Larry McMurtry's argument with the cowboy myth

Lynn Holleman Rudloff

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LARRY McMurtry's Argument

WITH THE COWBOY MYTH

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Lynn Holleman Rudloff
June 1993
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ABSTRACT

Larry McMurtry's novels dramatize the cowboy myth's effects on contemporary Westerners, but until 1985 he had not written about the Old West. Since then, in three Old West novels, Larry McMurtry recreates the cowboy myth, with his contemporary novels providing the justification for recreating the myth. Moreover, his essays provide the best frame through which to interpret his novels, which reiterate indirectly the ideology made explicit in the essays. As an additional point of interest, the parallels between the essays and the novels indicate a unified vision which spans three decades.

Identifying mythic qualities is a way of explaining a literary work's power. Rhetorically, a literary myth may motivate or caution; usually it presents an appeal to the unconscious. Myth's rhetoric of acculturation, which unifies a culture, also may promote submission and resignation.

McMurtry's fiction is ironic; that is, it offers contradictory perspectives that involve the reader in an argument, or dialectic. Also, the conclusion of an ironic narrative feels incomplete and leaves the reader uncertain of the meaning. This unsatisfied reader must discover the significance by resolving the conflict among perspectives, thus creating an expanded view of the human condition that reveals a universal meaning.
my parents Jerry and Inda
   who taught me to find my own truth
my husband Bob
   who made it fun and
   who made this work possible
my sons Brian and Tim
   who make this work important
my teachers Jennifer and Bruce

- my heartfelt thanks to you all
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ABBREVIATIONS

Listed below are abbreviations of McMurtry's titles used in this study. The second list is arranged chronologically by original publication date.

NOTE: Quotations may cite page numbers of a subsequent edition; if so, that edition will be specified in the list of references.

(AMF) All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers. 1972.
(ING) In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas. 1968.
(LC) Leaving Cheyenne. 1963.
(SD) Somebody's Darling. 1978.
(TE) Terms of Endearment. 1975.
(Moon) "The Texas Moon, and Elsewhere." 1975.

1961 Horseman, Pass By (HPB)
1963 Leaving Cheyenne (LC)
1966 The Last Picture Show (LPS)
1968 In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas (ING)
1970 Moving On (MO)
1972 All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers (AMF)
1975 Terms of Endearment (TE)
1975 "The Texas Moon, and Elsewhere" (Moon)
1978 Somebody's Darling (SD)
1982 Cadillac Jack (CJ)
1983 The Desert Rose (DR)
1985 Lonesome Dove (LD)
1987 Film Flam: Essays on Hollywood (FF)
1987 Texasville (TV)
1988 Anything for Billy (AFB)
1989 Some Can Whistle (SCW)
1990 Buffalo Girls (BG)
1992 The Evening Star. A Novel (ES)
CHAPTER ONE
The Cowpuncher and The Cowboy

I believe I would know an old cowboy in hell with his hide burnt off. It's the way they stand and walk and talk. There are lots of young fellows punching cows today but they never can take our place, because cowpunching as we knew it is a thing of the past.

"Teddy Blue" Abbott (230)

In his collection of essays, In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas (ING), Larry McMurtry discusses the cowboy myth and its effects on Westerners and on Western literature. In the following quotation, his symbol for the Westerner is his character Hud, from Horseman Pass By:

Not long after I entered the pastures of the empty page, I realized that the place where all my stories start is the heart faced suddenly with the loss of its country, its customary and legendary range. . . . [Hud and I] were left the mythology, he to live it and I to dramatize it. . . . I should like to consider how that mythology operated in the lives of some of my blood kinsmen, and how, by extension, it is operating now in my own books and the books of my artistic kinsmen. (ING 140)

Until the publication of Lonesome Dove (1985), McMurtry had not written about the Old West. Although set in the late nineteenth century American West, Lonesome Dove, Anything for Billy (1988), and Buffalo Girls (1990) are not typical of the Western genre. They create an alternate vision of the mythic cowboy, deliberately challenging the stereotype developed by movies, television, and standard Western fiction. A modified myth is necessary for, as McMurtry
states in ING, "commitment to the myth today carries with it a terrible emotional price" (148).

My thesis is that McMurtry recreates the cowboy myth in his three Old West novels and he provides the justification for recreating the myth in his contemporary novels. His essays provide the best frame through which to interpret the characters and action in his novels; the novels reiterate indirectly the ideology made explicit in the essays. What makes this relationship even more interesting is that the parallels between the essays and the novels indicate a unified vision which spans three decades.

For convenience and clarity, I will use the terms cowpuncher, cowboy, and Westerner as specific designations throughout this study. Cowpuncher refers to the historical figure, cowboy to the genre's evolutionary composite, and Westerner to the modern man who has based his expectations for behavior, especially self-expectations, on the male model developed by the Western. The cowpuncher does not provide the pattern for the Westerner; he follows the cowboy and thus is doubly a product of the genre. The Westerner need not live in the western United States; he is a Westerner because he is "of the Western." Quoted material may deviate from this usage; when necessary I have added my term in brackets.

The mythic cowboy originated in historical reality but this reality has become obscured by romantic qualities and
fantastic skills. The cowpuncher's way of life began to disappear 100 years ago; memory has been replaced by nostalgia. In one essay, McMurtry points out, in fact, that "the myth of the cowboy grew purer every year because there were so few actual cowboys [cowpunchers] left to contradict it" (ING xiii). The cowboy became an idealized figure with a specific style and code of behavior.

The trail-drive era began immediately after the Civil War when Texans returned to find that large numbers of wild cattle had multiplied while they were away at war. These cattle were driven north to the railheads where they were shipped to eastern markets. As the cattle industry moved into the northern plains, stock was moved further north up the trails, eventually reaching the ranges of Montana. Homesteaders spreading across the plains states of Kansas and Nebraska pushed the trails westward. Finally, with the enactment of quarantine laws to protect against Texas fever and with the arrival of the railheads, the era of the cattle drive across the great open range ended. From 1885 to 1895, the number of cattle drives declined rapidly. Thus, the historical period of the trail-driving cowpuncher began in the mid-sixties and ended in the mid-nineties, with the vast majority of the trail drives taking place within the first two decades. From the mid-1890s, punching cows has continued to provide a vocation, but not in the form idealized as the
free-roaming horseman; instead, the cowpuncher today is a ranch employee.

In contrast, the cowboy of the fictitious West has become a mythic figure who expresses the self-reliant ideal prominent in the American cultural myth of the frontiersman. The mythic cowboy was introduced in popular literature and continues to be developed through the media of print, radio, film, and television. The image is revised as American expectations and values change; thus, over time, the image signified by the term cowboy is the cultural invention with little or no reference to the historical cowpuncher.

The paradox presented by the connection of myth and history is explained by Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cord, who provide two ways in which the term myth is used:

Briefly stated, one school seeks to emphasize historical inaccuracies while the other approaches the problem from the vantage point of social psychology. One sees myth as the by-product of historical scholarship (or lack of it), while the other shows a marked concern for the ways in which myth serves the decidedly positive function of unifying experience . . . . Certainly, at times both definitions are present--on occasion they tend to blend to the point of becoming almost indistinguishable. (xiv)

Understanding a society's myths is as important to the documentation of its history as knowing history is to understanding the meaning of myth. Both history and myth are human products and, as such, reflect the time and culture which produce their creators. Thus, identifying various aspects of the American hero will reveal values and ideals
of American society, and in turn changes in the aspects of that hero over time will reveal changes in that society.

According to Northrop Frye, a mythology "is not a description of the outer world, a crude form of philosophy or science, but a cultural model, expressing the way in which man wants to shape and reshape the civilization he himself has made" (Spiritus 20). As such, the cowboy image demonstrates the function of social mythology, as defined by George Tindall: to inform a people of what they "think they are (or ought to be) or what somebody else thinks they are" (2). The cowboy myth also involves what Tindall identifies as the "danger of illusion, a danger that in ordering one's vision of reality, the myth may predetermine the categories of perception, rendering one blind to things that do not fit into the mental image" (2). These two states represent the tension within social mythology: the contract to protect society by promoting acceptance of what we are, in opposition to the contract to enrich society by offering a vision of what we can be (Frye, CP 131).

Bernice Slote, reviewing the various uses of the term myth with regard to literature, notes that the term refers "sometimes to a classical story, sometimes to created forms of belief . . . . [Both are] the narrative form of those particularly archetypal symbols which together make a coherent revelation of what man knows and what he believes" (v). For the classical Greeks, the narrative form for myth
was the epic poem. Our culture, on the other hand, portrays and creates myth primarily through the narratives of the novel and film.

Homer's epic poems have an obvious relation to the contemporary genre of fantasy and, when read today, may seem like entertainment rather than statement of belief. Yet we accept they were inspiring for the classical Greeks and, though not historically factual, served as reservoirs of historical and religious truth. According to Frye, myth expresses truth, not history:

For mythology is not primarily an attempt to picture reality . . . It is rather an attempt to articulate what is of greatest human concern to the society that produces it. . . . Mythology is a form of imaginative thinking, and its direct descendant in culture is literature, more particularly fiction, works of literature that tell stories. (Spiritus 72)

Fiction is the repository of myth because the narratives comprising its visionary worlds relate necessary and recurring concerns through events that hold our interest and characters that invite our alliance.

More specifically, fiction illustrates a society's myths through characters and events that are sufficiently realistic to be believable. At the same time, rhetorical devices such as irony and symbolism provide means of suggesting complex, even contradictory, meanings. Thus, fiction becomes the vehicle for myth because, through place, event, and character, it is able to convey significance more persuasively (i.e., rhetorically) than discursive prose.
Larry McMurtry gives as one reason for writing *ING* that it was an effort at exploring the possibilities of the nonfiction mode. This was his response to having identified a trend toward nonfiction among talented writers. He discusses the merits of fiction:

Why [they] are so often more persuasive in their essays than in their novels is of course a subtle question; possibly it is a delayed result of the contempt for narrative fostered by modernist literary theory. . . . The narrative impulse has been diverted. Many of the great essays of the last decade are essays in which both the tactics and the textures of fiction have been assimilated. . . . my preference for the straight fiction is principally a matter of voice. However well-pitched, clever, or sincere, my voice in the essay counts for much less than the voice of the novel. It is not a question of monotony, but of range and resonance and fullness, and on all three counts the novel outspeaks. . . . the novel still depends upon the creation of character, an element in fiction about as unfashionable as narrative and fully as important. I do not say that narrative and character should be stressed at the expense of structure and symbol, but merely that the former are much more important than the poetics of fiction has made them seem. (138-39)

His conclusion that the persuasive power of discursive prose resides in rhetorical devices borrowed from fiction offers support for the study of fiction by students in composition courses. His assertion that the rhetoric of fiction is located in character and narrative, that in fact fiction's greater effectiveness as a mode of persuasion requires the development of character and narrative, agrees with the critical theory expressed in this study.

Identifying mythic qualities in literary characters is another way of explaining a literary work's power. As
mythic, the cowboy image has the power to affect the unconscious. According to Kenneth Burke, "the key term for the 'new' rhetoric would be 'identification,' which can include a partially 'unconscious' factor in appeal" ("Rhetoric" 63). One element of McMurtry's art is his ability to create characters who are convincingly human and convincingly lost; that combination of ethos and pathos provides the strength for his argument—the logos developed by the tension between mythical and ironical elements.

At no point in any of his novels does McMurtry mention or directly blame the cowboy myth for the problems of his characters. He is primarily and powerfully a storyteller, masterful at absorbing the reader in the characters and the action. When the sum of his fiction is surveyed, however, his novels can be seen to carry forward a unifying argument concerning the social significance of the cowboy myth. The evidence emerges during analysis of recurring ironic perspectives; the dialectic required to resolve these apparent discrepancies involves the reader in McMurtry's argument.

Frye describes such thematic significance as the dilemma of fiction:

If literature is didactic, it tends to injure its own integrity; if it ceases wholly to be didactic, it tends to injure its own seriousness. . . . This dilemma is partly solved by giving an ironic resolution to a work of fiction. Irony presents a human conflict which, unlike a comedy, a romance, or even a tragedy, is unsatisfactory and incomplete unless we see in it a significance beyond itself,
something typical of the human condition as a whole. What that significance is, irony does not say: it leaves that question up to the reader or audience. ("Road" 14)

McMurtry's fiction is ironic in that the conflict his characters experience is not satisfactorily explained or concluded within the narrative; the reader-as-critic must discover the significance of the action. According to Frye, explication of irony—the indirect meaning—involves the reader-as-critic in a dialectic through which an expanded perspective of the conflict, and thus the human condition, is achieved.

Burke's connection of irony and dialectic is even stronger; qualifying his definition by "their role in the discovery and description of 'the truth,'" he suggests "for irony we could substitute dialectic" ("Four" 503). Burke explains why irony is such a powerful means of conveying significance:

... if you isolate any one advocate in a dialogue, and see the whole in terms of his position alone, you have the relativistic. And in relativism there is no irony... For relativism sees everything in but one set of terms... Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all the terms. ... the dialectic (or dramatic) explicitly attempts to establish a distinct set of characters, all of which protest variously at odds or on the bias with one another... ("Four" 512)

In works of fiction that provide access to the perspectives of many characters, the reader is permitted the "perspective of perspectives" ("Four" 512) and is seduced into the dialectic set up by the author. In this way, the reader
becomes involved in the author's argument. Even works presented from the single perspective of a narrating character invite the reader into the author's argument by the design of dramatic irony—when the narrator is uninformed or is deliberately or involuntarily oblivious to knowledge shared by the reader and the author.

The majority of McMurtry's novels are tied to contemporary Texas or Texans, with the action taking place primarily during the last four decades. McMurtry's contemporary male characters are bewildered and frustrated; they are uncertain what women expect from them and are unwilling (or unable) to show initiative or to direct their own lives. McMurtry argues that one source of their inertia lies in their acceptance of the social myth of the cowboy.
CHAPTER TWO

The Westerner: Danny Deck

[Some occurrences] stop us dead as though by some impalpable intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until we can die. Faulkner (189)

The cowboy myth has been a powerful shaper of identity for over a century. The cowboy is essentially a solitary figure, set apart from society by his relationship to the natural landscape. McMurtry suggests that the cowboy is a tragic figure and "one element of the tragedy is that he is committed to an orientation that includes but does not recognize the female" (ING 148). The Western belongs to the Romance genre; it stresses action and emphasizes reserve as a heroic masculine characteristic. The cowboy is committed to "a heroic concept of life" (148) and he thinks of women in terms of "a romantic convention" (149): he is the hero and she is the lady.

McMurtry explains how the hero's idealized and essentially chivalric relationship toward women causes trouble between the sexes:

The discrepancy between what the cowboy expected of women and what they needed of him accounts for a lot of those long rides into the sunset, as the drifting cowboy drifts away not so much from what he might want as from what he is not sure how to get. Women shook his confidence because it was a confidence
based on knowing how to behave in a man's world, and even the West isn't entirely a man's world anymore. (ING 73)

The independence and self-reliance that earn for the cowboy respect among men gain for him only disappointment from women. Relationships between the sexes receive a great deal of attention in McMurtry's novels, where he provides ironic, often wryly humorous, and sometimes pathetic views of this tension.

In terms of the cowboy myth, the primary reason for this dissonance between men and women is that the cowboy is more comfortable with his work and his comrades than he is with women. To provide a background for his explanation of this predicament, McMurtry refers to the memoir of cowpuncher "Teddy Blue" Abbott. According to Teddy Blue, cowpunchers felt they were roughened by their lifestyle and not fit to associate with decent women; specifically, cowpunchers were apprehensive of conversation with decent women because they were afraid of saying or doing something wrong (ING 150). While this inhibition has been mythologized in the cowboy as self-sufficient reserve, insightfully, Teddy Blue considers it an impediment, not a virtue.

McMurtry claims that this same fear operates in the Westerner. The truck or car has replaced the horse, but the Westerner experiences the same anxiety and restlessness because he is not sure how to meet a woman's needs.

Most of them marry, and love their wives sincerely, but since their sociology idealizes women and their
mythology excludes her the impasse which results is often little short of tragic. Now, as then, the cowboy escapes to the horse, the range, the work, and the company of comrades. (ING 150)

McMurtry dramatizes this claim in Danny Deck, the protagonist of two novels published 17 years apart. The parallels between these two novels, All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers (AMF) and Some Can Whistle (SCW), accentuate the significance of the problems proposed in the essays and invite conclusions about the cowboy myth and the Westerner.

In SCW, 51-year-old Danny Deck experiences the fear of talking to women, exactly as reported by Teddy Blue, and expresses this fear with the irony and humor that is characteristic of McMurtry's writing:

I was beginning to have a sense of déjà vu. Somewhere back along the road of my life I had had a similar, indeed an identical, conversation. Some other disappointed woman had vowed to stay with me by lowering her flame to my level, in effect. . . . It was all I could do to breathe, and I knew that anything I said would be wrong, yet I also felt that I had to say something. Indeed, I knew even from my half-obliterated memory of the analogous conversation from the past that whatever I found to say would be precisely wrong, would turn the woman's dull sadness into bitter anger or blistering contempt—and maybe that was the point. (SCW 306)

Like Teddy Blue, Danny is afraid to speak, certain he will say something wrong. He does not feel adequate to provide what a woman—in this case, his daughter—needs, but he knows he must find something to say. He also must say something different from what he has said wrong before, but he does not know what was wrong with his earlier attempts.
Danny expects to fail and be spurned, thus he sets up his own rejection. What Danny finally speaks is a sincere but self-deprecating declaration of his anxiety and lack of confidence; with this he evokes anger and disgust from his daughter, just as he had anticipated. That this is not an isolated instance for Danny is evidenced by his next statement:

"I didn't mean to make you feel that way," I said. Even as I said it, I felt those same words echoing endlessly off the walls of the long tunnel of my past. . . . I had never meant to make a single woman feel that way; and yet that way was exactly how I had made every one of them feel. (SCW 307) Significantly, it is words that echo through Danny's past. For Danny, words represent all his failed attempts to provide for a woman what she needed at the time, his failed attempts to say the right thing. Danny is a writer, so language is his work arena. Like the cowboy's horsemanship, this is the area in which Danny has demonstrated competence. But he feels inept when he tries to communicate with a woman about a problem in which he is personally invested. Indeed, all his experience has proved that he is inept, and all he is able to do is confess his frustration and helpless resignation.

Danny has accepted a belief that he cannot communicate with a woman about himself, even when it is imperative for him that he do so. For Danny, isolation has become part of his self-concept, as it is for the cowboy. Danny reports that all the women he has known have been saddened and
angered by his manifest helplessness with regard both to this inability to say the right thing and to his resigned acceptance of the loneliness it brings. The reader becomes frustrated with Danny, sympathizing not only with him but also with the women in his life. Thus McMurtry evokes from the reader the frustration he has described in the text, and the reader becomes a participant in the imaginative world of the novel.

Subsequently the reader-as-critic can become involved in the dialectic proposed through the novel's ironic resolution and can discern implicit thematic concerns. Through this critical process, Danny's problem can be identified outside the frame of the novel in the world inhabited by the reader, so that the significance is comprehended and expanded. In this way, McMurtry's challenge to the cowboy myth is conveyed more powerfully through the dialectic of his fiction than through the explicit discourse of his essays.

Danny became convinced that he would women, it is necessary to refer to AMF. This novel centers around late twenties, a student of one published novel. Through the he is increasingly unable to feeling. He becomes oriented by his inability to
make sense of what is happening to him. His incompetence at expressing his needs and fears prevents him from receiving help from people who would like to help him.

Young Danny expresses his isolation as being unable to talk, but his dissatisfaction is not only with verbal language. In the ironic conclusion at the end of AMF, he drowns in the Rio Grande the manuscript of his second novel, written while he was living in California. He saves only the prologue and epilogue he has written about characters from the Old West, Old Man Goodnight and Granny Deck. This ending signifies that Danny has returned physically to Texas and metaphorically to the frontier and the cowboy myth. The myth is able to justify his isolation and inadequacy with women because these traits are elements of the myth; ironically, then, his system of belief both produces and justifies his pain.

The story Danny saves about Charles Goodnight is one McMurtry relates in ING (for a discussion, see Appendix). In another ironic parallel, Danny wanted to meet a Texas writer from Fort Worth named Teddy Blue, who was also living in California, but kept missing him. In ING, McMurtry names Old Man Goodnight and Teddy Blue as faces of the cowboy god.

McMurtry's powerful sense of irony permeates his work; the drowned novel is entitled The Man Who Never Learned. Throughout AMF, Danny is told he will never learn when it
comes to his relations with women. On his approach to the Rio Grande, Danny expresses his extreme frustration:

I knew I would never learn. People were right. If I lived to be a hundred I would still be just as stupid. I would still do all the wrong things, with whatever people blundered into my path. Something was just wrong. I had missed some door. . . . The door to the ordinary places was the door I had missed. (AMF 242)

This door includes the door to the hospital where he has just been prevented from seeing his newborn daughter. Danny believes, like the cowboy, that he is unworthy of such female-centered warmth and he accepts his isolation. SCW begins with a phone call, twenty-two years later, from the daughter he has never met. Danny has believed that ordinary family life is impossible for him and this too can be seen as part of the tragedy of the cowboy myth.

In AMF, McMurtry provides a metaphor for the consequences of the myth in the form of a curse placed on young Danny. Because Danny is "a frontier genius" (AMF 41) who behaves offensively in a social situation, he is cursed by a woman, a "sinister, black-haired" (44) lesbian:

"I have powers," she said. "I now put a curse upon you. Your keys will no longer fit in locks. No door you really wish to enter will open for you again. From now on you will be thirsty. Water will stop running from your faucets. No one will give you presents. People will not like your clothes. Your stomach will be unsettled and you will belch all day. There will be sand in your bed. You will be constipated often. Those whom you remember will not remember you. You will have a rash between your legs."

The hairs on the back of my neck were standing up. I had never had a curse put on me before. She was matter-of-fact about it, and very convincing.
"Soon a pane of glass will drop between you and your wife," she said. "You will be able to see her, you will be able to hear her, you will be able to want her, but the pane of glass will always separate you. You will not be able to touch her. The pane of glass will enclose you like a cylinder, separating you from all women. You will want many women, but nothing will ever shatter the pane of glass."

She stopped talking and stepped back to light a cigarette. (45-46)

McMurtry presents the curse in two segments which are separated by Danny's comment. The curse's first segment seems humorous because trivial problems are juxtaposed with serious problems and both are delivered in child-like short sentences and simple clauses. That Danny believes the woman to be serious is made clear by the comment that separates the two sections of the curse. The second segment is solemn and ominous; this is reflected in the complicated syntax and is reinforced by anaphora. This segment introduces the metaphor of the pane of glass that will separate Danny from women. Danny has recently married, only to find that his wife is completely self-contained. She gives Danny no opportunity to share her emotions or her thoughts and does not need Danny once he has impregnated her. Their relationship is symbolized by the pane of glass and, more ironically, by the lesbian lifestyle of the woman who delivers the curse.

The consequences of the curse compare to the consequences of the cowboy myth as McMurtry has detailed them in ING. Interestingly, the curse occurs in the first fifty pages of AMF and, with the exception of the novel's
prophetic title, is never referred to again. It is up to the reader-as-critic to realize that, at the end of AMF, Danny has been physically and emotionally barred from doors he wants to enter, the people he preserves most powerfully are from a mythic past, he is alienated from all his friends, and he is denied closeness with the women he loves and needs.

Through Danny, McMurtry amplifies his definition of the cowboy's tragedy by dramatizing the cowboy's impasse. This representation, or synecdoche (Burke, "Four" 509), translates McMurtry's perception—an abstraction—into what he has perceived—a tangible act—through an agent—the character—who evokes some degree of sympathy from the reader. This metaphoric function of language encourages both the reader's connection of the act to its significance and the reader's connection to the character, which intensifies that significance.

In SCW, the pane of glass metaphor is expressed as a wall separating Danny from women. When Danny says precisely the wrong thing to his daughter (see above p. 13), he relates the episode to Jeanie, one of his women friends. Describing his frustration, Danny says:

Retelling it upset me. I remembered how T.R.'s face had filled with pain. I felt terrible for having caused my daughter such pain. My voice, in recalling it, began to crack. I sniffed a few times and stopped talking. All of a sudden I began to cry. It seemed too sad; I regretted my emotional ineptness too much...
"I want to meet this girl," she said eventually. To my surprise her own voice was shaky and tearful. ... "She cracked the wall . . . . you built around you," Jeanie said. "Don't say it wasn't there. It was there. I tried to crack it but I didn't have the confidence . . . . But you were dying behind your wall, and you're lucky to have a daughter who had the guts to crack it." (311)

Through Jeanie, McMurtry makes it plain that Danny has built the wall himself by adopting the ideal of the solitary cowboy, with its recognition, yet exclusion, of the female. The fear of saying the wrong thing incapacitates the man who adopts the cowboy myth and functions like a wall or a pane of glass between him and the women he needs.

Danny can accept the curse that accompanies the cowboy's isolation until the pane of glass separates him from his daughter a second time. His ex-wife had not wanted him to see or communicate with the child, and he had accepted this. His sense of worthlessness produced in him an inability to act on his own behalf. For young Danny, the word daughter was unrelated to any sensation or experience. In addition, his romantic ideal of womanhood prevented him from thinking of her in terms of an active element in his life. She served as a romantic element of tragedy that affirmed his unworthiness to have a normal life.

When Danny's daughter contacts him in the opening sentence of SCW, he is given a second chance to establish a relationship with someone who can be more for him than a romantic ideal of womanhood. For this to happen, Danny must give up the myth-justified isolation that excludes women and
make a real place in his life for his daughter. He has to act instead of dissembling in comfortable illusions that distance him from life. Ironically, soon after he realizes and accepts this, his daughter is killed. Thus, his isolation separates them for all but a brief period of her life. Danny raises his grandchildren, which prevents him from reverting to his previous isolation, but he is tormented and obsessed by the lost years when he could have known his daughter.

Through his fiction, McMurtry argues against one of the great American myths, the heroic cowboy. His argument is not presented explicitly on the pages of these novels; but both Danny Deck novels end in anguish and distress. McMurtry's challenge to the myth is revealed during the response that occurs in what Frye calls the second stage:

Whenever we read anything there are two mental operations we perform, which succeed one another in time. First we follow the narrative movement in the act of reading . . . . Afterwards, we can look at the work as a simultaneous unity and study its structure. . . . The chief material of rhetorical analysis consists of a study of the poetic "texture," and such a study plunges one into a complicated labyrinth of ambiguities, multiple meanings, recurring images, and echoes of both sound and sense. . . . [The second stage] involves attaching the rhetorical analysis to a deductive framework derived from a study of the structure, and the context of that structure is what shows us where we should begin to look for our central images and ambiguities. (CP 25-26)

McMurtry's argument with the myth is revealed when his novels are surveyed for elements of the rhetorical labyrinth; the reader who seeks to solve the puzzle has no
choice but to become involved in the dialectic. At this point his novels set in the present can be seen as his rationale for revising the myth to better express society's concerns, and his novels set in the Old West can be seen as recreating the myth so that it is liberated from its acquired meaning. Danny Deck's sufferings are eloquent argument for such a campaign.

In McMurtry's version of the myth, the cowboy's solitude is not admirable; rather, he is detached because he is emotionally inept or awkward. McMurtry's male protagonists, both Westerner and cowboy, illustrate this claim. Dramatizing the arguments of his essays, these characters are unable to make meaningful choices or confront problems in their personal lives. Afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing, they choose inertia. This crippling impasse results from their belief in the cowboy myth.

The romantic ethic of the cowboy myth produces and reinforces in the Westerner an inability to relate to women in ways that would satisfy him or, concomitantly, the women in his life. His difficulties with women increase his isolation, itself an element of his own romantic image which is borrowed from the cowboy's solitude or detachment. Thus his system of belief, which both generates and justifies his loneliness, also confers heroic qualities to his choice of riding off metaphorically into the sunset to avoid emotional issues.
CHAPTER THREE

The Three Faces of the Cowboy God

"Regional" is an outsider's term; it has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life.

Eudora Welty (132)

The Westerner characterized so well in Danny Deck suffers from a most serious type of nostalgia: he longs to return to a time he never experienced and a place that never existed. His desire is engendered by the sentimental memories of old-timers who reminisce to recall themselves powerful and by the inventors of romance whose mythologized West offers a landscape of prerogatives. The images convince him that he, too, would have been exceptional in such exceptional times; his ordinariness has been predetermined by these ordinary times. In relinquishing the present, he abdicates effective action, which is possible only at that moment of transition between the future and the past, that moment which belongs only to the present.

In ING, McMurtry writes from the perspective of one who knows this longing, but who recognizes in that attachment to the past an impotence of action. He describes in these essays the effects of change and of loss, the change from rural to urban traditions and the loss of identity connected with Texas no longer being a cattle kingdom and Texans no longer able to claim a kinship, however removed, with the
cowboy. The metaphor of the cowboy as the abandoning god, which he borrows to describe this change, is exceptionally poignant:

When I think about the passing of the cowboy, my mind inappropriately hangs on the poem of Cavafy's, from the scene in Shakespeare, from the sentence of Plutarch's: the poem in which the god abandons Antony. I like Cavafy's treatment best, with Antony at his window at night in Alexandria, bidden to drink past all deceiving while the god and his retinue file away. In Shakespeare only the guards hear the strange music that marks the god's departure, but it is still a telling moment—indeed, a telling fancy.

I can believe I have heard such music myself. The god who abandoned Antony was Hercules—what is the name of the god who now abandons Texas? Sometimes I see him as Old Man Goodnight, or as Teddy Blue, or as my Uncle Johnny . . . but the one thing that is sure is that he was a horseman, and a god of the country. His home was the frontier, and his mythos celebrates those masculine ideals appropriate to a frontier. (xxii)

These faces of the cowboy god—Goodnight, Teddy Blue, and Uncle Johnny—are fundamental to McMurtry's "own distinctive structure of imagery, which usually emerges even in his earliest work, and which does not and cannot essentially change. This larger context of the poem within its author's entire 'mental landscape' is assumed in all the best explication" (Frye, CP 22). It is this type of explication I am attempting by identifying these faces of the cowboy god, as well as other images of McMurtry's mental landscape, throughout his work.

McMurtry's fifteen novels can be separated neatly into five sets of three novels. The first nine novels can be divided into three sets by the chronology in which they were
written. Critics often use these groupings; for example, these divisions organize the critical material in Clay Reynolds' *Taking Stock: A Larry McMurtry Casebook*. The last six novels alternate chronologically into two sets of three.

His first three novels, commonly called the Thalia trilogy, share a West Texas setting, in a town similar to McMurtry's hometown. All three became movies: *Horseman, Pass By* (1961) was released as *Hud* (1963), *Leaving Cheyenne* (1963) as *Lovin' Molly* (1973), and the movie version of *The Last Picture Show* (1966) was released under the same name in 1971. McMurtry calls these novels "elegiac" and gives as their theme "the move from the land to the cities (or the small town to the suburbs) . . . the dying of a way of life—the rural, pastoral way of life" (*ING* xiii). These novels paradoxically justify both the leaving and the sense of loss. The collection of essays *ING* (1968) was published between the Thalia novels and the next three, called the urban or Houston novels.

Of the Houston novels, *Moving On* (1970) and *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers* (1972) have not been filmed; *Terms of Endearment* (1975) was released as a movie under the same title in 1983. Each of these novels includes characters who are English graduate students at Rice University, as was McMurtry; Danny Deck and Emma Horton appear in each book. Movement characterizes the first two novels: rootless young adults travel between Texas and
California; relationships between men and women do not work; the men climb in their cars and ride away. Patsy Carpenter, the main character of *Moving On*, rejects her husband, a Westerner whose rootlessness parallels the rodeo cowboys he follows. *Terms of Endearment* focuses on female characters: the firmly widowed Aurora Greenway is firmly rooted but her daughter Emma, who marries a Rice graduate student, is doomed to movement and an unsuccessful marriage.

The next three novels do not share an easily identifiable common thread, and none have been filmed. They are sometimes labeled the trash trilogy; this harsh term may reflect the apprehension that in leaving the Texas landscape McMurtry was forsaking the heart of his fiction. *Somebody's Darling* (1978) and *Cadillac Jack* (1982) center in Hollywood and Washington, D.C., respectively, but the characters have strong connections in Texas and narrative carries them there. These novels continue the biographical correlations of the first two sets: since he left Texas, McMurtry's work has located him in Hollywood and Washington. *The Desert Rose* (1983) takes place entirely in Las Vegas and concerns a mother and daughter. McMurtry's female characters generally lack the confusion and inertia of his male characters, especially the men who have lost their connection to the land and the mythic cowboy. His characterization of women intrigued me when I first read one of his novels in the
early seventies, sent me searching for more, and has kept me a faithful reader since.

In three of the six most recent novels, McMurtry returns to earlier scenes and characters after 25 to 30 years have passed. *Texasville* (1987) returns to Thalia, picking up the characters of *The Last Picture Show*; the movie version (1990) featured the actors and actresses of the earlier film. *Some Can Whistle* (1989) finds Danny Deck of *All My Friends* living outside Thalia and sends him to Houston to deal with his past. *The Evening Star* (1992) returns to Aurora Greenway and the grandchildren she inherited from Emma in *Terms of Endearment*. These continuations confirm that the angst and rootlessness of the male characters were not symptoms of their youth but of a more profound dilemma. The anguish of their youth has become despair.

The final set of three Old West novels directly confronts the cowboy myth that has dominated McMurtry's fiction. Danny Deck's description of leaving Texas illustrates the myth's hold:

It was strange, leaving Texas. I had had no plans to leave it, and didn't know how I felt. I drove on into New Mexico . . . . Then I really felt Texas. It was all behind me, north to south, not lying there exactly, but more like looming there over the car, not a state or a stretch of land but some giant, some genie, some god, towering over the road. I really felt it. Its vengeance might fall on me from behind. I had left without asking permission, or earning my freedom. Texas let me go, ominously quiet. It hadn't gone away. It was there behind me. *(AMF 67)*
Like Danny, McMurtry cannot escape the cowboy god, even by leaving Texas. With *Lonesome Dove* (1985), he recovers the mythic era of the trail drives. The television miniseries of *Lonesome Dove* aired in 1989. *Anything for Billy* (1988) and *Buffalo Girls* (1990) are set in New Mexico and Montana and dramatize historical characters and situations that have contributed to the cowboy myth.

The cowboy of the popular Western probably inhabits the ranges of Montana and New Mexico more often than Texas, but it is the Texas cowboy that McMurtry specifies in his essays, his contemporary novels, and *Lonesome Dove*. When the era of the cattle drives ended, the prudent cowpuncher turned to ranching; this is one of the themes in *Leaving Cheyenne*. Over time, as beef became less profitable than oil, the oilman replaced the rancher as the symbolic Texan, a tension central to *Horseman, Pass By*. When oil prices plunged, the Texas oilman-entrepreneur was replaced by the nouveau-poor squanderer prominent in *Texasville*. Cattle ranching in Texas now is little more than a recreational sport and a tax shelter. Very few ranches rely upon cattle as their primary source of income and only a large cattle operation would need cowpunchers. Most small ranchers and farmers who run cattle can handle their own stock.

Adam Fry of *Leaving Cheyenne* identifies the difference between cowpuncher and rancher as the difference between his son Gid and Gid's best friend:
Now you got the itch to go up on the plains and cowboy, just because Johnny McCloud's up there. Now I'll tell you about Johnny McCloud. He's a good cowhand and he ain't scared of nothing. I'll admit that. But that's the limitation of him, right there. He'll never be nothing but a damn good cowhand. When he dies he'll own just what he's got on and what he's inherited. . . . He'll fiddle around his whole life working for wages, and never accomplish a damn thing. . . . It don't make him bad at all. . . . The point is, you ain't like that. You've got too much of me in you. Punching someone else's cows never would satisfy you. (LC 26)

Gid accepts the truth in his father's assessment and gives up the idea of being a cowboy. Forty years later, Johnny provides his perspective on this issue:

That was Gid—he thought my working for wages was a disgrace. But I got my pleasure out of doing what I wanted to, not out of owning no damn mesquite and prickly pear. I told him a hundred times, but he never did understand it. (LC 194)

The cowboy is free but broke; the rancher is tethered to his land he owns. The unattractive side of cowboying is the accumulation of physical damage that makes it a young man's occupation but allows no accumulation of funds.

The cowboy-ranchers in the novels are composites of the historical figures who represent the cowboy god for McMurtry, though some favor one face more than another. Each Old West novel features one of the faces: echoes of Uncle Johnny enliven Isinglass in Anything for Billy, Teddy Blue is dramatized in Buffalo Girls, and Gus and Call of Lonesome Dove are modeled upon Charles Goodnight. All three faces of the god are found in All My Friends: Teddy Blue is the name of the young Texas writer from Fort Worth who went to
Stanford, Danny's Uncle Laredo is a caricature of McMurtry's Uncle Johnny, and Danny attributes tremendous significance to the story of Old Man Goodnight and the last running of the buffalo (for a discussion, see Appendix).

Both the history and the myth surrounding Goodnight are dramatized in Lonesome Dove. The histories of the characters Gus and Call parallel Goodnight's to some extent. When Call encounters Goodnight during his return to Texas, we find that they know each other and had even ridden together in the Frontier Regiment. Ironic evidence of their similarities lurks in the statement, "Call had never taken to the man—Goodnight was indifferent to authority, or at least unlikely to put any above his own" (811). More important, there are two particularly intense episodes from the novel that parallel events related in J. Evetts Haley's biography of Goodnight.² Both instances seem stranger in fiction.

When Deets, one of the original Hat Creek outfit, is killed, Call delays the herd an entire day to carve a marker for Deets' grave. The crew is surprised because Call, a particularly hard-driving trail boss, has pushed them ahead relentlessly. Even Gus finds Call's behavior unusual; they have buried many men, but the care Call takes with Deets' marker is unique. The text carved deeply into the wooden board reads:
Deets is a fellow ranger, a trusted comrade, and an African-American. This last is important because historical accounts report several thousand African-American and Hispanic cowpunchers, yet the cowboy in the Western is White. In Haley's biography of Goodnight, the parallel to Deets is Bose Ikard, who trailed cattle with Goodnight before buying a farm in Texas in 1869. When Ikard died in 1929, Goodnight marked his gravesite with these words:

Bose Ikard
Served with me four years on the Goodnight-Loving Trail, never shirked a duty or disobeyed an order, rode with me in many stampedes, participated in three engagements with Comanches, splendid behavior.
C. Goodnight (243)

Obviously, the text in Lonesome Dove rephrases this text with few changes, even repeating one misspelling. This historical basis adds to the episode in Lonesome Dove; the verisimilitude validates this challenge to the stereotype of the cowboy as White. However, McMurtry tells the better story; this is significant because the comradeship between Deets and the other men addresses one of our culture's central concerns and makes a more important point about the West than the biographer's point about Goodnight.

The other parallel episode, to be discussed at length in the next section, is Call's trip back to Texas with Gus's body. This strained my suspension of disbelief until I read
Haley's account of Goodnight returning Loving's body to Texas. Loving's fight with the band of Comanches, the escape by water of Loving's companion Wilson, and Wilson's survival in spite of his injuries to carry word back to Goodnight of Loving's predicament obviously provided the material for McMurtry's story of Gus and Pea Eye. Again this historical confirmation provides verisimilitude to a fictional episode that otherwise seems too heroic to make realistic fiction.

After the heroic countenance of the Goodnight face of the cowboy god, the treatment Uncle Johnny receives in the novels illustrates the diminished cowboy-rancher, born too late for the mythic era. McMurtry identifies Johnny as his favorite uncle (ING 160) and the tribute he pays Johnny (160-72) is particularly touching because of its contrast with the generally sardonic tone of the preceding essays. McMurtry describes him in these terms:

Of them all, he fought the suburb more successfully, and hewed closest to the nineteenth century ideal of the cowboy. He was the last to be domesticated, if indeed he ever was domesticated, and at one point he almost abandoned the struggle to be a rancher in order to remain a free cowboy. (ING 160-61)

Despite McMurtry's respect and affection, Uncle Johnny provides the pattern for Uncle Laredo, the caricature of the rancher in All My Friends, and for Isinglass, the ruthless cattle baron of Anything For Billy. These characters manifest McMurtry's attitude toward his own blood ties to the myth.
The end of the trail for the enterprising cowpuncher is a ranch of his own—domestication, according to the quote above. McMurtry's novels progressively depreciate the rancher by showing him in increasingly less complimentary ways. This treatment of the rancher-cowboy illustrates the progression from mythic romance to its ironic displacement which Frye described in his theory of fictional modes: "The sequence of displaced myths in Essay 1 may be regarded, then, as a sequence of increasingly ironic treatments of the mythic pattern found in romance" (Hamilton 151). Where romance acts as an pacifier by dramatizing myth with characters larger than life, irony acts as an irritant by dramatizing the real with characters who are all too ordinary. The figure of the rancher becomes increasingly ironic as the mythic content declines.

Adam Fry is closest to the mythic ideal. He chooses to die by his own hand and with his boots on, rather than weaken and die from illness. The line from Teddy Blue's song (Abbott 231) provides his metaphor for death in his final note to his son: "I think I'll go out on the hill and turn my horses free" (LC 107). In Horseman, Pass By, Homer Bannon's disastrous cattle purchase and second marriage, and the manner of his death are ironic; still, Homer represents the mythic ideal by his response to misfortune. But with Sam the Lion in The Last Picture Show, irony becomes the paramount mode. Sam had it all and lost it all—a ranch, an
oil business, a car dealership. He lost a son with each business, then his wife lost her mind. Now he owns the ill-fated picture show.

Continuing this progression toward the ironic, *Terms of Endearment's* Vernon is the supplanting avatar of the cowboy god, the millionaire oilman-cowboy. Vernon exemplifies the cliché that the car has replaced the horse; he literally lives in his car. Vernon owns a parking garage in downtown Houston and keeps the top level vacant so he can park there and sleep under the stars—more irony, since on most nights in Houston a parking garage is not high enough to find the stars. With Vernon, the cowboy has moved to the city, but he maintains—ironically—his relationship to the outdoors.

*Moving On* presents the first rancher-uncle, Roger Wagonner, who is also the most gracious and endearing of the ranchers. His sections of the novel provide the unity in *Moving On*. Ironically, Roger is not patterned after a McMurtry, but resembles Jeff Dobbs, an "uncle-by-marriage... [who] had been a cowboy and a Ranger" (*ING* 151) and who settled down in Oklahoma rather than Texas. The parallels linking Uncle Roger to Uncle Jeff are his nightly arguments with his wife about the Bible (*MO* 194; *ING* 151), the circumstances of his wife's death (*MO* 47; *ING* 151), and his relationship to Patsy Carpenter—Roger is her husband's "stepuncle"—her uncle-by-marriage (*MO* 37; *ING* 151).
In contrast, Uncle Laredo, the rancher-uncle of *All My Friends*, is an exaggerated collection of unfavorable characteristics. According to Danny, "He wasn't crazy and nice, he was crazy and mean" (164). The pattern for Uncle Laredo clearly is McMurtry's Uncle Johnny, although, ironically, Danny disclaims Uncle Laredo as "only an in-law" (*AMF* 150). The parallels between Johnny and Laredo become signal indicators as they reappear throughout McMurtry's novels, especially in the character of Will Isinglass in *Anything for Billy*, as connoting central significance in McMurtry's vocabulary of symbols.

For example, McMurtry shows the eccentricity of Johnny: He drove "an army surplus jeep of ancient vintage . . . it lacked both roof and seats. . . . the seat Uncle Johnny took care of by turning a syrup-bucket upside down in the floorboards and balancing a piece of two-by-four across it" (*ING* 167). His house was "a towering three-story edifice . . . Every grain of paint . . . abraded away by the blowing sand" (164). Yet Johnny "slept in the little bunk-house" (165). He married for the first time when he was sixty-five, but "even after they married it was some time before he considered himself quite worthy to occupy the same house with her" (170).

Danny Deck describes Uncle Laredo in similar terms: He drove "an old green army jeep, without a seat. He had piled some of the manhole covers in it, to sit on" (*AMF* 162). His
house, the Hacienda of the Bitter Waters, "had four stories, three turrets, seven porches. On the top was a huge cupola, with a spire rising from it. The wood had long ago been scraped by the sand until it was almost black" (155). Uncle Laredo "never slept in the house and seldom went in it at all" (156). He married "after eighty-nine years of bachelorhood. . . . She lived on her own ranch, some miles away" (162).

In Anything for Billy, Isinglass owns a house that is "all turrets and towers, balconies, and bay windows" (AFB 257) but "he sleeps in the bunkhouse with the cowboys" (256). He and Lady Snow are engaged in a "war of wills . . . a contest fully as intense and just as mortal" (258) as that of the gunfighters; she wants the ranch, with him dead. Isinglass's lieutenant Mesty-Woolah rides a camel from the herd brought over by Lord Snow (122), and each morning he emerges from his room "in one of the castle's several towers. . . . onto a tiny balcony and pray[s] in a loud voice, prostrating himself toward Mecca" (281).

Continuing the process of analogy, Uncle Laredo and his wife Martha are engaged in a contest to inherit the other's ranch: "The determination to outlast was the bond that joined them" (AMF 167). Uncle Laredo also has a camel herd (158) and his house has "a praying tower made of adobe brick" because the previous owner, Lord Montstuart, "had had a fling with Mohammedanism" (155).
These parallels establish a pattern; they show that Laredo and Isinglass are modeled after Johnny and after each other. These characters and the identifiers that link them represent irony and satire, which produce the ultimate displacement of myth. According to Frye, satire is a type of irony: "satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd . . . . Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy, centering on a theme of puzzled defeat" (AC 224). While Johnny and Isinglass can be considered ironic treatments of the rancher, Laredo would be satiric insofar as he is undefeated yet absurd. This treatment of myth functions for readers to "cleanse their perception and make them see their present state for what it is" (Hamilton 152). Frye's model is cyclic, that is, irony releases myth from the mimetic overlays that displace myth and enables the return movement from the real toward the ideal.

To illustrate, Danny personifies "puzzled defeat" and thus dramatizes the ironic mode. For example, he feels that Uncle Laredo and Martha had "contested Time and won. . . . They had made life theirs. . . . they could go on living until they got bored . . . . I didn't know if I would ever make life mine" (AMF 170). Despite his apparent victory, Uncle Laredo is "an old sonofabitch. The Hacienda of the Bitter Waters wasn't the Old West I liked to believe in--it
was the bitter end of something. I knew I would never want to visit it again" (170). Danny turns away from this ironic, even demonic, version of the cowboy myth, but not from the myth itself.

A few hours earlier, Danny had been reminded of the story about last running of the buffalo (see Appendix); a story he "had always loved," "a great story, full of tragedy." For Danny "it was the true end of the West" (162-63). This statement clearly is in opposition to the statement describing Uncle Laredo's world as "the bitter end of something." Danny finishes his narration of the last running just as he and Uncle Laredo arrive at the cairn marking the place where El Caballo—Uncle Laredo's horse—is buried, the place where Uncle Laredo and his cook build a signal fire every night to watch for their old comrade Zapata to return. Danny informs us briefly and ironically, "Zapata was immortal. El Caballo was the Horse" (164).

Danny decides he doesn't want to be "a helpless goat," gutted by mean, bitter people who have beaten Time. He decides to arrive at his destination "like Zapata—after so many years in the hills the sight of me would strike terror into my foe." He renames his car El Chevy and vows to "bury it someday beneath a cairn of rocks, preferably on the banks of the Rio Grande" (171). Instead he gives El Chevy to an old couple just before he drowns his novel in the Rio Grande, saving the sections that recreate the Old West
stories, thus symbolically recovering and preserving the myth.

*Lonesome Dove,* in dramatizing the origins of the cowboy and the rancher, draws heavily from the memoirs of Goodnight and Teddy Blue, but also includes important elements of Johnny. Although the rest of McMurtry's uncles ranched the farmland of the eastern panhandle, Johnny chose his ranch on the Llano Estacado, near New Mexico. McMurtry comments that "only a man who considered himself forsaken of God would live in such country" (*ING* 164). He attributes Johnny's attitude to an experience with venereal disease in his youth (169); that story is fictionalized in *Leaving Cheyenne.* As a result of this experience, Johnny set himself a penance of bachelorhood and discomfort. This self-castigation reappears in characters throughout McMurtry's fiction, most noticeably Gideon Fry of *Leaving Cheyenne* and Woodrow Call of *Lonesome Dove.* The key to understanding Call is this weight of guilt associated with forbidden sex, together with the superstitious presumption that sequelae to such sex signify divine punishment.

To understand why Johnny is given such ironic treatment in the novels, look closely at the faces McMurtry attributes to the cowboy god; they are the faces of three succeeding generations. Goodnight, born in 1836, was a plainsman--frontiersman, trail-blazer, ranger--and a rancher; Teddy Blue, born in 1860, was a cowpuncher--a horseman of the open
range—and a rancher; Johnny, born in 1891, was a Westerner--a failed rancher, "the only McMurtry ever to go formally broke" (ING 161). His one desire was to be a cowboy (161) but the trail drives stopped when he was five (xxiii); after cowboying five years, he traded freedom for an unprofitable ranch. His health was impaired and he was crippled from his mid-thirties on; this situation was complicated later in life by cancer and a series of injuries. Although his toughness is admirable, Johnny does not exemplify the ideal; he exemplifies the real, which is the stuff of irony.

"Teddy Blue" Abbott fits in between the mythic and the ironic. He was 11 years old on his first trail drive in 1871; he accompanied the cattle his father bought in Texas to their homestead in Nebraska. He left home to be a cowpuncher in 1878 and was a top hand until he married in 1889 and homesteaded in 1892. His memoir We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher (1939/1954) provides, in his words, "a history of the cattle range and of the movement of the cattle as they were gradually pushed north over the Texas trail" (Abbott 3). Teddy Blue's memoir is spell-binding because of his voice: his consistent and delightful presence is convincing and his language of work-related metaphor and aphorism supports his authority. After the narrative ends and the enchantment of that voice is broken, his own romanticizing and myth-making become more apparent.
The ironic content of Anything for Billy and Buffalo Girls suggests that mixing of this sort commonly complicates historical source material. In the previous discussion of Danny's Uncle Laredo, I noted that Danny had decided he would never visit the Hacienda of Bitter Waters again. This is linked to Danny's desire to romanticize the West, which is analogous to Teddy Blue's desire to romanticize his memoirs. Romanticism in literature is a primary theme in Anything for Billy, which is narrated by a romance writer; Buffalo Girls, which features the legendary Calamity Jane and Buffalo Bill Cody, raises questions about historical sources as well as Cody's representation of the Wild West.

According to McMurtry, Teddy Blue's memoir is "far and away the best book on the trail-drivers" (ING 175). What makes his account an important addition to the history of the West is his picture of the cowpuncher's "picaresque young manhood" (Dessain 485). Teddy Blue takes the cowpuncher into town, where he walks down the street with a sporting woman on his arm, dances in the saloon wearing her bloomers, and leaves with her stocking tied around his sleeve as her token. He provides the expected stampedes and wild rivers--after all, the dangers and violence of the job are part of its attraction--and so are the high jinks and wildness. His is the only face of the cowboy god that expresses that appeal of the "youth frozen in his wolfish pose of uncomplicated freedom and masculine duty to his
breed, and kept that way for a decade or more" (Dessain 475). His aspect offers the beguiling, forever-young fantasy symbolized by Peter Pan, augmented by the work-related competence and stamina of the adult. Teddy Blue provides the endearing boyishness of the Westerners and cowboys in McMurtry's novels.

In *All My Friends*, an illusive character named Teddy Blue is linked with McMurtry himself through parallel biographical details. Danny tries to find "a young Texas writer who went to Stanford. His name was Teddy Blue. He was from Fort Worth" (AMF 97). McMurtry attended Stanford, as well as Rice where Danny was a student, and like Danny, is a Texas writer from a small town near Fort Worth. The fictional Teddy Blue and his friends the "New Americans" (AMF 99) suggest McMurtry's friend Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, an influence that may have contributed to the lampoonery as well as the alienation in *All My Friends*. The previous chapter of this study shows how Danny dramatizes Teddy Blue Abbott's description of the cowpuncher's fear of women (Abbott 188). Thus both fictional characters, Danny and Teddy Blue, suggest details of McMurtry's history, and Danny, at least, suggests the historical Teddy Blue.

McMurtry's claim is that the Westerner, like the cowpuncher, escapes to his work to avoid the sexual tension produced by his paradoxical response to "the mysterious female principle, a force at once frightening and
attractive" (ING 72). Echoes of this claim can be heard in Danny's observation about the fictional Teddy Blue's wife: "She was so lovely that I kept wondering why Teddy Blue kept running off and leaving her" (AMF 145). In *Buffalo Girls*, T. Blue, a fictionalization of Teddy Blue Abbott, alternates between leaving his wife and his girlfriend. *Buffalo Girls* continues where the memoir concludes—T. Blue is a married rancher but still involved with the friends of his cowpuncher days. As discussed, Teddy Blue Abbott's memoir honestly acknowledges the cowpuncher's relations with sporting women; in *Buffalo Girls*, T. Blue has yet to conclude his long-term relationship with Dora DuFran, his "girl" from those wilder days.

Just as the novel invents an addendum to Teddy Blue's memoir, Calamity Jane invents an addendum to her own life; her letters to an imaginary daughter form a major portion of the narrative. Calamity is actively involved in inventing a romantic past for herself, including a child from her imagined affair with Wild Bill Hickok. Buffalo Bill Cody stages his Wild West shows on two continents, fictionalizing the waning West before it is completely over. This produces an ironic environment that encourages questions about the reliability of letters and memoirs as historical source material, especially when the writers are captivated by their own romantic images.
The issues of historicity and romanticism are keys to understanding the ironic content of all three Old West novels and, therefore, to understanding McMurtry's argument with the cowboy myth. Historicity lends verisimilitude to literary treatment of myth, adding to the myth's power by locating the narrative in the real world. McMurtry's rhetoric, including his "structure of imagery" based on the historical faces of the cowboy god and his ever-present ironic challenge, conveys to the reader his skepticism with the cowboy figure as well as his acknowledgement of the myth's power. The next chapters discuss the Old West novels and show how McMurtry's argument leads to recovery of the myth.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Myth Restored: *Lonesome Dove*

*When people lost sight of the way to live came codes of love and honesty.*

*Lao Tsu*

Literary treatment of myth may dramatize rewards for condoned behavior or penalties for condemned behavior. When myth is challenged by gentle irony—especially when obvious irony is expected of the author—the reader's problem is:

discovering which values are in abeyance and which are genuinely, though in modern works often surreptitiously, at work. To pass judgement where the author intends neutrality is to misread. But to be neutral or objective where the author requires commitment is equally to misread, though the effect is likely to be less obvious . . . (Booth 144)

Thus, the devotee of the Western genre who settles comfortably into the familiar setting and action of *Lonesome Dove* may ignore or dismiss the ironic argument developed by the structure of events or through the development of characters. For example, meaning accumulated by parallel events or character traits implied by symbolic association may argue against conventions or against the facts presented in the narrative, especially when the character's behavior, or the next parallel event, then contradicts our expectations.

Ironic arguments are not explicit; identifying them requires both continued interest and willing effort and often depends on associations and information outside the
narrative. Since popular fiction does not make these complicated demands of the reader, most reader-consumers accept the apparent meaning of the text. They have not acquired the role of critical reader which would authorize them to change hats after the enjoyable act of reading and begin analyzing and determining meaning. More to the point, they read popular fiction because they do not want to read critically. Many of the enthusiastic readers of Lonesome Dove are popular fiction reader-consumers; for them the explicit meaning has been satisfying.

The contradictory and generally disappointing criticism on Lonesome Dove is plentiful proof that expectations or preconceptions can complicate, even obscure, the acceptance and appreciation of irony. One critic faults the accumulation of incidents fictionalized from historical sources; another praises the novel’s accuracy and realism. One finds little effort toward demythicizing, another little psychological conflict. Admirers have singled out the characters, the detail and narration, the dialogue and plot. Ernestine Sewell identifies the three faces of the cowboy god, as well as the ego, superego, and id, in three of the ex-Rangers, Gus, Call, and Jake (Sewell 323); Don Graham identifies these same characters as Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, and Dean Martin (Graham 314). For Clay Reynolds, Lonesome Dove is only the warmup band for Anything for
Billy, the "dusty and lonely finale to the frontier myth" (Intro 17).

The expectation that the cowboy myth would, or should, be abandoned as a vehicle for expressing universal truths and current concerns is repeated throughout Reynolds' introduction to Taking Stock. He interprets McMurtry's entire cannon as an argument that "the frontier myth is a vapid, hollow illusion that is in the final analysis more destructive than useful" (Intro 11). Reynolds does not envision a liberated myth to be McMurtry's aim; instead, his concise synopsis is that the "lesson of McMurtry's philosophy remains clear: Legends are too easily made too much of" (27). For Reynolds, McMurtry's treatment of the Old West and the cowboy myth "exposes the notion that the Outlaw-God, like the Cowboy-God, was manufactured, fabricated, and false" (25). Cautiously, I would agree that McMurtry's argument reveals the confusion and isolation produced by the myth and exposes much of the heroic behavior as destructive. However, I argue that McMurtry does not intend to destroy the myth, but to recover it.

McMurtry's ironic treatment of the West does not lead to a simplistic rejection of the cowboy or frontier myth, or to the misleading belittling of myth, archetype, and symbol. McMurtry, who holds a graduate degree in English literature, has demonstrated his familiarity with Frye's anatomy of
fictional modes, specifically the function of irony in myth.

In *ING*, he applied Frye's terminology to the Western:

> in the fifties the Western began working its way down from the levels of myth and romance toward the ironic level which it has only recently reached. Westerns like *Shane* . . . are in the high mimetic mode, with the hero still superior to other men and to his environment. . . . a recent example of the low mimetic Western . . . is *Hud*, though it tends at several points toward the ironic. . . . in fiction: Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* is a brilliant ironic performance. (23)

In that 1968 essay, he predicts that the appeal of the Western would continue to wane, that the cowboy would be supplanted by the space explorer, and that the gunfighter would be displaced by the urban figure of the spy.

Twenty years later, in *Film Flam: Essays on Hollywood* (1987), McMurtry reiterates his earlier application to the Western of Frye's terminology. Apparently steadfast in his agreement with Frye's "flexible and inclusive" method, he describes the evolution of the Western "down from levels of heroic romance, through high-mimetic (tragic) and low-mimetic (realistic) modes, to arrive at the ironic mode (for example, *Little Big Man")* (FF 62). His explanation includes the return to the mythic as part of the cycle:

> The point on Frye's cycle next to the ironic is once again the mythic; the reappearance of the heroic outsider who comes to the aid of society (but remains outside) in *A Fistful of Dollars* may parallel, at a crude level, the reappearance of myth in an ironical masterpiece like *Ulysses*. A category like the low-mimetic is helpful in discussing Westerns like *Welcome to Hard Times*, in which the hero, society's protector, far from having special abilities, is either reluctant or downright cowardly. (FF 62)
In this discussion, McMurtry identifies the hero figure's reappearance as the return to mythic mode in the Western film. Thus my interpretation of McMurtry's ironic treatment of the cowboy myth as leading to its recovery is justified by McMurtry's prose.

Frye describes the relationship of literature and myth as one of displacement; that is, the mythical content is increasingly displaced as the story is made realistic and believable. Since the ironic mode displaces the low mimetic mode, it descends from realism; the mimetic hero, who like us is not superior to others or to the environment, is displaced by the ironic hero, who is inferior both to others and to the environment. Irony restores the desire for the mythic and allows myths to be recovered or recreated to better express the concerns of society. McMurtry's ironic approach serves to release the cowboy myth from the tired patterns that are no longer convincing, from verisimilitude become cliché. The mythic West can be recreated to more adequately express the concerns of the present.

The cowboy hero has remained a powerful mythic image, with an enduring appeal. It is simplistic to attribute the appeal to evolving attributes, such as myth's glorification of self-reliance or its orientation to violence (Warshow 348). The myth's power is connected to its potentiality. The cowboy hero inhabits a landscape of vastness, offering a range of possibility, of unending time and countless options.
On the frontier, the challenge is simple survival and the solutions appear to be just as straightforward as the problems. To survive, the mythic hero must center his attention on the present. This element of the cowboy myth is appealing in modern society where survival issues are less basic, challenges more complex, and solutions as complicated as the problems. The frontier represents a fabled place and time that can be adapted in stories to illustrate:

how things as they are may change to things as they should be. Or they may show the reverse, how things should not be. Essentially these designs are the two kinds of fiction, comedy and tragedy; figuratively, an ascent to some higher world or a descent to a lower one. (Hamilton 126)

This is the treatment the cowboy myth receives in Lonesome Dove; the ethos of the myth contributes to the novel's rhetoric, imparting a grandeur to the narrative's movement and force to the evidence of the argument.

One of society's present concerns that is particularly well suited for dramatization in the landscape of the Old West is violence, in particular the persistent connection of gun-based violence with the American hero. McMurtry states, in noting the waning cowboy myth, "If frontier life has left any cultural residue at all, it is a residue of a most unfortunate sort--i.e., that tendency to romanticize violence" (Moon 31). Lonesome Dove provides the archetypical background for illustrating "how things should not be," and for the argument that violence supports no romantic ideal but represents a descent to a lower world. The rhetorical
structure of this argument relies on connected events, beginning with a boy's struggle to make sense of the paradoxical actions of his heroes and ending with the hero's realization of the incongruity. The accumulation of parallel events forms an effective, though understated, argument.

Throughout the novel the young cowboy Newt's perspective exposes contradiction and paradox, illustrating and instigating for the reader the dialectic created by irony. The argument against violence begins with Newt's growing dislike of the code that Call and Gus live by. The first time Newt accompanies the outfit to Mexico, he realizes they are rustling Mexican livestock:

Newt could not help feeling a little odd about it all, since he had somehow had it in his mind that they were coming to Mexico to buy horses, not steal them. It was puzzling that such a muddy little river like the Rio Grande should make such a difference in terms of what was lawful and what not. On the Texas side, horse stealing was a hanging crime, and many of those hung for it were Mexican cowboys who came across the river to do pretty much what they themselves were doing. . . . Evidently if you crossed the river to do it, it stopped being a crime and became a game.

Newt didn't really feel that what they were doing was wrong—if it had been wrong, the Captain wouldn't have done it. (LD 113)

Although Newt is puzzled at first by this apparent moral contradiction, his naive resolution of the dilemma avoids placing blame on his heroes. The narrator makes no comment of his own; however, in the diction of that last sentence he conveys the naivety of Newt's faith.
When the rangers' comrade Jake Spoon is caught with a gang of killers and horsethieves, Gus tells Jake, "Ride with an outlaw, die with him . . . . I admit it's a harsh code. But you rode on the other side long enough to know how it works. I'm sorry you crossed the line, though" (LD 554). The Old West operates under a code, not only unwritten but unexpressed, its logos unexamined. Again it is in Newt's voice that the code is questioned; he wants evidence that hanging Jake--one of his heroes--was just and that his other heroes acted honorably:

Newt couldn't get Jake out of his mind . . . . Jake's hanging had happened so quickly that it was hard to remember . . . . Also, nobody talked much. There should have been some discussion, it seemed to Newt. Jake might have had a good excuse for being there, but nobody even asked him for it.

Not only had no one talked at the hanging, no one had talked since, either . . . . He had been the Captain's friend, and Mr. Gus's. It didn't seem right that he could be killed and buried, and no more said.

. . . "Just being along didn't make him a horsethief."

"It do to the Captain," Deets said, "It do to Mr. Gus."

"They didn't even talk to him," Newt said bitterly. "They just hung him. They didn't even act like they were sorry."

"They sorry," Deets said. (LD 602-64)

Newt wants his heroes to deliberate before they act. The code applies to behavior--how to act or react--and provides no basis to reason on issues of morality and ethics. One of the appeals of the cowboy is that he is a man of action, never knotted by indecision; his code allows him one course.
Ironically, Call is also haunted by the result of his obedience to the harsh code of the West:

Newt didn't know it, but Call, too, lived almost constantly with the thought of Jake Spoon. He felt half sick from thinking about it. He couldn't concentrate on the work at hand, and often if spoken to he wouldn't respond. He wanted somehow to move time backwards to a point where Jake could have been saved. (LD 605)

Call is the leader, now and always before, and his initial misgivings concern the possibility that Jake's downfall points out a failure to lead well. In addition, his desire to revise the past provides an appeal to the reader's heart, to that connection rhetoric requires, the communication of his ethos which is stressed in the latter part of the novel.

Making an even stronger argument against the code, Deets' death is also linked to horsetheft. When twelve of their horses are stolen, Gus asks Call if it is worthwhile to chase down the Indians who stole them. Call replies: "We can't start putting up with horse theft" (694). When they find the horses, Deets is killed by a young boy. Call's reaction is similar to his reaction to Jake's death:

... Call was sick with self-reproach. All his talk of being ready, all his preparation--and then he had just walked up to an Indian camp and let Josh Deets get killed. ... It was a mistake he would never forgive himself. (698)

Call is not questioning the code; he is a man of action who finds comfort in a code of behavior that protects him from the demand to reason. Gus is the one who always wants to
talk and debate about things; Call considers it foolishness and a waste of time.

Early in the novel Gus comments that, since Call was born in Scotland, he is not an American. When Call refutes him, Gus replies that being an infant when his parents came over "don't make you no less a Scot" (15). The literary connotations of being a Scot include Calvinistic sternness and the work ethic; both help to understand Call. Although there is no discussion of these implications in the novel, this fact is one of the few references to Call's background and must be interpreted as a clue to his motivations. That Call "would never forgive himself" for what he considers his responsibility in Deets death parallels his not forgiving himself for the mistake that resulted in Newt's birth. That unforgiving aspect of his characterization is conventional in literature for Calvinistic personalities. It is equally important that he does not question the code; it stands as inviolate as sacred law, indeed, stands in place of sacred law for Call. His disapproval of Gus for joking, drinking, whoring, speculating and philosophizing is associated with his Scottish heritage. The strength of protestant fundamentalism in Texas is significant to the rhetoric of McMurtry's characterization of Call.

The romanticized violence of the Old West no longer seems heroic after Gus's death. Call has seen most of his comrades die and each death strikes him as a mistake:
He regretted not trying harder to save Gus. He should have disarmed him at once and seen that the other leg was amputated. . . . All he had to think about were mistakes, it seemed—mistakes and death. His old rangering gang was gone, only Pea Eye left, of all of them. Jake was dead in Kansas, Deets in Wyoming, and now Gus in Montana. (766)

The strength of the argument develops as these parallel events accumulate; no heroic purpose or romantic ideal is supported by this violence. Call speaks for the reader now; the bond is the shared experience of being sickened by loss through violent death.

When an old man and his son steal some of their horses from the ranch in Montana, the code comes into question again, but this time Call's response is complicated. Call does not want to hang a crazy old man and a boy, but "they were horsethieves and he felt he had no choice. His own distaste for the prospect caused him to make a mistake" (793). Call hesitates and, by that inaction, the old man has an opportunity to attack one of the cowboys. Out of true necessity, Call shoots the old man but then has to decide what to do with the boy. Again, Newt is sick at the idea of another hanging for horse theft but doesn't speak to Call. This time, however, Call does not follow the code; he allows the boy to work for the outfit, even though he thinks the boy is also a thief. Ten days later, the boy takes several wallets from the cowboys and attempts to steal a horse. When he is caught he begs for mercy and is told by Call, "It's wasted on horsethieves." The boy is hung, and the narrator
states, "None of the men said a word," although Pea Eye says later, "Should have hung him in the first place" (795). This statement emphasizes that the issue has not been resolved.

Codified behavior is a cultural protection device, in the sense, for example, that funeral rituals protect the bereaved so that one need only follow custom to show respect and do the right thing. As a cultural device, the code of the frontier protected the lawful from having to judge, thus distancing the punisher from the punishment. The code was the judge determining the punishment; the lawful had only to act. The code is not bad in theory, but its protection was insufficient; in actuality, the violence it required became part of the punisher. Furthermore, the code encouraged the lawful to kill without forming their own judgment—without entering the argument the narrative creates when Newt questions the code and Call fails to enforce it.

The dialectic is not neatly decided at the conclusion of the novel. At first it appears the characters are headed toward a definite conclusion, only to have them confront another complication. Yet any solution other than the ironic resolution would ignore the complexity of this issue. By creating the dialectic between opposing perspectives and leaving the significance unexplained, McMurtry asks reader to ponder the implications. By discovering the meaning rather than being told, the reader parallels the characters who determine justice rather than follow the code.
Contributing to the power of the narrative's rhetoric about violence is that Gus is the character who seems most like the hero. He is not only brave and self-resourceful, he saves the girl. Gus is the character who captures the reader's affection and enlists the reader's participation. He involves the reader in the world of the novel, then he dies; no other death argues so effectively against romanticized violence. If Gus were the hero, the book would end with the death of the hero and the significance would rest only on that event. But the book does not end with Gus's death; it continues, primarily through Call.

Through most of the narrative Call has been difficult to understand and more difficult to like. After Jake's death the narrator reveals more of Call's thoughts, allowing his pathos to persuade the reader to enter his dialectic. When Gus is no longer the primary figure, especially during the trip back to Texas, the narrative centers on Call and his internal conflict. He reexamines the incidents and the errors that have brought about the changes--inside and around him--and tries to make sense of them. He formulates no conclusions; his role is to dramatize the bewildering effects of a person's introduction to self-doubts.

One avenue toward understanding Lonesome Dove is through the conventions of literature, identifying Call as the hero and Gus as the Wise Fool. In contrast to Call, Gus is a talker, a man who appreciates language and ideas. He
values different perspectives and enjoys discovering the
underlying ironies in human behavior. Call refuses to argue
with him because Gus:

"didn't really care what the question was, and it
made no great difference to him which side he was
on. He just plain loved to argue, whereas Call hated
to. Long experience had taught him that there was no
winning arguments with Augustus, even in cases where
there was a simple right and wrong at issue. (14)"

Call's common response to Gus's ideas and conversation is
that he talks nonsense. The Wise Fool tells the hero what he
needs to know but will not hear. Thus, the request Gus makes
of Call as he is dying is crucial to the novel's argument.

*Lonesome Dove* is a story of heroes and a quest. Most
apparent is the quest for the pastoral, a stock theme for
popular Westerns. This is the primary quest: the pursuit of
a simpler landscape unspoiled by civilization's "bankers and
Sunday-school teachers" (71). However, the secondary and
larger quest in *Lonesome Dove* seeks a benefit to society; it
expresses a contemporary central concern.

One of the puzzling elements in *Lonesome Dove* is Gus's
request that Call take his body back to Texas. Having
chosen to die, Gus tells Call:

"I've a big favor to ask you, and one more to do
you. . . . The favor I want from you will be my
favor to you," Augustus said. "I want to be buried
in Clara's orchard. . . . In Texas. By that little
grove of live oaks on the south Guadalupe. Remember,
we stopped by there a minute. . . . Yes, that's my
favor to you," Augustus said. "It's the kind of job
you was made for, that nobody else could do or even
try. Now that the country is about to be settled, I
don't know how you'll keep busy, Woodrow. But if
you'll do this for me you'll be all right for another year, I guess."

"This would make a story if there was anybody to tell it," Call said. "You want me to carry your body three thousand miles because you used to go picnicking with a girl on the Guadalupe River."

"That, plus I want to see if you can do it," Augustus said.

"But you won't know if I do it," Call said. "I reckon I'll do it, since you've asked. (762)

The request worded like a conundrum—a favor he asks of Call and a favor he does for Call—marks this request as coming from the Wise Fool and signals the need for further interpretation. In addition, the combination of death and a long and dangerous journey that arrives at a grove of trees by a river is connected with the classical quest of Aeneas. It resounds with symbolism within the context of mythology and literary convention. Frye describes this as a "resonance for literary experience, a third dimension, so to speak, in which the work we are experiencing draws strength and power from everything else we have read or may still read" (Spiritus 119). Thus this request becomes meaningful in the thematic structure of the novel.

However, in customary fashion, Gus gives Call ironic explanations that only veil the truth and function as a challenge. When Call reports Gus's death to the trail crew, the cowboys recognize they have been presented a puzzle:

All the men were annoyed with Captain Call . . . . His account was pregnant with mysteries, and the men spent all night discussing them. Why had Gus refused to have the other leg amputated, in the face of plain warnings? . . . To [Lippy], the mysterious part was why Gus wanted to be taken to Texas. . . .
The other men continued to talk of Augustus's strange request. (LD 771-72)

Neither Call nor the crew can resolve the mystery and the reader is left with only Gus's ironic explanations. Once more, the significance is left for the reader to determine.

Charles Goodnight's partner, Oliver Loving, provided the basis for McMurtry's story about Gus's last fight, his escape, and his death (see, Graham). Historically, Loving died on a trail drive, September 25, 1867, in Fort Sumner, New Mexico (territory). Loving's regrets were that "he would like to have lived longer on account of his family, and to show his country that he was a man who could overcome difficulties" (Haley 182). He asked Goodnight for his word "as a Mason" to continue their partnership until Loving's debts (due to Confederate loans) were paid, and Goodnight promised to do so. Goodnight remembers that Loving's words then were: "I regret to have to be laid away in a foreign country" (183). In spite of Loving's doubts, Goodnight promised to "see that his remains were laid in the cemetery at home" (183). Goodnight returned after completing the trail drive and in the company of "rough-hewn but tenderly sympathetic cowmen from Texas" (Haley 184) he took Loving home.

While the stories' similarities are obvious, the differences are more interesting. Loving's portrayal is heroic and perhaps more typical of the Southern than the Western myth. Gus is "a rake and a rambler" (LD 790) to the
end, ever the picaresque knight errant. Goodnight's trip was the "most touching funeral cavalcade in the history of the cow country" (Haley 184). Call's solitary return to Texas with Gus's body is an ordeal; considering Gus's requirement that Call deal with the two women at Ogallala and Call's wounds and mishaps, his trip becomes a passage—a hero's journey of trial and boon.

The American quest myth differs from the classical quest because the American hero's journey is one-way; the hero leaves civilization but does not return. Our culture's frontier hero, Dan'l/Bumpo/Shane, treks off to blaze a path in the wilderness, ostensibly for society to follow. But as soon as society arrives, our hero takes off again, pushing against the window of the frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his classic discussion of the American frontier, describes the effects of this movement:

the frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is antisocial. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to direct control. (683)

Noting that Turner considers the family the basic unit of society on the frontier, I must point out that this aspect is not part of the cowboy hero—he can have no family, as discussed in the prior chapter, because acquiring a family marks the end of the trail (Dessain 482).

Lonesome Dove's combination of the mythic landscape of the frontier and the mythic cowboy hero allows the
recreation of the quest myth. The classical hero's journey depends on his return and *reintegration with society* to bring the boon of the quest that will improve society. The cowboy or frontier hero of the American quest myth dodges his obligation to society. When Call returns Gus's body to Texas, he is making the return journey to the society he had left. Call must return, in contrast to the frontier hero myth dramatized by Natty Bumpo or Shane; it would violate the Western code of loyalty to comrades if he did not.

Call buries Gus by the grove of live oaks. As Call is marking the grave with what is left of Gus's creative sign advertising the Hat Creek outfit, a family of settlers stop to ask if the outfit includes a blacksmith. Call tells them the outfit is buried or in Montana. When he was done, he sat by the pool and "fell into a heavy sleep and didn't wake until dawn" (818). He awoke worried about other travelers seeing the sign and looking for the old outfit, "trying to find a company who were mostly ghosts" (818). Call realizes he has no place to go, has never felt he had a home. He remembers arriving in Texas as a boy, his parents dead, and observes that he has roamed ever since, except the years in Lonesome Dove. He leaves the grove and arrives in Lonesome Dove, where he notices the saloon is missing. He is told that Wanz, the owner, burned the building and himself, too, because of "The woman. They say he missed that whore" (821). These are the last words in the narrative.
But what to make of this? Obviously there are elements that carry the weight of literary and mythic resonance. The grove, the pool, and the company of ghosts allude to the Aeneas quest myth. The family of settlers represents encroaching civilization and contrasts with his own arrival in Texas without a family. Wanz' grief for the whore Lorena and Call's sense of having no home—in spite of the ranch in Montana—are connected to his rejection of his son Newt and Maggie, Newt's mother. So the end of Call's journey brings together the quest myth, the family, and loneliness.

The cowboy myth is a male myth that excludes women and recognizes her only as a romanticized ideal (see Chapter Two for a discussion of the problems this creates). There are few women and even fewer families in Lonesome Dove. Most of the named female characters are "sporting women"; of the few "decent women" only Clara has a major role. Lorena presents a complication to this neat classification; she is a decent woman who becomes a sporting woman only "accidentally" (21), through misfortune and betrayed trust. She plays a version of the Western's "good/bad woman" and differs from the ribald women working the cowtowns.

The young men of the trail crew react to women as Teddy Blue describes: they are frightened by decent women and are boyish scamps with the sporting women. Like Teddy Blue, they are excited by their talk of the cowtowns but are relieved
to take up the routines of the trail after a short time in town. McMurtry discusses this male society:

[I] doubt that I have ever known a cowboy who liked women as well as he liked horses, and I know that I have never known a cowboy who was as comfortable in the company of women as he was in the company of his fellow cowboys. . . . this was the result . . . of a commitment to a heroic concept of life that simply takes little account of women. (ING 148)

The boys of the trail crew, like Teddy Blue in his years on the trail, are in their late teens and early twenties. Call and Gus are considerably older. They have been riding together for thirty years and their relationships to each other and to their work express the central values of the frontier and the cowboy myth.

Gus is not afraid of women; in fact, among the men in the narrative, he is charming in his frank enjoyment of female company. He was married twice when he was young but being married didn't stop him from courting Clara--and neither Clara nor his wives kept Gus from rangering with Call. After Gus is dead, Clara tells Call:

I'm sorry you and Gus McCrae ever met. All you two done was ruin one another, not to mention those close to you. Another reason I didn't marry him was because I didn't want to have to fight you for him every day of my life. You men and your promises: they're just excuses to do what you plan to do anyway, which is leave. You think you've always done right--that's your ugly pride, Mr. Call. But you never did right and it would be a sad woman that needed anything from you. (LD 809)

When Clara refused to marry him, Gus was provided the perfect woman: a romanticized, unattainable memory that protects him from serious involvement with other women and
does not interfere with anything he wants to do. Clara was right not to marry Gus and right about Call, too. It was a very sad woman—Newt's mother Maggie—who loved Call.

The story of Maggie and Call develops further the situation McMurtry ascribes to Uncle Johnny and treats in Leaving Cheyenne: the effects of self-punishment and self-denial exacted in a waste of shame after lust in action. To empathize with Call's character, it is important to realize that he does not understand his own response to Maggie, "the bitterest memory of his life" (LD 340). A synopsis of Call's internal dialogue, as reported by the narrator, will show how the reader learns more than Call himself:

he had visited her out of curiosity to find out what it was that he had heard men talk and scheme about for so long. It turned out not to be much, in his view—a brief, awkward experience, where the pleasure was soon drowned in embarrassment and a feeling of sadness. . . . Some weakness in him brought him back every few nights, for two months or more. . . . he came to like her talk . . . . but stopped himself. . . . He never went to see Maggie again . . . . She had tender expressions—more tender than any he had ever seen. He could still remember her movements—those more than her words. . . . There was a period when he wanted to go back, when it would have been nice to sit with Maggie a few minutes and watch her fiddle with her hair. But he chose the river, and his solitude, thinking that in time the feeling would pass . . . . But it didn't pass—all that passed were years. . . . just because he had wanted to find out about the business with women. . . . And somehow, within the little bits of pleasure, a great pain had been concealed . . . . The night he heard she was dead . . . . He knew at once that he had forever lost the chance to right himself, that he would never again be able to feel that he was the man he had wanted to be. . . . it had happened in a little room over a saloon, because
of a small woman who couldn't keep her hair fixed. . . . He had seen terrible things in battle and had mostly forgotten them and yet he couldn't forget the sad look in Maggie's eyes when she mentioned that she wished he'd say her name. . . . It seemed to undermine all that he was, or that people thought he was. . . . Maggie had been a weak woman, and yet her weakness had all but slaughtered his strength. . . . He wondered if all men felt such disappointment when thinking of themselves. (340-44)

Call's musings show how frightening the female principle is for the frontiersman who loves his freedom. Call is unable to understand his feeling for Maggie nor to make sense of his active memories of unimportant details about a woman he knew more than fifteen years before. All he knows is that she was mysteriously stronger than she appeared.

In this dialogue Call blames himself for the mistake of having visited Maggie the first time. This behavior does not fit the exacting image he holds of being in total control. After Newt is born, Call knows he should marry Maggie. Yet Newt reminds Call of his disgrace; not only had he needed a women, she presented evidence of his visits. Tormented by a heart in conflict with itself, Call is unable to act. He uses the term whore several times during the dialogue, as if this were the reason he is reluctant to marry her, but the sense remains that he is afraid of her mysterious power: the weakness she produced in him, the way she is able to haunt his thoughts, the pain she left concealed in his heart, the chronic dissatisfaction she bequeathed him. These failures—the failure to avoid Maggie, connected to the failure toward Maggie—abrogate for him every heroic act of his life.
This internal dialogue takes place early in the novel when Call is still unwilling to admit that Newt is his son. On the return to Texas, he is no longer defensive of his failures. Joseph Campbell presents the hero's journey as an inward passage, "where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revivified, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world" (29). In light of this concept of an inward quest, Call's internal dialogue during the return to Texas will reveal how a revitalized myth addresses the concerns of our society.

Call returns with the boon of the quest—he returns with the knowledge that he has wasted the life he could have had with his son. When Call makes the promise to Gus to return to Texas, he has not admitted that Newt is his son. Over the winter following Gus's death, he learns to think of Newt as his son and feel proud of him, but he is unable to put this into words. When he leaves for Texas, he gives Newt his horse instead of his name, disappointing Newt badly. On the difficult trip, Call wishes ironically that he had given Newt his name and kept the horse.

According to Campbell, it is "the return and reintegration with society, which . . . the hero himself may find the most difficult requirement of all" (36). On the trip back to Texas, Call realizes the extent of his failure to his son and how that failure means he has not lived up to his own code. His inability to claim his son shows his
cowardice and trivializes his ability to lead men. When a
captain in the Rangers and again on the cattle drive, he
acted as a father to the men under him, yet he cannot be a
father to his son. He rejects his life as a sham.

Call believes he has no home, but as he rides into
Lonesome Dove he is confused to hear the dinner bell. He
feels he is in "a land of ghosts" and wonders if "the boys
would be there when he got home" (819). This is an important
suggestion of what actually constitutes home and family. But
more significant are Call's personal realizations. The true
values of life, as he comes to see them, endure in family,
not in work or leadership ability, not in all of his
scouting and trail-blazing, his rangering and law-enforcing.
These traditional activities of the American hero are of no
merit because he did not value family. Because the last line
of the narrative attributes Wanz' self-destruction to his
having "missed that whore," which allows us as readers to
associate that remark with Maggie, and since Call's
increasing pathos allows our identification with Call, we
believe, because of this connection, that he hears the
resonance of that final phrase, too.

If two vital concerns of modern society are erosion of
the family and of the concept of citizenship, then Call's
return provides a version of the cowboy myth that emphasizes
both the importance of family and the individual's
obligation to society. This contrasts with the traditional
Western which emphasizes the cowboy's independence and alienation, his flight from society, his rejection of home and hearth and his constant longing for it. The return of the questing hero is best expressed by the narrator's observation of "the Captain riding out of the sunset" (819). McMurtry restores the classical myth and in doing so restores the cowboy myth's ability to represent the concerns of society. The concerns of today are well expressed through the mythic landscape of the frontier and the restored cowboy myth.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Myth-Maker: Anything for Billy

You think you're a cowboy, but you're only a kid with a mind to do everything wrong.
It starts to get smoother when the circle begins, but by the time that you get there, it's gone.

Willie Nelson

McMurtry's next Old West novel, Anything for Billy, illustrates mythogenesis in the Wild West, dramatizing the mythmaker in the process of creating literary myth, and separates the gunfighter from the cowboy, producing in the process an effective argument against romanticized crime and violence. Anything for Billy does not attempt to recover a mythic Billy the Kid nor to uncover the real Henry McCarty, a.k.a. Billy Bonney. McMurtry's Billy Bone only suggests, rather than represents, the legend; people and places are renamed and events reinvented. By inventing Billy Bone, McMurtry is able to liberate the mythic structure and reinterpret the legend. This strategy dodges the tangle of historicity disputes over Billy the Kid; also, the novel avoids being confused with accounts of the historic Billy that merely displace the romanticized myth with more realistic myth. At the same time, the narrator's obvious fictionalizing of the narrative contents illustrates the process that has obscured the historical Billy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a central concern for our society involves the consequences of romanticizing
violence. One problem with the cowboy myth is that the
gunfighter has become blended with the cowboy hero. McMurtry
emphasizes the separation of the two figures:

Once more I might repeat what cannot be stressed too
often: that the master symbol for handling the
cowboy is the symbol of the horseman. The gunman had
his place in the mythology of the West, but the
cowboy did not realize himself with a gun. . . .
Movies fault the myth when they dramatize
gunfighting, rather than horsemanship, as the
dominant skill. The cowboy realized himself on a
horse, and a man might be broke, impotent, and a
poor shot and still hold up his head if he could
ride. (ING 150)

Anything for Billy illustrates this distinction; moreover,
the novel's dramatization is a more persuasive testimony of
McMurtry's claim. The essay's rhetoric explains, whereas the
novel's depiction permits discovery.

The narrator of Anything for Billy is Sippy, an
Easterner who writes penny Westerns about the romanticized
West that never was, without ever having been to the West.
Deserting his family in Philadelphia, Sippy seeks--and
finds--a West that satisfies his romantic expectations.
Despite Sippy's gloss over the narrative, the reader
confronts evidence that Sippy's interpretations are suspect.
The rhetoric created through an unreliable narrator not only
demonstrates the mythmaker at work, it encourages the reader
to become a literary critic. Wayne Booth describes the
reader entering such a rhetoric:

The effects we turn to now require a secret
communion of the author and reader behind the
narrator's back. . . . though the narrator may have
some redeeming qualities of mind or heart, we travel
with the silent author, observing as from a rear seat the . . . driving behavior of the narrator seated in front. The author may wink and nudge, but he may not speak. The reader may sympathize or deplore, but he never accepts the narrator as a reliable guide. (Booth 300)

Through the ironic situation of a narrator who provides more information than he understands, McMurtry also creates a reader who in detecting the irony feels superior to Sippy and, once dissociated from Sippy's rhetoric, is lured into McMurtry's rhetoric. Distrustful of Sippy's romanticized vision, the reader must create a revision from the facts that can be discerned once Sippy's smoke dissipates. This situation, of course, is part of McMurtry's vision.

An early indication that Sippy is neither an inductive reasoner nor a dependable observer is this report of his married life:

There's the fact of the nine girls, and yet I can't recall that Dora and I ever shared what a happier man would think of as a warm embrace. . . . Indeed, I would almost rather have had myself strangled than risk wafting a breath in Dora's direction—and yet, somehow, despite our rather polished avoidance of one another, little girls kept coming. The first I would suspect of their arrival was when I heard a new baby squalling in the nursery. . . . I can't help feeling that she must have exploited some [opportunities] that arose in total darkness, while I was drugged or drunk. I really can't explain it otherwise. (AFB 27) [italics added]

Sippy cannot explain it without contradicting his perceived world, which is peopled with idealizations who must behave appropriately for their roles. Sippy provides an early clue for interpreting the narration that follows by acknowledging his inadequacy (the phrases in italics). With Sippy's
credibility in doubt, the reader becomes responsible for distinguishing Sippy's overlay of self-deceiving romanticism in order to form her own independent conclusions. This exemplifies ironic resolution.

One element of Sippy's escape to the West is his quest for romance's heroic adventure. When asked why he came to the West, he replies "dime novels" (15), then explains that he developed "dime-novel mania" (16) from his first reading experience with popular romantic fiction. His diagnosis, however, is challenged: "Men don't go crazy just from reading books," Billy observed skeptically. "You was probably crazy anyway, Sippy... I'd say you were crowded up in the house with too many females" (20-21). Billy's insight is accurate; Sippy's family represents "ten firm impediments to the freedom of the imagination, and to most other freedoms as well" (24). This also is a clue to Sippy's quixotic narration: his quest involves the pursuit of an illusory open range where his imagination can freely roam.

When his first attempt at adventure fails, he realizes an incongruity between expectation and actuality: "When I set out to try the new Western sport of train robbing, it was my belief that New Mexican trains were a lot more cooperative than they actually are" (12). Sippy's comical understatement confesses his naivete; his narration is characterized by humorous self-mockery that indicates Sippy's perception of the irony in his own ignorance about
the actual West. The objective style is reminiscent of Mark Twain's distinctive essayist-omniscient voice (Gardner, 1985), but it is not McMurtry's own essayist voice.

The reference to train robbing as sport displays a lack of moral discrimination that flicks an ironic glance at the cultural phenomenon of the outlaw-hero. Sippy's desired freedom of imagination allows him to create romance from villainy, which is analogous to romanticizing crime and violence. The wrongful act becomes a feat and a proof of daring and, over time, vandalism and murder have become rites of passage. Sippy's fancies can no longer be considered harmless; the danger for society is that romantic whimsy becomes confused with cultural belief when they are merged in the narrative of myth.

Sippy has confronted his ineptitude for the hostile landscape of the West, thus he recognizes as his heroes those who are adequate to the challenge and are willing to include him in their adventures. Since he is seeking fancy and romance, it is consistent for him to reject the actual West, which threatens him with disillusionment, and contrive his sentimental account of outlaws and murderers. When Sippy reports villains yet perceives heroes, the discrepancy tells a more complex truth, and tells it better, than direct reporting could.

Sippy's term for gunfighters is sweethearts, an ironic turn on romance so precise, it would appear to indicate that
Sippy recognizes the term's absurdity and intends for it to be ironic. Yet, he is puzzled by the irony of Katie Garza's term for her gang; he intends to ask "why a lady bandit would call her gang the Turkeys" (AFB 81). He paints a grim scene in the grit and stink of Greasy Corners to show how his ideas about gunfighters have been corrected:

The dime novelists might portray gunfighters as a confident, satisfied lot—I've been guilty of that myself—but the truth is they were mainly disappointed men. They spent their lives in the rough barrooms of ugly towns; they ate terrible food and drank a vile grade of liquor; few of them managed to shoot the right people, and even fewer got to die gloriously in a shoot-out with a peer. The majority just got shot down by some bold stranger, like the drunk who killed the great Hickok. (78)

However, the recognition Sippy has achieved is tainted; he still regards the shoot-out as the glorious and proper death for a "great" gunfighter. Sippy often verges on mythoclastic realization, flirting with that potential for redeeming himself as a dependable narrator, yet he manages to accommodate each discovery within his romantic vision. He adjusts his belt a notch to describe the gunfighters: "hard though they were, I liked those gunmen who died in that windy gully. They only warred on one another, as near as I can see, and they brought some spirit to the ragged business of living, a spirit I confess I miss" (231). When Sippy calls the gunfighters sweethearts, he is not cynical, as Katie is with the turkeys, but he is ironic. "Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy,
centering on a theme of puzzled defeat" (Frye, AC 224). Sippy's sweethearts are disappointed men who "seek glory with the gun . . . [most] were frankly just the journeymen of the owlhoot trail, a jolly lot when jolly and a sullen lot when sullen" (AFB 69). They are sad men, not bad men.

Poetic imagery is one element of Sippy's constant refurbishing of his perceived world. With graceful metaphors like "journeymen of the owlhoot trail," Sippy creates disarming murderers. His rhetoric repeatedly entices with poetic figures, only to deflect his purpose by absurd analogies. The gunfighters are compared to heroes: "as the dead piled up on the plain, it began to seem like one of those great old poems of war, Homer or Roland or Horatio at the bridge" (87). The familiar convention of alluding to epic heroes beguiles, but the reader's discretion resists the image, then rejects the analogy. Later Sippy laments:

They're all part of legend now, the sweethearts who died at Skunkwater Flats: they died and were raised to glory . . . . Hill Coe rose from disgrace to die as gallantly as the hosts at the Alamo. . . . For they're all gone where Hickok is, and Custer, those sweethearts, and where Napoleon is and Hector and the other great fallen . . . (231-32)

The list, of course, is an ironic blend of equivocal heroes; again, his analogies work against his narration to prove his unreliability as a reporter. Sippy's appeal to the reader is a mirror image of the West's appeal for him. The conflict is the same: romanticism versus realism, but Sippy rejects the real in favor of his romantic vision of the West. The ironic
perspective on Sippy's romanticism, available to the reader, fosters the outcome that the reader will reject romanticism in favor of realism.

Other examples of allusions by which he attempts to ennoble the characters are his portraits of "that young Galahad, Billy the Kid" (407), also referred to as "the young prince of the town, the adored boy" (61); and of Cecily Snow, "as beautiful as Helen" (380), who "had gone where Guinevere is—surely she had; all they found was her sidesaddle" (49). There is a marvelous irony in comparing Billy the Kid to the knight whose purity permitted him to find the Holy Grail and in comparing the devastation caused by Cecily Snow to that caused by Helen or Guinevere. McMurtry's invention of Sippy as narrator is masterful and magical; Sippy's ability to convince himself without convincing the reader is fundamental to the ironic pattern of the narrative.

Sippy is a mythmaker—"a storybook man," according to Tully Roebuck, and "Billy was the storied one" (182). Despite Sippy's attempts to glorify the gunfighters' deaths, the ironic perspective created by Sippy's romanticism establishes that Billy and the others are sociopaths: they recognize no social or moral responsibilities and obtain immediate gratification through violent acts. Billy escapes being a villain because he retains a paradoxical childlike innocence: "you couldn't help liking him—he was just a
winning kid" (4). He is so pathologic, he doesn't really comprehend right and wrong:

he could not be made to consider the future at all. Later I concluded that was one reason Billy killed so easily, in such a conscienceless way: he apprehended no future, neither his own nor his victims'. The present swallowed Billy as the whale swallowed Jonah. (383)

Billy cannot be considered tragic because, not only does he lack stature of any kind, he does not experience remorse. Instead he is pathetic: "He looked small, pallid, and depressed . . . it was hard to believe such a pinched and weary boy had killed nine men in a little over a month" (353). He is able to claim the loyalty of the narrator, Joe Lovelady, Sister Blandina, and Katie Garza, even though he himself is incapable of either loyalty or gratitude: "such a lonely look stuck on his ugly young face that you'd want to do anything for him. . . . He had the sad boy's appeal" (185). Billy's expression sometimes shows hopelessness, but the narrative does not offer that information as explanation of his violence nor result of his violence, but only as Sippy's justification: "Perhaps it was the boy killer's hopeless young eyes that curdled my judgment--I don't know" (181). Billy's hopelessness may be the only way Sippy can comprehend and convey the loyalty Billy engenders.

Westerns with sympathetically portrayed gunfighters usually have a central theme of remorse or renunciation of violence. In the movie The Gunfighter the protagonist regrets that his reputation and inevitable death will lead,
just as inevitably, to his killer's reputation and inevitable death, in a self-replicating sequence. In *Shane* and *Pale Rider*, the gunfighter-hero has experienced some reforming change and no longer wears a gun; however, the community's need for someone who is capable of killing forces the gunfighter-hero to use his unique skill, although he is then excluded from the community.

But neither regret for his violent acts nor the desire to change is characterized in Billy Bone:

> A bad conscience would never be one of Billy's problems; I've often wondered how such a likable boy could be such a blank domino when it came to conscience. I've never come up with a respectable theory about it, though. . . . Billy Bone didn't spend many hours of his life thinking about his fellow human beings. The notion that they had some sort of a right to life probably never entered his head, and might have struck him as comical if it had.

> The long and short of it was, killing people just didn't bother him. It didn't excite him, as it does some killers, but I don't believe any of his killings caused him a moment's depression. (322-23)

Billy is a cold killer, the one you are afraid to even think of when you get money from the automated teller machine at night, the nightmare that keeps you home but still scared. Billy Bone may not be the historical Billy, but the West knew him by some name and he is known by some name now. McMurtry's characterization of Billy Bone argues against the gunfighter-hero and romanticized violence. In addition, by illustrating the process by which irony displaces mimesis and restores myth, it argues for the effectiveness of the mythic West to express society's central concerns.
The one romance hero in the narrative is Joe Lovelady, the apotheosis of the cowpuncher. For this character, the narrative bears out Sippy's assessment:

I soon came to see that if there were such a thing as the perfect cowboy, Joe was it. He had the skills to perfection—and more than that, he had the temperament. Joe asked for no more than horses and cattle, ropes and saddles, grass and sky. It was his misfortune—well, better say his tragedy—to fall in with the gunmen. (31-32)

McMurtry separates the cowboy and the gunfighter by pairing Joe and Billy as "compañeros" (32). In the first paragraph, Billy walks out of a cloud with "a pistol in each hand and a scared look on his rough young face" (3); minutes later, Joe "trotted out of the cloud, riding one horse and leading another" (7). Joe has stolen back their horses from the Apaches who stole them; he navigates effortlessly through the fog and across the plain, then provides their supper by hitting prairie chickens with his rope. Joe was "the genuine diamond, when it came to cowboys" (76), and had more self-assurance than Billy Bone would ever have" (8). Although Joe knows Billy will never be a cowboy because "it just ain't his line" (31), Joe is steadfast and "a true friend to Billy Bone" (32).

Joe is a widower of "twenty-one or two, but no older" (8), yet already he is distinguished by sadness over the loss of his wife and his month-old child after only one year of marriage. Melancholy reinforces his characterization of the romantic hero; also his loss is convenient for the
cowboy hero, as he is able to keep the love of his life—idealized forever and absolutely—and yet have no obligations that would prevent him from following Billy. Their friendship is based on destiny or chance—they "just met up" (31)—yet Joe is devoted to the doomed Billy because, "He doesn't have no folks, and I don't either, now" (31). Billy needs taking care of, so "that kind, lonely man" (404) takes Billy as his comrade and dies for Billy, knowing that Billy feels no loyalty in return.

To give Billy a chance to escape, Joe leads a chase "halfway across the West—up the Pecos, across the Jicarilla country, around great Shiprock Butte, north of the Navaho canyon, south from the desert of monuments" (278), until Joe's horse goes lame and Joe elects to shoot his pursuer's camel with his last bullet. Sippy's list of specific Western landmarks resonates with myth, from native American cultures and later American cultures, as well as from the Western, and the list grounds the chase in the real world. Yet, by locating the chase in the actual world, it acquires an actual distance of around 1000 miles. Once again, Sippy's narration beckons and bars participation through the same means.

Sippy protests that Joe has gotten too little attention in the stories about Billy: "that chase was the finest thing in the story . . . . Joe Lovelady's ride was as fine as Roland at the pass . . . [but] it was Billy Bone and his hot
gun that got the most space" (182). The legend's popularity is a response to violence, not valor; this is Tully Roebuck's point when he assesses Billy's greater appeal: "Joe Lovelady was just a cowboy. . . [he] never killed a soul" (182-83). Sippy's book about Joe fails to sell, although Joe expresses the old verities and represents a truer depiction of the cowpuncher. Ironically, the appetite of the reading public is both bloodthirsty and prurient and prefers the crimes and death of an outlaw.

In his book, Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981, Stephen Tatum explores the public's enduring fascination with the Kid in terms of evolutionary changes in the legend. His premise is that "all of us to some degree resolve our conflicts of value and feeling in fantasy. . . . the Kid and his West have existed as strategies for encompassing cultural and personal conflicts in an audience's present" (14). One interesting point with regard to McMurtry's interpretation of Billy is that dime novelists portrayed the Kid as a "badman," a stock character type set in opposition to a "outlaw hero" like Jesse James; as such the Kid had no heroic qualities (48).

Tatum credits the Hollywood version of the Kid with his "transformation from a folk or legendary hero into a mass-culture hero" (8). Tatum describes that transformation in terms of Frye's theory of myth displacement and fictional modes. From his beginning as a badman, the Kid evolved into
the more benign romance outlaw, portrayed either as a Robin
Hood-type hero who defends society from oppressive enemies
(117) or as a tragic figure whose alienation is a criticism
of society (138); either form offers a possibility of
redemption. The tragic figure evolves into the anti-hero
(162), whose ineffectual aggression toward society is—can
only be—meaningless. The evolution of the Kid is expressed
chronologically: 1881-1925 as the badman; 1925-1955 as the
romance hero or tragic outlaw; and 1955-1973 as the
increasingly ironic anti-hero (Tatum 199-200). (This summary
does not presume to encompass the substance of Tatum's
research.)

What may be important in relation to Billy Bone is
Tatum's observation about the period from 1973 until the
publication of his study in 1982:

The ironic vision, as Northrop Frye has suggested in
his Anatomy of Criticism, paradoxically and
inevitably clears the way for a return to a
mythopoeic vision of experience. Since 1973,
however, no major film, television show, novel, or
biography devoted to the Kid's life and death has
appeared to offer any vision of experience—ironic
or otherwise. . . . [only] a preoccupation with
distinguishing history and legend. (167-68)

Tatum argues that such quests for historical accuracy have
nothing to do with the cultural importance of the Kid. Thus
McMurtry's Billy Bone becomes even more interesting as
revitalized myth and as argument for the relevance of the
cowboy myth and the mythic frontier of the Old West today.
The character in Anything for Billy who is a likelier representation of the folk outlaw-hero is Katie Garza, "the flame of the cantinas" (64). The first time Sippy saw her, she rode into Greasy Corners and "swung off the white mare with a confident motion—it reminded me of the way some ladies arise from the bed of love" (81). Even given Sippy's love for poetics, this phrasing is significant; she moves with the grace and confidence of a lady, despite being an outlaw, and the metaphoric figure replaces a white horse with a bed of love. Katie is destined to play a major role in the drama because, with her arrival, "the great love story of the West began. For Katie Garza was Billy's true love, and Billy was hers" (86). A love interest makes this the dime-novel adventure Sippy came to the West to find; he even falls "a little in love" (357) with Katie himself.

Katie is the one who kills Billy, not because he leaves her, but because she cannot let him be killed by someone who does not love him. She explains her unusual motive in this way: "Billy was like me—he never had no place" (395). She has no place because her father is the rancher Will Isinglass and her mother, who refused to marry him, was a Mexican. Katie lives with her outlaw gang in Mexico and they steal from rich, oppressive Americans like Isinglass. Adding to the irony, Isinglass taught her to shoot well, abetting her Robin Hood-type career: "He said I'd get no help from the law, so I'd better learn to shoot. He said the law would
be my enemy, and I already see he's right. . . . I'm brown. . . and that's Texas, across the river" (169). In contrast to Billy, Katie's acts can be made heroic, especially in light of her revolutionary spirit:

Katie, wild in her heartbreak, went on to a distinguished career in massacre, joining Villa and then Zapata, shooting down *federales* whenever they got in her way, and finally plunging all the way south to Nicaragua to foment revolution and blow up Yankee banana boats. (398)

Rumors report that Katie was blown up in one of her own explosions; but this, of course, cannot be verified, leaving the classic ambiguity that gives rise to folk legend.

Sippy claims that Katie is not given credit for killing Billy because she is a girl; this would dishonor Billy as a villain, as well as the men on the scene who intended to kill him. This echoes the earlier episode when Katie outshoots the most famous gunfighter of the Greasy Corners sweethearts, Hill Coe, leaving him a broken man. Sippy observes that Coe could not have known "that on that sunny, still plains morning, in perfect shooting light, the arc of his life would break," that in fact each of us are no farther from ruin than "a hasty move, the twitch of a finger, the smallest of miscalculations" (95). Like most of McMurtry's female characters, the women of *Anything for Billy* are more resilient, and therefore tougher, than the men.

Katie is not the only woman in the narrative who is a better and deadlier shot than a man: Cecily Snow arranged
for Billy to be credited with shooting Isinglass's murderous henchman. Her request that Billy kill the henchman, his attempt to do so, and her success, unfortunately, had nothing to do with the henchman being Joe Lovelady's killer; neither of Cecily nor Billy can claim heroic motives. Cecily is the greatest villain of the story; she murders, not because she is pathologic like Billy nor in love like Katie nor to protect her property like Isinglass, but because she wants Isinglass's land. Like Danny Deck's Uncle Laredo and his wife, Cecily and Isinglass are locked in a struggle to outsurvive each other.

Isinglass is cruel and ruthless, but he is honest. He portrays John Chisum in the novel, but the characterization includes familiar elements that link him to the cowboy god. Like Goodnight, he is a legendary plainsman and landowner who loses his ranch in a partnership probate dispute. But the intriguing components of his characterization, as discussed in Chapter 3, are the bizarre elements reminiscent of McMurtry's Uncle Johnny, particularly those elements as they were developed in Uncle Laredo. Besides the baroque architecture of house and hearth, they all share a combative temperament toward others and the environment.

His death typifies this personality. He bought the first automobile in the region but, unable to make it stop, he was crushed when it "sailed off into one of the canyons of the Canadian . . . . They say he was emptying his pistol
into the motor, in a vain effort to kill the thing, when the car went off the cutbank" (400-01). The story is comical but Sippy's response is reverential; he cries, thinking of "that great, violent old man" (401). Throughout the narrative, Isinglass has been more of a villain than Billy; but, in attempting to shoot the machine destined to replace the horse, he represents the end of the rancher-plainsman, the end of the West, and the passing of the cowboy god.

During one of their "curious conversations," Isinglass tells Sippy, "I may die eventually, but I'll be damned if I'll allow myself to be disappointed . . . . I've lived eighty-five years and got every damn thing I wanted" (63). The semantics of these ironic statements reveal a steely determination to control his experience and environment and even imply a control over death. Twice he curses with a form of damn—an ironic curse that conveys the paradox in getting what you want but not getting what you expect. The passage continues with one of Sippy's nostalgic and poetic musters of the players, framed by his question: "All these years later I still wonder about that old man . . . . did he know regret?" (64). Tully Roebuck's opinion is that Isinglass, "not a man to question himself" (64), was unlikely to have regrets. In this regard, he is like Billy, who also had no regrets.

The crucial difference between ruthless Isinglass and ruthless Billy is the ideologies they represent. Isinglass,
for all his individualism, represents the ideology of integrated social forces; he has purpose because he believes in a possibility of victory. Billy represents the anarchic ideology of chaotic social forces; he lacks purpose because all action is ultimately meaningless. The characterizations illustrate the romantic and ironic poles of Frye's rhetorical theory of dialectical movements in literature; both Billy and Isinglass dramatize descent. Isinglass descends from the mythic toward the ironic; Billy descends from irony toward the demonic.

Although *Anything for Billy* concludes with a coda, the action culminates with Billy's death "on the cusp of the great American plain" (393), in a scene containing all the major players. Like Isinglass, Billy's death is also oddly comical: his last utterances, sprinkled through the action, stage his death as a burlesque of tragedy. When he sees Katie arrive, he says "This is gonna give me a headache" (390); after she shoots him, he says "I guess it's one cure for a headache" (390). Next Katie shoots the gunman Isinglass had hired, and Billy says "Long Dog's a dead dog, like I predicted" (391). Then he advises Katie to let Tully take the credit for killing him because "Tully's got politics to think of" (391). When Katie tells him to hurry and die so she can water her horse, Billy's last comment is, "That's spunk, ain't it, Sippy?" (391). His comments undercut the elegiac style of Sippy's narration.
Frye's literary theory proposes that irony descends to the demonic, then reverses with the upward movement of comedy. Frye's example in Essay 3 of the *Anatomy of Criticism* is Dante's *Inferno*, which is explained and expanded upon by A.C. Hamilton:

The abrupt end to Essay 3 with its joking reference to Dante's abrupt sight of Satan's arse, literally the bottom of hell, seems surprising. Essay 3 ends where the major writer often begins, not with romance, to delight readers by its vision of what should be, but with satire, to cleanse their perception and make them see their present state for what it is. Yet more is implied by this end than perhaps even Frye realized. Demonic epiphany begins the movement from irony and satire to comedy and romance, and therefore from the world of experience to the world of innocence, and it suggests that if readers respond to any literary work with sufficient imaginative intensity, that is, with full awareness of its place in the circle of mythoi, they may accompany Dante in his upward climb to Purgatory and subsequent redemption. (152)

Thus McMurtry ends Billy's story by decisively cleansing it of tragic tone, in spite of Sippy's desire for the heroic, because, to purify the cowboy myth of connotations that romanticize violence, the narrative must emphasize that Billy has not lived heroically and does not become a hero by dying.

I maintain that McMurtry's fiction is not mythoclastic, in that he does not destroy the myth; his vision is larger than was evident in the early novels exposing the problems created by the cowboy myth. The Old West novels complete the cycle identified by Frye for literary displacement of myth,
for which the analogy is the hero's journey. When Frye looks at the cycle of irony in *Finnegans Wake*, he asks:

> Who then is the hero who achieves the permanent quest . . . . No character in the book itself seems a likely candidate; yet one feels that this book gives us something more than the merely irresponsible irony of a turning cycle. Eventually it dawns on us that it is the reader who achieves the quest, . . . to the extent that he . . . is able to look down on its rotation, and see its form as something more than rotation. (AC 323-24)

McMurtry creates his appeal through displacement of myth into narrative and that appeal depends on the reader's involvement in the narrative movement (Frye, "Road" 7). The reader pursues meaning by following the argument set up by the narrative; however, because of McMurtry's ironic presentation, the reader does not acquire the meaning upon completing her reading of the text. "What we reach at the end of participation becomes the center of our critical attention. The elements in the narrative thereupon regroup themselves in a new way" ("Road" 8). Now that she is no longer participating in the narrative, the reader-as-critic arrives at her quest of the text's significance by resolving the dialectic created by the irony. McMurtry's dialectic becomes an argument, that is, a rhetorical statement, because "being in a poem, novel, essay, or play is being in an argument" as Jim Corder has pointed out (333). McMurtry's irony forces the reader to continue the argument in order to reach a resolution that would determine the significance of the narrative.
CHAPTER SIX

The End of the Trail: Buffalo Girls

The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.
Robert Frost, "The Oven Bird"

McMurtry accomplishes two interesting things in Buffalo Girls, his third Old West novel. First, he dramatizes legendary mythmakers after the Wild West is over; more specifically, he illustrates Calamity Jane creating a private myth, Buffalo Bill Cody creating theatrical myth, and Teddy Blue at the trail's end, after the close of his mythopoetizing memoir. In addition, McMurtry's characterization of Calamity Jane explores the consequences of challenging gender expectations and conventions. McMurtry's characters are not intended to serve as historical replacements for the legendary figures; instead, they further fictionalize these historical characters "whose stories outgrew their lives" (BG 351).

For each of his Old West novels, McMurtry has combined historical fact with imaginative vision; the historical elements provide the verisimilitude required by realism and the visionary elements allow the expression of renewed belief. Frye expresses these two rivals, reality and imagination, as creating a cycle:
The descending side of our world-picture is the side of the past... [and] the world of the future, of hope and expectancy for the not yet, as well as the record of the no longer. The ascending side is the power of creation, directed toward the goal of creating a genuinely human community. (Frye, Spiritus 122)

Frye explains that on the descending side, literature recreates memory and frustrated desire; on the ascending side, literature produces renewal. McMurtry's Old West novels are constructed from figures located in the past, but the significance conveyed by the narrative is located in the present, and the argument for that significance derives its power from the mythic West. What emerges from this obvious mixing of history, fiction, and myth is not restored history, but restored myth.

Frye identifies the "two great rhythmical movements in all living things: a movement towards unity and a movement toward individuality" (Spiritus 253). Humanity experiences these opposing forces as the desire to be unique and independent and the desire to be accepted as a member of a society. An interesting point about this observation is the gender associations that can be made: unity, inclusion, and connection connote feminine gender characteristics; individuality, independence, and differentiation are associated with the masculine gender. In Buffalo Girls, McMurtry illustrates the conflicts created by the opposing desires for independence and for connection, as well as by the polarization of cultural gender roles.
McMurtry discusses the attraction of the cowboy's West as a man's world: "The living conditions that make the wild, free cowboy such an attractive fantasy-figure to those already urbanized" (ING 27) include rejection of society's refinements. "Indeed, there has always been an element of asceticism in the cowboy's makeup . . . . [as well as] restlessness, and independence" (ING 26); by no coincidence, these traits are antithetic to the stereotyped feminine gender roles. The western landscape offers a proving ground for the cowboy where he substantiates that he has not been weakened by parlor gentility; at the same time, he skirts the sexual tensions he experiences around females and dodges their enigmatic expectations (ING 72).

McMurtry's focus is on the cowboy as the tragic figure who pays emotionally for his ideology, but he acknowledges that the women whose misfortune it is to love the cowboy also "are victims, though for the most part acquiescent victims. They usually buy the myth of cowboying and the ideal of manhood it involves, even though both exclude them" (ING 148). For some women, the basis of the cowboy's charm and appeal may be the challenge provided by his commitment to autonomy and freedom; for others, who have felt stifled by gender constraints, he offers an exciting male gender role to sample vicariously.

However, McMurtry is unsympathetic toward women who identify themselves as the cowboy: "A few even buy it to the
point of attempting to assimilate the all-valuable masculine qualities to themselves, producing that awful phenomenon, the cowgirl" (ING 148). Unless one hears irony in the descriptor "all-valuable," these words sound belligerent, especially during an era in which females are encouraged to enter professions traditionally limited to males. In McMurtry's defense, I interpret his censure of the cowgirl as directed toward her approbation of a belief system he maintains is damaging to both women and men. McMurtry's assessment of the cowboy is that of a tragic and frustrated figure; this is based partly on the cowboy's idealizing and not realizing women (ING 148-9). Similarly, one issue associated with women entering masculine professional arenas is the undermining of feminine attributes, perceived by some as pressure to exchange feminine for masculine attributes in order to succeed. This becomes especially ironic as men begin to question their own culturally assigned gender characteristics. Thus, the cowgirl provides an analogy of women who adopt questionable masculine characteristics as means of gaining acceptance in traditionally male arenas.

When McMurtry reaches into the historic West for Buffalo Girls, he chooses Calamity Jane to dramatize the current concern with masculine and feminine gender roles and to illustrate the consequences of challenging gender expectations and conventions. His characterization of Calamity Jane—for example, her inability to fit into
McMurtry's Calamity Jane is pathetic in spite of her freedom, partly because of her lack of frontiersmanship, but mostly because of her drinking and her lies. Calamity asserts, "I am the Wild West . . . I was one of the people that kept it wild" (BG 14). She refers here, most likely, to being a buffalo girl, or prostitute, (114) and a carouser (159) who smokes, cusses and gets drunk (288); in contrast, her friend Dora understands Calamity as sad, lonely and peculiar (36). Calamity claims to have been an army scout, among other frontier occupations, but these claims are recognized among her friends as bragging or lying. Dora finds it even sadder to think that:

Calamity hadn't actually done much of anything except wander here and there on the plains, the little reputation she had the result of invention, or the indulgence of a few kind men; her stories and her story were mainly based on whiskey and emptiness. (BG 37)

Dora universalizes her observation when she adds that most of the stories in the West were based on whiskey and emptiness. This general emptiness is developed in the
narrative to emphasize the cowboy figure's lack of family-centered connectedness, one of the themes in *Lonesome Dove*.

Even more is revealed about Calamity's loneliness by the premise underlying the novel's structure: one of the novel's narrative lines is a series of journal entries, ostensibly Calamity's letters to her daughter Janey. The imaginary child is the result of her love affair with Wild Bill Hickok, yet no one but Calamity believes she had an affair with Hickok. Calamity's inventions indicate her unhappiness: her fabrication of motherhood for herself shows her desire for a more conventional female role, even though the imagined relationship with Hickok represents an unorthodox means of producing a family. In one letter, Calamity justifies herself to Janey:

> You may hear people say your mother wasn't even a woman, Janey, don't believe it. In my youth when I was always traveling I dressed like a man, it's easier.

> Then later I disguised myself as a man to get work . . . I worked with men so much I guess I thought I was one at times--it was partly too that women had such hatred of me, all except Dora and a few others. They didn't like it that I went my own way and cussed and smoked--I had to face off with so many old biddies that I got tired of it, I gave up and went off with the men, at least I did when I could get work.

> You can't run off from what you are though--you have to make camp with what you are, every night, Janey. *(BG 341-42)*

Although at first her explanation makes it sound as if she came to the West in search of adventure, it becomes apparent as she continues that the wide-open West offered a place to hide:
I was born odd . . . stuck in between . . . . You are the child I would have chose, Janey, had I been normal . . . . I guess you rose out of my hopes, Janey--I had thought I put them out of my heart long ago, when all the doctors told me I couldn't bear a child. . . . But we don't have the say about our hopes, Janey--truth, if that's what it is, can't stop us from hoping. Or didn't stop me at least . . . (342-44)

McMurtry presents Calamity Jane as a hermaphrodite, both to explain her behavior and appearance and as a play on her name (178-79). The irony in this condition is that Calamity is neither male nor female, but both; if McMurtry has interpreted the cowgirl as envious of the cowboy, he has made an ironic joke about the hazards of wishing for something and getting it.

The sequence Calamity reveals in this passage is that she was married once, but when she and her husband consulted a doctor, probably about infertility, she learned of her condition. Apparently that precipitated her unconventional lifestyle. Even in the West, she was condemned by women for her dress, yet she was only given work if she concealed her gender. Although on the frontier she found a place she could belong, she would want a different life for her daughter:

I made up the best life I could for you Janey, it is the opposite of the life I have lived out here in this mess they call the west. Though I love the west, for all its sadness. (344)

This introduces a new perspective on the West, as a region populated with sad misfits. For those who did not fit properly within society, the western frontier offered a
community with greater tolerance. This changed, of course, as society appropriated the frontier.

One feature of McMurtry's poignant characterization is that Calamity invents a masculine identity for herself and helps to mythologize her eccentric role in the legendary West, yet finally confronts her enduring disappointment over being unable to fulfill the conventional feminine role of motherhood. Referring in this passage to the smallpox epidemic of 1878, Calamity reveals her maternal needs:

Over in Deadwood when the smallpox hit they said I was the best nurse they had, the boys said they'd never forget me. . . . Ha, I wasn't just the best nurse they had, I was the only nurse, nobody else would go near those dying boys—forty of them died anyway. I couldn't save them. I ain't a Doc, Janey all I could do was cook them soup and hold their hand—I hated to see those boys die . . . (20)

In this section of her narrative Calamity expresses a feeling of uselessness; she has no "chores" now that she is not needed as a nurse.

Among the many questionable details of Calamity Jane's legend, nursing the miners of Deadwood is accepted as a historical event and is included in many Western chronicles. A timeline of important events in the Wild West includes this note on Calamity Jane:

1878: Her nursing of smallpox victims in Deadwood, S.Dak., made a heroine of Calamity Jane (née Martha Jane Cannary), a brawling alcoholic and sometimes prostitute. Claiming to be Wild Bill Hickok's widow, she asked to be buried beside him in Deadwood, and, in 1903, she was. ("How the West" 25)
Calamity certainly earned the credit due a hero. As one of very few women so acknowledged, Calamity Jane comes to symbolize the pioneer women who nursed, and so often buried, their family and friends. This significance is ironic since this unconventional woman was scorned by conventional women. It is doubly ironic that Calamity became a historic hero in the traditional feminine gender role of a nurse; she did not become a hero for challenging gender boundaries.

Parallels are found in Anything for Billy's female characters: Katie Garza is the truly heroic character and Cecily Snow, the truly villainous, but Sippy is unwilling to give either woman that kind of stature. Cecily is motivated by evil intent to be the agent of death for her half-brothers and for Billy himself, yet Sippy compares Cecily to traditional female pawns, Helen and Guinevere, rather than to a villain. Not only is Katie justified as an outlaw folk-hero, she rescues Billy from the lynch mob in Lincoln, then has the valor to perform a coup de grâce so that Billy's life ends in a sacrifice with some honor. Yet Sippy makes no analogy to literary epic for Katie, spending all his hero allusions on Joe Lovelady and the gunfighters. This tendency is not unique to Sippy, but to our culture; our literature and our mythology do not provide archetypes for non-traditional female heroes.

The unconventional female of this era who gained popular acceptance is Annie Oakley. She appears in Buffalo
Girls but clearly she is different from Calamity. Annie is described as "a neat, pretty woman who soon collected a boatload of admirers, but did not appear to be interested in any of them. All she was interested in was shooting" (BG 152-53). Although Annie is "stiff with everybody" (157) and her "single-mindedness" is "irksome" (153), Calamity admires her riding: "she is a regular acrobat, some people are born with gifts, Annie Oakley was. She has got plenty of ability" (165). Annie is neither a drunk nor a carouser nor a sporting woman; she travels with her husband and remains aloof from the rest of the cast. Even though a trick-riding, sure-shooting performer is not a conventional feminine role, Annie is acceptable when Calamity is not. A gun-toting woman is permissible but not a sometimes prostitute.

Calamity's friend Dora has been a sporting woman for twenty years, following the cowpunchers from Abilene to Montana; in addition, she is a businesswoman, having maintained a series of sporting houses. Thus Dora not only ignores the conventions of traditional morality, she has entered the masculine realm of the business world. Unlike Lorena of Lonesome Dove, Dora "jumped into" the sporting life after leaving the family farm, happy "to drink and sing and hoorah with the cowboys, the steady stream of youths who for twenty years filled the plains with their laughter and their need" (BG 111). Now the cattle drives have all but
ceased and Dora's lover, the cowpuncher T. Blue, has become a rancher, a life Dora has refused to share with him.

In the context of challenging gender expectations and conventions, Robert Warshow's explanation discloses the complexity of the sporting woman:

[In Westerns], the important thing about a prostitute is her quasi-masculine independence: nobody owns her, nothing has to be explained to her, and she is not, like a virtuous woman, a "value" that demands to be protected. When the Westerner [cowboy] leaves the prostitute for a virtuous woman --for love--he is in fact forsaking a way of life . . . (Warshow 340)

Dora knows she is not suited for ranch life; her financial independence allows her to refuse to marry T. Blue. Yet she knows her life must change. The West is becoming civilized, and with the new society comes a different morality. Sporting women "were part of the romance of trail life" (Dessain 486), and the end of a way of life is symbolized when Dora closes her sporting house. Both Dora and T. Blue realize their lives together must change also, but do not find it easy to walk away from each other. Dora is hurt when T. Blue marries and then assumes he can still visit her whenever he likes; he is shocked when she marries and even more shocked to find her marriage ends their relationship.

The character T. Blue allows McMurtry to add a postscript to Teddy Blue Abbott's memoir.9 Teddy Blue's memoir ends with his marriage and filing a homestead; this is typical, according to Kenneth Dessain, of cowpuncher's memoirs:
McMurtry has been interested in Teddy Blue Abbott's marriage for a long time, going back to *All My Friends* and the first fictional Teddy Blue who puzzles Danny Deck by running off all the time and leaving a pretty wife. In *ING* McMurtry uses the metaphor of "long rides into the sunset" (*ING* 72) to describe how Westerners avoid the emotional stress produced by their relations with women, and he interprets this stress by referring to Teddy Blue Abbott's explanation of the cowpuncher's fear of decent women. Now in *Buffalo Girls* T. Blue is either leaving his wife or Dora, regularly riding off into the sunset.

Teddy Blue's memoir is recognized as providing an "honest treatment of the cowboy's [cowpuncher's] relations with women" (*ING* 50). His account is different because, in addition to describing the cowpuncher's working life, Teddy Blue relates the cowpuncher's relations with sporting women:

>We all had our favorites after we got acquainted. We'd go in town and marry a girl for a week, take her to breakfast and dinner and supper, be with her all the time. You couldn't do that in other places. . . . In Texas men couldn't be open and public about their feelings towards those women, the way we were. . . . I suppose those things would shock a lot of respectable people. But we wasn't respectable and we didn't pretend to be, which was the only way we was different from some others. I've heard a lot about the double standard, and seen a lot of it, too, and it don't make any sense for the man to get off so easy. If I'd have been a woman and done what I done, I'd have ended up in a sporting house. . . . As Mag
Burns used to say, the cowpunchers treated them sporting women better than some men treat their wives.

Well, they were women. We didn't know any others. And any man that would abuse one of them was a son of a gun. (Abbott 107-08)

Teddy Blue's main reason for providing his version of the cowpuncher's life is that other accounts "never put in any of the fun, and fun was at least half of it" (Abbott 3-4). His depiction of sporting women shows them to be as rebellious of social expectations as the cowpunchers themselves.

His explanation of the cowpuncher's different attitudes toward sporting women and decent women is intriguing. He states, "there was only two things the old-time cowpuncher was afraid of, a decent woman and being set afoot" (8). He explains this when he discusses his fear of losing the "decent young girl" he planned to marry:

I'd been traveling and moving around all the time, living with men, and I can't say I ever went out of my way to seek the company of respectable ladies. We didn't consider we were fit to associate with them on account of the company we kept. We didn't know how to talk to 'em anyhow. That was what I meant by saying that the cowpunchers was afraid of a decent woman. We were so damned scared for fear that we would do or say something wrong--mention a leg or something like that that would send them up in the air. (188)

The cowpuncher's "awe of a good woman" (189) is perpetuated in the cowboy myth as the male who is reserved, often uncertain or flustered around ladies, and obviously relieved to return to the company of his comrades.
Unfortunately, Teddy Blue's defense of sporting women and his description of their relations with cowpunchers—an essential complement to the cowpuncher's reticence with decent women—is not evident in the Western, which models the expurgated accounts:

[The bad woman] flocked into every cattletown to do her part in the winning of the West. She rarely appears in Western fiction, unless she is scrubbed down ... and robbed of her professional status. ... The town courtesan gets much less attention in the memoirs than she merited when the long drives were on. (Dessain 484)

Since the trail drives took place during the Victorian Age, this editing is usually attributed to the cowpuncher's awareness of the audience's scruples; yet, in effect, the censored versions provide no relations with women for the cowpuncher. Westerns depict this inaccurate situation which is reflected in the cowboy myth by the development of male figures McMurtry terms "repressed heterosexuals" (ING 72). For example, in the television Western Gunsmoke, Miss Kitty maintained for many years her apparently chaste friendship with Marshall Matt Dillon while she ran a saloon and employed provocative young women with unspecified duties.

Teddy Blue claims he renounced his wild behavior after his engagement for fear of losing his fiancee, who was certain to hear of any indiscretions. In Buffalo Girls McMurtry reveals his skepticism about this conversion experience; indeed, the life Teddy Blue describes with such nostalgic affection would be likely to tender a powerful
enticement. In contrast, T. Blue is involved in a familiar dilemma between two conflicting loves:

The shift in Dora, though, wasn't to be survived as easily as bullets, rivers, stampedes. He had assumed from her many refusals that she wouldn't mind if he married, so he had married; it was done, and he had no complaint about his wife, who was young, pretty, competent, devoted. Indeed, he loved her too.

He just hadn't imagined that securing a helpmate would affect Dora so . . . . Dora and he had been sweethearts for twenty years, moving, more or less in step, all the way up the plains from Kansas to Montana.

Was all they had shared just to be memories now, because he had married? (BG 131)

The self-mythologizing Teddy Blue is displaced by McMurtry's character T. Blue, who is portrayed in the low mimetic mode, that is, as neither inferior nor superior to other people. McMurtry does not make T. Blue ironic, only human.

Through the narrative, McMurtry clearly suggests a more critical reading of Teddy Blue's memoir. When Calamity discusses journal writing, she may be expressing the very issue that has intrigued McMurtry:

I thought I would . . . keep a diary, plenty of cowboys keep them—even Blue has one. If he put his adventures in it and his little wife ever reads it Blue will have to light out for the hills, she will scald him for sure, though who knows if Blue is truthful, even in his diary. (BG 343)

Calamity's suspicion is significant because T. Blue already has planted such doubts himself. He implicitly warns Dora that he is capable of restructuring the truth; this occurs during their discussion of Calamity's lies:

"Oh, she just exaggerates," Blue said.
"Everybody exaggerates, once in a while."
"You don't," Dora pointed out. Bragging was not among T. Blue's many failings; if anything he tended to understate his achievements as a cowboy.

"Well, you don't know that," Blue said. "I might exaggerate once in a while when you're not around." (BG 37-38)

When Teddy Blue's memoir was published, his wife was still alive; the fictionalized Dora DuFran dies in the narrative. It is clear from this passage that this situation would tempt the fictionalized T. Blue to exaggerate. This process is part of the development of family anecdotes.

However, such mythologizing jeopardizes the reliability of texts that may be used as historical sources. The cowboy myth's influence is evident in Teddy Blue's memoir, despite his claim that it is just "the story of my life, with some history thrown in . . . . There is no fiction in it" (Abbott 4). The primitive cowboy myth was powerful during the time of the trail drives, and Teddy Blue was captivated as an adolescent, when his heroes drove the herds past his father's farm. Also, the media popularized the cowboy long before Teddy Blue's account was published in 1939; as an adult's recollection, his account exhibits the incorporation of myth into memory and thus into history, a common feature of trail memoirs:

The idolized range rider who emerges from these recollections is a curious blend of the familiar and the intangible, a product of both unvarnished narrative and self-romance. (Dessain 474-5)

Teddy Blue discloses that his referent is the mythic cowboy when he singularizes the term cowboy; for example, he claims
the early "Texas cowboy's mode of speech and dress and actions set the style for all the range country. And his influence is not dead yet" (Abbott 3). He refers here, not to an individual, but to the symbol. The consolidated figure was created in response to a need for a defining ideal appropriate to the demands of the frontier. This exemplifies the way different regions and cultures create social myths.

The internationally famous mythmaker Buffalo Bill Cody also is characterized in *Buffalo Girls*. The following short biography is relevant on several points: it describes Cody as a fictionalized dime novel hero; it lists heroes he created; it names Annie Oakley as the symbol of the female frontier hero; and it gives Cody credit for the cowboy's worldwide fame:

Beginning in 1883 with his first Wild West Show, Buffalo Bill became a worldwide hero, an increasing flood of dime novels taunting his fictional exploits. He also created other heroes such as the cowboy, the patriotic chiefs—Sitting Bull, Rain-in-the-Face, and especially Chief Gall, who had helped doom Gen. George Custer's reckless attack on the Little Bighorn that hot June day in 1876. "Little Sure Shot" Annie Oakley stood for all the heroic frontier women in Bill's show, which played to at least a million people on both sides of the Atlantic. But Buffalo Bill did the most to make the cowboy perhaps the world's most recognized hero figure. (Goetzmann 26)

Cody's ability to mythologize the West is part of his own legend. The West he dramatized was much like Sippy's in that everyone was a hero unless he was a villain. His West was not a place where people lived out their lives and made a
living; it was a place where people lived out their drama and made history.

Ironically, Cody's tendency to self-mythologize is pointed out by Teddy Blue Abbott:

[Bill Cody] was a good fellow, and while he was no such great shakes as a scout as he made the eastern people believe, still we all liked him, and we had to hand it to him because he was the only one that had brains enough to make that Wild West stuff pay money. (Abbott 51)

Teddy Blue's opinion expresses the unanimous consensus among the characters of Buffalo Girls, too: that Cody was never a much of a plainsman, even though he made his reputation as a scout. However, he is respected as an entrepreneur, especially now that the West is tamed into an ordinary job market, and no longer offers unlimited possibilities for bonanzas of all kinds.

When the narrative opens, the sense of ending is very strong among the characters. The trail drives have dried up, T. Blue has married, and Cody is making their world into a historical era. Calamity--always melancholy and lately depressed--warns her friends to stop fooling themselves:

"Billy Cody made the point when he started his Wild West show," Calamity said. "The big adventure's over. It's over and that's that. He's smart to make a show of it and sell it to the dudes." (BG 68-69)

Their lives are turning into history before they are over; the West is done. Cody is just a sign of the times, as the observant Bartle Bone, a beaverman (17), knows:

there was really no longer a West. . . . it had been used up. . . . only a few details had actually
changed—the beaver gone, the buffalo gone, the Indians whipped—and yet, when those things went the glory went also. . . . "If Billy Cody can make a poster about it then there ain't no Wild West." (18)

Calamity calls it the big adventure and Bartle laments the glory. What is interesting about Bartle's observation is that he is specific about what ruined the West, and it is not barbed wire, sheepmen, or farmers. They spoiled it themselves—used it up.

Later in the narrative, Bartle gives his theory about the big mistake that caused the West to die, and he burdens Cody with some of the blame:

"I blame it on the Indians," Bartle said. "They gave up too soon. You're partly to blame, Billy. You're the one made a great name killing buffalo—next thing we knew they were all killed and the Indians were too starved to fight. If we had just kept the buffalo I believe the whole business would have lasted my lifetime," he added. (105)

Surprisingly Cody agrees; he has been building a herd of buffalo, buying all he can find and grazing them on his ranch. He has even "sold ten to Quanah Parker—he's going to try and get them started again on the south plains" (105).

In one of McMurtry's interesting bridges between novels, this connects to Sippy's recap of Isinglass's last years; Isinglass had "a few pet buffalo he had acquired from Quanah Parker" (AFB 400). 10

It is also interesting that McMurtry keeps returning to the buffalo and the Indians as the defining metaphor for the end of the West (for a discussion, see Appendix). Even the title of the novel refers to this metaphor; buffalo girls is
a symbolic term. It is not an accurate term, according to Teddy Blue, who considered it depreciating: "buffalo hunters and that kind of people would sleep with women that cowpunchers wouldn't even look at" (Abbott 102). Also, "those big old fat buffalo women" (121) had names that he refused to repeat, but the girls "that followed us up from the South" were "a different kind of people" (121). This is not the usage buffalo girls is given in the novel.

In the novel Dora knows, before T. Blue and Calamity will admit it, that "the era of the buffalo girls, as she and [Calamity] had known it, was clearly coming to an end" (BG 302). T. Blue looks back with sadness after Dora's death at "the fun they had then--the cowboy and the buffalo girl" (322). Dora remembers T. Blue, too, "when he was a brash young cowboy and she a pretty buffalo girl" (143). Calamity, though, remembers another buffalo pair:

I loved her the minute I saw her, she took to me just as quick and didn't mind that I chewed tobacco and smoked and cussed. Dora saw the girl in me when I couldn't even see it myself. We're buffalo girls, we'll always be friends, she said. Many a time we danced together, I'd pretend to be a cowboy in those dances. (114)

It would not be McMurtry's style to make Calamity's emotion for Dora any clearer than this; what is clear is that the West ends for Calamity with Dora's death and the end of the buffalo girls. Calamity aligns herself with the Indians; at the end of the narrative, when she is old, and is teased and treated rudely by some young men--the way she has seen
Indians treated—she writes: "it made me feel I had outlived my time, no doubt the Indians feel the same way. We are treated like jokes now" (339). With the buffalo and the buffalo girls gone, the Indians and the outcast are left with the tatters of the West.

Bartle Bone relates the lost glory of the West to the beaver, the buffalo and the Indians. For him, the big event of his life—the spectacle that signalled the climax of the West—was the Little Bighorn:

Watching the departure of the Indian peoples from the valley of the Little Bighorn that day was the most impressive and the most moving thing Bartle Bone had witnessed in thirty years in the west. Jim Ragg felt it, too. What they had stumbled on when they turned back that morning was the last act of a great drama. Jim had never seen a play above the level of a medicine show, but he knew that what he was watching was as great as any play.

"We'll never see nothing like this again," he said to Bartle. "Not in our lifetime."

"Nobody will," Bartle said. "It would be worth dying to see it."

... later when they ... walked through the chopped-up bodies of the veterans of the Seventh, the carnage had been anti-climactic. ... What they had seen earlier—the Indian peoples making the plains move—that was a rarer and a greater thing. ... He would always remember that leaving.

"That was a glory, wasn't it?" he said. (76)

Bartle observes that over the past few years, he and his partner have gotten along better with the Indians than with the soldiers. Perhaps the respect comes with the realization that the Indians had known how to preserve the Wild West.

Similarly, Teddy Blue's memoir presents an impassioned defense of the Indians and a scathing criticism of the white man, decades before such sentiments became politically
correct. He relates an episode he later regretted, when he became involved with a posse; but what he observed while they were hidden outside a Cheyenne village had great meaning for him:

I saw an old Indian go up a hill and pray to the sun. It was just coming up, and the top of the hill was red with it, and we were down there shivering in the shadow. And he was away off on the hill, and he held up his arms, and oh, God, but did he talk to the Great Spirit about the wrongs the white man had done to his people. I have never heard such a voice . . . . and that is a sight I will never forget. I am glad that I saw it. Because nobody will ever see it again. (Abbott 170)

These two narratives convey a majesty that transcends the meaning of the traditional Western. The themes of man versus nature, man versus society, or white versus white hold no grandeur in comparison.

Billy Cody says that only he and Calamity and a few Indians knew why the spectacle of the Wild West show held the attention of crowds worldwide: "the story of the west was a great story. You had a wilderness won, red race against white race, nature red in tooth and claw, death to the loser, glory to the victor: what could ever make a nobler show?" (BG 193). But only Billy and T. Blue can make the victory a positive event because only they are able to adapt to the change. For the others, the end of the West is the end of the story.
CHAPTER SEVEN

McMurtry's Argument

*Time present and time past*
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
*T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

McMurtry's characters demonstrate a progressive diminishment and loss of integrity as the mythopoeic era of the cowboy recedes into the distance. The men often are bewildered and incapable of making meaningful decisions; the women often are in the process of discovering their own strengths—as if one brings about the other. The cowboy-rancher of the older generations was committed to the myth, although that commitment made him progressively more anachronistic. The modern Westerner has acquired mythic values unconsciously; at the same time he has been exposed to increasingly ironic media treatments of the myth. This leaves him ambivalent toward the myth and unlikely to perceive it as the source of his confusion and inertia.

As far back as Gideon Frye who could not bring himself to love Molly completely, nor leave her completely, nor to leave his wife, McMurtry's male characters have shown an inability to act decisively. The characters experience a desire for connection, along with a conflicting fear that anything they say or do around women will be wrong. Caught in this conflict, the man opts for doing and saying nothing
in order to avoid what he perceives as a threat. Such a fear is understandable when it is described by Teddy Blue as an element of the cowpuncher, but it does not work for the Westerner. He does not perform violent, dirty work or spend all his time with men, and he does not lack contact with decent women. The Westerner can satisfy women, but fears he cannot. He prefers to do nothing, which is almost certain to exasperate the woman, rather than attempt and perchance fail. His lack of initiative is not a lack of response, but a passive response, and sometimes a passive-aggressive response.

This response is in direct opposition to the cowboy who is a man of action; the Western is a romance genre for which action is fundamental. The cowboy, when confronted with a problem, is not a man of thought; he has a code which determines his action so he does not have to think. In fact, the code provides the cowboy a course of action that overrides feelings or opinions. For the Westerner, the myth has descended to the ironic; in the process, the cowboy's code was questioned and found to be a fictional construct with no definition. The Westerner cannot act by this diminished code, thus he has no clearly defined mode of action; without a standard, each act requires thought and decision. This decision-making behavior is not modeled in the cowboy myth.
Warshow connects the cowboy's code of action with the his need to protect his honor; this provides an insight on the loss of integrity characterized in McMurtry's males:

What does the Westerner [cowboy] fight for? ... If justice and order did not continually demand his protection, he would be without a calling. Indeed, we come upon him often in just that situation, as the reign of law settles over the West and he is forced to see that his day is over; those are the pictures which end with his death or with his departure for some more remote frontier. What he defends, at bottom, is the purity of his own image— in fact his honor. ... he fights not for advantage and not for the right, but to state what he is, and he must live in a world which permits that statement. ... the movies which over and over again tell his story are probably the last art form in which the concept of honor retains its strength. (Warshow 341)

Since the Westerner, like the ironically portrayed cowboy, lives in a world that does not provide a clear-cut way to establish or defend his honor, he has no authorization or empowerment for his acts. The mode of action demonstrated by the cowboy no longer represents a statement of honor, thus the Westerner needs another way to state what he believes and to prove his integrity.

As discussed throughout this study, myth presents central cultural concerns in narrative form. A current issue for our society is the family, an institution that is increasingly fragmented by pressures on the individual. The role of the male in these fragmented families is considered especially uncertain. The traditional masculine family role has not emphasized nurturing and facilitating qualities. In addition, the masculine role includes disturbing elements of
violence and remoteness that reduce a male's chances of successfully establishing enduring attachments. Furthermore, these elements are sanctioned by the cowboy myth. Thus the Western genre offers an opportunity to address this concern of society through a recreated myth.

The previous chapters on McMurtry's Old West novels have identified both the need for connection among the characters and their problems satisfying that need. Call realizes his error in rejecting his son, Joe Lovelady's sacrifice for Billy ends his pain from losing his family, Dora and T. Blue bring to a close their past relationship and settle down in marriages, and Calamity fantasizes a daughter who symbolizes her own normality. After Billy's death, Sippy reestablishes a tenuous connection with his family; furthermore, Sippy's descriptions of "the orphan boy, Billy Bone" (AFB 15) indicate that Sippy creates a son, however symbolically, in "the little Western waif" (184). However, these examples, with the exception of T. Blue, do not offer illustrations of successful families.

After Dora dies in childbirth, T. Blue offers a home to her husband and their infant son Bob. Years later at a roping contest, when Calamity meets T. Blue with Bob, she expresses disappointment that Bob resembles Dora's husband:

I guess all these years I thought the child might be Blue's, I thought he and Dora deserved a child for all the love they shared. Things don't work in such a way though, Janey . . . . I said to Blue I thought he might be yours, T. Blue just smiled. "I got to
raise him for her, ain't that what matters?" he said. (BG 333)

T. Blue understands something truly important about family ties: the connection is not through blood but through love and through more prosaic qualities, like service and tolerance.

The three novels that revisit earlier characters also deal with family relations and share an emphasis on loss or longing. By the time McMurtry revisits Danny Deck in SCW, he has become the personification of confusion and inertia. Always able to express himself well, Danny speaks for all McMurtry's Westerners when he describes his response to the need for decisive action:

That night, worn out by my own indecision, my lack of confidence, my conviction that in my whole life I had never at any critical moment really known what to do, or managed to do what was in retrospect the obvious right thing, I went to bed early . . . (SCW 235)

Reacting similarly but far more severely after his daughter's death, Danny must struggle "through layers upon layers of inertia" (SCW 350) in order to move with his grandchildren to L.A. Though he is able to act, years of practice have honed instead his ability for inaction. Danny's passivity is described as a lack of initiative by his friend Jeanie. Advising him about his daughter, she tells him: "You may have to actually show some initiative. Women get tired of supplying all the initiative, you know"
His need for a connection to his daughter motivates him to act in spite of his passivity.

Danny, who was searching for a partner as a young man, wants a daughter in Some Can Whistle; when he gets grandchildren instead, he remains exasperatingly bereaved and broken, resolutely obsessed with loss rather than gain. Danny explains: "a critical human ability—the ability to let the lost be lost, the dead be dead—was another of the several I turned out not to have" (SCW 371). Warshow's analysis of the Virginian, Owen Wistar's Western hero, is helpful in understanding Danny. Warshow argues that Wistar's novel is a tragedy:

for though the hero escapes with his life, he has been forced to confront the ultimate limits of his moral ideas.

This mature sense of limitations and unavoidable guilt is what gives the Westerner [cowboy] a "right" to his melancholy. (Warshow 343)

Danny's guilt comes from not showing more initiative when he was barred from his daughter; this is much like Call's guilt over Newt. Like Uncle Johnny, his penance is severe. Eventually, around the age of seventy, he allows himself to find joy in his granddaughter, "my sunshine, her love the only radiance likely to pierce the clouds of age and confusion beneath which I lived" (SCW 376).

From the 1870s to the 1990s and beyond, these last six novels dramatize the disparate values associated with maturity's stages. The concerns of youth and young adulthood are linked with sexual attraction, with conquest, and with
the excitement of adventure. Around middle life, companionship and continuity through family become more important. From the ex-Rangers forward, the characters have opted for careers or carousing, but as they get older, they want the connections offered by family life.

In a strangely parallel manner, McMurtry has reconnected with the characters he created in his thirties and made peace with them. Although it is risky to attach too much importance to correlations between McMurtry's biography and his fiction, it is interesting that McMurtry returned to Texas to take up residence near his hometown around the time these books were written. Eudora Welty expresses the importance of connecting to place as well as to people:

> From the dawn of man's imagination, place has enshrined the spirit; as soon as man stopped wandering and stood still and looked about him, he found a god in that place; and from then on, that was where the god abided and spoke from if ever he spoke. (Welty 123)

In McMurtry's symbolic language, the god is the cowboy god and the place that god speaks is Texas. In person and in his novels, McMurtry has returned to the venue of origin. The result evidences in his fiction as renewed intensity and his tone shows an attitude of restored conviction about his work's importance.

Although McMurtry's fiction is commonly interpreted as mythoclastic, I have maintained throughout this study that his fiction restores rather than destroys the myth. In alternating Western and contemporary novels over the last
few years, McMurtry argues for the existence of an urgent need for restored myth. Although his contemporary characters have trouble communicating and in middle adulthood suffer a melancholia that borders on despair, their descendants have become minor criminals and pathologically dysfunctioning individuals who suffer an absence of idealism—that heroic inspiration that myth provides. In this way, McMurtry illustrates that the absence of myth is worse than an improper myth, not only for Westerners and not only for men, but for a culture generally. His contemporary novels demonstrate this need for restored myth, and he recreates the myth in the Old West novels.
The rhetorical effectiveness of fiction for conveying argument can be demonstrated by comparing two versions of a story about Charles Goodnight. McMurtry tells this story in ING, then four years later tells it again through Danny Deck in AMF. In the essay, McMurtry tells the story relatively simply and avoids overdramatizing or interpreting. In his own voice:

... the old timers at their whittling still tell stories of the Old Man, Charles Goodnight. The stories slowly alter, become local myths. Some remember that the Indians called him Buenas Noches. They can tell the sad story of the last running, about the ragged band of Comanches who came all the way from their reservation in Oklahoma to Goodnight's ranch on the Quitaque, to beg a buffalo of him. At first he refused, but in time he relented and gave them a scrawny young bull, thinking they would drive it back to the reservation and eat it. Instead, whipping up their thin, miserable ponies, they ran it before him and killed it with lances and arrows, then sat looking at it for a time, remembering glories and centuries gone.

Such a story catches a whole people's loss, but only a few old men and a few writers tell it today, and the old men, for that matter, usually tell it as a story about the craziness of Indians. (ING 18-19)

McMurtry acknowledges indirectly that this story is likely to have been altered, as stories are when history becomes myth. He does, in fact, embellish it slightly since he refers to the thoughts of both Goodnight and the Indians. For McMurtry this is a "sad story" of "a whole people's loss," and he tells us that this meaning separates him from
other tellers of the story who do not understand that sadness and loss.

In the novel, Danny's voice replaces McMurtry's and Danny's own struggles and losses—which are known to the reader—become connected to his interpretation of the story and add significance to the story. In return, Danny's characterization is developed by the significance which has accumulated around the story. Additionally, Danny is the fictional voice of a fictional narrative, and thus he is free to add to the story to make it more effective:

Seeing the buffalo reminded me of a story I had always loved. It had to do with Old Man Goodnight. Some Indians had broken off their reservation and come to Goodnight and asked him for a buffalo, and when he reluctantly gave them one they ran it down and killed it with their lances, on the plains in front of his house.

To me it was the true end of the West. A few sad old Indians, on sad skinny ponies, wearing rags and scraps of white man's clothes and carrying old lances with a few pathetic feathers dangling from them, begging the Old Man of the West for a buffalo, one buffalo of the millions it had once been theirs to hunt. He got tired of being pestered and gave them one, and they flailed their skinny old horses into a run and chased the buffalo and killed it, in the old way. Then all they did was sit on their horses and look at it awhile, the winds of the plains fluttering their rags and their few feathers. It was all over. From then on all they would have was their longing. I wondered what Mr. Goodnight had felt, watching it all from his front porch. I didn't know. I just knew it was a great story, full of tragedy. I didn't know exactly whose story it was, but I knew it was great. (AMF 162-63)

Danny first presents an abstract of the story, then develops it with details. His descriptors create a panoramic scene of the plains that includes Goodnight's house, the running
animals, and the riders. The tactile reference to "winds . . . fluttering their rags" locates the reader on the scene sensuously. The poignant appeal of "pathetic" as an adjective for feathers, the pitiful horses described as "skinny" and "old," the "rags and scraps" of the conquerors used as clothing—all these items signify the loss of corresponding symbols of the destroyed culture—feathers, fine horses, natural clothing—and this involves the reader emotionally as well. McMurtry provides a cinematic title, "The True End of the West," and concludes by suggesting that the story's significance is mystical and beyond his grasp.

McMurtry attributes this story to John Graves in his book Goodbye to a River. In a note at the front, Graves states: "Though this is not a book of fiction, it has some fictionalizing in it. Its facts are factual and the things it says happened did happen. But I have not scrupled to dramatize historical matter . . ." Graves' version of the story includes clear invention, such as dialogue and details that he then hedges in an editorial voice that intrudes on the narrative:

[Charles Goodnight] had respect and a kind of love for the Indians even when he fought them. They called him Buenas Noches. . . .

A tale exists. I heard it once about Goodnight and once about another of the old ones who stayed alive long enough to get rich, and it may not be true about either of them. But it could be true—ought to be. . . . [ellipses in original] When Goodnight was old, he lived on what was called the Quitaque ranch, having been eased out of the JA operation by the New York socialite widow of his Irish milord partner. Once a straggly band of
reservation Comanches, long since whipped and contained, rode gaunt ponies all the way out there from Oklahoma to see him.

No buffalo had run the plains for decades; it was their disappearance, as much as smallpox and syphilis and Mackinzie's apocalyptic soldiers, that had finally chopped apart The People's way of life. Jealously, Mr. Charlie had built up and kept a little heard of them.

He knew one or two of the older Indians; he had fought them, and later had gone to see them and reminisce with them in Oklahoma. They asked him for a buffalo bull.

He said: "Hell, no."

They said: "They used to be ours."

"They used to be anybody's that could kill one," the old man said. "These are mine. They wouldn't even be alive if it wasn't for me. You go to hell."

"Please, Buenas Noches," maybe one of them said. Maybe not--The People seldom begged.

He said no again and stomped in the house and stayed there for a couple of days while they camped patiently in his yard and on his porch, the curious cowhands gathering to watch them. In the end he made a great deal of angry noise and gave them the bull they wanted, maybe deriving a sour satisfaction from thinking about the trouble they'd have getting it back to Oklahoma.

They didn't want to take it back to Oklahoma. They ran it before them and killed it with arrows and lances in the old way, the way of the arrogant centuries. They sat on their horses and looked down at it for a while, sadly and in silence, and then left it there dead and rode away, and Old Man Goodnight watched them go, sadly too. (62)

Graves calls this a tale and, at first, when the narrator is setting the scene in the time of the "old ones," it sounds like a tale. In accord with John Gardner's basic rules for a tale (72-74), there is a mixture of vagueness and detail so that it is neither too real nor too unreal, the narrator clearly passing on a story he was told, the setting fairly remote in time, if not in space.
However, Gardner's first rule is that the content should fit "the inherent dignity and solemnity of the form" (72), but Graves damages that dignity when he makes light of his own story. Graves tells it without respect, as if he is embarrassed by the telling. Although a less important point, he breaks the rule against real people as characters in a tale: Goodnight is real, even if Graves hedges about it being Goodnight's story. Finally, in a tale, what ought to happen, does happen; that is, the story must express the world "of a moral universe" (73). This is where Graves runs into real trouble; his story expresses a truth more appropriate to realism; it is more ironically true than morally true. This may account for his mocking tone.

In this telling, the story lacks the impact of either version by McMurtry. Graves cannot tell it seriously enough for a tale, nor outrageously enough for a yarn. When McMurtry retells Graves' tale, McMurtry creates myth.

Scott Momaday recounts a similar event in his collection of Kiowa legends, The Way to Rainy Mountain. Except that both the ING and the Graves versions specifically identify the people as Comanche, it is tempting to connect these accounts, especially since Momaday's book was published in 1969, between McMurtry's versions:

[My grandmother] was about seven when the last Kiowa Sun Dance was held in 1887 on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek. The buffalo were gone. In order to consummate the ancient sacrifice—to impale the head of a buffalo bull upon the medicine tree—a delegation of old men journeyed into Texas,
there to beg and barter for an animal from the Goodnight herd. She was ten when the Kiowas came together for the last time as a living Sun Dance culture. They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree. (5)

This is the entire reference to the event from Momaday's introduction, but even in its simplicity it carries the mythic weight of loss and of ending that McMurtry places in his versions. Momaday's purpose in relating these stories is to create a mythic literature for the Kiowa, whose loss is fundamental and catastrophic.

Danny's pretense that he "didn't know exactly whose story it was" admits, in fact, that he knows the story belongs in the myths of both cultures. Each share the loss and the ending with all the people of the plains. This would be a good reason for Danny not to name the tribe.
NOTES

1. As Plato knew well, which is why Socrates objects to them as school texts; he objects also to the rhetoric of the written word. In an oral culture, myths and folk tales could more easily acknowledge current concerns, as the storyteller directly engaged the audience. The rhetor was similarly challenged to gain confidence and support in direct encounters.

2. This account is recommended by McMurtry (ING 51) as "the most impressive Texas book of the thirties." He also diagnoses Haley as having developed such virulent conservatism that "he has become the Captain Queeg of Texas letters." I offer this information by way of atonement.

3. I do not claim that this story argues against the stereotype of Texas cowboys and ranchers as ethnically biased racists. Only a congressional commission would attempt a subterfuge so doomed to failure. McMurtry argues in the essay "Southwestern Literature?" (ING 42) that the Rangers recorded by Walter Prescott Webb were racists.

Probably Goodnight was unusual. His friendships with Bose Ikard and Quanah Parker (Haley 457-58) would argue that Goodnight valued the friendship of, and was a loyal friend to, people of color. However, it is likely that Goodnight's attitudes—much like Call's—were quite complicated; as a ranger he drove the Indians from Texas, then was willing to help them; but apparently their staying out of Texas remained a demand. Haley's account is difficult to decipher; for example, he maintains that Goodnight "to the end of his own life was a benefactor of the red men in a country he had wrested from them! This may be the irony of history, though the way of the truly brave!" (Haley 312). [punctuation in original]

Confirming the racist stereotype, Teddy Blue Abbott calls Texas cowpunchers of the seventies "a hard bunch" but explains:

it was partly on account of what they came from. Down in Texas in the early days every man had to have a six-shooter always ready, every house kept a shotgun loaded with buckshot, because they were always looking for a raid by Mexicans or Comanche Indians. What is more, I guess half the people in Texas in the seventies had moved out there on the frontier from the Southern states and from the rebel armies . . . (Abbott 24)

And when discussing the killer Print Olive, he says, "being from Texas they was born and raised with that intense hatred of a Mexican and being Southerners, free niggers was poison
to them" (Abbott 33). This is the basis for the stereotype and was probably more common than Goodnight's friendships.

4. These various comments are from reviews reprinted in either Reynolds' Taking Stock or Contemporary Literary Criticism. Each review is listed separately by author in the reference list and may be identified as follows: historical sources (Graham); realism and accuracy (Lemann); little demythicizing (Balliett); little conflict (Sheppard); characters (Rev. in The New Yorker); detail and narration (Horn); dialogue and plot (Perrin).

5. On the American frontier of the early nineteenth century, the Disciples of Christ left the Calvinistic Presbyterian Church to return to "primitive Christianity," which signified the restriction of worship practices to those mentioned in the scriptures. In the late nineteenth century, a denomination separated from the Disciples on the grounds that missionary societies and instrumental music were not scriptural; this group formed the Church of Christ, a branch of fundamentalism particularly strong in Texas.

    McMurtry singles out the Church of Christ in two novels. In The Last Picture Show, the waitress Penny is characterized as:
    
    a 185-pound redhead, not given to idle threats. She was Church of Christ and didn't mind calling a sinner a sinner. . . . On Wednesday nights, when the Church of Christ held its prayer meetings and shouting contests anybody who happened to be within half a mile of the church could hear what Penny thought about wickedness. (13)

    Although McMurtry's opinion of the Church of Christ is indicated here mainly through irony, his negative judgment strengthens with the passage of time. In Some Can Whistle, he is more pointed. Discussing his daughter's grandparents with his friends, Danny Deck says:
    
    "She was raised by savages, remember . . ."
    "Savages? You mean you got a half-breed daughter?" Gladys asked. "I thought you told me your wife's folks were Church of Christ."
    "I think that's it," I said. "Some savage poor white fundamentalist sect. I didn't mean to insult native Americans." (15)

6. This of course paraphrases the first line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129.

7. Here I have paraphrased a line from Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech.
8. In his speech delivered December 10, 1950, upon accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature, Faulkner enumerated the old, universal verities, "lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice"; in opposition he places stories "of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value." Faulkner does not recommend this goal of writing with an eye toward satisfying the public's appetite, but with the goal of applying the poet's gift to the poet's vision. With regard to the stories of Billy and other romanticized sociopaths, it is easy to find such stories to report, slightly more difficult to make the stories appealing and marketable, ticklish to introduce a marketable moral lesson, and considerably more difficult to tell a story so that it feels as if the moral were discovered. The public has little patience for sermonizing and will expend little effort on irony; the window for producing a popular work containing an uncomfortable message is small. It may be fair to say that Faulkner's best works require more effort than the public will patiently provide; and, while McMurtry is more accessible, he suffers from popular appeal.

9. Teddy Blue Abbott married the daughter of Granville Stuart and Stuart's first wife, a Shoshone Indian. Calamity describes T. Blue's wife as "that half-breed daughter of Granville Stuart's" (BG 13); thus, T. Blue represents a fictionalization of Teddy Blue rather than an invented character modeled after Teddy Blue.

10. Haley's biography of Charles Goodnight includes the information that Goodnight "was a close friend of Kiowa, Comanche, and Taos Indians . . . . He donated hides and tallow to the clans for ceremonials at Taos, urged their cause in Congress, and contributed a foundation buffalo herd to the tribe . . . . He always admired Quanah Parker. . . . and kept up his friendship until the Indian died" (457-58).
REFERENCES


