

## THE RHETORIC OF THE FRONTIER: THE POSTMODERNIST VENTURES IN LARRY MCMURTRY'S FICTION

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### Abstract

In the *Lonesome Dove* McMurtry makes his character Augustus McCare tear pages out of his Latin grammar to build a fire on a cold night to keep himself from freezing to death. This is a classic example of postmodernism because Latin is a classical language. Allegory is another aspect of postmodernism. McMurtry uses this as a scaffold to shape his fiction. The theme of physical fragmentation is found in his fiction. The text is characterized by fragmentation and fluidity. The central narrative voice shifts among at least a dozen characters, offering a fragmented postmodern multicultural voice and the assumption of power by other characters. Postmodern artist like Larry McMurtry confront the audience with a multiplicity of styles, a seemingly discordant polyphony of decontextualized voices. Metonymic fragmentation also characterizes his novels. The theorists whom the researcher would like to cite are mainly postmodern thinkers and analysis.

**Keywords:** voices, postmodernism, voices, multicultural, etc.,

Larry Jeff McMurtry novels are placed in the old Wild West- now modern Texas. Larry McMurtry is a living American writer and is the son of a North Texas ranch owner. His life is always centered round books. His novel the *Lonesome Dove* earned for him the prestigious Pulitzer Award. McMurtry's famous novel the *Lonesome Dove* is the stepping stone to his success. The novel itself reveals his keen observations of the ranch life-of breeding and selling cattle, of horses and stealing horses, of war with Native Americans, of gambling and womanizing and finally instant justice, thereby revealing the hoary nature of the Wild West. Jake Spoon, former Texas Ranger alongside Gus and Call, has roped himself a bright idea: to relocate to Montany. With a team assembled, Call leads the way north from Lonesome Dove to Montany. They have to cross rivers, take shelter from hailstorms, and brave giant clouds of grasshoppers along the way.

Blue Duck intends to sell Lorena to an Indian tribe, and mistreats her in a variety of ways. Jake Spoon completely abandons her-and the cattle company-so it is up to Gus to get her back. July decides to give up his search for Jake Spoon because he receives word that his wife Elmira, has run away. Elmira leaves to look for the man she actually loves, Dee Boot. She finds Dee just as he's about to be hanged. Dee gets into a fight with a guy at a bar and kills him, and Dee's days are numbered. Dee is hanged and Elmira is distraught. They have robbed, killed, burned property, and, worst of all, stolen horses. So Gus and Call decide to catch the men and hang them. It comes as a surprise that Jake Spoon is with them. She also thinks Call should tell new with his father. After a few casualties, and tragedies along the way, the cattle company finally reaches Montana. It is as beautiful as Jake said it was, even though he's not there to see it anymore. The cattle company's lead scout, Deets, is killed by an Indian tribe, leaving Gus to take the point position. He, too, is shot with an arrow, and he is forced to practically crawl to the nearest town. By the time he gets there, it is too late to save both legs. But instead of going on with life on a pair of stumps, Gus decides to choose death. Gus's final wish is for Call to take his body to a grove where he used to charm Clara. Call travels all the way back South. Along the way, he delivers the news of Gus's death to Lorena and Clara, who are sad that he is dead. July Johnson gives her the lamest marriage proposal ever. She turns him down but says she might reconsider after a year, if he would just stop being so lazy and useless. He has spent forty years on the border and the frontier, many of those with his more talkative but equally respected late partner, Gus McCrae. Protecting

settlers in innumerable skirmishes with hostile Indians, rustlers, and dangerous gangs has earned him a great deal of respect and a reputation that generally strikes fear into the hearts of criminals.

Family is a focal point of McMurtry's book, with the emphasis on two very different families. One is that of Pea Eye Parker, Call's corporal, a fellow former-ranger who assists Call in his bounty-hunter duties. Pea Eye is now married to Lorena Wood, the whore heroine of *Lonesome Dove* and now a school teacher and mother of five. Pea Eye is increasingly pressured by his wife and children to stop following the captain in pursuit of bandits, but his loyalty and devotion to Call usually prevails. The second family that dominates the plot of *Streets of Laredo* is the family of Joey Garza. Joey's mother, Maria, is the midwife of a small Mexican village on the Rio Grande. She has had a string of brief, failed marriages and has three children, of which Joey is the oldest. Of the other two, her daughter, Teresa, is blind from birth, while her other, Rafael, is very slow.

Joey possesses a fine German rifle with a telescopic sight, which enables him to shoot his victims from a half-mile away. At the outset of the novel, Joey is hiding out in Crow Town, an outlaw village deep in the borderland desert. Maria travels by horse to Crow Town to warn Joey that Call is on his trail. Joey disappears, stealing his mother's horse, and rides to Langtry, Texas, where he shoots and hangs Judge Roy Bean, the "Law West of the Pecos". (LSD 56) As Call and Brookshire search for Joey Garza, they discover that he is not the only outlaw preying on the railroad. A string of strange murders soon leads Call in the pursuit of a ghost from the past - Mox Mox as the Apache call him, "The Snake You Do Not See".(LSD 78)

The news is especially traumatic for Lorie, who herself had nearly been burnt by the villain while she was a captive of Blue Duck. Pea Eye and the Kickapoo Famous Shoes, unaware of the threat of Mox Mox, continue South to find Captain Call. They are thrown into the Presidio jail when the sheriff accuses Famous Shoes of being a horse and decides to hang him. Captain Call hears of their plight and frees them from jail (near-killing the sheriff in the process in a furious beating) and continues in pursuit of Mox Mox. He ambushes the gang just as they are about to burn two children alive, killing outright all but two - Quick Jimmy, a renegade Cherokee, who escapes unscathed, and Mox Mox himself, who limps off to die.

After rescuing Pea Eye and Famous Shoes from a corrupt border town sheriff, Call and his gang surround Joey Garza. Ned Brookshire is killed in the ensuing scuffle; the anticipated confrontation between Call and Joey leaves Call seriously wounded; Lorie must amputate a leg to save him. The Mexican bandit is instead shot and mortally wounded by Pea Eye. Garza then drags himself back to his native village and attempts to kill his younger siblings, Teresa and Rafael, for whom he has long reserved his greatest hatred. Maria, mother of the three children, attempts to stop Joey; he stabs her. A local villager shoots Joey dead. Maria dies from her wounds, and at her request, Pea Eye and Lorie adopt Maria's two surviving children, return with them to their farm. Call, crippled and no longer able to pursue bandits, goes to live with them. He becomes increasingly attached to Teresa, Maria's blind daughter, demonstrating for the first time an attachment to anyone besides Gus McCrae, and perhaps, secretly his son Newt. In 1842, young Texas Rangers Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call are introduced quickly and brutally to the wandering-ranger life on their first expedition, in which they are stalked by the Comanche war chief Buffalo Hump. After a narrow escape, the rangers return to civilization, only to quickly join an expedition to capture and annex Santa Fe, part of New Mexico to Texas. The expedition, led by pirate and soldier of fortune, Caleb Cobb, is ultimately a failure; of the two hundred initial adventurers, only about forty survive, falling to starvation, bears, and Indians, only to be swiftly arrested by the Mexican authorities. Those survivors are forced to march the *Jornada del Muerto* *Dead Man's Walk* to El Paso, and many, Mexican and Texan alike, die along the journey.

The Texas contingent is reduced to ten persons when the captives panic after they observe cavalry drilling and are slaughtered in a blood lust as they flee. At their destination, the ten are forced to gamble for their lives by drawing a bean from a jar - a white bean signals life, a black bean death. Call and McCrae are among the five survivors. The last Rangers then return to Texas, escorting an Englishwoman and her son, who have also been held captive by the Mexicans. This novel *Comanche Moon* is also hoary in nature. In this novel also there are horse thieves, Comanche Indians Mexican bandits and rancher-troops. Texas Governor Elisha Pease sends a small troop of Texas Rangers, under the leadership of Captain Inih Scull, to the Llano Estacado in pursuit of the celebrated Comanche horse thief, Kicking Wolf. This bold Indian steals Hector, Scull's famous horse, and takes it to the Sierra Perdida to give to the notorious Mexican bandit Ahumado. Ahumado intends to impose a slow death on Three Birds, but Three Birds throws himself off a cliff. Scull finds the unconscious Kicking Wolf being dragged by the horse, and cuts the Comanche's bonds, which allows Kicking Wolf to survive and return to his tribe.

Prompted by Scull's insistent and promiscuous wife Inez, Governor Pease sends Call and McCrae out in charge of another typically small Ranger troop to rescue Captain Scull. While they are on this mission, Comanche

chief Buffalo Hump leads his nation on the warpath. They burn much of Austin, killing Clara's parents and ravaging fellow Ranger Long Bill Coleman's wife, Pearl. Maggie, having been prepared by Call, hides under a smokehouse, thus escaping the Comanches' notice. Scull handles the cage so well that Ahumado has him taken down, and has his henchman Goyeto cut off his eyelids. The Rangers go to Lonesome Dove in search of cattleman Captain King. Ahumado has been bitten by a brown recluse spider, and goes South to die. Call and McCrae find Scull going insane in a pit, but the rescue is soon enough to allow Scull to mostly recover. Scull returns to Austin and later becomes a general with the Union army. Because of the eyepieces he has devised, he becomes known as "Blinders" Scull. Meanwhile, Buffalo Hump banishes his half-Mexican son Blue Duck. Blue Duck goes East and acquires wealth and notoriety as the leader of a gang of bandits.

At this point, the novel moves more quickly, giving highlights covering the period leading up to the sequel, *Lonesome Dove*. The Civil War takes most of the soldiers away from the frontier, enabling the Comanches to push back the white settlers. Buffalo Hump has gone off to die. Blue Duck hears of this and leaves his cutthroats to pursue his father. The Rangers attack his band, but Blue Duck, having left, evades capture. He finds his father at his chosen place of death and kills him there. Maggie dies while the Rangers are on this expedition.

*Lonesome Dove* is popular the major themes incorporated are Man and the Natural World, Man and the Natural World quotes, Love, Gender, Marriage, Mortality, Respect and Reputation, Friendship, Principles, Race, Life, Consciousness and Existence. All these genres highlight the frontier novels of Larry McMurtry. Rhetoric is the art of discourse, wherein a writer or speaker strives to inform, persuade or motivate particular audiences in specific situations. As a subject of formal study and a productive civic practice, rhetoric has played a central role in the European tradition. Along with grammar and logic or dialectic-see Martianus Capella, rhetoric is one of the three ancient arts of discourse.

When those using criticism analyse instances of rhetoric what they do is called rhetorical criticism. According to rhetorical critic Jim A. Kuypers, "The use of rhetoric is an art; as such, it does not lend itself well to scientific methods of analysis. Criticism is an art as well; as such, it is particularly well suited for examining rhetorical creations" (72). He asserts that criticism is a method of generating knowledge.

*Rhetorical strategies* are the efforts made by authors to persuade or inform their readers. Rhetorical strategies are employed by writers and refer to the different ways they can persuade the reader. According to Gray, there are various argument strategies used in writing. He describes four of these as argument from analogy, argument from absurdity, thought experiments, and inference to the best explanation. The debates surrounding this popular text have questioned the value of the myth and the frontier to American identity.

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