

## Introduction

With the 1992 release of his novel *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy launched into fame, especially after the novel won him both the National Book Award for Fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction (“All the Pretty Horses”). The month before the novel’s release in May, Richard B. Woodward noted in *The New York Times* that none of McCarthy’s novels had “sold more than 5,000 copies in hardcover – which changed with *All the Pretty Horses*, a national bestseller in the United States. The book was, 8 years after its initial publication, turned into a popular movie, directed by Billy Bob Thornton and starring Matt Damon and Penelope Cruz (“All the Pretty Horses”). *All the Pretty Horses* garnered McCarthy international attention and recognition as a great American author.

This novel that brought McCarthy awards and recognition was a cowboy novel, showcasing two boys from Texas crossing into Mexico in order to pursue the frontier life typical of the genre. Beginning with the death of John Grady’s grandfather, *All the Pretty Horses* opens with the possibility for change in John Grady’s life, opening up a future that could, as far Grady is concerned, follow one of two routes. His grandfather’s death could, best case, result in John Grady inheriting the Grady family ranch, taking over the business despite its financial failure and thus staking out a place for himself within his home country. He envisions an opportunity to pursue his cowboy dream in the United States by

taking on the responsibility of the ranch and finding in it a place where he finally belongs. The other possibility is that his mother will sell the ranch, denying Grady a chance at happiness and fulfillment within his home country and thus driving him to find a new frontier, a foreign land where he can find a sense of belonging. He must either inherit the ranch, extending the United States' agrarian legacy and creating a place for himself there, or he must exit his home country and construct a new frontier for himself.

Grady is ultimately denied the ranch and, as a result, a space in the United States. His mother prioritizes finances over Grady's cowboy romanticism, selling the ranch that had "barely paid expenses for twenty years" (McCarthy 15). Grady talks to his father about the ranch before its sale, seeking solace and a sympathetic ear but instead finding yet another advocate of selling the ranch. His father presents not merely the declining profits, but also changes in the racial makeup of its laborers as argument against Grady's inheriting the ranch: "There's not any money. This place has barely paid expenses for twenty years. There hasn't been a white person worked here since before the war" (McCarthy 15). The fact that the ranch has not hired white laborers in years not only points to the undesirability of the work – underlining Grady's father's later point that "not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dying and going to heaven" (McCarthy 17) – but also supports Grady's notion that he does not belong in the United States. If the work is not suitable for white laborers in the

United States, then it is undeserving of Grady, in his home culture's understanding: the work is unfit for him, a white man, and thus should not be provided to him through inheritance. Simultaneously, however, the cultural undesirability of the work within the United States contributes to Grady's belief that he does not belong in his native country. If his country does not share his values, if it does not see his dream life as befitting a white man, then it is not his country, and he must leave in order to find or construct a society that does share his values. He must push past the United States' borders in order to find a place where he can be himself, where his love of horses and an agrarian life will be shared, since his native country clearly does not support his dream.

What Grady's father's point shows, and what is beyond Grady's understanding throughout the novel, is that the border is and always has been permeable. The ranch's shift in labor source coincides with the rise of the Bracero Program and increased hiring of contract (or, frequently, undocumented) Mexican laborers by agricultural employers in the United States (Nagi 139). The Grady family ranch participated in the larger trend of replacing white laborers with Mexicans, changing not only the financial value attributed to the labor, but also the cultural value – since cheap, imported laborers of color filled previously white jobs, the work became quickly devalued. This shift in racial makeup of the ranch hands provides a historical basis for Grady's desire to find a country that shares his value of an agrarian life, as his native country contributed to the devaluing of

ranch work by replacing men like Grady with Mexican men, who were seen as disposable and as undesirable (Kim 131).

This quote about the ranch's labor source, then, points to a historical trend that, essentially, pushed Grady out of the United States, even while he did not understand the political nature of the border that allowed the ranch to hire foreign laborers. Employers in the United States imported contract and undocumented workers from Mexico, pushing white men like Grady out of the work that defined Grady's masculinity (Ngai 143). Braceros rendered Grady redundant, unnecessary and, indeed, out of place in his native country – he has no role to fulfill that will both contribute to his sense of cowboy masculinity and personhood and to his country's wellbeing and gain. He has nothing to offer and nothing to gain within the United States' borders as a result of the Bracero Program, resulting in his desire to leave behind his country and reverse the journey of braceros in order to find ranch work in Mexico.

Grady's journey is necessitated, bizarrely, by the Bracero Program, requiring that he follow an inverted journey of a Mexican migrant laborer in order to find fulfilling work. His migration is rendered not only possible but necessary by the fact that the border is and always has been permeable, not absolute, a reality that Grady cannot grasp. Similarly, his trek across Mexico reflects a larger anxiety in the United States – a continual fear that immigrants will take white people's jobs, forcing them into poverty. The United States has constructed a

narrative of its founding that portrays itself as a nation of immigrants (Behdad 16). Its citizens identify as the legacy of hard-working immigrants, the positive result of a state accepting foreigners into its land and its nationhood. This narrative, however, comes into direct conflict with a national anxiety over the alleged negative consequences of immigration, especially when the immigrants are people of color from impoverished nations (Behdad 19).

This national worry within the United States manifests simultaneously as a desire to be a nation that is so accepting and so generous that it will take in immigrants when the nation-state can benefit from their presence and labor – but also as a national refusal to allow immigrants to deprive native citizens of their perceived rights. In times of economic uncertainty, or when the future of the nation-state seems to come into question, immigrants are an easy target for those anxieties and are blamed for a perceived lack of employment opportunity. Particular immigrant groups have been targeted as the perpetrators of economic instability in the United States across its history, but the twentieth century has seen national attention turn to Mexican and other Latino immigrants, a group that was, at the time, beginning to enter the United States in increasing numbers (Ngai 131). Latinos were, in the national narrative, responsible for white American citizens not having jobs – they were unwelcome when their presence was seen as detrimental to white Americans, especially to white men, when their labor was

blamed for depriving white men of their right to work, to provide for their families, and to contribute to their nation.

John Grady's father, in mentioning the ranch's dependence on Mexican laborers, explicitly brings this national anxiety over the role of immigrants within the United States into *All the Pretty Horses*. Grady and his father do not bemoan further the racially changing labor force, and Grady finds a way to resist the changes he sees as threatening his dreams and values. Rather than begrudgingly accepting unemployment, or finding work in a trade that he sees as beneath him, Grady pushes back by going into Mexico. He shares the same fears as the rest of his country, worrying that he will not be able to find work or happiness because immigrants – and especially, in today's political climate, immigrants from Latin America – have forced white people out of their jobs. Grady's journey is fueled by a desire to push back on the perceived encroachment of Mexicans in the United States, their "theft" of white people's livelihoods, by crossing into Mexico himself. He reclaims their native country for himself, taking back the work he values and the lifestyle he admires, because he has internalized his country's anxieties surrounding immigration. Instead of calling for the deportation of immigrants from the United States, he chooses to leave in pursuit of new opportunities.

Grady's claim over Mexico, then, comes because he sees changing waves of immigration as a cultural shift, not as a result of changes in policy – a view that

is, in turn, because his understanding of and worry over immigration has been formed by a national, not merely a personal, anxiety. The changing labor force may have been the result of the Bracero Program and other contract labor programs, but Grady does not recognize the role that official or international policy plays in depriving him of the ranch. His ignorance of the United States' and Mexico's states role in the changing labor force of his native nation allows him to construct a different narrative of why the labor force has changed and why he no longer belongs in his native country. The issue is contained within the borders of the United States, meaning that he can cross into Mexico in order to escape the effects of a changing economy – and since, in Grady's understanding, his displacement is caused by a cultural shift, not a change in policy, he is not barred from crossing this border. His narrative allows him to escape not only the effects of the cultural shift he sees as the root of his issues, but also to ignore the role that states have played in changing the United States and Mexico alike, allowing him to romanticize Mexico as the solution to his displacement, an open frontier without a state that can repeat the displacement process.

In this way, Grady misunderstands the importance of the border, as well as the impact it has had on his life – as well as how it will impact him once he crosses it. He understands the border in terms of two extremes, as enforcing total difference and absolute impermeability even as it has no political or legal authority. For Grady, the border exists only in theoretical absolutes, and he cannot

find some middle ground between his two opposite understandings of the border. It must simultaneously have no legal backing and have total control over its citizens and its crossers; the border must have absolute power, but it has no source for that power. Grady, despite living in Texas and seeing how his own family's lives have been changed by the border, does not understand the border's actual power. He cannot grapple with the border as it is, because that would undermine his vision for his journey – a border that has actual, though not absolute, authority would be able to impede his crossing, to punish him for ignoring its power. Grady must ignore the middle-ground of the border in order to cross it.

Grady's understanding of the border is fundamentally rooted in the 1990s, the time period when Cormac McCarthy wrote *All the Pretty Horses*, not in the historical 1940s United States. Though McCarthy does not explicitly grapple with late twentieth century discussions of the border, his character Grady is clearly influenced by border theorists contemporary to McCarthy. The theorists of the late 1980s and 1990s explicitly explore the problems presented and reinforced by a character like Grady, problematizing the views that Grady shares – and showing why it is necessary to fully understand the border in a way that John Grady does not.

The woman frequently pointed to as the founder of border theory, Gloria Anzaldúa explores, in her famous *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, what it looks like when the alienated citizens of the borderlands have, necessarily,



constructed a means of navigating and surviving warring cultures on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Grady does not engage in the cultural fluency of the borderlands, having existed near the geographical border but protected from the political and cultural enforcement that *mestizas* face there. His privilege protects him from having to construct a new understanding and culture. For Anzaldúa, the border is not only arbitrary, it is violent, coming from a history of violent white imperialism, and serving to separate *mexicanos* from each other and from Anglo-Americans. The border divides ethnic Mexicans from their families and their culture – an artificial boundary that pays no attention to ethnic territories and the history of the land it seeks to regulate, the border separates *mexicanos* from Mexico, keeping them within the United States but rendering them second class citizens subject to policing and surveillance. This segregation necessitates a cultural fluency, an ability to navigate cultures on both sides of the border, among *mexicanas*: women, Anzaldúa argues, are subject to the most scrutiny and regulation, and as a result must learn how to engage in and survive among the various cultures constructed around the border. Their fluency gives way to a *mestiza* consciousness, a new way of seeing the world that comes out of bridging the borders that segregate the United States politically and culturally – and a consciousness that Grady cannot construct or access, because his whiteness and his maleness protect him from the struggles it depends on.

Mae Ngai explores further the border's role in defining national identity based on constructed hierarchies between native (namely white) citizens and the undocumented immigrants whose labor the U.S. depends upon. She argues, "Undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcome: they are woven into the economic fabric of the nation, but as labor that is cheap and disposable" (2). National discourse over immigration simultaneously centers how it will or will not benefit the United States while highlighting the country's "generous" immigration policy, using it as a source of national pride even as "we also resent the demands made upon us by others and we think we owe outsiders nothing" (11). The United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants, but it strips undocumented immigrants of their rights, violently casting them out, even as it depends upon their labor and their contributions to the American economy, and as it makes it harder for immigrants to gain documentation and the legal right to cross the United States' borders. It relies on immigrants in the abstract for its national identity and its economic wellbeing, but it denies actual immigrants rights or a place within the nation.

Similarly, the United States' national identity depends on "immigration as a form of national hospitality," according to Ali Behdad (3). Its "benign myth of democratic founding" ignores its forceful past of imperialism and slavery, looking instead to a largely fictional past in which Americans opened their arms to immigrants, allowing them to improve their lives within its borders (Behdad 6).

Its history as a nation of immigrants is a point of pride, proof that the United States as a nation and as a state has always helped others and put the needs of immigrants above its own. It may pride itself on its national hospitality, but, as Ngai also points out, this narrative is self-serving: while American citizens get to feel good about their mythical past of selfless hospitality to foreigners, their state can continue to deny rights to immigrants in order to protect itself, pointing to national security or the economic toll of foreign labor as issues that prohibit immigration, and can continue to violently deport immigrants that do not directly benefit the state. In constructing a narrative of hospitality, then, the United States has created a means of control that provide a basis for state regulation of the borders and who passes through them, maintaining national pride that rests on an actual history of violence and exploitation of immigrants. Grady's family has benefitted from the braceros it has hired, but he has come to view their labor as a detriment once he believes they have robbed him of work – his identity as an American cowboy has been taken away from him because migrant laborers have taken his work, and now he must re-establish his own identity by asserting his dominance over Mexico.

Jinah Kim, in "Dismantling Privileged Settings: Japanese American Internees and Mexican Braceros at the Crossroads of World War II," highlights the racial significance of the border. She argues in favor of "theorizing space in relation to race and power" when it comes to the border, seeing it as a site for the

government to enforce racial segregation and white American privilege (123). The border functions as a visible marker of a nation-state's authority, where it can exert – for its citizens and for other countries to see – its own power in separating its preferred citizens from its racially and economically inferior citizens, as well as from “aliens.” The border in *All the Pretty Horses* has been blurred by the influx of migrant laborers, as Grady's place within his own nation is taken from him; he has not, within the United States, been properly separated from the Latinos who work on his family's ranch, who have, he believes, taken his role and denied him value. The border must be re-asserted in order to maintain a racial status quo and to prevent a total loss of a way of life.

In the United States, when it came to the Bracero Program, the border it shared with Mexico allowed the United States to perform its authority, opting to highlight the border's power when it chose to deport Mexican migrant laborers. The United States uses its border to highlight racial difference, to point to workers and citizens of color as perpetually “foreign,” and thus as disposable and easily deported: braceros “were treated and represented as an ‘alien’ race without any capacity for control or ownership over their own bodies because the site of their labor was imagined as being outside of civilization, despite, it almost goes without saying, the fact of intense citizenship regulation, border manipulation, and dispossessions that underwrite this image of the Southwest” (Kim 131). The border itself was arbitrarily constructed, creating the differences it now enforces,

but it nonetheless serves to tell a narrative whereby true American citizens are white, and all others are foreign – citizens of color are denied participation in the American nation, and are, as a result, viewed as alien and disposable, regardless of the process they went through to become a legitimate citizen. The border, in this way, functions as a way of imagining and projecting racial difference in the national hierarchy, protecting white Americans from the threat of “foreigners,” even as the state allows alien workers into the country to profit off them. The state’s enforcement of the border is as arbitrary as the border itself, flexing its authority only when its citizens feel threatened by foreigners.

Kim, then, presents the border as a means of enforcing segregation, a point taken even further by Mike Davis and Alessandra Moctezuma in “Policing the Third Border.” Davis and Moctezuma argue that the border exists beyond its geographical location and is enforced throughout and beyond the country it delineates. The first border is the one on a map, the physical location that marks where one country’s territory gives way to another’s, but it is enforced and given power by the second and third borders: “Whereas the second border nominally reinforces the international border, the third border polices daily intercourse between two citizen communities” (Davis and Moctezuma). The third border exerts authority within the boundaries marked by the first, geographical border, functioning “as a new form of racial segregation deep within the country” (Davis and Moctezuma). It separates desirable citizens from those deemed undesirable

because of their race, keeping citizens of color within the United States separate from white citizens. The third border subjects citizens of color to intense scrutiny and surveillance within their own country, constructing boundaries intended to protect white citizens while policing black and brown citizens. Grady, however, meets with a third border of another kind in Mexico, a border situated in Alejandra's body that forbids Grady from having a relationship with her – to transgress this cultural border would threaten the racial and cultural division between Grady and Mexico. The third border exists to maintain the racial hierarchy among its citizens, but within the country, rather than on an international level – it does not lead to international deportation, but to the development of ghettos, segregated neighborhoods, and prisons populated disproportionately by people of color.

Similarly, John Agnew also recognizes that borders are “widely diffused geographically” in their authority, policing difference within and beyond the territory marked by the border itself (10). The fact that “bordering” occurs throughout a country rather than merely at its territorial limits “not only makes the whole national territory into a border zone, but also potentially criminalizes the entire population” (10). All of a country's citizens are subject to border enforcement and its legal effects, not merely perpetual foreigners or those alienated from nationhood because of the color of their skin. Grady, however, does not see himself as subject to this enforcement, and instead only meets it well

within Mexico, far from the geographical border it shares with the United States. He believes he is protected from the “diffused” border because he safely crossed the Rio Grande, but he is reminded that he, too, is subject to its policing after he transgresses the cultural border situated in Alejandra’s body.

Agnew also argues that the authority of the border depends on its ability to define national identity, not just its authority in defining who may or may not cross a particular boundary. Indeed, borders define how citizens think about other countries, as Kim points out in *Americans defining themselves against foreigners*, as well as how citizens understand their own nation. The borders of a state also “override more locally-based distinctions,” defining difference as entirely national as opposed to regional (7). Differences, he argues, exist solely across a border, not within them: citizens on one side of a national border (no matter how geographically separate or how culturally separate due to skin color, religion, or other factors) inherently share an identity, a culture, a history, none of which can be shared by someone on the other side of that same border. Local difference cannot exist when all difference is marked by the border of the state. Grady shares this view, believing that the antiquated, agrarian way of life he values not only cannot exist within the United States (since it no longer exists in San Angelo, Texas), but that it must exist across Mexico (since Mexico must be the opposite of the United States because the two nations are divided by a border). This sets up a contradiction in understanding the United States as a nation – its third border

polices local and personal difference, but the geographical border marking its state's authority denies the third border a role by marking all difference as absolutely national. When thinking about other countries, American citizens understand themselves as united; when actually within that nation, though, the state delineates and polices differences among its citizens, enforcing a racial hierarchy that goes against its national narrative of sameness.

Harkening back to Anzaldúa's idea of the *mestiza* consciousness as a way of navigating and understanding the connections that exist within and across the borderlands, Robert Alvarez, Jr. points us to the metaphor of "bridging" as a way of highlighting similarities that connect people across borders (539). Alvarez writes that "our current scholarly emphasis on division, boundary and barrier continues to characterize the people and place of the border" (541). However, border theory and writing must move past this – national narratives may depend on viewing the border this way, but understanding the actual role of the border in people's lives necessitates finding bridges, seeking out connections across the border. Though the border does indeed have power, it does not have absolute authority, and theorists cannot continue to conceptualize it as a marker of total difference. Connections must be sought out and explored in order to understand its real-world as well as its theoretical significance.

José Saldivar, too, argues in favor of finding connections across borders: "By examining the contact zones of the U.S.-Mexico border, the spaces where the



nation either ends or begins, we can begin to problematize the notion that the nation is ‘naturally’ there” (14). The border is arbitrary, not inherently meaningful, and looking at the connections that exist across the U.S.-Mexico border reinforces that it was constructed, as were the differences it now enforces. Indeed, these differences may exist in a national narrative, but looking at the borderlands, the areas directly north and south of the border, serves as a reminder that the border’s authority is limited. The borderlands are policed and subjected to intense surveillance because “our southern border is not simply Anglocentric on one side and Mexican on the other” (8) – regional connections thrive, regardless of the political and national border that purports to segregate them and rid the borderlands of their international cultural bridge.

In short, then, John Grady Cole’s understanding of the world around him depends on a cultural difference marked by the U.S.-Mexico border, crossing which will, in his fantasy, allow him to finally find a country that shares his values and dreams. The geographical border in his fantasy does not, however, carry the weight of the state apparatus - he wants to ride into a new nation without facing the legal burden of documented immigration. Indeed, in *All the Pretty Horses*, the Rio Grande does not function as the political border. Within Mexico, John Grady encounters a cultural border situated in Alejandra’s body, and he faces punishment for transgressing this border and the cultural norms and racial differences it enforces. He finds himself, unlike white imperialists before him,

punished for transgressing the cultural rules protecting women's bodies from invasion. John Grady, then, is situated between the imperialist power of his home nation-state – a power that protects him in his journey across the border – and that of the nation-state he enters and expects to subjugate; having rejected his country, he finds himself vulnerable to state control in Mexico, even as he benefits from his privileged position as an American.

This thesis will explore how these conceptions of the U.S.-Mexico border can and do intersect with and illuminate John Grady's misunderstanding of the border. First, I explore Grady's contradictory vision of the border as simultaneously maintaining absolute authority while still allowing him to cross it and enter an open frontier in Mexico. I argue that Grady does not understand the modern border and does not conceive of Mexico as a sovereign nation-state, and instead imagines it as a modern frontier in which he and Rawlins can be "a couple of pretty tough cowboys" (McCarthy 186), where they can fulfill the cowboy masculinity and agrarian life Grady believes is no longer possible in the United States. His cowboy vision necessitates leaving the United States for Mexico, which he expects to share his antiquated love of horses and ranch work because he believes that the border marks total national difference, even if it cannot police him. I then turn to Alejandra as a way of understanding and exploring the violent, imperial history that Grady perpetuates in Mexico, since white imperialism has always relied on a sense of entitlement to foreign lands and the women who live

in them. At the same time, though, Alejandra's body acts as a third, cultural border, transgressing which ultimately leads to Grady's punishment and eventual deportation. I then turn to Grady's adopted persona as a perpetual outsider, whether in the United States or in Mexico, as fundamental to his cowboy masculinity and another manifestation of his ignorance of nationhood and citizenship. Finally, I argue that Grady's complete misunderstanding of the border and ignorance of the political climate surrounding it is because his privilege protects him the continual cultural conflict that Anzaldúa argues is fundamental to actual cultural fluency.

#### Grady's Vision of the Border and of Mexico as a New Frontier

John Grady Cole's understanding of the world around him depends on a cultural difference marked by the U.S.-Mexico border, crossing which will, in his fantasy, allow him to finally find a country that shares his values and dreams. The geographical border in his fantasy does not, however, carry the weight of the state apparatus - he wants to ride into a new nation without facing the legal burden of documented immigration. Indeed, in *All the Pretty Horses*, the Rio Grande does not function as the political border - it simultaneously exists as a cultural division and as a frontier. It separates Grady from his desired community, from the culture that he imagines for himself in Mexico, but it also functions as a division between

civilization and the vast expanse of the frontier, a space in which Grady can and must enact his white colonial vision.

John Grady's search for an antiquated, hyper-masculine, agrarian way of life is founded on the existence of a distinct cultural border dividing the United States and Mexico. He envisions a sharp cultural difference between the nation he rejects and the nation he enters. The Rio Grande functions in his fantasy not as a political divider or as a site for state control, but as the specific location where he can leave behind an urban, industrial country and enter one that shares his love of horses and cattle and pre-technological agriculture. It is a specific point of difference and division, one that he can locate on a map and whose power exists solely in that space. After crossing the border, Grady can leave it behind without fearing punishment within Mexico; the border cannot follow him or exert what little authority it has over him once he has crossed it.

John Grady seeks out an agrarian space, one untouched by industrialism and urbanization. His father tells him, "Son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven" (McCarthy 17). Grady's vision is antiquated, a symptom of his romanticization of some imagined past. Not only does his vision no longer exist – if it ever existed – but it is no longer possible within the United States. His country has rejected Grady's values, choosing factories over farms, cars over horses. In a similar vein, Rawlins asks Grady, "How the hell do they expect a man to ride a horse in this

country?" to which Grady responds, "They dont" ( McCarthy 31). Rawlins and Grady have determined that the United States no longer shares their values, that the United States as a whole has stopped prizing agriculture and horses, rendering their cowboy masculinity antiquated and out of place. In order to actualize their vision, they must leave the United States for a space yet untouched by the corrupting influence of industrialism.

Grady values, above all else, horses and cattle. Indeed, he and the Mexican hacendado come to agree that "God had put horses on earth to work cattle and that other than cattle there was no wealth proper to man" (McCarthy 127). Grady firmly believes that horses and cattle are the real measures of wealth, and he envisions Mexico as a space where he can find a society that shares these values – where cattle ranches still exist and where horses are still useful. His mother may have sold the family cattle ranch, signaling the end of agrarian life in the United States, but Mexico still exists as a land of opportunity where Grady can pursue his cowboy fantasy. In Grady's vision, Mexico exists as all that the United States can no longer be. Grady can project onto Mexico the opportunities he believes he can no longer find in the United States, facets of life that have been lost to urbanization and industrialization. Just south of the cultural border, Mexico still exists as the yeoman's dream, full of horses to be broken in and ranches to find work on.

This difference – between the United States as a modern, urban country and Mexico as an agrarian fantasy – necessitates a border that has cultural authority. Even as he rejects the idea of a political state divide, a location where one state acquiesces authority to another, John Grady's vision depends on the existence of the border as a cultural divider. He wants to cross it without ramifications – perhaps more importantly, though, he wants to do so without a state monitoring his activity. Grady's fantasy undermines the actual function of the border a state apparatus, a marker of national difference that uses the power of the state to enforce it. The border encircles and protects the nation, which Anderson defines as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” The nation is a community made up of citizens who share a culture, a heritage, a history, and its sovereignty is enforced by the state, at the border and elsewhere. The state functions as a protector of the nation, guaranteeing its autonomy and self-rule.

In this way, the border also acts a site where national identity is not only enforced, but is also created and established. The border functions as a site of national anxiety and as a space for national identity; it simultaneously defines the nation-state and allows its authority to come into question. “Lurking behind bordering everywhere is the effect of that nationalism which has come along with the territorial nation-state: that being perpetually in question, national identity has to be constantly re-invented through the mobilization of national populations (or

significant segments thereof). Borders, because they are the edge of the national-state territory, provide the essential focus for this collective uncertainty” (Agnew 7). It is here, at the border, where national anxieties can manifest – anxieties over the security and safety of the border, over the border’s ability to protect the nation, for instance. These anxieties also allow the border to be re-constructed as the definitive marker of the national identity, the enforcer of national difference.

In the same way that the border distinguishes nations, it also erases differences within nations, requiring Grady’s border crossing in order to find what cannot exist in the entirety of the United States. In Grady’s conception of the world around him, state “borders are not, therefore, simply just another example of, albeit more clearly marked, boundaries. They are qualitatively different in their capacity to override more locally-based distinctions” (Agnew 7). Difference can only exist across a border, not within it. His thinking depends on enforced borders that mark difference. For Grady, borders “matter, then, both because they have real effects *and* because they trap thinking about and acting in the world in territorial terms” (Agnew 2). He changes his life by crossing the border, though not, ultimately, for the better. He may have been correct that life in Mexico would be different from life in San Angelo, but the way he envisioned his life in the country he chooses was (incorrectly) colored by his understanding of the border. John Grady sees the border as enforcing all cultural difference, as separating two

territories with vastly different cultures, values, and economies. Borders define Grady's world, constructing and regulating difference.

Gloria Anzaldúa also posits that the border is meant to represent a racial and cultural divide, whereby one side does differ from the other and they must, thus, be separated. However, she takes this argument in a different direction than Grady, pointing out that the border is artificial, not innate:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants (Anzaldúa 25).

The border does not actually define absolute national difference – indeed, it cannot, because it is a human construction. It is “unnatural,” unrepresentative of the actual lives and identities of the people inhabiting the borderlands, the regions that surround the artificial division. Those who live in the borderlands live in an in-between culture that goes against the concept of the border. Influenced by the culture that has been separated from them by a relatively recent political divide, they stand apart from people who live on the same side of the border as them, people who share their citizenship but not their experiences or values. For residents of the borderlands, the border does not mark national but regional difference, whereby they are isolated from people who share their heritage and



culture in a larger nation-state's effort to subsume and subjugate them. The borderlands, then, stand as a direct challenge to Grady's understanding of the border as the definitive marker of cultural difference – his delusion ignores the lived experiences and stories of the people most affected by white frontiersmen like himself.

Grady misses fundamental aspects of the border and its authority by seeing it as a marker of difference and as a division between two opposite nations. He misses what Alvarez calls the bridges between his home country and the one he enters – the commonalities that exist between the two cultures. Instead, in imagining the border as a marker of complete, national difference, he misses not only potential opportunities to find agrarian work within the United States, as well as the possibility that Mexico, too, will be undergoing the same economic shifts that rendered ranch work obsolete to Grady in Texas.

Furthermore, Grady's conception of the border also constructs the United States and Mexico as opposites. There is no room for nuance in John Grady's fantasy – local difference and international similarity cannot exist in a world defined by borders. San Angelo, Texas stands in for the entirety of the United States. John Grady's understanding of America seems to be based entirely on his experiences in his home town. His mother has sold off the family ranch outside San Antonio after the changing economy of the region had long since rendered family-owned farms unprofitable. In Grady's eyes, the closure of his family ranch

meant the end of a way of life in the United States as a whole; he would no longer find anywhere in his home country the blissful agricultural life he had envisioned for himself on the ranch, and he thus has to leave the United States in order to pursue this. Indeed, the ranch had been on a steady decline for years by the time it closed: “This place had barely paid expenses for twenty years. There hasn't been a white person worked here since before the war” (McCarthy 15). It could not afford nor – perhaps more importantly, in Grady's eyes – attract white workers, reflecting larger changes in the United States as a whole. As a young man who values cattle and horses above seemingly all else, Grady loses hope with the failure of the ranch, seeing America as an increasingly urban country that can no longer satisfy his needs nor share his values.

Mae Ngai offers another, divergent understanding of the border and its effects on those inhabiting the borderlands: “a nonjuridical concept of membership suggests the production of collectivities that are not national but transnational, sited in borderlands or in diaspora. The liabilities of illegal alienage and alien citizenship may thus be at least partially offset through individual and collective agency, within and across nation-state boundaries” (Ngai 3). She posits that a connection can exist not only within but across borders, and that connections such as these can minimize the alienation of crossing a border. Grady sees himself as part of this connection – he benefits from a connection to the culture he envisions in Mexico, already part of the community he seeks to enter.

Even prior to crossing, Grady is part of a Mexican collective because of his adherence to cowboy values, which he believes Mexicans share with him. Their participation in a lifestyle and set of values rendered increasingly outdated and irrelevant by urbanization in the United States gives them a collective identity, one that defies the border. Indeed, the border acts as a barrier between Grady and people like him – it separates him from his true community and nation.

Simultaneously, however, this collective identity does not render the border obsolete or unwanted. He is the exception to the border, the sole citizen of the United States who does not share with it a national love of cities and desire to give up ranches. His individual difference mandates a border crossing, which would otherwise be impermissible – because he is the exception to his belief that the border enforces cultural difference. Since local differences cannot exist in a world view that is defined by international borders, outliers and outsiders other than Grady cannot exist. He is the only man who does not belong in his country of origin, and so he is the only man who may cross the border and seek out a likeminded community.

Although the border defines the end of a territory, it does not define the end of a state's authority. Grady carries the power of the American state with him when he crosses into Mexico. His body becomes the locus of state authority, protecting him from the Mexican state for most of his journey through the country. As Agnew argues, this is typical in the modern world: "...these days

border controls extend well beyond borders per se into workplaces and neighborhoods in the interior of the state. This not only makes the whole national territory into a border zone, but also potentially criminalizes the entire population in the face of enforcement of identity checks and so on” (Agnew 7). All of Mexico is transformed into a “border zone” as Grady carries the power of not only the border but also its enforcement with him as he moves south.

The desired lack of a state apparatus allows John Grady to project his fantasies onto Mexico. He rejects the idea of Mexico as a nation-state, denying it the sovereignty of either its own government or its own culture. The border functions as a definitive manifestation, as proof, of a state’s authority and its ability to control its affairs. Mexico cannot have a border in the modern sense because that would demonstrate that it has not only its nationhood, but also a state apparatus that can and must protect its nation’s autonomy. The border is one site where the Mexican state can act to protect its own interests, demonstrating both its ability and its right to do so. This directly contradicts Grady’s fantasy of Mexico as an expanse where he can enact his own will and exert his own authority. If Mexico were to have a political border, this would necessitate both a state to protect the border and a nation for the border to enforce – and Mexico can have none of the above if it is to be Grady’s playground.

For John Grady, Mexico exists as an open, barrier-less expanse into which he can ride. By refusing to grant his dream land autonomy or any tangible self, he

can, without repercussion, imagine there a culture that shares his own, personal values. His fantasy renders Mexico powerless and deprives its border of any international authority, or even any power over its own contents. In this way, then, Grady imagines the U.S.-Mexico divide less as a modern border than as a frontier – a division which can be overcome and, in turn, subjugated and incorporated. Mexico exists as a frontier for Grady to ride into and colonize, a vast expanse in which he can finally actualize his cowboy fantasy.

Much of Grady's understanding of the border coincides with the American myth of the frontier – a myth told by and for white American men like himself, a myth that emerged more than a century before Grady's border crossing. As Richard Slotkin argues, "The Myth of the Frontier is our [America's] oldest and most characteristic myth," according to which

the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, or democratic polity, an over-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and "progressive" civilization... [The] Myth was called on to account for our rapid economic growth, our emergence as a powerful nation-state, and our distinctively American approach to the socially and culturally disruptive processes of Americanization (11).

This American myth demanded the construction and transgression of a frontier by Americans, an area that lay simultaneously within and just outside of American territory. Rightfully American but not yet conquered, the frontier had to be populated by Americans so they could claim what belonged to their country and themselves. Once staked out by American citizens, the frontier could be incorporated into the United States, bringing with its incorporation various benefits considered necessary to American progress.

In Grady's frontier fantasy, the Rio Grande represents not an insurmountable barrier but a natural marker that must be crossed in order to further the national progression of history. Grady must cross the river and enter the uncharted land of Mexico in order to achieve his antiquated vision – his idea of progress is reactionary, a return to a mythic past, attainable only by entering and expanding the mythic frontier. He shifts the traditional frontier from the West to the South, expecting to find yet another region populated by people unequipped to resist American advances. He expects to easily conquer the people he finds south of the border, to quickly and without resistance establish the natural return to a cowboy life.

This imagining of Mexico as a frontier that Grady must enter is reinforced by how casually Grady and Rawlins cross the border:

They crossed the river under a white quartermoon naked and pale and thin atop their horses... They rode up out of the river among the willows and

rode singlefile upstream through the shallows onto a long gravel beach where they took off their hats and turned and looked back at the country they'd left. No one spoke. Then suddenly they put their horses to a gallop up the beach and turned and came back, fanning with their hats and laughing and pulling up and patting the horses on the shoulder. (McCarthy 45)

Grady's fantasy is supported, not undermined, by his crossing of the river, which is never explicitly called the border or the Rio Grande. In this passage, Grady is not entering another state, but merely crossing one of many rivers; he is entering a vast and open frontier, not subjecting himself to policing and scrutiny by the Mexican government. His crossing is not dramatic because he does not believe his crossing is momentous, and so it is presented as merely bringing his horse across the river rather than as illegally crossing another nation-state's border without documentation.

The frontier fantasy renders Mexico an object rather than a subject – it has no power, no culture, no state, and it exists solely for John Grady to explore in his efforts to actualize his outdated masculinity. Before leaving Texas and having to confront the reality of the country they are preparing to enter, John Grady and Rawlins find a map of the border, beyond which Mexico is blank and, seemingly, uncharted: “There were roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map as far south as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white” (McCarthy

34). The two boys understand Mexico about as well as this map does, viewing it as a vast expanse of nothingness, as a cultureless and stateless terrain which they can explore until they either find or construct the culture that reflects their values. John Grady, even before crossing into Mexico, begins to confront the reality of his imagined country – when Rawlins asks, “You reckon it aint never been mapped?” he replies, “There’s maps. That just aint one of em” (McCarthy 34). He understands that, logically, there are “roads and rivers and towns” on the Mexican side of the border, but he does not yet see the country as full of people with lives and values beyond his own. Mexico is still an empty reflection of John Grady. Indeed, Rawlins eventually responds with a final comment on the map, stating, “There aint shit down there” (McCarthy 34), demonstrating that neither of them yet sees Mexico as an entity beyond their imaginations.

Even at the same time that Grady does not see the border as a manifestation of a state apparatus or the authority of the nation-state, he also conceives the border as a cultural division that can be enforced. The border is not enforced by a state apparatus, but it does enforce cultural difference. It functions as the divide between urban American culture and the agricultural culture John Grady imagines in Mexico, between the country where John Grady will never fit in and the frontier where John Grady assumes he will excel. Even when Grady attempts to deny the border its political power, his understanding of national difference depends on the authority of the border – his conception of the world



around him necessitates a border that divides, despite his determination to ignore the source of its authority, the state.

Indeed, the U.S.-Mexico border must maintain its authority when it does not deal with John Grady in order for his fantasy to be realized. He and Rawlins must be the sole exceptions to the governmental enforcement of the border. Mexico must be a frontier for Grady and Rawlins alone – though especially for Grady – or else it would not have the culture he envisions. No other Americans may be allowed access to the Mexican frontier – either (or perhaps both) the United States and the Mexican state must forbid border crossing to other people seeking to leave their home country in order to actualize their fantasies.

Furthermore, according to Slotkin, violence and conflict are necessary components of the Myth of the Frontier, which Grady quickly discovers to be true despite his peaceful expectations. Grady cannot cross into Mexico without meeting resistance, and he cannot exert his American authority without relying on violence and conflict. He must, in keeping with the frontier tradition, use violence to subdue the people he meets and to maintain his position of power after leaving behind his country.

Well before Grady crosses into Mexico, he refers multiple times to the Comanche missing from the southwestern American landscape – and especially to their war trails and the violence he associates with them. Early in the novel, he looks to the South and he envisions the “nation and ghost of nation passing in a

soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives” (McCarthy 5). He sees the Comanche as a nation that has been lost, whose presence is missing. Something, according to Grady, has been lost – something violent, something bloody, but also something fundamentally human and respectable in its violence – with the loss of the Comanche.

In turn, Grady imagines the southward path of the Comanche as they left Texas: “the warriors would ride on in that darkness they’d become, rattling past with their stone-age tools of war in default of substance and singing softly in blood and longing south across the plains to Mexico” (McCarthy 6). Again, as Grady imagines the Comanche, he imagines a lost, violent way of life, a respectable nation of the past. Here, however, they have left a trail behind them that Grady can follow to find a modern incarnation of his values. He can, like the Comanche before him, ride south to find a space where his anachronistic and increasingly outdated values have a place. When he stands before their old trails, however, he stands “like a man come to the end of something” (McCarthy 5): their path still stands, and Grady can follow it south, but the Comanches’ culture and lives have ended because of the success of Grady’s predecessors. They are no longer a part of the Texan landscape, but Grady can follow both the Comanche and the cowboys who chased them out of Texas in their southward path – he can,

too, chase after the old cowboy tradition by following the old war trails left by imperialists and the people they attempted to subjugate.

In this vision, the Comanche have disappeared from the Texan landscape because of the success of the frontier mission – they have been conquered and forced to evacuate because of the white American men who preceded Grady. White American men engaged in the “savage war” described by Slotkin – they exerted civilization over wilderness and “savagery,” white dominance over indigenous nations (12). Their imperial mission across the frontier resulted in the displacement – if not the extinction – of native communities. These men, then, were responsible for the displacement of the Comanche from Grady’s landscape; the Comanche are missing because Grady’s literary and historical predecessors were successful and won the “savage war.” In keeping with the tradition of the frontier mission and myth, Grady must find a new frontier in which to carry out this violence – and to do so he must turn south and follow the trails of the Comanche.

### Cowboy Masculinity

John Grady hopes to fulfill a cowboy masculinity once in Mexico – there, in the frontier, he can finally engage in a tradition of manhood rendered outdated by industrialization and urbanization. The cultural and racial border extends to enforcing economic difference, too, so that he can cross it and enter a region

untouched by industrial capitalism and its cultural effects. Grady hopes to cross into an idealized vision of the United States' past, a vision formed by the tropes of cowboy novels and spaghetti Westerns, where he can ride his horse, work on a ranch, and fall in love with a beautiful woman to prove his masculinity.

Integral to Grady's performance of his cowboy masculinity is his heavy emphasis on the value of horses, which seem to be the ultimate source of value and meaning in a man's life. Repeatedly, he makes clear that his life must include horses – and that Mexico is so desirable to him because, as the United States' cultural opposite, it will allow him to depend on horses. Indeed, he and the Mexican hacendado come to agree that “God had put horses on earth to work cattle and that other than cattle there was no wealth proper to man” (McCarthy 127). Grady firmly believes that horses and cattle are the real measures of wealth, and he envisions Mexico as a space where he can find a society that shares these values.

While still in the United States, he and Rawlins lament that their native country no longer has space for horses. When Rawlins asks, “How the hell do they expect a man to ride a horse in this country?” Grady tersely responds, “They dont” (McCarthy 31). Cars have overtaken the roads, replacing horses as a much more efficient mode of travel. Indeed, travel by horseback has not only become outdated, since cars have become faster and much more accessible, but also dangerous – horses must share the roadways with cars, who are much faster and

sturdier. There is no longer a space in which horses are practical or valuable in the United States beyond Grady's idealism.

Despite the practicality of cars, Grady and Rawlins take their horses on their journey into Mexico, heading south from Grady's ranch by horseback. A few days into their southward crawl, they stop at a store, where the boys tell the clerk that they rode their horses down from San Angelo, to which she responds, "Well I'll declare" (McCarthy 36). She did not expect Grady and Rawlins to have traveled so far on horses, reinforcing the boys' belief that their values are not shared by their country. The store clerk, much like the rest of the country as the boys understand it, does not share the boys' desire to travel so far on horseback. Their journey takes her aback in a country that prefers cars to horses, rendering Grady's preferred mode of travel so outdated that it surprises other Americans.

Once in Mexico, Grady easily finds employment on a cattle ranch, completing the kind of work that he was fated to do, but which was no longer available or possible in the urban and industrial United States. On the hacienda, Grady originally works alongside the other ranch hands, but he quickly finds work more suited to his innate connection to horses. He demonstrates that he can break in freshly captured wild horses, who have "never seen a man afoot" and "aint had no Mexican to try and break em" (McCarthy 99). Thereafter, he spends his days alone, physically distanced from the other men, among the freshly trained horses who still struggle to ignore their wild impulses. Finally, on the hacienda,

Grady finds work that is worthy of him, and work that can fulfill his cowboy fantasy.

Even more so than the hacienda, Grady's dreams offer him ultimate closeness and connection to horses. He continually dreams of wild horses, untrained and untouched by men – other than him, of course. In these dreams, Grady naturally belongs among the horses and runs with them as though he was one: his “thoughts were of horses and of the open country and of horses. Horses still wild on the mesa who'd never seen a man afoot and who knew nothing of him or his life yet in whose souls he would come to reside forever” (McCarthy 117-18). His dreams show what he longs for above all else – freedom from men and their inventions, and unity with the horses he so values. In these dreams, he can finally leave behind the constraints of man-made society to return to what is right and good, to return to horses.

Anzaldúa presents another understanding of the significance of horses, both culturally and within *All the Pretty Horses*. Although horses retain a cultural importance, their value is demeaned and devalued by, not in spite of, men like Grady. For Anzaldúa, horses' importance is much more innate – they are valued beyond their connection to an antiquated, romanticized way of life. She writes about the *mestiza*, the mixed-race woman othered and degraded by white America and by Mexico alike, “She could not trust her instincts, her ‘horses,’ because they stood for her core self, her dark Indian self” (Anzaldúa 65). The *mestiza's*

“horses” are innate, inherent in her mixed and denigrated heritage. She is told to push them down and ignore them because they are associated with the part of her ancestry that she is told to erase. The *mestiza* is tied to horses through her native ancestry, and they are as much a part of herself as the genes and influence of her native predecessors. She cannot reject them, even if she has been taught not to trust them.

Grady is connected to horses not because of their connection to his inner self or his instincts, but because of their connection to an imperial, cowboy past. The cowboy masculinity that he constructs and pursues depends on horses because of their significance in the history of American conquest. His value of horses stems from the United States’ imperial past, glamorized and romanticized by the tradition of cowboys out on the frontier. His horses differ from Anzaldúa’s horses, from a *mestiza*’s horses because of their very different positions in this imperial past. Whereas Grady has inherited the tradition of the colonizers, of the men who rode their horses into the West to conquer the native populations and spread the power and influence of the United States, Anzaldúa has inherited that and the history of the colonized. She has both the history of the colonizer and the colonized, those who enacted imperialism and those who have to live under its ill effects. Her horses, however, are connected to her native ancestry, to a resilient Indian self that has endured despite repression and white oppression.

Anzaldúa's poem "horse (*para la gente de Hargill, Texas*)" also gets at this difference between Grady's value of horses and the *mestiza*'s. The poem begins with a vision of a horse running free and wild, reminiscent of Grady's dreams – but whereas Grady dreams that his contact with these mythic horses will grant him freedom, the meeting of white boys and horse in the poem results in extreme violence. The white boys, the sixteen-year-old *gringos* of the poem torture a Mexican man's horse, leaving it alive rather than killing it. Their willingness and desire to torture the horse is seen as an inherent trait, whether by the sheriff, who says that the boys were merely being juvenile and thus should not be punished, and by the Mexican townspeople: "But it's the mind that kills/the animal that *mexicanos* murmur/killing it would have been a mercy" (Anzaldúa 128).

The violence enacted by these boys can only be understood in terms of the history of white masculinity and its close connection to imperial, racist violence that Anzaldúa explores in the rest of *Borderlands*. In the history of the United States and its frontier tradition, white men have used violence as a means of maintaining power over indigenous peoples, enacting it in order to expand both their individual power over natives and the authority of their growing state. This history of violence by white men over native people – especially over women, as well as over their animals and property, as with the horse in Anzaldúa's poem – informs the cowboy masculinity that Grady seeks to emulate. Cowboys of



American myth relied on violence, and the masculinity associated with them depends on violent action as a mode of ensuring male dominance, especially white dominance over indigenous and *mestizo* men. Grady's vision is built on this tradition of violence as a means of enforcing white masculinity, and his value of horses comes from the same frontier tradition that rendered horses useful as tools in enacting violence against native peoples and *mexicanos*, whether as a means of transportation across the frontier – or as stand-ins, convenient replacements against which white cowboys can enact the violence they intend for *mexicanos*.

When Grady and Rawlins finally face the Mexican state and punishment for crossing the border, Rawlins names their shared cowboy fantasy, saying “We think we’re a couple of pretty tough cowboys” (McCarthy 186). When Grady concedes, saying “Yeah. Maybe,” Rawlins points out the delusion in their fantasy: “They could kill us any time” (McCarthy 186). This is the first and only time that Grady explicitly and openly acknowledges that he journeyed across Mexico because he wanted to be a cowboy. Grady was driven by a desire for an American agrarian masculinity, one that has been rendered antiquated and irrelevant by urbanization in the United States. He has been chasing a fantasy across Mexico, but Rawlins forces him to acknowledge that he has not achieved his goal. Grady only thinks he’s a “pretty tough” cowboy – he is not actually one, and instead he remains subject to the Mexican state. He cannot completely escape into his

fantasy or make it a reality, and instead Grady faces punishment – and possibly death – for crossing into Mexico in pursuit of this antiquated masculinity.

### Alejandra and Violent Imperialism

Grady confronts and enacts violence against Mexican citizens and officials when he faces punishment and eventual deportation. He must face the fact that the Mexican state not only exists, but that it wields power over him and his actions, and that it has the authority and right to punish him for transgressing its borders. Ultimately, however, his punishment is not brought about by his crossing the political or geographical border, but of a cultural border. Grady is punished for pursuing a relationship with Alejandra, the daughter of the *hacendado*, forbidden to him by her family and her culture.

Alejandra's body alone is forbidden to Grady in Mexico; he may work and live there, he may explore the landscape as though it were a frontier, but he cannot pursue a relationship with her. He may take whatever else he wants from Mexico, but he must assimilate and conform to Mexican expectations of female respectability and sexuality. Since the nation has forbidden premarital sex for a young, upper-class, Mexican woman or girl, Grady must follow this one law imposed on him. His failure to assimilate to this particular cultural value and to adhere to this rule are what cause his punishment and deportation. Grady's transgression of a cultural border imposed on Alejandra's body necessitates his

legal punishment. Since he carries his American view of sexuality with him across the border and refuses to discard it, he is thrown into prison. As Alejandra's great-aunt tells Grady, "But you must understand. This is another country. Here another woman's reputation is all she has" (McCarthy 136). She has made explicit the difference between the United States and Mexico, as well as the enforcement of the female body in Mexico – Grady must end his relationship with Alejandra, not only for his own protection and survival in Mexico, but also to protect her.

In this way, Alejandra's body, not the Mexican landscape or its other inhabitants, functions as the site of the nation-state. She – and specifically her sexuality – must be protected from Grady, an American interloper. Alejandra actively chooses to have a relationship with Grady, despite her family's interdiction – after Grady is told to drop the relationship, she comes to him in the middle of the night to continue it. Within the novel, though, her choice seems meaningless. Of course she will choose Grady, the ideal cowboy, the tragic hero, over the outdated respectability that Grady rejects. Alejandra must choose to give her body to Grady, to allow him to colonize her body as well as the rest of Mexico's landscape. If Mexico is a frontier for his exploration, so is her body, and she must give it willingly.

Grady, in turn, sees himself as deserving Alejandra's body. He carries with him not only his American view of sexuality, but also his imperialist view of

Mexico, which allows him to see Alejandra's body as something which is owed to him, not something that he should protect or honor. After her great-aunt tells Grady that he must respect Mexico's view of Alejandra's body and give up their relationship, he refuses. He may not actively pursue Alejandra, but he allows their relationship to continue. Grady sees having a life and a job as well as sexual pleasure in Mexico as his right. He does not need to choose between acting out his cowboy fantasy and having sex with a wealthy, beautiful Mexican woman. The two are inherent parts of his quest in Mexico to realize his vision. Working on a cattle ranch, breaking and training young horses, and having a sexual relationship with a beautiful woman are all part of his fantasy as well as the cowboy masculinity that encircles it, and as such are all part of his right in Mexico.

As far as the novel is concerned, Grady never worries that he is undeserving of Alejandra, the beautiful daughter of his wealthy employer. Grady does not consider himself a mere ranch hand, a laborer who works for very little money and who has few worldly possessions to his name. He does not worry that he and Alejandra belong to different social classes on the hacienda, let alone that this difference will keep them apart. Rawlins points out their very different social and economic ranking, arguing that, while Grady's last girlfriend in the United States may have left him for a guy with a car, Alejandra "probably dates guys got their own airplanes" (McCarthy 118). Grady acknowledges that Rawlins is

“probably right” (119), but he is unfazed by the argument – their different socioeconomic statuses do not separate them.

Grady is, instead, the exception. The same cowboy who got to cross the U.S.-Mexico border with impunity now gets to have a relationship with a woman who would be barred to any other ranch hand on the hacienda. His worth is finally recognized in their relationship – he deserves to be with a woman who is beautiful, wealthy, and intelligent. She is his right as an exceptional American in Mexico. The Mexican landscape belongs to him because he will use it to its full potential, to actualize his values and return to an antiquated, agrarian way of life. In the same way, Alejandra’s body is his right. He has demonstrated his merit – having crossed the border, ridden his horse down to the hacienda, and broken in a large group of wild horses – and now he may reap his reward by having a relationship with Alejandra.

Alejandra in this way fits into a larger imperialist tradition, whereby colonized women’s bodies are claimed by their colonizers. Her body is an imperialist site, a space for conflict between the colonized nation and her colonizer, between Mexico and the United States, between Grady and her father. Her body is not her own. Alejandra stands in for the Mexican landscape as opposing forces struggle over her. Significantly, she chooses Grady, her colonizer. She ignores her family’s interdictions to seek out Grady.

She can, then, be understood within Anzaldúa's conception of the trinity of women who define traditional Mexican womanhood: "*Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two" (52). Alejandra is not a mother, nor is she virginal – indeed, her explicit sexuality defines her tie to Grady. If Grady is a modern cowboy, another incarnation of the white colonizer, then Alejandra is a *Malinche* figure, a traitor. After her great-aunt forbids her from pursuing Grady, Alejandra chooses him over her family, over her life and her country. She chooses an American cowboy over Mexico, rejecting her culture for her imperial lover.

The *hacendado's* refusal to allow Alejandra and Grady to continue their relationship stems from an understanding of the historical threat that white men like Grady have posed his country and his culture. Indeed, as a Mexican who claims Spanish descent, he is familiar with the trajectory, since Spanish *conquistadors* and settlers had sexual relationships with indigenous women in order to establish their authority and right to settle in an area. The same story unfolded in the western United States, as Grady's cowboy predecessors created families in "unsettled" regions where white Americans did not yet hold power. In constructing families and white lineages on the frontier, imperial men establish their right to exist and live in unsettled areas – and where they live, they must

rule, because their whiteness inheres authority. Grady's relationship with Alejandra, particularly given the sexual nature of their relationship and thus the risk for pregnancy and marriage, grants him a stake in not only in the *hacendado's* family, but in his property and in his country. Alejandra provides Grady a way to further his claim to Mexico as his personal frontier, and her father sees the risks in granting Grady free rein with her. Their relationship must be stopped before it allows Grady to establish himself as a figure of authority and to culturally colonize the *hacienda*.

Alejandra's body figures as a sort of third border, a site of cultural segregation. Jinah Kim (in summarizing Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis) states that "the third border's main function is not to reinforce the international (first) border but to police the movements of immigrants and racial citizens" (125). The third border is the state's method of maintaining national difference within the country, separating desirable citizens from undesirable people, especially immigrants and citizens of color. In *All the Pretty Horses*, the third border serves to separate Alejandra and Grady in order to maintain the cultural border between the United States and Mexico. Their bodies be separated sexually, divided in order to maintain the power of their respective nations. Allowing Grady to use her body would constitute a loss of sovereignty for Mexico, granting Grady control over not merely her body but all of Mexico. When Grady crosses this third border, this cultural border, he must be punished. Her body exists as a

site of cultural division – and of political and legal enforcement. Grady is not ostracized or socially punished for his transgression, but is put in prison and forced to leave Mexico. Her body is the site of border enforcement, as determined by the men of her country and of her family: “Men make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (Anzaldúa 38). Her father has decided that their relationship is dangerous, and she must submit to his will – as must Grady.

Grady expects Mexico to be a frontier, a vast space that shares his own values. In Grady’s vision, Mexico is a frontier where he can enact his imagined cowboy masculinity in an antiquated, anachronistic space. It must be empty except of cattle and horses, and the few Mexicans he meet must share his values – they must also prize cows and horses, they must value agriculture about industries, as well as any other values tied to Grady’s cowboy fantasy. It comes as a shock to Grady that someone in Mexico would object to his sexual relationship with Alejandra, since this is part of his masculine values. For the first time, Grady has been denied something integral to his ability to enact his cowboy masculinity. He does not respect the limit placed upon him and nevertheless tries to enact all aspects of his vision, and this transgression causes his punishment.

The hacendado has Grady and Rawlins forcibly taken from the ranch once he learns that Grady is still seeing Alejandra. Having previously protected the two Americans from law enforcement officers seeking them as potential allies in Blevins’ crime spree, the hacendado turns them over willingly to the authorities.



The hacendado had been willing to overlook Grady's potentially criminal past, but his cultural violation required punishment by the law. Grady was not officially or explicitly punished for transgressing a cultural norm, and instead his violation was hidden under the charges that he had helped Blevins steal a horse and kill a man. Grady's relative privilege comes to an end when he is charged with breaking the law, and he is reduced to a mere criminal, not an American cowboy.

It is, then, well within Mexico that the border is enforced for Grady. He does not encounter border patrol officers, he is never reported for suspicious activity based solely on his skin color, and his employer never asks Grady to show his papers. The border nonetheless enforces itself well within the country, far from the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. In this way, the border enforces a cultural divide, not a political one. It does not mark the strict divergence between two states, the site where one state must cede authority to another. Instead, the border represents one nation ceding to another. The border is the site where two cultures meet and diverge, where national difference is made explicit by their confrontation.

This meeting is violent in *All the Pretty Horses*, as Grady enacts and faces violence in Mexico, and in *Borderlands*. Anzaldúa writes, "The U.S.-Mexico border *es una berida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (25). An inherent violence

exists where these two cultures meet and must interact. The meeting causes harm, and this violence is what allows – if not forces – the culture of the borderlands to emerge. On both sides of the border, this violent confrontation between two nations necessitates the construction of another culture, one which must find a means of surviving in the two cultures that surround and ignore it.

Grady's crossing reinforces the historical violence of the frontier and of the border, as he brings with him the violence of his cowboy masculinity into Mexico. In crossing a modern border, though, he also brings with him the violence of border enforcement. Though he sees himself as exempt from enforcement, he nonetheless carries its effects into Mexico. By ignoring the political nature of the U.S.-Mexico border, Grady necessitates its enforcement – and carries with him the violent tradition of the border. In attempting to render Mexico a frontier, and in ignoring the authority of not only its state but also its culture, Grady brings about the violent enforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border. His privilege initially protects him from this violence, insulating him from the reality of existing in the borderlands. His American citizenship and his whiteness allows him to cross unmolested, which in turn enables him to continue imagining Mexico as his own personal frontier even after he has crossed the border and has met Mexican citizens.

He arouses violent enforcement after crossing not merely the political border, but the cultural one – when he continues his relationship with Alejandra,

he knowingly crosses a significant cultural barrier meant to separate him from Mexico. Her great-aunt, Alfonsa, warns him that a relationship with Alejandra would be wrong, reminding him that it “isn’t a matter of right... It is a matter of who must say. In this matter I get to say. I am the one who gets to say” (McCarthy 137). He is the figure of absolute cultural authority that he has, thus far, imagined himself to be; the great aunt reminds him that he, too, is subject to the laws and the norms of Mexico, even as an American. Indeed, she tells him, “This is another country” (McCarthy 136). Alfonsa does not allow Grady to continue to imagine himself as a privileged figure within Mexico, capable of importing and projecting his own values onto an empty frontier. She presents him with a more realistic understanding Mexico – that this is a fully developed country, one with values that differ from his and from the United States’, and one with the authority to defend itself. The great aunt, here, begins the enforcement, even before it becomes violent, as she exerts her own authority over Grady.

Grady’s first experience of violence carried out against him happens shortly before the rangers arrive to carry him and Rawlins away, and it is perpetuated by Alejandra, his lover. One night, as he and Alejandra have sex, she bites into his palm and causes him to bleed: “Drawing blood with her teeth where he held the heel of his hand against her mouth that she not cry out” (McCarthy 142). In silencing her during sex, he incites a violent reaction – she would not be controlled by him, and she resists his silencing palm. Here, again, Mexico begins

to resist Grady's colonial power over his new-found southern frontier, and it does so through women's resistance. Much as Alejandra's great aunt attempted to define for Grady the cultural difference that he must respect if he hopes to remain in Mexico, Alejandra, too, establishes resistance to Grady's self-claimed absolute authority. She will not be silenced, even if she allows Grady to cross the border situated in her body.

Earlier that same day, Grady sees five rangers carrying guns and riding horseback, on some search mission on the *hacienda*. Their empty threat is initially, weakly fulfilled by Alejandra's bite, but soon they can enact a much larger, state-led resistance to Grady's presence. Within a few days, the *hacendado* calls them back to his ranch to carry Grady and Rawlins away, and "two men entered his [Grady's] cubicle with pistols drawn and put a flashlight in his eyes and ordered him to get up" (McCarthy 149). These Mexican officers are associated closely with their visible guns, which grant them authority over Grady – his colonial power is met with firearms and organized resistance.

Grady is finally stripped of his self-claimed power after he refuses to return to the acceptable side of the border dividing him and Alejandra. When Grady makes clear that he will pay no heed to the great aunt's warning and will ignore this cultural border, just as he ignored the political border, his authority is taken from him and he is subjected to Mexico's legal apparatus. Grady carried out his frontier vision too boldly in continuing to sleep with Alejandra despite threats

from her great-aunt and father, and as a result he is punished and met with violence – and he continues to carry it out, too, as he struggles to maintain his American authority over Mexico.

Grady is finally confronted by representatives of the Mexican state after he transgressed a cultural border and over-exerted his own authority over citizens of the Mexican nation. After this, he faces and enacts violence continually, as the captain has Blevins beaten and executed and then sends Grady and Rawlins to a prison, where they must fight and kill for their lives. Within the walls of the prison, Grady fights to gain respect and to survive – and, eventually, he kills a hired assassin, choosing to kill a man rather than to die. Even within the prison, however, Grady does not face punishment for his violence. He is physically injured and teeters on the edge of death from his wounds, but he heals quickly and is immediately after allowed to leave the prison.

Within the prison and after he has left, Grady does not face punishment for his use of force, and instead his violence is normalized as a mode of survival rather than control. In the narrative of the novel, Grady's violent actions are natural, not his efforts to exert his authority over a colonized people. He must survive, and in order to survive, he must fight, even if it means killing another man – his life remains valuable, and he must protect it. His survival remains, throughout the rest of the novel, more important than his punishment, allowing

him to continue to enact violence – kidnapping the captain, forcibly retrieving his horse and Blevins’ – without legal consequence.

John Grady may be subjected to violence as punishment within the prison, but he nonetheless is capable of using it in turn to regain his authority and his control. Instead of leaving Mexico immediately after being released from prison, as Rawlins does, Grady heads back to the hacienda and then returns to the captain’s office. He forcibly kidnaps the captain, taking him hostage in order to negotiate the release of his horse. Grady makes a final stand in Mexico, exerting his authority over the country’s state apparatus, using the captain in order to regain what he values most, his horse. After regaining his horse and taking Blevin’s old horse, though, Grady does not give up his hostage – he instead takes the captain with him as he ventures north, heading toward the border.

On his journey back to the United States, Grady faces a dilemma in how to deal with the captain: he must either kill him, or he must release him, potentially giving the captain an opportunity to retaliate against Grady’s violent kidnapping. Before he makes his decision to either grant mercy or to enact a final instance of violence, his decision is made for him by the self-titled men of the country. Men on horseback find Grady and the captain, taking the latter with them after hearing Grady’s story, seemingly in order to retaliate on their own terms against the captain’s corruption. Grady relinquishes his authority over the captain, allowing the men of the country to use violence themselves in order to claim control for

themselves within their own country. He need not choose how best to deal with the captain, giving him over to the Mexican men and thus giving up his final opportunity to re-assert his own power over Mexico. He heads back to the United States without further conflict after giving up his last chance to enact his own violent power.

#### Grady as an Outsider

Grady's identity is simultaneously shaped by borders and beyond the boundaries of any one country. His understanding of the world relies on the existence of borders, yet he himself must transcend them. Throughout the novel, he sees himself as immune to the consequences of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, even as he faces them. By the end of *All the Pretty Horses*, though, he rejects altogether the significance of borders in his own life by rejecting both nationhood and citizenship, by rejecting the idea of belonging to a country or to a nation-state. After returning to the United States, John Grady confirms that it is "still good country," but in the same breath states, "But it aint my country... I dont know where it [my country] is. I dont know what happens to country" (McCarthy 299). His country is not the United States, nor is it Mexico – instead, he is, seemingly, stateless, nationless, country-less. He has rejected all the attributes of the border, separating himself from the people whose lives are regulated by it,

even after he has faced punishment for crossing it. Grady is without home and without nationality, even after being forced to return to his home country by his chosen country.

John Grady's rejection of nationality and nationhood is an integral part of his masculinity, even as it ultimately renders him vulnerable to Mexican law enforcement. He intentionally constructs himself as a perpetual outsider, purposefully living at the fringe of Mexican society and avoiding assimilation. After leaving an American city, he avoids cities in Mexico, aligning himself instead with the nomads and members of small towns in Mexico. Grady distances himself from spaces of community and shared identity, as well as sites of legal enforcement. Even at the hacienda, he separates himself from the other laborers, spending most of his time with the horses he is taming.

As an outsider, John Grady makes himself vulnerable – outside of his native country, outside of the bounds of legality, he is at the mercy of the enforcers of the border. To some (very limited) degree, he has aligned himself with the undocumented immigrant, rendering himself vulnerable to the power of the state: "Marginalized by their position in the lower strata of the workforce and even more so by their exclusion from the polity, illegal aliens might be understood as a caste, unambiguously situated outside the boundaries of formal membership and social legitimacy" (Ngai 2). In Mexico, Grady is excluded from the state, and he eventually forces himself into exclusion from the society. In



choosing not to assimilate to Mexican cultural values, Grady finds himself pushed out of Mexico, confined to its prison and then deported. He is punished for a social transgression, not a violation of the law, and this could happen to him because of his vulnerability as an outsider in Mexico.

Similarly, John Grady is vulnerable to his employer. He is not excluded from the workforce or kept to its lower levels of pay and respectability, and instead quickly rises to a prestigious role within the hacienda as his employer trusts him to break in young horses. Even in his relatively high position in this hierarchy of duties, however, Grady remains vulnerable to his employer. American employers who recruited undocumented immigrants as laborers in the middle of the twentieth century would call upon American border enforcement officials to conduct raids on their employees. Having gotten the work they wanted out of undocumented Latino immigrants at a low wage (if they had paid their laborers at all before the raid), they would have them deported (Ngai 144). Although Grady never ceases to be economically useful to his employer, he sleeps with the hacendado's daughter, transgressing a rule established by the hacendado's aunt and necessitated by their cultural norms. He becomes detrimental to his employer by corrupting his daughter, and he is punished. His punishment relies on Grady's vulnerability as an outsider – if Grady had had the legal right to work and live in Mexico, if he had the actual protection of the

American state behind him, his punishment no doubt would not have been so violent.

At the same time, however, John Grady can attempt to reject his national identity in part because of his own relative privilege. Even though he wants to deny that he is American, the fact that he is a white man from the United States guarantees him some safety and privilege in his journey into Mexico. He can construct himself as an outsider because he still has the protection of American citizenship. Grady, unlike undocumented immigrants to the United States, does not need to cling to what little protection his native state can provide him – he does not fear that he will be violently cast out of the country he enters and punished for crossing a border. He does not see himself as vulnerable to the Mexican state, as its subject, because he does not see Mexico as having a state. He has nothing to protect himself from when it comes to the Mexican state, understanding his body as the site of authority, not the government.

Grady cannot reject his American status, even as he rejects his home country. Instead, he participates in a larger history of white imperialism with the protection of the American state, a safety that allows him to explore Mexico as though it actually was open to him and him alone. According to Truett and Young, the border has served for years as a locus for the *reinforcement* of boundaries marking the body politic, whether expressed in national, racial, or gendered terms. From both the U.S. and Mexican perspectives, the border has

been a site where white men could renew their virility and articulate a ‘primitive masculinity’ that reinforced both national and racial boundaries” (11). Grady participates in this tradition of white imperialism, crossing the border in order to establish and act out his cowboy masculinity. He uses Mexico as a frontier space in which he can actualized the masculinity he envisions for himself. Grady engages in this tradition through his privilege as a white American man, rejecting his national identity and the concept of a border while still carrying across the border the protection offered by the American state. He can use the imagined freedom of the frontier he imagines in Mexico in order to actualize his quest for a cowboy lifestyle, protected from border enforcement because he is American. His heritage guarantees him some degree of power over Mexico and its citizens, even as he attempts to reject his national identity.

Although John Grady situates himself as a perpetual outsider, he does not construct himself as a foreigner or as an immigrant. He is neither Mexican nor American, and he belongs to no country in particular. Grady does not see himself as belonging to any nation, and so he cannot see himself as an immigrant. Part of this comes from the discrepancy between the American narrative of immigration and Grady’s constructed narrative of his own border crossing. In the national, American narrative, immigrants are the byproduct of hospitality and economic necessity – or, alternatively, have come to the United States by trespassing the bounds of and exploiting American hospitality, and as a result will undermine the

country's economy (Behdad 11). There is no such narrative when it comes Mexico – the nation does not emphasize its own hospitality, its own good will toward immigrants, in how it constructs itself. Indeed, Mexico does not have a history of accepting mass waves of American immigrants; Grady does not fall into a category of historical migrants in his quest for a culture that shares his values. Although there is a white imperial tradition in his adventure, there is not a larger historical trend of thousands of men like Grady crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in order to become cowboys and live on cattle ranches.

Furthermore, Grady's privilege as an American protects him from the negative stereotypes associated with undocumented immigrants, as well as Latino immigrants by and large, in the United States. Undocumented immigrants are presumed to be criminals, in part because they have broken one law in crossing the border (Ngai 149). This one illegal activity allows Americans to assume that undocumented immigrants will break any law – having broken one, they will break others. This perception of a sort of domino effect or slippery slope when it comes to undocumented immigrants spread to all Latino immigrants, documented or not (Ngai 149). Grady, however, as a white man crossing the border into Mexico, is protected from this association with criminality. Even as an outsider, he is protected from the negative associations with immigration; even as he rejects his American national identity, he aligns himself with the tradition of the American at broad, rather than an "immigrant." The novel distances Grady from

the morally and legally suspect status of immigrant in order to grant him moral liberty in his journey to the south.

Although Mexico does not share this with the United States, Grady projects this narrative of hospitality onto Mexico, basing his expectations off the narrative he is so familiar with in his native nation. He anticipates that Mexico will accept him with open arms, not reject him. Grady sees Mexico as owing him hospitality – as something that either he inherently deserves, or as something for which he does not need to prove his desert. He does not have to market how he will benefit the country or its citizens, he does not have to prove that he will abide by any laws or that he has the proper documentation. Instead, he continually is accepted into the homes and circles of Mexicans after crossing the border, sharing meals with groups of men and with families as he makes his way closer to the hacienda where he will eventually find work. His status as an American, again, guarantees him some sort of privilege in his interactions with Mexicans, preventing them from questioning his intrusion into their spaces and his use of their food. As an American, Grady deserves this hospitality, this warm welcome from Mexicans. He projects onto the nation the American narrative of hospitality, carrying it with him across the Rio Grande as he first is invited to share food with strangers, and later is invited into the home and workforce of the hacendado – and, eventually, into the arms of the hacendado's daughter, Alejandra.

John Grady believes that Mexico owes him use of its space and its resources not merely because he projects American values onto it, but because he does not respect its sovereignty as a nation-state. The divide between the United States and Mexico is not a border, in John Grady's understanding, but rather a frontier. It is not the site of state control, but is instead a marker of cultural and ethnic difference. The frontier allows him to cross into Mexico unmolested, and it allows him to see Mexico as a state of mind, not as a nation-state. There is no state apparatus to enforce the border as such, to maintain strict division and prevent John Grady from enacting his fantasy once he has crossed the Rio Grande. Instead, he has total freedom to pursue his vision without legal consequence.

This conception of Mexico as an empty frontier without a state to monitor or protect it – or even a nation to populate it – denies Mexico any autonomy. It is not sovereign, but instead is subject to his will. It owes him a place not because it is generous to foreigners, but because it cannot protect itself from Grady. Mexico does not have the authority to determine who gets to cross its borders, to decide for itself what is in its best interests. It neither has the apparatus to govern and protect itself nor the people to protect or govern, and thus it must be subject to Grady's decisions.

Furthermore, since Mexico is not a nation-state, Grady cannot immigrate to it – he can only explore it and journey across it. He does not need to go through

the process of immigration and instead can merely cross the Rio Grande into the vast expanse of Mexico. It exists as a space for him to enact and explore his vision of cowboy masculinity. Since Mexico is not a nation-state, Grady cannot be presented as an immigrant – to do so would emphasize Mexico’s sovereignty and autonomy, its ability and right to cast Grady out for breakings its laws. However, Grady does not see Mexico as capable of expelling or deporting him; it is a frontier, not a sovereign state, and it is subject to his will, not its own.

The novel never presents Grady as an immigrant, but it does use this conception of nationhood in describing “Mexicans” living in the United States. Again, they are never called “immigrants,” but they are denied any American national identity. To Grady, they are also perpetually outsiders, though not of their own choice – unlike Grady, Mexicans in Texas did not reject citizenship or nationhood, but instead have been denied it by other people. Grady always calls them Mexicans, never Mexican-Americans, let alone Americans. This is true even when he talks to a young man who has never crossed the border, who was born in the United States and speaks Spanish alone. He is denied a place within the American nation-state, forced into a position as an outsider. Whereas Grady can choose to be an outsider, this man cannot; Grady’s privilege allows him to choose where he does and does not belong, while this man is forced into a status as a perpetual foreigner, regardless of where he was born or how he identifies.

Indeed, this man's status as a Mexican despite having never set foot in Mexico comes in part from the American impulse to perpetually "other" the Mexican immigrant workforce upon which it depends. As Ngai argues,

Mexican labor was, similarly, constructed as an imported workforce... Casting Mexicans as foreign *distanced* them both from Euro-Americans culturally and from the Southwest as a spatial referent: it stripped Mexicans of the claim of belonging that they had had as natives, even as conquered natives... The act of distancing was one way by which the 'other' was constructed... It is different from the colonial stances toward native subjects, in which the other is a ward to be converted, civilized, and otherwise remolded in the colonialist's image. No such sense of responsibility inhered in the colonialists' relationship to imported labor. (132-33)

Mexican laborers, even *Tejanos* native to the region north of the border, can never become American in *All the Pretty Horses* because they, unlike Grady, are situated within a legacy of imported labor. They are perpetually associated with the foreign, with the un-American, regardless of how long they or their families have lived within the United States. They are immigrants, even when they have never crossed a border, while Grady is never portrayed as an immigrant despite leaving behind his home country for Mexico.



Even in Texas, which borders Mexico and shares ethnic borderlands with Mexico, Mexicans are foreigners in *All the Pretty Horses*. There is no room for *Tejanos* in Texas – ethnic Mexicans, whether born in Mexico or not, do not belong in the novel’s American landscape. Grady sees the border as cultural and ethnic, though not political. The border prevents Mexicans – ethnic or cultural – from ever truly becoming American or assimilating into the American nation, regardless of citizenship status. Similarly, it does not prevent Grady from crossing the border, but it does preclude him from ever becoming Mexican. He can attempt to assimilate into the culture, he can reject his status as an American, but Grady can never become a Mexican. He is, again, rendered an outsider.

Gloria Anzaldúa offers a different perspective on this foreigner status. She writes,

...(by *mexicanos* we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which one country lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship (84).

Like Grady, she views ethnic Mexicans living in the United States, including those who never crossed a border, as inherently Mexican. Whereas Grady makes the distinction between American and Mexican based on skin color, Anzaldúa does so based on a “state of soul.” There is something deeper than skin color that

determines racial identity – it is a shared past, a heritage, that defines a Mexican’s racial status. This “Mexican” that Grady encounters is Mexican because he has inherited it, not because it has been thrust upon him by an American.

Grady does not see himself as immigrating to Mexico, in part because he does not view Mexico as having its own, distinct nationhood and national identity – but also in part because he does not see himself as a migrating laborer. Cormac McCarthy, similarly, does not situate Grady as a direct parallel to Mexican migrants finding work in the United States, with or without documentation. The tragedy of Grady’s story is not that it, in many ways, so closely mirrors the experiences of undocumented Mexican laborers in the United States, either when the novel was published in 1992 or when it takes place in the late 1940s. This facet of Grady’s story goes unaddressed, rendering him a historical loner rather than a participant in a larger trend of violence against undocumented immigrants.

*All the Pretty Horses* takes place in the late 1940s, shortly after World War II. Before Grady quits the United States, his father mentions the ranch’s changing labor force, alluding to the probability that the ranch, much like others in the United States in the 1940s, was hiring braceros rather than white workers. Though a family-owned ranch, it followed the same trajectory as America’s large, company-owned farms in the early- to mid-twentieth century, moving away from white labor to labor from racial minorities – and, in the case of Texas and the rest of the Southwest, labor from Mexican immigrants and migrants. The Bracero

Program began in 1942, only a few years before *All the Pretty Horses* begins, and ran (cyclically, periodically stopping and starting again as the United States needed more laborers and then needed to dispose of its excess alien laborers) through 1964 (Hernandez 423). This program would have been relevant to Grady and his family, who relied on labor from ethnic – if not national – Mexicans while running their ranch. As agricultural employers, they would have known about the program and its offer to provide them with cheap, disposable labor, even if they opted to hire only Mexican-Americans. The novel does not address the national origin of the Cole family's farm hands, noting only that they were not white – which, in the ethnic landscape of *All the Pretty Horses*, renders them un-American and alien, even if they happened to have been born in the United States. The novel does not distinguish, either in terms of the Cole family's hiring practices or in terms of Texan citizens at large.

The Bracero Program was intended to prevent what happened to Grady's Mexican parallels – namely, the violence he faced at the hands of his new country's law enforcement officers, and the unjust deportation he sensed himself to feel. It was

a series of agreements between the U.S. and Mexico governments that facilitated the migration of short-term Mexican contract laborers into (and out of) the United States. Known as *braceros*, these laborers generally worked on southwestern farms, and U.S. and Mexican officials closely

managed their migration between the United States and Mexico (Hernandez 423).

It gave employers the opportunity to hire temporary workers and pay them wages lower than those expected by American laborers; though the Program stipulated a reasonable minimum wage, few employers provided it to their imported workers. Braceros were hired for periods of time specified by their contracts, after which they were expected to return to Mexico, with transportation costs accounted for in the contracts.

Comparatively few, however, Mexican laborers who came to the United States between 1942 and 1964 did so under a contract, and those who did rarely had their contracts honored by their employers. Instead, Mexican immigrant laborers were disposable and cheap labor for American employers, who would cast them off once their usefulness was surpassed by any legal trouble they might cause their employers. Once the employers' own well-being was threatened by having hired undocumented Mexican workers, they would have them deported by American border enforcement officials. Furthermore, the Bracero Program came with "commitments to prevent Mexican laborers from surreptitiously crossing into the United States and to aggressively detect and deport those who had successfully affected illegal entry" (Hernandez 423). In crossing the border and following in reverse the path of many undocumented Mexican immigrants, Grady

faces enforcement of the border – the natural consequence for his undocumented crossing is his punishment by officers of the law.

This is, however, where any and all similarities end between Grady and undocumented Mexican immigrants to the United States. Despite not having documentation, Grady carries into Mexico the privilege of not only being a wealthy white American, but also the privilege of coming from a long tradition of imperialists immune to the sovereignty of the nations they enter. He crosses into Mexico not as an immigrant, but as an imperialist – he remains an outsider because he ranks himself above the nation-state he enters, exempt from the authority of its government and superior to its citizens. Grady is not attempting to become Mexican, but to claim Mexico as his frontier, as a vast terrain in which he can fulfill his antiquated cowboy fantasies. He cannot immigrate to or assimilate into a nation-state whose sovereignty he does not recognize.

### *Mestiza Consciousness*

John Grady's crossing relies on a conflicting conception of the border: it is significant, but it is powerless. It is culturally and racially important, but it is politically meaningless. He has not been forced to confront the culturally fluid but politically intact reality of the border. Because he does not understand the actual role of the border, Grady does not know that he will not find a radically different culture on the other side, but instead will encounter the authority of the state.

Anzaldúa argues a case for a *mestiza* consciousness, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of not only the U.S.-Mexico border but also the cultural connections and divides between and within these countries. This *mestiza* consciousness is the product of existing at the meeting place of different cultures – and of being vulnerable at this meeting point. Being a Mexican-American woman necessitates a cultural fluency that Grady does not have. She writes, “From this racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross-pollination, and “alien” consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (99). This *mestiza* consciousness is constructed by the cultural interactions that occur primarily along the U.S.-Mexico border and the regions surrounding it, regions characterized by poverty, violence, and racial and cultural heterogeneity. It is the result of this diversity, albeit only for the *mestiza*, the racially mixed woman who must learn to navigate these cultural and geographical borderlands. She must develop a different understanding of the world, a different set of skills, in order to survive in the borderlands.

The *mestiza*, in Anzaldúa’s view, constructs this borderlands consciousness as part of *la facultad*, which “is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (60). Her *mestiza* consciousness allows her to better understand

diverse situations, to properly engage in different social and cultural interactions – to know how to behave around fellow *mestizas* as opposed to around white women, around Mexican nationals as opposed to Mexican-Americans, and so on. She can quickly sense which self to present, which behavior to emulate. This cultural fluency is a result of and is integral to her survival.

Indeed, Grady is not capable of forming this cultural fluency. He cannot engage in this new dual *mestiza* consciousness – not because he has not had to, but because he has not had any of the experiences integral to formulating a new understanding of the world. As a white man who voluntarily engages and interacts with Mexicans, he can choose to back out of a situation that makes him uncomfortable; he rarely needs to, though, because these interactions occur on his terms, not on Mexico's, and certainly on those of Mexico's citizens. Each time he is confronted with some reality of Mexican culture that he had not anticipated, he either flees or he renegotiates the terms, demanding that the culture be reworked to fit his expectations.

Grady refuses to engage in an unfamiliar cultural exchange when a group of Mexican workers ask him how much he would charge for Blevins. They have mistaken his unwanted traveling companion for a slave, nearly naked, clearly dirty and disheveled, and horse-less as he is. Blevins alone in the group does not have his own horse, and he is much smaller than the other boys – he looks different, and he is treated differently, and so these men believe that he is a slave

whom they can purchase. Grady thinks for a minute, and moves to shut down the conversation: “Gracias por su hospitalidad,” he says, and then “turned and crossed the clearing toward the standing horses,” followed by Rawlins and Blevins” (McCarthy, 76). After they ride off, Rawlins tells Blevins that the man had offered to buy the boy, and Grady reprimands him, saying “there wasnt no call” to tell Blevins about the offer (77). Grady chose to reject the interaction rather than having to accept its reality and its implications regarding the country he has chosen to inhabit. In thanking the working men for their hospitality, he ignored their offer before leaving. As with the map, Grady has not yet had to confront the contradiction between the country he imagines and the country he crosses into – he can continue to think of the blank map in the abstract (especially since he does not go through any large towns or cities), and he can literally leave a conversation that threatens his romantic vision of Mexico.

In backing out of this uncomfortable interaction, Grady asserts that all other interactions must be on his own terms, just as they were in the United States. He re-asserts his power in and over Mexico. He owes the wax-making men no explanation – Grady does not have any obligation to explain his morality, to explain that he does not own Blevins. Though he does not have the final word, he intentionally ignores the man’s offer to pay him in wax, simply standing up and leaving the group. His exit has significance, asserting his moral superiority over the men who have provided him with food, if not his financial superiority, since



he does not need their wax or their money and will not part with his otherwise financially useless traveling companion.

This exit re-establishes the power dynamic he had over Mexican-Americans in the United States as a solidly middle-class white man. He maintains this power as he ventures further into Mexico, even as he is hired as a *vaquero* by a wealthy man. Grady receives superior treatment to the Mexican men he works alongside at the *hacienda*, men who remain anonymous despite their proximity to Grady. He never has to confront their individuality, instead lumping them together as an anonymous mass, especially once he begins to receive special treatment from the *hacendado*. Grady is invited into his employer's home, spends time with his employer and his family, and is served by his equals in terms of the *hacienda's* financial hierarchy. His whiteness distinguishes him from the men and women who would otherwise be his equal – and provides him power over them. Grady spends his leisure time playing chess with the *hacendado*, not with the men with whom he works.

Grady does not formulate a *mestiza* consciousness because he cannot: protected by his privilege, he is incapable of either sympathizing with or blending into another culture and another people. His understanding of the world is entirely rooted in his own experiences of it – and these experiences are crafted by his position as a colonizer, not as a colonized subject. According to Slotkin, however, Grady's whiteness does not preclude him from gaining a dual consciousness:

“Although the Indian and the Wilderness are the settler’s enemy, they also provide him with a new consciousness through which he will transform the world” (14). A white man’s colonization of an indigenous nation can allow him to understand the nation he conquers; he can gain access to their view of the world, which he can in turn transport back to the metropolis in order to improve it and himself. His colonial efforts on the frontier grant him a psychological intimacy with the people he pushes out, and this intimacy fosters the development of a dual consciousness along the lines imagined by Anzaldúa.

Grady, perhaps, develops a faux dual consciousness – he believes he understands the people he aims to subjugate, but he does not and cannot. His position of privilege allows him to simultaneously distance himself from the colonized people around him, as he believes that he understands them and represents them. Having grown up among Mexican-Americans who taught him Spanish, Grady believes that he has access to the interior thoughts of Mexicans, that he can understand how they feel, what they value. These representatives of the culture he wants to penetrate, however, are his family’s employees, skewing the power balance between himself and the people he hopes to learn from. He is unlikely to receive any information, any human connection, any insight into the experiences of an oppressed people, by speaking to his family’s servants (even though he himself does not see them as servants, referring to them as his family).

Actual emotional intimacy and reciprocity are barred from him because of the power imbalance between himself and these Mexican-Americans.

Of course, this argument that a systemic, racial power imbalance would prevent Grady from developing a dual or *mestiza* consciousness applies to the white heroes of the Myth of the Frontier, too – these “Indian killers” had power over the native populations with which they interacted and with whose help they supposedly formed a dual consciousness. The American men sent out to the frontier in order to colonize it were not on equal ground with the indigenous populations of these regions. These white men had power, carrying into the frontier the authority and protection of the American state as they carried forth its nationhood. They were, too, sent out to kill the people they encountered, if they would not cede to the authority of the expanding nation-state – as “Indian killers,” they were not out on the frontier to empathize with native peoples. Furthermore, within the Myth of the Frontier, these men did not give up their mission of colonization upon achieving a dual consciousness, but instead embraced the knowledge they extracted from natives before killing or otherwise expelling them. Their new consciousness was for the benefit of the colonizers, not to protect the colonized. Their empathy did not end the “savage war,” but instead allowed it to carry forward more efficiently.

## Conclusion

Despite John Grady's both geographical and personal closeness to the border – as a Texan and as a man who sees himself as wronged by the border even before he crosses it – he does not understand its actual role or the extent of its authority. His privilege separates him from the reality of the border, even as he lives so close to it and witnesses its effects. In Texas, Grady has no need to fear the enforcement of the border. As a middle- to upper-class white man in the United States, Grady is protected, not policed, by the state – he may have lost ranch work to braceros, but he does not fear the border's enforcement in his daily life. He brings this privileged ignorance with him into Mexico, which he views as his natural domain, yet another rightful frontier for him, guaranteed to him by his whiteness.

Grady cannot imagine being policed by the border because he has no precedent for it – as a white man from the United States, Grady has never had to face the authority of the border, especially of another state's border. He has no personally relevant basis for understanding the reality of the border. Grady may have been unable to attain work because of changing policies, but he was never personally policed by the border while he lived in Texas. Beyond his own experiences within the United States, however, John Grady has no historical basis for imagining an international border that would also apply to him. The United States' history and literary tradition are both rich with examples of white men crossing into unknown territories – stories that ignore the sovereignty of nations,

as well as their rights to enforce their sovereignty and exclude transgressors. The Western as a genre is based off this tradition of white men riding their horses into allegedly unsettled territory, coming into contact and, inevitably, conflict with indigenous groups that already existed in these spaces beyond the United States' borders. These stories showcase the triumph of white men over native peoples, whether forcing them out of their land so that the United States can annex and claim it, attempting to assimilate the indigenous people the cowboys meet, or killing off nations who refused to acquiesce to the cowboys' or the United States' authority.

These cowboys were not always representatives of the United States, on a mission to expand the territory of their native nation-state. The authority they carried with them, though, was distinctly American – they brought with them the protection of the United States, even after crossing its borders. They geographically distanced themselves from their nation-state because of a perceived cultural difference, but they carried with them the protection their nation-state offered. Grady, too, carries with him the protection and privilege of his native country when he crosses into Mexico. He has rejected the United States and sets out to Mexico in order to create a new life for himself, but he brings with him the respected status of his nation-state. The authority of his state allows him to cross the political border unmolested – he goes across Mexico unquestioned and unhindered. The protection offered by the state is stripped, though, when he

crosses a cultural border. This transgression is not mitigated by the authority of a government, and instead forces Grady to lose his protection as he finally comes into contact with the authority of the Mexican border.

In aligning John Grady with the cowboys of American literature and history but placing him in a more modern context, Cormac McCarthy has created what he doubtlessly means to be a tragic figure. Grady's failure to find happiness in both the United States and Mexico is meant to be a modern tragedy. Modernity has robbed Grady of his happiness by stripping the United States of its original yeoman values. His unhappiness stems from the fact that he is a man out of place in the twentieth century – had Grady lived a century earlier, he would have been born into a country that shares his values. He never would have had to leave in order to find fulfillment; though if he had, Grady would have been able to push West with other cowboys, part of a movement of men going out into the frontier in order to prove themselves and their own worth as men. Instead, though, Grady tried to cross into Mexico after World War II, when the frontier had long been closed and white men could no longer push outward without facing organized resistance.

Grady, then, is not really a terribly tragic character: Grady fails to find happiness because the United States has changed culturally and, more importantly, because Mexico has developed a state capable of resisting domination by white men like Grady. Mexico asserts its own sovereignty over

Grady after he crosses a cultural border, ending Grady's adventure as an imperialist on a ranch. His misfortune is brought on by a willful blindness to the world's realities, not because of an innate flaw. He is ignorant because his privilege has allowed him to ignore the world around him unless it directly impacts him – he does not understand because he can survive without understanding, not because he is entirely incapable of learning about the political climate of his world.

He is punished because he had hoped that he could re-play the centuries old tradition of white men exerting their own power over native peoples and their states – and he had hoped he could perpetuate this legacy because he is ignorant of twentieth century politics. International relations and the role of borders had changed by the 1940s – and even more so by the 1990s, the decade that really shaped and created Grady as a character, not the post-war period – and Grady remains ignorant of these changes. He continues to imagine the world as the world of open frontiers and cowboys, of killing Indians and settling out West, not as the world of free trade agreements and contract labor programs.

Grady's seemingly willful ignorance problematizes his role as a tragic figure. His unhappy ending is not the result of his being born into the wrong era or the wrong culture, but of his ignoring the political realities of the twentieth century. Grady's privilege shields him from the reality of the U.S.-Mexico border

and allows him to imagine that it does not have authority over him and that he can exert his own authority over a sovereign nation-state.

Though Grady's tragedy is self-induced, not fated, his story was hugely appealing when it released: indeed, this is the novel that launched Cormac McCarthy into fame, and the novel was a national bestseller and won multiple awards. This modern take on a cowboy novel has maintained its appeal: it was turned into a popular movie eight years after its initial publication, and the novel continues to sell two and a half decades later. Its continued popularity points to anxieties that have remained relevant politically and culturally: the story of an American pushing back against the perceived invasion of immigrants, striking out into the "unknown" (the seemingly uncharted territory on the map Grady and Rawlins find in a convenience store) in order to find happiness in a world that actively thwarts it, appeals in a culture that is so focused on the impact of immigration. We look to a man who crossed, undocumented, in order to resist the effects of migrant laborers, heading south to find work because his job was taken by a foreigner.

Just as John Grady's father points to the policies that drove Grady to Mexico, he also points to a larger, unnamed anxiety over the United States' future. In their last conversation before Grady quits the United States, "his father said that the country would never be the same" (McCarthy 25). Grady and his father both worry about the changes taking place in the United States, the same



changes that chase Grady across the border in an effort to escape them. His father elaborates, explaining that United States citizens worry for their own safety, and for the safety of their nation-state. Just as the United States was established by conquering and chasing away native groups, so too can another, stronger, new group come and erase it from existence: “People dont feel safe no more, he said. We’re like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We dont know what’s goin to show up here come daylight. We dont even know what color they’ll be” (McCarthy 25-26). Citizens of the United States are worried, according to Grady’s father, that they will face the same fate that they subjected groups like the Comanche to. They worry that the United States may not be permanent, infallible, superior, but instead open to foreign threats and invasion.

Here we see the even more insidious side of Grady and his father’s fears over the changing make-up of the ranch’s labor force: they are not just concerned about how the Bracero Program and undocumented immigration will impact ranch labor, but about how that same tide of immigration could be a modern invasion. The changing labor force points to an uncertain political future, a potential upset of the status quo due to increased immigration. The future of the United States as a whole, not just the Grady family ranch, is called into question with the influx of Latino immigrants. Braceros pose the same threat to the United States that white settlers posed to the Comanche, undermining the stability of the nation and its future.

This worry over how immigration will impact the future of the nation-state, this concern that an influx of those deemed foreign will threaten the ability of the nation-state to maintain its sovereignty and authority, partially explains why a cowboy novel like *All the Pretty Horses* is so appealing today. It is the same fear that makes Donald Trump and other politicians popular in the United States – their power is driven by a national fear that Latinos are not only depriving white Americans of work by taking all their jobs, but are also working to undermine the stability of the United States.

The promise of a wall dividing the United States and Mexico envisions a border that is all-powerful and all-defining, a vision that Grady shares. Trump and his supporters imagine a United States protected by a literally impermeable border, which will protect both the state and the nation. The wall promises to keep out foreigners who threaten the United States, who take jobs and who undermine the superiority of white America. It also separates the United States from the influence of its neighbors, maintaining the cultural rigidity that Grady imagines: the wall represents a national homogeneity, whereby all who live within it share the same nationality, the same history and identity, and are different from those who live beyond it. A wall at the border takes Grady's vision of national homogeneity to its furthest limit.

This strict division of nation-states appeals to white Americans in the same way that *All the Pretty Horses* does – it provides an idealized vision of the

world, a means of escaping the unwanted effects (real or imagined) of immigration and political and cultural shifts. Whereas McCarthy provides a romantic image of a white man riding his horse out into the frontier to push back against the changes occurring around him, Trump gives another option, one in which the United States as a whole asserts its sovereignty and authority over all other nation-states and groups. Both Trump and McCarthy offer a vision of resistance against the encroachment of foreigners and the threat posed by them, but Trump's resistance is even more threatening than Grady's. Grady acted as an individual, albeit one in a long line of American imperialist cowboys, and he the protection, though not the full force, of the American state behind him; Trump, on the other hand, carries the power of the entire nation-state as he willfully ignores the reality of international relations and politics. He acts not as an individual, but as the leader of a country, and he has the capacity to harm entire countries with his policies. He follows the same tradition as Grady, but he threatens many more people than the sixteen year old boy written by Cormac McCarthy ever could – Trump offers a culmination of the anxieties of *All the Pretty Horses*, threatening to inflict conflict at the border and well beyond in his efforts to reaffirm national division.

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