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Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres: Utilizing Genres to Explore Literary Themes Through Genre Fiction

Michael W. Rickard II
Buffalo State College, rickarmw01@mail.buffalostate.edu

Advisor
Dr. Lorna Perez
First Reader
Dr. Lorna Perez
Second Reader
Dr. Jennifer Ryan-Bryant
Department Chair
Dr. Ralph Wahlstrom, Chair and Professor of English

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Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of English

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Michael W. Rickard II

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Dates of Approval:

_____ _____

Dr. Lorna Perez
Associate Professor Honors Faculty Fellow
Chairperson of the Committee
Thesis Adviser

_____ _____

Dr. Ralph Wahlstrom
Professor and Chair
Chairperson of the Department of English

_____ _____

Kevin J. Miller, Ed.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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Abstract

Genre fiction can be used to explore literary themes found in marginalized literature such as Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*, Emma Pérez's *Forgetting the Alamo or Blood Money,* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred.* Each author uses the respective genres of hard-boiled detective fiction, American Western literature, and science fiction to explore the elements of borderland literature and the neo-slave narrative. These elements include hybrid identities, the clash between two cultures, disjunctive localities, and the marginalization of both ethnic groups and women. This thesis will show how each genre's elements are used to further explore the elements of borderland fiction and the neo-slave narrative and will argue that the conventions of genre and the political concerns of borderland literature and neo-slave narratives are mutually constitutive. This thesis will demonstrate that the conventions of genre, rather than detracting from the important political work of the novels, actually heightens it effectively, highlighting the radical work that genre can do.

Chapter One: Genre Fiction

Genre theory and genre criticism are important in the study of literature. Genre criticism is defined by J.A. Cuddon as "a field of study whose origins may be traced back to early Greek attempts to categorize literature as exemplified bv Aristotle in his Poetics" (299). As Anne Herrington and Charles Moran explain in "Genre Across the Curriculum", the concept of genre dates back to antiquity and continues to be analyzed today. In his work, *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* ("Mystery") English professor and pop culture scholar John Cawelti notes the benefits of genre criticism: "Genre criticism has long been a standard approach to literature and the other arts, primarily because of its advantage in organizing criticism as a collective enterprise" (96). Genre criticism has given rise to a wide body of scholarly work. Critics have found genre to be a rich vein to tap in terms of literary analysis, but it can be used in many other areas[1].

Critics have noted the importance of genre in organizing art including the way it reaches an audience. As Lei Zhang and Hope Olson explain:

> Genre is characterized by its stability, which makes one genre being distinguishable from another, and generally communicable between the producer and the recipient. The genre is a convention, so the producer conforms to the expectations of that genre, and the recipient knows what to expect from that genre. For example, we usually browse by genre, such as thriller, comedy, action, and so on, to find movies of interest, or by genres like rock, country, jazz, and so on when we download music. (Zhang and Olson 544)

[1] As Katherine Arens discusses, genre can also be used to analyze cultural hegemony and how a culture values or diminishes works using genre classifications.

Thus, genre serves as a tool for producers, distributors, and consumers of content (literary and otherwise). Whether it's an artist creating content for a specific audience, a distributor knowing who to market it to, or a consumer looking for content that appeals to their tastes, genre has its purposes. Thus, genre criticism is often used to classify literature, music, cinema, and other artistic endeavors, but some critics question genre's role in the production and criticism of artistic work.

Some critics question genre's effect on artistic expression. While genre can be an effective way to categorize art, it can also "look like a very blunt instrument to use on texts" (Frow 110). Critics argue genre is too fluid to categorize art while others argue it is an effective method for critics and readers to identify art. Some critics argue genre fiction (if such a thing exists) does not qualify as literature, but others argue to the contrary. I will establish that genre is a way of structuring art[2], while still maintaining artistic freedom. I will also show that genre can include literature and enhance the elements that make a piece of writing literary.

Like many other theoretical frameworks, a clear definition of genre continues to elude scholars. The concept of genre is more than compiling a checklist of elements and matching it to a literary work to determine whether it falls into a genre. Genre provides structure, or as critic John Frow explains:

> Genre…is a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its material (10).

[2] Genre can be applied to a number of artistic mediums including film, music, and art, but this analysis concerns literary works, focusing on the novel.

Genre can be a starting point for letting people know what qualities a work may have as genre is situational and requires engagement with the consumer of a work. Frow concludes:

> Genre guides interpretation because it is a constraint on semiosis, the production of meaning; it specifies which types of meaning are relevant and appropriate in a particular context, and so makes certain senses of an utterance more probable in the circumstances than others. (110)

Genre helps a reader understand some of the conventions that belong to a certain type of story. For example, a story involving cowboys in the American West of the 1870's suggests they are reading a Western story. However, as we shall see, genre can be fluid and genres can overlap as seen in Alan Parr's essay, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance Inhabits Film Noir" where he examines the crossover between the Western genre and the genre of film noir.

Not all critics subscribe to the idea of genre as a class. For example, Adena Rosmarin distinguishes genre, noting, "genre is not, as commonly thought, a class, but rather, a classifying statement" (25). Genre can be dependent on things such as culture. For example, Diana S. Goodrich notes, "genres are culture-specific and clearly historical; like other institutions - although perhaps in a more elliptical way - genres provide insights into the societies in which they flourish" (viii).

Genres provide an audience with an idea of what to expect when they pick up a book. Any trip to a bookstore or online book vendor shows books are categorized by genre, giving potential readers an idea of what they are getting and where to look for books that meet their taste. Consumer who have read books from a certain genre and enjoyed them are likely to return for more from the same genre just a consumer may patronize a certain type of restaurant because they like the food it offers, whether it be Mexican, Italian, or American.

While a comparative analysis of popular fiction vs. literary fiction is beyond the scope of this work, it is important to note critics no longer dismiss popular fiction as incapable of literary qualities. However, what are those qualities that make a work "literary"?

Scholars and critics often define literature as having a special quality. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines literature as , "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit" ("literature"). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines it similarly, noting, "traditionally, if we describe something as 'literature,' as opposed to anything else, the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply that the work in question has superior qualities; that it is well above the ordinary run of written works" ("literature"). For many years, genre fiction was considered outside the realm of literature, being associated with popular fiction.

However, critics have struggled to define what popular fiction is, more defining it by what it is not. For example, Matthew Schneider-Mayerson notes:

> Popular fiction is defined by what it is not: "literature." Most critics openly or implicitly adhere to the following claims: Whereas "literature" is indifferent to (if not contemptuous of) the marketplace, original, and complex, popular fiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic (22).

Over time, scholars studied popular fiction, resulting in clearer definitions. Critic Ken Gelder argues popular fiction is distinguished by:

> Its logics and practices…are primarily industrial and commercial; it is intimately tied to the category of entertainment (something that is true even for the most 'cerebral' works of science fiction); it mostly operates outside of official, educational apparatuses (even though it can be meticulously researched and therefore informational); it is closer in kind

> to 'craft' than to the discourse and practices of the art world' and it deploys to lesser or greater extents, a set of formal features (plot, convention, simplicity, event, exaggeration, pace and so on) that underwrite its identification and structure the manner of its production as well as the means by which it is marketed, processed, and evaluated (159).

Thus, popular fiction is work produced for mass consumption, aimed for broad tastes, while literature is associated with work written for "art's sake" rather than for profit (although works considered literature have been best sellers).

Nonetheless, critics question the classification of certain works as literature and certain works as non-literary, arguing there are cultural and societal factors at work. Cuddon notes, "there are many works which cannot be classified in the main literary genres which nevertheless may be regarded as literature" (405) and that "debates about what constitutes artistic merit, and characterization of genres like children's literature and graphic novels have made this term vastly more comprehensive and far less indicative of aesthetic hierarchy" (405). Nonetheless, genre fiction still retains a stigma amongst some critics regardless of a work's individual merit. As I will explain in the individual chapters on genre, genre fiction is capable of attaining qualities traditionally associated with literature, and specific genres can help further explore the elements of works such as borderland literature and neo-slave narratives.

Hard-boiled detective fiction is a sub-genre of mystery fiction (aka detective fiction), which is sometimes categorized under the genre of crime fiction[3]. Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin mysteries are often regarded as the first detective story (Moore)[4] with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mysteries seen as popularizing the genre to the point where it became

[3] Crime fiction and mystery fiction are sometimes used synonymously but other critics note crime fiction as an umbrella term that includes mystery fiction and stories with criminals as protagonists.
[4] Like most genres, critics disagree on what constitutes the first detective story. For a concise discussion, consult John Scaggs' *Crime Fiction (The New Critical Idiom*)

a popular form of fiction. These stories are what John T. Irwin calls, "…the analytic detective story, a narrative whose structure and emotional dynamic turn upon the analysis of clues and the deductive solution of a crime" (171). The genre is not limited to America, with detectives and mysteries appearing in England, France, as well as the United States. However, in the 1920's a new type of mystery appeared—hard-boiled detective fiction[5].

Bernard A. Schopen discusses the development of the hard-boiled novel in his article, "From Puzzles to People: The Development of the American Detective Novel," clarifying the differences between the analytic detective story and the hard-boiled detective story:

> Joseph T. Shaw, editor of the pulp magazine *Black Mask,* in which the new stories first appeared, put forth their central theoretical premise; deliberately turning away from the detective story of "the deductive type, the crossword puzzle sort, lacking—deliberately—all other human values," they strove to fashion a form which "emphasizes character and the problems inherent in human behavior. In other words, in this new pattern, character conflict is the main theme; the ensuing crime, or its threat, is incidental." (177)

Although hard-boiled fiction has several elements which distinguish it from other fiction (which will be elaborated on shortly), the stories' main distinguishing feature is how the individual reacts to the conflict presented before them, and whether they will break their personal code. Critic Lewis D. Moore identifies three eras in hard-boiled fiction: 1) The Early Period (1927-1955); 2) The Transitional Period (1964-1977); and 3) The Modern Period (1979-present).[6] The genre elements established in the Early Period would evolve over time with the

[5] While many hard-boiled detective fiction stories feature private investigators, there are exceptions where the character is not a private detective but the story features the elements of hard-boiled fiction. *Desert Blood* is one such story as Ivon Villa is not a private investigator, but engages in detective-like work.

[6] Like any genre, it is difficult to pin down exact dates and while critics differ, Moore's analysis creates a good framework for the purposes of this thesis.

Transitional Period and the Modern Period seeing refinements of these elements as well as the addition of new elements. For example, the Early Period featured male protagonists but female protagonists appeared during the Transitional Period. This evolution is consistent with other genres; a reflection of various genres' ability to adapt to changes in society.

Critics and scholars typically establish The Early Period as beginning with the work of Carroll John Daly's 1927 work, *The Snarl of the Beast*, soon followed by Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest.* Hard-boiled fiction includes short stories found in pulp magazines including *Black Mask* and novels by authors such as Raymond Chandler, Mike Hammer, and Dashiell Hammett. Perhaps the best description of this era's protagonists is Bernard Schopen's description of Sam Spade (the protagonist in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*): "…Spade himself embodies the basic conflict of the individual and society; as a detective he is a ruthless and successful predator in an amoral and predatory world; but as a man he is isolated by his integrity from the human community" (180).

The Transitional Period contains many elements of the early period, but sees a shift in character development, particularly the protagonist's relationships to others. While the setting of the hard-boiled stories remained in the city, stories took place in cities other than major ones such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. The Transitional Period also would see diversity in its characters such as Katherine V. Forrest's lesbian detective Kate Delafield, Joseph Hansen's homosexual protagonist Dave Brandstetter and protagonists with a disability such as Michael Collins' Dan Fortune.

The Modern Period maintains many elements of the early and transitional period and also features more exploration of characters and their relationships with others. This era is notable for its explosion of diverse characters and locations, as "…the modern hard-boiled detective from

the 1980's to the present reveals a range of options, e.g. gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, class, politics, and locales…" (Moore 175). The addition of new faces and new voices would bring new perspectives to the hard-boiled stories while remaining true to the core principles of a relentless figure fighting to protect the innocent.

Hard-boiled fiction features several foundational elements which make it easily identifiable and keep the genre alive after over one hundred years. These include the determined individual, the setting of the hazardous city, widespread corruption, the femme fatale, the quest, an irresistible status quo, and violence. The protagonist is a tough individual who sees things through, despite facing stronger opponents. The protagonist is often physically tough, but their true toughness derives largely from their refusal to give up on a case until it has been solved. This often brings the protagonist up against overwhelming odds such as the government, organized crime and opponents with considerable resources. Raymond Chandler's description of the hard-boiled detective summarizes what a protagonist must be:

> Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. ("The Simple Art of Murder")

The hard-boiled protagonist is also notable for their personal code. Cawelti notes the similarities between the hard-boiled protagonist and Western hero's code of honor, "The hero's code, however rests primarily on a personal sense of honor, and rightness which is outside both law

and conventional morality" ("The Gunfighter" 59-60). The protagonist is not above breaking the law as their goal is justice.

The Western is a genre with deep roots in American history. Westward expansion has been a goal of Americans since the earliest settlers, fascinating the settlers themselves as well as people who read about their exploits. In *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (*Six-Gun Sequel*)Cawelti argues the earliest Western stories date back to the 17th century *Slave Narrative of Mary Rowlandson*, the story of a Puritan woman taken captive by Indians who eventually was released. "Rowlandson's story established one of the themes which would be central to the Western tradition, the supposed threat of Native Americans to the welfare and morality of white women (59). Amy T. Hamilton and Tom J. Hillard explore this further in "Before the West Was West: Rethinking the Temporal Borders of Western American Literature," arguing early colonial stories such as the lost colony of Roanoke and John Smith's *General Histories* constitute early Westerns.

As the American frontier expanded, new tales arose, ranging from the frontier tales of James Fennimore Cooper that dealt with early America to the Wild West adventures of outlaws such as Billy the Kid and the James Gang. Over time, three artistic mediums helped to tell the story of the American West. According to the *BFI Guide to the Western,* they are the dime novels, stage shows, and paintings. The dime novels were cheaply produced books containing various tales set in the American West, and some were based on real-life characters such as Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and "Wild" Bill Hickock. The stage show presented depictions of life on the frontier, the most popular being William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* show. Lastly, painters such as George Catlin, Frederick Remington, and Charles Marion Russell, helped to capture key historical moments and life in general in the American West. How accurate

a depiction these mediums are has become a recurring thing in criticism of Western American literature. For example, in her article "Indigenous Memories and Western American Literary History," Susan Bernandin discusses the hidden history of indigenous people in America while in "The Recovery Project and the Role of History in Chicano/a Literary Studies," José F. Aranda Jr. examines recovered 19th and 20th century texts to show subalterned voices in American history.

The story of the American West is one of ideology. Like any ideology, there is the question of hegemony and what the prevailing worldview is. The ideologies tied in with the American West present different worldviews, and it is important to understand these ideologies and their relation to ideologies presented in Western novels. For many years, the ideology of American expansion was built on two concepts; Manifest Destiny and the Frontier Theory. During the 1800's, some (but certainly not all) Americans believed that they had a destiny and an obligation to occupy all of America, utilizing America's resources to the fullest, and giving the world an example of the American project started by the thirteen colonies. Inherent to this idea was that Americans would make the best use of the land, even land occupied by others. This became known as Manifest Destiny, a term credited to newspaper editor John O'Sullivan from an 1845 essay in the *Democratic Review.* Slotkin discusses Manifest Destiny in his book, *The Fatal Environment. The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* and its ideological impact on fiction and non-fiction. Related to Manifest Destiny was the idea that taming the frontier had a transforming effect on Americans. Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier theory" was put forth as an *ex post facto* justification for westward expansion. In 1893, Turner presented his thesis "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to the American Historical Society in Chicago, postulating that American democracy was developed through the

struggles associated with taming the West. The thesis along with other essays would be published as *The Frontier in American History.* Turner's idea proved popular and would become central to American history over the next forty years. Turner argued that Americans developed their unique identity through the hardships involved with settling the West. (Campbell 375)

While there have been Western stories that told tales from the perspective of disenfranchised groups such as women and Native Americans, it was not until the 1960's that Westerns routinely presented stories from perspectives other than those of white males. Young and Veracini mark a change in scholarly attitudes towards Westerns, "The field of western American literary studies emerged in the 1960s and '70s as a regionalist critique that imagined a western ethics of place against the Turnerian consensus that then dominated American studies" (2). This perspective progressed into the 1990's with the concept of the "Postwestern," a form of literary criticism that incorporated a postmodern approach to analyzing Westerns.[7]

The Western has two connected elements, geographic location and time. Generally, Westerns are set west of the Mississippi. They are set during the time frame from 1866 to roughly 1890[8] It should be noted that some Westerns are set in the twilight of the West. However, like all genres, these elements are not set in stone.

While the Western genre may seem more rigid than others with its geographic and spatial elements, there are exceptions. As mentioned earlier, James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* are seen by critics such as Cawelti and Slotkin as early examples of the Western, despite being set east of the Mississippi and long before 1866. Additionally, critics have also suggested

[7] Susan Kolin argues this Postwestern criticism is unnecessary as it conducts the same work as, "Indigenous studies, environmental humanities, queer theory, feminism, borderlands criticism, transnational studies, settler colonial theory, and postcolonial criticism Indigenous" (61) only under a different name.
[8] Historians generally agreed upon 1890 as the time when the American West had been settled

the Western is less a concept of geographic setting as previously thought: "Attempts by critics to pin down the geographical limits of the genre, however, fail to understand the subtlety of the relation between actual and imaginative geography" (Buscombe 17). In the book, *International Westerns: Re-locating the Frontier*, several critics analyze foreign films set in their nation's frontier, arguing the Western genre is not limited to the setting of the American West[9]. As mentioned earlier, scholars of Western fiction developed the concept of the "Postwestern," arguing, "Rejecting the place- centered critique as inflected with lingering patriarchal and nationalist politics, the postwestern critics worked to extricate 'westness' as a social construct from the nationalist constraints that Turner imagined" (Young and Veracini 2). This is an important discussion as *Forgetting the Alamo* takes place outside the traditional period of the Western.[10]

The element of the frontier is tied in with the geographic setting of the Western (West of the Mississippi). Cawelti's *The Six-Gun Mystique* and *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* detail the frontier concept as one where civilization has not yet arrived. The frontier is a place of wildness where characters such as outlaws and/or indigenous people pose a constant threat. The frontier setting can be seen in a variety of stories ranging from townspeople dealing with outlaws, settlers in the process of taming the land, or soldiers trying to keep the peace at a frontier fort. Overcoming these challenges is the final step in taming the land.

A second element of the Western concerns the protagonist drawn into the frontier setting. This person is often a hybrid of civilization and the wild. He or she can survive in the wild, often

[9] The Western genre shares many similarities between the mediums of fiction and cinema which is why Western films are sometimes discussed here.
[10] The Mexican/American border is been a recurring location in the Western genre and is particularly useful here as *Forgetting the Alamo* is a combination of the Western genre and borderland literature.

possessing skills that the pioneers do not have. The hybrid may be a former outlaw or has had interaction (positive and/or negative) with indigenous peoples. It is these skills that will make the difference between whether civilization or chaos will prevail.

A third element is the transforming effect the hybrid protagonist's actions will have on him or her. The protagonist may choose to stay with the pioneers, undergoing a taming of sort. The protagonist may decide to move on as they are not ready for civilization yet. In some cases, the protagonist may not be welcome, even if they are willing to become "civilized".

A fourth element is the use of violence. While stories of violence in the American West have been exaggerated, Western fiction and film abound with the use of violence in solving problems. Critic Richard Slotkin's works such as *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, Gunfighter Nation: The Frontier Myth in 20th Century America,* and *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* are just a handful of the many examinations of the pervasiveness of violence in Western fiction. Slotkin discusses how violence was repeatedly shown as a necessary tool for "taming" the West, but that violence helped to forge the American identity (*Regeneration Through Violence*).

Science fiction opens up incredible settings and storytelling possibilities thanks to elements such as time travel, a hollow earth filled with prehistoric creatures, alien conquerors (and sometimes alien friends), spaceships traveling to distant galaxies, incredible (but plausible) machines, and cybernetic entities. With its stories generating a sense of wonder and featuring novum, science fiction can be incredibly compelling at its best, but hackneyed at its worst. Of all the genres of fiction, science fiction arguably provides the most opportunities for literary

qualities and yet has often earned a reputation for formulaic and derivative works. While science fiction can be difficult to categorize and some critics argue it is not a genre, there are consistent elements in science fiction stories[11]. There are three highly regarded definitions of science fiction where two elements are consistently noted—1) a sense of wonder; and 2) the concept of novum[12].

There are two schools of thought on when the science fiction genre began, with scholars and critics such as Adam Roberts linking science fiction with the fantastic elements found in ancient stories such as Plutarch's *On the Face Apparent in the Circle of the Moon*[13] and Lucian's *True Histories*[14] (31) while others linking it with the time when science acquired its modern meaning. For example, Brian Stableford argues:

> The word 'science' acquired its modern meaning when it took aboard the realization that reliable knowledge is rooted in the evidence of the senses, carefully sifted by the deductive reasoning and the experimental testing of generalizations. In the seventeenth century writers began producing speculative fictions about new discoveries and technologies that the application of scientific method might bring about, the earliest examples being accommodated—rather uncomfortably—with existing genres and narrative frameworks. (15)

In *The History of Science Fiction,* Adam Roberts charts the evolution of science fiction, tracing science fiction elements in what he classifies as ancient novels (27-35) through medieval times. Critics note the many number of stories featuring the fantastic such as space travel before

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[11] Not all critics agree science fiction is a genre. David Seed argues science fiction is best thought of "…as a mode or field where different genres and subgenres intersect" (1).
[12] Novum generally refers to genre-specific elements in science fiction such as time-travel, faster-than-light speeds, aliens, and futuristic technology.
[13] Roberts notes this work dates "from 80 AD" (29)
[14] Roberts notes *True Histories* is believed to have been written "some time between AD 160 and 180" (31)

this time, suggesting science fiction's much earlier roots than the time frame usually associated with it (which will be discussed next).

While science fiction elements are found before the 19th century, the 19th century saw science fiction became a recurring theme of popular fiction with consistent elements, developing into a genre. Critics note three or four periods of science fiction: 1) The "pre-genre" era; 2) the magazine era (1926-1960); 3) New Wave; and 4) Contemporary (1980-present).

Brian Stableford traces science fiction's early roots to the beginning of the scientific age, noting, "The word 'science' acquired its modern meaning when it took aboard the realization that reliable knowledge is rooted in the evidence of the senses, carefully sifted by deductive reasoning and the experimental testing of generalizations" (15). Stableford argues early science fiction works bordered or crossed over into frivolity (18), but by the early 19th century, works by Poe, Hawthorne, and Shelley evidenced the beginning of what is now recognized as science fiction. This early era was boosted by pulp novels and what became known as "scientific romance." With works by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells achieving tremendous success, science fiction continued evolving.

The popularity of pulp magazines in the 20th century saw more stories that dealt with science fiction. The word science fiction was not used. Scholar Brian Atterby notes "A major innovation in magazine fiction from the 1940s on was the imagined application of experimental method and technological innovation not to physical problems, but to fundamental questions about society and the mind" (39). Magazines devoted to science fiction featured a number of developments including scientific teaching in stories (35), the "thought-variant story"[15](37), a

[15] As notes, SF magazine editor "F. Orlin Tremaine, used the term 'thought-variant story' to describe a particular blend of philosophical speculation and fiction, but in a sense all the stories published in the magazines of the 1920s and 1930s were thought variants; jazz-like improvisations on familiar themes" (37).

shift in writers experimenting "with style and narrative technique" (41), and most important, what Atterby describes as "the imagined application of experimental method and technological innovation not to physical problems but to fundamental questions about society and the mind" (39). Fueled by an avid fanbase, science fiction developed certain rules that separated it from similar works such as fantasy and the weird. For example, Hugo Gernsback, the editor of *Amazing Stories* limited the magazine's "fictional contents to stories of scientific extrapolation and outer-space adventure" (33).

In *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction,* Damien Broderick discusses the period (1960-1980) known as "The New Wave" (a term appropriated from French "New Wave" cinema) which saw a departure from the type of stories found during the Golden Age with writers telling stories darker in tone. Broderick notes how the New Wave era also saw a hybrid of "Golden Age" science fiction stories with the New Wave style. The New Wave saw a number of different voices telling stories in science fiction including women, people of color and people with different sexual orientations. These writers provided a fresh perspective as science fiction expanded its scope. This era also saw an increase in scholarly examination of the genre as academia reconsidered its opinion of science fiction as escapist fare.

While science fiction has always been a source for entertainment mediums such as film, radio, and television, the genre saw an explosion of media adaptations in its contemporary age (roughly 1980 to the present). While some people only know science fiction through adaptations, the genre continued developing from the 1980's forward, including the subgenres of cyberpunk and steampunk. John Clute notes the genre was jump-started during the 1980's as the Information Age offered both writers and readers a new sense of wonder.

Dacko Suvin defines science fiction as, "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the *presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environments"* (qtd. in Roberts 1).

Damien Broderick, a novelist and critic, defines science fiction as:

> …that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supercession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal. It is marked by (i) metaphoric strategies and metonymic tactics, (ii) the foregrounding of icons and interpretive schemata from a collectively constituted generic 'mega-text' {i.e. *all previously published SF*} and the concomitant de-emphasis of 'fine writing' and characterization, and (iii) certain priorities more often found in scientific and postmodern texts than in literary models; specifically, attention to the object in preference to the subject. (qtd. in Roberts 1-2).

Broderick's definition while well-received is exhaustive and as Adam Roberts notes, author and critic Samuel Delany challenges Broderick and Suvin's definitions as relying too much on its "subject matter" (Roberts 2). Instead, Delany argues, "most of our specific SF expectations will be organized around the question: what in the portrayed world of the story, by statement or implication, must be different from ours in order for this sentence to be normally uttered?" (qtd. in Roberts 2). Roberts suggests Delany sees SF as "…as much a *reading strategy* as it is anything else" (2).

Like the other genres being discussed, science fiction is a starting point for readers and is subject to change. A reader does not produce a checklist and determine a text is science fiction and as mentioned elsewhere, genres can intertwine with other genres. Nonetheless, science

fiction does contain elements that make it distinct both in terms of content and its ability to explore literary themes.

Hard-boiled fiction, Western fiction, and science fiction provide elements that distinguish them from each other as well as from other literary genres. While these elements are evolving and can intermingle, they help to classify works of fiction. As we shall see, they also help to enhance the exploration of literary elements found in borderland literature and the neo-slave narrative.

Chapter Two: Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres: Utilizing Genres to Explore Borderland Literary Themes in Genre Fiction

Alicia Gaspar de Alba uses the hard-boiled detective genre ("hard-boiled fiction") in her novel, *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*, to further her exploration of the elements of borderland literature. Borderland literature features elements such as hybrid identities, the clash between two cultures, the marginalization of both ethnic groups and women (Anzaldúa) and disjunctive localities (Mignolo). Gaspar de Alba incorporates the elements of hard-boiled fiction such as the determined individual, the setting of the hazardous city, widespread corruption, the femme fatale, the quest, an irresistible status quo, and violence in her novel, creating a multi-layered text rich for analysis. Gaspar de Alba's amalgamation of hard-boiled fiction and borderland literature provides a unique opportunity to not only explore the elements of borderland literature, but to expand awareness of the Juárez murders, shifting the focus from the impersonal to the personal as the author engages readers with the impact of the Juárez murders. Although the characters in *Desert Blood* are fictional characters, Gaspar de Alba researched the Juarez murders, drawing on actual crimes and actual casefiles from the femicides.

Although critics recognize Gaspar de Alba's skilled exploration of borderland themes in *Desert Blood*, they overlook her use of the hard-boiled genre. As discussed in chapter one, critics argue that genre provides a rich vein to tap in terms of literary analysis and it can organize art including the way it reaches an audience. As we shall see, Gaspar de Alba uses the genre of hard-boiled fiction to enhance her exploration of the Juárez murders and the corresponding elements of borderland literature found in her novel.

Although hard-boiled fiction has several elements which distinguish it from other fiction (which will be elaborated on shortly), the stories' main distinguishing feature is how the

individual reacts to the conflict presented before them, and whether they will break their personal code. This is seen in *Desert Blood's* protagonist Ivon Villa's quest to rescue her sister from a snuff film ring.

The protagonist is a tough individual who is determined to see things through, despite facing stronger opponents. The hard-boiled protagonist is also notable for their personal code. John Cawelti notes the similarities between the hard-boiled protagonist and Western hero's code of honor, "The hero's code, however rests primarily on a personal sense of honor, and rightness which is outside both law and conventional morality" ("The Gunfighter and the Hard-Boiled Dick" 59-60). The protagonist is not above breaking the law as their goal is justice.

Ivon Villa shares many of the characteristics of the hard-boiled protagonist. She is tough and unrelenting in her quest to find her missing sister. She is fiercely loyal to her younger sister Irene and keeps as cordial a relationship with her family as she can, even though some (particularly her mother) look down upon her for her being a lesbian. Like many hard-boiled protagonists, Ivon is flawed, but she has a personal code she follows. Although Ivon is in a committed relationship, she succumbs to femme fatale Raquel. Nonetheless, Ivon's code of justice will not let her rest until she discovers the mystery behind the murder of the birth mother she was going to adopt from. Ivon's temper often gets the best of her and she gives in to temptation by cheating on her partner. Ivon's code follows that of many hard-boiled detectives—a tireless pursuit of the truth, regardless of the risks. Ivon is committed to justice and equality, whether it is her willingness to break the law and risk her life in order to find her sister or her willingness to adopt a black-market baby for her and her partner since their status as a same-sex couple makes it difficult to adopt. This pursuit of a black-market baby is an example of how the hard-boiled detective genre evolves to address injustice in non-traditional ways such as the

inequality imposed on Ivon's desire to adopt due to her being gay. Ivon shares many of the characteristics of other protagonists from the modern era in that she is a complex individual who has relationships with friends and family that affect her life, particularly her quest to find her sister. Indeed, Volk and Schlotterbeck note, "Gaspar de Alba's characters survive only because they are supported by a (largely but not exclusively) female community built around extended family, friends, and lovers" (146). Ivon Villa's network of support is similar to other modern era hard-boiled detectives such as Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski.

Ivon is similar to other hard-boiled protagonists in that she has a dual nature, something which links her with elements of borderland literature. Ivon is an academic but she is also street-smart, a native of El Paso and a denizen of academia. On another note, Ivon is a lesbian, which corresponds to Anzaldúa's idea that:

> I like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos:* the coming together of opposite qualities within. For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. (41)

Ivon's ostracization from her family and society due to her sexual orientation also creates what Anzaldúa calls *La facultad, "*…the capacity to see in surface phenomenon the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (60). Ivon's sense for danger is not infallible, but it serves her well throughout much of the story. Furthermore, Ivon's dual identity in her status as a former citizen of El Paso and a member of academia reflects the complex identities of mestizas as described by Anzaldúa.

The setting of hard-boiled fiction is often a metropolitan city full of dangers such as organized crime, apathetic police, and corrupt government. Here, Gaspar de Alba links the setting of a dangerous city with borderland fiction by utilizing two dangerous twin cities—El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, which allows her to explore the themes of hybridity and the border. When we met Ivon, she is an academic living in Los Angeles, though as a native of El Paso, she is also deeply familiar with Ciudad Juárez, El Paso's twin city just across the border[19]. The characters who are preyed upon in the novel are often helpless due to their gender and/or their economic status. This helplessness mirrors the plight of Mexicans and Chicanos discussed in borderland literature. In that literature and in real life, the maquiladoras cannot challenge their employers' oppressive tactics for fear of losing their jobs. This opens them up to physical, sexual, and economic exploitation due to the tremendous power differential between them. Early in the novel, Ivon's cousin Ximena explains what Elsa (a maquiladora) experienced as part of her employment application, "Elsa got some injections at this *maquila* she was applying to a few years ago. You know, they make them do a pregnancy test when they apply and stuff" (Gaspar de Alba 82). Later, Ivon realizes Elsa's (who swears she never had sexual intercourse) pregnancy is due to artificial insemination after Elsa recalls her "pregnancy test"

> "They took my temperature in my mouth and…you know…back there. And then he put something else inside me, something different. I don't know what it was, but it was sharp, almost like a needle. It hurt so bad. I could feel myself bleeding. And then he told me I had to lie with my legs up for fifteen minutes. The nurse matched me to make sure I didn't put my legs down" (91).

[19] The twin cities also offer a look at Perez's exploration of the double in *The Decolonial Imaginary*.

The maquiladoras are subject to sexual abuse as shown here as well as physical abuse through overwork. One worker thinks of an average day's work, "By the middle of the morning, her right wrist hurts, and by lunchtime she has to support it with the other hand, but she knows better than to complain. *Twenty more girls waiting to take your place,* the lineman likes to yell out at least once a day" (149). This worker experiences the ultimate exploitation of the maquiladoras as she is unwittingly sent to Jeremy Wilcox and kidnapped for his snuff film ring. Wilcox not only epitomizes the corrupt law-enforcement officers present in hard-boiled detective fiction but also personifies the governmental forces that exploit impoverished Chicana workers seeking a better life, a theme found in borderland literature.

Another hard-boiled element is that the innocent turn to the hard-boiled protagonist because they are the only person capable and/or willing to navigate the city. Like the city in film noir, the city in hard-boiled fiction can be a seemingly inescapable maze, with danger at every corner. The protagonist is familiar with the city's hazards, allowing them to navigate it, but not without risk. Ivon is familiar with El Paso and the world of academia, as well as Ciudad Juárez, a city she visited when she was younger. Despite Ivon's familiarity with Juárez, it is a dangerous city with Ivon surrounded by untrustworthy people.

Desert Blood's twin settings provide more than a traditional borderland setting, but a traditional setting for hard-boiled fiction—a dangerous city with perils seemingly everywhere. Here, there is the city of El Paso and the city of Juárez, each with their individual dangers and a thin façade hiding widespread corruption. This environment allows de Alba to tell her hardboiled story while showing the societal effects of the Juárez murders. This links with Anzaldúa's concept that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*…" (25). However, like the city in hard-boiled fiction, there is the façade of safety and

respectability and the reality of danger and corruption. As Anzaldúa explains "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (25)

Hard-boiled fiction often sees a protagonist surrounded by fraud and deceit or as Schopen describes it, a world, "…crepuscular and savage, its inhabitants moral primitives who assume the appurtenances of civilization, only to create those illusions which assist them in their rapacious pursuits" (180). Police are indifferent at best and corrupt at the worst, proving no help for the protagonist and sometimes interfering with their investigations. The protagonist often finds they have no one to turn to and even supposed friends can turn traitorous. This corruption makes the protagonist stand out because of their honesty. A hard-boiled protagonist is rarely without flaw, but their honesty is typically a consistent trait. As Sean McCann notes, there are various types of the hardboiled detective, ranging from the heroic such as Carroll John Daly's Race Williams to knights errant such as Chandler's Phillip Marlowe. However, Ivon fits another mold, that of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, "a truly ordinary-seeming person who turns out to conceal extraordinary cleverness beneath his commonplace exterior" (McCann 49). Ivon fits Hammett's mold further as she presents "an often disturbing image of moral neutrality" (49). While the Op is motivated by his love of his job, Ivon displays a disturbing sense of the ends justifying the means whether it is her quest to obtain a black-market baby or her using whatever people around her she believes will help her find her missing sister.

Corruption takes place in many forms and on many levels in hard-boiled fiction as reflected in *Desert Blood.* There are the corrupt work conditions the maquiladoras experience, the corrupt police such as Mexico's judicales and the Border Patrol's Jeremy Wilcox, the black-market adoption Ivon goes to El Paso for, and the numerous people involved in the snuff films

such as the medical examiner's assistant. Ivon also experiences deceit from her cousin Ximena, who hides her affair with Raquel.

The femme fatale (or "fatal woman") consistently shows up in hard-boiled fiction, often using intelligence and sexuality to corrupt and manipulate those around her for her gain. However, a femme fatale can also be someone who inadvertently leads characters into perilous realms as the femme fatale is indifferent or ignorant as to the consequences of their actions. Even the hard-boiled protagonist can find themselves drawn to the femme fatale, providing a test of the protagonist's character. While the femme fatale is common, the "homme fatal" (or "fatal man") appears also. With hard-boiled fiction expanding with gender and sexual identity, the fatal woman or fatal man can take many forms.

Desert Blood contains a femme fatale in the Raquel character. Raquel is a type of the femme fatale, a woman who preys on younger women such as Ivon for sexual gratification. Ivon recalls how the adult Raquel groomed her when Ivon was a high school student, and begins to suspect the worst about Raquel and Irene, "And then an eerie thought crossed her mind. No, she didn't even want to think about it, but it nagged at her anyway, a weird sensation at the idea that Raquel might seduce her little sister" (Gaspar de Alba 126). Raquel is also dangerous due to her carelessness as seen when Raquel inadvertently leads Irene to be kidnapped. Raquel's sexual obsession with Ivon challenges Ivon's fidelity (a challenge Ivon fails) when the two former lovers reignite their passion for one night.

The protagonist is often involved in a search for the truth, but their story may also involve a quest, whether it is a journey to find a missing item, clear an innocent's name, or find a missing person.[20] The quest often features the protagonist unraveling a mystery, but the quest can

[20] Given the many comparisons between the hard-boiled protagonist (particularly those from the early period) and medieval knights, the quest is a logical element.

be the crux of a story. Here, Ivon tries to make sense of the Juárez murders as it is tied with her quest to find Irene.

Hard-boiled protagonists often find themselves starting off in one direction only to find themselves veering off into a much different direction. In *Desert Blood,* Ivon begins the story looking for a baby for her and her partner. However, this shifts to Ivon looking for her sister Irene after she is kidnapped. This quest is positioned in the larger setting of the Juárez murders, but Ivon's primary goal is to find her sister with the mystery of the femicides being secondary.

While the characters in hard-boiled fiction often succeed in their quest, the status quo rarely changes. A corrupt politician may be exposed and brought to justice, but a new one is waiting to take over. The protagonist's wins are battles in a seemingly unwinnable and unending fight? Victories may be important in the small picture, but rarely in the larger picture. Although Ivon Villa finds her missing sister, she finds no justice for her sister or the victims of the snuff film ring. While Jeremy Wilcox is killed, he is given a hero's funeral and credited with running an undercover task force that breaks up the very ring he headed. After a newspaper article reports this, a furious Ivon laments to her partner, Brigit, "They're calling it a sting operation! They're saying that this Border Patrol pig was operating undercover. In other words, he was *infiltrating* the porn ring, not running it. That is complete bullshit" (De Alba, 327). Later, Ivon reflects on the silence that perpetuates the femicides:

> A huge malignant tumor of silence, meant to protect not the perpetrators themselves, themselves, but the assembly line of perpetrators, from the actual agents of the crime to the law enforcement agents on both sides of the border to the agents that made binational immigration policy and trade agreements. The cards fell so perfectly into place, it was almost nauseating (Gaspar de Alba 335).

Ivon's disgust is further shown as she realizes, "This thing implicated everyone. No wonder the crimes had not been solved, nor would they ever be solved until someone with much more power than she, with nothing to lose or to gain, brought this conspiracy out into the open" (335). This realization is a terrifying reminder that the status quo remains and may never change.

The hard-boiled protagonist is often an individual who can walk in two worlds. The protagonist finds themselves using their skills to work in and out of society, an advantage over others. As John Cawletti notes in "The Gunfighter and the Hard-Boiled Dick,", the hard-boiled detective shares the Western gunfighter's trait that, "They are on the edge of anarchy, and within their societies, legitimate authority tends to be weak and corrupt" (58). The hard-boiled detective can find anarchy within society, where it hides behind a façade of legitimacy. The idea of corruption rises to a grander scale in *Desert Blood* as the story involves international corruption set on the borderland of Mexico and the United States.

Ivon walks in two worlds figuratively and literally, relying on her upbringing in El Paso to help her travel to Juárez in search of her sister. This allows her to investigate Irene's disappearance in the different worlds of Juárez and El Paso. Ivon's knowledge of linguistics allows her to decipher the mystery found in the bathroom graffiti. As Irene Mata notes, "…*Desert Blood's* protagonist, Ivon Villa, embodies the strategy of reading signs and symbols that Chela Sandoval identifies as a 'methodology of the oppressed' by employing a transnationalist feminist analysis of global networks of oppression" (15). Ivon is clearly someone who possesses the analytical skills to track down her sister, but also the physical skills as she endures the hot sun in Juárez, bluffs the crooked Mexican police who abduct her and her cousin, and survives the novel's violent climax against Wilcox and his trained dogs.

While traditional detective tales often involve violence such as murder (hence the term, "murder mystery"), their focus is on the detection and solution of crimes after they have occurred, with little or no violence employed in solving them. Conversely, the hard-boiled protagonist uses violence, faces violence, and the stories often feature explicit depictions of violence, subjecting them to criticism that the violence is gratuitous.

Like most hard-boiled protagonists, Ivon encounters violence during her quest. She is abducted twice, endures potential violence during her search, and witnesses and inflicts extreme violence when she rescues Irene. Ivon's ability to dish out violence is seen when she strikes Raquel for allowing her sister to be kidnapped and when Ivon shoots the dogs attacking her sister. Finally, there is the endemic violence in the novel as Gaspar de Alba shows the grisly nature of the murders in the snuff film ring.

An analysis of *Desert Blood* reveals the story contains many of the aforementioned elements of hard-boiled fiction. However, what (if any) purpose does the novel's classification as a hard-boiled novel have on its discourse involving the Juárez murders? *Desert Blood* is an excellent example of borderland literature, but its hardboiled elements add a new lens to interpreting the novel's themes. The book may be read as a hardboiled novel or it may be read as borderland literature. When the two genres are taken collectively, it creates synergy which strengthen both aspects of the novel and allows a better exploration of the Juárez murders. Critics note that readers of genre fiction are often familiar with a particular genre's elements and this is one reason they return to the same genre. Thus, readers familiar with the elements of hard-boiled fiction subconsciously or consciously pick up on how these elements may related to other elements of a genre such as borderland literature.

Although Ivon is an educated woman, she is ignorant about the conditions in El Paso and Juárez, giving the reader the opportunity to learn what Ivon learns about the murders, and equally important, about the persons affected by them. This further allows readers to engage themselves emotionally and intellectually in the Juárez murders as they become invested in the novel's characters.

Although public awareness about the Juárez murders has increased over time, critics such as Sandra Soto (2007) argue the full human impact is still misunderstood or understated. Whether it is a case of blaming the victim, focusing on the international issues responsible for socioeconomic chaos in Mexico, or focusing on the deaths rather than the lives of the victims, *Desert Blood* provides a means not only to raise awareness of the murders, but to create a world in which victims and their families live, thus allowing a better understanding of the murders on a personal level as well as the larger issues surrounding them. Volk and Schlotterbeck note:

> Gaspar de Alba's critique of the Juárez murders is much more systematic than that of Patrick Bard [who wrote *La Frontera,* a detective novel about the murders] …Bard's journalist-detective uncovers a vast conspiracy at work without elucidating the basic economic and social forces that provide the oxygen for the murderous conflagration. It is by Gaspar de Alba's Ivon who becomes a detective in the original sense of the word, not only discovering what has been "artfully concealed" but bringing it to the light of day. In doing so, de Alba provides a microcosm and a macrocosm to explore the murders and the forces behind them. (146)

Critics such as Volk, Schlotterbeck, and Sato note the number of cultural takes on the Juárez murders. These critics also note the lack of depth to these presentations, suggesting they do not convey the impact of the murders. For example, Melissa Wright likens the murders to the

business concept of waste, with the maquiladoras' value as workers diminishing and eventually ending. The final form of waste is the murder of these maquiladoras as they are seen as lacking any purpose and are disposed of. However, Alicia Schmidt Camacho disagrees, arguing, "To reduce the complex forms of women's negotiations with patriarchal, state and corporate power to an abstract narrative of human wasting is to neglect the important ways in which mexicanas have narrated their struggle for control of their own bodies, labor, and political agency, and often militated for better working conditions and fair wages" (33). Camacho seeks a better way to make people understand the full impact of the femicides to their victims, the victims' families, and society.

Anita Revilla discusses how *Desert Blood's* Ivon Villa provides a look at the character's relationship with her partner, and the socioeconomic restrictions that lead her to seek a black market adoption (133). Revilla also discusses how Ivon's character makes de Alba's story more powerful, "Through the narrative, Ivon makes reference to her dissertation and her goal of completing her Ph.D. In this way, the author is able to introduce several academic and theoretical analyses of the murders—an effective way to bridge literature and theory" (133). As discussed earlier, Ivon's hybrid nature mirrors Anzaldúa's concept of the mestiza, another example of the text being borderland literature.

While critics have recognized de Alba's use of the mystery novel[21], they have misunderstood the true genre of *Desert Blood. Desert Blood* is more than a detective novel, it is a hard-boiled detective novel. There is more at stake than solving a mystery. The story focuses on Ivon's quest to find her sister, but it is also about the lengths Ivon will go to in order to do so, risking her relationship with Brigit and her life. Gaspar de Alba's novel also differs from

[21] *Desert Blood* would win the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Mystery.

traditional mysteries in terms of character and character development. As Irwin notes, "analytic detective fiction is essentially a plot-driven genre with a low tolerance for or interest in fully developed characters" (173). However, Scaggs argues that "the hard-boiled text can be identified as a 'writerly' text, whose gaps and fissures encourage the reader to enter into the production of meaning. The 'writerly' text[22], significantly, is usually a modernist one, plural, diffuse, and fragmented with no determinate meaning (Eagleton 1996: 119)" (75). Hard-boiled fiction has the potential to be a sophisticated literature (as I argue *Desert Blood* is), making it a powerful genre for evoking the elements of borderland literature as reflected in *Desert Blood.*

Certain critics also seem unaware of the genre's history and a key element—the detective's failure to change the status quo. The genre reflects the reality of life in that while one person may influence change, they cannot effect complete change on their own due to the many forces driving and sustaining the status quo. The resistance to the status quo is noted by several critics such as Lewis Moore in his overview of hard-boiled fiction, *Cracking the Hard-Boiled Detective.* Whether it is the Continental Op in *Red Harvest* who restores order to a corrupt town with the likelihood it will be corrupted by someone else, or Ivon Villa breaking up a snuff film ring but failing to stop the ongoing Juárez murders, hard-boiled protagonists rarely prove capable of destroying a crooked status quo. In a world filled with flawed characters, dangerous cities, and widespread corruption, the protagonist can only hope to mitigate the damage.

Given the complex nature of the Juárez femicides, it is much more realistic for Ivon to save her sister, but do little in the greater picture. Lorna Pérez notes how *Desert Blood* does not provide an all-encompassing solution to the Juárez murders, "…Gaspar de Alba forecloses the possibility of assigning singular and comfortable blame and insists on turning a scathing gaze on

[22] Scaggs refers to Roland Barthes concepts of text either being "readerly texts" or "writerly" texts (74).

the systemic violence that allows for the annihilation of the Juárez system" (97). Clearly, the status quo remains in place at the end of *Desert Blood,* as the forces driving the femicides remain.

Irene Mata also mistakes *Desert Blood's* status as a ground-breaking novel for its protagonist. "*Desert Blood* also pushes the boundaries of genre through Gaspar de Alba's decision to place a queer Chicana at the center of the narrative. With Ivon, Gaspar de Alba challenges the literary tradition that favors the representation of the adept sleuth as male" (23). As Margaret Kinsman explains in her essay, "Feminist crime fiction":

> The late 1970's and early 1980's saw American writers Marcia Muller, Sue Grafton, and Sara Paretsky, independently of each other, each creating a female private eye investigator character; all three novelists subsequently developed commercially successful and popular series based on their mold-breaking female private-eye creations (148)

Kinsman discusses Muller's Native American character Sharon McCone and the bi-sexual private detective Kat Guerrera (152-53), both of whom debuted in 1977, decades ahead of Gaspar de Alba's Ivon character. The modern period of hard-boiled fiction is full of diversity including queer characters, persons of color, and queer female characters. This does not diminish the power and effectiveness of *Desert Blood,* but it is important to acknowledge past contributions to the genre[23]. For example, there is the previously mentioned Sharon McCone from the Marcia Muller's 1977 novel *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* and lesbian protagonists such as J.M. Redmann's "Micky" Knight (who debuts in 1990's *Death by the Seaside)* and Sandra Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano (who first appears in 1991's *Everything You Have is Mine*).

[23] Maureen T. Reddy provides an overview of detectives of color in her essay, "Race and American crime fiction" which includes a discussion of race and elements of hard-boiled fiction.

Desert Blood's adherence to hard-boiled fiction's elements such as an irresistible status quo encourages the reader to look at the larger picture of the femicides and conclude that systematic change is necessary to end them. Gaspar de Alba writes a compelling hard-boiled novel that explores the elements of borderland literature, challenging its reader to reflect on these elements and the Juárez murders. Indeed, *Desert Blood* provides a comprehensive approach to discussing the many issues surrounding the Juárez murders. "Read through an analytical framework that privileges a differential mode of consciousness, the novel becomes an example of the power of writing in creating alternative paradigms for challenging the social inequality of globalization processes" (Mata, 15). Reading *Desert Blood,* the audience is exposed to the different factors contributing to the femicides as well, providing a better understanding of the scope of the femicides.

For example, *Desert Blood* shows inequality between men and women: "Women's labor and women's bodies are observed, managed, and threatened in ways that men's are not. Key here, of course, are issues of reproduction, manipulation of the sexualized body, and susceptibility to sexual attack" (Volk and Schlotterbeck 127). Gaspar de Alba illustrates this early in the novel when Ivon's cousin Ximena tells her of the maquiladora's working conditions, "The girl's been wearing a girdle, you know so they can't tell she's pregnant, or else she'll get fired" (11). When Ivon expresses her shock, Ximena informs her, "…the factory would have to pay maternity leave. That would cut into its profiles. Take your birth control if you want to keep your job" and "Company logic is there's plenty of girls lining up for the job" (12). This and many other scenes in *Desert Blood* show the exploitation of the maquiladoras.

Gender inequality is shown in other ways such as how Ivon is treated by her family. When Ivon resolves to search for Irene in Juárez, her Mormon cousin William is tasked with

escorting her. Ivon's feelings about this are clear, "…she wasn't going to take any paternalistic bullshit from Mr. Mormon Deacon here, who was younger than she by five years" (Gaspar de Alba 184). William is reluctant to be there and proves useless to Ivon, particularly when they are accosted by the Mexican police. Despite William pleading he is an American and a Mormon deacon, William and Ivon escape danger only when Ivon mentions TV reporter Rubi Reyna's name, bluffing her way out.

Desert Blood also discusses law enforcement's failure to solve the Juárez murders, revealing law enforcement may be incompetent, apathetic, or complicit in the murders (as Border Patrol officer Jeremy Wilcox is). In chapter 33, Gaspar de Alba shows how the victims' families and volunteers find themselves searching for their missing loved ones' bodies (the process is called the rastreo) because the police will not do so. Camacho discusses the real-world rastreo that is fictionally depicted in *Desert Blood:* "The rastreo functions both as an act of protest and as a corrective to police inaction. Because of police corruption and manipulation of crime scenes, families of the disappeared have begun to mount forensic investigations on their own" (43). Again, actual events are chronicled in the fictional world of *Desert Blood*, providing readers a chance to experience the characters' emotions and reactions, particularly their feelings of despair and helplessness. Again, *Desert Blood* evokes one of the principal elements of hard-boiled fiction, that:

> In a world where the law is inefficient and susceptible to corruption, where the recognized social elite is too decadent and selfish to accomplish justice and protect the innocent, the private detective is forced to take over the basic moral functions of exposure, protection, judgment, and execution. (Cawelti *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, 152)

In essence, Gaspar de Alba uses this hard-boiled element to drive home the feelings experienced by the victims' families.

Activists and victims' family members believe there are many factors at work in the Juárez murders, such as corruption and Mexico's dependence on foreign investments. Gaspar de Alba shows these elements in the novel as well. Mata explains the importance of the novel, "Through Ivon's musings, Gaspar de Alba voices the concerns of many who have questioned the corruption of the government and Mexico's dependence on foreign investments" (25). Gaspar de Alba's depiction of the judicales' indifference to the murders and the factories which are given carte blanche control over the maquiladoras' bodies furthers the discussion of the many factors at work in the Juárez killings. The novel's ending with guilty parties such as Wilcox praised as heroes, and the fact that there is no end to the plight of the maquiladoras fits in well with hard-boiled fiction's notion that, "unlike the tidy resolutions of Golden Age detective fiction, small, local, and temporary victories are all that the hard-boiled private eye can ever hope to achieve in a corrupt world" (Scaggs 63-64). As heroic as Ivon's actions are, she can do little more than rescue her sister, leaving the grave injustices of the Juárez murders unresolved. I argue that this adherence to the genre elements of hard-boiled fiction is a means of conveying to the reader that this is an international problem which requires a collective effort, a theme addressed by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* . The complexity of the forces driving the Juarez murders requires a solution not based on any one element such as law enforcement, immigration reform, or economic reforms, but a solution comprising all of these elements (and likely more). Just as the hard-boiled protagonist finds it impossible to resolve the status quo, so too does the individual trying to defeat the forces behind the Juarez murders. A collective and multi-pronged strategy is necessary to overcome a problem engrained in society. Hard-boiled fiction's theme of

an irresistible status quo mirrors Anzaldúa's solution concerning the conflict between clashing binaries whether it is whites and people of color or men and women:

> The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence of war (102).

Likewise, the status quo that Ivon rages against, "This thing implicated everyone. No wonder the crimes had not been solved, nor would they ever be solved until someone with much more power than she, with nothing to lose or to gain, brought this conspiracy out into the open" (335). Thus, hard-boiled fiction's element of an unyielding status quo provides a chance to examine a real societal menace—the horrific effects of globalization, sexism, and racism as seen in the femicides depicted in *Desert Blood,* but which are based on actual events.

Lastly, there is the graphic depiction of violence in *Desert Blood* that delivers powerful imagery to the reader, reinforcing the horror of the femicides. Although some critics have argued the violence is gratuitous, it is necessary to relay the horror of the femicides. Pérez observes:

> …the violence we encounter from the first page of *Desert Blood,* while extreme, is not gratuitous or voyeuristic; rather it is the space in which we as readers must confront the body *as it is in the process* of being rendered into object, and must do so in ways that force us to participate in a process that we find repugnant and unnerving. By maneuvering our gaze in this way, Gaspar de Alba reveals our complicity in these crimes, on the literal level of the text we encounter the body spayed open, cut open, terrified,

> tortured, and disassembled though we must often have to do this either through the subject gaze of the victim or through the gaze of the violator. (100-101)

Ultimately, nothing less than a brutally realistic depiction of violence can drive the message home that, "First-World privilege is literally constructed on terror, on violence, and on graves" (Pérez 99). *Desert Blood* gives the reader no room to avoid the reality of these crimes, despite this being a work of fiction.

Using the hard-boiled fiction genre, Gaspar de Alba is able to add a second dimension to her borderland story. As John G. Cawelti explains, "the literature of mystery reflects the conflict between explanation and inexplicability, between reason and the incomprehensible" (*Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* 337). The following statement by Richard Bradford shows a particular effectiveness of blending hard-boiled fiction and borderland literature

> Crime writing in the U.S. has for most of the 20th century been closely allied to the upmarket counterpart—realist and experimental—not because of some consensual indulgence on the part of the literary establishment but for the most straightforward reason that it reflects a fabric of experiences, mediated and actual, that most Americans take for granted (94).

Therefore, Gaspar de Alba's use of hard-boiled fiction (which falls under Bradford's umbrella term of crime writing) allows readers a second lens to examine the story and the complexity of the horrific phenomenon that is the Juárez murders. *Desert Blood's* ability to engage its readers with a compelling hard-boiled story adds to the reader's understanding of the many factors at play in the Juárez murders including gender, ethnicity, economics, and politics. Although Gaspar de Alba's novel is fiction, she creates realistic characters in a realistic world, providing a laser-guided entry into the horrific reality of the Juárez femicides.

Chapter Three: Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres: Utilizing Western literature to Explore Borderland Literary Themes in Genre Fiction

Western literature ("the Western"), a genre associated with the United States' western expansion, provides a fascinating look at American ideology thanks to the myths associated with the concept of the frontier. Genre is constantly changing due to changes in society and culture, which means the Western genre changes over time as well. While the Western is often thought of as stories told after 1865 set in the American frontier, the Western dates back much further and it encompasses a greater geographic region than critics commonly believe. Moreover, we shall see how the Western itself has evolved as a genre, and considering the evolution of the genre provides important insights into borderland literature.

As previously noted, genre is an important structural element that helps shape and clarify thematic concerns in literature. While chapter two has already touched on borderland themes that are amplified in *Desert Blood* by the use of the hard-boiled detective genre, Gaspar de Alba is not the only borderland writer to use genre to intensify the thematic concerns of borderland literature. Emma Pérez, the historian, literary theorist, and novelist, also uses genre, specifically, the Western in her novel *Forgetting the Alamo or Blood Memory*[24]

Genre provides crucial insight into literary conventions, tropes, and even styles, but it is not a fixed structure of requisite elements. Brian Caraher notes that Aristotle posited "genres have histories and cultural motives and may evolve and cross-pollenate depending upon a variety of specific social factors and happenstances" (29). In his essay "Genre Theory: Cultural and Historical Motives Engendering Literary Genre," Caraher examines the close link between genre

[24] Gaspar de Alba and Pérez may be influencing each other's work as they are close friends. The question of how authors can consciously drive the direction of genre's evolution is worthy of research but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

and a society's cultural and historical changes, documenting the emergence of myths and genre's ability to change over time. This evolution provides the opportunity to examine a genre and see if and how it has evolved. In *Genre,* scholar John Frow argues:

> the teaching both of a critical knowledge about genres and of the ability to perform a diverse range of genres is central to a critical understanding of and engagement with the social order. Genres carry and organize their culture and fashion our sociality in the broadest sense (166).

Comparing and contrasting *Blood Memory* to a traditional Western allows a look at this evolution and how the conventions of the genre heighten and amplify the concerns of borderland literature.

Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is a key text that opened discussion of borderland theory. Anzaldua's identification of hybrid identities, disjunctive localities, marginalization of ethnic groups, the clash of cultures, and women focuses on the situations created by two borders crashing against each other, opening wounds that do not heal and creating a new sense of being. Emma Pérez 's *Decolonial Imaginary* furthered the discussion of borderland theory, expanding awareness of female identity and involvement in historical events before and during the Chicano movement, deconstructing the dominant cultural hegemony imposed not only on Chicanos, but specifically Chicanas.

The power of borderland theory lies in its ability to explore the nationalistic and cultural themes involving the American/Mexican border. This border creates a space of indeterminacy where the land is neither American or Mexican, but the culturally disputed, hybrid, and layered space of both. Much has been written about this and borderland theory provides a means of deeply exploring its specific issues as well as seeking an answer to the conflict between the

United States and Mexico. Anzaldúa and Pérez both stress the special role of women in this examination, and *Blood Memory* is particularly well-suited as a borderland text due to its protagonist being a female and its setting during the conquest of Texas, a time when the Mexican/Texas borderland was in dispute. *Blood Memory's* characters are caught up in the interstitial spaces between these two countries and this conflict affects Micaela—the novel's queer, female protagonist—throughout the novel.

Anzaldúa argues the border defines individuals on many levels ranging from identity to gender to sexual identity, and more. In her essays and poems, she describes how her own identity as a lesbian mestiza is influenced by her life on the border. This clash between nations results in multiple forms of hybridity, including linguistic, religious, and gender hybridities.[25] and the hostile reactions by different groups (in and out of Mexico) concerning it. The existence of ancient religions (such as the Aztecs) clash with Roman Catholicism, providing further confusion and conflict. *Blood Memory's* character Micaela exemplifies *Borderlands/La Frontera's* theme of an individual with a hybrid identity battling internal and external conflicts. Micaela battles her own personal demons (such as her consuming jealousy) as well as persecution from two societies (Mexican and American) for her gender and sexual identity.[26]

In her work *The Decolonial Imaginary,* Emma Pérez narrows Anzaldúa's exploration of borderland theory elements, focusing on how women have been ignored by the Chicano movement, and arguing for decolonial imaginary, a process of finding women's place in history

[25] In her chapter "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa lists some of the languages (many hybrids) including: standard English, working class and slang English, standard Spanish, standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations), Tex-Mex, and *Pachuco* (called caló).

[26] This is not to say Micaela receives blanket persecution as some individuals such as her mother and Clara are sympathetic to her.

and rethinking history against what has been imposed through cultural hegemony. As Pérez explains:

> Where women are conceptualized as merely a backdrop to men's social political activities, they are in fact intervening interstitially, while sexing the colonial imaginary. In other words, women's activities are unseen, unthought, merely a shadow in the background of the colonial mind. Yet Chicana, Mexicana, India, mestiza actions, words spoken and unspoken, survive and persist whether acknowledged or not. Women's voices and actions intervene to do what I call sexing the colonial imaginary, historically tracking women's agency on the colonial landscape. (7)

Pérez repeatedly tracks women's involvement in Chicano/a history, and I will show how she utilizes *Blood Memory* to explore roles for women in the so-called war for Texas independence. Texas's Mexican inhabitants not only were subject to the invaders' physical and sexual assaults, but faced traumas caused by hybrid identities, disjunctive localities, the marginalization of ethnic groups and women, and the clash between cultures.

While several of these elements of borderland literature such as identity and gender can be found in other literary theories that address feminism, colonialism, postcolonialism, and race, these literary theories do not adequately address the complexity of borderland issues. As Audrey Goodman notes in "Southwest Literary Borderlands":

> The literary history of this land, its many borders and its people may be too layered and complex to fit a single paradigm even one that does the important work of interrogating relations between local articulations and global politics. Even within a single cultural tradition or historically bounded period, Southwest borderlands literature alternatively reveals, resists, and reimagines the acts of violence, national rivalries, dislocations and

> ecological damage that accompanied and facilitated the region's Spanish and Anglo conquests. (146)

The novel *Blood Memory* is borderland literature, but it is also a Western, containing many elements associated with the Western genre, including its setting and plot structure (the journey; the revenge story). While *Forgetting the Alamo's* use of queer, female protagonist, Micaela, seems to disrupt the genre, and speak to Pérez's concern with writing women into history, I will demonstrate that *Forgetting the Alamo: or Blood Memory* is, at its heart, very much a Western, and its use of the Western genre opens up needed conversations about the history of conquest in the American west. A crucial component of this analysis is showing how *Forgetting the Alamo* incorporates "the captivity narrative," (one of the earliest forms of the Western) into its structure, thus enhancing its status as both a Western and a borderland novel.

The Western is a genre with deep roots in American history. Westward expansion had been a goal of Americans since the earliest settlers, fascinating those who experienced the journey firsthand, as well as people who read about their exploits. Some scholars, including John Cawelti, argue the earliest Western stories date back to the 17th century *Slave Narrative of Mary Rowlandson*, the story of a Puritan woman taken captive by Indians who eventually was released: "Rowlandson's story established one of the themes which would be central to the Western tradition, the supposed threat of Native Americans to the welfare and morality of white women (Cawelti 59). As the American frontier expanded, new tales arose, ranging from the frontier tales of James Fennimore Cooper that dealt with early America to the Wild West adventures of outlaws such as Billy the Kid and the James Gang.

The story of the American West is one of ideology. Like any ideology, there are questions of what prevailing worldview is being used. There is also the question what myths are

established to support a cultural hegemony imposed through this ideology. As we will see, genre arises out of myth and can change over time. We will see the ideology of the Western challenged in *Blood Memory* but since genres evolve, we shall see *Blood Memory's* ideological perspective is different (that of a conquered, but resistant people) but that it is a Western.

The myth of the American West holds true to Richard Slotkin's definition of myth:

> A myth is a narrative which concentrates in a single, dramatized experience the whole history of a people in their land. The myth-hero embodies or defends the values of his culture in a struggle against the forces which threaten to destroy the people and lay waste the land. (269 "Regeneration")

Here, the Western myth typically sees a protagonist seeking to help defend settlers from savages (traditionally outlaws or indigenous people, but as I will show later, this term can encompass other meanings) as they attempt to bring "civilization"[27] to the wilderness.

Not everyone agreed with Manifest Destiny and the frontier thesis, either now or when it was first suggested. Writer Henry David Thoreau wrote against the Mexican War, a war tied in with the idea of Manifest Destiny. Politicians such as Senator Thomas Corwin, former President John Quincy Adams, and future President Abraham Lincoln voiced their opposition to the idea of Americans taking lands from others. As Richard Slotkin explains in *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*, America's westward expansion (specifically the war against Mexico[28]) raised questions amongst the citizenry:

> Within the army of conquest, divisions appeared between those who persisted in seeing the war as a liberation of the Mexican underclass and those who saw it as the prelude to a

[27] The concept of bringing civilization is a key component of borderland literature (as seen in Mignolo's work) and will be addressed later.

[28] Although *Blood Memory* is set before the war between the United States and Mexico, many of the arguments raised during said war were discussed when Americans in Texas sought to secede from Mexico.

> national leap into imperialism…it became difficult to maintain an operative belief in the comfortable paradox which held that society could consist of superior and inferior races, without prejudice to democratic practices or egalitarian faith. (187)

Despite this opposition, conquest remained the order of business. Nonetheless, some view the ideas of Manifest Destiny and the frontier thesis as a way to whitewash the conquering of the land's indigenous people (Indians) and an established nation (Mexico). Despite the talk of destiny and helping to "tame" the West, it is argued that the reality is that Americans conquered their way from sea to shining sea, taking land they had no right to take.

While Western fiction has often supported the dominant culture, there are other voices contributing to these genres? including those of subaltern people such as indigenous people or Chicanos. Reclaiming subalterned voices is a central component of borderland literature, with *Forgetting the Alamo* being an example. However, a rich library already exists and is being rediscovered by the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. The Project, as José Aranda Jr. explains:

> has created and promoted a national and international framework for reconstituting the longue durée of a "Hispanic" presence in what would become the United States of America. While the Project has always had a three-prong set of goals—archival preservation, publication of important, heretofore unavailable texts; and curricular reform from K-12 to university—one of the major consequences has also been a recovery and remapping of the settler colonialisms of North America.

Aranda discusses how the Project "has been able to rehistoricize and respatlialize the imaginaries of what constitutes U.S. literature, from Spanish North America to the beginning of the civil rights movement (31). This is important to any discussion of the Western as it proves there were

differing voices in the Western genre, but that these voices were either ignored or forgotten. These include works such as Felix Varela's 1826 historical novel *Jicotencal,* Lorenzo de Zavala's *Journey to the United States of America,* and Daniel Venega's *The Adventures of Don Chipote*, Leonor Villegas de Miagnon's 1920 novel *The Rebel,* and 1885's *The Squatter and the Don* by María Ruiz de Burton (Aranda 32-33)[29].

As Aranda posits, these past works were ignored or forgotten because "this body of literature was never incorporated into the canon of literary nationalism of the United States, nor for that of Mexico" (34). Even today, cultural hegemony restricts the marketing and distribution of dissenting voices, with so-called controversial literature being forced into small presses or self-publishing.

Arana argues that even today, there are difficulties incorporating some of this past literature into the canon. The first reason is that the Chicano/a movement often took too narrow a focus on recognizing past literature, as scholars argued over labelling it as pre-Chicano/a literature or foundational. The second reason scholars have been reluctant to introduce this rich historical literary treasure trove is an inherent bias by some critics towards literature written by authors labeled as collaborators with colonial governments[30]. Central to this idea is what Aranda calls the "fantasy heritage" thesis, "a literary critique used by Chicano/a's who dismiss any fiction that lacks an "overall critique of Anglo society and any representation of a stoic but heroic 'resistance' to their racial oppression as Mexican-Americans" (38). Aranda notes "the 'fantasy heritage' thesis had a disproportionate effect in isolating the premovement writers from consideration, not just in constructing a canon, but in the larger, more important metanarrative

[29] A number of Caucasian female writers wrote Westerns early in the genre including Willa Cather's celebrated and progressive 1927 novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

[30] Not surprisingly, this mirrors one of the issues raised in neo-slave narratives, whether figures such as "the mammy" were complacent in slavery or resistant in their own way.

that was to underwrite Chicano literary history" (39). These problems unfortunately are denying people access to material which can not only provide other voices in history, but also deny scholars the opportunity to show further examples of subalterned works. For now, scholars must rely on existing works while other works are rediscovered and examined, but there is no denying that there is a canon of Western fiction (and non-fiction) written by Chicano/as, Mexicans, and Mestizo/as.

Like any genre, the Western contains elements that guide a reader, or as Frow explains. "Genre thus defines a set of expectations which guide our engagements with texts" (113). An examination of Western genre will show a number of elements that do guide the reader's engagement. Scholar John Cawelti's book *The Six-Gun Mystique* provides an excellent overview of the Western. This 1984 book provides several elements of the Western which remain relevant. A quick overview of them will show how the genre has evolved in Pérez's *Forgetting the Alamo.* These elements are character, setting, and plot.

Cawelti distinguishes the different characters in a Western:

> There are three central roles in the Western the townspeople or agents of civilization, the savages or outlaws who threaten this first group[31], and the heroes who are above all "men in the middle," that is, they possess many qualities and skills of the savages, but are fundamentally committed to the townspeople. (46)

Inherent to the Western is its frontier setting. While conventional wisdom has it that the Western takes place west of the Mississippi from 1865-1890, Cawelti argues:

> The Western story is set at a certain moment in the development of American

[31] Cawelti notes "It is possible to have Westerns without Indians or outlaws, but not without somebody playing the role for savage, for the antithesis between townspeople and savagery is the source of plots."

> civilization, namely at that point when savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of law and order, but are still strong enough to pose a local and momentarily significant challenge. (38)

The Six-Gun Mystique notes the variety of plots contained in a Western such as the quest for revenge, but Cawelti points out these plots boil down to one basic concept:

> the epic moment when the values and disciplines of American society stand balanced against the savage wilderness. The situation must involve a hero who possesses some of the urges toward violence as well as the skills, heroism, and general honor ascribe to the wilderness way of life, and it must place this hero where he becomes involved with or committed to the agents and values of civilization. (66)

Part of what makes *Forgetting the Alamo* so effective at exploring borderland themes is that Pérez relies on a protagonist, setting, and plot that are Western at their core, but does so while deconstructing the traditional concepts of what constitutes civilization, the wilderness, and savages. By presenting the savages as land-hungry whites who invaded an existing nation to impose so-called civilization on an already civilized land, Pérez is able to examine borderland themes through the Western genre while addressing the historical injustices committed. Pérez uses her novel's title, *Forgetting the Alamo, or Blood Memory* to show the difference between how her protagonists saw the Battle of the Alamo and how the Americans who annexed Tejas saw it. Pérez's characters would undoubtedly like to forget the battle (as well as the subsequent violence that led to the seizure of their land), but they cannot as the violence is engrained in their history, their culture, and will live on through blood memory (aka epigenetics)

Western fiction scholarship has expanded the scope of what constitutes a Western, just as Western fiction has expanded its scope to include exploration of non-traditional characters. The western, like any genre, is not rigid. Neil Campbell posits:

> In the late twentieth century, westerns entered a revisionist cycle whereby mythic structures as well as generic codes and conventions were placed under critical scrutiny. After World War II, the civil rights movement, along with antiwar protests, a growing environmental awareness, and the women's rights movement, created a culture that reevaluated the central themes, conflicts, and characters of the genre. (374)

This change mirrors other literature which is reexamined due to the scrutiny mentioned, with Campbell noting this "challenged the national regional, racial, and gender imaginaries typically encoded in the established genre to make space for new narrative possibilities, thus ushering in what might be called the 'post-western'" (374) A textual analysis of *Forgetting the Alamo* reveals it can be classified as a post-western.

- The comparison of *Forgetting the Alamo* with the traditional Western genre provides a look at genre and borderland literature's elements including identity, sexuality, gender, and geography. Perhaps the most obvious place to begin this analysis is with a consideration of the protagonist, Micaela, a young, queer woman on a quest to avenge her family. Does Micaela fit in as a cowboy? Micaela certainly possesses the traditional skills associated with cowboys, i.e., the ability to ride, shoot, and live in the open-air environment, but what of her gender and sexual identity?

Pérez cleverly uses the cowboy role to examine Anzaldua's concept of the Shadow Beast. Cowboys often find themselves caught in the middle since the outlaw skills they possess make

them unacceptable in the civilization they are trying to aid. Micaela possesses these skills, but she also faces the challenges inherent to the Shadow Beast. Anzaldúa describes it as:

> There is a rebel in me—the Shadow Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is the part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. (38)

Micaela certainly grapples with the Shadow Beast throughout *Forgetting the Alamo,* defying gender norms imposed on her as well as cultural hegemony regarding sexual identity. Micaela is also self-destructive as she drinks heavily and allows her jealousy to ruin a lasting relationship with her lover Clara.

Micaela's gender and sexual identity distinguish her from traditional cowboys. Although there were real-life and fictional female cowgirls in the West, they were the exception. Pérez uses Micaela to resist the dominant idea that women did not participate in the West in these roles. This ties with Pérez's arguments that Chicanas have been dismissed as active participants in historical events. Micaela is also an outlaw of sorts as she defies cultural tyranny. As Anzaldúa explains, "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insists that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala"* (39). Micaela is an outlaw, but like some Western protagonists who are outlaws, she is seeking justice for the defenseless.

Cawelti's *Six Gun Mystique* discusses the vulnerability of women in the Western: "Women are also women, however, and implicit in their presence is the sexual fascination and fear associated with the rape of white women by savages" (47). Pérez has Micaela assume the identity of a male as she is well aware of the dangers presented by a woman in the West (a

danger she is reminded of by characters). Early in *Forgetting the Alamo,* Micaela's cousin Jedediah warns her:

> "Girl you better get yourself home," he yelled. "Soon as some ole boys get a whiff of you they're gonna know you're a girl and danged if I'm gonna be able to save you. You can't even guess the kind of trouble boys like that will make for you." (Pérez 57)

Jedidiah's warning comes true again when two of the ranch hands sees through Micaela's disguise as a boy:

> That's when I saw Romundo gawking at the both of us as if he was reckoning something. He stared at me and wouldn't let up. I didn't like his eyes fixed on me that way. Not one bit. It was as if he was wanting to do something to me. Something a man would want to do to a woman[32]. (Pérez 79)

Micaela is a woman in a patriarchal society where women are reduced to the traditional roles Anzaldúa lists in *Borderlands/La Frontera*—mother, nun, or whore (39). Pérez repeatedly shows the dangers women face as well as the violence imposed on them such as Ursula's rape, the repeated rapes of Juana (which end in her death), and a culture where violence against women is endemic. Another example occurs when Miss Elsie tells Micaela's mother Ursula:

> Look around. I'm a whore and I live in a whorehouse and what's more it's my whorehouse and I keep whores for the likes of men like Walker and old man Barrera. You think I like what I do? Alls I know is somebody's gotta give them poor girls a place to live cuz they been run out of their homes by some mean husbands or papas or brother or uncles who raped them or beat them or expected them to be their dang slaves. Well, let

[32] Micaela's heightened perception exemplifies Anzaldúa's concept of la facultad: "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities" and "an instant sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning" (60).

> me tell you, here they got a home and I ain't never let a man raise a hand to them and if them boys gonna get a poke, well then they better pay up." (Pérez 25)

Miss Elsie describes one the steps some women take to protect themselves from a male-dominated society that is supposed to protect women, but often victimizes them instead. Pérez again uses her post-Western to uncover the interstitial spaces buried in traditional Westerns and in history.

While Micaela's gender is unusual for the Western, her sexuality as a lesbian is a major departure from the traditional Western which features heterosexual characters. Despite this, Micaela's sexual identity does not pose a problem for the elements of the Western, particularly the idea of the woman as a civilizing force in society. Micaela and Clara's relationship adheres to a butch-femme model[33], where Micaela acts as the wild and untamed "masculine" force, while Clara fits the role of the civilizing female, thus representing the male/female dichotomy of the traditional Western[34]. John G. Cawelti describes the importance of women in the Western: "Women are primary symbols of civilization in the Western" (47). Micaela's outlaw/rebel serves as the Western genre's traditional male protagonist to Clara's civilizing female. Clara is willing to start a family with Micaela, but only if Micaela learns to control her wild jealousy. This jealousy is an element of Micaela's outlaw nature, which Clara will not tolerate. In chapter 15, Clara confronts Micaela about her jealousy:

> "When do you plan on growing up?"
>
> "I'm grown up."
>
> "I mean in here." She pointed her index finger over my heart. "When you plan on letting

[33] While it is outside the scope of this paper to examine this in detail, Sue Ellen Case's "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" is a helpful starting point.
[34] This shift from a heterosexual to homosexual relationship reflects genre's ability to evolve with societal changes.

go of childish jealousy." (Pérez 119)

Regrettably for Micaela, she is unable to control her jealousy and Clara will not tolerate her lack of control. Like some Western cowboy characters, Micaela is unable to adapt to the family and civilization Clara offers.

Superficially, the setting for *Forgetting the Alamo* (the Texas area of Mexico) does not fit into Cawelti's setting of a story "set at a certain moment in the development of American civilization, namely at that point when savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of law and order" (38). The setting is of a sovereign nation, i.e. Mexico (rather than American) which only becomes a frontier due to encroachment of American invaders. Thus, Pérez confronts the myth of the American West and posits that the Texas area is a frontier with a developing civilization challenged by savages—here, the invading Americans rather than the traditional Western's savages of outlaws or indigenous people.

Forgetting the Alamo uses the elements of the Western frequently to explore the various elements and themes of borderland literature such as gender and sexual identity, but its ultimate accomplishment is in deconstructing the colonial imaginary and creating a decolonial imaginary that reminds readers the so-called war for Texas independence was an invasion by Americans that displaced the original occupants (Mexicans, mestizos, and indigenous persons) by force.

Pérez gives voice to the subalterned throughout *Forgetting the Alamo,* repeatedly showing the seizure of land that is already occupied, and the savagery inflicted on its occupants. Early on Tomasa recalls, "White folk came from the east with slaves and Kentucky rifles and we came in from the south, just our own backs to slave on the land but looks like we lost most of what we earned…Squatters took what we had." (Pérez 41). Pérez shows that the invaders not only seized the land by force, but imposed their will upon the original occupants.

Time after time, the reader of *Forgetting the Alamo* is shown the changes that are coming to the land that was once part of Mexico. When Micaela speaks fondly of the land she knows as Coahuila y Tejas to enslaved man Lucius, he tells her:

> "Look here, you better wake on up to what's coming. You might as well get yourself on back to Mexico and leave this place to ole whitey because, darlin, it's slave lynching country and it's Mexican killing country, and it's Indian scalping country and it's going to be that for a long time." (Pérez 202)

This scene drives the point home that violent changes have happened, are still occurring, and have become the status quo. This is shown again when Oscar tells Micaela, "Things are about to change. Not right away, but it's going to happen, boys. The lone star's going to join up with the U.S. flag. Mark my words. Better get yourself some land. Steal it, if you got to" (Pérez 92-93). Oscar's words will come true, and Pérez shows the conquerors' policy of seizing land by whatever means are necessary.

The question then is how this presentation of the violence imposed on indigenous people and Mexico's other occupants makes up a Western. After all, aren't Westerns about Americans settling lands and overcoming savages to bring civilization to a wilderness? Traditional Westerns are, but even a cursory glance at Westerns (both in film and literature) shows an evolution in the concept of the Western and the introduction of protagonists who are indigenous persons, other persons of color, and women. The Western has evolved to the point where the plot Cawelti describes as "the epic moment when the values and disciplines of American society stand balanced against the savage wilderness" (66) challenges what constitutes the values and discipline of American society while denying the inherent American exceptionalism embodied in these values and disciplines. Traditional American values such as liberty are hardly evident as

the invaders in *Forgetting the Alamo* seize occupied land and kill and/or displace anyone in their way. Furthermore, "American" values and discipline such as hard work and courage are not on display here as the invaders are often lazy and cowardly, preying on the weak and using violence and fraud to obtain the land they covet. Values and discipline such as hard work and courage are not limited to white Americans, and *Forgetting the Alamo* shows people in Mexico working their lands tirelessly to eke out a living. Thus, this element of the values and disciplines of American society can apply to other societies as well, a reflection of genre's ability to conform to changes in society.

Forgetting the Alamo also challenges cultural hegemony in its portrayal of "the savage." As noted earlier, every Western features the protagonist battling the savage. Here, things are inverted as Micaela face savages, but these savages cloak themselves in the façade of respectability thanks to their making the law. This factor ties in not only with borderland literature's themes of injustice, but also with the cultural tyranny of men making laws. Pérez uses card games to allegorize this when Micaela reflects:

> Men were fools at games. The only way they ever won, really won, was by cheating and stealing and believing they had played fair. As if there was such a thing. Games were never fair when there was always someone who pretended he knew more than anyone else and established the rules in his favor at his outset. (171)

Pérez demonstrates this when Micaela is placed on trial for the murder of her cousin Jedidiah Jones. Pérez presents the trial for what it is, a sham, providing a look at how those in power can bend the law to their whim. Like any good sham, it hides behind a façade of respectability. The judge (aka the Colonel) addresses the courtroom:

> "We're gonna have a trial here. A fair trial. You all know that the laws are changing mighty fast in these parts. Now, I'm sure you're wondering why I got to go on about this but it's important to what's doing here today. All eyes are on Texas, boys…It's up to you to be sure that we run a fair trial. We're entering a new time in our history. A great time. The laws of great men who founded this republic are being tested today and that's a great thing, boys." (Pérez 197)

The Colonel's speech is an affirmation of the new power being imposed on the land that has been seized. It is a set of rules made by those in power—men, specifically white men.

Thus, the law imposed by the judge is arbitrary. When Micaela's attorney Mr. Lloyd protests the court's irregular procedures, the judge admonishes him: "Son, so long as I'm judge and not to mention mayor around here seems to me that I got the right to say what's regular and what's not. You got a case to state or don't you?" (Pérez 197). Micaela's attorney again points out the court's indifference to established procedure (for example, the lack of any evidence or the prosecution's key witness, Mr. Rove). The judge's reply again shows who is making the law:

> "Now see here, Mr. Lloyd. You don't understand our kind of folks. We're good, God-fearing boys here and we don't need no fancy-talking lawyer to set us right. We know our kind aright from your kinda right…And our kinda right is led by the hand of our Christian God." (Pérez 200).

These examples connect to what Anzaldúa calls cultural tyranny:

> Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the versions of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. (38)

Micaela is mocked for being a Mexican and she is mocked for her identity, described as a "he/she" repeatedly through her trial.

Forgetting the Alamo also utilizes an early development in the Western—the captivity narrative. The captivity narrative is a key component not only in Western mythology, but in American literature. In his landmark work, *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin describes how captivity narratives were quickly coopted for hegemonic use: "The first captivity narratives were genuine, first-person accounts of actual ordeals, and for that reason it is possible to view the genre as a natural spontaneous product of the New World experience" (95). These tales proved wildly popular not only with American audiences but with English audiences as well. As Slotkin notes:

> Puritan ministers and men of letters were quick to realize the polemical and theological potential in the tales and began to exercise direct control…shaping them for their own ends…the genre became very flexible, serving (often simultaneously) as literary entertainment, material for revival sermons, vehicle for political diatribes, and "experimental" evidence in philosophical and theological works. (*Regeneration* 95)

Captivity narratives served these purposes via the narrator's experiences navigating through Native American culture while reflecting on the circumstances that led to their captivity (typically the idea being that personal or societal sin led to their captivity) and the divine miracle that led to their ultimate freedom.

It is important to stress the captivity narrative not only because it is the first type of Western literature[35], but it dovetails with mythology's connection to society and societal upheaval's contribution to genre, and it shows how historical conditions alter a genre (in this

[35] The first captivity narratives were non-fiction, but fictional accounts eventually entered the Western canon.

case Pérez's take on the genre). Pérez incorporates the captivity narrative into her story to pierce the colonial imaginary imposed on Mexican history and its people.

The captivity narrative sees Micaela abducted by the Colonel and his men, with the apparent goal of her being sold into slavery. When the Colonel and his men slaughter an Apache settlement, Micaela is given the chance to shoot an Apache, instead turning the weapon on one of her captors before escaping. Although Micaela's captivity is relatively short, Pérez uses it to explore Micaela's psyche as she processes the horrors she has seen. At one point, Micaela tells stable worker Lucius, "'I've seen what evil men do,' I said. 'I still see it. Every night before I fall asleep. I see it so clear that I wish I could pluck out that vision from inside my head but I can't'" (Pérez 101). To be certain, this is just one component of the story, but its importance in Western literature is noteworthy.

Is *Forgetting the Alamo* a novel that challenges the conventions of the Western to explore borderland themes, or should it be considered a Western proper? The argument can be made that Pérez inverts the elements of the Western to challenge it, but I argue Pérez's novel also exemplifies the Western's (or any other genre's) ability to evolve as society evolves. This in no way takes away from the many themes of borderland literature raised, but instead, shows both the flexibility of genre and the way genre can be used critically.

As Caraher notes:

> The myths or narratives that succeed in recuperating their origins—and this possibility is in no way precluded by the "transformational spiral" of socio-linguistic modes – do so because they do not distort or rewrite the means of producing and refocusing significance for particular social and cultural crises. (32)

While Micaela does not defeat the savages encroaching on her people's territory, she does achieve an important victory. In *Forgetting the Alamo,* Pérez suggests a path to victory that does not entail military victory but the victory of keeping a conquered people's story alive:

> "That another war is coming doesn't dishearten me as much as before because so long as men like Walker and the Colonel occupy our land, there will be more wars. Maybe the only justice we'll ever know is in surviving to tell our own side of things. Maybe that's enough for now. Telling our own stories so we won't be forgotten" (206).

Whether it is Mignolo, Pérez, or Anzaldua, the concept of preserving history and identity is a starting place for victory, which makes *Forgetting the Alamo* an example of the Western's ability to continually evolve. The Western genre incorporates new voices and new perspectives while maintaining its core elements of characters, setting, and plot. Although *Forgetting the Alamo's* characters are different than what many people might think of as a Western (a white American male helping settlers battle savages), the core principles remain. Cawelti's helpful guideline for the traditional Western as "the epic moment when the values and disciplines of American society stand balanced against the savage wilderness" (66) remains true with the modification that the American society becomes an equally valid society/civilization where:

> The situation must involve a hero who possesses some of the urges toward violence as well as the skills, heroism, and general honor ascribe to the wilderness way of life, and it must place this hero where he becomes involved with or committed to the agents and values of civilization. (66)

Micaela is a lesbian cowboy who seeks revenge against those who have harmed her family and who threaten her society's existence. While she is only partially successful in her quest for

revenge, she succeeds in preserving her civilization's culture and history against the savages and the savage wilderness they bring to her home.

Chapter Four: The Present Confronts the Past: How a Neo-Slave Narrative is Amplified by Using the Science Fiction Genre

Science fiction is a genre capable of presenting a number of fantastic characters and settings to tell stories as it explores the human condition and society as compared with Western fiction which traditionally uses ordinary characters in a frontier setting[36]. Science fiction, when combined with neo-slave literature, is arguably one of the best ways of enhancing the exploration of neo-slave literature's thematic elements. In the case of Octavia Butler's *Kindred,* the science-fiction genre is not only *one* of the best ways for Butler's exploration of neo-slave narrative themes but the best way.

Chapter one discussed the different elements of science fiction and as I will show, Butler incorporates the novum of time travel in order to present a unique analysis of the neo-slave narrative's various themes. In *Kindred,* the time-displaced Dana and her husband Kevin provide an unusual perspective for neo-slave narratives. The concept of two persons from 1976 America being thrust back into the antebellum South is different from typical neo-slave narratives which offer perspectives from characters born and raised in that time period. By using protagonists from the contemporary period who are jolted by the historical and social realities of a slave society, *Kindred* allows the reader to feel the same sense of displacement, confusion, and culture shock that Dana (and in a different sense Kevin) feel. The reader is given contemporary guides—guides who have similar cultural and historical understandings to our own—to move us through a world that is in equal parts familiar and strange. This chapter will discuss some of the

[36] That is not to say that Western genre mash-ups do not exist. Stableford notes works such as Edward S. Ellis's *The Steam Man of the Prairies* (1868), just one of several dime novels that combined inventor fiction and Western fiction (22).

neo-slave narrative's themes and how Dana and Kevin's science fiction journey amplifies the exploration of said themes.

Kindred contains elements which classify it as a science fiction novel. The foremost element is the novum of time travel. Dana's unexplained jumps from 1976 to different periods in the antebellum South provide a means of comparing and contrasting not only time periods, but individuals' reaction to the past, including coping and comprehension. As Adam Roberts notes:

> It should not surprise us that a genre fascinated by the encounter with difference should have so often dramatized the various encounters of racial difference that have done so much to shape twentieth-century culture from the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the explosion of black cultural expression of the 1960s and 1970s, through the multicultural present day. (*Science Fiction* 94)

Science fiction's exploration of other beings and cultures presents many opportunities for exploring "The Other," but this has not always been as effective as one might think.

Helen Merrick discusses race in science fiction, noting work where authors often (but not always) ignored race, portraying a world where racism and its related problems had been eliminated through society. Merrick explains that this is problematic because:

> This may be a conscious model for a future society, or a gesture to 'political correctness' by an author whose interests in the story lie elsewhere, but either motive avoids wrestling with the difficult questions of how a non-racist society comes into being and how members of minority cultures or ethnic groups preserve their culture. (254)

For example, Adam Roberts surveys the evolution of the *Star Trek* franchise, tracing the franchise's positioning of persons of color as background characters to featured and fully-developed characters (*Science Fiction* 102-105).

As Merrick notes, even when science fiction addresses questions of race and ethnicity, its authors may miss the mark:

> Being able to publish one's work in many ways comes out of a position of privilege, including both the education and the time for writing, and consequently, these people who are oppressed the most are the ones least likely to be writing about it. Further, since racism often appears different to members of a minority than to members of a majority or dominant culture, what one white writer or reader perceives as a socially progressive work might be seen by a reader of colour as engaging with racist tropes or as an appropriation of the values and concerns of a minority culture. (254)

For example, in *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom,* Adam Roberts explains how while some critics praised William Gibson's *Neuromancer* for its portrayal of the black Rastas character, black science fiction author Samuel Delaney saw the characters in a negative light because he felt that Gibson portrayed them as passive victims (97). Delaney takes issue with the characters, though, with Roberts discussing Delaney's objections:

> However, much he admires the novel as a whole, he sees Gibson's Rastas as too passive to dramatize the tensions of racial difference effectively; they are "computer illiterates", "women are not part of Rasta colony at all", they are presented as being easily manipulated by the sinister Artificial Intelligence Wintermute. "As a black reader," he has said, he finds it difficult to applaud "this passing representation of a powerless and wholly non-oppositional set of black dropouts by a Virginia-born white writer" (97).

Delaney's argument shows how authors must take care and be aware of the privilege that affects their worldview, despite the best of intentions.

A related issue is the inclusion of women in science fiction both pertaining to authors and the role of women in the genre. As Merrick explains:

> debates about the role of women and the presentation of female characters in sf have been present from the genre's beginnings in the pulp magazines. Concerns about 'women in sf' developed from the 'sex in sf' question which loomed in the (un)consciousness from the late 1920s through the sexual liberation of the 1960s (and be partially absorbed by) feminist narratives from the 1970s to the present. (242-243)

These debates often revolve around women's gendering in works. For example, is a work's heroic female character hyper-masculinized because of authorial and/or societal beliefs that women can only be heroic if gendered as males?

Thus, the science fiction genre has also dealt with accusations that it was primarily written for and by men.[37] As Roberts notes "From the down of SF (whenever we choose to date that) through the end of the 1950s the female audience for SF was small, and those who were interested in reading it did so with a sense of themselves as alienated or at least sidelined spectators" (72). However, as Roger Luckhurst observes:

> What the feminist intervention of the 1970s did effect though was a new reflexivity about the conventions of SF, exposing how a genre that praised itself for a limitless imagination and its power to refuse norms had largely reproduced "patriarchal attitudes" without questioning them for much of its existence (qtd. in Roberts *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* Roberts 73)

[37] As Roberts notes in *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom,* "This is too crude and reductive an account of the matter" (72). For a detailed analysis of women's participation in the sci-fi genre, please see Roger Luckhurst's 2005 work *Science Fiction.*

Thankfully, authors such as Octavia Butler emerged to provide new authorial voices in science fiction. *The History of Science Fiction* explains how:

> Butler is a major African-American novelist whose muscular, eloquent, fabulations regarding the heritage of slavery in American, and world, culture gain traction from the tacit estrangement those fabulations entail. (Roberts 449)

As we shall see, her work *Kindred* incorporates science fiction into a neo-slave narrative to explore slavery's impact in the past and the present.

The neo-slave narrative is a powerful example of how major social conditions and historical events can motivate a group of writers to pursue a new textual means of addressing their concerns about societal conditions and historical events. The neo-slave narrative[38] is the direct result of several events in the 1950s and 1960s—the civil rights movement, the emergence of Afro-centered identities[40], and the reaction of African-American intellectuals to treatises such as Elkins's *Slavery* and fiction such as Styron's *The Autobiography of Nat Turner*. These works utilized the time frame of North American slavery to address not only questions of liberty, but many others including cultural production, subalterned voices, and the marginalization of African-American's oral history by white academia.

Timothy Spaulding analyzes what he calls the post-modern slave narrative, [41] to explore the forces driving African-American writers:

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[38] Although Mitchell prefers the term liberatory narrative, I will use the term neo-slave narrative There are a number of terms used for neo-slave narratives including post-modern slave narratives. It would be interesting to analyze whether a generic term should be used or whether liberatory narratives, neo-slave narratives, and post-modern slave narratives are specific to certain texts, just as there is the concept of modes in genre studies.

[40] Here I am referring to the move away from Anglo-American cultural norms and standards, that become epitomized in the Black Power movement

[41] Spaulding's article discusses what he refers to as texts whose authors deploy "elements of the fantastic or metafiction in their texts" (2) that "share many of the key preoccupations of postmodern aesthetics and politics. In their critique of traditional history, the postmodern slave narrative engages in the dismantling of Enlightenment conceptions of history and identity and the totalizing grand narrative of Western superiority." (3)

> Many African-American writers…sought not only to recover these stories, but also to redefine the way we narrate the slave experience. Writers such as Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, Samuel Delany, and Jewelle Gomez set out to correct a limited historical record on slavery and to critique traditional history's reliance on objectivity, authenticity, and realism as a means of representing the past. (1-2)

As we'll see, these authors identified the forces of cultural hegemony and what became known as the master narrative in ignoring or suppressing subalterned voices.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a time of social change with the civil rights movement both empowering and frustrating minority groups (in this case, African-Americans) who saw emerging guarantees of constitutional rights (such as voting rights), but who also saw limits due to structural racism and a dominant culture that often ignored African-Americans' desire to define their own identity. Rushdy notes how:

> The late sixties, then, saw a social change with the emergence of Black Power, an intellectual change with the development of New Left social history, and an institutional change with the opening up of new opportunities in publishing and teaching black-authored texts. (90)

Black Power and New Left intellectuals challenged the cultural hegemony traditionally imposed on historical works. For example, works such as Elkins's *Slavery* were not only criticized, but refuted by historical works that included the traditionally disputed or ignored oral history of African-Americans. Critics and scholars criticized Styron's *The Autobiography of Nat Turner* for a number of reasons including its white author speaking in the voice of a historical black man, but more importantly taking liberties with historical facts by portraying Turner as a hapless, sex-crazed individual. The offensive manner in which Styron portrayed Nat Turner and the initial

overwhelming literary praise he received exemplified African-Americans' discontent with the white cultural hegemony that allowed such works to be blindly celebrated.

Publishers also saw a potential new market of African-American readers after the success of *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond,* which was one example of the growing opportunities for African-American authors to have their works published. Other examples include Broadside Lotus Press and anthologies such as *Understanding the New Black Poetry* and *Black Fire.*

Both Angelyn Mitchell (*The Freedom to Remember*) and Ashraf H.A. Rushdy (*Neo-Slave Narrative*) discuss how neo-slave narratives explore the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, along with questions of identity such as culture, gender, sexuality, and others. These neo-slave narratives examine related areas such as cultural production, cultural appropriation, gender (often focusing on female identity), individual identity vs. collective identity, cultural hegemony, varying techniques on surviving slavery, counterhegemony, and intertextuality. Related to these texts is the exploration of what additional creative freedom the authors of neo-slave narratives had that the authors of slave narratives did not.

Angelyn Mitchell details how slave narratives were limited by societal norms in terms of what a writer could describe without offending their audience and the dominant culture (in this case, American abolitionists). Slave narratives were greatly restricted in describing the violence and/or sexual abuse inflicted on the enslaved, which encumbered their authors' efforts to convince people of their humanity and the evil of slavery. These politically-driven works had to empower the abolitionist movement without offending the moral sensibilities of readers (particularly white women readers) or alienating potential readers. Despite these efforts not to offend, it would be inaccurate to say works such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are free of violence (either physical or sexual).[42] Neo-slave narratives, on the other hand, have no political imperative to soften the violence of chattel slavery. Writing a century or more later, authors utilized their artistic freedom to vividly describe the violence and horrors left outside the slave narratives and at best, only hinted at. This creative freedom saw authors such as Toni Morrison, Marlon James, Edward P. Jones, Shirley Anne Williams, and many others produce fiction that forces us to confront the violence—physical, sexual, and psychological—of chattel slavery in no uncertain terms.

The cultural appropriation of African-American history and identity was a strong force driving the development of neo-slave narratives. Additionally, neo-slave narratives explore the concept of cultural production and how a dominant culture influences a subalterned culture, either intentionally or involuntarily. Cultural hegemony and the production of artistic works come into play with neo-slave narratives. Rushdy discusses the difficulties faced by African-American writers (including *Dessa Rose* inserting a disclaimer that it is fiction) in producing authentic works. The power imbalance led to African-American authors experiencing difficulties in getting their works published. Styron's much-criticized *The Diary of Nat Turner* is used as an example of a master narrative. Mitchell explains, "The written narrative that a society writes about itself is considered the *master narrative,* and this narrative is always presented and interpreted from the perspective of the hegemonic power base[43]" (5). Both Mitchell and Rushdy

[42] There is also the often-overlooked issue of morals laws such as bans on pornography or other indecent material that likely prevented the depictions seen in neo-slave narratives from appearing prior to the 1960s when these laws were relaxed compared to earlier periods.

[43] Mitchell and Rushdy's discussion of the hegemonic forces on cultural production mirror those of Edward Said (*Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*) as well as Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Like any academic discussion, this is not to say that Mitchell and Rushdy's views are academia's universal position.

discuss the often-overlooked topic of cultural production and how neo-slave narratives were a direct result of the emerging black[44] writers at the time who felt compelled to tell their stories.

One of Rushdy's major themes is the connection between neo-slave narratives and the 1960s: "The connections between antebellum America and the sixties were compelling, for the sixties were years when 'race occupied the center stage of American politics in a manner unprecedented since the Civil War era'" (7). Rushdy notes how the 1960s were the most radically racialized time since the era of slavery. The result was an opportunity to address racial problems. Neo-slave narratives were often written in the 1970s and 1980s, which provided writers a chance to compare and contrast the 1960s to contemporary times, examining what progress and/or setbacks were made in the civil rights movement. For example, Butler's *Kindred* features Dana, a character from 1976 (not coincidentally, the year of America's Bicentennial) hurled back to the antebellum South where she faces oppression as a black woman. The time travel element provides the reader with a chance to examine the irony of a nation celebrating 200 years of independence when a portion of that history included the enslavement of people.

Women play a special part in neo-slave narratives. While neo-slave narratives deal with female and male characters, many neo-slave narratives feature female protagonists. Many authors and scholars argue the female perspective provides a greater breadth and depth to the goals of the neo-slave narrative.[46] The majority of slave narratives were authored by men, which created a gap in the experience of enslaved women. As Burns explains:

Yet, this very reality—that the suppression of Black female agency

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[44] The terms black and African-American are used interchangeably as there are instances where an author's ethnicity may be in question such as an African-Canadian as opposed to an African-American.

[46] As Angelyn Mitchell notes, slave narratives did not allow women to discuss issues such as women's sexuality due to concerns over offending readers. However, as noted earlier, these limitations may not be severe as Mitchell and others believe and may also be due to indecency laws just as much as concerns about wanting to offend readers. Other writers such as Morrison intersect the stories of men and women to fully explore the issues of neo-slave narratives.

> has so often served as the condition of freedom for Black male writers—
> has led many Black feminist writers and critics to suggest that unique
> possibilities for rethinking the notion of freedom might emerge from
> a Black female subject position. (Burns 120)

Indeed, as Mitchell notes, the circumstances of female enslaved persons raised many different issues than male enslaved persons and gave authors a special perspective to examine contemporary issues as well. Mitchell identifies the themes of: 1) individualism; 2) motherhood; 3) sexuality; and 4) community in neo-slave narratives. She notes how women not only lost their freedom, but lost their agency in the above-referenced spheres. This is a common occurrence in neo-slave narratives such as *Kindred* where the time-displaced Dana must fight off sexual assault and lose? her former independence as a 20th century American woman. Butler explores this further with Alice, who acquiesces to Rufus's sexual assault in order to stay with her children, knowing her children can be taken away and sold at any time. Butler shows the reality of this threat late in the novel when Rufus lies to Alice, telling her he has sold her children.

As African-Americans sought to forge their own identity in modern times, they used neo-slave narratives to explore the theme of enslaved persons' fight to preserve their identity. Identity is a large part of neo-slave narratives as authors explore individual and collective identity and the effect of slavery on aspects of personhood such as identity, culture, and sexuality. This relates to African-Americans' expanding exploration of their cultural identity at the time (as Mitchell notes), an identity that distinguished them from the identity imposed on them by the dominant culture.

Trapped in the antebellum South, Dana finds herself struggling to maintain her own individual identity as a free black woman in a time when women had few rights and black

women had none. Dana battles to maintain her identity while navigating a time period when any expression of her selfhood can lead to grave consequences. Dana finds herself doubly damned in her situation. As she watches over Rufus, she thinks, "I helped to keep him safe. I was the worst possible guardian for him –a black to watch over him in a society that considered blacks subhuman, a woman to watch over him in a society that considered women perennial children" (Butler 68). Over time, Dana realizes the particular vulnerability of black women in the antebellum South. This causes her (and possibly the reader) to rethink all she knows about slavery as she gains a greater awareness of the experience of being enslaved.

Ultimately, Dana creates her own identity based on personal choice rather than the imposition of others, reasserting her individualism. It is a slow and painful path for Dana as she is repeatedly punished (physically and mentally) while navigating her way through the slavocracy. Dana undergoes a series of struggles and compromises which lead to her actualization of who she is and what she will and will not do as an enslaved person, regardless of the consequences. When Rufus attempts to rape Dana, she realizes:

> A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her. And Rufus was Rufus—erratic, alternately generous and vicious. I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover. He understood that once. (Butler 260)

Dana is forced to kill Rufus in self-defense, maintaining her individualism. As we will see, it is a difficult journey from when she repeatedly makes compromises to protect herself in a slavocracy to the point where she asserts her right to be a person, not property.

Butler explores motherhood in *Kindred* as Dana is forced into a motherly role in order to save herself and her ancestors. The time travel trope transforms Dana into someone who is

responsible not only for the birth of her ancestors, but ultimately herself. Butler plays upon this irony by showing Dana's conflict over being forced to keep Rufus alive long enough for him to perpetuate Dana's bloodline while also enduring the conditions of the slavocracy and, in some instances, perpetuating injustices on the enslaved. For example, Dana convinces Alice to sleep with Rufus, which Dana finds repugnant but part of her mission. Again, Butler's use of time travel creates a seemingly incredible situation which further explores the themes of the neo-slave narrative such as the commodification of women and their sexuality and the violence imposed on women.

While Dana is not a mother, Mitchell explains:

> her decisions and responses are not predicated on nor mediated by biological motherhood in the twentieth century. The perpetuation of her lineage, however, informs her decisions in both centuries. Additionally, Dana learns that her actions affect everyone on the plantation, family or not; therefore, the collective good of the enslaved community remains primary to Dana in the same way that a mother in similar circumstances might place good of her family over her individual needs. (52)

By placing Dana in this position, Butler further explores the tightrope an enslaved person walks. For example, Alice considers escape, but realizes bringing her children along complicates any escape attempt. Later, Dana sees an enslaved man sold when Rufus becomes jealous of the man's affection for Dana. Something as seemingly harmless as flirting can lead to a person's life being dramatically altered. Dana also sees how Rufel uses community (in this case children) to coerce her and Alice into doing his bidding.

Community is another theme that Butler explores in *Kindred.* There are two types of community mentioned in neo-slave narratives—specifically, the concepts of adoptive and quasi-

filial kinship. Rushdy notes:

> The difference between the two fictive kinship systems is that in "adoptive" kinship, the slave is welcomed into the slave community with the intent of "genuine assimilation"…while, in quasi-filial" kinship the slave is welcomed only nominally and the "language of kinship" is used as a means of expressing, at the same time as it hides, "an authority relation between master and slave" (152)

The adoptive kinship is seen amongst the enslaved persons on the Weylin estate who look out for each other, a community Dana eventually becomes part of. Conversely, there is the quasi-filial kinship seen in works like *Dessa Rose* where an enslaved woman is brought in as a "Mammy"/mother figure but in name only. While there are no explicit characters in *Kindred,* Dana is seen as a mammy type by Alice due to Dana's close association with Rufus. Alice sees herself becoming one too when she confronts Dana, telling her "I got to go while I still can—before I turn into just what people call me…I got to go before I turn into what you are" (Butler 234-235). What Alice is referring to is made clear when she tells Dana to help her: "Else, you'd have to see yourself for the white nigger you are" (235). Dana carries this stigma initially, as seen when she goes into the cookhouse and notices, "I went into the cookhouse and the young man who had his mouth open to speak close it quickly, looking at me with open hostility. The old man simply turned his back. I'd seen slaves do that to Alice. I hadn't notice them doing it to me before" (220). Over time, Dana has tried to help the enslaved community, but her forced association with Rufus alienates her from her fellow enslaved persons.

Cultural hegemony is inherently linked with identity as enslaved persons fight a dominant culture that approves slavery. Often deprived of their culture, enslaved persons fought to keep their cultural identity and/or resist the imposition of a dominant culture. *Kindred* has several

examples of this as Rufus is indoctrinated into a culture that sanctions the enslavement of others. Even worse perhaps is the hegemony that conditions enslaved children to accept the reality of slavery, as seen when the enslaved children mimic a slave auction. What seems like an innocent game to the children horrifies 20th century visitors Dana and Kevin because they know the future that awaits these children—a life of chattel slavery. *Kindred* is able to do so because it employs the science fiction genre's use of time travel, something unusual for neo-slave narratives.

Cultural hegemony not only maintains the status quo amongst the enslaved, but perpetuates the notion amongst slaveholders that slavery is normal and acceptable. Dana aims to free Rufus of the hegemonic forces that could turn him into his father. She tells Kevin, "Let me help with Rufus as much as I can. Let's see what we can to keep him from growing up into a red-haired version of his father" (Butler 81). This ultimately fails.

There is also the danger of the culture changing Dana's husband Kevin, a danger that leads her to think:

> A place like this would endanger him in a way I didn't want to talk to him about. If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place would rub off on him. No large part, I knew. But if he survived here, it would be because he managed to tolerate the life here.
>
> He wouldn't have to take part in it, but he would have to keep quiet about it. (Butler 77)

In spite of these forces, Kevin remains true to his convictions and fights to free enslaved persons while he is trapped in the past. Kevin is no passive commentator but ends up paying a physical and psychological cost helping enslaved persons. When Kevin returns to the Weylin estate, Dana notices how much he has changed:

> His face was lined and grim where it wasn't hidden by the beard. He looked more than ten years older than when I had last seen him. There was a jagged scar across his

> forehead—the remnant of what must have been a bad wound. This place, this time, hadn't been any kinder to him that it had been to me. But what had it made of him? What might he be willing to do now that he would not have done before? (Butler 184)

Dana discovers Kevin has been gone for five years and asks him what he has been doing, and he reveals he has been teaching and helping enslaved persons to escape.

Neo-slave narratives explore survival techniques as well as value judgments made concerning different reactions to being enslaved, chief among them ridicule towards "Sambo" or "Mammy" figures. The concept of survival is key to many neo-slave narratives and examines different survival strategies. This allows writers to reexamine issues such as "Sambo" and "Mammy" types, something which addresses historical examinations of slavery at the time[47]. As Rushdy notes, the conventional wisdom that slavery created passive enslaved persons (as defined by the stereotypes of "Sambo" and "Mammy") carried through the 1960's with Elkins's historical writings and the Moynihan Report (which linked social ills with slavery). Writers used the neo-slave narratives to challenge these misperceptions, noting the "Sambo" and "Mammy" types were usually the result of master narratives which ignored the larger picture of enslaved persons' survival techniques. Furthermore, writers such as Octavia Butler and Dessa Rose explored the difficulties of coping with slavery. *Kindred's* Dana is a 20th century independent woman who initially feels she can deal with being in her situation. Although the "Sambo" character type is absent in *Kindred,* the "Mammy" character plays an important role in the book, forcing Dana to rethink her beliefs about slavery and resisting it. This realization comes as Dana witnesses the practicality of "going along to get along" by some enslaved persons (a philosophy that she notes might get them ridiculed as an "Uncle Tom" or "Mammy") and when she is forced

[47] For further discussion, please see Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Theory.*

to decide how far she will go before she says enough (this turns out to be Rufus' attempt to rape her which results in Dana killing him). Dana is also herself perceived by some enslaved persons who work in the field of being a "Mammy" tape. This reflects the dichotomy between passive resistance in the civil rights movement and the more aggressive stance of leaders such as Malcolm X and the Black Panther movement. This allows contemporary authors to use the neo-slave narrative to explore this challenge.

When Sarah tells Dana, "life ain't bad here, I can get along" (Butler 145), Dana looks down on her in judgment:

> She had done the safe thing—had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called "mammy" in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom—the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter (Butler 145).

Dana's judgment of Sarah shows how Butler adeptly uses the time travel motif to do what other slave narratives cannot do—take a person from contemporary times and transplant them into the antebellum South. This allows Butler to use Dana and Kevin, people whom the reader can identify with as knowledgeable and capable, and show them they are not as knowledgeable or capable once they are put in the same position as those in antebellum America. Indeed, the sheer horror and depravity of the slavocracy is nothing like what either Dana or Kevin expected.

Ironically, Kevin's initial impression of the Weylin estate is that it is not as bad as he thought historical slavery would be. Naturally, this disturbs Dana, and Butler uses this viewpoint to show the privilege of those who are not enslaved persons judging something they have not

experienced themselves. This is seen in the exchange between Kevin and Dana when Dana tells her husband of the whipping she has seen and the inhumane living conditions imposed on the enslaved. When Kevin tells Dana, "I'm not minimizing the wrong that's being done here, I just…" (Butler 100), Dana responds, "Yes, you are. You don't mean to be, but you are" (100). Kevin and Dana's awareness of the harsh reality of antebellum America expands as the novel progresses, with the two time travelers acting as guides for contemporary readers who likely have little understanding of the dangers existing as an enslaved person, let alone surviving.

Butler uses science fiction's time travel to skillfully force the 20th century Dana to confront her own ignorance about how difficult life was for enslaved persons and to realize that resistance of any kind was costly. Butler also shows how even an intellectual from the 20th century is not only ignorant about the experience of the enslaved, but not any more capable of escaping it. This idea is seen when Dana fails to escape from Rufus:

> Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. Yet in a few years an illiterate runaway named Harriet Tubman would make nineteen trips into this country and lead three hundred fugitives to freedom. What had I done wrong? Why was I still a slave to a man to had repaid me for saving his life by nearly killing me. Why had I taken yet another beating? And why…why was I so frightened sick at the thought that sooner or later, I would have to run again. (Butler 177)

As Dana writhes in pain, she thinks *See how easily slaves are made?* (Butler 177)

As a 20th century empowered black woman, Dana is quick to judge, but her experiences force her to realize the dangers enslaved persons face every second of their existence. Dana learns about the various ways of survival and resistance. Escape is a dangerous option.

Ultimately, Dana gains a deeper understanding of how an enslaved person's identity is stripped away.

Kindred illustrates one of the prevalent discourses in neo-slave narratives, the idea of the contemporary generation criticizing past generations for not doing enough to fight slavery and later, racial discrimination. A classic example is the "Mammy" concept of the subservient slave woman who acts as a surrogate mother to slaveholders' children and who was often looked down upon. Through the events of *Kindred,* Dana not only realizes the hazards that all enslaved persons faced, but the spirited resistance that so-called "mammies" made and the sacrifices they made in order to protect their loved ones. Dana eventually becomes a sort of "mammy" figure, protecting her ancestors by ensuring that Alice and Rufus's children are born (thus ensuring Dana's eventual birth). Dana resists as best she can, realizing that so-called mammies did the same.

Dana finds herself making questionable compromises as her journey progresses. When Rufus confronts her about a map she possesses, she gives in to him and destroys it, telling herself she knows how to use the stars and sun to guide herself (Butler 143). Later, Dana puts her trust in Rufus to mail a letter to Kevin. She tells herself, "I couldn't really doubt that Rufus had sent it. He didn't want to lose my good will any more than I wanted to lose his. And this was such a small thing" (Butler 153). Dana finds herself conceding to Rufus despite being fully aware of him treating her as property. Even as Rufus is about to rape her, Dana nearly compromises, thinking to herself:

> He was not hurting me, would not hurt me if I remained as I was. He was not his father, old and ugly, brutal and disgusting. He smelled of soap as though he had bathed recently—for me? The red hair was neatly combed and a little damp. I would never be to

> him what Tess had been to his father—a thing passed around like the whiskey jug at a husking. He wouldn't do that to me or sell me or… (Butler 260)

Dana realizes the reality of her situation as an enslaved person. She has no rights nor power except those she asserts (albeit at great risk in the society she is trapped in). Dana chooses to compromise no further in order to preserve her identity, killing Rufus to protect herself from rape and physical violence.

Enslaved individuals are repeatedly treated as property in *Kindred.* For example, Sarah reveals that slaveholder Margaret Weylin has purchased new furnishing for her home by selling Sarah's children:

> "She wanted new furniture, new china dishes, fancy things you see in that house now. What she had was good enough for Miss Hannah, and Miss Hannah was a real lady. Quality. But it wasn't good enough for white-trash Margaret. So she made Marse Tom sell my three boys to get money to buy things she didn't even need!" (Butler 95)

The dehumanization of enslaved individuals is seen in how they are treated as property, not persons. Property has no rights, which makes violence easy to impose on the enslaved.

While slave narratives depicted violence towards enslaved persons, the authors of neo-slave narratives are able to depict violence, both physical and sexual, without the restrictions imposed on slave narratives due to concerns about offending the reader. The neo-slave narratives' often graphic depictions are meant to dispel any illusions about the reality enslaved persons faced every day, but *Kindred's* time travel element allows *Dana* to witness first-hand the stark brutality of violence with Butler contrasting it to the sanitized violence shown on television:

> I had seen people beaten on television and the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard the well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. (Butler 36)

Butler's use of time travel provides a unique storytelling experience as people from the present (Dana and Kevin) sees the actual violence of the slavocracy, witnessing it firsthand rather than in books or sanitized television programming. Violence is repeatedly shown throughout *Kindred,* culminating in the scene where Dana loses her arm as she returns to the future as a mortally wounded Rufel struggles to keep her in the past. This violence and the connection from the past to the present are another example of slavery's impact on people and society, and the time travel motif amplifies this idea as Dana jumps from the past to the present. When Dana is hurt in the past (such as when Tom Weylin whips her for teaching a child to learn how to read), the injury does not disappear when she returns to the future. This hints at how the violence imposed on enslaved persons in the past is carried into the present.[48]

As previously discussed, the number of works by African-American authors published by mainstream publishers increased during the late 60s, including works by women[49]. Author Octavia Butler's *Kindred* was just one science fiction novel that deals with the issues of race. However, her mix of the neo-slave narrative with the science fiction genre creates a remarkable hybrid due to the unusual (for a neo-slave narrative, but not for a science fiction story) positioning of 20th-century characters Dana and Kevin in the antebellum South.

[48] The concept of "blood memory" is recognized in the science of epigenetics.
[49] Women and authors of color participated in the science fiction genre before the 1960s. For a comprehensive look at their participation in the science fiction genre consult Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction.*

This time travel motif again allows Butler to show just how little most people living in contemporary times know about slavery. Dana and Kevin's repeated exposure to the daily horrors of slavery forces an understanding on them that is designed to also make the reader rethink their understanding of slavery. This ties in with Spaulding's argument that:

> Like its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterpart, the postmodern slave narrative represents a political act of narration designed to reshape our view of slavery and its impact on our cultural condition. It is designed to intrude upon history as a means to reform it. (4)

It is difficult to think of a bigger intruder than a time traveler witnessing firsthand the horrors of slavery. Dana and Kevin are intelligent and educated, yet their education does not prepare them for the reality of the antebellum South. This fact supports Spaulding's argument and the idea that there are interstitial gaps in history that need to be addressed, whether it is adding the oral history of blacks to history or other means of reexamining and rethinking it.

Sherryl Vint astutely observes *Kindred's* effectiveness in reexamining what we have been taught about slavery and what we think we know about it:

> Dana must understand herself as a specifically embodied African-American, female subject who is shaped and read by experience and discourse. Dana--and the twentieth-century black readers for whom she stands in--develops a more nuanced understanding of the choices faced by her ancestors, overcoming her previous conviction that she is different from earlier generations who were willing to submit. (249)

Vint's analysis of *Kindred* exemplifies why the time-travel motif is so crucial to Butler's success in exploring the many themes in the neo-slave narrative:

> For authors such as Butler the reality of slavery and its unrelenting effects are thematically crucial; and combining the fantastic and the realist modes enables past and present to be mixed in such a way that the reader cannot simply treat the story as happening in a reality ontologically distinct from our own. (Vint 243)

It is one thing to read about slavery or watch a documentary about it, but nothing prepares Dana and Kevin for what they experience, just as many people today have scant knowledge of: 1) the many forces that sustained slavery (including racism and economic policies); 2) the individual and collective impact on enslaved persons; 3) the individual and collective impact on the slavocracy; and 4) the aftereffects of slavery on contemporary society. As Mitchell explains, "We, like Butler's protagonist, learn that for all we may know about slavery, we really do not know as much as we think we do because what we have traditionally learned has been from one perspective only—the hegemonic "(18). The use of time travel furthers this point as Dana and Kevin confront their ignorance of the antebellum era.

Slavery's impact on contemporary society is another theme of the neo-slave narrative and as Vint posits, "*Kindred* implies that we cannot escape or repress our racist history but instead must confront it and thereby reduce its power to pull us back, unthinkingly, to earlier modes of consciousness and interaction" (248). *Kindred* is a science fiction tale that serves as an allegory for the many themes raised in the neo-slave narrative including resisting a master narrative, slavery's particular impact on women (including individualism, motherhood, sexuality, and community), as well as particular issues of violence, property, and identity. *Kindred* ultimately uses the science fiction genre to present a neo-slave narrative through the eyes of 20th century characters which amplifies the exploration of the neo-slave narrative's many themes, forcing the

present to confront the past, providing an opportunity to rethink the past and forge a more authentic and inclusive history.

Chapter Five: Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres: Utilizing Genres to Explore Literary Themes Through Genre Fiction

This thesis has analyzed what benefits an author can derive when they blend a text such as borderland literature or the neo-slave narrative with a type of genre fiction, in this case the benefits being an amplification of the themes of the first text using the particular elements found in the second. This analysis provides various examples of how this combination amplifies the themes in borderland literature and neo-slave narratives. Additionally, it provides an exploration of the forces driving particular genres such as Western fiction as they relate to understanding the themes of borderland literature and neo-slave narratives.

Genre studies continue to explore genre's uses such as its ability to frame texts and guide reading of texts. This thesis also shows that incorporating genre into a particular text (such as a text that blends Western fiction with borderland literature) can amplify the exploration of literary themes by using a genre's elements to reinforce these themes.

As explained in this thesis and noted by assorted scholars and critics, genre, while sometimes thought of as a method of categorizing texts, is more a means of framing a text and guiding the reader. This same guiding can lead the reader to look at the melding of genre elements with the themes found in specific literature such as borderland literature and neo-slave literature.

The three texts examined here demonstrate how an author can blend a type of genre fiction with a literary form such as borderland literature, using the genre's elements not only to amplify the themes, but to look at the societal forces that have created a genre. This deconstruction and analysis is a second way to explore a text's ability to more deeply inquire into particular themes.

While genre fiction sometimes rises to the level of literature, the question of whether a piece of genre fiction is literary is irrelevant for this discussion. What is important here are the societal and cultural forces driving a genre. For example, chapter three deals with the tremendous American mythology driving the Western, forces which provide an excellent field of study for comparisons between the ideology empowering the myth of the West and the reality of what took place during Western expansion. Like any text, genre fiction is affected by the forces of cultural hegemony. Dissecting the cultural forces inside genre is particularly important for borderland literature and neo-slave narratives as the literature was fueled in part by efforts to resist the dominant ideology imposed on subalterned groups.

This analysis shows that particular genres are useful for exploring the themes found in borderland literature and the neo-slave narrative. Many of the themes found in both have links with particular genres either in societal and historical underpinnings or the specific elements of a genre that maximize the exploration of certain themes. Chapter one introduces the types of genre discussed in this analysis (hard-boiled detective fiction, Western fiction, and science fiction) and posits why genre elements can be used to amplify the themes found in texts such as borderland fiction or neo-slave narratives. In chapter two, I highlight how the tropes of the hard-boiled detective genre amplify the themes explored in borderland fiction. For example, the genre's elements such as corruption and violence are found in *Desert Blood* where law enforcement, government officials, and business leaders are involved in the brutal and sadistic murders. Likewise, chapter three shows how *Forgetting the Alamo* incorporates Western fiction's genre elements such as the hybrid hero known as the cowboy and the setting of the frontier besieged by savages, i.e., outlaw elements, along with the Western's recurring plot of the revenge quest to deconstruct the American myths driving Manifest Destiny. Finally, chapter four notes how the

science fiction genre's element of novum makes time travel a believable element in *Kindred* and allows Octavia Butler to force a contemporary African-American woman to confront the realities of living in a slavocracy, which in turn provides an analysis of neo-slave narrative themes such as identity, community, women's sexuality, violence, and others.

One of the most important insights from this historical research was the evolution of what genre is. While genre is sometimes thought of as a classification system, much of the research suggests that it is a framing device that guides readers, and, in the mind of some theorists such as Derrida, it also guides authors. Genre is not as much a system of what makes up a genre type such as science fiction, but elements a reader can expect and reading strategies they may want to apply. For example, if a reader knows they are reading a science fiction story, they are willing to believe the story's depiction of fantastic elements such as time travel or alien beings coming to Earth.

Another important insight are the cultural and historical forces driving genre. Genre is not fixed, and many of the scholars indicate genre evolves over time, not only to survive, but because the initial myth that led to the creation of a genre may have been modified. This information helped to examine the greater question of whether genre fiction can amplify the themes of literary types such as borderland literature and neo-slave literature.

An ignorant application of genre can lead to problems in using and understanding genre. While genre can be helpful in a number of ways, there is the risk of people falling into the trap of using genre for no other purpose than to classify works. As discussed, genre studies provide much more than simple categorization. Even more critical is the potential for genre to become exclusionary due to elitist ideas.[50] An additional problem is the idea that anyone can define what

[50] For example, a hard-boiled detective story might be excluded from entering the canon of literature (a loaded term) due to elitists taking a self-appointed role as arbiters of canon. This is somewhat similar to the argument made by

a text's genre is. Genre requires participation by both the reader and author (and Derrida argues there is also form going on in and out of the text). Finally, as helpful as genre is, there are texts that do not fit into genre. *Finnegan's Wake* is a text that genre critics use to illustrate certain works' resistance to incorporation into a genre.

There appears to be several areas to build off this thesis's research. One is to determine what role market forces play in literary texts. Scholars note that genre is used for marketing purposes in a number of works including books, film, and television. There is a body of work on the use of genre in marketing films, but genre in marketing texts needs to be expanded. One area that should prove fascinating is that of publishing houses creating a "prestige novel" similar to the "prestige film." Consider how the novel *American Dirt* is marketed as an important literary work, i.e., a prestige novel that marketing forces seem to demand make it worthy of critical acclaim. Does its marketing alone as a prestige novel make it literary? The answer would be no, but how does this marketing influence consumers and possibly even critics? What role do scholars have in ensuring that texts are not commodified by a master narrative, returning to the dismal days when works such as Styron's *Diary of Nat Turner* were applauded despite their serious shortcomings, including cultural appropriation?

Another area of future research is to evaluate whether a text similar to *Desert Blood* faces a stigma since it is both a hard-boiled detective story and borderland literature. Does *Desert Blood's* status as genre fiction (still looked down upon by some critics as "formula fiction") influence critics and scholars despite its artistic merit? In other words, while critics' once-rigid opinion that genre fiction could not or in rare cases might "rise" to the height of literature, what (if any) negative consequences might an author have in blending their story with another genre?

African-American critics and scholars that African-American works were excluded by the dominant culture that established itself as the sole judge of merit.

Is such a text automatically marginalized and if so, what can be done to change this misguided perception?

This thesis has shown genre's effectiveness in amplifying the themes found in borderland literature and neo-slave narratives, but what of the works known as genre mashups such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Android Karenina?* Do these mashups fit into the framework discussed so far or are they incompatible for such analysis?

There is also a need for greater awareness among some critics and scholars as to genre fiction's history. There is a rich canon of genre fiction and nonfiction which deals with subalterned persons, yet which has been misunderstood by some academics. For example, chapter two addresses scholar Irene Mata's apparent confusion over the history of hard-boiled detective fiction, as seen by her statement, "*Desert Blood* also pushes the boundaries of genre through Gaspar de Alba's decision to place a queer Chicana at the center of the narrative. With Ivon, Gaspar de Alba challenges the literary tradition that favors the representation of the adept sleuth as male" (23). Unfortunately, Mata misses the mark by about three decades, something detailed in chapter three. This may seem trivial but it is important that scholars and critics have a complete understanding of a genre's history due to the importance of societal and historical forces driving genre and how these forces are used to analyze genre.

That is not to say that all critics have ignored the insights provided through utilizing genre. Discussing writers such as Octavia Butler and Ishmael Reed and their use of the fantastic in their neo-slave narratives, Timothy Spaulding argues:

> In their revisions of the slave narrative, these contemporary writers create an alternative and fictional historiography based on a subjective, fantastic, and anti-realistic representation of slavery…They use the fantastic and genres like science fiction, the

> gothic novel, postmodern metafiction, and the vampire tale to claim authority over the history of slavery and the historical record. (2)

Critics and scholars such as Spaulding understand the power of reading marginalized authors' works through the lens of genre. They understand how the use of genre can create a new platform for authors to tell their neo-slave narrative or borderland fiction story. A person may pick up *Forgetting the Alamo* and enjoy it as a postwestern first, but also gain an appreciation and understanding of the borderland elements presented in the work.

One of genre studies' purposes is to explore the underlying thematic and social concerns empowering specific genres and, as this thesis shows, this analysis cultivates an understanding of how the specific texts discussed here play off the genres utilized by their respective authors. It is no accident that each author selects a specific genre to further explore the themes found in their work. Whether it is Gaspar de Alba using the hard-boiled detective fiction genre to complement and enhance her exploration of corruption, hybrid identities, and the status quo in *Desert Blood*, or Butler using science fiction to enhance her neo-slave narrative in *Kindred,* each author understands the added storytelling and thematic elements available by incorporating genre fiction into their works.

This thesis' analysis of texts that explore marginalized identities and use genre in compelling ways to examine the themes in borderland literature and the neo-slave narrative, a point that is often overlooked in the analysis of these novels, suggests there is room for much more analysis. This oversight as well as the ever-expanding body of previous work being rediscovered (and new works written and published) necessitates this analysis if scholars want a better understanding of these texts. The research discussed in chapter three suggests that there is much genre fiction and non-fiction which has yet to be discovered, particularly about subalterned

persons and written by them. Chapter three discusses the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project which, as Aranda describes, “has been able to rehistoricize and respatlialize the imaginaries of what constitutes U.S. literature” (31). Recovering lost or suppressed texts is necessary to better contextualize genre’s framing power and its evolution as no analysis is thorough without a complete knowledge of the canon. One cannot claim a text as the first example of a subalterned character or other important first without a thorough understanding of the genre’s evolution.

Finally, this thesis shows genre fiction deserves recognition for its literary merits as it has far too often been marginalized with terms such as “formula fiction” and “popular fiction,” which dismiss its status as literature. A strong argument can be made that the works discussed in this thesis are not only texts that incorporate genre fiction into neo-slave narratives or borderland fiction, but genre texts that stand on their own in exploring the themes of neo-slave narratives or borderland. Genre fiction is an ever-growing area of study and the research discussed in this thesis suggests some new areas to investigate. Combining genre works and works such as borderland literature and neo-slave narratives can amplify the exploration of themes in these texts and likely offers other critical analysis as well.

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