalent ideology in colonialism. Such sentiments resonate with the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, the widespread nineteenth-century sentiment in the US that Anglos had a "moral duty" to help benighted and backward nations.

Through his fiction, Fuentes responds to travel narratives that espouse the innocence of the *exploratrice sociale* who sees herself performing a moral duty to help others less fortunate. Harriet simultaneously asserts US hegemony while claiming moral high ground that she is right, innocent, civilized, progressive, and reform-spirited—what she believes to be legitimate justifications of her efforts (Pratt 7). To demonstrate that Harriet's "innocent" efforts are not welcome in Mexico, Fuentes provides examples of Mexican responses to her patronizing attitude. She piques Arroyo's anger telling him that she plans to "civilize" Mexicans—her "duty" to Mexico (Fuentes 41). In addition, Harriet directly challenges Arroyo's authority and position revealing a superior attitude toward Mexicans (Fuentes 59, 41, 59). Critic Frederic Murray summarizes Arroyo's anger and



Harriet's naïve colonial mindset: "Those attitudes that belong to a culture foreign to one's experience run the risk of being viewed as misguided at best, or at worst, as being inherently false and deliberately pernicious" (21).

Additionally, Fuentes casts Harriet as a political meddler who willingly and actively accepts her role in a colonial legacy. He does this through her claim that the Revolution is a misguided effort at governmental reform that could better be achieved through peaceful, grass roots, democratic government. This intervention—an Anglo telling Mexicans how to govern themselves—alludes to the melding of "politics with the personal" common to the practices and writings of *exploratrices sociales* (Pratt 168). Such travel writing is also reflective of a history of US colonial intervention in the domestic affairs of Latin American nations. In the scene, Harriet tells the camp followers that they must elect officials and learn to "truly govern themselves" in a democratic fashion (Fuentes 94). In response, the Mexicans feel "pity" for her because she does not realize they are fighting to oust "democratic" leader Porfirio Díaz. Harriet's political meddling backfires; the Mexicans do not accept her as a "take-charge" leader but instead see her as an outsider who does not understand their ways. Portraying Harriet's efforts as counter productive to her goals is the means that Fuentes uses to critique a tradition of travel writing that espouses personal and political intervention.

The protagonist's first lesson in cultural sensitivity occurs when Arroyo shames her into realizing that her relationship to Mexicans and Mexico is ignorant and inappropriate. In this scene, the Anglo woman incorrectly assumes the revolutionaries have stolen a pearl necklace, "spoils" and "booty" of war, during the village feastday (Fuentes 105). The General literally drags her to the chapel where she sees the pearls hanging on a statue of the Virgin Mary. The poor villagers "save the whole year,

*señorita*,” Arroyo explains, “they go hungry to have their fiesta on the appointed day” (Fuentes 108). What Harriet interprets as stealing for individual profit is, in effect, an act of generosity for the benefit of the whole community. Misunderstanding the community’s religious devotion, she tries to “hide her shame” when she realizes that she is an outsider ignorant of local practices (Fuentes 107). This is significant because it shows Fuentes’s revision of the figure of the *exploratrice sociale*: Harriet becomes aware of cross-cultural difference, a process that unfolds as she falls in love with Arroyo.

Fuentes uses the amorous relationship to explore how an *exploratrice sociale* might gain a greater appreciation for Mexican culture. He does this on two levels. First, using the literary motif of mirrors, he taps into an emphasis on visual observation via European subjects seeing and perceiving native objects in eighteenth-century European travel writing. Fuentes uses the ballroom of the Miranda estate, invoking the Spanish verb, “*mirar*” [to look upon], to underscore the importance of seeing oneself in a moment of self-revelation and seeing others in moments of heightened consciousness (Castillo 39). Second, he juxtaposes Arroyo and Harriet, showing how an Anglo woman is able to recognize cultural difference in an intimate encounter through the contrast of her perceptions with those of the Mexican man. This suggests a woman’s process of self-discovery emerges through a man, a fact revealing Fuentes’s own patriarchal biases. Nonetheless, these techniques coupled with Fuentes’s use of the ballroom space in the Miranda hacienda render a geopoetic expression of Harriet’s transformation into a more culturally sensitive individual, as Fuentes links a specific class-based place to the conventions of travel writing.

In The Labyrinth of Solitude (1950), Mexican writer Octavio Paz explains how immersion in a foreign culture enables individuals to see themselves with new

awareness.<sup>10</sup> He describes this process of self-discovery based on his experiences crossing the US-Mexico border:

We can all reach the point of knowing ourselves to be Mexicans. It is enough, for example, simply to cross the border . . . I should confess that many of the reflections in this essay occurred to me outside of Mexico, during a two-year stay in the United States. I remember that whenever I attempted to examine North American life, anxious to discover its meaning, I encountered my own questioning image. That image, seen against the glittering background of the United States, was the first and perhaps the profoundest answer which that country gave to my first questions. (12)

When Paz examines North American life while living in Los Angeles, for instance, he sees his own "questioning image" because it stands out as different from Anglo culture. In short, the differences between one culture and another come into bold relief when juxtaposed. Traversing the US-Mexico border serves as an occasion for self-discovery for Paz. Fuentes depicts a directionally opposite but parallel experience in Harriet.

Though a series of interpersonal and intercultural interactions in the Miranda ballroom, the author depicts Harriet's transformation from a state of blindness, where her own ethnocentrism is invisible to her, to an ability to see herself in relation to Anglo and Mexican culture. Fuentes's construction of ballroom space speaks to a Victorian gentility with which Harriet is familiar, a space that reinforces her "innocent" imposition of civilizing missions. When Harriet enters the ballroom for the first time with the old Gringo, an elderly man serving in Pancho Villa's forces, she finds comfort in the company of a fellow Anglo. His presence reinforces cultural stereotypes about gentility, since he is a man who offers her protection from "uncivilized" Mexicans around her.

Over the course of their conversation, Harriet asserts that she did not notice her reflection in the mirror when she entered the ballroom. Symbolically, Harriet is not self-reflexive when she is with another Anglo; in accordance with Paz's theory of self-discovery, her own ethnocentrism is invisible to her because she is immersed in the prison house of her own culture.

Fuentes disrupts Harriet's comfortable positioning in this space when revolutionaries burst into the quiet ballroom. Her fear of the Mexicans registers a degree of self-centeredness that suggests the revolutionaries have nothing better to do than to seek out the Americans among them. The author reinforces the message of Harriet's egoism by contrasting her behavior with that of the old Gringo who tries to make sense of what he sees. Frightened by the Mexicans, Harriet takes refuge in the presence of the old Gringo, fretting, "[t]hey have seen us" (Fuentes 39). Her fears prove ungrounded. The revolutionaries are "indifferent to the two gringos" because they are preoccupied with the reflection of their own whole bodies in the mirrors, a new experience to which they exclaim joyfully, "it's me" and "it's us" (40). The old Gringo concludes that seeing oneself whole is a privilege the two Anglos have taken for granted, because they have been "doubtlessly conditioned to ballrooms" in San Francisco or Washington D.C. (39). With the seemingly dangerous situation averted, Harriet tries to cover up her misreading of the situation, stating the soldiers "are ruining the parquet" with their boots (Fuentes 40). This statement confirms that Harriet both realizes that her fears of the Mexicans are unfounded and that she is still invested in the idea she is superior to Mexicans.

Resolving to "take charge of this place" (40), Harriet completely misses the significance of this moment from the perspective of the revolutionaries: they see it as a victory over economic oppression (Castillo 38-41). In Fuentes's construction, the

revolutionaries see a space clearly associated with the upper class elite and representative of the intense classism in Mexico against which they fight. The soldiers' reflections in Old Gringo can be understood in Paz's conceptualization of the Revolution as "revelation." In "Re/Visions: Mural Painting," Paz explains:

Our revolution brought forth, as in the delivery of a child, an unknown Mexico. Except that the child that was born in 1920 had existed for centuries: it was the popular and traditional Mexico, hidden by the previous regime. The Mexican Revolution was the discovery of Mexico by Mexicans. . . . The Revolution revealed Mexico to us. Or better put: it made us look back so as to see it. And it made painters, poets, and novelists above all look back. (114)

Paz posits that the Revolution, a powerful epoch of massive social upheaval, forced freedom fighters to confront the realization that Mexico had become a nation politically fragmented and socially divided along class and ethnic lines. Once that reality was confronted, the goal of the revolutionaries became one of reclaiming a "popular and traditional Mexico." According to Paz, this might occur by establishing a new government that serves people equally regardless of class. Like the artists that Paz mentions, Fuentes provides a "look back" at the Revolution in the novel as revolutionaries see the ideal, whole nation they want to claim, a vision captured figuratively by their reflections in the mirrors. Their moment of self-discovery is a victory because they witness an image "hidden" from them by decades of class oppression. In Fuentes's portrayal, the ballroom no longer represents an exclusive, elitist space as it did to Harriet, but a sphere the soldiers have conquered that entitles them to the right to be seen—by everyone—as wholly enfranchised citizens.

Because Harriet is too immersed in her own world to see beyond it, she completely misses the importance of this event. However, as the novel progresses, Fuentes uses the mirrors as well as Harriet's growing love affair with Arroyo, to show how she begins to change. Fuentes's engagement of visual observation, a prevalent element in travel writing, added to his portrayal of space ultimately produce a geopoetics in which Harriet's transformation is confirmed: "All that was left was to accept the change Harriet had undergone in Arroyo's violent love" (147). While dancing with him, she sees herself for the first time in the mirrors because his presence as a Mexican makes her own Anglo identity visible to her. She admits that initially she did not see the revolutionaries:

Arroyo, I know, I have not looked at all of your people, I wish I had, I have certainly missed something, what have I missed? . . . You must tell me. *I cannot take it all in in such a short time.* I am weak and foreign and, even in my shabby gentility, sheltered. Do you understand this? I have learned. I am making an effort, I swear it. I am trying to understand all this, you, your country, your people. (Italics in original; Fuentes 190)

This experience signals Harriet's changing attitude from patronizing haughtiness to a more sensitive appreciation of cultural difference; how she sincerely wants to "understand" and "learn" about a cultural that once seemed primitive to her.

Dialogue functions in the novel to confirm Harriet's transformation from an *exploratrice sociale* espousing a rhetoric of Manifest Destiny to a woman who recognizes her complicity in a colonial legacy. Fuentes accomplishes this through counter-pointing dialogue Harriet utters when she first arrives in Mexico with exchanges made after beginning the affair with Arroyo. In the opening pages, for example, the old Gringo tells

Harriet, “[y]ou aren’t going to stay to educate anyone. They would likely educate you first,” a comment she dismisses at the time (Fuentes 42). Harriet parrots this line back to him in the closing pages, stating, “You mean, although I came to teach, I am the one who is being taught” (Fuentes 148). Harriet also states a very similar line to Arroyo in the final pages (Fuentes 190). Such dialogue reveals the author’s sexism, depicting a woman thoroughly subordinated to men following her love affair with Arroyo, but it also confirms Harriet’s transformation.

The author portrays the most overt examples of Harriet’s change in the closing pages of the novel when she re-enters the US. The US-Mexico border, in Fuentes’s use of geographic spaces, affirms the significant role travel plays in enabling the identification of ethnocentrism. It is in this final border crossing that she firmly realizes and rejects her role in a colonial legacy when reporters bombard her with questions on whether the US military should intervene in the Mexican Revolution. She retorts, “No! No! I want to *learn* to live with Mexico, I don’t want to save it. . . . what mattered was to live with Mexico in spite of progress and democracy” (Italics added; Fuentes 187). With the thorough transformation of the *exploratrice sociale* and the author’s use of space to show its multiple meanings from the perspective of Anglos and Mexicans, Fuentes thereby creates a geopoetic expression that reflects on and refutes a colonial legacy of travel writing.

Authorial perspective, specifically Fuentes’s transnationality and nationality, helps explain the relationship between travel, identity, and cultural difference that causes Harriet’s transformation in Old Gringo. Because Fuentes shuttles between Mexico City and London, nations with distinct cultural traditions, he is uniquely positioned to convey the perspective that geopoetics in the novel makes clear: travel facilitates awareness and

sensitivity to cultural practices by revealing difference.<sup>11</sup> His transnationalism contributes to his ability to create that message through fiction. Harriet's behavioral changes in the novel must also be understood from the author's perspective—it matters that a Mexican author not only writes for an American audience, but through the viewpoint of a woman.<sup>12</sup> The gender politics of the text invoke a formula that suggests a woman's transformation is contingent upon contact with the right man. Such sexism withstanding, narrating through Harriet's perspective as she "sits and remembers" Mexico establishes common ground with a US audience who, in theory, might identify with a fellow Anglo's feelings while traveling or living in a strange and exotic land and the post travel rumination cultural encounters might generate. Her transformation positions her as a "*figura simbólica de la conciencia norteamericana*" ["symbolic figure of North American conscience"] (Roy 63) suggesting that Fuentes wants the US readership to change, like Harriet, by recognizing their complicity in a colonial attitude toward Mexico.

Furthermore, a male author's choice to tell his story through a female perspective may hint that women are more sympathetic to cultural difference and more open to change than men. Both Fuentes and Doerr expose a colonial legacy of travel writing through fictive accounts of women that demonstrate travel is a gendered experience. "*Exploratrice sociale*" is a term that speaks to "histories of freedom and danger in movement" for women travelers exclusively because historically the purpose of women's and men's travel has been different; "women were impeded from serious travel"; whereas men travel for reasons that are "heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, or ennobling" (Clifford 6, 31). Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo demonstrate that one explanation for travel as a gendered phenomenon is that men's and women's roles in the



colonial legacy are radically different; Sara Everton and Harriet Winslow initially attempt to “civilize” Mexicans through education while John Grady Cole, the protagonist of All the Pretty Horses, tries to conquer Mexicans through force of arms.

Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo operate as models of emergence from cultural insensitivity to cross-cultural awareness; female protagonists enact and refute a colonial legacy. All the Pretty Horses functions as a model of transgression as the male protagonist embraces his role in a colonial drama, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge any cultural values but his own.<sup>13</sup>

### **All the Pretty Horses**

Geopoetics in All the Pretty Horses (1992) pairs Cormac McCarthy’s engagement with the code of the West with artistic renderings of the open range, Big Rock Candy Mountain, and a Mexican prison to offer a confession and apology for a history of colonial expansion in the West. McCarthy writes out of and in response to the genre of the Western to offer a revisionist stance that exposes rather than celebrates masculine heroics of conquest.<sup>14</sup> Protagonist John Grady Cole is an Anglo cowboy moving in the spaces and places of Mexico without regard to the cultural sensibilities of the native inhabitants. Those travels begin in San Angelo, Texas in 1949 with an image of Cole crossing the US-Mexico border with best friend, Lacey Rawlins. They begin their journey with a colonial mentality in which Mexico is a blank space ripe for the inscription of Anglo values.

McCarthy counterpoints the significance of the landscape in the US and Mexico to the Anglo teens; they believe each nation offers radically different futures to them. Dwindling open range in Texas suggests to Cole and Rawlins that the old American West is gone forever: fences dissect the formerly open plains, oil rigs blight the horizon, and

wild mustangs no longer exist. When Cole learns that his grandfather's 18,000-acre cattle ranch—what he hoped would be his legacy and life work—is to be sold, he concludes that he cannot live the life of a cowboy in the US. The boys presume to pursue their calling in Mexico where they expect to find a nineteenth-century version of the Old West. Roads and towns dotting US territory on Rawlins's map seems to confirm the urban encroachment and economic development that threatens the life of a rancher in the US and the boy's future prospects in Texas. In contrast, blank, white space denoting Mexican territory on Rawlins's map reinforces what the cowboys want to see south of the border. Rawlins asks, "You reckon it aint never been mapped?" and even as Cole assures him it has, Rawlins persists in demonstrating his ethnocentrism by concluding definitively: "There aint shit down there" (McCarthy 34). As if a scene from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902), the blank spaces on the map represent places available for those willing to and capable of occupying them. Cole and Rawlins believe they have a future in Mexico based on their vision of the past in the US; by traveling to Mexico, they think they can live as wranglers in the Old West, a tradition as nearly extinct in south Texas as the ghost Comanche who ride through the pages of the novel.

Prior to entering the seemingly uncharted territory of Mexico, Cole and Rawlins meet a fellow Anglo traveler and, against their better judgment, allow him to join them because of his appeal to a sense of shared nationalism. Just north of the US-Mexico border, a thirteen year old boy named Jimmy Blevins, riding a big bay horse, approaches Cole and Rawlins. Cole and Rawlins are reluctant to let Blevins tag along because they find out he is a run-away and they suspect the horse is stolen. Ultimately, Blevins asks to ride with the older boys because, he claims, "I'm an American" (McCarthy 45). Cole and Rawlins relent because crossing the US-Mexico border is a significant event that calls for

the Anglos to stick together. Although Cole and Rawlins certainly do not stand to gain much from Blevins's presence, they do not abandon their "kid brother" as they enter unknown, foreign territory.

The narrator's description of the boy's river crossing is chilling: they plunge into the Rio Grande/*Río Bravo* on their horses "making for the alien shore like a party of marauders" (45). McCarthy uses this description to clearly evoke a colonial legacy that calls on the Anglo frontier myth of westward expansion as represented in Blood Meridian (1985), his first novel set in the Southwest. Blood Meridian depicts the brutality of Anglo scalp hunters in the nineteenth century—a notably male paradigm for travel in which danger, freedom, and gender roles generally precluded women's involvement. Just as Anglo soldiers invade lands inhabited by Native Americans or Mexicans, the three young men enter Mexico like "marauders" ready to inscribe their own values in the blank spaces of this "alien" world, echoing the border crossings in Blood Meridian. This interpretation is further supported by the intertextuality of Blood Meridian and All the Pretty Horses, texts separated by exactly one hundred years (the former starts in 1849 and the latter in 1949) and their similar response to the valorization of conquest set forth in the dime novel tradition of early Western writing and perpetuated to the present day by writers such as Louis L'Amour. McCarthy's intent is to show the cyclical nature of US history (Pilkington 315). Critic Tom Pilkington sums up: "McCarthy's characters, then, search out frontiers, those fluid zones of freedom and opportunity, of action and destiny that Americans traditionally have sought. What they often find is an actual and metaphysical horror" (315).

McCarthy's portrayal of the boys' subsequent behavior on the opposite shore shows how naïve they are about their role in a colonial drama even as they re-enact it.

Ignorant of the fact that spaces and places are imbued with the culture of the native inhabitants, the Anglos ride on in order to physically inhabit the “empty” space on the map which, from their perspective, represents unclaimed and available land for them exclusively. Compared to their earlier description as “marauders,” once in Mexico McCarthy portrays them as demonstrating a happy-go-lucky attitude confirming that they have accomplished something significant by traversing the US-Mexico border. For example, they cross the river “fanning with their hats and laughing and pulling up and patting the horses on the shoulder” as Rawlins boasts, looking back at Texas: “Goddamn. . . . You know where we’re at?” (McCarthy 45-6). Rawlins’s question coupled with the boys’ giddy behavior evokes a spirit of high adventure typical of male travel narratives; he knows that they have not simply forged another stream.<sup>15</sup> The three cowboys provide a noteworthy contrast to Sara and Harriet in Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo as *exploratrices sociales* where the women impose their values on Mexico vis-à-vis a legacy of education and charity work. The boys inherit a violent and aggressive history of conquest that, although not exclusively male, intimates the possibility for inflicting great damage on Mexicans as well as themselves.

As demonstrated in Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo, the Anglos’ first impressions of life in Mexico illustrates a lack of cultural sensitivity, a pattern reinforced by All the Pretty Horses. In McCarthy’s novel, the boy’s initial perceptions of Mexico confirm again what they want to find and what they anticipate seeing based on previous-learned stereotypes. When they ride into the town of *Reforma*, for instance, they notice there is no electricity, roads, or cars.<sup>16</sup> The lack of technology affirms Cole and Rawlins’s preconceived notions about Mexico as a primitive place. Rawlins’s jokes, “[d]rinkin cactus juice in old Mexico . . . What do you reckon they’re saying at home about now?”

(McCarthy 51). Rawlins's question evokes stereotypes of lazy Mexicans in serapes drinking tequila under saguaro cactus. Ironically, it is the Anglos who take *siesta* in this scene—not the villagers. Cole does not disabuse Rawlins of his preconceptions, but answers by stating, "I reckon they're saying that we're gone," a response that illustrates his confidence and self-assuredness (McCarthy 51).

In the catalogue of first impressions, the author provides a noticeable contrast between Cole and Rawlins as a way to show that each boy reacts differently to cultural encounters over the course of the novel: Rawlins slowly gains respect for the cultural codes of Mexicans, but Cole does not. Cole appears more sensible about their adventure than does Rawlins, who initially appears to be a naïve sidekick less knowledgeable than his partner. Cole takes responsibility for charting their route in Mexico and, although Rawlins understands Spanish, Cole is the only one to speak to the people they encounter in Mexico. In casting Rawlins as relatively unaware of his ethnocentrism, McCarthy sets up a reversal to be exposed by later events in the plot: compared to Rawlins at the outset, Cole is a traveler who seems to be knowledgeable; subsequent events, however, show it is Cole who does not respect cultural differences. Subtly, the roles of Rawlins and Cole shift in this novel as Rawlins—not Cole—recognizes that the Anglos cannot impose their values on Mexicans without grave consequences.

McCarthy draws on the formula characteristics of the western genre vis-à-vis land and horses as a way of formulating Cole's conflict between the code of the West and cultural difference in Mexico.<sup>17</sup> As the quintessential cowboy, Cole's skills give him false confidence that he can handle anything that might happen in Mexico and cause him to assume his values have universal application north or south of the border. Specifically, he can read the land and talk to horses whether in Texas or Coahuila, and he shows

repeatedly that he is capable of navigating across hundreds of miles of rugged, open terrain with which he is not familiar. Lest a reader think such talent is common place among cowboys, McCarthy frequently emphasizes Cole's unique affinity to the land. For instance, when Rawlins and Blevins fall asleep at night, Cole lies awake for hours and feels "the wildness about him, the wildness within" (McCarthy 60), metaphorically connected to the landscape (Cheuse 141). In "A Note on Landscape in All the Pretty Horses," critic Alan Cheuse posits the land in All the Pretty Horses functions as a character in itself that shadows Cole's "inner universe" (140-1).<sup>18</sup> Cole's seemingly spiritual relationship with the land is complemented by his mystical connection to horses; Cole communicates with them like a horse whisperer and communes with them like a kindred spirit.

Rawlins and Cole find work at the *Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de La Purísima Concepción* in the border state of Coahuila, claiming that they have found their own Big Rock Candy Mountain. The allusion to Western American writer Wallace Stegner's Big Rock Candy Mountain (1938) illustrates how McCarthy uses space to further demonstrate the reasons that Cole believes his values are universal. Cole and Rawlins believe they are living the life of "the old waddy" or the US cowboy of the early twentieth century:

This is some country, aint it?

Yeah. It is. Go to sleep.

Bud?

Yeah. This is how it was with the old waddies, aint it?

Yeah.

How long do you think you'd like to stay here?

About a hundred years. Go to sleep. (McCarthy 96)

Such naiveté and exuberance, critic John Wenger reminds us, illustrates that “these are two teenage boys who have not yet seen enough of life to know how harsh it can be” (106). If Cole and Rawlins believe they have found the Old West, by extension, they believe it is a place governed by the code of the American West—a personal sense of justice to which the cowboy subordinates all else. This logic is obviously problematical in Mexico, a nation whose history and culture do not incorporate the western mythos of independence and egalitarianism. Cole may have read Stegner’s novel, as he intimates in the narrative, but he does not learn the message set forth to Stegner’s protagonist, Bo Mason; Big Rock Candy Mountain is not only an elusive place, it is an Anglo utopia located somewhere within the borders of the US—not in Mexico.

McCarthy fashions one of the boy’s first adventures in Mexico, specifically the incident in which Blevins’ horse runs away, to illustrate Rawlins’s growing situational awareness in Mexico as well as Cole’s stubborn adherence to a personal code of justice. The cowboys find the horse in Encantada, a word meaning “delighted” or “enchanted” that proves to be ironic given the fact that an incident in this town later causes Blevins’s death and Cole’s and Rawlins’s imprisonment. The Anglos realize that the only way to recover and reclaim the big bay horse is to steal it back from the Mexican farmer who found it. Rawlins is hesitant to do so. He confronts Cole, warning him that they could be shot for stealing a horse in Mexico, adding half-joking that, “We’re going to die in this goddamned country . . . . I’d hate to have to shoot my way back to Texas” (McCarthy 86). Rawlins further suggests that they abandon Blevins, who loses not only his horse in the flash flood, but also a pistol, saddle, and one boot. The scene unfolds in a way that

tells us that Rawlins grasps the life-threatening implications of their actions while Cole, in contrast, refuses to walk away from the situation.

Cole states that he is willing to help Blevins put things right. This is an assertion in accordance with the code of the West and with a sense of fair play evident in the tradition of the Western novel. “A *norteamericano* . . . he thinks that every man born on this planet is an Adam, free of memory and external constraint, able to shape his illimitable ‘self’ in any way he chooses” (Pilkington 320). Cole reasons that the horse is Blevins’s property because “[i]t damn sure dont belong to them Mexicans” (McCarthy 89). According to his logic, even if Blevins stole the horse in the US, Blevins is the proper owner of the big bay in Mexico because he rode it across the border. This exchange illustrates how Cole privileges what he thinks is right over the danger of their circumstances. McCarthy uses Rawlins’s and Cole’s differing degrees of situational awareness in Mexico as a foreshadowing of future cultural conflict.

Specifically, Cole’s willingness to impose his values of “individualism, free will, [and] volition” in Mexico (Pilkington 320) set up the protagonist for a conflict between Mexican and American cultural norms that plays out at the Mexican hacienda where the cowboys work. McCarthy writes Cole as a male traveler with unrestricted space and innate cowboy skills that transcend borders, but when the Anglo man falls in love with a Mexican woman, these selfsame qualities prevent him from recognizing the Mexican cultural codes that block a courtship between a working class *vaquero* and a *hacendado*’s daughter. McCarthy thus undermines the heroic attributes of the American cowboy as icon set forth in the Western novel by revealing the dangers of failing to heed the “complex maps and histories,” “continuing legacies of empire,” and the “intertwined roots and routes” that are seared onto the entangled past of the US and Mexico (Clifford



7, 5). Added to the weight of Cole's colonial legacy is the further complication that Cole grew up in the US-Mexico borderlands in a household where, due to his parent's estrangement, a Mexican woman rears him. McCarthy suggests that the protagonist's lifelong intimacy with and exposure to Mexicans leads him to believe that he knows more than he does about Mexico.

Cole's encounter with his lover's godmother, *Doña* Alfonza, signals Cole's first lesson in cultural difference. The lesson is that cultural mores in Mexico regarding social propriety are rigid and the consequences for violating them are permanent. Put frankly, Alfonza tries to tell Cole that people in Mexico are unforgiving of women who have lost their virginity. As the young woman's guardian, she refuses to allow Cole to unwittingly undermine Alejandra's chance for a proper marriage with a partner of commensurate class and social standing. Cole responds to her by privileging his own sense of justice over the danger of ignoring cultural difference. Specifically, Alfonza explains to Cole that he must be "considerate of a young girl's reputation" because "there is no forgiveness" (McCarthy 136-7). Unlike men, women who "lose their honor" can never regain it in Mexico because "[t]his is another country. Here a woman's reputation is all she has" (McCarthy 136). She adds that the consequences of tarnishing a woman's reputation can be "of a gravity not excluding bloodshed. Not excluding death" (McCarthy 136). Cole responds that the social constraints on women in Mexico are not "right." This comment indicates his ignorance of how deeply embedded social mores are in Mexico and how drastically they differ from his own as well as his adherence to the code of the West. It also subtly places Cole in the role of knight: he is the male liberator who might free Alejandra from what appears to be an imprisoning, penalizing social code.<sup>19</sup>

Cole simply does not get it. His conversation with Alfonza clearly exposes him to Mexican cultural norms, but his understanding of them is limited at best. Note, for example, his conversation with Rawlins immediately after meeting with Alfonza:

You still aint told me what answer you gave her, said Rawlins.

I told her I'd do whatever she asked.

What did she ask?

I aint sure.

They sat watching the fire.

Did you give your word? asked Rawlins.

I dont know. I dont know if I did nor not.

Well either you did or you didnt.

That's what I'd of thought. But I dont know. (McCarthy 139)

As the dialogue suggests, Cole is flummoxed: he does not understand that expectations about courtship greatly differ between the US and Mexico. Beyond that, his passion for Alejandra prevents him from a rational assessment of Alfonza's warning. Cole fails to register the severe consequences of ignoring these differences as he insists on privileging his own sense of what is right over Mexican social codes. In contrast to Cole, Rawlins anticipates the danger that the young boys face because he has grown increasingly aware of their status as foreigners on Mexican soil. He correctly predicts that they will be run off the hacienda if Cole continues to court Alejandra.

That Cole is compelled to do what he thinks "right" is doubly reinforced because he believes that he has found the Old West where a cowboy's code is paramount, and he disagrees with the existing social constraints placed on Alejandra. Critic Vereen Bell explains that Cole and Rawlins try to "move back in history by riding south. The great

irony, as *Señorita Alfonza*'s story underscores, it that some kind of history is everywhere" (926).<sup>20</sup> Mexican history records not the American code of the West, but the colonialism of Anglo expansion into their northern frontier. Beyond a history of antagonism between the two nations is the potential for imperialism by Cole as a disinherited rancher. He knows that by marrying Alejandra he would be entitled to the ranch, a notion that Rawlins recognizes by goading his buddy: "You got eyes for the spread? . . . Sure you aint" (McCarthy 138). McCarthy draws on the presumption set forth in the genre of classic Western novels such as *The Virginian* (1909) that social mobility is an option for the cowboy hero. Cole sees the opportunity for a future in Mexico as a cowboy, a desire that echoes his first impression of Mexico as an empty space that he intends to occupy. Despite the *Doña*'s warning and because of his presumed mastery of cowboy skills and a childhood spent among Mexicans, Cole incorrectly thinks that he is well fortified to withstand the fatal consequences that both Alfonza and Rawlins predict for him. Ensuing events prove otherwise. When the *hacendado*, Don Héctor, learns about the courtship, he has the boys imprisoned in what begins a very violent and dangerous experience for Rawlins and Cole.

Ejecting the protagonist from open range space, McCarthy situates Cole in the unforgiving space of a Mexican prison, where again the protagonist refuses to acknowledge the mores of the native culture even though his life is in danger. Cole and Rawlins land in jail to find Blevins being held for murdering a *rural* and wounding two other Mexicans. Rawlins blames Blevins for their misfortune and recognizes the severity of their predicament: "We're dead men. I knew it'd come to this. From the time I first seen him" (159). Rawlins's acuity is only slightly off: it is Blevins who dies, en route to a federal penitentiary, when a Mexican policeman executes him. Once imprisoned, Cole

and Rawlins are constantly attacked by inmates because they are Anglos. The ruling *papazote* [big shot] explains to them that they will not survive the prison because they “dont speak the language,” a statement emphasizing the Anglo’s inability to understand and participate in cultural codes of the prison that could keep them alive: “You don’t know what is the situation here. You don’t speak the language. . . . Maybe in a year here you might understand. But you don’t have no years. You don’t have no time” (188). Cole dismisses the *papazote*’s warning and rejects his offer to protect them, to which the Mexican later responds, “Even in a place like this where we are concerned with fundamental things the mind of the anglo is closed in this rare way. At one time I though it was only his life of privilege. But it is not that. It is his mind” (194). Shortly thereafter, Rawlins is attacked in a knife fight that leaves him badly injured and, in an act of self-defense, Cole kills a fellow prisoner.

Through the depiction of violent action with the confining space in the novel, McCarthy makes it clear that Rawlins and Cole would have died in prison had Doña Alfonza not obtained their release. When they are set free, Rawlins asserts that he will return to the US immediately. He tells Cole not to “go down there,” referring to the Rocha y Villareal hacienda (211). Before heading home, Cole insists he must confront *Doña* Alfonza. He suspects that she has made Alejandra promise not to see him again as a condition of release from jail. To this Cole adds, “I still want the horses,” a comment that underscores the fact that, unlike Rawlins, he learns very little from his experiences in prison—he stubbornly persists in the single-minded focus of reclaiming property that he considers has been unjustly stolen from him, even though the exact same endeavor by Blevins was fatal.

Cole returns to the hacienda for a second exchange with *Doña* Alfonza. In this exchange, *Doña* Alfonza again encourages him to respect Mexican cultural practices, engaging in a biographical monologue about her courtship with Gustavo Madero, brother to the first President elected after the Mexican Revolution. Alfonza's biography is thus not only an alternate and supplemental history of Mexico as Wenger claims (106), it is another attempt to inform Cole about the importance of heeding cultural difference. In McCarthy's rendering her cautionary tale anticipates Alejandra's story: both Alejandra's and Alfonza's chances for a proper marriage are threatened; both suffer grave consequences because they are "tainted" women; and both promise their father that they will abandon their lover in order to save his life. Because the older woman knows the outcome of forbidden romance in Mexico, she tries to prevent the illicit relationship between Cole and Alejandra. Yet again, Alfonza explains to Cole the social restrictions that prohibit their courtship. She frames key aspects of her narrative by telling Cole, "I will tell you about Mexico" and "I've thought a great deal about my life and about my country" (McCarthy 236, 238). Cole shows no signs of recognizing the parallels stories of the two women or of grasping her warning to respect cultural differences or pay the consequences. Against Alfonza's wishes, he resolves to see Alejandra again.

When Cole meets Alejandra in Zacatecas, she tells him that their romance has had devastating consequences—an echo of Alfonza's personal story. Alejandra's father no longer loves her. Cole tries to comfort her by saying, "I'll make it right." He implies that if he is allowed to tell his version of the story to her father, Don Héctor will see that Cole loves Alejandra and intends to marry her. First, his insistence on making it "right" shows again his willingness to subordinate Mexican cultural norms to his own sense of justice. He falsely believes that he is capable (i.e., has the power) of reconciling the situation with

her father. Second, his repeated use of the word “right” in the exchange with Alejandra is an echo of his initial reaction to Alfonza that the limitations on women in Mexico “don’t seem right.” Finally, his assertion reinforces his role as the male hero who seeks to rescue an imprisoned heroine. These three implications of Cole’s desire to make things “right” show McCarthy’s critique of the attitudes endorsed by the conventions of the Western novel: the hero is wrong on each count and Alejandra’s story turns out precisely as Alfonza predicted. In two final parallels with Alfonza’s story, Alejandra rejects Cole’s marriage proposal and realizes she must live with the consequences of her father’s scorn. Pilkington explains that she leaves him “because she is the daughter of her family, class, and nationality,” acknowledging the “obduracy of centuries-old conventions and customs” (320).

After Alejandra leaves him, Cole resolves to get his horse before returning to the US. McCarthy’s inscription of the cowboy’s travels in Mexico thus far show a stubborn tenacity that cause him to be evicted from a hacienda and nearly killed in prison. Cole again resolves to impose his value system in Mexico before heading home. This fact demonstrates not only his failure to heed cultural difference, but his complicity in carrying out a colonial legacy regardless of the circumstances—a legacy that the author disrupts throughout the novel. Cole’s final adventure reclaiming his horse reinforces the message that there is no place for an Anglo in Mexico who refuses to respect the cultural practices of the country. In a long, daring escape, Cole gets his horse, as well as that of Rawlins and Blevins, but is chased out of Mexico. He survives the wicked journey only because he is young, resilient, and a good horseman.<sup>21</sup> Comanche Indians appear to Cole in the closing pages of All the Pretty Horses as they did in the beginning of the novel to confirm that there is no place for the American cowboy either in the US, where ranching

appears doomed, or in Mexico, as his expulsion illustrates because they contribute to, rather than challenge, a US colonial legacy that McCarthy believes must end. McCarthy portrays the Indians as a ghost nation of a bygone era who recognize that Cole as a cowboy will someday be extinct as well: "They stood and watched him pass and watched him vanish upon the landscape solely because he was passing. Solely because he would vanish" (301). Ironically, the cowboy vanishes only to join those peoples that he has helped make extinct in the process of Anglo westward expansion.

Cole's intentions may appear to be just; after all, he helps Blevins get his horse, he wants to court and marry the woman he loves, and ultimately he re-claims his horse. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Cole refuses to learn that his values are not universal—that crossing the geopolitical border necessarily involves crossing cultural borders. Where Doerr and Fuentes enable the women travelers in Stones for Ibarra and Old Gringo to emerge from their journeys transformed by cultural encounter, McCarthy represents Cole trapped by the "spatial practices" of cultural, political, and economic precedents that constitute him as an American cowboy (Clifford 35). The entangled histories of US and Mexico have made the border a zone of "policing and transgression" that brutally impact Cole's sojourn as a young Anglo moving in space (Clifford 37). Analysis of geopoetics in All the Pretty Horses show us that, regardless of the spaces and places in which the protagonist finds himself, he reaffirms aggressively and violently the literary code of the Western novel and a complicity in a colonial legacy. The spatial relationships in the novel enable McCarthy to simultaneously draw on and undercut the stories of the Western novel that posit the cowboy as an American icon, endorse the mythical code of the West, and idealize history of territorial expansion.

Artistic expressions of Anglos moving in the spaces of Mexico engage and critique both travel writing and the Western novel. In the following chapter, the Mexican Revolution serves as the catalyst that drives thousands of Mexicans and their relatives to the US as a way to avoid the violence and upheaval of war. These northern migrations are recorded in varying narrative forms in José Villarreal's Pocho (1959), Ernesto Galarza's Barrio Boy (1971), and Américo Paredes's George Washington Gómez (1990). Geopoetic depictions of Mexicans making space for themselves in these works center on how the genre of the bildungsroman shapes the places and spaces of the protagonists' childhood, such as homes and schools, to demonstrate the dynamic and complex processes of assimilation and transculturation.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have selected the following novels for specific reasons. Stones for Ibarra, Doerr's first novel, has yet to receive the critical attention it deserves. Although book critics have reviewed Stones for Ibarra in such elite forums as the Times Literary Supplement, London Review of Books, and the New York Times, it has not yet been the subject of a substantial, literary study. In contrast to Doerr's work, Fuentes's writing has been the subject of many critical analyses that primarily concern biographical traces and intertextuality/allusion between the fact and fiction surrounding American writer Ambrose Bierce and Fuentes's protagonist, the Old Gringo. While such literary detective work is valuable, my approach to Old Gringo focuses on geopoetics and draws on the work Paz to clarify Fuentes's depiction of the spaces in a way that has not been previously done. Finally, I investigate McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses in this chapter because it has not been analyzed fully as literature of the borderlands with emphasis on cultural difference, a surprising oversight given that it is the first volume of McCarthy's recently completed "Border Trilogy" [among The Crossing (1994) and Cities of the Plain (1998)]. Although scholarship on McCarthy's southwestern work is growing, much of the existing criticism addresses the ways in which his novels are revisionary, post-modern westerns. This work too views McCarthy's novel as a revisionary Western, but does so through the paradigm of geopoetics, in this case by exploring the depiction of cultural difference through genre and geography. In the novels I analyze in this chapter, McCarthy provides the only substantive reference to Border Indians (however brief). I concede that my study would be enhanced by a novel that uses the Mexican Revolution

to illustrate cultural differences among Anglo travelers and Border Indian communities; however, to my knowledge, no such work currently exists.

<sup>2</sup> According to Said, such false interpretations arise from written accounts in which readers afford more authority and “authenticity” to a non-native literary portrait of a culture than that which is represented. He explains that “many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes” (Said 876).

<sup>3</sup> My own study of Anglo soldiers’ accounts of their travels in Mexico during the Mexican American War witness the recurring colonialist refrain of Manifest Destiny: the US moral mission to enlighten a benighted southern neighbor and, in the process, expand westward to the Pacific Ocean. [See “Border Crossing in the US-Mexico War,” in The Legacy of the Mexican and Spanish American Wars: Legal, Literary, and Historical Perspectives (2000)].

<sup>4</sup> This chapter responds to Clifford’s call to study literature depicting cultures in movement—traveling rather dwelling—as a means to better understand identity, set forth in Routes: Travel and Transculturation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997).

<sup>5</sup> For biographical information on Doerr, see the Gale Literary Database entry under the author’s name at [www.galenet.com](http://www.galenet.com) and the following internet website: [endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med.lit-med-db/webdocs/weddescrips/doerr472](http://endeavor.med.nyu.edu/lit-med.lit-med-db/webdocs/weddescrips/doerr472) (10 Jan 2000).

<sup>6</sup> I refer specifically to Macbeth’s speech in Act V, Scene IV: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard

no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (qtd. in Riverside 1337).

<sup>7</sup> That Sara is an *exploratrice sociale* is made evident when she tries to change the life of the Ibarrans through advocating women’s suffrage, suggesting increased use of birth control, encouraging children to stay in school, screening in the windows of public schools, advocating the women boil water to avoid dysentery, and recommending prenatal care to pregnant women.

<sup>8</sup> For a biographical summary of Fuentes’s life and work, see van Delden’s recent publication of Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity (1998), Hernández de López’s La Obra de Carlos Fuentes: Una visión múltiple (1988), or Roy’s “Genesis y evolución de Gringo viejo” in War and Revolution in Hispanic Literature (1990). Also, brief biographies of Fuentes are available at the following websites:

[www.txwesleyan.edu/scoggins/world/projects/elboom/carlosfuentes](http://www.txwesleyan.edu/scoggins/world/projects/elboom/carlosfuentes) and  
[www.brown.edu/Departments/English/fuenbio](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/English/fuenbio).

<sup>9</sup> The names “Winslow” and “Miranda” take on special significance in the novel. Roy posits that Harriet Winslow’s last name alludes to President Woodrow Wilson and the “US Winslow,” an American naval warship involved in the Spanish American War. For more information, see Roy’s work in War and Revolution in Literature (1990). Harriet may be linked to Robert Lowell’s first cousin, also named Harriet Winslow, who was born the same year as the fictional Harriet and died the year Fuentes started writing the book (Gunn 75). Fuentes may have known the real Harriet Winslow because he sublet his Washington DC apartment to a woman of that name (Gunn 75). For more information,

see her article "Tongue in the Ear: Fuentes' *Gringo viejo*" in *Revista Cadaiense de Estudios Hispánicos* (1989).

<sup>10</sup> According to van Delden's recently published book, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity* (1998), Fuentes and Paz became literary allies in the 1950s when Paz declared he wanted to change the "literary and artistic life in Mexico by 'opening windows, introducing movements, works and names that were unknown in Mexico'" (4). With Fuentes's publication of *Los dias enmascarados* (1954) and his editorial work on the *Revista mexicana de literatura* (from 1955-7), Paz identifies Fuentes as an important force in Mexican letters. Critics such as Debra Castillo have explored the relationship between *Old Gringo* and Paz's notion of death in Mexican culture as articulated in "Mexican Masks" and "The Day of the Dead" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950).

<sup>11</sup> Critic and historian Enrique Krauze criticizes Fuentes as a "guerrilla dandy" and a "special kind of Mexican" particularly unfit to depict the people or the nation (38, 28). However, I argue his status as a transnational is fundamental to understanding *The Old Gringo*, particularly in light of the emphasis on travel that I have maintained as central to reading this novel.

<sup>12</sup> That Fuentes writes for a US as well as Mexican audience is confirmed by his simultaneous publication of *Old Gringo* (as both novella/*novelle* and screen play) in English and Spanish (Valdés 60) and his place as the first Mexican author to make the *New York Time's* Best-seller's List ("Border Speak" n.p.).

<sup>13</sup> For biographical information on McCarthy, see the website of "The Cormac McCarthy Society" at [www.cormacmccarthy.com](http://www.cormacmccarthy.com).

<sup>14</sup> According to Jane Tompkins's West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (1992), there are five primary elements in the Western novel: death, male language, landscape, horses, and cattle. She argues that such elements contribute to definition of masculinity that is very limiting to men. For example, terse male language in the Western novel favors action and results over contemplation or thoughtfulness; as a result, to be considered manly means to act quickly and aggressively, dealing with the consequences later. In general, the construction of masculinity within the genre of the Western helps to explain the notion that male roles are more aggressive and violent than female roles in the colonial legacy.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of such narrative include Mark Twain's "Roughing It" or Jack London's "Whose Business is to Live."

<sup>16</sup> *Reforma* [reform] is an ironic name for a town with few modern features. First, the name suggests the town has not been "reformed" to a place with a more modern infrastructure, an ideal of the Mexican Revolution. Second, the name may refer to *Paseo de la Reforma*, the broad, tree-lined, luxurious thoroughfare in Mexico City, the most modern and progressive city in Mexico. Later in All the Pretty Horses, McCarthy uses another ironic place-name, Encantada. The irony of such names suggest that McCarthy has an extremely thorough knowledge of Mexican geography. In one of the rare interviews granted by McCarthy, he claims that he does not write about a place until he has visited it (Woodward 28). This claim supports the fact that his works appear to be extremely well-researched. Within the context of geopoetics, the use of ironic place names reinforces the idea that authors' construct space and place to achieve specific effects within their novels—most notably, intensification of character (and/or reader)

responses to cultural encounter. In the case of Reforma, for example, Cole and Rawlins notice the lack of modern services in the town (i.e., no electricity, paved roads). In this way, McCarthy reinforces their negative stereotypes of Mexico. In total, the ironic town name registers the limitations of the characters while showing the author's savvy.

<sup>17</sup> While I will not summarize here the ways numerous critics interpret McCarthy's work as a postmodern (and therefore) revisionary western, it is important to my argument to highlight the major characteristics of the western genre: (1) a connection to the land; (2) an elegiac sense of rootlessness in a boom or bust world; (3) laconic language and emphasis on action; (4) existence outside of the dominant social order; (5) conflict resolved by the use (or threat) of violence; (6) a code of justice that is higher than the law. It is a notably male genre in terms of its hero, writers, and readers. The formulaic western novel emerges out of medieval romance of the solitary knight fighting for what he believes is fair and true. Combining the medieval romance and western genre in All the Pretty Horses, Pilkington summarizes the plot: "A wandering cowboy and his sidekick ride innocently into hostile territory. There ensue fights against insurmountable odds, the hero's romance with a lovely young *señorita*, chases on horseback through a harsh but beautiful landscape" (318-9). It is also important to note that the formulaic western generally does not include crossing the US-Mexico border, one reason that many critics label McCarthy's work as "revisionary." For additional information, see Jane Tompkins's West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (1992) and Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1978), (especially "The Western Hero"), respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Chuse draws from Paz's essay, "Landscape and the Novel in Mexico" (1983) that addresses D.H. Lawrence's and Malcolm Lowry's depiction of land in Mexico. Chuse argues that McCarthy's use of landscape in All the Pretty Horses is as equally riveting.

<sup>19</sup> In Fuentes's work, traditional gender roles suggest that a man enables a woman to achieve greater self-awareness. In McCarthy's work, Cole tries to reinforce male conceived views of gender roles as the agent that might free his lover from restrictive cultural codes regarding virginity and marriage. However, McCarthy ultimately shows that Cole's quest fails and thus the author challenges, rather than reinforces, patriarchal gender roles.

<sup>20</sup> Bell is one of only three authors to have written a book-length critical study on McCarthy's writing [The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy (1988)]. The other book-length studies include John Sepich's Notes on Blood Meridian (1993) and Robert L. Jarrett's Cormac McCarthy (1997). In addition, the 1992-issue of Southern Quarterly was devoted exclusively to McCarthy's work.

<sup>21</sup> Even in the final volume of the Border Trilogy, Cities of the Plain (1998), Cole persists in following his own sense of justice, a perspective that accords with the individualistic code of the West. In Cities of the Plain, he again crosses the border to "save" a Mexican woman, this time, a prostitute; the act has deadly consequences.

CHAPTER 3  
MAKING SPACE: NORTHERN MIGRATIONS IN THE  
HISPANIC BILDUNGSROMAN

Whereas two of the three novels in the previous chapter depict Anglos traveling south to Mexico around the period of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17, works in this chapter present Mexican and Hispanic characters migrating north to the US in the same epoch. José Villarreal's Pocho (1959), Ernesto Galarza's Barrio Boy (1971), and Américo Paredes's George Washington Gómez (1990) are geographic in their attention to movement across the border and occupation of space in communities north of the border. The novels merge geography with poetic expressions originating in the bildungsroman novel. Within that form, the narrators' renderings of space and place represent processes of transculturation and assimilation. These authors draw on the trajectory common to the genre of the bildungsroman. The protagonist, a naïve boy, experiences comfortable, stable childhood; following his childhood is a tumultuous period of self-discovery that is resolved by the protagonist finding his place in the existing social order. That trajectory of the bildungsroman hero is nuanced by cultural conflict as the coming of age involves Mexican or Hispanic protagonists adapting to life in a dominant society that discriminates against them. Exploring genre and authorial constructions of space that include villages, households, barrios, and public schools elucidates the ways that the protagonists ultimately make space for themselves in the US. They carve out new hybrid identities that allow them to draw on their Mexican/Indian heritage and Anglo culture.<sup>1</sup>

Pocho and Barrio Boy demonstrate models of transculturation in which protagonists integrate Mexican cultural mores instilled in them as children and beliefs of the dominant Anglo community they learn in US public schools. Cuban sociologist



Fernando Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” in the 1940s to replace “acculturation” associated with the US “melting pot.” Acculturation implies that one’s ethnic heritage becomes inextricably amalgamated with greater Anglo culture (Oboler 84-86). Ortiz introduced transculturation as a term recognizing that an individual may retain distinct elements of ethnic identity while also borrowing norms from other cultures (Pratt 228; J. Saldívar, Border 204). The term’s contemporary currency implies a hybridization of identity as “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials submitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (Pratt 6). Hybridization, then, refers to that process of selection and invention that is set in motion among subordinated groups whose marginalization is the result of transculturation. In contrast to the more contemporary concept of transculturation revealed in Pocho and Barrio Boy, George Washington Gómez gestures back to the earlier model of assimilation as a reductive process in which an individual abandons the original culture and then replaces it with identification to another. Thus, the protagonist of George Washington Gómez struggles to reconcile competing loyalties to the Mexican and Anglo communities but ultimately rejects any identification with his Mexican heritage.

Chicano and non-Chicano critics alike have contended that Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez are precursors to the Chicano literary renaissance of the 1970s (Myers 186). Within the existing scholarly discourse on these texts, my approach to these works as geopoetic representations figures them not only as examples of Chicano/a letters, but as literature of the borderlands—an important distinction—because the latter has clear associations to a political and physical geography, the US-Mexico borderlands, while Chicano/a literature is not necessarily tied to such specific geographies. Even as Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez are certainly

pioneer works of the Chicano movement, validating and legitimizing countless stories of migration, resistance, and adaptation, their social definitions are also spatial. That is, they show how spatial geography combines with social relations to inform characters' processes of resisting and/or adapting to life in the US. Framing border literature as geopoetic expression emphasizes a political geography that defines the region and informs this body of writing. Conceptualizing these works as borderland writing offers an elucidation of the effect of the geopolitical border on the region as generating specific forms and styles of literary expression. Borders act as an agent and reflection of cultural difference, influencing how writers construct narrative space and how they represent characters as negotiating those spaces.<sup>2</sup>

Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez are bildungsroman narratives, a form that originated with Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre [Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1759)]. As this title suggests, the bildungsroman is variously conceptualized as an "apprenticeship" work or narrative of "individual development," genre paradigms based on the German word "bildung" or "formation" (Minden 118-9). That formation is expressed as realistic narrative about the maturation process of a single character, usually male. Such a character emerges from a comfortable childhood, enters a state of self-discovery, and ultimately achieves social integration as an adult within a larger community (Minden 119). While using the elements of the bildungsroman novel, Barrio Boy is, in fact, an autobiography.<sup>3</sup> This genre is closely related to the bildungsroman because both forms embody youths' "utopian projections" about how they can simultaneously retain a sense of individuality yet conform to societal demands (Minden 121). I approach all three narratives as works demonstrating characteristics of the bildungsroman; in the explication of space, place, and geography

within the geopoetic model, I explore Pocho and George Washington Gómez through the framework of liminality. This paradigm does not apply to Barrio Boy because Galarza's autobiographical recreation of a nostalgic, idyllic childhood and adaptation to a new cultural space and society is devoid of a tumultuous, liminal period of self-discovery. Thus, it does not figure as a narrative that is usefully examined in terms of liminality, a theory concerning a disruptive coming of age process developed by anthropologist Victor Turner. Turner's concept of liminality emphasizes literal and symbolic spaces in the ritualization of an individual's transition from childhood to adulthood thus offering a useful framework for examining how the author shapes childhood and transitional spaces and places in a coming of age tale in which the protagonist is temporarily suspended between spaces and places in society. Applying liminality to Pocho, the subject of the following section, frames this bildungsroman novel as an expressive representation that tells us that geography matters—birthplace makes a difference in how one adapts and resists norms of family, community, and culture as the protagonist, Richard Rubio, matures from childhood to adulthood, achieving a rite of passage in which he transculturates to become a pocho who adopts cultural norms from both the Mexican and Anglo communities.

### **Pocho**

Villarreal's novel personalizes the "great exodus that come of the Mexican Revolution" through the story of the Rubio family that begins with Juan Rubio, a former Revolutionary officer (15).<sup>4</sup> Villarreal begins in a way consistent with a motif in the bildungsroman genre in which the protagonist's future conflicts are foreshadowed, in this case, before his birth. The conflicts with which the protagonist will later struggle—feeling torn between his Mexican ancestry and his American citizenship—are set up in

the opening pages with Villarreal's portrait of Richard's father as a revolutionary. That father's loyalties to Mexico are later manifested through the environment he creates for Richard as a child, loyalties from which Richard will ultimately free himself by claiming a hybrid identity of "pocho," a mid-twentieth-century label for people born in the US of Mexican decent (Villarreal, "Chicano" 161).

Pocho begins in Mexico where Juan kills a man during an altercation in Juárez and crosses into El Paso, Texas. The "old dog of the Revolution" joins an insurgency group to oust the "bastard opportunist," President Álvaro Obregón, whom Juan agrees to assassinate to make way for the presidency of Pancho Villa (Villarreal 6, 10, 27). The insurgency is aborted, however, when Villa is assassinated—a death that signals the end of the revolution and causes Juan to despair. Shortly afterwards, Juan's wife, Consuelo, gives birth to their first and only son, Richard, and the Rubios move to Santa Clara, California. That Juan had joined an insurgency group and agreed to assassinate Obregón before the move north, and mourns the end of the Revolution illustrates his intense love of Mexico. These feelings do not abate when he settles in the US. The Rubios' relocation to Santa Clara is significant in Villarreal's depiction of place: Juan, despite his desire to cross back over into Mexico, does not return to the beloved homeland Mexico because he murdered a man and has political enemies there. Instead, the Rubios move farther away from Mexico not just for economic reasons, to follow migrant farm jobs, but more broadly, as a register of how Juan is acutely and painfully reminded that the Revolution is over.

Despite Juan's displacement, Villarreal uses place in the novel as a means of showing how Juan figuratively carries a piece of Mexico with him to the US where he seeks or creates spaces that will teach Richard about his ethnic heritage. Such an

expression of space figures the young boy as the quintessential bildungsroman hero who assumes the role set forth for him as a child who, in this case is thoroughly and contentedly enmeshed in Mexican community. The author's depiction of Richard's early childhood is commensurate with the genre paradigm of the bildungsroman in which a young boy's life is a "happy dream," where he finds "kindred spirits," "friendship and love" (Minden 119). For instance, Juan foregrounds the importance of Richard's connections to the local Mexican community by bringing the boy on visits to Mexican and Hispanic households scattered throughout the Santa Clara Valley where, years after the Revolution, he boasts of someday returning to Mexico.<sup>5</sup> The trips with his father provide deep cultural roots for Richard that squarely anchor him to community:

With his father, Richard sat around campfires or in strange kitchens, with wood stoves burning strongly and the ever-present odor of a pot of pink beans boiling, freshly cooked tortillas filling the close, warm room, and listened to the tales of that strange country which seemed to him a land so distant, and the stories also seemed of long, long ago. It was then, listening and weaving a parallel fantasy in his mind, that he felt an enjoyment so great that he knew he could not possibly savor it all. (Villarreal 43)

This passage illustrates Villarreal's artistic expression of the safe spaces of Richard's childhood at the hearths of Mexican households and the fire pits of migrant work camps. Richard is intrigued by stories of Mexico and conjures fantasy images of the beloved homeland to which he will belong someday. The young boy hears fellow Mexicans corroborating his father's hope of returning to Mexico in a manner that suggests to Richard that Juan's vision will someday be a reality for him. Although Richard has yet to

live in “that strange country,” the adults’ nostalgia for the place—which in Juan’s case grows over the years—is as palpable to the youth as the beans and tortillas he eats.

Juan provides Richard with another glimpse into Mexican culture by allowing fellow Mexican migrant workers to camp in their yard or live in the barn during summer harvests. Richard has many Mexican friends during these “glorious” times when he learns to sing Mexican folksongs and perform regional dances at fiestas “so that there, in the center of Santa Clara, a small piece of *México*, was contained within the fences of the lot on which Juan kept his family” (Villarreal 43). The author’s construction of spaces—hearth, home, lot, and barn—shows how Juan’s loyalty to Mexico influences the way he raises his only son, exposing him to “a small piece of Mexico” in Santa Clara (43).<sup>6</sup>

Villarreal also depicts Richard’s mother immersing her son in Mexican culture through involvement with the Roman Catholic Church, an institution attended by Santa Clara’s Spanish-speaking community. In Villarreal’s depiction of space, the church reinforces Richard’s place in the community. This depiction is characteristic of the bildungsroman novel in which religion is a force that integrates the boy hero into society but ultimately becomes one of the institutions that the adult protagonist rejects in formulating an independent sense of self. According to the author, Consuelo actively promotes Richard’s participation in the church as a small child to prevent him from feeling as alienated as she does: “She would not try to explain to him the importance of companionship and the security of belonging to a group. It would only make her think of how she herself was sometimes lonely here without any of her people” (35). To satisfy her needs of belonging and ensure her son’s membership in the church community, the family attends mass routinely and participates in saints’ days. As a child, Richard

embraces the religious zeal demonstrated by his mother, admitting, "I believe in God, *Mamá*, I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" (Villarreal 65).

In Villarreal's portrayal, church and family reinforce the importance of Mexican community and celebrate Mexican identity, thereby offering Richard a "relatively fixed or stable condition" during his childhood, a phase that Turner labels pre-liminality ("Betwixt" 94-5). Artistic expressions of his childhood environs combined with a portrait of the boy's childhood reveal a literal and cultural geography in which Richard feels intimately connected to well-defined, stable, social spaces shaped by his Mexican immigrant parents. However, as Richard enters prepubescence, his intellectual inquisitiveness drives him beyond the confines of church and home that, however comfortable and familiar, limit his sense of self in their exclusive identification with Mexicanness. Foreshadowing how the teenager begins metaphorically to outgrow the spaces of his childhood, Villarreal uses religious doubt and reading to mark the beginning of Richard's entrance into a transitional state where he increasingly ventures into the surrounding community. The purpose of these adventures is to find his place in the existing community, an issue that troubles the bildungsroman hero.

Richard seeks to know more about God than either his mother or the priest will tell him. He searches for answers to reconcile paradoxes about God that confuse him, such as how a benevolent God is also responsible for creating the evil thing that he fears the most, darkness. Richard asks his mother questions about God, but she tries to pacify him by urging simply faith (Villarreal 33). Her stance is backed by the church priest who tells Richard that "one does not question God" (Villarreal 37). Angered by responses that call for blind faith rather than genuine understanding, Richard silently wonders, "Why did they not want to tell him? *God made the world. Who is God?* But if He was good and

kind, why did He make darkness?" (Italics in original; 37). Richard secretly tries to find answers outside home and church to satisfy his quest for knowledge; among other things, he lies in a vacant field challenging God to respond directly to his questions.<sup>7</sup>

Richard's passion for reading books also demonstrates a hunger for knowledge that carries him beyond the parameters of home. He loses himself, finding solace, comfort, and instruction in books that not only free him from the physical places that he inhabits—the geography of the boy's home space limits and confines him—but that also enable him to satisfy an intellectual hunger unfulfilled by family, community, and congregation. The youth reads voraciously, trying to read every book in the school library, because, he claims, it allows him to "travel all over the world and sometimes out of this whole universe" (64). Villarreal suggests that Richard's parents tolerate such behavior because it serves their own ends. Consuelo thinks Richard's education will increase the family's socio-economic status someday, and Juan believes Richard's pursuit of knowledge will prepare him to become a professional in Mexico.

However, when Richard reaches puberty, Consuelo's and Juan's expectations for him begin to conflict directly with his own desires. This conflict creates a situation that plunges the teenager into a transitional state, what Turner would call a liminal phase.<sup>8</sup> Cultural norms that made relatively few demands on Richard as a child, according to Villarreal, place the teen in a troubling new space characterized by "ambiguity and paradox" (Turner, "Betwixt" 97).<sup>9</sup> The culture that initiated him into a sense of self becomes inadequate to Richard when it levies familial duties on the protagonist that he does not want to accept, a common struggle in the bildungsroman portrait that will lead Richard toward the life of an intellectual and an artist. Examining Villarreal's use of both genre and space reveals that his parent's strong associations to Mexico—Juan's



nationalism and Consuelo's faith—begin to stifle the US-born teenager who increasingly registers less interest in his parent's past in Mexico and more keen desire in forging his own future in the US.<sup>10</sup>

As the novel progresses to reveal the protagonist's bildungsroman development, true to the liminal paradigm, Richard is no longer "classified" solely as a schoolboy but he is "not yet classified" as a workingman (Turner, "Betwixt" 96). Villarreal signals the transition from stable childhood to tumultuous adolescence in a scene in which Richard's mother offers him options concerning work and school that, in the young teen's mind, are unacceptable. Consuelo first tells Richard, as the oldest male child, that he may have to quit school and find employment to help support the family in accordance with Mexican custom. Relenting somewhat, Consuelo then says that Richard may be allowed to continue school, but only to increase the Rubio family's socio-economic status (Villarreal 62). On top of these expectations, she adds the final requirement that both parents levy on Richard—that he marry and have a family of his own someday (Villarreal 63).

Villarreal balances family responsibility with independence of spirit to show how Richard attempts to reassure Consuelo of his loyalty to the family. At the same time, Richard recognizes education as the "freedom to think as one pleases, to discover knowledge on his terms and not have it imposed" (Cárdenas 129). In the scene, Richard demands that he be allowed to stay in school: "Ah *Mamá!* Try to understand me. I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something—I *am*. I do not care about making a lot of money and about what people think and about the family in the way you speak. I have to learn as much as I can, so that I can live . . . learn for *me*, for *myself*" (Italics in original; Villarreal 64). He adds a sense of urgency by justifying his studies on the basis that life is short; he says, "the Mexican people are right when they say that life is only a

breath” (64). Here, the author illustrates the burgeoning liminality of the protagonist, who uses the familiar Spanish epithet, *Mamá*, and a Mexican colloquialism to demonstrate loyalty to his family’s heritage, while also appealing to an American ethos of individualism that privileges the pursuit of personal dreams.

Villarreal characterizes Richard as a figure making a transition from Mexican boyhood to Hispanic adulthood:

Then he suddenly felt a responsibility so heavy as to be a physical pressure, and first he became sad that his lot was a *dictate* and that his parents believed so strongly in the *destiny*, and then he was angry that *traditions* could take a body and a soul—for he had a soul; of that he was certain—and mold it to fit a pattern. He spoke out then, but not in anger, saying things he sensed but did not really understand, an *uncomprehending child with the strong desire to have a say in his destiny*. (Italics added; Villarreal 63)

Chicano critic Ramón Saldívar conceptualizes this scene as part of a larger discussion of the ways in which Richard struggles to reconcile his individualism with his Mexican heritage. Richard “sees the possibility of figuring his own world,” according to Saldívar, “which might serve as the foundation for a revitalized personal and cultural identity” (*Chicano* 67). The protagonist recognizes that the forces shaping his destiny also deny him the agency and power to control it. As Richard grows older, this predicament becomes increasingly contentious, a situation that Villarreal frames through growing antagonisms between parents and son.

Several arguments with Juan highlight Richard’s positionality between his responsibilities to his Mexican heritage and freedom from it offered by Anglo culture. Literary critic Rafael Grajeda writes that Richard has an “urge to be recognized on his

own terms,” a signal of his individualism that, in this critic’s larger assessment, illustrates Richard’s heroic qualities (332). In a series of exchanges with his father, Richard refuses to identify exclusively with a sense of Mexicanness. When Richard asks about his Indian, Spanish, French, and Mexican ancestry, Juan barks at him, “We are Mexicans, Richard, that is all” and later tells him not to speak English, “the dog language,” at home (Villarreal 99). “But this is America, Father,” Richard retorts, “If we live in this country, we must live like Americans . . . I mean that you must remember that we are not in *México*” (Villarreal 133). Challenging his father’s singular and exclusive ties to Mexico, Richard disrupts the “fixed points in space-time of structural classification” set forth for him by Juan (Turner, “Betwixt” 97).

Richard pushes away from the impositions of his parents and seeks out people and places where he is encouraged to pursue his own intellectual interests, activity typical of the bildungsroman character. The protagonist finds a fellow-outsider and freethinker in Joe Pete, a shepherd in Santa Clara who functions, among other characters in the novel,<sup>11</sup> as a guide who encourages transitional characters like Richard “to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them” (Turner, “Betwixt” 99). Joe Pete’s solitary life of rigorous intellectualism appeals to Richard who “absorb(s) everything” (Villarreal 81). Richard is hungry for answers, but Joe Pete does not overtly provide them—he forces the boy to think for himself. In response to questions about religious faith, for example, Joe Pete tells Richard, “I would do you great wrong to teach you what I feel, because to you it should only be important what *you* feel” (italics in original; Villarreal 85). Thus, Joe Pete inculcates in Richard the importance of making one’s own decisions, a point Martínez makes within a larger discussion of the ways in which Joe Pete encourages Richard’s eventual positionality as a transculturated persona

(422). Joe Pete also prompts Richard to question not only his sense of self but what Turner calls the “elements and basic building blocks of symbolic complexities they had hitherto taken for granted” (“Variations” 49-50).

Joe Pete’s eccentric lifestyle provides a model for Richard by showing him that it is possible to live on the margins of society, a place where Richard might be able to pursue the intellectual life that he craves. Villarreal’s depiction of Richard’s mentor places Joe Pete literally on the fringes of Santa Clara in a shack on the outskirts of town and symbolically in a marginal place in the Spanish-speaking community, an agnostic estranged among Roman Catholics. The son of a Portuguese aristocrat, Joe Pete has also withdrawn from his family because he disapproves of his father’s political opportunism, that is, his ever-changing loyalties that shift according to the ruling group in power (Villarreal 81-3). Joe Pete’s refusal to compromise his beliefs affords Richard a role model that the liminal teenager increasingly emulates by asserting what he believes, even when it requires him to defy his parent’s expectations. Joe Pete’s fate in the book—being arrested on charges of molesting a young girl—also teaches Richard the dangers of living on the edge of society.

Richard seeks out other marginalized characters, notably a pachuco/a gang, as he increasingly ventures into the local community and pushes away from what he perceives as the constraints of the institution of family. The author describes the Mexican zootsuiters, using an unmistakable allusion to Octavio Paz’s polemical portrait of them in The Labyrinth of Solitude (1949). Both Villarreal and Paz note the pachuco’s/a’s polyglot “Spanglish,” defiant manner of dress, and rebellious conduct. Sometimes American-born and sometimes a “product of migration,” pachucos/as steadfastly cling to a liminal position by refusing to return to Mexico or assimilate into US culture

(Monsiváis 109).<sup>12</sup> In Mexican Postcards (1997), Carlos Monsiváis explains that pachucos in Texas and California mapped out new territory between the Mexican and Anglo communities between 1938 and 1942 (109-110). Like Joe Pete, the pachucos/as teach Richard that it is possible to occupy a marginal place in society, though such positionality comes with sacrifices and risks. Villarreal illustrates the latter when the gang is arrested on allegations of stealing that reflect more a climate of racism in the community than the youths' criminal intentions. The liminality of the pachucos earns them scorn from their Mexican parents and Anglo peers because they are "affiliated to the American Way of Life only eccentrically," even as they are identified as "part of Mexican culture by confronting racism" (Monsiváis 110).

At this point in the narrative, the protagonist emerges from a liminal state. In the course of enduring several "ordeals," which fit Turner's paradigm of literal or symbolic challenges for initiands, spatial dynamics come into play as Richard figuratively tries to make a place for himself by accessing both Mexican and Anglo cultural mores. If liminality offers, as Turner avers, "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" ("Betwixt" 97), Richard emerges from the first ordeal, a conflict with his father, by rejecting familial mandates that his parents have imposed on him since childhood. In this scene, Juan tells Richard, "Your life belongs to us, and will belong to us even after you marry, because we gave it to you. You can never forget your responsibility to the family" (Villarreal 130). He also tells his son that Richard has "fulfilled but a part of your *debt to your race*," adding, "you must fulfill the destiny of your God. When you are older, you will marry and have a family" (Italics added; Villarreal 130). Juan frames his exhortation for Richard to have children as if it were a national obligation to Mexico. Ignoring his father's patriotic demand, Richard,

states that he does not plan to get married, a “false” and meaningless institution in his mind (Villarreal 144-5).<sup>13</sup>

Richard’s rejection of marriage in broader theoretical terms means that he embraces individualism to the degree that it precludes him from participating in an institution that not only pairs him with another individual for life but may obstruct him from achieving his personal goals that, although unspecified at this point, suggest an artist in the making. This depiction of Richard resonates with the *künstlerroman*, a form made famous by James Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916). In the *künstlerroman*, the hero struggles to become an artist accepted by society, negotiating “poetry of the heart and the prose of the world”; in the *bildungsroman*, the hero attempts to attain a sense of individuality and social position (Minden 121). Richard is challenged to do both in Pocho, as his various tests demonstrate.

Richard’s second test involves a confrontation with his mother. Deconstructing ethnic labels in this scene, Villarreal marks Richard’s rejection of the term “wholly Mexican” imposed by others on him. When Juan threatens to leave the family, Consuelo tells Richard that he will be responsible for the family should this occur. Richard balks: “He thought of himself, and starkly, without knowledge of the words that would describe it, he saw the demands of tradition, of culture, of the social structure on an individual. ¡Mierda! ¡Es pura mierda! And he knew that he could never again be wholly Mexican” (Villarreal 95). He forswears a “wholly Mexican” identity that threatens to subsume his personal sense of self. This incident foreshadows Richard’s final test that occurs when Consuelo and Juan separate.

Grajeda conceptualizes Richard’s predicament as a struggle for individualism from which Richard later emerges a hero who remains true to his unique sense of self.

Grajeda summarizes: "His father wants him to be a 'man' and a Mexican; his mother wants him to be a provider and a good Mexican son . . . Valuing only his own individuality, he attempts to wind his way through the many obstacles that he sees as attempts at stifling him as a person" (334). When his father leaves the family, Richard dismisses his mother's new role for him in the Rubio family and reasserts the importance of education in his life. Richard offers to work temporarily until he can find the means to go to college but he also informs her, "when the time comes that I want to go to school, *Mamá*, I will do so" (172).

With the youth's dismissal of the roles imposed by both his father and mother, Villarreal signals Richard's coming of age. Richard breaks away from the spaces of his origin to make space for himself in the larger national society, a common motif in the bildungsroman. For Richard, this assertion of self marks a rite of passage into adulthood—a transformational "change in being" (Turner, "Betwixt" 102)—in which he transculturates into the hybrid identity of a pocho who selects elements from both his Mexican and American heritage. Richard affirms a bicultural identity when he tells a Mexican friend, "I am a Pocho" (Villarreal 165); an important signpost in Richard's personal sojourn, it marks the first time in the novel that he self-identifies. His identification as a pocho is significant because it is Villarreal's only reference to the title throughout the novel; the author underscores the importance of Richard's chosen identity following a difficult liminal sojourn. In addition, this statement anticipates the empowerment Richard feels as a pocho who, on one hand, is no longer bound by the responsibilities associated with the labels of eldest son in a Mexican family or devout Catholic parishioner. On the other hand, Richard simultaneously embraces an identification with Anglo culture based on his status as American-born.

In a 1979-interview, Villarreal defined "pocho" as a label for people born in the US of Mexican decent ("Chicano" 161). As an example of its use, he notes that Mexican parents call their American-born sons and daughters "pocho" to recognize the confluence of Mexican and Anglo cultures that influence their sense of self ("Chicano" 161-2). Villarreal recognizes it as an insider's term of "endearment," that is, an epithet used exclusively between people with Mexican ancestry. Villarreal also states that "pocho" connotes the difficulties of adapting to Mexican and Anglo culture as if "alone in a new country—alien, striving, expending our every energy merely to keep ourselves alive" (161-2). As a pocho, Richard can be "part of everything," to use Villarreal's words in the novel (152), thereby transforming "his ambiguous status as a child of two cultures into an acceptable identity for himself" (R. Saldívar, Chicano 61).

Self-identifying as a pocho is empowering because it is a chosen rather than imposed label; "When we name things, we give them a life of their own," explains Paredes, "By naming ourselves, we affirm our own identity" ("Problem" 31). Self-naming is also important, particularly among minority cultures because, as Suzanne Oboler notes, ethnic labels are powerful mechanisms that have traditionally been used to homogenize or otherwise control a particular group of people (generally minorities) (1-16). Within a larger discussion of the term "Hispanic," an official government categorization, she notes that ethnic labels invoke a politics of representation that is minimized through self-identification. Richard's choice to assert himself as a pocho is an act demonstrating a degree of agency that prevents others from imposing a label on him.

In addition to labeling himself a pocho, Richard asserts himself in another manner: he confidently tells his father that he plans to be a writer. The protagonist's reintegration into the existing social order as a pocho and writer projects a literary



identity in which Richard re-establishes a space for himself within the literal home in Santa Clara and his larger home in the US. This combination of genre elements and spatial depiction ultimately mark a resolution of the conflict between father and son building throughout the text. When Richard tells his father that he will be a writer, Juan is surprisingly supportive even though Richard undercuts his father's dream for his son to be a doctor or lawyer in Mexico. In this exchange, Juan links Richard's selected vocation to his ethnic heritage by stating, "if it does not stand in your way, do not ever forget that you are Mexican" (Villarreal 169). Although somewhat uncharacteristic, Juan's statement nonetheless confirms Richard's status as a transculturated and bicultural man. It acknowledges what his son has been struggling to reconcile since adolescence: the notion that his identity is not wholly a "dictate" of Mexican cultural norms. Juan's comment also subordinates Richard's ethnic heritage as a Mexican to Richard's adoptive identity as a pocho, that becomes for the boy "a new and different source of personal, cultural, and political consciousness" (R. Saldívar, *Chicano* 70). The competing values that surface during his liminal period—Juan's proud hope that Richard will be a professional in Mexico verses Richard's desire to become a writer in the US—are resolved.

In the closing pages of the book, Richard permanently leaves the Rubio family. Villarreal suggests the military is Richard's only escape from his promise to help support the family following Juan's abandonment of them. In a bar one day, he realizes that he could be easily "carried along in the stream of life in Santa Clara" as a working class man who simply grows older and worn out (Villarreal 178). He thinks, "There was nothing to be done now, except run away from the insidious tragedy of such an existence" (Villarreal 186). He enlists in the Navy sensing that it is "his only alternative—to get away from this place" (Villarreal 185). Villarreal uses this final act in the novel to

guarantee Richard a place far beyond the confines of those spaces and places that limited his sense of self by imposing narrow culturally defined roles.

Villarreal's artistic expression of space combines with incremental phases of liminal experience to demonstrate the protagonist's process of transculturation. Over the course of the novel, Richard moves from a world defined by and associated with his parent's inculcation of Mexicanness through an experimental, liminal phase to a world outside home and church where he defines himself as a pocho and writer. These dual self-identifications mean Richard, both the bildungsroman and *künstlerroman* hero, achieves his objective of finding an acceptable "accommodation between the individual and society" (Minden 120). Like Pocho, Barrio Boy also fits the bildungsroman paradigm in Galarza's depiction of the maturation of an individual—from a specific starting point in childhood to a specific endpoint in adulthood. Barrio Boy is also an expressly autobiographical narrative, a "work of self-revelation" that, in conjunction with the bildungsroman, is also a "development of the self" (Minden 122). Exploring the overlapping genres of autobiography and bildungsroman as well as Galarza's depictions of place in Mexico and the US in Barrio Boy shows the ways the protagonist smoothly adapts to the influences of Americanization, while maintaining pride in his Mexican roots.

### **Barrio Boy**

Barrio Boy describes Galarza's own migration to the US and his own coming of age story. To accomplish this, the author combines elements of the autobiography and bildungsroman genre with depictions of space and place, specifically an idyllic Mexican village, US public schools, and urban barrios. The work culminates in a process of transculturation wherein the protagonist, Ernesto Galarza, becomes a social activist, a

cultural mediator between the Mexican and American communities; thus, Galarza achieves the objective of the bildungsroman hero, which is to harmonize one's internal needs with external demands from society (Minden 119). In Galarza's expression of this experience, "inner and outer combine fruitfully, without one being subordinated to the other" (Minden 119).

Rendering of the past in Barrio Boy begins in Mexico. Galarza nostalgically fashions his hometown of Jalcocotán, Nayarit as a paradisiacal space for a young boy's early childhood. He accomplishes this by depicting the protagonist as contentedly immersed in village culture because, among other reasons, the community defines and enforces social roles and acceptable behavior for children through well-articulated norms. Omitting the foreshadowing that often begins the bildungsroman narrative, Galarza portrays the hero as a content child, happily enmeshed in the community that surrounds him (Minden 119). For example, the author explains that children are assigned distinct gender roles around the age of six: girls are relegated to domestic work and boys begin to help their fathers at odd jobs outside of the house, in activities such as collecting firewood and tending the cornfields. Ernesto accepts and embraces such prescribed roles as giving him a chance to prove himself capable of being a man.

Traditional ritual exchanges associated with children's roles also explain Ernesto's feelings of stability and security as a child. For Ernesto, Jalcocotán is an "easy place" to live because he simply adheres to the well-articulated roles for children and practices the traditional exchanges expected by the community (Galarza 51). For example, children running errands for adults must do so according to prescribed behaviors. "When you delivered something," Ernesto explains, "you always began by saying: 'My mother sends greetings and says may God give you a good day, and here is

an egg” (Galarza 46). Adults in the village enforce ritual exchanges because of the values that such behavior implies: children are to respect adults. In addition to revealing a premium on respecting elders, this quote reveals a prevalence of oral tradition and reciprocity of gift giving in the town that contribute to Galarza’s nostalgic, autobiographical recreation of it.

Galarza depicts homogeneity as another factor contributing to his happy childhood; he finds his place easily in the social fabric of a community with little social or economic diversity. This depiction yet again speaks to the harmonious integration of a child’s inner and outer selves, an element representative of the bildungsroman narrative. Galarza renders the village space as well as the boy’s social space in a utopian projection of the past: Jalcocotán appears part of a Golden Age characterized as an epoch of natural, pastoral, simple life governed by virtuous moral order (Williams 35-45). In addition to a shared consanguinity and common Native ancestry, every family in town has a similar quality of life. Identical mud houses line the street featuring two doors, no windows, and a corral in the back yard. Everyone lacks electricity and plumbing and most of the men work similar agricultural jobs. The fact that there is no governor, priest, teacher, or police in Jalcocotán further contributes to the pervasive homogeneity of a community that lacks an official regulatory hierarchy.

Community spirit in Jalcocotán also manifests in the lack of distinct spatial borders between public and private spheres. People keep their front and back doors open all day and, demonstrating the colloquialism that “*mi casa es su casa*,” *Jalcocotecanos* enter each other’s houses as if they were their own. Similarly, the street and plaza have no name and the town itself has no artificial boundaries. There is also no delineation of property between different villages regarding the surrounding forest.

At this point in the autobiography, the author has established a sense of community in which Ernesto recognizes the importance of his own membership. A geopoetical approach reveals Galarza's triple engagement with autobiographical recollection and recreation of the past, a bildungsroman paradigm of utopian harmony between personal desires and community demands, and a fashioning of pastoral, idyllic spaces where the protagonist thrives. The narrative goes on to chronicle the author's migration to the US through Ernesto's travels to Tepic, Acaponeta, and Mazatlán that occur when the violence of the Mexican Revolution threatens to invade the tranquil Jalcocotán. Galarza reconstructs the journey to the US as an exciting adventure for a young boy. In each city that Ernesto temporarily inhabits before continuing the journey north, he is exposed to varying degrees of technological innovation, class stratification, and capitalism that broaden his provincial sensibility. In accordance with the bildungsroman, the protagonist is thrust into the world for the purpose of self-discovery (Minden 119). But this is not a troubling or tumultuous period for Ernesto; instead, traveling beyond Jalcocotán offers a world of "possibilities" where he hopes to learn more about himself and others through new experience (Minden 120). As the youth becomes more worldly and cosmopolitan, however, he also retains an appreciation of those values his Mexican roots herald, such as respect for adults, community involvement, helping others.

Galarza uses the journey to the US to celebrate the Mexican nation and to illustrate the ways that the protagonist identifies as a Mexican citizen. Specifically, he notes how a sense of shared nationalism in each city that he visits also helps him to maintain a sense of his Mexican selfhood. Whether admiring the horsemanship of a *charro* or comparing the *plazas de armas* in different towns, Ernesto maintains a firm

sense of identity due to the imagined community of the nation. Here it is useful to consider this larger sense of fidelity in the context of the work of theorist Benedict Anderson. He defines the nation as an "imagined political community" which is conceived through a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (6-7). In this framework, citizens who do not know one another, and indeed may never meet one another, share a common conception of what it means to be a Mexican citizen. Their communal "taken-for-granted frames of reference," according to Anderson, create an "imagined community" (6-7). Even though the Galarzas come from an isolated mountain town, they find common ground with other Mexican citizens in their shared concept of the nation. That concept of the nation is stressed, especially, in national institutions, such as public schools, the military, and mythic representations of the past, particularly in past battles against other nations. As the star of the school play, Ernesto experiences such shared comradeship when he is cast as a Mexican soldier in battle against French invaders. The raucous approval of the audience makes Ernesto proud.

Even though the concept of the nation is in transition due to the Mexican Revolution, the war also helps Ernesto maintain a strong attachment to his ethnic heritage while also depicting the journey as an exciting adventure for the boy. Galarza accomplishes these acts by using the Revolution to provide a clearly identifiable, common hero around which his family and multiple communities rally. His mother and uncles clearly side with Francisco Madero's efforts to reform the government when the Revolution begins in 1910. His uncles, José and Gustavo, explain to Ernesto that they support the revolutionaries because of the abuses of the thirty-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. On another occasion, Ernesto and his family live through a siege of Mazatlán, an exciting but scary event for the boy. After their home is nearly bombarded

by the hated federal troops, Ernesto proudly watches the revolutionaries march victoriously into the plaza (Galarza 168). He affirms his role as a member in the community, a role firmly established in Jalcoctán, and broadens it to include his position within the imagined community of the nation. This expanded sense of self is an element in the bildungsroman in which the protagonist's "fundamental integrity as a human individual emerges strengthened" from new experiences (Minden 120). In addition, Ernesto's new sense of identity is a celebration of Mexican nationalism, a recreation of national pride in an autobiography written fifty years after the Mexican Revolution.

After narrating months of travel in Mexico that take up over a hundred pages of text, the author writes a brief paragraph describing how he disembarked from a train having "finally arrived" in "The North" (Galarza 183). Crossing the US-Mexico border from Nogales to Tucson is an experience, in other words, that does not warrant much of the author's attention. In the book, Galarza recalls that the US flag is different from the Mexican one, but he does not recollect any other signifier of the border as a demarcation of national territory or cultural difference.

Galarza's scant attention to actual border crossing in Barrio Boy is telling when compared to Villarreal's representation of Juan's experiences at the border in Pocho. Galarza's reconstruction of this event suggests that the US-Mexico border does not constitute a jarring moment of cultural difference—a depiction consistent in an autobiography that goes on to show Ernesto's transition to life in the US as an opportunity for empowerment or, in the structure of the bildungsroman, a chance to widen a range of "intellectual and emotional experiences" (Minden 120). As a recreation of Galarza's own process of Americanization and transculturation, Barrio Boy depicts the border crossing as an exciting adventure in Ernesto's young life, not as vexing entrance

into a liminal state. Thus, Galarza downplays the physical border crossing in the narrative because it is not as important as the new spaces of his childhood that he eagerly enters in the US.

Having moved from the simple life of Jalcocotán to a trip of high adventure, Barrio Boy takes the reader to a new world of the author's childhood in the US, the spaces of public school and neighborhood barrios. The autobiography renders such places and spaces by means of Ernesto's eager interest in becoming an American citizen while also retaining a sense of pride in his Mexican identity. This "process of becoming" constitutes the "formation" (or the "*bildung*" in German) of the bildungsroman protagonist. In Galarza's depiction, school in the US is a place that does not demand abandonment of one culture for another. He explains, "At Lincoln, making us into Americans did not mean scrubbing away what made us originally foreign. . . . It was easy for me to feel that becoming a proud American, as [Miss Hopely] said we should, did not mean feeling ashamed of being Mexican" (211). Miss Hopely encourages the students to share stories about their homelands; during show-and-tell, Ernesto learns about fishing in the Philippines and quilting in Italy, yet also talks about his adventures on a stagecoach in Mexico. School also promotes cultural diversity as demonstrated by the fact that teachers pronounce students' names using their proper accent. Miss Hopely's name is important too, perhaps as an invocation by Galarza of the boy's hope to achieve the American Dream. Finally, Villarreal depicts school as a place where teachers do not discount national heroes from countries other than the US. Ernesto must determine for himself "whether Abraham Lincoln was as great as Benito Juárez, or George Washington braver than the priest Don Miguel Hidalgo" (Galarza 238), choices that he ultimately does not make because he lauds each as heroes of nations with which he identifies.



Galarza represents the barrios of Tucson and Sacramento much as he does the public schools—spaces in which cultural difference is heralded in a way that makes the young boy's transition to life in the US a process of exhilarating self-discovery by a bildungsroman hero, demonstrating the "idealism of the genre" (Minden 122). Ernesto's neighborhood in Sacramento is a "collage of nationalities" in which fellow migrants retain pride in their homeland even as they strive to acculturate in the US (Galarza 212). He recreates the barrio in the text as a "kaleidoscope of colors and languages and customs that surprised and absorbed me at every turn" (199). He records a place where it is common to see Filipino farm workers walking home after work, Portuguese and Italian families gathering outside their houses, Hindus living in rooming houses, and African American men drifting in and out of the neighborhood (199). He also enumerates the diverse jobs of the people in the barrio including "farm workers, riverboat stewards, houseboys, . . . bartenders, rent collectors, insurance salesmen, the mates on the river boats, the landladies" (199). His own family also continues their ethnic practices swearing their loyalty to Madero, eating traditional foods, and speaking Spanish (Galarza 245). Language in this space is also diverse as Ernesto notes the different tongues of the Poles, Yugo-Slavs, Koreans, Filipinos, Portuguese, and Italians in the barrio.

Language ultimately plays a fundamental role in Ernesto's transition into life in the US and his eventual positioning as a transculturated adult able to "select and invent" from cultural norms in both the Mexican and Anglo communities (Pratt 6). Under the tutelage of Miss Hopely's one-on-one tutoring, Ernesto becomes an advanced English speaker. Bilingualism not only gives Ernesto access to the Anglo world that he wants to know more about, it also reconfigures his position in the family and community by reversing the role of child-adult. Galarza illustrates this when the family moves out of the

*barrio* to Oak Park, a white, middle class suburb of Sacramento. Because the Galarzas are the only family that speaks Spanish in the suburb and his mother's and uncles' English remains poor, Ernesto's bilingual language skills take on increased importance. He translates between the realtor and his mother in negotiating the purchase of their house.<sup>14</sup>

Ernesto is thrust into adulthood following the deaths of his mother and Uncle Gustavo, who die in the international flu epidemic after WWI. He returns to the *barrio* with Uncle José and, at this point in the memoir, Galarza depicts Ernesto using his bilingualism to serve the people in the *barrio* of Sacramento, a community that replaces his biological family which is all but gone.<sup>15</sup> The author subtly shifts spatial depictions from home and school, initially the boy's foci of identification, to the *barrio* where Ernesto identifies more broadly with the local community. This marks the beginning of the protagonist's transition into a larger social order, the goal of the bildungsroman hero. Ernesto begins to translate for his neighbor Doña Tránsito: "To her tiny parlor *chicanos* in trouble came for advice, and the firm old lady with the rasping voice and commanding ways often asked me to interpret or translate for them in their encounters with the *Autoridades*" (Galarza 254). Ernesto also "interprets for *chicanos* in distress" at various (unnamed) public offices and for "*chicano* patients" at a local pharmacy (259-60). Galarza does not attack any US institutions, but establishes Ernesto as a helpmate to non-English speakers trying to attain "licenses, certificates, documents" from "Americans uptown, *Autoridades*" (256).

Just as his role as translator incrementally broadens from family to community, so does his fight in "*la lucha*" or "the struggle" for economic survival (Galarza 134).<sup>16</sup> That struggle marks the gradual integration of the bildungsroman hero into society. Ernesto

enters *la lucha* for the first time in the novel when he tries to help Uncle José pay the funeral debts incurred by the family. Thereafter, Ernesto joins *la lucha* on behalf of his community as a bicultural individual fighting against economic oppression of Mexicans in his local community. For example, while performing temporary work in a farm camp, Ernesto learns first-hand about dangerous working conditions of laborers and how white bosses cheat the Mexican workers at the scales. On one occasion, several Mexican children in a labor camp die due to water poisoning. Because of his bilingualism, the camp committee sends him to Sacramento to find a state *Autoridad* to report the incident. Shortly thereafter, he makes his “first organizing speech” as a camp unionizer (Galarza 265). Again, Galarza does not overtly attack any specific US institutions but decries capitalism in general and those bosses willing to exploit others for profit. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo argues that the real “enemy” in the book is capitalism more than overt racism (76), a claim supporting his larger argument that the text represents one individual’s story of the “Chicano struggle against Anglo-American domination” (80).

Ernesto’s role as cultural mediator marks the apex of his transculturation into Mexican and Anglo culture as he negotiates between the working class interests of the Mexican *barrio* and the profit-seeking practices of agri-business. The combining of autobiography and bildungsroman literary forms has prepared the reader for this moment. Place and space—roots in Mexico and a migratory experience—enable the protagonist to identify shared values with oppressed Mexicans in the US. A public school education provides enough training for him to understand and access US institutions. Ernesto’s well-defined integration into the existing social order, a formulaic of the bildungsroman and autobiography, plus Galarza’s representation of the *barrio* as an integrating space confirms Ernesto’s maturation into community activism. He becomes the hero of the

book's title—unnamed save the Spanish and English words that position him squarely in both Mexican and Anglo communities. He adapts by navigating the precarious borders between both worlds, “inhabiting both in good faith, and finally forging a span between his original Mexican and his acquired American enculturations,” a claim Saldívar makes while arguing that the text offers a model of transculturation (“Ideologies” 32).

Barrio Boy illustrates the protagonist's successful transculturation achieved through Ernesto's negotiation of village, school, and barrio spaces as well as the bildungsroman and autobiographical pattern of the hero's trajectory from childhood to adulthood. As an autobiography, Barrio Boy anticipates a future where the author becomes an academic intellectual and community activist who remembers his roots in the *barrio* (Flores 88).<sup>17</sup> The success of the book as a best-selling autobiography testifies to the author's ability to tap into the US publishing industry, all the while voicing resistance to the self-same capitalistic system.

While Pocho and Barrio Boy are artistic expressions of transculturation, Paredes's bildungsroman novel, George Washington Gómez, illustrates assimilation as the protagonist subordinates and replaces one cultural identification for another. In George Washington Gómez, Paredes sharply contrasts the private spaces of home to the public spaces of school in the life of protagonist, George Washington Gómez. These imaginative depictions, when paired with specific characteristics of the bildungsroman, reveal the protagonist's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to sustain a “checker-board consciousness” (147) in order to cope with his loyalties to different cultures. Paredes shows that George eventually makes space for himself by moving away from the borderlands to Washington D.C. where he aggressively denies his Mexican heritage and fully assimilates into Anglo culture.

### George Washington Gómez

George Washington Gómez is a child of Mexican descent born in South Texas, a region characterized by cultural tension. The bildungsroman novel begins by creating an environment that anticipates the problems the protagonist will encounter later in life, a motif also illustrated in Pocho. Paredes accomplishes such foreshadowing through the roles of George's uncles and the family's physical location on the border of South Texas. George's uncles, Lupe and Feliciano, are members of the *sedicioso* movement comprised of Northern Mexicans and South Texans who seek to establish a Republic of the Southwest, a place independent of both the US and Mexico. Thus, George is born into a family who identify themselves as "Mexicotexans," a label that Paredes later defines as "dual personality" split between attachments to the US and Mexico (195). Furthermore, the Gómez family appears caught between the violence of the Mexican Revolution, that prevents his Mexican-born parents from "going home," and a life in the US where they are discriminated against by the Texas Rangers. These circumstances later contribute to the hero's status as a liminal adolescent caught between competing loyalties to the Mexican and Anglo communities.

Paredes also uses George's name to foreshadow those later conflicts that he will confront in his transitional adolescence. His parents, Gumersindo and María, name the baby "George Washington" because they want him "to have a great man's name. Because he's going to grow up to be a great man who will help his people" (Paredes 16). Instead of picking a historical Mexican leader's name, his parents purposely select the name of a "great North American." George's parent's idyllic vision for social justice blinds them to the irony of naming their son after the founder of a country whose political machinery, economic practices, and social institutions so vehemently discriminate against

them. In addition, George's physical appearance as fair skinned may, his parents think, give him access to mainstream Anglo society where he could become a leader.

When George's father is suddenly killed by Texas Rangers, Paredes refocuses the narrative. The family moves away from the border, led by Uncle Feliciano who is determined to heed Gumersindo's dying wish that his newborn son not be subjected to racial violence in the borderlands. Paredes moves the family from the tumultuous border city of "Jonesville-on-the Grande" to the peaceful town of San Pedrito. In this new place, the author engages a characteristic element of the bildungsroman that begins with "a young man entering into life in a happy dream, seeking kindred spirits, finding, friendship and love" (Minden 119). Concomitantly, the author characterizes George as a pre-liminal persona whose relationship to his family, community, and culture are secure and stable (Turner, "Betwixt 94-5). Specifically, the opening chapters of the text portray George with a sense of belonging to the community that is defined by the familiar, comfortable spaces around him. For example, the third person narrator describes the Gómez's blue framed house as an "enchanted place" with multi-colored rose bushes in the front yard, fecund gardens of figs, papayas, and guayabas near the house, and a front porch swing that marks the family's affluence in the poor Mexican *barrio*. Like many seven-year-old boys, George has a favorite place: the banana grove in the back yard that he calls his "best friend" (Paredes 67).

Paredes describes the banana grove as George's "playground and playmate" and renders this space as a site where the boy imagines mortal battles between Anglos and Mexicans (50). Here George enacts the heroism of his namesake as a great American man who "saves his people." In this way, George's daydreams—temporary liminal states—appear to be more than the natural fantasy of a child's imagination because they

are colored by the ethnic conflicts of the region. For example, George pretends that he is Gregorio Cortez fighting the Texas Rangers (which he calls *rinches*) in shoot outs and knife fights where he alternately kills or gets killed by a white man (Paredes 63, 67). In either case, George images he is a brave Mexican hero, outnumbered and outgunned, in a violent conflict with Anglos. He thus imagines himself reacting decisively to injustice, being persecuted for his actions, and fleeing to Mexico, as if he were a *corrido* hero.<sup>18</sup> George plays this role based on what he has learned from Uncle Feliciano, whom George knows “hated the *rinches*” (Paredes 63).<sup>19</sup> He plays out his version of the conflicts in a safe space where he can resolve the extant cultural conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans that occur beyond his backyard.

If the banana grove offers a private space to rehearse his imaginary role as a great leader, in Paredes’s rendering, the rough *barrio* where he lives fulfills a sense of belonging to the local Mexican community. George lives in “*Dos Veintidos*” (i.e., the second ward, twenty-second political precinct), a working class neighborhood that lacks electric and sewage services. This space in the novel is more than merely a setting. As Saldívar points out, Paredes engages space as a “formative presence” that envelops and shapes the hero (79). In Turner’s paradigm, the neighborhood space represents a “structure of positions” where George is securely anchored to the Mexican community (Turner, “Betwixt 94-6). One Sunday in church, for example, George threatens to fight a white boy. The aggressor backs down when he learns that George lives among the “bad people, rowdies, tough characters” of *Dos Veintidos* (Paredes 61). In the exchange, George realizes that “being tough was the Two Twenty-Twoers greatest pride” (Paredes 61). This small victory confirms George’s place in *Dos Veintidos* to himself and his peers. Thus far in the novel, immediate space surrounding the protagonist coupled with

the conventions of the bildungsroman novel and pre-liminal model that call for a stable childhood reveal a geopoetics in which the hero is closely attached to both Mexican folk heroes and comfortably immersed in the Mexican community.

Uncle Feliciano, who raises George when the boy's father is killed, also contributes to the boy's sense of Mexican identity by inculcating in him pride for Mexico. Paredes intimates that George's uncle feels responsible for ensuring the child develops a strong appreciation for his roots in Mexico, particularly given the fact the family has moved away from the border.<sup>20</sup> He instills in George reverence for his Mexican Indian heritage. For example, when Feliciano registers George for preschool as "Gualinto" (his grandmother's mispronunciation of "George Washington"), Feliciano tells the teacher it is an Indian name from Mexico. In turn, George feels immensely proud of his heritage "with all of its associations with familial, cultural, and local history" (R. Saldívar, "Borderlands" 285). In addition, Feliciano teaches George through storytelling. Although Paredes characterizes Feliciano as a laconic man, the author highlights his attachments to Mexico by showing that Feliciano enjoys swapping tales of Mexican folklore with his neighbors. Even when George is frightened by the legends, he also learns much about his heritage from them, most notably the ways in which the stories confirm his *corrido* heroes. In all, the boy's relationship to Uncle Feliciano further contributes to a secure identity from which, in accordance with the bildungsroman, he will emerge into a threatening world.

That occurs when he enters public school in circumstances that differ sharply from those in Pocho and Barrio Boy. Villarreal uses school as an escape for Richard: it metaphorically frees the protagonist into a larger world of knowledge when he feels trapped by the confines of his parent's impositions in Pocho. Galarza heralds public



schools as sites where teachers encourage mutual respect for different cultures in Barrio Boy. Rather than a place of possibility and hope, Paredes's grammar school is "a kind of hell" for George because his teachers discount and devalue his Mexican heritage (124). It is an intensely Americanizing institution, and as such, enacts a convention of the bildungsroman in which the hero begins to encounter "the struggles of hard reality" as he "matures amidst the many experiences of life" (Minden 119). Entering school changes George into a liminal persona caught "betwixt and between" a private life at home and public life at school (Turner, "Betwixt" 96). The difficult experiences in school, outside the safe confines of home, ultimately help the protagonist find his place in the social order of greater society. For instance, Miss Cornelia, George's first grade teacher, belittles the boy publicly when he includes the Spanish letters *ch*, *ll*, and *ñ* in the English alphabet. Miss Cornelia tells him sharply that this is not a Mexican school. Also, when he mistakenly pronounces the word "equals" in math class, she pokes fun at him, calling George "Mr. Eckles" until his classmates adopt this new nickname for him.

George becomes a figure torn between the Mexican culture of his early childhood and the process of Americanization fostered in the classroom. "[H]is heart and mind become the battleground for cultural hegemony" (R. Saldívar, "Borderlands" 279) when he is subjected to the legitimacy a public institution has to advance Anglo culture and foster US nationalism. He begins "to acquire an Anglo-American self" at odds with his Mexican identity; "The boy nurtured these two selves within him, each radically different and antagonistic to the other, without realizing their separate existences" (Paredes 147). The following lengthy but significant passage demonstrates concrete examples of George's liminal state caught between competing cultural values:

*Consciously he considered himself a Mexican.* He was ashamed of the name his dead father had given him, George Washington Gómez. He was grateful to this Uncle Feliciano for having registered him in school as “Gualinto” and having said that it was an Indian name. He spoke Spanish, literally his mother tongue; it was the only language his mother would allow him to use when he spoke to her. The Mexican flag made him feel sentimental, and a rousing Mexican song would make him feel like yelling. The Mexican national hymn brought tears to his eyes, and when he said “we” he meant the Mexican people. “*La Capital*” did not mean Washington, D.C., for him but Mexico City. Of such matter were made the basic cells in the honeycomb that made up his personality.

*But there was also George Washington Gómez, the American.* He was secretly proud of the name his more conscious twin, Gualinto, was ashamed to avow publicly. George Washington Gómez secretly desired to be a full-fledged American without the shameful encumbrance of his Mexican race. He was the product of his Anglo teachers and the books he read in school, which were all in English. He felt a pleasant warmth when he heard “The Star-Spangled Banner.” It was he it was who fought the British with George Washington and Francis Marion the Swamp Fox, discovered pirate treasure with Long John Silver, and got lost in a cave with Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher. Books had made him so.

(Italics added; Paredes 147-8)

This passage provides ample evidence of the ways that Paredes’s illustrates George’s “in-between existence,” the hallmark of a liminal persona (Paredes, “Problem” 25). Saldívar identifies such struggles as part of this transitional experience by noting that the “double Mexican and American culture systems each acquire within their own spheres a

presumed priority by virtue of their apparent production of a formed subject” (“Borderlands” 282). That formed subject is a conflicted boy with a “bilingual-bicultural makeup” who must constantly switch cultural modes because he perceives them as exclusive (Paredes, “Problem” 37).

George is able to maintain a checkerboard consciousness because the public and private spheres of his early school life do not overlap: “[i]n the schoolroom he was an American; at home on the playground he was a Mexican” (Paredes 147); his behavior is contingent upon the physical space that he occupies. Paredes summarizes the boy’s predicament: “Hating the Gringo one moment with an unreasoning hatred, admiring his literature, his music, his material goods the next. Loving the Mexican with a blind fierceness, then almost despising him for his slow progress in the world” (Paredes 150). Paredes explains, “Immigrants from Europe can become Americanized in one generation. Gualinto [George], as a Mexicotexan, could not. Because, in the first place, he was not an immigrant come to a foreign land. Like other Mexicotexans, he considered himself part of the land on which his ancestors had lived before the Anglotexans had come” (147-8). Paredes recalls the label of Mexicotexan bestowed on George at birth, a label that registers the cultural tensions seemingly pulling apart George’s formerly coherent sense of self.

By the time he becomes a high school student, George can no longer segregate his bifurcated identity as a Mexicotexan. According to Paredes’s depiction, the protagonist exists in a troubled state of limbo where he is “no longer . . . a member of a culturally-defined social position or class” (Samuels 61). The goal of the bildungsroman hero—social integration—combined with the author’s construction of separate spheres reveal a the hero in a tenuous, liminal position. Paredes figuratively and literally shows George’s

private and public spheres colliding due to conflicts over official interpretations of the history of Texas and the roles that Mexican and Anglo families alike played in that history. When the US-Mexico border shifted in the mid-nineteenth century, explains Renato, the borderlands became “as much a homeland as an alien environment” for Mexicans and their descendants (“Politics” 67-8). George confronts this complex legacy in the classroom when, in his junior year for example, he presents an oral report that celebrates the heroism of Mexican soldiers. Anglo classmates challenge the veracity of George’s report starting a bitter debate in which students attack each others’ families *ad hominem*, accusing the others’ fathers and grandfathers of being Mexican criminals or murdering *rinches*.

The older he gets, the more George feels compelled to vocalize a counter history to that offered in his school textbooks. He sadly recognizes that “Texas history is a cross he must bear,” but he refuses to invalidate the heroes of his childhood (Paredes 149). In this conflict, Paredes entangles his protagonist in a “politics of location” that highlights the interstitial relationship between space and social relations in the context of a geocultural identity and the historicity of narrative (J. Saldívar, *Border* 41, 72-91).

Paredes characterizes the protagonist as increasingly conflicted and alienated by the time he reaches his senior year in high school. George will have no choice but to decide his allegiance, a decision that the author sets forth through a dramatic scene that teaches George a painful lesson: publicly supporting his Mexican heritage comes at significant expense. In this incident, George stands up for fellow Mexican students when they are not admitted to the Senior Class Party at *La Casa Mexicana* because, the doorman explains, “orders is no Mexicans” (Paredes 173). Although the fair-skinned George could have entered the restaurant, he refuses, declaring himself Mexican. This

claim causes his Anglo girlfriend to break up with him on the spot. Paredes's heavy-handed use of irony in naming the restaurant *La Casa Mexicana* is not lost on the protagonist, who realizes the paradox of a "Mexican House" that does not admit Mexicans. The four students who are not admitted to the Senior Party, "*los cuatro Mexicanos*" as they become known, grow increasingly alienated from their peers during the remainder of their senior year. Even though George demonstrates an act of resistance against racism, he is far from rewarded like the hero of his childhood fantasies.

Just before graduation, it becomes impossible for George to continue fluctuating between "checkerboard" identities at school and home. On one hand, he disavows his namesake, wishing that his father had never saddled him with a responsibility to help a race he considers inferior: "I'm not going to be a great man. I'll just be another Mexican with the seat of his pants torn and patched up. That's all I'll ever be. And I don't want to help my people. Help my people? What for? Let them help themselves, the whole lot of ragged, dirty *pelados*" (Paredes 265).<sup>21</sup> Although Paredes portrays George's diatribe as caused by frustration and anger, the author also contextualizes the scene amid socio-economic forces that oppress Mexicans. Such oppression creates obstacles so great that they cannot be overcome by a boy from the *barrio*. His Mexican heritage, he decides, undermines his chances of future success, but, at this point in his life, claiming American heritage proves impossible as his graduation ceremony illustrates.

Paredes shapes the bildungsroman novel to a point where the protagonist can no longer viably juggle his bifurcated identities and experiences an identity crisis where the "appearance of an awakening sense of identity was coupled with a challenge to that same identity" (Paredes, "Problem" 40). The liminal teenager appears to have slipped between the threads of social fabric altogether, fitting neither into home or school life fully, as he

defends and forswears his Anglo and Mexican identities. George experiences a meltdown of identity when confronted with Paredes's ironic character of K. Hank Harvey, a graduation speaker who is a racist. A presumed Anglo "expert" on Mexican culture, Harvey delivers a graduation address that includes an anecdote where Harvey tricks an Anglo farmer into shooting a Mexican, a lengthy commentary on "Mexican cruelty and tyranny" at the Alamo, and a celebration of Texas independence over Mexico.<sup>22</sup> Harvey's remarks are grossly inappropriate to members of the audience like George, but the ethnographer does not realize his blatant offensiveness. Enraged, George leaves the ceremony calling Anglos "the cause of all evil" (273). As the narrator explains, "All the tales of hate and violence from his childhood came back to him from the half-consciousness in which they had been submerged. He thought how there had always been an Anglo blocking his path to happiness, to success, to plain dignity" (Paredes 273).

Shortly after this tense graduation scene, Paredes makes an interesting structural move in the last section of the novel titled, "Leader of His People." The author jumps ahead chronologically to depict George nine years later as a twentyish lieutenant in the US Army's counter-intelligence department. What is significant about this gap in the narrative is that Paredes does not explain the protagonist's transformation from a conflicted boy struggling with his attachments to the Mexican and Anglo communities to an assimilated persona who has joined the Americanizing institution of the US military. In the narrative, George is not afforded a rite of passage per se; he leaves San Pedrito a liminal teenager and returns as an assimilated man who has integrated into Anglo society.

By omitting George's transition, Paredes underscores the radicalness of George's change. The reader cannot help but see the difference between the agitated high school graduate troubled by competing, mutually exclusive identities and the highly assimilated

lawyer/soldier with an American-sounding name. He also changes his name to the neutral sounding "George G. Gómez" to disassociate himself from the burdensome presidential name. Paredes engages an important element of the bildungsroman—the protagonist's break with a tradition or institution—through George's disavowal of his attachments to Mexican culture, but does not explain how that occurs specifically.

Metaphorically and literally, George must distance himself from his childhood inculcation in Mexican heritage in order to assimilate into Anglo culture. When he first sees his old classmates, George tells them that he is proud that he got away from San Pedrito and recommends they get away too if they want to "make something of themselves" (300). This logic resonates with George's early childhood coping mechanism of separating his bicultural selves spatially between a Mexican home and Anglo school. Only by leaving the border town where he grew up is George able to fully assimilate into Anglo culture. According to Saldívar, the novel is "precisely about the large and small dislocations in space that must occur before, at the novel's end, the hero George G. Gómez can completely assimilate" (Border 41).

In the final section of the novel, Paredes achieves the goal of the bildungsroman hero to integrate into the larger social structure. That process is illustrated by his job in the military which is to spy on Mexicans and Mexican Americans along the US-Mexico border. In contrast to Pocho, where the protagonist uses the military to escape Santa Clara and possibly pursue higher education, George Washington Gómez represents the military as an assimilationist institution that has in some unspecified way (implied by the gap in the narrative) contributed to George's transformation into a man who not only refuses to acknowledge his Mexican roots, but agrees to become a traitor to it by spying.

Paredes reintroduces his protagonist to the people and places of his childhood that were once so important to him, an act that confirms the radical way in which he has changed into an assimilated adult. By the time he returns to San Pedrito, George has married an Anglo ethnographer who studies Mexican migrant workers, a fact that undercuts his earlier antagonism toward ethnographer K. Hank Harvey. In addition, George's father-in-law was once a Texas Ranger, the paramilitary force that killed his father and fought against *sedicios* like Uncle Feliciano. George endures his father-in-law's racist slurs without comment, a behavior unlike his adolescent protests against Anglo versions of Texas history or his fight against discrimination at *La Casa Mexicana*. Also, George praises the fair skin of one of his sister's children while calling his other sister's children "little Indians" because of their dark features (Paredes 285). Literary critic Héctor Pérez concludes from this behavior that the protagonist's "attitude toward darker-skinned Mexicans becomes one element in his rejection of his community" (40).

Whether the protagonists in Pocho, Barrio Boy, and George Washington Gómez transculturate or assimilate, each works to make space for himself, literally moving away from the borderlands and figuratively creating a hybrid transculturated or new assimilated identity. In these narratives, the authors use the Mexican Revolution as a force that casts the characters on chaotic physical and personal journeys. These works provide insight into a historical era of northern migration through coming of age narratives of the bildungsroman hero. Leaving behind transitional childhood spaces in both the US and Mexico, Villarreal, Galarza, and Paredes carry the reader into the modern world. That world is represented in Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead (1991) and Miguel Méndez's Pilgrims in Aztlán (1974). Drawing from conventions of a literature of utopia, Méndez and Silko offer cautionary tales that depict border cities like Tijuana and Tucson



as amoral dystopias in which members of capitalistic society squelch anyone inhibiting their quest for endless profit or self-gratification. The power of the wealthy accrues unabated on both sides of the border forcing the impoverished to migrate between the US and Mexico trying to reclaim their own space, a place with ample food and water and where their voices are not muted.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term Mexican heritage describes the fact that Richard Rubio and George Washington Gómez are US citizens with Mexican parents and Ernesto Galarza is Mexican-born living in the US. By Anglo cultural norms, I refer to Richard's assertion of his unique individualism and determination to unburden himself from gendered Mexican familial roles. In addition, Anglo cultural norms generally includes Ernesto's use of the English language and factors associated with George's complete assimilation into US culture (i.e., his job as a spy in the military, internalization of anti-Hispanic sentiment).

<sup>2</sup> This expanded perspective on the border as an agent and reflection of cultural difference makes sense particularly in regard to Pocho, a work that Villarreal adamantly claims is not representative of Chicano writing exclusively, an assertion contrary to Chicano critics' claims (Villarreal, "Interview" 40-47). In other words, Villarreal rejects the labeling of his work as "Chicano literature" because, according a 1976-interview, he believes the finest writing crosses racial lines by appealing to a common sense of shared humanity (42-45). To some extent, his refusal to be limited by an ethnic label is captured in the plot of Pocho, specifically in the protagonist's rejection of culturally defined roles.

<sup>3</sup> Critics agree that Barrio Boy is an autobiography, a fact confirmed by Galarza's preface to the book as well as the connections between the author's biography and the story of the protagonist, Ernesto Galarza (Flores 81; R. Saldivar 25). George Washington Gómez is clearly recognized as a work of fiction, as is Pocho, though critics variously describe the latter. Chicano critic Joe Rodríguez, for example, identifies Pocho as a "survival narrative" (68) while Villarreal terms it a "novel of character development" (422).

<sup>4</sup> For a biographical sketch of Villarreal's life, see the entry (by his name) in Chicano Literature: A Reference Guide (1985). For information on his career as a writer, see Revista Chicano Riqueña (1976) as well as Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature (1979).

<sup>5</sup> In Villarreal's portrayal, Juan re-channels the longing to achieve social justice that he was unable to achieve as a soldier of Pancho Villa's army, into his expectations for Richard to grow up to be a lawyer or doctor practicing in Mexico. Juan's goal for his son is that he should follow his own model of serving the Mexican people—a problematical expectation for a boy born in El Paso and raised in California, who has never even seen Mexico. For example, he tells his son, "[l]earn all that you can in the English, for next year by this time we will be in our country" (Villarreal 96). While other Mexican parents make their children work, Juan keeps Richard in school because he wants him to get a good education.

<sup>6</sup> Folklorist Arnold Van Gennep identifies three rites of passage universal to the human experience in Rites of Passage (1960): pre-liminal rites, liminal rites, and post-liminal rites (11). He defines these stages as rites of separation, transition, and incorporation.

<sup>7</sup> He hides this experiment from everyone because, at this point in his life, he does not want to challenge openly a religious community in which priests serve as intermediaries between believers and God—a belief contrary to his attempt to commune directly with God. Villarreal also suggests that as long as Richard's love of reading, like his queries of God, do not directly compete with the demands of his parents or priests, reading does not threaten his place in the home.

<sup>8</sup> Villarreal only sporadically includes the date or Richard's age in the novel. In this instance (as well as with the other novels in this chapter), I estimate the age of characters based on chronological events in the novel.

<sup>9</sup> The Latin root of liminal is *limen* meaning margin. Liminality, however, should not be confused with marginal or alienated, terms suggesting displacement from mainstream or dominant norms. In contemporary literary theory, for example, a marginal or alienated person is situated outside a theoretical center of social ideology. bell hook's works, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984), demonstrates this position. A liminal, in contrast, is situated in a place "betwixt and between" margin and center in time and space. For additional information, see Turner's "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites of Passage*" in The Forest of Symbols (1967).

<sup>10</sup> A common familial dynamic throughout Latin America is men's nationalism and women's faith. Pocho registers this dynamic clearly: Juan is exceedingly loyal to Mexico but only tangentially interested in Catholicism; conversely, Consuelo appears mildly nationalistic, but fanatically religious.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to Joe Pete, other liminal guides exist in the text. Richard's best friend, Ricky Malatesta, and a gang of pachucos/as show Richard what he does not want to be when he grows up (e.g., pursuing the American Dream as does Ricky and living permanently as a liminoid as do the pachucos/as).

<sup>12</sup> Villarreal distinguishes between "pocho" and "pachuco" in the novel to illustrate the fact that Richard's chosen identity is an affirmation of individuality rather than subordination to gang mentality. The author accomplishes this at the end of the narrative when Richard asserts his individuality and pulls away from group membership required

by the pachuco/a gang: "I can be part of everything, he thought, because I am the only one capable of controlling my destiny. . . . Never—no, never—will I allow myself to become part of a group—to become classified, to lose my individuality. . . . I will not become a follower, nor will I allow myself to become a leader, because I must be myself and accept for myself only that which I value" (Villarreal 152-3). He distinguishes himself from the pachucos/as who occupy a liminal space "betwixt and between" the Anglo and Mexican cultures and affirms himself as a pocho who resolutely occupies an acculturated place in both cultures. Monsiváis also recognizes the subtle but important difference between the terms "pachuco" and "pocho" that Villarreal sets forth in the novel. Monsiváis claims that the Mexican and American communities scorn pachucos/as because of their steadfast resolve to be liminal personas; whereas, pochos are scorned because they dare to acculturate into both cultures.

<sup>13</sup> Because of the cultural nationalism associated with "La Raza," it is a term that means more than its literal translation of "the race." The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines "*La Raza*" as a phrase connoting "a strong sense of racial and cultural identity held by Mexican Americans" (244). According to this source, "*La Raza*" may be traced to Mexican educator and philosopher José Vasconcelos who identified *La Raza* as "the people of mixed race [who] will inherit the earth" (244). *El Diccionario del Español Usual en Mexico* (1996) associates the term with "*rasgos culturales, históricos, lingüísticos, and religiosos*" [distinctive features of a cultural, historical, linguistic, and religious nature] (757).

<sup>14</sup> Ernesto's role as family translator resonates with that of Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982) as the protagonists in each text

occupy a position that reverses the role of child and adult based on the needs of their family.

<sup>15</sup> This is one distinction that critics note between Galarza's and Rodriguez's texts: Ernesto transculturates creating an identity that involves aspects of both Mexican and Anglo culture whereas Richard assimilates into the Anglo community. As might be expected, Rodriguez's work is not well received among Chicano critics. See Saldívar's "Ideologies of the Self: Chicano Autobiography" and Flores's "Chicano Autobiography: Culture, Ideology and the Self."

<sup>16</sup> Throughout the novel, the term "*la lucha*" is used solely to refer to the economic hardships of the Galarza family. Even though the term has been used to connote the Mexican Revolution, it is not related to the war explicitly in the novel, even though Revolution causes the family's economic problems because it forces them to abandon life in Jalcoctán.

<sup>17</sup> For a brief biography of Galarza's life, see Rosaldo's "Politics, Patriarchs, and Laughter" (1987).

<sup>18</sup> The *corrido* or Mexican ballad is a "narrative poem in Spanish set to music" (Griffith 22). The *corrido* is "one of the most important verbal folk art forms in the twentieth-century," explains folklorist James Griffith, because it "reflects the point of view of the working [Mexican and Hispanic] people" (22). One of the most well-known examples is *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*, a ballad analyzed and popularized by Américo Paredes. *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* serves as an example of the *corrido* tradition, a living oral poetics, that constructs the characteristics of a border hero in particular and the traits of

Mexican and Hispanic people in general, both in response to Anglo class and ethnic oppression.

<sup>19</sup> Pérez is one of the few critics who recognizes the connections between this novel and 'With a Pistol in His Hand.' In "Voicing Resistance on the Border," he argues that Feliciano epitomizes the corrido hero who young George tries to emulate while playing in the banana grove.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed history of the *sedicio* movement in the American Southwest in 1915, see David Montejano's Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas (1987).

<sup>21</sup> *Pelados* is a slang term that refers to working class Mexicans who are crude in their behavior. The term intimates the socio-economic obstacles that George faces in achieving the expectations of his namesake to be a great man.

<sup>22</sup> Two comments warrant mention. First, I believe the fictional Harvey is an allusion to the early Anglo anthropologists and folklorists such as J. Frank Dobie, Charles F. Lummis, or John Gregory Bourke against whom Paredes's rails for their "less than satisfactory" studies of Mexicans in "The Problem of Identity" as well as "On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups." In these essays, Paredes contends that the work of such supposed "experts" perpetuated racism. Second, Paredes's use of the term "identity crisis" resonates with Juan Flores and George Yudice's identification of Latino consciousness as schizophrenic. See "Living Borders/*Buscando América*" in Social Text (1990). For fiction on the ways male Latinos construct identity in response to forces of transculturation and assimilation, see Muy Macho: Latin Men Confront their Manhood (1996).

## CHAPTER 4

### RECLAIMING SPACE: DYSTOPIAS AND UTOPIAS IN THE BORDERLANDS

Protagonists in works explored in the previous discussion make space for themselves in the US as transculturated or assimilated individuals. They metaphorically carve out new identities by drawing on Mexican heritages and accessing Anglo cultural norms. Characters in Pilgrims in Aztlán [*Peregrinos de Aztlán*] (1974) and Almanac of the Dead (1991) seek more than figurative space. Miguel Méndez and Leslie Marmon Silko portray characters carving out and re-claiming sacred Chicano/a and Indian homelands in the US-Mexico borderlands. That struggle takes place in the border dystopias of Tijuana and Tucson and in the desert utopias of Yuma and Sonora. Méndez's and Silko's renderings of space combined with formulaic elements and common themes in utopian writing result in a geopoetics that critiques society by offering a glimpse into a more humane world. Méndez represents that place as Aztlán, a site where the poor will have sustenance and self worth. Ultimately, however, that vision is unobtainable for poor Chicano/a people: Aztlán is a desert mirage that cannot materialize; the aggressive and violent forces of capitalism prevent its realization. Silko portrays utopia as a locale where Native characters and their allies live harmoniously in sacred Indian lands. Although she does not actualize utopia in the novel, the final pages suggest that it will come to fruition through the efforts of multi-ethnic resistance movements poised to destroy the borderland dystopia that they inhabit.

An interlocking relationship exists between the artistic expression of utopias and dystopias. Critic B.G. Knepper explains that relationship writing, "the basic characteristic of either form is that an imagined society is compared and contrasted with an existing



one” (20). For example, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), the text that gave the genre its name, portrays an idyllic community as a way to expose the immorality and imperfections of European society without critiquing it overtly.<sup>1</sup> As Paul Turner writes: “*Utopia* does not represent a positive ideal, but a negative attack on European wickedness. Its object is to shame Christians into not behaving worse, as they do now, but far better than the poor Utopian heathen” (11). Méndez and Silko suggest ideal societies by exposing immoral ones. Their work functions as strong social criticism and daunting cautionary tale. *Pilgrims in Aztlán* condemns capitalism as a form of genocide to lower class Chicanos and their allies; *Almanac of the Dead* attacks literal and figurative class stratification, racism, or cultural conflict that estrange human beings.

Utopian and dystopian literature is also characterized by little moral ambiguity in representations of communities. Genre critic Artur Blaim explains that in the case of More’s text, “all positive values are associated with Utopia and all the negative ones with Europe” (19). More, Bacon, and others<sup>2</sup> depict true republics founded on equality, peace, and community spirit and dystopias characterized by inequality, violence, and individualism (Blaim 19). The same is true in Méndez’s construction of space and place. He vilifies greed, egoism, and self-gratification in Tijuana and valorizes social justice, egalitarianism, and universal enfranchisement in Aztlán. Méndez’s romanticization of Aztlán, a site of all positive values, alludes to the Chicano homeland cited in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, the charter of the First Chicano National Conference (1969). According to legend, Aztlán existed in 19,000BC as an island situated in the Atlantic Ocean “where an advanced civilization, the Chanes (which means the ‘people of the snake’ in Mayan) established the center of their civilization” (Alurista 221). In both the novel and *El Plan Espiritual*, Aztlán represents an idyllic society based on shared

communal property and social harmony. Both works suggest Aztlán would be inhabited by Chicano/a people, a term not clarified by specific ethnic labels but seemingly inclusive of Indians, Mexicans, Hispanics, and perhaps other poor, disenfranchised minorities. The primary difference between the artistic expression of Aztlán in the novel and the Chicano charter is that Méndez's narrative shows that the desert utopia cannot be attained. Thus, the author's message is that reclaiming ancestral land between the US and Mexico is not a realistic means for Chicanos/as to achieve social justice. Instead, Méndez's closing paragraph urges readers to create a utopia within existing society. Ultimately, he argues that Aztlán need not be a far-off, mythic, legendary homeland, but might be achieved through massive socio-economic reform wherever Chicanos/as live.

Méndez's message makes visible the pragmatic, realistic considerations required of a genre meant to critique the world outside the novel. More's text established the conventions associated with geographical placement of an idealized community based on the term, "utopia," meaning "no-place" and "well-place" (Blaim 25). According to these conventions, an idealized society is located in an unspecified geographical location far beyond existing civilization. Authors usually account for the descriptions of the "well-place," which constitute the bulk of the narrative, through a travel-narrator. Travel to the utopia involves a long, dangerous journey or near ship-wreck as occurs in, for example, Francis Bacon's New Atlantis (1626), Shakespeare's The Tempest (1623), Joseph Hall's Mundus Alter et Idem [Another World yet the Same (1600)], or Tommaso Campanella's City of the Sun (1623). In contrast to utopian writing, dystopian literature is set in an immoral civilization in which evil is nearly ubiquitous, except in the far-off utopian land. Authors must account for the manner in which protagonists extricate themselves from the

dysfunctional society to reach utopia or the ways in which characters orchestrate an overthrow of the dystopia.

Méndez and Silko employ some, but not all, of these pragmatic conventions of utopian literature. For all but the final paragraph in the novel, Méndez situates Aztlán somewhere in the Yuma and Sonoran deserts along the border. Silko locates utopia in tribal lands of the American Southwest. Also, both authors address the need to physically travel to a utopia. For Méndez, the pilgrims of the book's title are migrant workers who cross and re-cross the US-Mexico border in search of higher paying jobs and figuratively looking for Aztlán. For Silko, thousands of Mexican and Indian migrants comprising an "odd new mystical movement" marching from Mexico to the US to reclaim ancestral land (709). In neither work, however, do the pilgrims reach a utopia.<sup>3</sup>

Both works set out specific dystopic societies as the catalyst for the traveler's search for an ideal, just society. Méndez fashions a dystopia called the "Republic of the Despised."<sup>4</sup> This name identifies the inhabitants of the immoral society without specifying ethnicity, thus suggesting the "despised" belong to all racial groups. Also, the place name is a "republic," a term suggesting that its citizens freely established the evil society according to their own desires. The relationship between Méndez's representation of this dystopic space and his engagement with a utopian literary tradition warns readers against the dangers of economic ruthlessness. In this evil society, capitalism oppresses poor Mexicans, Indians, Chicanos, and *mestizos/as* who do not speak the language of business and who may not speak English, both of which are necessary for survival. The power of the wealthy accrues unabated on both sides of the border, forcing the impoverished to migrate between the US and Mexico in search of Aztlán, a site with ample food and water. In addition to providing nourishment, the utopia

is a place where the voices of the poor are not muted and they are respected as human beings.

### **Pilgrims in Aztlán**

The form of Pilgrims in Aztlán emphasizes voice and dialogue of characters through a heteroglot style. This style represents qualities of the utopia and the dystopia: the former is illustrated through Méndez's novel in its inclusion of dialogue by many poor characters, representing the ideals of free speech in Aztlán; the latter is demonstrated by the primacy of a language of commerce and trade that pervades the dystopia. For example, if the promised land is a place in society where the poor will be able to voice their grievances, Méndez's novel articulates those concerns through a form concomitant with Bakhtinian primacy on dialogue. Bakhtin conceptualizes language as a dynamic, unstable, creative system that evolves in/from social exchange through dialogue, defined as an exchange of speech utterances. He says, "As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, a heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Bakhtin 35). Multiple voices in dialogue create a discourse of heteroglossia where "tensions that are holding together and pulling apart a language at any one time . . . are producing multiple changes that constitute the history of language" (Bakhtin 35).

Those tensions "holding together and pulling apart" simultaneously constitute the centripetal and centrifugal forces in Pilgrims in Aztlán. This form is illustrated by the "orchestration of a diversity of social discourses" (Morris 112), including, among other voices, crude bar talk of hard working Mexicans, lyrical descriptions of the desert by poet-worker Lorenzo, a hippy's free-love jive, and advice on picking cotton by migrant farm help. Further, Méndez writes in shades of ethnic speech by characters who define

themselves as *pochos*, Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and *mestizos/as*. Finally, the fact that the book is published in English and Spanish also testifies to its polyvocality. Even as the language of commerce nearly quells the oppressed, their dialogue in Méndez's narrative testifies to their presence and purpose. While literary utopians generally achieve harmony by enforcing conformity, Méndez's depiction of utopia challenges that convention of the genre by encouraging individual self-expression—dissonant voices each articulating needs that are muted.<sup>5</sup>

Pilgrims in Aztlán presents a dystopia fueled by extreme capitalism—profit at any cost—that begets inequality among its citizens. Market forces stratify society along class lines by segregating the upper class from the disenfranchised, disempowered, and silenced members of the lower class that generally (but not exclusively) include Chicano/a people. Méndez's expression of space focuses on Tijuana, a border city of “dubious reputation” (Méndez 12). This city typifies the greater borderland dystopia as a site where societal ethics give way to any form of selfish gratification that makes money.

Méndez's depiction of Tijuana shows how commercial marketing of sex, drugs, and alcohol excludes the poor who have no goods or services to sell. He accomplishes this by personifying Tijuana as a “mythical goddess” and “damsel off her rocker” who, without compunction, takes advantage of “human weaknesses to fill its farthest corners” (Méndez 13). A city that speaks the language of commercial exploitation sells dirty brothels, cheap drink, and easy drugs to anyone with fast cash. Cloaked by the “beauty of supply and demand,” Tijuana aggressively courts her customers by saying, “In here, in here, you marijuana smokers and drug addicts, come on in, come on in! . . . You got greenbacks? Yea, dollars. Because if you don't, you're out of luck, sweethearts. . . . It

doesn't matter if you're assassins, thieves, slave drivers or dirty social climbers" (Méndez 13).

If you have money and guts, Tijuana appears to be a tough but enticing city. However, if you are hungry, homeless, and injured—as is the hero of the book—it is also a place where “living meant struggling unto death” (Méndez 8). Méndez creates a protagonist Loreto Maldonado with whom he clearly sympathizes. Loreto is an eighty year old Yaqui Indian who can hardly sustain a living in Tijuana by washing car windows. He is also a former colonel in Mexican Revolution who has earned a “crippled leg and a shack to live in located in the poorest part of the city” in exchange for his service to a nation that once valued Yaqui warriors (Somoza 69).<sup>6</sup> Although Tijuana is governed by those with money, influence, and an insatiable appetite for each, the bulk of its citizens are “enslaved Chicanos” and “Indian peoples reduced by the torture of hunger and the humiliation of plunder” (Méndez 82-3).

In the Republic of Despised Mexicans, power is in the hands of anyone motivated by uninhibited greed and sexual perversion—people who show gross indifference to human life. For example, Pilgrims in Aztlán contains a litany of villains on both sides of the border, one of whom is Mario Miller de Cocuch, a Mexican ex-revolutionary turned millionaire “by combining the activities of politicians and thieves” (Méndez 123). His relentless pursuit of wealth and status is best illustrated by the fact that Mario encourages his wife to have sex with prominent men so that he may be promoted. Méndez sums up Mario as a “prodigious acrobat on the trapezes of politics and an expert manipulator of the levers of the machines of the influential” (10). Unbridled ambition demonstrated by this Mexican character is paralleled by Anglo characters as well. One Anglo businesswoman (unnamed in the text) builds a hot dog stand into a restaurant franchise,

Siesta Chile Dogs, by exploiting illegal Mexican workers. She makes a fortune paying them menial wages (i.e., four dollars a day plus a dozen hot dogs) and employing them in substandard working conditions. Méndez writes, "Once the voracious old dame began to count off the endless advantages the wetbacks had, hidden away in her hotdog factory, there was no stopping her" (29). She further boosts profits by routinely inviting the *Migra* to her business; they promptly deport the Mexican workers *sans* paychecks. As these examples show, wealthy people perpetuate their own power and "deprive the poor of any participation in the system" so that "the tragedy of the oppressed knows no borders" (Somoza 74-5).

When an individual is no longer useful to the powerful, she or he is discarded. Méndez illustrates this through the story of Good Chuco (alias Jorge Curiel), a migrant farm hand. Chuco began working at age twelve and, after several years, becomes the number one harvester of grapes, tomatoes, and eggplants throughout the Imperial Valley. Méndez exclaims ironically, "If the work in the farm fields had been classified as an Olympic sport, how many gold medals ol' Chuco would have won" (27). However, Chuco gets no prize for years of strenuous labor in the capitalistic system; twenty-three years of breaking records leaves Chuco broken down. He is unable to qualify for workers' protections in the US—health care, compensation, or social security—because of his illegal status. He eventually becomes an unemployed alcoholic wandering the streets of Tijuana.

Méndez shows that Chuco is acutely aware that the very society that his work fed has now discarded him like a broken tool because he no longer serves them. In one scene, middle and upper class pedestrians (whose ethnicity is unspecified) accuse Chuco

of being a lazy Mexican drunk and threaten to call the cops. He retorts by pointing to a sign with a Mexican sleeping under a saguaro wearing a sombrero and *sarape*:

You see that pal there, leaning against the cactus? These people, pal, say that he's lazy, that he doesn't work, you know, but that guy's [sic] there, really, because he's all beat and all sad. The fellow was the harvest champion, you know. He's there because he's all tired out with no one to help him, not even anyone to respect him, just like a shovel or a worn pick that's not worth a damn any more.  
(Méndez 28)

But, because the privileged consider the destitute less than human, the words of the poor are viewed as meaningless. In this scene, it appears as if the passersby cannot hear the words of Chuco even when he tries to establish common ground. Chuco calls his accusers "pal" numerous times and pleads for them "to see" and "to know" what he is talking about. He cries during his emotional speech. In return, the pedestrians pelt him with hatred: "Damned lazy people! All they think of is booze and sleep! Yes, drink and do something . . . *manaña!* By the way, has someone called the cops?" (Méndez 28). Ultimately, the police haul him away; "Everyone was happy to see them carting the drunken Chicano off, real decent people, most of them wearing nice ties, the sign of well-being and good jobs" (Méndez 28).

Méndez offers other examples of the ways that people in power, notably the rich or those who serve them, silence the voices of the poor. This occurs because empowered individuals in the dystopia hate the poor, considering them inferior or merely tools of their own success and pleasure. Once they are no longer useful, they are vilified. For instance, citizens in Tijuana treat Candelita, a lottery vendor, with invective because she is old and ugly. When she begs them to buy a ticket, passersby respond with sere hatred:



“Well, just what are you doing here in the world, old woman? You should be good and dead” (Méndez 60).<sup>7</sup>

In the Republic of the Despised, the greed that drives individuals to make more money spreads to civil institutions such as the police force, legal courts, and border patrol.<sup>8</sup> This occurs on both sides of the US-Mexico border. Méndez does not explicitly label the institutions of the borderland dystopia as does, say, Aldoux Huxley in Brave New World (1923) with the “College of Emotional Engineering,” “Hospital for the Dying,” or the “Slough Crematorium.” Instead Méndez makes his vision perhaps more frightening by leaving the reader with the extant, familiar names of institutions while simultaneously exposing the unjust values institutionalized in the infrastructure of the dystopia. For example, satirically labeling the *Migra*, “jealous guardians of the law,” Méndez states that they “never bothered the old cunt of a businesswoman, despite the fact that on the border patrol lists there were more than two-hundred names of Mexicans who had worked at Siesta Chile Dogs” (31). The US border patrol is as unethical as are judges of US courts. Rudolph Smith, an Anglo judge, is a racist. He commutes the sentence of a guilty Anglo woman because she is from a wealthy family. Smith reasons that the “inopportune occurrence” which landed her in jail (i.e., strangling her baby to death) is attributable to a temporary lapse into madness for the angelic-looking blond girl of fine breeding. In contrast, he doles out a disproportionately heavy sentence to Chuco because he is Mexican. “For [Smith], it was more than natural to believe that not to be white constitutes, in a certain sense, a crime that must somehow be punished” (Méndez 112). When the Judge hears Chuco speaking Spanish in the courtroom, his face twists into a “grimace of profound hate” because he cannot understand a word of it. Smith unjustly sentences Chuco to four years in jail for stealing four bottles of liquor (117).

Justice is equally tainted in Mexico. In one of many bar scenes, Trompas, a Mexican police officer, harasses a character named Jesus, a modern day apostle, for no apparent reason. Méndez describes the bully cop: "Trompas is the one who's paid to kill students in Mexico City. He came to the border with his tail between his legs because a careless photographer took his picture at the time he was getting a student during one of the many bloodbaths" (Méndez 96). In the bar, Trompas is aggressive and violent. He breaks Jesus's jaw with a rifle butt, literally and figuratively preventing him from speaking. As this incident shows, institutionalized brutality causes "the poor disappear silently, without anyone knowing the truth about their lives. . . . No one knows who or what they are" (Bruce-Novoa, "Méndez" 208-9).

The novel counters its portrayal of the oppression by individuals and institutions in the borderlands by offering hope through occasional examples of humanity. In Méndez's rendering of the dystopia, only the poor treat each other as respectable human beings because the downtrodden have not internalized the values of greed and egoism that motivate the upper class. In contrast to the businessmen and woman who hoard their money, Loreto, the destitute car washer, shares what little he has with others. In one instance, he gives a Chicano named Frankie Pérez his overcoat, fresh water, and watches over him all night with careful vigilance. Fellow laborers also demonstrate acts of kindness by sharing advice on how to survive oppressive work environments or inclement weather. For example, Chuco is first taught how to pick cotton by a fellow laborer who tells him, "Well, watch your step, buddy. Look, here is how you strip these babes" (Méndez 26).

In Méndez's world, characters who perform small acts of charity are primarily—but not exclusively—Chicanos, Indians, or Mexicans. Poor Anglos are also capable of

generously treating societal outcasts, such as disturbed war veterans, homeless people, prostitutes, and the mentally ill. In this way, Méndez suggests that the heroes of the novel, characters who reject the values of the dystopia, cut across ethnic lines but not across class divisions. For example, a Yaqui Indian and Anglo man treat each other with compassion but, Méndez seems to suggest, such humanity is only demonstrated among fellow poor. In one scene, Bobby Foxye (rebellious son to the Anglo millionaires, Mr. and Mrs. Foxye) occasionally keeps vigil for Loreto. "The young hippie . . . watched over the sleep of the ancient man with great seriousness, as though the Indian were an important piece in something he needed to identify" (Méndez 98). Bobby does not dismiss Loreto as a mad man even when he babbles incoherently about his memories of the Revolution. In turn, Loreto does not abandon Bobby when he is high on drugs. Bobby and Loreto do not communicate verbally, but they commune in another way by simply sharing space along a wall or in an alley. The Yaqui and Anglo men treat each other with compassion befitting of human beings even in the most oppressive circumstances. Méndez generally portrays the poor as dignified and proud characters without romanticizing them.

In contrast to poor characters' rejection of the values that govern the dystopia, upper class characters are incapable of envisioning a more humane world. In a society that worships money, they have internalized values that subordinate all to a false god of profit. The author conveys this idea in the portrait of the rich as hypocrites who use religion to mask their own vile natures. This critique of institutional religion in Pilgrims in Aztlán is a common motif in literature of the dystopia and utopia. For example, Tommaso Campanella's City of the Sun (1623) is a utopian work that calls for reform of the Church of Rome. Campanella criticizes clergy who seek to be secular rulers of

empires rather than spiritual leaders concerned with souls (Donno 14-19). Pilgrims in Aztlán also exposes false religion. In the novel, good “Christians” go through public motions of devotion. *Don* and *Doña* de Couch, for instance, dress impeccably for Church, after which they imagine themselves as saints among the poor; “On Sundays it was their pleasure to mingle among the poor. They admired themselves deeply. On many occasions in which they wandered among the ragged and hungry people, they complimented themselves” (9). Mr. and Mrs. Foxye, the stingy millionaires, also pervert religion for their own ends. “They ate poorly in order to save money,” writes Méndez, “The precepts of religion were a great help to them in their economic goals, since they were forbidden to drink or smoke or do anything that might mean spending money without income” (100). Finally, the hot dog entrepreneur thinks that she is “the heart of Christianity” when she introduces the migrant employees to “civilization” (Méndez 30). Méndez reveals a caustic wit: “She likes to pretend she was charitable, a real Christian” when she allows the Mexican workers to use the gleaming toilets in her restaurant (29).

Again, the poor offer a contrast to the hypocritical behavior of the rich. Loreto is not a religious man, but conducts himself according to a “code of honor,” to use Méndez’s term (11). He is characterized as more ethical than his rich Christian brethren even though Loreto does not attend church. His code of honor mandates that he treat others—regardless of their rank in society—with the due respect appropriate to every human being. When Loreto violates this code, he feels genuine regret. This happens on one occasion when Loreto swears at the kids who encroach on his business but later he feels guilty, especially because one of them dies from a cold he gets on the job. Loreto has nothing material with which to make amends, so he imagines acts of kindness in which “He drew handfuls of money from his pockets with which he filled the hands of

the kids” (Méndez 65).<sup>9</sup> This example illustrates Méndez’s point that only the poor genuinely experience regret; they do not quell guilt through false alms giving.

Méndez’s dystopia also exposes the perverted nature of family relationships, a theme popularized in contemporary utopian novels such as Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1985).<sup>10</sup> Such literature posits the breakdown of the family institution where, for instance, children are separated from their parents, genetic engineering or eugenics replaces sexual relations, or a state institution replaces the family. Pilgrims in Aztlán suggests the gradual breakdown of the family by portraying a climate in which there are no loving familial relationships among the rich. The de Cocuchs, like others, use each another for personal gain. There are also no healthy parent-child relationships because attempts at genuine love are thwarted by unquenchable egoism. Méndez shows that even the lower classes are slowly being infected by such societal trends. Lencho García y del Valle is a poor Mexican with ten children who lives south of the US-Mexico border. To prevent the family from slowly starving to death, a process well underway, his sons shine shoes and wash cars while his wife and daughters clean clothes and make tortillas. However, Lencho has no job. He occupies himself by drinking away the earnings that he robs from his wife and children.<sup>11</sup>

The dysfunctional Foxye family offer a more detailed example of the break down of caring familial relationships. In this example, Méndez further shows how downtrodden characters articulate the absurdity of a society driven exclusively by commercially-based values. The author accomplishes this by depicting the spaces of this borderland dystopia through a carnivalesque atmosphere and satirical tone. These poetic devices, like utopian literature in general, function as a social critique and attack on unloving familial relationships. In a predictable story, Mr. and Mrs. Foxye invest their energy into their

business rather than raising their son, Bobby. The boy becomes estranged from them and, by age twenty-three, he is a hippie and drug addict wandering the streets of Mexico.

When Mr. and Mrs. Foxye decide they are ready to invest love rather than money, they buy a dog that Mrs. Foxye “came to love with the love of a mother” (Méndez 103).

Though Mr. and Mrs. Foxye are hailed as competent, respected people, they see their dog as human and their son as an animal because he is dressed in ragged clothes and smells like a sewer. Méndez highlights that inversion using a carnivalesque style that resonates with the work of theorist and linguist Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>12</sup> According to Bakhtin, the power dynamics of a carnival successfully “invert hierarchies and undermine boundaries” in its “affirmative, militantly anti-authoritarian attitude toward life” (74, 66). In Méndez’s dystopia, Bobby appears more adult in his behavior than his parents, who fail to recognize that the dog is a substitute for the love they do not give Bobby.

Like Bobby’s ability to point out the absurdity of his parent’s misplaced love, many members of the lower class identify the values of aggressive individualism and relentless egoism that prevail in the dystopia. Méndez uses characters such as Jesus to expose that immoral code in a way that engages the conventions of the dystopian novel. According to critic Gary Saul Morson, the climax of dystopic fiction involves characters rebelling against the existing order once they acknowledge the societal “Lie” that governs the dystopia (125-128). Having recognized the oppressive world in which they live, characters like Jesus want to reform the society. In the novel, Jesus is a Mexican Indian born in a village called Bethlehem in the Yaqui Nation of Sonora, Mexico. He recognizes the lie of the borderlands as a place that privileges reckless commercialism at the expense of human life. Jesus rebels against those values by calling “anyone who had bread to

share it with the hungry, for anyone who was dying from the cold to receive from his brother who had clothes a piece of his blanket” (Méndez 93-4).

Méndez’s unmistakable allusion to Jesus Christ demonstrates broader Christian themes, such as the humanitarian ideal of loving one’s neighbor. Like Jesus Christ, Jesus-the-character believes himself to be part of the greater brotherhood of humankind—a communal spirit common to utopias but antithetical to the extreme individualism of dystopias. The allusion to Jesus Christ also evokes a parallel between Aztlán in the novel and Heaven in a Christian tradition. The fictional character and Christian God are spiritual pilgrims in desert civilizations who rebel against injustice rampant among individuals and institutions alike. Both strive for creating a more egalitarian world in this life and their good deeds promise them entrance into an ideal world.<sup>13</sup>

Another character who strives for a better society is Lorenzo, a working class poet who serves as the voice of Aztlán in the novel. He is one of thousands of pilgrims trying to reach Aztlán. While crossing the US-Mexico illegally, Lorenzo has a vision of Aztlán. In Méndez’s narrative, Aztlán is a mirage; “The lakes that magic paints from a distance, as though they had only been lighted by the centuries, would suddenly take on the life that would return them to the reality of the movement that animates the fountains and the rivers” (82-3). Lorenzo envisions his place in the utopia stating, “In the future I would be a true citizen requesting and receiving justice” (Méndez 82). Compared to the dystopia, the utopia offers a space for self-expression by the poor: in Aztlán, what the impoverished say will matter. They will also be treated like human beings and share a code of honor similar to Loreto’s. Further, Lorenzo tells us that the inhabitants of Aztlán will have adequate food and water because the desert’s “unploughed lands” will be

transformed by “multitudes of Chicano brothers who made paths and roads to peace and tranquility from the immense sandy plains” (Méndez 83).

Méndez’s conceptualization of Aztlán is similar to the ideal community set forth in the Chicano charter, *El Plan Espiritual*. Creating the site as a pastoral oasis in the novel resonates with the civil rights document which states, “Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to foreign Europeans” (1). Both the novel and *El Plan Espiritual* intimate a communal utopian society where those who work the land—migrant farm workers for example—are the rightful owners rather than the “foreign Europeans” or exploiters who, under present circumstances, have legal title to the land. Méndez’s expression of Aztlán is also similar to that image set forth in the *El Plan Espiritual* in terms of the US-Mexico border. The charter reads:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal ‘gringo’ invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaim the land of their birth . . . We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continents. . . . We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán. (1)

Both the novel and *El Plan Espiritual* view the US-Mexico border as an artificial construct. In the passage, the reference to the “capricious” border is an indictment of US aggression in the Mexican American War. According to this view, the US military acquired sacred Chicano homelands that rightly belong to the Mexica and Aztec nations of Mezoamerica (Alurista 221).



In Méndez's expression of Aztlán, the US-Mexico border is an ineffective boundary. It does not prohibit or impede travel. Characters are constantly traversing the border according to push-pull dynamics of market forces, as economist Immanuel Wallerstein defines and explains, that characterizes the relation of core to peripheral nations in a system of global economics. In the novel, Loreto, Chuco, Vate, Ramagacha, and Lorenzo migrate north "as though it were a Mecca for the hungry" because they feel the pull of higher wages in the US, a core nation in world trade markets (Méndez 39). After nearly fatal journeys across the Sonoran desert, they enter the US illegally and work as migrant farm hands. However, nearly all of the characters return to Mexico, a peripheral nation in international markets. The migrant workers are pushed back to Mexico by the *Migra*, poor health, family necessity, or other such reasons. Méndez writes:

Day after day of crossing the territory in order to cross the river or jump the fence, coming finally to destroy their souls for a few dollars they exchange for sausage, bread, beans. The *Migra*! The border patrol arresting wetbacks, mistreating them, jailing them because they break the law by working in an alien land. Ah! The wetbacks break the law by working in the US, but those who give jobs to the wetbacks do not. They have the freedom to employ them and to pay them whatever they want . . . Slaves in an alien land, forgotten and banned in their own.

(39-40)

The border is a permeable membrane as pilgrims—migrant, illegal workers searching for a better quality of life—cross and re-cross the desert seeking the elusive Aztlán.

Although Lorenzo is able to visualize Aztlán, it proves to be an elusive promise of a better life. He sees Aztlán on the horizon, but he is also slowly dying of thirst. The

desert wasteland offers the traveling pilgrims that Lorenzo symbolizes only death or “the worthy embrace of the graveyard” amid “thorns of scorn and indifference” and “dunes that rise up to look like tombs” (Méndez 82-3). The water imagery that drips and drowns fails to quench the thirst that will eventually kill Lorenzo. Water is a symbol of life and hope that satisfies the pilgrim’s thirst for voice and extinguishes the flames of the dystopia. However, the lack of water in this desert space provides infertile ground for language, even Lorenzo’s lyrical ballads. The poet’s words are lost in a “no-man’s-land” and consumed by “dust storms” that cover any trace of his “tightly spaced steps” (82). He thinks, “I lose myself in the tangle of vocabulary and the words that still are not born of thought and that makes one’s heart ache. I lost myself among the sand drifts of the Sonoran desert” (Méndez 82). No matter how vibrant and alive the verse—or how vivid and powerful the dream of Aztlán—Lorenzo’s poems collapse in a “tangle of vocabulary” that is covered by dust and sand of the desert’s “language of silence.”

As Lorenzo slowly dies of thirst, Méndez depicts the deserts Yuma and Sonora transforming into a place as perilous as the city streets of Tijuana. The author inscribes the landscape with the values of the dystopia to show that the Republic of the Despised has spread from cityscape to countryside. For example, he writes, “Sand and moon dripped from their clothes, and driven by the thirst of the winds, the exodus of wetbacks dragged its feet because of the greed of the powerful” (83). He adds, “Scourged by the tenebrous winds that roast with the cruelty of pyres, the voices of the deceitful would flee, bearing with them tribunes of hypocrites who betray the trust of their children and their forebears” (83). The passages suggest that familial dysfunctionality is now associated with the fiery deserts that consume the young and old. The passages also refers to the betrayal of familial love among parents. According to the imagery, the

institutionalization of the “greed of the powerful” consumes workers like fuel for the market.

Lorenzo’s final act is to imagine a utopia forged in a great battle between the pilgrims of Aztlán and the mighty deserts that looks much like Milton’s epic war between heaven and hell. In Méndez’s version, the Yuma Desert commands a militia of succulents, such as “armies of prickly cholla bushes,” “fierce beavertail cacti, their tails turned up,” “barrel cacti armed with daggers,” and saguaro “watchmen” welding “swords of steel” (73). Nature tries to stop the advancing forces of the pilgrims who defiantly surge forward, each mechanical step a victory over the desert. The migrants march defiantly forward in the hot and hazy battleground:

We will come to your center, cursed desert, anointed by the spirit of the ancient gods of our race. And there, filled with rage, we will drive into your unmoving heart the torn flag of the wetbacks. Who are you, desert? You have stolen the beauty of the seas, aspiring to the majesty of its movements. Who are you? A monster of otherworldly refuges, lost in the chaos of the primeval times. Altar Desert . . . Are you perhaps the promised land of the hungry who have no country? Ah! Now I know who you are. You’re the immense tomb of the banished and of the empire of the Indians. Yuma Desert! (Méndez 74)

The pilgrims plant the “torn flag of the wetbacks” firmly in the desert, an act that signals Méndez’s allusion to the mythic Chicano homeland where people with “no country” claim one for their own.<sup>14</sup> However, Aztlán proves only to be a desert mirage eternally beyond the reach of poor Chicano pilgrims. Following this battle, it does not materialize. The weary pilgrims claim only a “tomb” shared by the fellow oppressed. When Aztlán fails to actualize, Lorenzo dies in the desert. Lorenzo’s death, according to the

conventions of utopian literature, means there is no hope to escape from the increasingly pervasive dystopia. In Méndez's construction of space, the natural landscape, like society itself, has turned on the pilgrims; the sand, bush, and cacti prevail.

Just as the corruption of the city metaphorically spreads to the deserts, Méndez shows similar values infecting all of society. The author uses the death of Loreto, the Yaqui car washer, to suggest that the humane relationships common among the poor may be ultimately tainted by the greed prevalent in greater society. Loreto dies silently from hunger in a shack whose cardboard and metal walls are covered with pictures of food. Garbage collectors rifle through his possessions in search of anything worth material value, but find nothing that will earn them profit. They pause momentarily when they see a picture of Loreto during the revolution, young, strong, healthy and of high rank. However, reflecting the practices of greater society as a whole, they throw his body and shack into the dump because it has no value to them. The deaths of Loreto, the most dignified character in the book, as well as Lorenzo, the spokesperson of Aztlán, cautions that capitalistic values in a dystopia may become so pervasive that they become a form of genocide to poor Chicano people.

In the final two paragraphs, Méndez reconfirms the events in the narrative and offers a new vision of utopia through a direct (and highly uncharacteristic) exchange with the audience. First, he reaffirms that Aztlán, the desert utopia that his characters seek, does not exist. He calls it a death site "where the voices of those who have succumbed dwell" that also includes "petrified trees without songbirds and owls" as well as the agonizing "screams" of the oppressed (178). In its place, the author posits that a utopia is a space that exists within society. He asks, "Who has made you believe that you are lambs and beasts of burden?" a question designed to inspire Chicanos/as to realize they

need not exist merely as cheap labor that is exploited by the rich (178). “In this region,” he adds, referring to the borderland dystopia, “fight for the destiny of your children!” (Méndez 178). For Méndez, Aztlán is not a mythical homeland or an elusive place in the desert; utopia is a place where future generations “will not be willing to tolerate the kind of institutionalized ethnocentrism, racism, and class oppression to which Mexicans, Native Americans, and other Third World people are subjected” (Alurista 225). This new conceptualization of Aztlán notably differs from *El Plan Espiritual* that refers to a legendary homeland. The closing words in the novel represent Méndez’s engagement with the genre that figures a new utopia as the reformed society in a space once characterized as a dystopia. Thus he implants the poetics of utopianism within the geography of existing society.

Méndez calls for massive changes within society by critiquing capitalism as a form of genocide to poor Chicanos/as. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko engages the conventions of the utopia and dystopia amid projections of space in a geopoetic representation similar to Méndez’s borderland dystopia. In Silko’s depiction of space, the borderlands are a chaotic wild zone where “destroyers” barricade themselves from others by building “closed systems” to protect their possessions and *sangre pura*. From this dystopia, Silko offers a glimpse of “One World, Many Tribes,” which is the name of the utopia and the title of the final section of the novel, in which characters are poised to achieve an idealized society. Native characters and their allies work together in the spirit of mestizo/a consciousness to actualize that utopia by reclaiming sacred Indian lands in the American Southwest and destroying the existing borderland dystopia. In this manner, geography and genre warn about borders that separate people from one another—ethnic,

geographic, linguistic, and otherwise—thereby inhibiting the creation of a communal, egalitarian and humane world.

### **Almanac of the Dead**

Almanac of the Dead is a novel about Native characters and their allies transgressing borders and reclaiming land seized by expansionists of the Old World in the homelands of the New World.<sup>15</sup> The utopian dream of indigenous repossession of the land is predicted by the almanac of the dead of the book's title, an ancient tribal prophecy that posits the disappearance of all "things European" (Silko n.p.). In Silko's hands, the almanacs rejects the traditional notion that Old World communities might establish or discover utopias in the New World, a belief set forth in its literary antecedents of utopian writing. Instead she draws on aspects of utopian literature that posits a past as mythic and recoupable. Working within this literary convention, the almanacs in the novel state that the Aztec god who predicted the coming of the Europeans to the New World also predicted the disappearance of the selfsame people in the Americas. When the prophecy is realized, a utopia will be achieved through a "rebirth of humanity" (Silko 736). In contrast to the original literature of utopia which served as "colonist propaganda" inspiring Old World expeditions to America, Almanac of the Dead calls for the return of "things European" to the Old World (Knapp 21). Silko does not indicate specifically what constitutes "things European" or, by extension, "things Native." In broad, theoretical terms, however, things European seem to include those constructs that block Indians from attaining their homelands. This might include the US-Mexico border; it would also include Anglo history, because that history valorizes the conquest and "civilizing" of Indians. In addition, things European likely include the existing values

and institutions of power in the borderland, such as capitalism, private property, class stratification, and competition.

Recalling the notion of utopias as prelapsarian and communistic societies, Silko's rendering makes pre-conquest America an edenic site where "Mother Earth embraced the souls of all who loved her. No fences or walls would stop them" (Silko 736). As this comment by the omniscient narrator suggests, private property will not exist in Silko's utopia. More broadly, borders and barriers will not exist either, a concept that Silko articulates in the following 1998-interview: "Our human nature, our human spirit, wants *no boundaries*, and we are better beings, and we are less destructive and happier. We can be our best selves as a species, as beings with all the other living beings on this earth, we behave best and get along best *without those divisions*" (Italics added; Arnold 10). Characters in Almanac of the Dead echo her sentiment. Calabazas, a Mexican smuggler, offers the best example when he states:

We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to that isn't real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. . . . We don't see any border. (Silko 216)

According to the almanacs, when Quetzalcoatl's prediction comes true, the Americas will return to its former utopian state, albeit with citizens more humble and wise for their experiences in the extant dystopia.

In contrast to its portrayal of a homogeneous utopian past, the novel depicts the present as a dystopic borderland that churns with movement in which political strife,

economic instability, and violent encounter create a volatile and destabilized atmosphere. Streams of refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico travel north fleeing revolution and civil unrest. US military forces amassed on the border are stretched thin by the impossibility of defending a 2,000-mile frontier. Added to this, water resources in the US Southwest are running out and the US economy is on the edge of bankruptcy. What becomes increasingly evident in the text is that the US-Mexico border is a porous and permeable membrane ready to collapse. The US and Mexican federal governments never achieve more than tenuous control of the border, no matter how much money they invest in defending it. Their efforts grow increasingly feeble against the mounting pressure caused by massive migration and smuggling.<sup>16</sup>

Silko makes clear that this wild zone is a product of the egocentric values of the society that spawned it. To cite just a few examples in Almanac of the Dead, Beaufrey traffics in pornography and snuff films, Max Blue takes cool pride in his effectiveness as an assassin, and General J.'s favorite topics are castration, rape, sex, and blood. A prolific trade in sex film in the novel illustrates this concept.<sup>17</sup> Beaufrey runs a profitable business on "dissection films" for which customers pay "hundreds even thousands of dollars" (Silko 103). The "steady, lucrative demand" increases so rapidly that the waiting list for his videotapes grows longer as the black market business expands (Silko 103). Beaufrey also trades in human body parts. He kidnaps Seese's baby, Monte, only to later dismember him for sadistic video viewing pleasure. Trigg offers another example of the commodification of human life.<sup>18</sup> A small-time hustler who runs plasma centers in Tucson, he kills many of the donors in order to harvest their organs. Trigg sells them on a black medical market where there is demand for "fetal-brain material, human kidneys, hearts and lungs, corneas for eye transplants, and human skin for burn victims" (Silko



398). Trigg believes “biomaterial” to be so profitable that he considers it “the bonanza of the twenty-first century” (Silko 398). Medical theorist Ann Folwell Stanford underscores the way the novel functions as caution to a real world market in organ transplants: “With the specter of ethnic cleansing hovering over the world and with the paranoid policing of borders in the US and elsewhere, the commerce in human bodies has a menacing pragmatism—getting rid of certain (radically unstable) categories of people” (30).

Using the labels of “destroyer,” “manipulator,” and “exploiter,” Silko defines morally bankrupt characters like Beaufrey and Trigg as individuals who “make the boundary lines and try to separate [people]” (Arnold 9, 26). In Silko’s rendering of space, destroyers barricade themselves from others as a way to protect their material interests in a chaotic dystopia. For example, Trigg steadily buys up Tucson slums pushing out other businesses while he plans the exclusive walled retirement community of Verde Canyon; Ferro fortifies his isolated ranch with electronic surveillance and guard dogs; Greenlee grows thick cactus gardens around a home with more weapons than a national armory; Leah Blue imagines a rich community of “Venice” isolated in the middle of a desert. As these examples suggest, Silko’s expression of space as dystopia offers geographic representations that critique the values of egoism and greed that arise from a primacy on material wealth and private property. She accomplishes this by drawing on a common motif in utopian literature that celebrates communal property and values that promote egalitarianism and equality.

Where physical barriers sequester destroyers and their property from each other, they also serve as “psychological borders” (Anzaldúa n.p.). Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa uses this term to describe the ways people separate themselves from personal space where human beings “edge” and “overlap” with others (n.p.). Silko depicts

figurative borders that are fueled by racism, narcissism, misogyny, and hatred in a world where destroyers shrink from human intimacy. Critic Janet St. Clair explains: "Almanac reveals an utterly amoral and atomized society in which each isolated member is indifferent to everything but the gratifications of his own enervated passions. He is connected to nothing" (141). Serlo is an excellent example of a man "connected to nothing." He lives in the desolate *llano* outside Cartegena to protect himself from "swarms of brown and yellow human larvae called natives" (Silko 549, 5). His racism precludes general contact with other human beings who lack *sangre pura* like his own; he believes that in "strict biological order to the natural word . . . only *sangre pura* sufficed to command instinctive obedience from the masses" (Silko 549). In fact, his narcissism is so twisted that he refuses to have sexual relations with anyone, a fact that illustrates his extreme mortification of intimate personal space. His goal is to literally be connected to nothing which he hopes to achieve by launching the "Alternative Earth" unit, a space capsule that will permanently sever his ties with Earth.

Silko reminds us that that destroyers' pseudo-protective shells—figurative "psychological borders" that prevent human intimacy—will always self-destruct (Anzaldúa n.p.). Eventually, closed systems such as "Beaufrey's games" turn cannibalistic.<sup>19</sup> Beaufrey keeps a menagerie of lovers sequestered in a glass penthouse high above the beaches of San Diego. His exclusive sex club thrives on endless love triangles like that of Seese-Eric-Beaufrey, Eric-Beaufrey-David, and Beaufrey-David-Serlo. His extreme narcissism, in which "he had always loved himself, only himself" (Silko 532), prevents him from forming genuine loving relationships (St. Clair 141-4). He manipulates his partners believing that "[o]thers do not fully exist" because he "existed more completely than any other human being he had ever met"

(Silko 533). Beaufrey usually kills the people he can not love in this parasitic environment. He casts off Seese for David and Eric, then supplies her with enough cocaine to overdose. Although Seese is tempted several times to overdose, ultimately she does not. She survives Beaufrey's games by leaving him and moving away. However, Beaufrey's other lovers are less fortunate. His sexual relations with David cause Eric to kill himself. Later, David dies violently in a riding accident at the *finca*, an outcast to Beaufrey's new liaisons with Serlo. Beaufrey then turns on Serlo, "the next source of cannibalistic satisfaction" (St. Clair 144). With the death of each player in Beaufrey's games, Silko suggests, this closed system appears destined to destroy itself.

The novel is replete with other examples of implosions where the psychological borders of destroyers ultimately suffocate the very people the barriers are designed to insulate and protect.<sup>20</sup> This occurs because of blind faith in technology, a theme introduced to the literature of utopia through Bacon's New Atlantis, with its primacy on science and mechanical invention. In dystopian narratives, Brave New World (1932) popularized the theme through its depiction of a society that worships science and mechanization. Almanac of the Dead offers an excellent example in the way Menardo, a Mexican insurance salesman, uses technology to create psychological borders for others as well as himself. Ignoring his dreams of death and placing hope in technology, Menardo's distrust of others results in his own self-destruction (Stanford 35). Menardo sells insurance to the corrupt elite of Chiapas, who buy special policies "against all the unknowns stalking the human race," backed by a 100% guarantee to cover "all losses, no matter the cause, including acts of God, mutinies, war, and revolution" (Silko 260-1). Menardo grows increasingly wealthy smuggling arms but soon realizes Universal Insurance is an illusion: he cannot prevent calamity—even his own death—no matter

how far-reaching the insurance coverage. Such thinking signals Menardo's demise as he grows increasingly paranoid about being killed. At first, Menardo refuses to take off his bullet proof vest day or night. When an assassin's bullet fails to kill him, he is fooled into a false sense of security as a "man invincible with the magic of technology" (Silko 503). He dies as a result of his own hubris when he orders the chauffeur, Tacho, to fire a 9mm automatic gun into his chest and the vest fails.<sup>21</sup>

As the destroyers continue to try to protect themselves and their possession, Silko shows a growing number of Native characters realizing the immoral values prevalent in the dystopia, especially egoism and greed. In Silko's rendering, these characters strive either to escape to a utopian land or rebuild the dystopic society. They do so because they foresee the eventual self-destruction of the borderlands as predicted by the almanac of the dead. Native characters and their allies also believe their society will ultimately collapse because it is inhabited by destroyers; according to this view, the dystopia is a closed-system predicated on values that will ultimately destroy an increasingly violent and chaotic society. Depicting this process, Silko engages a convention of dystopian writing in which individuals become aware of a societal "Lie" and begin to rebel against the dystopia (Morson126).

In Almanac of the Dead, the best example of the lie is US history, a written record of past events that functions as a totalizing narrative valorizing Anglocentric discourse. In addition to depicting Natives as savages, this "master" narrative does not acknowledge that the US government stole tribal lands, a common theme of Native oral histories made clear by Silko in the novel. Official history subjugates the people striving to reclaim tribal lands because it denies them legitimacy associated with written chronicles of the past. A shared language about the past, specifically those living oral

traditions that articulate a people's relationship to the land, empowers Natives and their allies to "rewrite parts of the fallacy that is 'American' history" (Holland 344). Unified by their belief that Anglo history is an illegitimate representation of the past, characters unite to create a utopia where they will own and occupy sacred lands and to destroy the false history on which the dystopia is based. The author thus uses the convention of the dystopic lie combined with a depiction of the borderland dystopia to create a geopoetic expression that shows how the chaos of a wild zone begets a space where alternative oral histories challenge monolithic written record.

Silko demonstrates the ways in which individuals come to recognize societal lies—dystopian delusions—through the character development of Sterling, a Laguna Indian. As a child, Sterling learns in Anglo Indian boarding schools that US history is a true depiction of past events. As an adult, however, that begins to change. When he is banished from his reservation in New Mexico, he decides to move to Tucson. He is excited about relocating because Tucson "had history" (Silko 29). Sterling divines such history from reading old issues of the Police Gazette, True Detective, and Reader's Digest (Silko 29). However, throughout the course of the novel, he realizes that the profiles of Dillinger and Geronimo in the magazines are not true renditions. The stories both disappoint him and anger him. Ultimately, he recognizes that all written records—including those in history books he read as a child—are lies. Silko writes, "The magazines referred to a world Sterling had left forever, a world that was gone, that safe old world that had never really existed except on the pages of Reader's Digest in articles reducing blood cholesterol, corny jokes, and patriotic anecdotes" (757). He later returns to his homeland and begins to recall the stories of his tribe's origins. Sterling awaits the

creation of a utopia that will not be based on written, monolithic depictions of history, but will honor alternative, oral versions of the past that he knows to be true.

The author illustrates the ways that oral histories such as that preserved by Old Gorgon, a Mexican businessman and smuggler, are dismissed by Anglo society which records its own (revised) versions of the past through written record. As a youth, Old Gorgon gets rich selling rotgut whiskey to US troops and Apaches at war along the border. He explains that "whorehouses and gambling halls . . . was all Tucson had been in the 1880s" (Silko 168). Such stories are denied by subsequent generations; the city's founding families cover up their illicit past: "In only one generation government embezzlers, bootleggers, pimps, and murderers had become Tucson's 'fine old families'" (80). These white families opt for a historical veneer with an appearance of civility. Their revised view of the past also legitimizes their power as white noble conquerors of a wild frontier and portrays Indians as savages. Old Gorgon rails against "Tucson's aristocracy" who were

spawned by the whiskey bootleggers and whoremasters who had fattened off the five thousand US troops who had chased Geronimo and fifty Apaches for ten years. Ah, Tucson high society! With their pedestrian little fortunes skimmed off government supply contracts for army rations of weevil-infested cornmeal and wagonloads of spoiled meat. (Silko 645)

Silko uses the Indian Wars in the novel to show a clear example of how different communities hold varying interpretations of history. Many characters advocate the idea that the Indian Wars are not over, an idea that challenges existing "historical fact." Zeta explains clearly: "War had been declared the first day the Spaniards set foot on Native American soil, and the same war had been going on ever since: the war was for the

continents called the Americas" (Silko 133). Lakota lawyer-poet Wilson Weasel Tail recognizes that the Indian Wars never ended; in his poetry, for example, he summons "armies of warriors' ghosts," exclaims "We are at war," and invokes the Ghost Dance to reunite with "beloved ancestors lost in the five-hundred-year war" (Silko 717, 715). Angelita tells her followers, "this is war, the war to retake the Americas and to free all the people enslaved" (Silko 532). Calabazas, too, claims that, 'the war that had never ended,' the war for the land" (Silko 178). Finally, this theme is made explicit on the text's map, "The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas" (n.p.).

Natives and their allies challenge Anglo history by giving voice to alternative interpretations that work to re-connect people to their own stories. "Failure to give a regular and accurate accounting of a tribe's historical relationship with its land base," claims critic Christopher Norden, "is in many tribal cultures seen as prelude to social and ecological apocalypse" (102). Clinton (the "first black Indian" and a Vietnam vet) and Angelita (a Marxist guerrilla leader) try to re-establish those connections by literally re-writing history and re-publicizing it orally. In this act, Clinton and Angela are able to use history so it becomes a "self-determining factor in a people's emancipation" (Holland 348). Clinton and Angela make public a list of dates and events (742-46 and 527-530) that have been omitted from white history. They do so because they believe "the powers who controlled the United States didn't want the people to know their history. If the people knew their history they would realize they must rise up" (Silko 431). Clinton also plans weekly radio addresses which he plans to broadcast after the Army of the Homeless captures radio stations because "he wanted black people to know all their history; he wanted to know all that had gone on before Africa" (Silko 416). Clinton adds, "[I]gnorance of the people's history had been the white man's best weapon" (Silko 742).

Harsh punishment befalls those characters in the novel who forget the value of the peoples' histories. Angelita accuses one such character, Bartolomeo, a Cuban rebel who seemingly has "no use for indigenous history"; she adds, "Comrade Bartolomeo denies the holocaust of indigenous Americans! Seventy-two million people in 1500 reduced to ten million people by 1600! Comrade Bartolomeo is guilty! Guilty of crimes against history!" (Silko 531). Ultimately, the Marxist tribunal run by Angelita sentences Bartolomeo to death. In effect, he is killed because he refuses to recognize those stories that connect a people to its land and origins.

Even as Silko attributes import to such stories, she goes beyond a call to make space for alternative histories. In her utopia, history is a palimpsest where stories are layered atop one another—much like the structure of the novel—to create a multifaceted and inclusive record of the past. This is exemplified in the multiple, fractured identities of Geronimo in the novel that surface from the disjunction between Anglo journalists who insist on recording the demise of Geronimo for posterity and Old Mahawala's assurance that the "real Geronimo" never surrendered. According to written history, Geronimo's surrender at Skeleton Canyon is the historic marker signaling the end of the Indian Wars. Yet according to the oral history in the novel, the events at Skeleton Canyon were actually a joke by Old Pancakes, an Indian who poses as Geronimo. In one of the funniest stories of the novel, Silko tells us that Old Pancakes is just one of many "fake Geronimos" such as Wild Ledge, Red Clay, and Big Pine, each with his own story of resistance. This identity diffusion begets immeasurable "confusion among white people and their historians" intent on capturing the demise of the "ferocious criminal Geronimo" and declaring the historical pronouncement that the "territories [are] safe for white settlement" (129, 229).<sup>22</sup> Various photographs of different Geronimos, each meant to



record his surrender for historical purposes, add to the confusion. On a literal level, the multiple pictures of Old Pancakes, et. al., defy historians' attempts to portray the real Geronimo. The stories of the multiple Geronimos create a layered, complex, and nuanced pictures of the past. According to oral tradition, there are many freedom fighters who strove to reclaim tribal lands, not a single, monolithic interpretation of the past as favored by Anglos.

Employing the genre of utopian writing, Silko offers a geopoetical construction of space in which characters' rebellions against written history become a form of resistance through language that arises in the space of a wild zone. First conceptualized by anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener in Perceiving Women (1975), the wild zone was contextualized as a "female-identified space" inaccessible by "dominant male-identified patriarchy" (252). In effect, the Ardeners hypothesize that women can and must speak men's language (which is public and hegemonic), but men cannot understand women's codes. That space of misunderstanding, defined by the Ardeners as "physiology-derived" and "stereotyped-derived," provides a disjunctive place for women's empowerment and resistance (Candelaria 249).<sup>23</sup> What makes the wild zone necessary, perhaps inevitable, to an understanding of Silko's borderland is the novel's construction of history as metanarrative rather than master narrative. The novel consciously dwells on this disjunction which parallels the dystopia/utopia contrast in the narrative. Native characters and their allies know Anglo history, but Anglos do not know Native history. Out of this space, a New World utopia will be born.

Much like Méndez's conceptualization of Aztlán as a site where the voices of the poor will not be muted, Silko's rendering of utopia is a place where alternate histories, oral and written, are valued equally. Conceptualizing the past as multiple enables Silko

to create a utopian landscape “from a reconfigured geography and historical record of the Americas” (Holland 345). For example, the histories written by Angelita, a Mexican Indian, and Clinton, an African American Indian, operate much like a dialogue. Their histories offer an inclusive, comprehensive understanding of the past that helps break down barriers between different oppressed minorities (Holland 346). Roy, Clinton’s white veteran buddy, offers another example. When Clinton’s ravings about white history get excessive, Roy feels “free to talk wild-talk right back at that crazy black fucker” (Silko 404). The vets may have completely different interpretations of the same event; they may recognize dates in history as significant for different reasons. Nonetheless, their varying interpretations do not cancel each other. Instead, they find solace in the fact that each man respects—or at least tolerates—the other’s perceptions of the past.

Articulating their stories enables freedom fighters like Angelita, Clinton, and Roy to beget increasingly stronger bonds through the realization that they share a past of resistance against a common foe—the destroyers. Over the course of the novel, disparate tribes with different languages, cultures, and histories on both sides of the US-Mexico border rally around the prophecy of the almanacs of the dead. Silko engages the common motif of utopian fiction where, in this case, the almanacs expose Anglo history as a societal lie, revealing the delusions of the world in which they inhabit and inspiring them to battle for attainment of a utopian place. Calabazas tells us that Cochise inspired different tribes in the fight for their land: “he had reminded the people of the prophecies different tribes had. In each version one fact was clear: the world that the whites brought with them would not last. It would be swept away in a giant gust of wind” (Silko 235). Similarly, Angelita explains that the single-minded goal of the Marxist guerillas is to reclaim stolen land: “If they could agree on nothing else, they could all agree the land

was theirs. Tribal rivalries and even intervillage boundary disputes often focused on land lost to the European invaders. When they had taken back all of the lands of the indigenous people of the Americas, there would be plenty of space” (Silko 518). Representing a rainbow of tribal affiliations such as the Hopi, Yaquis, Apache, Plains, Mohawk, and Laguna, every Native character in the novel responds to the call to break borders set up by destroyers to keep tribes from unifying.

Clinton, an African American veteran, is among the first to recognize the strength of their combined resistance: “Right then the magic had happened: great American and great African tribal cultures had come together to create a powerful consciousness within all people. All were welcome—everyone had been included” (Silko 416). Silko’s novel builds an increasingly complex web of interconnection between cultures, similar to the one Clinton describes, that culminates in the invocation of mestizo/a consciousness, which Anzaldúa defines as “the possibility of uniting all that is separate” (79). She adds:

This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element that is greater than the sum of its severed parts. The third element is a new consciousness—a mestiza consciousness—and through it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (79-80)

In Silko’s hands, the crystallization of such “powerful consciousness” is capable of dismantling ethnic borders as Mexican Indians, African Americans, and Koreans, for example, unite to achieve utopia. Shared histories synthesize into a “third element” that becomes a heterogeneous group of heroes working to establish a New World utopia in the

novel.<sup>24</sup> The motley cast includes ecoterrorists; Marxist guerillas; prisoners in US jails; an army of homeless veterans; leaders of newly-independent African nations; "Friends of the Indians" from Japan, Korea, Germany, Holland and Arab nations; as well as thousands of Mexican Indians and Mexicans on a spiritual pilgrimage to reclaim lands in the American Southwest. The powerful consciousness engendered by "straddling two or more cultures" gains unprecedented momentum in the final section of the novel (Anzaldúa 80), aptly named "One World, Many Tribes,"<sup>25</sup> where the prophecy of the almanacs are on the verge of fruition. As if concurring with Silko's fictional prophecies, Anzaldúa remarks, "This land was Mexican once / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again" (91).

Mestizo/a consciousness is powerful enough to transcend the US-Mexico border, an artificial barrier that separates Natives from their homelands. This is best illustrated by the spiritual pilgrimage of thousands of Mexican and Indian pilgrims, an "odd new mystical movement," ready to march from Mexico to the US (Silko 709). Tacho, a Mexican spiritual leader, tells his followers at the Holistic Healers Convention that they can reclaim tribal lands simply by walking there. The march becomes a spiritual journey to an ancient tribal homeland, much like that in Méndez's Pilgrims in Aztlán. However, in Silko's version, utopia awaits the pilgrims gathering strength in numbers. The author writes that the travelers slowly awaken to truth that the almanacs reveal: that "things European" will disappear in the New World: "What was coming was relentless and inevitable; it might require five or ten years of great violence and conflict. It might require a hundred years of spirit voices and simple population growth, but the result would be the same: tribal people would retake the Americas; tribal people would retake ancestral land all over the world" (Silko 712). As more people join the pilgrimage, Silko

suggests their combined energy is powerful enough to surmount the obstacle that blocks their path homeward—the US-Mexico border.

Mestizo/a consciousness is building strength throughout the Americas. While some pilgrims will march to the desert utopia, others plot to destroy the borderland dystopia. At the end of the novel, multiple conspiracy plots are on the brink of activating. These plans include firing a space laser, rioting among federal prisoners, launching spiritual pilgrimages, seizing radio stations, organizing a homeless army, and exerting diplomatic pressure and blowing up Glen Canyon Dam. Silko gives us the impression that the efforts to reclaim the land will either erupt simultaneously or spark one another. “When the time came, all these scattered crazies and their plans,” such as the Army of the Homeless fire base attacks, the Barefoot Hopi’s prison riots, ecowarrior bombings, “would complement and serve one another in the chaos to come” (Silko 755). Sterling, the Laguna Indian who slowly recognizes the lie of history over the course of the novel, returns to his native land in New Mexico. He knows that the almanacs will come true and a utopia will materialize.

Silko’s engagement with a utopian literary tradition as well as her expression of the borderlands as dystopia space provide a geopoetic representation that serves as social criticism. The novel warns against borders—geopolitical, psychological, linguistic, and otherwise—that divide rather than unite people. Like Méndez’s novel, Silko’s work critiques society by offering a window into a more humane world. Simultaneously, both works also caution that a world based on greed, materialism, and violence will ultimately destruct. The evil that characterizes the borderlands at the end of the twentieth century generates a borderland literature depicting chaos and malevolence. This literature also calls for the deconstruction of a geopolitical border that marked the beginning of US-

Mexico borderland literature over 150 years earlier. Significantly, Pilgrims in Aztlán and Almanac of the Dead suggest that borders and borderlands offer an important register of social change and upheaval. If one concurs with that assessment, geopoetics through its emphasis on genre and geography is a valuable model for studying cultural contact, conflict, and encounter in literary works set in borderland regions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the genre of utopian writing, see Artur Blaim's Early English Utopian Fiction (1984), No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction (1983), and F.E. and F.P. Manuel's Utopian Thought in the Western World (1979).

<sup>2</sup> Two points warrant mention. First, I am referring to a utopian literature in its many forms (i.e., novel, dialogue, tract) to include works such as Plato's The Republic of Plato (360BC), Tommaso Campanella's City of the Sun (1623), Kurt Vonnegut's Player Piano (1952), Ursula LeGuin's The Left Hand of Darkness (1969). Within this tradition exists the dystopian literature in various forms to include, for example, Joseph Hall's Mundus Alter et Idem [Another World yet the Same] (1600), Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1923), George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-four (1949), and Animal Farm (1946). A recent popular culture depiction of a dystopia is The Postman (1997), a film starring, directed, and produced by Kevin Costner. For an extended list of literature on the utopia and dystopia, see [www.nlc-bnc.ca/events/sci-fi/t3-le.htm](http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/events/sci-fi/t3-le.htm) (15 Jan 2000). Second, dystopias inevitably arise out of utopias because of the way these ideal constructs are posited with little moral ambiguity; in other words, utopian communities strive for pure and untainted existence, an impossible ideal for human citizens who are naturally flawed and imperfect beings.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, claims to sacred Native and Chicano/a homelands in Silko's and Méndez's texts distinguish the novels as Native American literature and Chicano/a literature, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> For biographical information on Méndez, see Bruce-Novoa's Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview (1980), Gary D. Keller's Miguel Méndez in Aztlán (1995), and the "Gale

Literary Database on Contemporary Authors” (see [www.galenet.com/servlet/GLD](http://www.galenet.com/servlet/GLD) entry for Méndez) (10 Jan 2000).

<sup>5</sup> In his autobiographical novel, Méndez also uses language in a manner that resonates with Bakhtinian theory. *Bricks and Belles Ladders* [*Ledras y latrillos* (1980)] describes language as a “river of words” with “linguistic streams adding to the swell and its mad dynamics” to evoke the image of border crossings at the Rio Grande/*Rio Bravo*. Méndez adds: “Yet what could be more fascinating, more engrossing than to contemplate the wild unbound course of these rivers dragging all along, erasing what it chooses and imposing its own will on the landscape? It is one with all phenomena in that it abhors the static, no matter who bemoans that fact or might bemoan it in the future. Yet those advocates of exclusivity—surely it cannot be mere coincidence that makes them also the guardians of privilege of power and riches—are seeing themselves outnumbered day-by-day by this unbounded growth of those same masses whose domain is but that of wretchedness” (80). This pell-mell river of words “abhors the static” in a way that echoes Bakhtin’s idea of language as a dynamic system, yet takes it further by suggesting the inevitability of such streams to change the linguistic landscape. The unified masses in this context—Mexicans, Chicanos, Indians, *mestizo/as* and “the poor from both countries”—replace the “guardians of privilege” by sheer numbers when, as is their destiny according to the quote, they will occupy a space where their words are heard and people are fed (Bruce-Novoa, “Méndez” 211).

<sup>6</sup> Betrayal of the Indian soldiers by those who are traitorous to the ideals of the Revolution, hints Méndez, engenders the crime and corruption of present-day Mexico in the novel. Among other indictments, he writes, “The leaders [of the Revolution] grabbed



up the bounty in a silent struggle in which money and power were to be had. . . . People assassinated each other in betrayal and viciousness and with exterminatory zeal, where intrigue and astuteness sought an alliance with luck” (159). A similar theme is addressed in many novels, most relevant to this project is Carlos Fuentes’s The Death of Artemio Cruz (1962).

<sup>7</sup> Two additional examples warrant mention. Kite, alias “Great Tolito,” offers another example. Kite was once a successful, wealthy comedian who has become an imbecilic and childlike beggar. In one scene, Kite is crying on the street. “Men wearing nice clothes” are kind to Kite—until they engage in a conversation. The businessmen ask him who he is, but when Kite chooses not to answer, the well-dressed men conclude that Kite is “nothing but a bum, one of those useless men” (Méndez 128). Finally, *La Malquerida* illustrates how the voices of the poor are muted, this time through indifference rather than hatred. When *La Malquerida* tells the Mexican police her heart-wrenching story of being lured to the border and sold into prostitution, the investigators could not care less. Because she is a prostitute, they show no sympathy whatsoever. Méndez writes, “*La Malquerida* started to sob convulsively with bitterness. The representatives of justice looked at each other. ‘We don’t see the connection, ma’am . . .’” (122). The police silence *La Malquerida* by arresting her as an accomplice to a crime committed by her brother, a crime in which she had no part.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to acknowledge that St. Clair’s article (see citation) on Silko’s novel informed my understanding of Méndez’s novel. I use the premise that she sets forth to interpret Almanac of the Dead (i.e., that characters are incapable of love) to explore dystopia in Pilgrims in Aztlán.

<sup>9</sup> On another occasion, Loreto tells Chalito a folktale about the marriage of the sun and moon. Loreto passes on a little of his wealth of oral tradition, a theme thoroughly explored by Chicano critics such as Juan Bruce-Novoa. Because he has written extensively on the tension between written and oral language in Pilgrims in Aztlán, I will not replicate that theme in this analysis. See "Righting the Oral Tradition" (1981) and "Miguel Méndez: Voices of Silence" (1986).

<sup>10</sup> As the example of Lencho suggests, both Méndez and Atwood critique patriarchal family structures.

<sup>11</sup> If Lencho's relationship to his family is dysfunctional, his place in greater society is too, in part because of his odd speech. "He did not express himself like most people," Méndez writes, "He didn't talk like the common people, the down-and-out and low-class people talk. He had taught himself with pretentious and ready-made sentences. His clichés were not extracts from great literature, but sentences repeated by generations of politicians and ass-licking journalists, blind in their imaginations" (74). Indeed, Lencho's words consist mostly of malapropisms and as a result, he is often abused by the very society that he strives to emulate.

<sup>12</sup> In "Rabelais and His World," Bakhtin explores the pre-Lenten festivals in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance to show, among other things, the way laughter and play function as safety valves in a potentially charged atmosphere.

<sup>13</sup> Méndez's allusion to Jesus Christ also speaks to the connection between Catholicism and Mexican identity.

<sup>14</sup> See Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland (1989) for a comprehensive source that includes the mythic, metaphorical, and literal interpretations of Aztlán as well as the *Plan*

*Espiritual de Aztlán*. See especially Alurista's chapter titled, "Myth, Identity, and Struggle in Three Chicano Novels by Anaya, Méndez, and Acosta" (219-241).

<sup>15</sup> For biographical information on Silko, see the Dictionary of Literary Biography, volume 143 "American Novelists Since WWII" (3<sup>rd</sup> series) as well as the first full-length biography by Per Seyersted titled Leslie Marmon Silko (1980).

<sup>16</sup> Further yet, Silko suggests that the US, the most heavily armed nation in the world, has never been capable of defending, policing, and regulating its southern boundary with Mexico as her character, ex-CIA and hit man, Max Blue, testifies: "[w]hite men had never been able to control Tucson or the Mexican border" (357). Calabazas, a Mexican smuggler concurs, stating, "we carry a great many things back and forth. We don't see any border. We have been here and this has continued thousands of years. We don't stop. No one stops us" (Silko 216). In fact, fortifying the border fails to stop the drug and gun running, the occupation of most characters in the book. Finally, the novel portrays Apache war hero, Geronimo, crossing and re-crossing the border in his fight against Mexican and US soldiers. Silko's rendering of the borderlands shows it to be a contested space across which people have been traveling unimpeded for years.

<sup>17</sup> The novel's connection to actual events in Chiapas is also an excellent example. See Deborah Horvitz's article in SAIL (1998) for details.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed look at Almanac of the Dead interpreted as a cautionary tale to the medical industry, see Ann Folwell Stanford's article, "Human Debris."

<sup>19</sup> Native theorist Paula Gunn Allen concurs in The Sacred Hoop (1986) writing that destroyers condemn themselves to a "living death" due to their separation from other human beings and natural resources (118).

<sup>20</sup> Other closed systems that self-destruct are illustrated by the fate of Greenlee, Trigg, Leah Bleu, Zeta/Lecha's father, and Ferro.

<sup>21</sup> Throughout the novel, Silko reiterates the point I have illustrated in the Beaufrey and Menardo examples: that malevolent and egotistical values that sever relations between humans will ultimately collapse. For example, Alegría, Menardo's wife, knows that "the system that starved and destroyed human beings for the profit of a few was a system that must fall from the sheer weight of the bodies of the dead" (Silko 307). Wilson Weasel Tail alternately accuses and warns the US government to return stolen tribal land or else: "Give back what you have stolen or else as a people you will continue your self-destruction" (Silko 725). It is such self-destruction of "things European" that the almanacs of the dead predict.

<sup>22</sup> For additional textual evidence, note that Wide Ledge states that "traces of other beings and other places preserved on paper became confused for even the white people" (Silko 227). Also, Silko's inclusion of many Geronimos in Almanac of the Dead evolves out of an earlier interest the author expresses in "A Geronimo Story" [in The Man to Send Rain Clouds (1974)]. For more information, see "Photography as Resistance in Almanac of the Dead" by Eric Gary Anderson in American Indian Literature and the Southwest (1990) as well as the PBS Video titled, "Geronimo and the Apache Resistance" produced in the American Experience Series (vol. 11, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> The wild zone could be seen as related to alternate conceptions such as Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness," Freire's theory of "bifrucated vision," and Candelaria's "multicultural wild zone" (Candelaria 251).

<sup>24</sup>Silko shows that malevolence as well as benevolence crosscuts ethnic lines. Like her heterogeneous heroes, she spreads malevolence equally to Anglos, African-Indians, Mexican Indians, and Native Americans. She does not cast any one group as uniformly angelic or evil. Drug and gun smugglers along the border include Border Indians such as Zeta and Ferro, Mexicans like Calabazas, and right wing Anglos like Greenlee. All are armed with high powered weapons, driven by profit motives, and willing to do violence if necessary to protect their assets. Members of every ethnic group demonstrate a blatant disregard for human life by committing equally perverse, sadistic acts. One critic summarizes, "Part of the complexity of *Almanac* arises from Silko's refusal to identify one group as completely evil, another as completely good" (Stanford 26-7).

<sup>25</sup> Those who work to break borders recognize their similarities with people of other races and classes. Sterling, a Laguna Indian like Silko, realizes that "people he had been used to calling 'Mexicans' were really remnants of different kinds of Indians. But what had remained of what was Indian was in appearance only—the skin and the hair and the eyes. . . . They had lost contact with their tribes and their ancestors' worlds . . . Indians flung across the world forever separated from their tribes and from their ancestral lands" (Silko 88). Clinton, an African American veteran of the Vietnam War, finds solidarity with Black Indians in Haiti. Born in the US, Clinton also makes connections with people in Africa. The cultural blending represented by Sterling and Clinton appears throughout the novel. Root, Lecha's handicapped lover, looks white with blue eyes and light hair but is Mexican; Lecha is a Mexican Indian with what she calls Korean eyes; Menardo, a wealthy Mexican businessman, hides his Mexican Indian heritage. He disclaims his

distinctively Indian features, for instance, lying that his nose was broken in a boxing match.

## CONCLUSION:

### GEOPOETIC REPRESENTATIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Borderland authors articulate their creative power through geopoetic representation—expressions of spatiality and engagement with literary conventions. Analyzing the relationship between the two elucidates the multiple ways in which characters respond to cultural encounter—acknowledging, resisting, and adapting—from the earliest border narratives to the present. This study begins with literature depicting the creation of the US-Mexico border and ends with literature calling for its deconstruction. The rubric encompassing the works I have analyzed, the US-Mexico border, has provided a means to better grasp processes of identity formation. The study of how these processes are represented in borderland literature leads to the cumulative effect suggesting a compelling relationship between genre and geography. That relationship is the way in which writers' articulate literary expressions of cultural affiliations to space, place, and geography.

Whether in the historical romance or the Western novel, the literature of the US-Mexico border describes a phenomenon which is both a metaphorical and geopolitical construction. In each of its literary manifestations, the border functions as an articulation of ideological difference, as a barrier generating cultural conflict and as a bridge promoting respect for cultural difference. However, previous scholars have failed to note the paradoxical characteristic of the border. The literary precursors of this study, Américo Paredes and Cecil Robinson articulate geopolitical representations of the border as a bridge or a barrier, rather than as both. When Paredes describes the border as a "symbol of separation," the underlying tenet magnifies cultural difference between Mexico and the

US. In his creative and critical work, he conceptualizes the border as a physical obstacle between abutting nations that codifies difference through immigration checkpoints, border patrols, and electric fences. Conversely, Robinson highlights the paradigm of the border as a common place for unifying US and Mexican literary depictions of the region.

More recent scholarship also fails to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the border as both an area of cultural resistance and amelioration. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha alludes to borders as interactive spaces that span nations rather than separate them. He explains: "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* . . . 'Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to the other banks . . . The bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses'" (italics in original; 5). In contrast, border writer Gloria Anzaldúa depicts the border as a barrier: "1,950 mile long open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods into my flesh" (2).

Each claim is incomplete by itself; taken together, however, they reflect the rubric that surfaces in this project: literature that addresses borderland events and experiences necessarily shapes the geopolitical border as that which causes and contributes to cultural misunderstanding, yet facilitates an improved awareness and acknowledgement of cultural sensibilities in different communities. This way of perceiving the border opens up the layers of meaning informed by expressions of geography and poetics in literary worlds that are united and divided by the US-Mexico border and allows for interpretation that accounts for the seeming contradictory elements of borderland narratives. Examples from the novels in this study illustrate the paradoxical nature of the border as unifying and dividing. In Caballero, González inscribes the border with competing negative and



positive characteristics through the artistic expression of space and an engagement with formulaic elements of historical romance. The novel provides a representation of the border as a geopolitical boundary between nations that reflects the conflicts and divisions between Mexican and Anglo communities inhabiting US territory. González draws on the absolutist conventions of the historical romance, polarities of good and evil, to represent national territory and domiciles as spaces with little neutral ground. From the perspective of Mexican male characters, the newly imposed border severs their ties to Mexico and threatens to disempower them as Mexican landowners occupying US soil. Geopoetics in the novel also reveals the border as the medium for the romance quest; in other words, from the perspective of the female characters, the border is the catalyst that introduces them to their Anglo lovers. The resolution of conflict engages elements of the genre through the allegory of the lovers' union that is achieved in marriages of Anglo men and Mexican women. These inter-cultural marriages reconcile the schism caused by the US-Mexico border and the Mexican American war.

All the Pretty Horses is another example that illustrates the paradoxical metaphor of the border. McCarthy's artistic rendering of landscape in the US and Mexico critiques the colonial legacy inscribed in the Western novel. On one hand, geopoetics presents the border as a gateway to the Old American West for John Grady Cole, a disinherited rancher who presumes to pursue his calling in Mexico. Drawing on elements of the Western novel, McCarthy characterizes the protagonist as a quintessential cowboy who can read the land or talk to horses equally well north or south of the border. On the other hand, the author uses of the code of the West, a common motif in the Western novel, coupled with a depiction of space in Mexico to show the border less a bridge to Cole's future than an obstacle signifying a colonial past. What is significant about these

examples is that they suggest that the US-Mexico border is a critical foci for artistic expression. Indeed, writers, artists, and musicians are drawn to the border because of the ways it functions in dual manifestations, whether geopolitically or metaphorically constructed, revealing cultural difference yet begetting cultural understanding.

### **Geopoetics amid Multiple Poetics**

The lens of geopoetics also contributes to an understanding of experience and encounter in the US-Mexico borderland through artistic genres not addressed in this volume. Short story, poetry, visual art, drama, film, and music that focus on the US-Mexico border are also interpretable through a critical approach that explores the connection of aesthetic form to expressions of space. For example, geopoetics may be effectively applied to the short story for the purpose of understanding character responses to cultural difference in the US-Mexico borderlands. "Economical, focused, and dense," explains fiction writer Debra Spark, "short stories usually concentrate on a limited number of psyches and actions, often structuring themselves around a single event and aiming for a single emotional realization" (21). As this definition suggests, a writer's portrayal of setting is compressed and compact for the purpose of achieving maximum impact on a short story's single climax. Because geopoetics underscores spatiality, it is a method that may be effectively used to unpack such dense spatial images and geographical settings. In "The Iguana Killer" (1984), for example, Alberto Ríos juxtaposes tightly-constructed depictions of Villahermosa, Mexico and Nogales, US, to portray a "single emotional realization" in Sapito, an eight year old Mexican boy (Spark 21). The author builds to the protagonist's epiphany by distilling setting: Villahermosa is a "jungle tropics" associated with good deeds in the story, and Nogales is a city space associated with US commercialism (11). The boy's epiphany is that altruism yields a

sense of self-satisfaction far more valuable than the attention he gets because of the two US-made products he owns, an “iguana killer” (i.e., a baseball bat) and a picture of snow. The story combines a focused rendering of towns in the US and Mexico as well as a single epiphany, an element of the short story in general and short bildungsroman in particular. Ríos uses this combination of genre convention and town spaces to illustrate how a Mexican youth learns to reject US commercialism in a coming of age story.

“Mac—American,” a short story by journalist and fiction writer John Reed, also demonstrates the importance of understanding setting and form in the short story. Reed’s work is set in barroom in Chihuahua City, Mexico where two Anglo men, surrounded by Mexicans, discuss their plans to return to the US. One of them, Mac, claims Anglos are superior to Mexicans. He berates Mexicans in the bar as dishonest, ignoble, and inhumane but, in Reed’s hands, these characteristics prove applicable only to Mac who boasts about secretly seducing his brother’s lover and playing the “greatest sport . . . of hunting niggers” (47). In the final line, ironically, Mac cannot wait to cross the border into the US to live among fellow virtuous people like himself. Thus, Reed couples irony and the bar setting to show how Mac projects his own ignoble, racist behavior onto the Mexicans who surround him, rather than recognizing his own unethical behavior. As this example demonstrates, the border functions as a barrier from the perspective of Mac who seeks to return to his homeland; however, the border also serves as a bridge between the author and reader who jointly acknowledge the irony of Mac’s racism.

The model of geopoetics might also be applied readily to Jack London’s rendering of space and use of genre convention in “Whose Business is to Live.” This short story is set in the Mexican towns of Tampico and Panuco during the Mexican Revolution. London represents these places as sites of intense anti-American sentiment. Amid shouts

of “Death to the Gringos,” US flag burning, and a general call to expulse Americans from Mexico, two male Anglo characters travel from Tampico to Panuco to rescue an American woman whom they both love. Because the plot involves men striving to prove their worthiness to a helpless female, the short story reinforces traditional gender roles. This shortfall notwithstanding, London uses elements of drama, suspense, and danger to depict a daring escape narrative that ends when the group of American men and women leave Mexico safely, traversing the border to find US troops. Pairing the form of rescue narrative with the spaces of Tampico and Panuco generates an expression of characters’ determination to survive a situation when mob violence threatens their lives.

The geopoetic model also applies to poetry, a literary form more “dense” than the short story. Poetry packs together the “image-making capacity” of language through concrete, sensory description (Guth 400).<sup>1</sup> Because of its sparse form, poetry compresses setting more so than the short story. Yet again, an approach that hones in on spatiality is capable of unpacking the condensed representations of space, place, and geography common in poetry. For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa’s poem titled, “To Live in the Borderlands Means You,” represents the US-Mexico borderlands with competing characteristics, calling it, for example, both a safe “home” and a “battleground” (194-5). A site of multiple intersecting cultures, the borderland spaces in the poem are populated by a “new race” that combines the identities of the “*hispana india negra española*” (194-5). Anzaldúa mixes English and Spanish throughout the poem to represent the borderlands as a space of linguistic hybridity. The poem also contains sensory detail, specifically appealing to taste and smell, in a depiction of borderlanders eating, for example, *chile* on their borscht or tortillas made of whole wheat (194-5). Combining bilingualism merged with cultural food choices and sensory detail with the geographical

spaces, the poet suggests that to survive in such a borderlands, one must be able to cross multiple cultural barriers, living “*sin fronteras*” [without borders] (195). As the border both separates and unites individuals from different cultures in Anzaldúa’s poem, the borderlands becomes a social milieu conducive to hybrid aesthetics and identities.

Not all poems represent space, place, or geography in such expressive manner. For such poems, a geopoetic approach nonetheless proves valuable, as evident in “The Other Alamo.” In this poem, Latino poet Martin Espada, articulates the theme of repeating cycles of economic exploitation. “The Other Alamo” appeals to aural and tactile sensation to construct images, both past and present, of capitalistic oppression in the gift shop of the Alamo, a Texas-Mexico cotton field, and at a “whites-only” segregated lunch counter. Espada depicts these spaces as borderland settings of racial conflict. Perhaps the most overt example is the Alamo, a site that resurrects memories of contested geography whose aftermath caused Anglo hatred of Mexicans and discrimination against Hispanics. The poet evokes sensory experience combined with the continuing, parallel images of commerce yesterday and today to criticize cycles of economic exploitation of Mexicans, Hispanics, Chicanos, whose ancestors once controlled this borderland geography and economy.

Drama, a form closely related to poetry, provides not only text but staged production that lend themselves to a geopoetic approach (Guth 400). This approach is well suited to drama’s emphasis on scene, setting, and stage, as illustrated by the play, “Culture Clash in Bordertown.” Produced in 1998 at the San Diego Repertory Theater, the play offers a self-consciously cultural interpretation of cross border complexity (“Culture Clash” n.p.). Using interviews of local people in both San Diego and Tijuana, writers-actors Richard Montoya, Ricardo Salinas, and Herbert Siguenza claim the goal of

the play is to depict “cultures in opposition, and by opposing them bring them together” (“Culture Clash” n.p.). The play accomplishes this by, among other things, personifying the US and Mexico as lovers; in this depiction, the stage becomes a bedroom where the US and Mexico alternately feud and reconcile (“Culture Clash” n.p.). The dramatic conflict centers on marriage fraught with cultural weight (“Culture Clash” n.p.). Engaging a poetics of satire and comedy as well as a personification of geography, “Culture Clash in Bordertown” enforces the idea that because the physical location cannot change—the border cannot be erased—the US and Mexico must reconcile relations as peaceful partners in a binding relationship. This geopoetic expression once again demonstrates how the border functions as an oppositional metaphor of that which attracts and repels through the love-hate relationship among the partners personified in the play.

Film is drama marketed, packaged, and commercialized as a medium capable of exercising broad, popular appeal to audiences around the world. An approach that evaluates aesthetic form and spatial depiction applies to the way that film is capable of globalizing and/or localizing dramatic experience. For example, film is capable of universalizing an immigrant experience by conveying, for example, the dangers of crossing international borders, regardless of immigrant identities or border locations. One such film, *El Norte* (1984), dramatizes the journey of a brother and sister, Paco (David Villalpando) and Rosa (Zaide Silva Gutierrez), who flee political persecution in Guatemala. Viewers of such a film may translate the difficult experience of the Guatemalan protagonists to Cuban migrants fleeing their home nation or Moroccan migrants trying to reach Spain. While universalizing an experience, film is also capable of localizing it. Director Gregory Nava evokes sympathy for Guatemalan migrants as

they make the treacherous crossing near Tijuana only to see their American Dream turn nightmare. Acknowledging Diego Rivera's notion that all art is political, film may be especially so in its ability to convey the oppressive circumstances of a people and border to an international audience. Because geopoetics explores the way screen writers and film directors select and shape space and engage convention, it is a salient method to understand both the localizing and globalizing manifestations of film.

*El Norte* is a cinematic travel narrative that universalizes the dangers of the immigrant experience. After journeying thousands of miles through Mexico, Guatemalan migrants arrive in Tijuana only to discover that the border is fortified "like a war zone." This portrayal of border spaces builds to Nava's climactic scene showing Paco and Rosa's struggle to cross the border through a rat-filled sewer pipe, an experience that Rosa ultimately does not survive. "When discussing immigrants," one reviewer comments, "many times individuals dehumanize them and the film allows for viewers to understand and feel compassion for immigrants who have struggled both in their home country and in their new country" ("*El Norte*" n.p.). As this quote suggests and what geopoetic representation makes explicit is that this film evokes sympathy for Hispanic and Native immigrants in general, an appeal based on spatial portraits of the border and cinematic dramatization of transnational travel narrative.

*Lone Star* (1996) is another film set on the US-Mexico border. Exploring spatial constructions of a local setting on the US-Mexico border reveals the objective of director John Sayles. His goal is to highlight ethnic conflict between Mexicans, African Americans, Anglos, and Hispanics so viewers become aware of profound cultural tension along the border. Set in the border town of Frontera, the murder mystery requires sheriff San Deeds (Chris Cooper) to uncover events that led to a crime fifty years ago. Sayles

works through the “narrative device of the thriller” which is particularly appropriate to the border town as a space of “heightened tension” (Turan n.p.). Conflicts among Anglos, Mexicans, Hispanics, and African Americans erupt over issues such as illegal immigration, assimilation, and history textbooks. Overcoming these conflicts ultimately shapes the way in which the mystery is solved. At the end of the film, Deeds identifies the killer in a dramatic climax in which the corrupt Anglo sheriff (Kris Kristofferson) is shot down by a fellow Anglo, his own white deputy. Because Frontera is constructed as a racialized and segregated space, Sayles achieves a surprise ending—viewers expect conflict between ethnic groups, rather than one Anglo shooting another. Thus, examining the combined elements of murder mystery, such as suspense, withholding of information, and danger, and an explication of space as highly segregated supports the value of a geopoetic approach to this genre. Such analysis explains how the film “peels back the layers of Frontera society to explore the complex interconnections” between Anglos, Mexicans, and African Americans in the localized setting of the border (Turan n.p.).

The various artistic expressions evaluated thus far confirm the way that a model considering poetics and place is useful, necessary, and perhaps inevitable to a study of works focusing on the US-Mexico borderlands. The lens of geopoetics further elucidates how the border serves as a metaphor of both bridge and barrier. Two additional forms common to the borderlands warrant attention: the *corrido* and *conjunto* music. Because of their prevalence on the border, the *corrido* and *conjunto* must be evaluated using the model of geopoetics that focuses on place in particular. Just as this model proves useful to other poetics performed or exhibited, such as “Culture Clash” and *La Frontera/The Border*,” by extension, the *corrido* and *conjunto* engage space, place, and form in a way telling of borderland experience.



The *corrido* or Mexican ballad is a “narrative poem in Spanish set to music” (Griffith 22). The *corrido* is “one of the most important verbal folk art forms in the twentieth-century,” explains folklorist James Griffith, because it “reflects the point of view of the working [Mexican and Hispanic] people” (22). One of the most well-known examples is *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*, a ballad analyzed and popularized by Américo Paredes. *El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez* serves as an example of the *corrido* tradition, a living oral poetics, that constructs the characteristics of a border hero in particular and the traits of Mexican and Hispanic people in general, both in response to Anglo class and ethnic oppression. This is illustrated in the way the ballad engages the border, depicting it as the gateway to an accepting homeland when the hero rides south toward the US-Mexico border fleeing the Texas Rangers. Added to this spatial representation is a narrative about escape and resistance that uses elements of suspense, humor, comedy, and tall tale to show how Cortez repeatedly outsmarts the Anglo pursuers. This narrative aesthetic and spatial representation produces the image of folk hero: a brave, smart common man who refuses to be wrongly imprisoned. This border ballad is also a geopoetic representation that acknowledges institutionalized racism against Mexicans; Cortez is the everyman, in this case Mexicans, Chicanos, Hispanics, and perhaps other minorities, who assumes that he will be unjustly penalized in the US justice system.<sup>2</sup>

The *corrido* and *conjunto* (or “*musica norteña*”) share affinities as aural forms of folk tradition with working class origins; like the *corrido*, the *conjunto* is a form that might be understood through poetics and place. Understanding modern *conjunto* music is contingent on recognizing the origins of *conjunto* in the 1950s, its peak era in the US. At this time, urbanization and class stratification among *Tejanos* polarized the community

into an assimilated middle-class and an unassimilated working class (Peña 5). The latter group rallied around *conjunto* music as a way to keep alive their hopes of returning to Mexico and to resist hegemonic forces of Anglo culture (Peña 1-15). *Conjunto* bands half a century ago created a sense of place, specifically a romanticized, rural past in Mexico, through two elements of the music, the accordion and *lo ranchero*. Because geopoetics hones in on these elements of aesthetic expression and the evocation of place, specifically a Mexican homeland, the model is useful to evaluating *conjunto* music. Compared to the *bajo sexto* (twelve-string bass guitar), saxophone, contra/electric bass, and drums, other instruments of the *conjunto*, the accordion is significant symbol working class Mexican identity according to ethnographer Manuel Peña (3). Called “*el instrumento del pueblo*” [instrument of the folk], the accordion sound of this era evoked “folk origins” in Mexico to a diasporic, poor community of *Tejanos* surrounded by Anglo culture in the US and snubbed by fellow *Tejanos* of higher class standing (Translated by Peña; 143; 38). The *conjunto* also recreated a sense of place among working class *Tejanos* because of its musical precedent, *lo ranchero*. Ranchero music, avers Peña, gave rise to “feelings of *mexicanismo*—momentary recreations of a simpler and romanticized folk heritage” (11). Much like the paradoxical metaphor of the border, the *conjunto* united a working class community but also reinforced its alienation from Anglos and fellow Mexicans. While most conjunto is generally instrumental, Spanish lyrics of this music reinforced associations with the ranchero through highly sentimentalized folk traditions in rural Mexico. The reconstruction of place as well as the accordion and *lo ranchero* demonstrate the *conjunto*’s symbolic significance as working-class music among a *Tejano* community in the 1950s that literally and figuratively wanted to return to Mexico.

Recent *conjunto* bands, such as *Los Tigres del Norte*, echo nostalgia for Mexico evident in the music of the 1950s with an important difference regarding place and form. Where the music of early *Tejano* bands offered hope of returning to Mexico, contemporary *conjunto* bands eulogize Mexico as a place to which they will never return. Also, whereas the early *conjunto* was primarily instrumental or sung in Spanish, modern *conjunto* often has bilingual lyrics. Geopoetics acknowledges, indeed emphasizes, the important relationship of geography to form, in this case to bilingualism, in the modern *conjunto*. *Los Tigres*, an undocumented *conjunto* band from northern Mexico living in San Jose, expresses immigrant fear of deportation and unfulfilled longing for Mexico through the rendering of place and bilingual lyrics in *Jaula de Oro* [Cage of Gold (1985)]. The song represents “beloved Mexico” as the place a Mexican father can “never forget” and “never return” to (qtd. in Saldívar, Border 4-5). In contrast, the US is figuratively the golden cage of the song’s title, a prison due to the father’s illegal status: “I almost never go out to the street. / I’m afraid I’ll be found and deported” (5). The architectural space suggested by the US as a metaphorical jailhouse highlights the anxiety of an undocumented worker feeling a panopticon of Anglo surveillance. Bilingualism also reinforces the contrasting sense of place between the US and Mexico. When the father’s son is asked in Spanish if he wants to live in Mexico, and the boy replies in English, “What are you talkin’ about Dad? I don’t want to go back to Mexico. No way, Dad” (4-5). In total, *Los Tigres* represent the border in this song as that which unites father and homeland, but separates father and son.

Applied to multiple artforms, a critical methodology that makes explicit the relationship of spatial representations and genre conventions informs textual—in the broadest sense of the term—depiction of cultural encounter in the US-Mexico

borderlands. In addition, the lens of geopoetics is suggestive of those broader possibilities between poetics and places that involve, as illustrated, cultural implications and associations among communities inhabiting the US-Mexico borderland. Beyond this borderland, geopoetics is a complex and nuanced model that may be modified to account for alternate geographies and other border writings. This modification involves expanding geopoetics to account for pre-national, tribal identifications in a global context. Such identifications involve sacred land claims and mythic pasts that challenge the imagined community of the nation. Theorizing geopoetics in this general manner yields a broader understanding of literary constructs that depict cultural difference, conflict, and encounter in multiple geographical settings.

### **Geopoetics in a Global Context**

When modified to address issues of pre-nationalism, geopoetics is an approach that applies to literary forms set in, for example, Palestine, Germany, Europe, Africa, and India. It may be applied to works that include profound expressions of cultural difference much like those exhibited among Anglos, Mexicans, Border Indians, Chicanos, and Hispanics, as rendered in works examined in this volume. Addressing works in nations beyond the US-Mexico borderlands through an explicit focus on geography is a method useful to understanding cultural contact represented in literature set in multiple sites.<sup>3</sup> A paradigm combining spatiality and poetics is a way to link borderland narratives to global literature. Three groups of authors—unassimilated individuals, diasporic transnationals, and travel writers—illustrate this point. These writers embrace prenational identifications in a way that proves geopoetics to be a comprehensive medium for understanding expressions of cultural difference in a global context.

Recognizing the differences between pre-national and national contexts shows how and why geopoetics might be reframed to include works beyond the US-Mexico border. The concept of the nation as a modern imagined community is based on, among other things, particular constructs of limitedness and history, boundaries and biographies (Anderson 1-7). According to global comparatist Benedict Anderson, nationhood emerges in the late eighteenth century with the advent of print culture and capitalism. The imagined community of the nation is defined as a “limited” entity: a nation is bounded by finite—though elastic—borders that clearly delineate its territory from other nations (7). Also important to the concept of nationhood is that it has a historical, chronological biography with a specific start time. For instance, however it recognizes its pre-conquest or colonial past, Mexico as a nation “begins” with its independence from Spain in 1820. Anderson uses the analogy of nationhood and personhood to suggest that nations, like people, have specific birth dates or independence dates but they recreate, through print culture and capitalism, an infinite past and future to account for the identity of the nation. He writes, “As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of *‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity*—product of the rupture of the late eighteenth century—engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’” (Italics added; 205).

The two world cultural systems that predate nationalism include religious communities and dynastic realms (Anderson 9-46). These pre-national communities were organized according to strict hierarchical principles that placed God in a “high center,” followed by monarchies and a stratified class system (12-46). Thus organized vertically, pre-national civilization was “not boundary oriented”; instead, borders of religious or secular empire were porous, bleeding indistinctly into one another (Anderson

19-46). Another important characteristic of a pre-national world is the fact that time was not conceptualized chronologically. Instead, religious and secular rules alike posited themselves as an extension of an eternal, sacred past that extend infinitely back to a mythical time.

Based on their relationship to land, pre-national communities are accurately conceptualized in a global context as “tribes.” Anthropologist James Clifford identifies tribes as a people who “stress continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a ‘natural’ or autochthonous connection to the land” (Routes 252).<sup>4</sup> Tribes place a “premium on localism and rootedness” (253). Clifford argues that tribes challenge modern nation-states, particularly assimilationist ideologies of the nation, based on their relationship to land. Predating the national, tribes claim a “firstness” to the land (albeit a difficult claim to prove) by placing a premium on a sacred past and a spiritual connection to land (253). That connection is expressed through “nature, divinity, mother earth, and the ancestors” (Clifford, Routes 253).

Whereas the nation is conceptualized with a specific modern, historical beginning marked in time, tribes rally around an imagined mythical past in which they rightfully occupied sacred homelands. Nations challenge tribal assertions for homeland by reconstructing time before their advent; since Benito Juárez, for example, the government of Mexico has reconstructed the history of indigenous people long prior to national independence. Such efforts to extend time infinitely backwards reveal a paradox in the biography of a nation, what Anderson calls “forgetting the experience of continuity” in the aforementioned quote. The nation celebrates its independence as a time when it finally came to assert control over its own territory as a sovereign nation; however, this very act presupposes that other peoples inhabited or controlled the land prior to the birth

of the nation. Tribes use such a paradox to assert themselves as the other peoples who have a right to claim the land.

Because tribes and nations claim land differently, unassimilated and assimilated writers depict cultural conflict over land acquisition and usurpation differently. Unassimilated writers represent battle over land as a struggle against the nation to retain and maintain a sense of tribal identity. Almanac of the Dead, for instance, represents Native America's goal to reoccupy sacred land as the survival quest of a people. If the dystopia is not torn down and replaced by a society that acknowledges tribes, Silko seems to suggest, the nation will ultimately cause the genocide of Indians. Expanding the model of geopoetics to include both national and pre-national considerations makes it applicable in a global context. Modified thusly, a way of reading that considers both poetics and places reveals how assimilation affects authorial representations of cultural conflict in worlds beyond the US-Mexico borderlands. An author's degree of assimilation in the nation directly influences her representation of cultural contact and conflict in all borderland areas. Jewish writers offer an example.

The geographical borders of the West Bank are perhaps the boundaries most similar to the US-Mexico border in the world. Both border zones are highly militarized regions characterized by religious, language, and ideological differences. These two borderland regions are also marked as core/periphery nations or "first/third" worlds based on asymmetrical power dynamics within the context of both international socio-political organizations and national market share of globalized capitalism. Beyond these geographical considerations, the West Bank and US-Mexico borderland are inhabited by people with a long history of tribal conflict. Both border zones consist of communities claiming distinction from each other yet who share tribal claims of entitlement to specific

holy land according to a mythic past. As their novels suggest, authors in this volume depict Chicano, Mexican, Hispanic, and Indian characters claiming land based on an imagined historical past that predates the nation. The authors also depict nations like the US legitimizing their possession of national territory based on the biography of the imagined community.

Unassimilated border writers address cultural difference in their writings because of national claims to land deny pre-national rights to the land. For example, Ruiz de Burton's and González's work privileges pre-national rights to land over national rights to land; stated another way, The Squatter and the Don and Caballero assert the primacy and legitimacy of *Californio* and *Tejano* land claimants over US territorial rights in an era of intense nation building and consolidation. These authors represent cultural conflict over land division because they are highly marginalized individuals within the nation. As testimony to their unassimilated status, both González and Ruiz de Burton identify with their Mexican cultural heritage strongly and publicly thought out their lives. González also suspected that her manuscripts were rejected by major publishers because Caballero addresses a subject, the dispossession of *Tejanos*, not worthy of interest. Additional evidence that Ruiz de Burton was unassimilated was her economic standing: over her lifetime, she lost most of her land holdings to Anglo squatters and businesses, a life story that is reflected artistically in The Squatter and the Don. The status of these subaltern women as unassimilated authors is underscored by the fact that their work calls for social reform, highlighting conflict over the division, acquisition, and occupation of land.

Unassimilated Jewish writers such as Isaac Singer, Amos Oz, or Primo Levi address similar cultural encounters in their writings. Singer offers endless detail of Jewish culture in conflict with opposing cultures. Such conflict is intensified in the work of Oz



and Levi, Holocaust memoirists who chronicle the genocide of a people and culture in WWII Nazi Germany. The point is that these unassimilated writers portray cultural difference in their work based on usurpation their homelands. Rather than identifying with the nation, these writers self-identify with a tribal culture based on an imagined mythic past whose claims to land predate the nation. Because of this, spatial representations in their writings of the world around them asserts primacy to a sacred homeland. Exploring these depictions of space—prenational conceptualizations of land claims—in conjunction with the conventions of their work, whether a memoir chronicling daily life, a testimony to racial injustice, or a narrative exposing anti-Semitism, makes geopoetics a model for understanding global cultural inscription.

An exploration of genre and geography that accounts for the national and prenational also might be usefully applied to diasporic writers who depict geographies radically dissimilar to the US-Mexico borderlands. With this kind of application, geopoetics becomes a means of connecting borderland to global literature. This volume proposes, engages, and produces a way of approaching literature that depicts an intense degree of cultural conflict in the US-Mexico “border/lands,” the site where two nations physically abut. This abutment creates an area significantly influenced by the confluence of interaction among people from different cultures and communities. Thus, writers are drawn to this region where people, languages, histories, food, music, goods, and money flow across the 2,000-mile US-Mexico border, in part, due to access created by a shared land mass, (border checkpoints and immigration laws notwithstanding). Expanding the model of geopoetics to consider the implications of prenational travel in general and diasporic travel in particular, the approach renders a way of engaging literature through

poetics and spaces that is useful to understanding cultural conflicts far removed from any geopolitical border.

Again turning to a pre-national context, travel and diaspora is a human phenomenon that has been on going for centuries; “Practices of displacement emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings,” argues anthropologist James Clifford, “rather than as their simple transfer or extension” (2-3). Since the formation of the nation, borders have been codified, regulated, and policed in a manner unknown to eras prior to the eighteenth-century explosion of nationhood everywhere. To protect their limited, bounded territory, nations “require constant, often violent, maintenance” of borders (Clifford 9). What Clifford makes clear is that nations are a relatively recent phenomenon; prior to their advent in the late eighteenth century, people have always and everywhere traveled. Moreover, such travel in the era of religious communities and dynastic realms involved movement across indistinct, ill-defined borders. While people continue to travel in the epoch of the nation, a movement facilitated by modern transportation, the point is that borders, immigration laws, checkpoints, and other tools of the nation inhibits the travel of diasporic peoples and the literary genres they employ to record real and imagined homelands.

Clifford asserts that diaspora—defined as the political struggle to define a local, distinctive community—is about “feeling global” (Routes 252-4).<sup>5</sup> This sentiment harkens to a prenatal existence in which borders were crossed freely and easily. To survive within the nation while pending return to a homeland, diasporics simultaneously resist and adapt to the country and culture in which they live. Transnationals carve out a form of “flexible citizenship” that allows them to practice cultural systems of a homeland while also inhabiting a foreign nation (256-8). As Clifford points out, diasporics retain a

sense of homeland through “identification with world-historical cultural/political forces” in which they assert tribal identifications to a sacred land that predate the national (256). An expanded model of geopoetics might take advantage of the tribal affiliations of diasporics in its application to transnationals who may live far away from the geopolitical borders that frame their homeland by examining their strategies for inscribing their cultural longings and geographic realities.

Within the context of diasporic writings, global geopoetics might be applied to any variety of geographies, whether island or urban, periphery or metropolis. Diasporic authors, like the aforementioned unassimilated writers, offer profound illustrations of cultural conflict. Global geopoetics might be fruitfully applied to such work even though there is not a contiguous shared landmass among abutting nations. To demonstrate my point, one cannot read Paule Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brownstones (1981), George Lamming’s Castle of My Skin (1953), or Maxine Hong Kingston’s Woman Warrior (1976) without recognizing the painful situation of the diasporic protagonists who must mediate and negotiate the spaces between the dominant culture in which they live and the homeland culture which they seek to understand or reinhabit. Home for such protagonists becomes a series of relay points, a spatiality on which geopoetics might capitalize. Such spatial elements in a diasporic work, combined with various poetics of male and female bildungsroman and memoir in the aforementioned examples, illustrates the usefulness of this model to exploring the cultural longing, inheritance, and eulogizing evident in the diasporic narrative.

A global concept of geopoetics applies to yet another circumstance: travel narratives that function as an extension of colonialism. In the travel fiction assessed in this volume, I addressed the ways in which Harriet Doerr and Carlos Fuentes offer a

response and critique to the US colonial legacy in their depictions of Anglo characters traveling in Mexico. While these characters travel across the US-Mexico border, an application of geopoetics need not be limited to crossing a “border/lands.” Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1902) or E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India (1924) involve white travelers crossing borders far distant from their native England. Cultural conflict in such works is preeminent and, to a degree, explains why these texts have been taught in US classrooms for decades. Like Doerr and Fuentes, Conrad and Forster represent travel from a core nation to peripheral nation for overt colonialist purposes. Representing travelers’ misconception that values of the imagined community must be imposed on a seemingly tribal culture, these writers each expose the hegemonic ideology of the nation. Identifying such renderings of space in the context of genre conventions of travel writing yields a representation of colonialism in literature set beyond the borders of abutting nations.

This study has explored depictions of cultural encounter in some of its many manifestations. Those include conflicts about the division, acquisition, and appropriation of land, the imposition of ethnocentric values in a foreign country, processes of adapting and resisting dominant cultures, and capitalistic values within existing society. From the imposition of the US-Mexico border in 1848 to the end of the twentieth century, the progressive development of authorial strategies to represent the US-Mexico borderlands reveals that character responses to cultural conflict arise out of geopoetics. The conception of the border as a paradoxical metaphor and the paradigm of geopoetics can be usefully applied to various artistic forms which inscribe the US-Mexico borderlands. Beyond the US-Mexico borderlands, a comprehensive model of geopoetics calls for

comparative criticism of works depicting cultural conflict in a variety of geographies and borderlands.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that short story, poetry, et. al. contain far more conventions of genre or more complex depictions of space than set forth in this discussion. In an effort to be concise, I present only those elements of genre or dimensions of spatiality that show how and why geopoetics applies to forms other than those discussed in previous chapters.

<sup>2</sup> The use of space in poetry, *conjunto*, and *corrido* is similar because, as is the case with the aforementioned examples, all three forms consist primarily of narrative set in specific locations. An approach such as geopoetics is useful and applicable to these poetics because geographic location is important to the themes of the works. Furthermore, geopoetics might be useful in understanding the connections between the *corrido* and bildungsroman. Again, these are forms in which setting is important. The *corrido* and bildungsroman each depict the development of a hero who experiences traumatic encounters in a highly racialized, tense geographical region from which he emerges stronger and wiser. That process is informed by a model elucidating spatiality and literary conventions.

<sup>3</sup> Rather than discussing the genre elements of each text presented, I limit this discussion to authors' representation of space, place, and geography for two reasons. First, expanding the model of geopoetics to account for pre-national considerations affects authors' relationship to land (i.e., how a diasporic writer strives to return to homelands for example) perhaps more than it affects the way an author uses genre elements (i.e., some formulaics of the bildungsroman, such as the coming of age theme, are universal). Second, within the three major groupings of writers cited, I use texts of different genres. For example, the diasporic narratives cited include memoir and bildungsroman, each a

poetics with distinct elements of form. To identify and demonstrate all such elements represents a level of detail beyond the scope of this volume.

<sup>4</sup> Within the context of the nation, tribe is also understood relative to land ownership. For example, “tribe” developed in the US as a legal category identifying Indians who permanently settled on a tract of land (as opposed to migratory nomads). (Clifford, Routes 253).

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed definition of diaspora, see William Safran’s “Diasporas in Modern Societies” (1991).

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