"Catholicism, Women, and the Crossing of Borders in *Caballero: A Historical Novel.*"

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Abstract: This essay analyzes the role of women and the Catholic Church in Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero: A Historical Novel* in order to comment on their roles in the making and unmaking of ethnic, social, religious, and political borders. More specifically, this study seeks to demonstrate how both Catholic priests and Mexican women in *Caballero* are presented as key forces in the crossing and undoing of social, national, familial, and ethnic boundaries, thereby creating a more inclusive borderlands culture based on 'transcendent' values such as humanity's inclination towards the divine (religion) and towards authentic community (true love). In doing so, *Caballero* provides a more nuanced view of the relationship between the United States and Mexico in the 1850s. This work will conclude by noting that although *Caballero* serves as a prophetic 'borderlands' text through its criticism of many racial, political, and cultural practices that lead to the unjust exclusion of certain groups, it nonetheless participates in the action of 'bordering' through its erasure of African American and Native American narratives.

Key Words: Borderlands / Chicano/a Literature / Catholicism / Colonial Studies / Women's Studies

Published in 1996 but written almost 70 years before, Jovita González (1904-83) and Eve Raleigh's (1903-78) *Caballero: A Historical Novel* presents the reader with a captivating political and romantic drama set during the end of the Mexican American War.[1] The multiple perspectives this novel addresses, including that of a U.S. officer, a Mexican *ranchero*, a woman, a priest, and a peon, have led critics to view this novel as a sort of prophetic prelude to the Chicano/a borderlands literature of the 1960s and 1970s.[2] As a result, various studies have analyzed this work, focusing on topics such as the role of women, the breakdown of patriarchal society, the emancipation of peons, and more. However, as of yet little work has been done to analyze the surprising characterization of the Catholic Church in the novel, and few studies have commented on the function of women as social and political negotiators that effectively work to bridge differences where male power and rhetoric fail. Thus, this study argues that in *Caballero,* both the 'Catholic' Church and women are presented as key forces in the undoing of social, national, familial, and ethnic borders, thereby creating a 'more inclusive' borderlands culture based on 'transcendent' values such as humanity's inclination towards the divine (religion) and towards authentic community (true love). That being said, African Americans and Texas Native Americans find no home in this new border culture, highlighting that *Caballero's* weak points come precisely from the construction of borders and the novel's failure to follow its own advice.

[1] Various critics have commented on the life and extended works of *Tejana* folklorist Jovita González and her husband, as well as on the surprising lack of information on Raleigh (the pen name of Margaret Eimer) and the rationale as to her inclusion in the *Caballero* project. As a result, this study will not attempt a similar undertaking. However, by way of example, the reader can reference José E. Limón's "Introduction" to the novel. In this work, Limón presents an excellent introduction to the life and writings of González. In addition, he notes that "Eimer had a strong authorial hand in shaping the romantic plot development of *Caballero* but always with the active participation of González in the crafting process" (xxi), but he recognizes that little else is known about her than her Texas residency, her friendship with González, and her death in Missouri in 1978 (xviii).

[2] According to Javier Rodríguez, "the novel can be read as heteroglossic prophecy rather than history…it forecasts the more recent concerns of Chicanismo partially, if not essentially, grounded in a history of war and displacement. That kind of legacy refers not…to incorporation, but rather to a great deal of disconnection, destruction, and dehumanization" (119).

Before beginning an analysis of *Caballero* within the context of borderlands criticism, it will be helpful to present a brief (and by no means definitive) review of those concepts of borderlands theory that will be utilized in this analysis. According to Paul Allatson, "the term borderlands is arguably one of the most widely used critical concepts in Latino/a cultural studies, particularly in Chicano/a studies, and in border theory more generally" (39). He notes that 'borderlands' typically refers to the land surrounding the national divide between the United States and Mexico (39) but recognizes that many critics "have regarded the borderlands as an imaginative trope, a metaphor of liminality, multiplicity, fluidity, flux, and possibility" (40). While the borderlands are a product of historical, political, and geographical factors, their presence in modern critical thought is centered around the process of 'bordering' *per se.* David Newman observes that:

> It is the process of bordering, rather than the border outcomes *per se*, which should be of interest to all border scholars. The process through which borders are demarcated and managed are central to the notion of border as process and border as institution… the demarcation and management of borders are closely linked to each other… Demarcation is the process through which the criteria of inclusion/exclusion are determined, be they citizenship in a country, membership of a specific social or economic group, or religious affiliation. (148)

Thus, for Newman, the concept of 'borderlands' can be understood as the synthesis of the cultural, geographical, or social 'spaces' within which bordering occurs.

The notion of borderlands and its importance to Latino/a studies rose to critical prominence especially through the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa. As Mary Pat Brady notes:

> The U.S.-Mexico border is… a system with multiple and slippery meanings and symbologies… whose crossing and ongoing production involve contradictory and ambivalent historical narratives, family memories, desires, and national(ist) fantasies… to meditate on ''borders'' is no simple, naïve, or clichéd task. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera* further underscores this point. (83)[3]

[3] José David Saldivar affirms that "Gloria Anzaldúa argues convincingly… that an autonomous, internally coherent patriarchal universe no longer seems tenable in the postcolonial world of the Border" (82), and Nicole M. Guidotti-

Anzaldúa's representation of the space that simultaneously joins and divides Mexico and the United States is predicated on the ideas of violent 'othering' as a border process and the differences that result from this 'othering.' She declares:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants… Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there, and death is no stranger. (25-26)

For Anzaldúa, therefore, the borderlands are characterized by two processes: bordering and unbordering (or crossing borders). Whereas bordering consists in the process of 'othering,' the undoing, or bridging, of borders occurs in spaces where "people of different races occupy the same territory… where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, "Preface" no pagination). The constant chafing of these two processes has produced the current state of affairs in the southern United States and northern Mexico, a state Anzaldúa defines as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture" (25). This third space is defined by Mary Louise Pratt as a "contact zone," a site "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). However, it is also an embodiment of Aztlán, an Edenic space defined by Allatson as "one of the most powerful and resilient symbols of Chicano/a identification and mobilization… a unitary myth… for their mythic homeland" (24-

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Hernández recognizes Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a hallmark in the field of Latino/a, Chicano/a, and Border theories ("Borderlands" 23).

25). In this regard, the borderland shared by the United States and Mexico can be seen as both a promised land and a fallen world, a place of bondage and the site of future unity.

As a result, for many critics, borderlands are defined not just by the violence of othering or the negotiation of obstacles, but also by the reality of 'mixing,' or *mestizaje,* and the unity that results from this interaction.[4] Alicia Arrizón defines *mestizaje* as "the product of mixing two distinct cultures… it is an unstable signifier that has different meanings…. Referring to the biological and cultural mixing of European and Indigenous peoples in the Americas, mestizaje can be understood as the effect caused by the impact of colonization" (133),[5] and Rafael Pérez-Torres notes that mestizaje 'has become a dominant metaphor for understanding the racial, cultural, social, and linguistic mixing that characterizes life in the borderlands" (1). Anzaldúa specifically champions a *nueva mestiza* and a "new mestizaje consciousness," which, according to Arrizón, can be defined as "a transcultural form of consciousness, constantly traveling back and forth between race, gender, sexuality, language, and nations" (135). In other words, *mestizaje* in the field of borderlands criticism has come to signify the hybrid nature of the borderlands culture, a culture identified as much by the borders that are crossed as those that are erected.

However, not every person, history, or culture is necessarily included in the notion of *mestizaje* in either its old or new expressions. Anzaldúa chooses to focus on *la nueva mestiza*

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[4] María Cotera supports this view of the borderlands, noting that the borderlands space is one of physical, social, and literary intersections ("Feminisms" 66), and Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández notes that the coexistence of intimacy and conflict on various levels is an indicative mark of many borderlands ("Borderlands" 23).

[5] Guidotti-Hernandez adds that "an offshoot of borderlands theory is a discussion of mestizaje, the racial mixing of European, black, and Indigenous peoples." ("Borderlands" 22). Likewise, Rafael Pérez-Torres states: "Mestizaje has become a powerful means of naming the dynamic interconnections between cultures, a relational sense of self-identity, the legacies of colonial encounters, racial inequality, national dislocation, linguistic mixture and innovation, asymmetries surrounding gender and sexuality, and a host of other issues relevant to the study of Latino/a literary texts. It is a powerful yet not a sole term that can name the complex interrelationships between Latino/a bodies, histories, and cultures" (6).

precisely because of the exclusion of female narratives from traditional Latino/a literature. For Anzaldúa and a great many other critics, the *Latina* of the borderlands has been historically, socially, and politically excluded from the place in which she resides.[6] Thus, *la nueva mestiza* can be understood as one who works against the process of bordering through her hybrid identity. Nonetheless, even Anzaldúa's borderlands are not without their borders, and her concept of *mestizaje* is in no way universally inclusive. Various critics have called attention to the voices inhabiting the southwestern United States that remain silent in her narrative. For example, Blackwell notes that while the Chicano/a movement's goal of reinhabiting 'Aztlan' (which corresponds to the area of Mexico lost to the United States due to the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo) was primarily one of decolonialization, their vision "overlays many other Indigenous nations… the Chicano movement and Chicana feminists have uncritically adopted Aztec imaginaries to reclaim their Indigenous roots" (102, 104). Likewise, Tatiana Flores has highlighted the complicated heritage of the notions of *mestizaje* and *latinidad,* arguing that Anzaldúa presents an oversimplification of both concepts.[7] In addition, Guidotti-Hernández has

[6] For example, Anzaldúa states: "*la mujer indocumentada*, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe home-ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain" (34-35). Additionally, María Eugenia Cotera declares that "over the 1970s and 1980s Latinas developed their particular understanding of intersectionality in response to their social condition as members of a broader Latina/o community that had experienced five hundred years of colonialism, U.S. imperialism, state violence, and labor exploitation…this collective experience of oppression had particular (compounding) effects on women and sexual minorities" ("Feminisms" 65).

[7] Flores follows in the footsteps of Juliet Hooker, recognizing that "the oversimplification or celebration of mestizaje by Latinx intellectuals, including Gracia and Gloria Anzaldúa" overlooks the fact that "'ideologies of mestizaje ...were utilized by conservative elites to simultaneously defend the region's standing in light of scientific racism, legitimize their rule over racially diverse populations, and obscure the reality of racism in their countries' Among Latinx scholars, Josefina Saldaña Portillo has voiced a forceful critique of how mestizaje as a Mexican state policy and in Chicanx cultural production contributes to the silencing of present-day Indigenous peoples. In the essay 'Who's the Indian in Aztlán?,' she urged Chicanxs to 'recognize that when we appropriate the tropes of mestizaje and indigenismo, we are necessarily operating within the logic of representation to which these tropes belong," chiding Anzaldúa for "deploy[ing mestizaje] to produce a biological tie with pre-Aztec Indians rather than a political tie with contemporary U.S. Native Americans or Mexican Indians'" (70).

called attention to the absence of Afro-Latinos and Afro-Latinas in Anzaldúa's work,[8] and both Theresa Delgadillo and Anne M. Martínez have advocated for a renewed emphasis on the importance of religion to the Chicano/a movement.[9] María Cotera summarizes the diverse nature of the borderlands and its relationship to Latino/a studies, stating: "examining a field as broad as Latino/a folklore requires not only an ability to see connection… but also careful attention to the particularities of indigenous, Creole, Afrolatino, and Mestizo realities" ("Latino/a Literature" 1).[10] In other words, a true appreciation of any specific borderland and the cultures that reside there requires an awareness not only of its recognized inhabitants, but also of those who have been historically, politically, o socially excluded from the space in question, but who nonetheless call it their home.

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[8] According to Guidotti-Hernández, "Further, Afro-mestizos and blacks in general form another silent part of racist thought and politics of exclusion in Chicana/o, Mexicana/o, and U.S. national imaginaries. Even though Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* makes a concerted effort to discuss blackness as part of the mestizaje paradigm, we will see these multiple imaginaries gain force by obviating people of African descent" (*Unspeakable Violence* 19).

[9] Theresa Delgadillo notes that although the term "spiritual mestizaje" appears only once in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera,* it is nonetheless "synonymous with transformative genesis in Anzaldúa" and "at the center of Anzaldúa's autobiographical, historical, theoretical, and poetic text about personal and social transformation at the U.S.- Mexico border" (1). Delgadillo defines this 'spiritual mestizaje' as "the transformative renewal of one's relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self- reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred" (1), and notes that "a new mestiza consciousness cannot be achieved without it" (1). Nonetheless, while spiritualty does appear in the writings of Anzaldúa, Anne M. Martínez notes that "there is longstanding resistance in Latina/o and Chicana/o studies, in particular, to writing about religion" (192), by which she means Christianity and organized religion in particular. She adds that "some of this resistance derives from the origins of Chicana/o and Boricua studies, which were deeply imbued with Marxist trends and influences, but it also has to do with the historical stigmatization of Indigenous and African traditions in the Americas. Further, the association between Christianity and colonialism leads some scholars to regard Catholicism as a tool for the oppression of Latina/o communities by colonial forces. Such perspectives minimize the contemporary centrality of religion to Latina/o populations, as well as the ways Latinas/os have used religion to resist oppression in a variety of settings" (192). Thus, spirituality and religion can be seen as both a central element of the Chicano/a identity and nonetheless in need of further examination.

[10] A reluctance to include certain groups within the borderlands narrative stems, in part, from the notion of bordering as a process; that is, it questions the very idea of who can be defined as an 'original inhabitant' of a certain land. This debate over the invading settler's right to expropriate the lands of the colonizer who oppressed the indigenous population in the first place has been termed 'settler nativism,' and it was especially prevalent along the Texas-Mexico border in the late 1800s. As Franks notes, "According to this logic of settler nativism, the relationship between indigenous and settler populations represents an ambivalent and potentially shameful past of dispossession through colonization. By contrast, the relationship between colonizer descendants and immigrants represents an uncertain and potentially fearful future of settler displacement… in response…self-styled patriot groups emerge to "defend" their state or nation and its colonial ideals" (89).

A profound example of the often-simultaneous reality of beauty and messiness within the borderlands, a reality that arises when the 'particularities' of various social and ethnic groups collide, can be found in Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero: A Historical Romance*. Considered to be a watershed of Mexican American literature and a forerunner to the Chicano/a and Latino/a movements, *Caballero* recounts the story of the family of Don Santiago Mendoza y Soría and their encounter with the new way of life brought by the United States military during their occupation of Southern Texas and Mexico in the 1840s and 50s.[11] In his "Introduction" to the novel, José E. Limón introduces one of González's own inspirations for composing *Caballero:* a desire to present the tale of Texas and the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo from the side of the Mexican *hacienda* owner. Quoting González, he states:

> It is the only book of its kind, the Mexican side of the war of 1848 has never been given. We are not partial. We picture the Mexican hidalgos with their faults as well as their virtues, with their racial and religious pride, their love of tradition and of the land which they inherited from their ancestors. We also picture the American officers, their kindness to the conquered race, but we also picture the vandals who followed on the trail of the army. . . It is a book that is needed. (xvii)

In this sense, *Caballero* is a text centered in the borderlands that also attempts to undo the 'bordering' created by other, less multifaceted works depicting the same region and time period. While the critical studies that analyze *Caballero* are not especially extensive in number, several valuable contributions to its status as a foundational borderlands and Chicano/a text do exist. To

[11] According to Lowe, "José E. Limón and María Cotera's discovery and 1996 publication of the lost novel *Caballero*, by Jovita González (1904-83) and Eve Raleigh (1903-78), marked a watershed in Mexican American, Texas, and, as I argue here, Southern literature. This richly detailed and powerful narrative resurrects and revises the complicated history of the settlement of Texas, the US Mexican War, and, most importantly, the accommodations the Mexican people in the newly annexed Texas lands had to make as the United States reorganized their complex society. Limón, Cotera, Vincent Pérez, and several other major scholars of Mexican American, feminist, and queer studies have given us engrossing readings of this fascinating tale, and it has subsequently been established as a classic of Mexican American and multi-ethnic literature. Feminist scholars have rightly seen the book as a critique of patriarchy and as a surprisingly adamant reconstruction of the role of women in the conquered territory. We must also consider *Caballero* a key text for the transnational South" (235).

give some brief -and by no means exhaustive- examples to foreground this current study, Kaup recognizes *Caballero's* attack on "the inherited right of the patron to absolute command over the immediate and extended family of relatives, servants, and peons" and its utilization of the tragic Don Santiago and his son, Alvaro, to deconstruct "the male warrior as the hero of 'his' Mexican people… prefiguring contemporary Chicana feminism" (569). Meanwhile, Pérez notes that the novel contradicts "ethnic nationalism through its depiction of unions between Mexicans and Anglo-Americans," thereby speaking "to the heterogeneity of Mexican-American culture and history and the multiplicity of current and past identities as shaped by this myriad experience" (472). In addition, Salazar-Amaro has analyzed the relationship between *Caballero's* borderlands and Anzaldúa's work.[12] Finally, Franks has analyzed the question of settler nativism in *Caballero,* and in an Epilogue to the novel, Cotera examines the presentation of the Mexican woman in *Caballero* to argue that the work "represents an attempt, far before its time, to deconstruct traditional male centered images of resistance and bring in multiplicity of voices to the Chicano experience" (346).[13] In his "Introduction," Limón sums up the importance of *Caballero* to the critical fields of borderlands theory, Chicano/a studies, and beyond:

> As the reader will soon discover, *Caballero's* story does not confine itself to these male landowners, and therein we find the novel's special strengths. For soon after we read of the American military occupation of South Texas, countervailing terms of romantic and endearment began to flow across this new intense ethnic border as *Caballero's* leading young protagonists fall in love. These are romances that in rich, detailed fashion set in motion a complicated articulation of race, class, gender, and sexual contradictions. (xv)

[12] According to Salazar-Amaro "consequently, the duality of this world - where Mexicans, Texans, and Americans can be one and the same - fuels the creation of what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as a "third space" where worlds chaotically collide and connect…The historical novel *Caballero*… presents realistic, albeit fictional, interpretations of this bilateral matriarchy & patriarchy which continues to influence women and men generation after generation in the South Texas region. Through this examination of South Texas literature, we can observe and analyze the purpose of bilateral matriarchy as it exists along the borderlands between Texas and Mexico" (83). This 'third space' is obviously reminiscent of Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zone.'

[13] Franks proposes "settler nativism as a means of better understanding the politics of belonging and nationhood in *Caballero*…. Settler nativist belonging is characterized by an anxiety over being dispossessed, from both within and without. As a colonizer descendant, Santiago interprets power derived from property ownership and generations of lived experience within a patriarchal system as justifiable claims to his entitled sense of belonging." (88).

In short, Limón's observation clearly posits *Caballero* as a text about the making and unmaking of sexual, ethnic, national, political, and literary borders. In doing so, it also establishes a dialogue between the transcultural romances narrated by González and Raleigh and the connection between love and patriotism explored in Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions.* According to Sommer, "romantic novels go hand in hand with patriotic history in Latin America. The books fueled a desire for domestic happiness that runs over into dreams of national prosperity; and nation-building projects invested private passions with public purpose" (7).[14] For Sommer, in many Latin American novels, the protagonists "passionately desire… one another across traditional lines and desire… the new state that would join them" (31-32). In these instances, marriage allows these characters to negotiate their borderlands by bridging various national, racial, or cultural divides, thereby contributing to and legitimizing (or naturalizing) the foundation of a new state or society. The multiple romances in *Cabellero* that occur between the men of the United States military and the daughters of Mexican *hacienda* owners clearly establish the relationship between nuptials and nation-building within the context of the borderland as a central theme of the text. Although the status of *Caballero* as a landmark borderlands text has been established, the novel's multifaceted nature inevitably implies that various key elements have been severely understudied. For example, the novel's startling presentation of the Catholic Church has received no commentary at all, and while the figure of

[14] Sommer goes on to note that "the national novels of Latin America – the ones that governments institutionalized I the schools and that are by now indistinguishable from patriotic discourse- are all love stories" (30), and she adds that "A variety of novel national ideas… ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in marriages… provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at midcentury. Romantic passion… gave a rhetoric for the hegemonic projects in … [the] sense of conquering the antagonist through mutual interest, or 'love,' rather than through coercion" (6). Likewise, in an article titled "Mexicans, Foundational Fictions, and the United States: *Caballero,* a Late Border Romance," Limón recognizes the relationship between *Caballero* and Sommer's work, noting that the novel's general plot "became viable as a foundational fiction for resolving Anglo-Mexican conflict" (347).

the Mexican-American woman in *Caballero* has been discussed at length, her role as a catalyst for social change (specifically in contrast to the Mexican caballero) and her centrality in the unmaking of borders and in the creation of a more inclusive borderland culture has received little critical attention. This article begins its study in these places.

Caballero's presentation of the Catholic Church is, by all accounts, shocking, precisely because it is one that paints the Church in a positive light as especially 'catholic,' or universal, and therefore fundamental to the creation of a borderlands culture. Martínez notes that "colonialism and Catholicism are inseparable" (193), and she adds that "the association between Christianity and colonialism leads some scholars to regard Catholicism as a tool for the oppression of Latina/o communities by colonial forces" (192). The role of the Catholic Church and the complicity of some of its members in the atrocities committed by certain colonists is undeniable. In addition, the close ties maintained between the Mexican and Spanish power structures (and upper classes) and the Church is widely recognized as well. However, as this essay hopes to show, *Caballero's* primary representation of Catholicism is generally positive, which begs the question: *why?* In reality, through the figures Padre Pierre and Don Santiago, the novel essentially presents *two* versions of Catholicism: a more 'accepting' version that seeks to distance itself from both Mexican nationalism and U.S. Manifest Destiny, and a second version tied to Spanish and Mexican patriarchal colonialism and oppression. This multifaceted image of the Church is due in part to the unique relationship between Catholicism and colonialism in the United States and Mexico during the early 1900s. Martinez recognizes that despite "the historical legacy of Catholic cruelty… in U.S. historical narratives" (193),[15] at the time of *Caballero's*

[15] As Martinez notes, "Catholicism, superstitious and secretive, was the foil to the religious ethos of the United States, which promoted individualism and progress, ordained by God through Protestantism. Latina/o Catholic practice was often cast as idolatrous by Euro- American priests within the U.S. Catholic Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries…William Hickling Prescott (1837, 1853) and his nineteenth- century

composition, "U.S. Catholic fervor was revived during the Cristero Rebellion (1926– 1929), a Catholic uprising against an anticlerical government bent on limiting the role of the Catholic Church in Mexican society" (194). In other words, *Caballero* was composed during a time when a traditionally anti-Catholic society in the United States was beginning to sympathize with an ever-spreading Catholic presence within its borders; however, this Catholic sympathy was at the same time divorced from any sort of official Mexican nationalism.

Caballero's first version of Catholicism, as represented by Padre Pierre, mirrors the historical context in which the text was composed, presenting a Church that is able to transcend border conflicts, calling for peace and unification. In this regard, it is especially important that Padre Pierre is a French priest, and not a Spanish, Mexican, or American one, a reality not unnoticed by Don Santiago, who declares: "Padre Pierre is French and has not the proper distrust of the *Americanos.* These French priests are too liberal. They are too much the missionaries. I understand he is very firm that they [the U.S. soldiers] be allowed in church, and he has even heard one's confession" (González and Raleigh 43).[16] Although French priests in the Texas-Mexico area were not unheard of, they were not numerous; thus, Padre Pierre's nationality as tied neither to the United States nor to Mexico is noteworthy. The first notable appearance of the priest takes place in the rectory of the Church in Matamoros, where Captain Delvin, a Catholic

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contemporaries advocated the 'Black Legend,'… which cast the Spanish as exceptionally cruel and intolerant in their interactions with Indigenous peoples in the New World. Prescott's paradigm was reinforced by the Spanish-American War in 1898, after which the United States gained the last of Spain's colonial territories... This, of course, erased early American interactions of the British, Dutch, and French with Indigenous populations, which more often led to elimination or forced migration than integration" (193).

[16] While there is no space to devote to such a topic, it is worth noting that the utilization of French priests within literature as a way of emphasizing the transcendence of the Catholic Church above any Mexican, Spanish, or American nationality is not limited to *Caballero.* The most noteworthy example of this phenomena is Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* which was written in 1927 (around the same time as *Caballero*) and likewise set in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands during the end of the Mexican American War. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* recounts the story of Fr. Latour, a French priest who becomes the first bishop of the recently acquired New Mexico territory, and his non-Spanish, non-Mexican, non-U.S. identity is likewise crucial to his characterization as a Catholic clergyman.

soldier in the U.S. Army, introduces Lt. Robert Warrener, the eventual love of Susanita, to both the Padre and the reader for the first time. Padre Pierre immediately makes his stance as an intermediary between the Mexican residents and the occupying U.S. soldiers known, declaring: "the Rangers, last summer, and the soldiers of General Taylor – a fine man and we were friends- did nothing to make the people of Matamoros love them" (45). Although Padre Pierre recognizes noble qualities in some of the U.S. leadership, he automatically takes issue with the treatment of the Mexican townspeople by the Texas Rangers and U.S. soldiers. He advises Captain Delvin to be prudent in his dealings with the newly arrived *rancheros* and declares outright: "tell your major that I ask for peace" (45). However, aware of the near impossibility of what he asks, the priest immediately exclaims: "I babble like a fool. Of what use is it to ask for peace?" (45). In other words, although Padre Pierre desires the peaceful coexistence of the U.S. military and the Mexican *ranchero,* he recognizes that past and present injustices and tensions stand in the way. The conversation between the two U.S. officers and the French clergyman continues in a "restrained" (45) manner until another injustice is brought up. Warrener describes plantation life and slavery in Virginia, the place of his birth:

> Black slaves. Padre Pierre did not like this and voiced his sentiments. 'A man should be a slave only if he wishes it. Slavery as such does not exist here, but we have peonage which is almost as bad. If your nation is so progressive, why does it not free its slaves? Only freedom of the individual is progress.' Water did not rise above its level, Delvin argued. There would be chaos if the blacks were freed unless they were sent back from where they came from. Freedom- who then was free? (45-46)

Padre Pierre's denunciation of the enslavement of both Black people and peons and his emphasis on the freedom of the individual clearly sets himself in contrast with *both* the invading U.S. army and the Mexican *rancheros* led by Don Santiago. In addition, it characterizes him as a defender of liberty, peace, and true progress, a progress other than that trumpeted by 'Manifest Destiny.'

Padre Pierre continues in his role as promoter of peace and 'civility' during his second major appearance in the novel, in which he infiltrates and interrupts a meeting between prominent Mexican *rancheros* about how to deal with the occupying U.S. army. He chastises Don Santiago's son Alvaro for crying for bloodshed (52) and urges once again for peace:

> Vengeance is mine, said the Lord… Do you set yourself above God? Peace, my children, I beg of you, have peace. True, many injustices have visited you, war roils around us. I know you are thinking that I am French and so cannot feel as you do, but I can indeed. It is only that I have learned that one does not reason with emotions and that is what I am trying to impress upon you. (53)

He exhorts the *rancheros* to recognize the qualities in the *americanos* that are admirable, but he also emphasizes the merit of Mexican culture, declaring: "they are strong, powerful, fearless, and seem to have unlimited wealth, but most of them lack what we have: dignity self-respect, pride, nobility, traditions, and old and sound religion" (54). Padre Pierre reflects on "his first resentment and dislike of the invaders who had, all too often, treated the Mexican shamefully" (55), but he nonetheless pleads with the *rancheros*:

> Seek the *Americano* officials who have influence and invite them to your homes and entertainments. Show them that we have much to give them in culture, that we are not the ignorant people they take us to be… it has seemed to me that what is done now will have a great influence upon the future… a co-operation with a government which is ours no matter how much we may resent its being thrust upon us. (54-55)

Padre Pierre's assessment of the situation is realistic, not optimistic. He recognizes the animosity that exists between the Mexicans and their northern neighbors and the atrocities that have occurred. While he urges the Mexican landowners to trust in the justice of United States law, he admits that that same law will do nothing to right the injustices committed by its own soldiers in the past (56-57). MacMahon notes that "the priest's appeal to the land-owning Spanish-Mexicans to deploy 'Spanish' colonial domesticity suggests the powerful role of prevailing nineteenth-century racial discourses of Mexicans within a white/nonwhite racialized binary and a

civilized/savage dichotomy. Most Anglos of this period viewed all Mexicans as foreign, alien, 'nonwhite'" (232). Thus, the vision Padre Pierre paints of cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. is not a utopian ideal, but rather what the priest sees as the best of many uncomfortable options going forward. Despite his urging, however, the narrator observes that "there was no listening, and they cast, each one, his stormy protest into the confusion of sound" (González and Raleigh 57). In an ironic contradiction, Don Santiago thanks Padre Pierre for his advice, but explains that "not being one of us, you cannot quite understand how sacred our traditions are" (57), echoing in his reference to 'tradition' the very words of the priest himself.

Despite his lack of success in the two appearances discussed above, Padre Pierre is instrumental in helping to undo some of the borders that surround two of Don Santiago's children: Luis Gonzaga and Susanita. In regard to the former, who desires to be an artist, Padre Pierre admits that "I have a deep affection for Luis, and it is I who have procured supplies for him and persuaded his father to let them use them" (105). Don Santiago, meanwhile, regards his younger son as effeminate and weak: "painting pictures like a woman, and he a Mendoza y Soría! An artist- insult to a father's manhood!" (6).[17] Going against the wishes of Don Santiago, Padre Pierre introduces Luis to Delvin, who is also an artist, and who invites Luis to accompany him back to Baltimore to study painting (105-6). When, Luis, torn between the feelings of love for art and duty towards his family, cannot find it in himself to leave, Padre Pierre declares: "sometimes one is a traitor only to himself, Luis Gonzaga…. As for duty, it is a word too often used to cloak selfishness and coercion. God gave you this great gift- watch that you do not throw it away" (156). Although it takes him several more chapters, Luis eventually breaks free of his

[17] According to Salazar-Amaro, "Luis Gonzaga isn't inherently opposed to life as a caballero, but his true passions lie in artistic endeavors like drawing or painting. These activities are steeped in femininity in the eyes of the male portion of society, and as such, Luis Gonzaga is pilloried as weak and unworthy to be the head of household" (87).

father's control and does leave for Maryland with Delvin, although his father disowns him as a result (198). Ultimately, due in part to the help of Padre Pierre, he and Delvin make their way to Europe, where he embarks on a successful career as a painter (332).[18]

Likewise, the priest approves of the 'forbidden' love and eventual marriage between Warrener and Susanita, which he believes to be ordained by God and beneficial not only to the couple but to their wider social and ethnic circles as well. In other words, he sees their love as one which is divinely inspired. The narrator states that:

> He favored this marriage… the house of Mendoza y Soría had reached its ultimate in the present generation and must inevitably go downward unless new and vigorous blood were united with it… God had sent this fine young man here and put Susanita in his path and given them a great love because it filled a plan of betterment. (289)[19]

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[18] Various critics have characterized the relationship between Delvin and Luis Gonzaga as homoerotic. For example, Limón notes in his article "Mexicans, Foundational Fictions" that "the sensitive Luis develops a homoerotic relationship with Captain Devlin, a fellow artist serving in the occupation army. Each relationship means a rejection of Don Santiago's patriarchal right to dictate and arrange his children's liaisons" (345). While the undermining of Don Santiago's control over his children is obvious, there is little textual evidence that the relationship between Delvin and Luis is homoerotic. In fact, the narrator mentions that Delvin was formerly married and that his wife died, which is why he joined the military (106). In addition, the involvement and encouragement of Padre Pierre in the creation of the friendship between Delvin and Luis would seem much more out of place if its result were to be a homoerotic union. Perhaps a better way of understanding the situation of Luis that still undermines his father's authority and that also finds support in the text would be to see his vocation as an artist as a sort of ordination or entrance into the religious life. In this interpretation, Luis, who shares the divine spark of artistry with Delvin (a fellow Catholic), is aided by Padre Pierre in making the journey to Maryland (a traditionally Catholic state, as the novel notes) and then to Spain to pursue his vocation of beauty.

[19] It is worth mentioning that some of the little scholarship that has analyzed Padre Pierre's place in *Caballero* has fixated on this passage and several related ones. According to Ramirez, "using Padre Pierre as a mouthpiece, González and Raleigh rewrite the eugenics lesson of the day and represent social and political barriers between Anglos and Mexicans as a path towards… genetic degeneration... The project of maintaining one's racial purity is no longer a scientific and ethical enterprise, but an anti-modern, atavistic practice" (34) However, Ramirez then goes on to state that "Padre Pierre literally naturalizes the intercultural union between Susanita and Robert by arguing that it is pre-ordained by nature in order to preserve the fine whiteness of the Mendoza family… Padre Pierre advocates abandoning blind loyalty to tradition and the adoption of a racial ethics in favor of making a choice based on love—and not politics" (35). For Ramirez, Padre Pierre's desire for the marriage of Susanita and Robert seems grounded in maintaining the best qualities of both families, including whiteness. However, in Ramirez's own words, such a project of maintaining racial purity impedes progress according to Padre Pierre's own view. While it may seem odd to today's reader that a priest speaks of bloodlines in the first place, it is worth noting that he never mentions the whiteness of neither Susanita nor Warrener. Rather, when he speaks of the qualities possessed by the Mendoza y Soría family, they are decidedly not racial and often, in fact, present a different vision of perfection than that held by Don Santiago. For example, he states that "Luis Gonzaga… typifies the finest the blood has produced" (González and Raleigh 158), and later reflects that "there would be no beauties, artists, women with the spiritual strength of Angela, men with leadership and intelligence… if they married in their correspondingly weakened group of acquaintances" (289). While this statement may strike the reader as strange and more than a little condescending towards the families with which the Mendoza y Soría family associated, it is worth pointing out that often, high-

The Padre's mention of blood and betterment once again critiques the notions of racial purity harbored both by the semi-royal *rancheros* and by the invading Americans. For Padre Pierre, such notions are ultimately self-destructive and therefore contrary God's plan. Thus, when Susanita leaves her home to go to the Lieutenant, the Padre gladly marries them:

> Padre Pierre was standing at the church, greeted them warmly, and to Susanita's great delight opened the church door, where candle flames waved a welcome from the gloom of the altar. She clapped her hands. "Oh, *padre,* you will marry me in the Church, really?" "Why not? It is your church, and that is where marriages should be performed" (290)

The priest's decision to allow Susanita to be married in the Church is extremely significant. First, it symbolizes the Church's official approval of her marriage and the union between her and Robert Warrener. Second, by characterizing the church as hers, Padre Pierre implies that the Church is *not* that of Don Santiago. This separation between Mexican high society and Catholicism is notable, as it distances the Church from traditional Mexican patriarchy, thereby undermining any moral high ground or divine mandate a ranchero such as Don Santiago might claim to have when preaching violence against the *americanos*. In sum, Padre Pierre presents a startlingly positive and 'universal' picture of the Catholic Church, in which borders are undone and differences transcended for the sake of greater goods such as love and justice. In the priest's own words: "God's love is universal, not limited to us… we only see the underside of His weaving, my friends, not the upper side that is before His eyes" (54).

Although Padre Pierre represents a Church that is truly 'catholic' and that helps unite cultures and races, a novel about the Texas-Mexico border in the 1800s that only presented this sort of church would be grossly inaccurate. As was already noted, certain factions of Catholicism were very complicit with- and even involved in- Spain's colonization of the Americas and the

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class Mexican families only intermarried between each other to maintain their *pureza de sangre.* Thus, it is equally possible that Padre Pierre is criticizing this practice instead of espousing a eugenic theory to preserve whiteness.

subsequent promotion of Spanish-Mexican patriarchal society. *Caballero* recognizes this sobering reality through its presentation of a second version of the Catholic Church, a version embodied in Don Santiago himself.[20] Whereas Padre Pierre seeks to solve border disputes, Don Santiago's religion is tied to the land he sees as his own. According to Franks:

> Santiago's religion is rooted in his ancestral home, which, for him, is literally a house of God. During the hymn of the sacrament, "Don Santiago, leading and commanding" his family and peons yet again, reportedly feels "a kinship with God" that nearly transcends into the physical presence of two of the most important Catholic figures, Christ and the Virgin Mary... Moreover, religious obedience is structurally ingrained in the hacienda… religious practice is another means by which Santiago enforces his patriarchal rule. (94)

Don Santiago is characterized throughout the novel as a religious man, but his religion, though also a form of Catholicism, is decidedly un-catholic. Rather, as Franks notes, it is a worldview that grants Don Santiago the power of bordering: of determining what his children and wife can and cannot do and who will and will not be allowed into his *hacienda.* He fails to remember that "Christ who rode in on a procession of palms came to earth to preach the gospel of love" (González and Raleigh 21). The true deity in Don Santiago's life is power:

> Power was wine in his veins. Power was a figure that touched him, pointed, and whispered. Those dots on the plain, cattle, sheep horses, were his to kill or let live. The *peons,* down there, were his to discipline at any time… to punish by death if he so chose. His wife, his sister, sons, and daughters bowed to his wishes… 'Yours,' said Power pointing, 'All yours!'. (33)

In other words, Don Santiago desires nothing more than the power of creating borders: borders between life and death, between man and woman, between family and outsider, and he sees religion as a justification of his right to do so. According to Lowe, in Don Santiago the reader finds "a striking parallel between Mexican peonage and Southern slavery in that

[20] In addition, the only other priest who is present in the novel is characterized as "a silent, somewhat sour Spaniard who viewed marriages [between Red and Angela], and changes, like this, with foreboding" (315), and as one who views "the influence of the *gringos*… as a scourge the Lord sent to His people" (326). This priest can also be viewed as representative of the second 'vision' of Catholicism as *Caballero* and as directly in contrast with the Padre Pierre.

hacienda/plantation patriarchs assume godlike control over the bodies and lives of their servants, a blasphemous violation of the first commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'" (248-49). In other words, Don Santiago at least implicitly sees religion, and therefore God, to be at the service of his patriarchal notions and traditions. However, the moments that most clearly define Don Santiago's religion as one of Power and bordering are found near the end of the novel. In chapter thirty-three, Don Santiago attempts to reroute the Rio Bravo (also known as the Rio Grande) so that his own lands will be extended further south. His actions are motivated by both defense and defiance against the threat of land-grabbing *americanos,* but ironically, in moving the Rio Grande further south, he is only increasing the amount of land that falls under the official control of the United States. In this case, Tomás the peon voices the obvious futility of Don Santiago's actions: "it is against the law of God to change what he has made… and besides, it cannot be done" (González and Raleigh 305). However, it is the last passage of the novel, in which Warrener discovers the recently deceased Don Santiago, that illustrates Don Santiago's materialist religion in the clearest terms. When Warrener finds his body, he notices the old man is smiling and wonders: "did he feel arms about him, and touch the sweetness of love again?" (336). His answer comes when he opens Don Santiago's clenched hand and finds "a scoop of earth, dry and brown" (337). In sum, while Padre Pierre seeks to cross borders and foster unity, Don Santiago´s spirituality is tied to power, bordering, and ownership.

While Don Santiago fails in his attempts to maintain his power and Padre Pierre finds only limited success in his efforts to create peace and unity, the most effective social actors presented in *Caballero* are its women, specifically the daughters of Don Santiago: Susanita and Angela (María de los Ángeles). Ultimately, the marriages they enter into allow for cultural reconciliation and their own partial emancipation, whereas the inaction of their Mexican fathers

and brothers does neither. In fact, the 'caballeros' resort only to ineffectual talking and fighting to try to remedy their current situation, whereas Susanita and Angela, among other women, reveal themselves to be astute characters who ultimately bring about a partial undoing of some (but not all) of their social and ethnic restrictions. The role of women in *Caballero* has received much more attention than that of the Church.[21] Rather than present a summary of such scholarship, this article seeks to expand on a series of comments made by the novel's editors, Limón and Cotera. Firstly, Limón echoes the writings of Doris Sommer by noting that the Susanita-Warrener and Angela-Red marriages represent "a national allegory in which social groups are being married…. Anglos and Mexicans as warring nationalities are now envisioned as marrying socially" ("Mexicans, Foundational Fictions" 108). In other words, the marriages in *Caballero* represent the crossing of borders and the union of national identities under a higher banner, be it love, freedom, unification, or a desire for social justice. Meanwhile, Cotera questions the traditional folkloric notion of the Mexican caballero as a hero, stating:

> Like the figure of Gregorio Cortez in Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand,* Alvaro 'becomes the typical guerrilla, the border raider fighting and fleeing, and using the warrior's tricks to throw the enemy off.' The attributes above would, had he been the central, unproblematic hero of *Caballero* (as the title implies), transform the novel into 'a folk hero's tale of almost mythic proportions.' However, *Caballero* goes beyond retelling the traditional myth of the *corrido* hero by pointing out that 'a man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand,' is fighting for his right and the rights of other men to maintain a traditional patriarchal order. By exposing this inconsistency, *Caballero* establishes Susanita as the true hero, a brave woman who risks her life and her honor to save the imprisoned *corrido* hero and suffers severe consequences as a result of her actions…. Her punishment reveals the contradictions inherent in a patriarchal code of honor. (345-46)

This inversion of gender roles in political and social negotiations is one of *Caballeros'* most defining aspects as a borderlands text, and its significance bears further examination, starting with a brief return to the aforementioned secret meeting of the Mexican *rancheros* that Padre

[21] The reader can reference, for example, Cotera's work in "Latino/A Literature and the Uses of Folklore," as well as the already cited work of Stephanie Salazar-Amaro.

Pierre interrupts. The narrator notes that only men were present at the meeting, and only the *rancheros* and their sons; that is, men of high social standing. It is these men, therefore, who task themselves with determining what response their community shall give to the problem of the occupying U.S. forces.[22] However, it is worth noting that no resolution is drawn from this meeting. In fact, Padre Pierre characterizes it as "a meeting to whip up your emotions" (52), a description similar to that which is given to conversation between Susanita and her friends, a conversation of "laughter and chatter" (42) that Don Santiago considers to be so foolish that he goes "to join his friends, gathering for gossip in the plaza" (38-39). However, the chatter of the girls is only a front put up when their chaperones are within earshot to disguise their real topic of discussion: their willingness to try to accept, and even love, an *americano* man (40-42). The inversion of roles is clear here; while Susanita and her friends engage in profound discussion about the possibility of friendship with a foreign people, Don Santiago and the other males gossip idly.

Susanita, as Cotera suggests, is indeed the heroine of *Caballero,* and her actions are therefore central to the novel's plot and conclusion. Although she is a central character throughout the work, Susanita helps undo *Caballero's* many borders in three distinct manners: through her love with Warrener, an American; through her rescuing of Alvaro, her older brother, from prison; and through her decision to leave her family and marry Warrener. Regarding the first, Susanita's understanding of love is practically identical to Padre Pierre's. At one point early in the novel, she reflects: "as if God cared if one were Mexican or something else; why it was the same as saying he would care if one's hair were yellow or black. To Susanita there were no

[22] According to Lowe, "Male/patriarchal dominance of this type is far more pronounced in the novel. Don Santiago repeatedly silences and overrules his daughters; his wife; his effeminate son, Luis; and his fiery sister. As the Mexican community ponders how to deal with the Anglo invasion, only the men are involved" (248).

frontiers in God's love, for surely, He loved everybody, everything He created" (10). In other words, for Susanita, ideal (divine) love specifically knows no borders; it *has no frontiers,* be they of nationality, religion, or nature. Thus, she is able to fully and freely love Warrener, despite his identity as a 'foreigner,' because love operates within and above the borderlands. In fact, as Warrener's unconventional entrance and dance with Susanita at the Christmas ball shows, the crossing of borders is a defining aspect of their loving relationship: "no one moved. Generations of culture and breeding… was a bar holding them… And Robert Warrner walked forward to Susanita, took her hand in his and… led her to the empty middle of the dance floor" (93). To put it briefly, González and Raliegh specifically characterize the love between Susanita and Warrener as one that transcends difference and undoes division.

However, Susanita's desire for goodness and love is not limited to her relationship with Warrener. Perhaps her bravest and most border-breaking action is her ride alone – with only a male peon to accompany her- into Matamoros to attempt to plead for Alvaro's life when he is captured by the Rangers and sentenced to death, despite the fact that such actions were unheard of for a woman of her social status. The narrator relates:

> She would have to go herself... It would mean riding all night with a *peon,* unattended by a woman; going to s soldier camp and pleading with strange men- things a lady would die before doing, almost impossible for one like her… she would not, she thought, do it for Alvaro who had brought it upon himself, who so often had been mean to her and was always selfish and exacting. But for *mama,* to keep her heart from breaking. For *papa,* longing for his son. And surely *papa* would love her again. (262-62)

However, even though Susanita succeeds in her mission of rescuing Alvaro, neither he nor Don Santiago thank her for it; rather, both insist that she has done the wrong thing and brought dishonor upon her and her family. For example, upon seeing her, Alvaro, who is still in prison, declares: "riding all night alone with a *peon,* you a Mandoza y Soría! Going to s soldier camp, riding with them, consorting with them, alone! Couldn't you have let me die instead? It would

have been an honor to our name… now you have dishonored us forever!" (270). In addition, when she returns to Rancho La Palma, which the narrator describes as a "judgement hall" (277), Don Santiago states: "your honor, Susanita, was also mine…. You took what was not only yours and mine, but his also" (280), and the narrator adds that for Don Santiago, "not one of the men he knew, had they been in Warrener's place, would have given Susanita respect… it was unthinkable that man of an inferior race… could treat a girl with greater courtesy and gentleness than a Mexican *caballero"* (280), despite the fact that this is what has just occurred (265-76). In fact, Don Santiago ultimately disowns her, even though Susanita has just rescued his favorite son from certain death (282). Susanita exposes the hypocrisy of the patriarchal viewpoint, declaring that "it seems a poor kind of pride for a woman to let her brother get handed and not try to prevent it" (González and Raleigh 271), and the narrator agrees with her, proclaiming: "Honor! It was a fetichism. It was a weapon in the hand of the master, to keep his women enslaved" (280).

Susanita's actions, and her father's reactions, clearly show a conflict over societal and gender-based borders. The heroine continually undoes the borders surrounding her, and ultimately chooses to leave the *hacienda* to be with Warrener (286). This final act of Susanita is especially noteworthy; in an inversion of Biblical proportions, *the woman leaves her father and mother and clings to her husband.* Now, this is not to say that Susanita was the wholly active one in her relationship with Warrener. In addition, it should be mentioned that any emancipation Susanita finds in her marriage with Warrener will only be partial, specifically due to the fact that it must be found in a marriage. While Tinnemeyer notes that Susanita's marriage must be seen as an act of "emancipation or liberation" (27), Limón cautions that "such marriages- as all marriages- must always be carefully monitored. The Mexican partner begins the relationship as

'woman' and therefore in a relationship of assumed social inferiority. However, if the Anglo male partner is willing to be just and fair, such an initial inferiority should be eliminated over time" ("Mexicans, Foundational Fictions" 108). In addition, Warrener is equally as active as Susanita, serenading her while she is in Matamoros (González and Raleigh 83) and even traveling to Rancho La Palma to ask for her hand (225). In other words, their relationship is one of equals. Nonetheless, once it is all said and done, it is Susanita who initiates the change from courting to marriage, and who motivates Warrener to become more 'Mexican.' In fact, according to Rodríguez:

> Robert Warrener and Red McLane act more like border-crossing globalized elites than torch-carrying nationalists. Despite their roles as invaders and sexual conquerors, they become somewhat Mexicanized by their erotic desires… Red mimics Mexican customs and converts to Catholicism to marry Maria [Angela] and, at one point, the authors claim that Warrener, an Anglo "caballero," is so aristocratic in heritage and behavior that he could be a son to Santiago. These key Anglos are not entirely Mexicanized, but that is the point. The issue is not the selection of a particular "nation," but modes of identity that exist, again, on a continuum. (133)

In addition, Susanita's decision to leave inspires the actions of other women to undo the borders surrounding them as well. When she travels to Matamoros to plead for Alvaro's life, she stays with her friend Inez, who married Johnny White, a Texas Ranger (González and Raleigh 278). Likewise, her courageous actions inspire her widowed aunt, the quick-tongued Doña Dolores, to speak out in her defense against Don Santiago, exclaiming "Susanita did a brave thing… the rules and laws we have made did not count when she could save her loved ones from death and sorrow… you could go further and reward her by letting her marry the man she loves" (281). Dolores, in fact, eventually leaves with Angela and ends up marrying Don Gabriel, Don Santiago's neighbor, despite the social conventions that prohibited the marriage of a widowed woman of her age (323-25). Finally, Paz, the oldest servant at the *hacienda*, who frequently utters phrases such as "women are put here to serve men… you would be happier if you accepted

that" (258) chooses to abandon her previous life and travel with Susanita to Matamoros (286), where she can be closer to her grandson, who is living with U.S. soldiers and learning to read and write, and opportunity he would not have been given as a peon (204). In sum, while the actions of Susanita (and those she motivates) do not entirely erase the social, sexual, political, and ethnic borders *Caballero* describes, they go a great distance in lessening many of them.[23]

As the aforementioned quote from Rodríguez demonstrates, Susanita's sister Angela is also an agent for the undoing of borders in *Caballero,* especially through her marriage with Red McLane. Whereas for Susanita, true love breaks down all differences, Angela seeks to cross borders in her pursuit of goodness. Rodríguez notes "the Red/Maria [Angela] marriage does imply a perfect equilibrium between progress and tradition… what is most notable about the Red/Maria marriage is its lack of both romantic cliche and nationalist dogma" (125-26). While Rodríguez will also argue that Angela ultimately marries for reasons of economic convenience (125), the novel's text seems to indicate that Angela sees her union with Red primarily as a religious vocation from which she can help others. Angela is characterized by her religiosity from the start of the novel (González and Raleigh 4), and although her father forbids her repeatedly to enter the convent, she only halts her attempts when one of the nuns advises her in the following manner: "Mother Gertrudis said I might have a more important role to play in life. She said I had a capacity of great things and that God had given me a profound… strength of faith… for perhaps a greater purpose than bringing it into the convent" (62). In addition,

[23] As Rodríguez notes, "no matter where a reader might be in the globalizing swirl, she or he can probably find a comforting scenario somewhere in the novel. Too frightened by change, there's Susanita; too confined by tradition, there's Luis; too torn by both, there's Maria." (126). Likewise, Kaup declares: "Does *Caballero* claim full equality between the sexes? No. Angela, the only figure who approximates the modernizing paradigm, initially wanted to reject marriage for the convent: "I would be just the woman of the house, and there is something in me which asks for more" (154). She eventually defies her father but chooses a life of service for Red McLane's political cause. As the future governor's wife, she achieves a semipublic role, which, though unimaginable in the past, nevertheless is limited to "entertaining" Mexican guests at state dinners that help get her husband elected" (582).

although Angela originally feels called to the convent, she sees marriage as a sacrament (a divinely instituted calling) as well, and therefore as an equally worthy vocation (154). What is more, like her sister, she sees the *americanos* as worthy of love and respect, stating: "I cannot think anyone beneath me. We are equal in the sight of God. Even the *Americanos* are God's children" (100). Angela sees her marriage as a calling from which she is able to help others, exclaiming: "when he [Red] wrote at Christmas of how the people, our people, were suffering here in Texas…I saw plainly where my duty lay… here my life is wasted, there it will be filled" (311-312). As a result, Angela, like Susanita, chooses to actively leave her family home and go to be with her *americano* spouse. She plainly admits that she does not love Red in the way Susanita loves Warrener (285); however, the marriage of the two brings freedom and prosperity not only to them, but to many others as well.[24] Limón states:

> Angela and Red are far closer to a certain social reality. Angela is of darker complexion and far less fashionable in dress and makeup than her sister and not at all given to romantic frivolity as she contemplates her life's mission of helping others through God. Unlike the young aristocratic lieutenant from Virginia, Red is rough-hewn. Both he and Angela have a pragmatic outlook; both understand that their marriage is to be based not on rapturous love but on what I shall call convenience with consciousness and conscience and on respect and deep mutual admiration. Red intends to be a key player in shaping the new Texas… he becomes a liberal who knows that the Mexicans must be included in the new "nation." To this end, but also attracted by Angela's character and determination, Red invites her into his enterprise. She accepts, calculating that through such a marriage she can offer the greatest service to her people, particularly the peons. Consolidation, the narrative suggests, is better carried out by coolheaded, intelligent, resourceful, socially compassionate, "unfeminine" women. ("Mexicans, Foundational Fictions" 350-51)

The narrator notes that Red allowed Angela more freedom than she could have imagined, and that "here she was treated like a queen… it was Angela's place to reign; and this Angela was

[24] Lowe notes that "Angela's suitor, Red McLane, offers another mode of masculinity. The son of a New York pastor, he fled to Tennessee as a youth, met Sam Houston, and went with him to Texas, where he met Stephen Austin and the other founders of the state. He admires the strategy of Jim Bowie, who married a Mexican woman of an aristocratic family….His pragmatism early on generates his conversion to Catholicism, an essential component of attracting his wife. He avoids fighting in the war to have an advantage with the natives and soon owns much property in San Antonio. This union offers a fascinating counterpart to that of Warrener and Susanita in that it constitutes a marriage of convenience; Angela furthers his career, and his money enables her to minister" (250).

doing effectively by now, managing her charities and her duties as a hostess in a nice balance" (González and Raleigh 326). Don Gabriel comments that Angela has flourished to such an extent that "you would not know her" (327), and through Angela's relationships, Red is able to connect more easily with the Mexican landowners of the region, registering their property and forming them "into a voting organization controlled by him" (214). Whereas Angela labors for the divine *polis* and is interested in crafting good heavenly citizens, Red seeks to shape the new inhabitants of the United States into productive earthly citizens. However, as their own characters show, this citizen is neither fully Mexican nor fully of the United States; rather, it is a sort of hybrid, a 'catholic' (in both senses of the word) whose very existence crosses borders.

Finally, a borderlands analysis of the role of women and the Church in *Caballero* would not be complete without a mention of what borders are maintained; that is, without a mention of who is excluded from this new American 'third space' formed by individuals such as Susanita, Angela, and Padre Pierre. Since I have already mentioned groups that receive partial 'liberation' from their bordered worlds, such as women and peons, I will not comment further on them here. Rather, I would like to briefly address the two groups that are fully excluded: African Americans and Texas Native Americans. According to Brousseau, despite the many merits *Caballero* contains, "González's texts 'enact their own form of epistemic and discursive violence through the stock caricatures, outright denials, racist portrayals, and erasures of African Americans and Texas Indians'" (133). Apart from the already cited debate between Padre Pierre, Warrener, and Delvin about the morality of slavery, there is almost no mention of African Americans throughout the novel. Although Padre Pierre defends the dignity and freedom of the African American, it is worth noting that Delvin, another supposedly devout Catholic who attends Mass regularly (González and Raleigh 42), argues with him, trying to maintain the slave's intrinsic

inferiority. In general, however, Black people simply remain absent from the novel's action as a whole. Guidotti-Hernández states that:

> African Americans make only sporadic appearances in González's work on the Rio Grande Valley, suggesting that they were not stakeholders in the power struggles over South Texas. When Texas was annexed in 1845 it was a slave state, and at the start of the Civil War as much as thirty percent of the Texas population was enslaved. In the 1850s Mexico offered safe haven to fugitive slaves who escaped across the border, and border towns like Laredo and Rio Grande City were originally settled by Afro-mestizos. Yet González's rendering suggests African Americans or Afro-mestizos did not exist in Texas, or at least not in South Texas. (*Unspeakable Violence* 148)

The novel's erasure of their presence in Texas during the 1850s is furthered by the implicit exaltation of the slave-owner in the figure of Warrener; in fact, some critics have identified parallels between *Caballero* and the Southern plantation romance. For example, Pérez recognizes "*Caballero's* striking similarities to U.S. southern plantation fiction" (472), and Lowe notes that "while González and Eimer do not emphasize the fact of slavery, Warrener, who presumably will inherit La Palma with his wife, owns a plantation staffed by slaves in Virginia and might bring some of them to Texas" (245).[25] While characterizing Warrener as a *bona fide* plantation owner is not necessarily supported by the text, which describes him as "the family black sheep… not exactly booted out but not implored to return" (González and Raleigh 44), the fact remains that Warrener is tied to slavery and makes no attempt to free himself from such ties.

Second, Texas Native Americans are rarely mentioned in the novel, and always in a negative light associated with violence and unrest. For example, Susanita comments to Paz that she can travel to marry Warrener because "it will be safe… there are no Indians now" (284), and a messenger tells Don Santiago's wife, Petronilla, that Padre Pierre is coming to visit the

[25] Peréz goes on to argue that this connection serves "to illustrate the complexities and contradictions of the [Chicano/a] Recovery Project's reconstruction of literary history. In its cultural and historical convergences with plantation narrative, *Caballero* explodes Chicano/a studies categorizations that would define such early Mexican-American literature as uniformly subaltern" (472).

hacienda in July "if it be God's will that no Indians kill him on the way" (204). Padre Pierre might speak out against the slavery of Black people, women, and peons, but he never once decries any violence done to the Indigenous peoples of the region. Guidotti-Hernández notes that "González portrays a narrative of Indian resistance as the story of the Mexican nation but does not acknowledge Mexican or Texas-Mexican racism against indigenous peoples" (*Unspeakable Violence* 147), and Franks adds that "the novel yokes Indianness to infestation" (93).[26] In other words, Native Americans, like African Americans, are not included in González and Raleigh's vision of the southern United States. Thus, the society that is created through the romances of Susanita, Warrener, Angela, and Red will apparently exclude these 'others' from the stories (or fictions) that are to serve as the foundation of their new national identities. In sum, while *Caballero* does affirm the undoing of certain ethnic, national, and social borders through its presentation of the Catholic Church and its transcultural women, the novel fails to follow its own advice of recognizing the dignity of every individual in its treatment of African and Native Americans, who are excluded from this 'third space' of the U.S. borderlands.

In conclusion, *Caballero* presents the challenges of living within the borderlands, specifically within the climate of social, political, ethnic, and sexual bordering found in southern Texas in the 1840s and 1850s. Within González and Raleigh's prophetic work of pre-Chicano/a literature, the concepts of bordering and the borderlands are addressed again and again. Various questions are raised. What does it mean to be an inhabitant of the borderlands? Are some borders worth maintaining, and if so, which ones? How can national, ethnic, and social borders be effectively navigated? In the end, many of Don Santiago's children, specifically Susanita, Luis

[26] Thus, Escobedo declares that "González realized these four sentiments—revenge, hatred, murder, and greed—could never be divorced from south Texas history because they continued to exist during the construction of the novel. Violence… is actually the driving meta-narrative within *Caballero*" (69).

Gonzaga, and Angela, successfully undo many (but not all) of the borders surrounding them, replacing them with bridges that connect them with their U.S. spouses, their former peons, and their friends. However, in building these bridges, they ultimately burn the bridges constructed between them and their patriarchal father, whether they desired such a thing or not. Like Susanita and Angela, Padre Pierre represents the crossing of borders. The vision of religion he espouses is one of a truly catholic Catholicism, where all difference is set aside in recognition of humanity's common source and end: union with God. However, while Padre Pierre seeks to foster unity and reconciliation, he confesses his inability to right the wrongs committed by the invading U.S. forces. Even if the newly 'americanized' Mexicans will in fact find legal and political protection under their new government through individuals such as Red, this does not change the history of un-righted wrongs, culminating in a bloody war, that thrust them into this 'third space' to begin with. Finally, the exclusion of African Americans and Native Americans undermines the rhetoric of universal love, dignity, and acceptance preached by Padre Pierre, Susanita, and Angela and raises a further question: are the construction and destruction of borders intrinsically linked? Nonetheless, despite its faults, *Caballero* is indeed a bold and pioneering borderlands text, and a work that is deserving of further investigation and acclaim.

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