

‘RE-BORDERISATION’ IN THE SOUTH-WESTERN NOVELS OF ANA CASTILLO AND CORMAC MCCARTHY.

PETER CARR

Swansea University, UK

Two novels of the US/Mexican borderlands published in the early 1990s achieved notable mainstream success and critical acclaim –*So Far From God* by Ana Castillo (first published in 1993) and *All The Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy (first published 1992). Here were two ostensibly very different South-Western novels which nevertheless managed to achieve a singular effect: in each case it was this novel that thrust an established, but limited-appeal, writer out of the gloom of academic readership and into the glare of mainstream literary celebrity. These texts, then, are crossover novels in two senses. They are of the margins in the sense that as novels of the borderlands they each deal with the interface of Mexican and Anglo cultures but they are also of the centre in that their multicultural narratives have been embraced by the mainstream.

This paper argues two main points. The first is that the mainstream consumer-appeal of these novels –their successful commodification of multicultural images– actually relies upon the subtle repetition of myths of the borderlands in ways that that reinforce ethnic and cultural stereotypes. The second argument is that this process in the novels is part of a general mainstream ‘reborderization’ in the US in the early-to mid-1990s: a reactionary response to the perceived erosion of traditional concepts of national identity in an era dominated by post-modern trans-boundary forces exemplified by initiatives such as the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Historically, ever since the establishment of the Border Patrol in 1924 and the mass deportations of the 1930s and 1950s, the border region has been a focal point for special security measures aimed precisely at preserving a sense of distinct national identity. Spurred on by “sensationalistic portrayals of undocumented immigration, drug trafficking, and occasionally even the threat of terrorism” (Dunn 1), various administrations have happily made political capital through expedient manipulation of the issue of border control. By the time that events such as the Mariel ‘invasion’ of 1960 had led to the passage in 1986 of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, immigration had long been portrayed in the media as “a growing crisis with national security implications” (Dunn 2).

And yet it was against this background that, early in 1990, Mexican President Carlos Salinas initiated free trade between Mexico and the United States. The North American Free Trade Agreement was signed by Salinas, President George Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in the autumn of 1993, but only after having been delayed by a fierce Congressional debate about the cultural as well as economic implications of the policy.

Events occurring in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez at the time of NAFTA ratification perfectly illustrate how difficult it is to separate the issue of cross-border radical hybridisation from the fear of diluted national identity. 'Free trade,' of course, was already *de facto* in 'borderplexes' such as Ciudad Juarez/El Paso where the border was essentially already unguarded and where there was established a large degree of formal and informal social and economic interdependence. To that end, in celebration of NAFTA, local civic leaders proposed a 'Day of Unity' to be held on October 10th, at which both mayors were to sign a 'good neighbors' convention on the international line. But this neighbourly spirit reckoned without the conscientiousness of newly appointed chief patrol agent in the US Border Patrol Silvestre Reyes, who somewhat spoiled the party by launching Operation Blockade on the morning of September 19th. With prior consultation of neither residents nor local officials, Reyes installed hundreds of agents and patrol vehicles along twenty miles of the international line in an initially highly effective crackdown on unauthorised crossings in the city (Spener and Staudt 234).

Whilst accepting the acclaim of many El Pasoans who feared that 'border control' had become something of an oxymoron, Reyes soon realised that the effectiveness of his operation merely had succeeded in shifting the immigrants around the geographically far more hazardous ends of the blockade. To counter this unfortunate leakage of unauthorised immigrants the US Border Patrol, with impeccable logic, suggested building a 2.8 kilometre steel wall on the slopes of Monte Cristo Rey. This demand for 'Mexico's own Berlin Wall' was tabled on the 10th of October, the very date of the proposed neighbourly 'Day Of Unity' (Spener and Staudt 235).

Although actual construction of the Wall was smartly rejected, the desired effect has been tirelessly pursued by a continuing range of measures only marginally less extreme in their conception. There have been repeat operations Rio Grande and Gatekeeper, a wall has been constructed to definitively separate Mexican Nogales from American Nogales, and military troops are regularly stationed as the border on the pretext of halting drugs traffic. Furthermore, in the interior of the United States, the blockade "has been transmogrified into California's Proposition 187 and the 1996 federal welfare reform law" (Spener and Staudt 235).

The central irony that forms the critical parameters of my discussion of the two novels begins with this simultaneous creation of free trade and blockade. Here I would like to introduce Spener and Staudt's concept of 'deborderization' and

subsequent 'reborderization.' Debordering includes the "increasing permeability of traditional boundaries by postmodern forces such as communications and capital' and rebordering includes the 'reassertion or rearticulation of socially constructed boundaries" (Spener and Staudt 235). These competing forces mean that borders, for Spener and Staudt, do not exist statically, but are inherently processual. An example of the complex and ongoing nature of this process can be found in policies initiated at the level of government: witness the amnesty program of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act in the US which legalised the status of about two million Mexicans on US soil, or the amendment of the Mexican constitution to enable Mexicans abroad to keep their Mexican citizenship even after becoming citizens of another country. These are both formal deborderization policies that are initiated in response to transnational realities created by informal deborderization – mass illegal immigration that makes Los Angeles the second largest Mexican city and means that the US now houses the third largest Spanish-speaking population of any nation in the world (Spener and Staudt 240).

When, in the postmodern era, the outlines of the nation-state erode in the face of unrestrained cross-border circulation of products and information, traditional concepts of ethnic identity necessarily respond. The most obvious example of rebordering is the capture and deportation of those autonomous transborder migrants that are doing the informal debordering: over one million of them in 1995 alone. Then there is the fiscal fortification of the border that has included doubling the INS budget to nearly \$4 billion in the five years beginning in 1992, and an increase over the same period of the number of US border patrol agents from 1500 to 6500. Similarly, the first Gulf War proved to be a windfall for guardians of the border, contributing more military equipment and technology in the form of walls, fences, floodlights, x-rays, night vision, ground vehicles and helicopters.

All this situates the two novels firmly in an era of exaggerated border dialectics in which a crude 'rebordering' response may manifest itself as coldly as repeated Reyes-type operations and steel walls, or as fantastically as the eight feet high wall of fire once proposed in order to prevent killer bees from invading northwards from Central America. But just as often, as Spener and Staudt point out, the boundaries may be "re-established, repositioned, or reconfigured in a new guise," and this process can be "both territorial and non-territorial" (236). Conventional examples of non-territorial reborderisation would naturally include California's Proposition 187, or new regulations at the point of employment, but my argument here is that *So Far From God* and *All The Pretty Horses* are equally part of this new guise. The two novels are so perfectly products of their time that they embody this border dialectic: seeming to blur boundaries by engaging with the 'other' culture, they are at the same time subtle examples of informal and non-territorial reborderisation.

Robert Hughes contends that multiculturalism “asserts that people with different roots can co-exist, that they can learn to read the image-banks of others, that they can and should look across frontiers of race, language, gender and age without prejudice or illusion, and learn to think against a background of a hybridised society” (Hughes 23). The commercial viability of *So Far From God* and *All The Pretty Horses* very much trades upon the image banks of others; and yet, crossing physical and metaphysical boundaries in the US/Mexican borderlands as do the characters in the novels, it is my contention that their portrayals do nothing to break down the political and social prejudices and caricatures that preserve those frontiers.

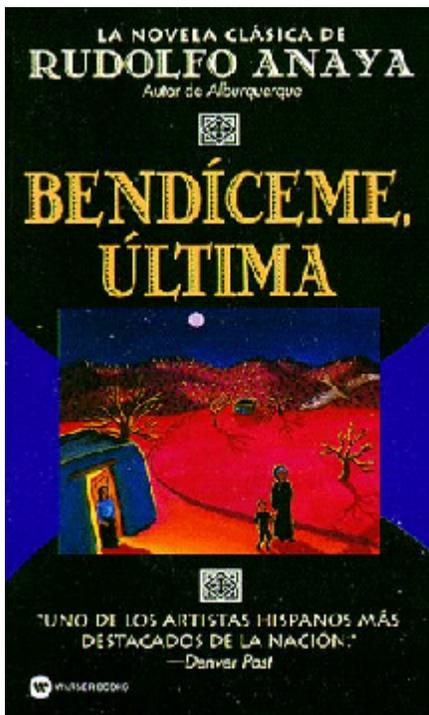
In justifying this assertion, I want to look initially at the texts through the same powerful optic that is presented to the consumer: that is, the packaging. The ‘packaging’ includes not just the covers of the novels, but also media reviews and the public profiles of the authors, the manner by which the author is marketed as a literary celebrity.

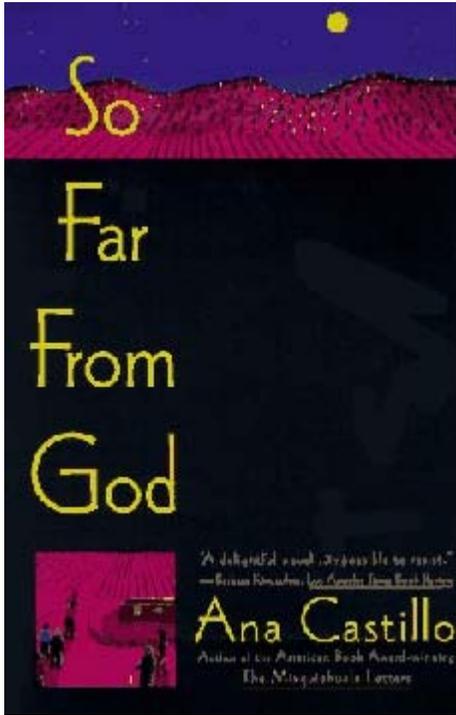
At the start of the 1990s market research undertaken by various large publishing houses in the United States revealed, to those who depend upon such things, that there was a mainstream readership demanding Latina writers of magical realism. Isabella Allende and Elena Poniatowska from South America were already household names for this kind of fiction, and now it was felt there was room for a Mexicana-American. In response to this market research, the well-known New York agent Susan Bergholz –not short of a best-selling author or two– set out to add a few Chicanas to her portfolio.

One writer that Bergholz was successful in signing was Ana Castillo, and the result is the lurid copy of *So Far From God* published in the U.S. by Norton (see illustration 1). In comparing the promotional packaging of *So Far From God* to that of McCarthy’s *All The Pretty Horses*, I hope to extend here Ellen McCracken’s trenchant critique of the marketing of Castillo’s novel as “postmodern ethnic literary commodity” (McCracken 32). Upon its release *So Far From God* was heavily promoted –advertised on the cover of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* of May 16, 1993, for example– and received widespread media attention. The *Los Angeles Times* called it the novel to read if Gabriel Garcia Marquez seems too complex, being a cross between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the television soap ‘General Hospital’. The key images consistently selected by the publicists are those suggesting breakthrough and crossover.

In gazing at the cover we are following an ethnic community –several generations– of naively painted figures in a ritualised procession through a stylised rural New Mexico. This is a New Mexico portrayed in lurid, magical colours –a land of enchantment. The fidelity of the style of the cover to any authentic local artistic vision is not what is at stake here: what is most significant is that there is an almost identical painting by the same artist –Bernadette Vigil– on the cover of the 1994

Warner Books edition of Rudolfo Anaya's seminal *Bless Me, Ultima*, now published as a 'Mass Market Paperback' edition. (see illustration 2).





Vigil paints them to order. Was the order from Warner Books in this case to present Anaya's novel as a more colourful and magical commodity than was the first edition published with the Tonatiuh Press back in the 1970s? That cover was a simple black and white line drawing by Octavo I. Romano-V., the senior editor of Tonatiuh Press: a much more sober affair, reflected by the steady but less than spectacular sales performance of the novel up to its makeover in 1994.

That this is symptomatic of a general marketing strategy in the early 1990s is demonstrated also by the use of the artist Nivea Gonzalez by Random House both on the cover of Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* (1984) and the cover of *Three Filipino Women* by F. Sionil José (1993). This is not a gesture of inter-ethnic solidarity, but an attempt to hitch the fortunes of an unknown Filipino to an established and already successful Chicana writer. Why is this troubling? – because it is an example of what Ellen McCracken calls “minority metaphoricality” whereby the mainstream is quite happy to substitute “one minority for another in the marketing of postmodern ethnic commodities” (206), expressing a difference which “must conform to certain uniform features” (203), in this case, artistic qualities that happen to have proved acceptable and hence successful in the past.

The covers of these novels are highlighted here because, as the interface between the text and the reader, they are the invitation to consume, to read the image banks of others in entirely stereotypical ways, providing a graphic example of what McCracken refers to as “pleasing narrative exoticism” (27).

Within Castillo’s text itself are to be found further examples of exoticism. Castillo, as McCracken points out, presents a number of ethnic cultural practices in the novel but tends to dwell on “those customs, beliefs, and motifs that foreground the US Latino as Other” (35). This is primarily because the text is directed to a consumer who is distinctly Anglo, the use of Spanish being restricted largely to occasions where context facilitates comprehension. Where this is perhaps not the case, the author steps in to reassure the mainstream reader: “Doña Severa was particularly proficient at curing ‘suspensión,’ an ailment unknown to gringos and which has no translation. In so many words, the main symptom is constipation as a result of shock.” (Castillo 234)

Exotic ethnic practices are the type of cultural artefact that appeals to the tastes of the mainstream market, and within Castillo’s text readers are able to browse through a six page section detailing common ailments and their *curas* (Castillo 65-71). Or, they can flip through the several pages of instructions on La Loca’s favourite recipes: “If you want to be a good cook...you have to first learn to be patient” (Castillo 64). Castillo never wrote a truer word. “Next you roll it out on the board to about a third of an inch thick. (Loca would not say a third of an inch, of course, but for our purposes here, I am adding specific measurement myself)” (Castillo 1994: 167). What *are* her purposes here? Castillo is trying to cook up a recipe for mainstream success, trading on acceptable versions of difference. She is making *Chicanismo* consumable as the exotic ‘other’ culture.

This manoeuvre brings to McCracken’s mind the criticism of multicultural texts articulated by critics such as Ernesto Laclau and Nelly Richard, noting that “one of the striking ironies of multiculturalism is this notion of inclusion through the foregrounding of difference” (McCracken 5). Antagonistic, or potentially subversive, forces are integrated into society via a postmodern celebration of diversity; but where the peripheral or marginal is re-appropriated as exotic festival (or as difference, but within acceptable codes), difference becomes merely stereotyped hegemonic versions of multiculturalism, versions authorised by the centre. As Richard puts it:

Celebrating difference as exotic festival [. . .] is not the same as giving the subject of this difference the right to negotiate its own conditions of discursive control to practise difference in the interventionist sense of rebellion and disturbance, as opposed to coinciding with the predetermined meanings of the official repertory of difference. (Richard 160)

Ellen McCracken makes it clear that the cover of *So Far From God* and the text itself present an exotic New Mexican culture "overcoded with the predominant tropes of the postmodern ethnic commodity" (32). This is also reinforced by the formulaic marketing of another aspect of the package –the Latina writer as a postmodern ethnic literary commodity, as celebrity.

Thanks in part to her agent Susan Bergholz, Castillo appears as the face of accessible *Chicanismo*. Frequent book promotions, readings, and appearances on local TV gossip shows mean that she is a public fixture in her home town of Chicago (*literally* a fixture since April 2000 when Castillo was one of a number of Chicago writers honoured by having her image painted into a mural of the city's history on the 103rd floor of the Sears Tower). Her image is broadcast into cyberspace via personal messages on her newly introduced 'Blog' (web-log) and her own official website –on the first page of which is a welcoming invitation to get in touch with Bergholz should we desire a speaking engagement or an interview with the author.

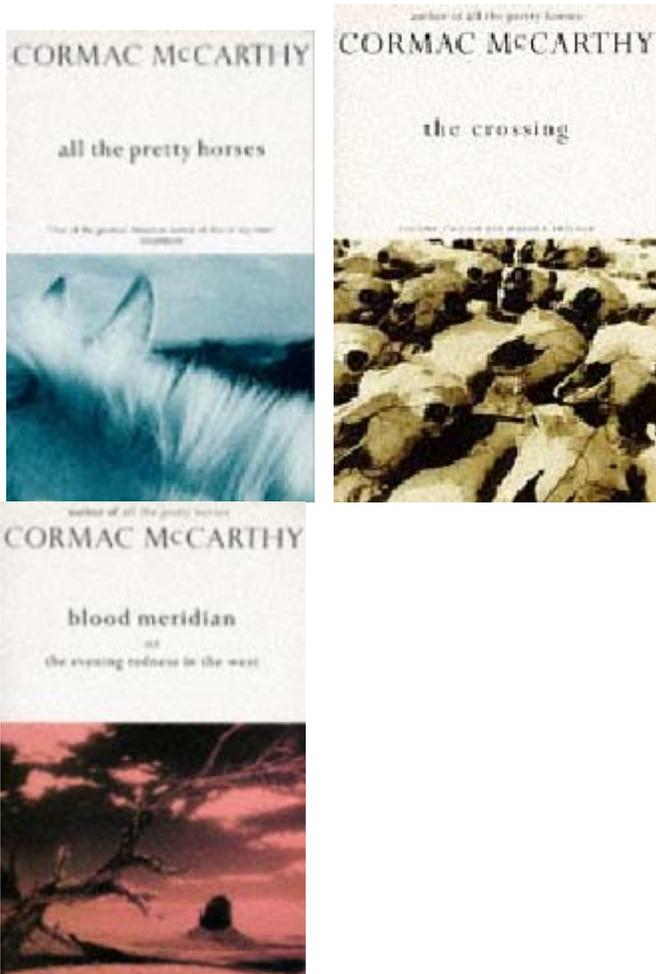
Although born and raised in Chicago, and now currently teaching there, Chicago has not always been Castillo's home. In one of her many interviews (in fact, one conducted whilst Castillo was 'on a break' from a tour promoting *So Far From God*) Castillo reveals how she once came to call the south-western city of Albuquerque 'home'. Having previously visited New Mexico, a vision during a ritual in a sweat-lodge convinced her to move permanently to the 'Land of Enchantment' where she proceeded to look for and then buy a "beautiful rustic adobe 'sanctuario'" (Romero). In her own relocation to Albuquerque, Castillo reprises the paradox of multiculturalism: that a move to the periphery can at the same time be a movement to the centre. The irony here is that the image on the cover of the novel and the image that Castillo, during promotion of the book, presents as her reason for moving to Albuquerque are the same. This irony is only heightened by the fact that *within* the text both the ritual of the sweat and the vision of domestic ethnic bliss in an adobe *sanctuario* are heavily parodied as pandering to ethnic stereotype. This is not to say that Castillo, aware of the pitfalls of ethnic exoticism, is willing to suspend her integrity for the sake of sales. Nevertheless, in postmodern consumer culture the power of the package is absolute: the distorting strength of the optic through which the text is read is such that any subversion of ethnic stereotyping intended within *So Far From God* is diffused by the strategies employed to promote the product.

The peregrinations of Cormac McCarthy invite a comparison with Castillo's career. Having lived and worked in Chicago where his first novel too was written, McCarthy made a similar geographical move –eventually from Tennessee to El Paso, to find, as Greg Jaynes puts it, "a spot that hadn't been written out." "Published words about the South were everywhere, thick as clematis on a mailbox. This border territory, though, offered room," notes Jaynes. McCarthy left his second wife in Knoxville, moved into a series of tumbledown motels in and around El Paso in the late 1970s and lived until relatively recently in his own "dog-eared little stone-

and-stucco affair” (Jaynes) on Coffin Avenue, El Paso. He now resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Both authors move to the margins, the border, in order to write the novel that will be their passport into the mainstream.

All the Pretty Horses is a winner of the National Book Award, and has earned praise as “one of the greatest American novels of this or any time” (*The Guardian*). A *New York Times* bestseller, 190,000 hardcover copies were sold in the first six months of its publication in 1992. Image-wise, there is an immediate contrast to the visual statement made by Castillo’s product: the covers of the whole Border tetralogy make an elegantly coordinated series, the typeface sober and understated. The covers are graphically divided into two, with a line across the centre –on one side of the border are elegant but enigmatic and vaguely troubling images in muted colours, across the line is white, blank un-colonised space (see illustrations).¹

¹ In light of the success of McCarthy’s border novels, his dark and disturbing early Appalachian novels were also repackaged by Picador with covers that matched this theme.



These graphic features are echoed by the textual representation of the borderlands:

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.

It don't show nothing down there, does it? said Rawlins

No.

There aint shit down there.
(McCarthy, *ATPH* 34)

What *is* down there, as Peter Messent points out, is “presented as alien and is (literally) consumed as such in entirely stereotypical ways, by the incoming adventurers” (Messent 96):

Drinkin cactus juice in old Mexico, he said. What do you reckon they’re saying at home about now?
I reckon they’re saying we’re gone, said John Grady.
(McCarthy, *ATPH* 51)

These initial presentations of the ‘other culture’ are important for the cultural assumptions they reveal. In *So Far From God* the reader is spoon-fed a Chicano culture that is exoticised and rendered palatable not just by means of repeated ethnic cultural practises but also by the use of an accepted and assimilated literary convention. The significance of Castillo’s opening pages, which firmly situate her novel within the convention of Magic Realism, is that they signal to the reader a culture that is both alien and understood, accepted, at the same time. As such it is coyly mysterious but unthreatening, it does nothing to disturb the mainstream market’s terms of reference with regards happy multiculturalism. McCarthy, in *All the Pretty Horses*, employs a different literary convention to what *appears* to be a different effect. McCarthy utilises the convention of the Western in which the Mexican is stereotypically alien and inscrutably unknowable. Relocating Western conventions to a 1940s Mexican landscape that is “represented as a (relatively) undeveloped space” evokes and reinforces a nostalgic view of “distinct national and individual self-definition” as Peter Messent remarks (93-94). Despite the cultural engagement with Mexico in the novel, despite the amount of detailed historical, political, economical and personal information about life on the other side of the border that McCarthy painstakingly provides the reader, all of these images fade into the whiteness of the novel’s cover.

John Grady Cole, the young Anglo-American protagonist in *All the Pretty Horses*, has no need to read the image banks of others without prejudice or illusion because Mexico is *required* to remain essentially a blank screen upon which he can project an image of himself as true-hearted lover and powerfully righteous avenger. Of course, we can point out that McCarthy as author subverts precisely this tendency of the boys –in an early brief scene that questions their polarised vision of the frontier, the first ‘Mexican’ that Rawlins and Cole come across in Texas is as much an American product of the border as they are:

You know that country down there? said Rawlins
The Mexican shook his head and spat. I never been to Mexico in my life.

(McCarthy, *ATPH* 34)

But Mexico has 'been' to the reader. The mythical and stereotypical Mexico of the Western has imposed itself upon the imagination of the reader many times, just as it has the imagination of Cole and Rawlins, and the associations serve to overwhelm the author's intended subversion of genre. When reading McCarthy we are unavoidably confronted by more than just the text. Cole and Rawlins may dash across the Rio Grande in an ecstasy of charging horses, of flying shingle and spray but we have to metaphorically pull up at the border and face all the stereotypical images that are arraigned there in a 'great cultural mirage'. As a textual commodity, McCarthy's border comprises the cover, the textual imagery, the picaresque narrative, even the Hollywood movie and the audio compact disc, and – crucially – the author as celebrity. This is where McCarthy, like Castillo, is a servant to the idea of a fixed boundary between self and other: the other exists, but only to the extent that margins exist in order to demarcate and validate the centre.

The 'celebritisation' of Cormac McCarthy lends its significant weight to a nostalgic ideal of distinct 'national definition': his is a public image that is consumed in entirely stereotypical ways. It is Joe Moran's contention that celebrity culture "reifies individuals and allows them to be used by capitalist society in a variety of ways –as market stimuli, as representations of ideal social types, as focal points for the desires and longings of the audience, and so on" (Moran 60). Castillo, the celebrity, is branded and marketed as a representation of a certain ideal social type (the exotic but unthreatening ethnic minority) and this is partly achieved through links to other unthreatening ethnic minorities –minority metaphoricity. McCarthy, on the other hand, is a recluse. He doesn't want to play the media game and has withdrawn from the celebrity circus. In stark contrast to Castillo and Bergholz, McCarthy's agent, Amanda Urban, soon gave up trying to cooperate with the press – "never again" were McCarthy's words after a *New York Times* interview in 1994. And that remains his sole interview, granted only as a favour to a retiring editor. Again in contrast to Castillo, McCarthy's agent and his official website present themselves as stern custodians of the author's "clearly expressed desire for privacy," as the forbidding endnote to McCarthy's website biography has it. (<http://cormacmccarthy.com/Biography.htm>)

And yet, the author-recluse figure generates its own interest, as Amanda Urban is shrewd enough to realise. When cornered in Luby's Cafeteria in El Paso by a reporter from The Telegraph in 1994, asking for an interview, a quote, anything, McCarthy once simply said, "I'm sorry son, but you're asking me to do something I just can't do." This very refusal has gone on to become a significant element in the legend of McCarthy, perhaps because it is almost impossible to imagine this line being uttered accompanied by anything other than a gunfighter's gritty stare. Celebrity culture in the postmodern age refuses to let silence speak for itself. Steffen Hantke points out that

“[s]ince the power of [the publicity] machinery is geared toward textual and commodity production, just as the author himself, isolation and silence alone are not sufficient means of throwing sand into its gears. Rather, silence and absence open up a space that remains a potentiality, a site that remains, as of yet, uncolonized until it is noticed and taken advantage of. In the absence of prior claims, postmodern culture will attempt to invade that space by staging the author as celebrity.” (in Moran 66)

As a reluctant but bona fide celebrity, McCarthy –a lonely figure in the West writing about lonely figures in the West– can be made to stand for a certain mainstream ideal. In fact, the very integrity of his uncompromising exceptionalism becomes part of a code through which Anglo-America reads not the ‘image banks of others’, but only an entrenched version of itself. The Western is a code that rejects Robert Hughes’s background of hybridised society, and instead tends to preserve conventional, and confrontational, frontiers of race, language, gender, and ethnicity.

Inescapably mired in celebrity culture, McCarthy becomes a kind of cowboy celebrity, one whose values are made to echo a national ideal,² and which in turn colours the way the text itself is perceived. The abridged Border Trilogy is available on cassette and compact disc read not by the author but by Brad Pitt: should you want to order this item on the internet you will be offered e-links to a plethora of other ‘Western’ products accompanied by cowboy images. Whether or not we would want to call these imposed associations a kind of cowboy metaphoricality to complement the minority metaphoricality that McCracken detects in the marketing of Castillo, there is one thing that is implicit: here are two novels from positions on opposing sides of the fence that may be striving to convey some sort of hybrid middle ground, to render the border as a space of ‘in-between-ness’, of potentiality, but these novels actually become packages whose consumption serves to *reinforce* reactionary concepts of the boundary.

Novels of the periphery have in the past succeeded in infiltrating the centre, the domain of the mainstream, by means of ironic or parodic use of literary convention and cultural stereotype.³ However, in the case of *So Far From God* and *All the Pretty Horses*, where there is such an attempt, it has acted as a magnet for all sorts of associations that tend to overpower and neutralise any subversive intent. The result with these two particular novels is two commodified versions of difference – the image of the exotic but assimilated other in *So Far From God*, and the image of blank intractability in *All The Pretty Horses*.

The parallels between these two apparently very different novels have been highlighted because by moving to the border to be border writers, Castillo and

² McCarthy has been praised in the magazine *Guns and Ammo* for his depiction of the border. (1998)

³ From Willa Cather to Annie Proulx; from Edward Abbey to Rolando Hinojosa and Sherman Alexie.

McCarthy acknowledge its marginality, they keep the margins peripheral. This manoeuvre stakes out the ground for a horde of associations to impose cultural stereotypes that further corroborate the centre. The move to the margins becomes a move to the centre, reinforcing the very boundaries that the authors set out to cross: instead of being border texts that facilitate interculturalism and what Emily Hicks calls "multidimensional perception" (24) they are packages distorted by the optic of commodified multiculturalism.

Why should the mainstream seek to appropriate Castillo and McCarthy in this way? Castillo and McCarthy are border writers in the sense of the border being processual. The appropriation of their texts in an example of the US mainstream rebordering in the constant flux of debordering and rebordering –a means to impose some measure of control on a too-complex multicultural America: McCarthy through cowboy nostalgia, Castillo through ethnic exoticism.

To look more deeply into this coded desire for rebordering in the border novels is to examine the links between stereotype and ritual. Canclini observes that we "need rituals because we do not tolerate excessive hybridisation," and that "the persistence of rituals in contemporary societies can also be interpreted to mean that as subjects we can't live in permanent indetermination and transgression" but depend upon rituals as "systems of ordering" (Canclini 81). Indeed, the action in the novels highly ritualised. In Castillo we are provided the recipes, the *curas* (remedies), we witness the sweats, we hear the recital of *dichos* (sayings), we are taken along on the pilgrimages. The list is almost endless because ritual is the very stuff of the novel. But if it is true to say that Castillo sees her role as an accommodating cultural tour guide, then what about McCarthy? Rituals are somewhat less intrusive in *All the Pretty Horses*, although on the very first page we are witness to John Grady Cole out on the prairie "holding his hat like some supplicant to the darkness over them all" (McCarthy, *ATPH* 3). Through early and repeated utilisation of conventional and ritualised imagery McCarthy takes great pains to situate the text alongside the Western genre in the opening chapters of the novel: leaving his grandfathers funeral, at sunset Cole "saddled his horse and rode out west from the house" (McCarthy, *ATPH* 5). This imagery then becomes reified through McCarthy's self-conscious use of cowboy ritual once the boys, escaping from town, "get used to this life" (McCarthy 1992: 35), and especially when they meet Blevins:

You throw your pocketbook up in the air and I'll put a hole in it, he said.

[...] He stood with his back to the sun and the pistol hanging alongside his leg. Rawlins turned and grinned at John Grady. He held the billfold between his thumb and finger.

You ready, Annie Oakley? he said.

Waitin on you.

He pitched it up underhanded. It rose spinning in the air, very small against the blue. They watched, waiting for him to shoot. Then he shot. The billfold

jerked sideways off across the landscape and opened out and fell twisting to the ground like a broken bird.

(McCarthy, *ATPH* 48)

In assuming the role of stereotypical cowboys once they have left their homes in Texas and crossed into Mexico with the impressionable Blevins, McCarthy's protagonists set in motion a chain of events that will lead to violence and to being spat back over the border. I argue that a similar thing happens with McCarthy: McCarthy, like Castillo ostensibly subverting an established literary genre, flirts with the danger of being co-opted by the conventions associated by that genre and contributing to the cultural mirage of the border land – in the end he sets of a chain of associations that he cannot control, on a frontier that is re-polarised, 're-bordered.'

Gomez-Peña in 1993 surveys the culture of the borderzone and optimistically declares that

[d]espite the great cultural mirage sponsored by the people in power everywhere we look we find pluralism, crisis, and non-synchronicity. The so-called dominant culture is no longer dominant. Dominant culture is a meta-reality that only exists in the virtual space of the mainstream media and spaces of the monocultural institutions.

Today, if there is dominant culture, it is border culture. And those who haven't crossed a border will do so very soon. (160)

Gomez-Pena formulated his post-modern celebration of the border's multiculturalism in the light of policies such as NAFTA, and the even more powerful and pervasive forces for informal deborderization, which would *appear* to include the success of border novels such as *So Far From God* and *All the Pretty Horses*. But multiculturalism can be read in two ways –it can be taken as the prerequisite for a process of uncertain but creative synthesis, a radical hybridisation, or it can be seen as chaotic, disturbing, a divisive "betrayal of once-coherent national cultures" (Lipsitz 309) What we find with these two cross-border products, is that –from the cover of the novels to the celebrity of the authors– once they enter the virtual space of the mainstream media, 'dominant culture' reacts in order to reassert itself, restoring images of coherent national cultures by colonising the texts with associations and implications. The 'great cultural mirage' is re-established.

WORKS CITED:

Albert, Mathius, and Lothar Brock. "New Relationships Between Territory and State: The U.S.-Mexico Border in Perspective," *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending*

- Divisions, Contesting Identities*. Eds. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt. Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1993. 22-41.
- Canclini, Néstor García. 1993. "The Hybrid: A Conversation with Margarita Zires, Raymundo Mier, and Mabel Piccini." *Boundary 2*, Volume 20, Number 3: 77-92.
- Castillo, Ana. *So Far From God*. London: The Women's Press Limited, 1994.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- Dunn, Timothy J. *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin Press, 1996.
- Gomez-Peña, Guillermo. *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts and Poetry*. Graywolf Press, 1994.
- Hicks, D. Emily. *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Hughes, Robert. *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. New York: Warner, 1994.
- Jaynes, Gregory. "The Knock at the Door: Fame comes calling on Cormac McCarthy, but he's hiding out in order to write his violent, exquisite novels." *Time, Domestic* (June 6, 1994) Volume 143, No.23.
- Lipsitz, George. "Their America and Ours: Intercultural Communication in the Context of 'Our America.'" *José Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*. Eds. Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998. 293-316.
- Lorey, David E. 1999. *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1999.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *All The Pretty Horses* London: Picador, 1993.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Crossing* London: Picador, 1994.
- McCracken, Ellen. *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*. Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1999.
- Messent, Peter. "All The Pretty Horses: Cormac McCarthy's Mexican Western." *Borderlines: Studies in American Culture*. Volume 2 Number 10 (1994): 92-112.
- Moran, Joe. *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America*. New York: Pluto Press, 2000.
- Richard, Nelly. 1993. 'Cultural Peripheries: Latin America and Postmodernist De-centring.' *Boundary 2*, Volume 20, Number 3: 156-161.
- Romero, Simon. Interview with Ana Castillo. *Nu-City* (18th June – 1st July). Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1993.
- Spener, David, and Kathleen Staudt. "Conclusion: Rebordering." *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities*. Eds. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt. Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 1993. 232-241.

<http://anacastillo.com/ac/indexIE.html>

<http://cormacmcCarthy.com/Biography.htm>