Novelist, essayist and screenwriter Larry McMurtry has written more than forty-six books and countless articles, screenplays, and other published works. Most are set in Texas and all are steeped in Texas values, with back road treks into traditions, mores, behaviors, and even taboos. Though he has valiantly attempted to dispel the myth of the great old west, the popularity of his books has betrayed that effort, with his greatest acclaim arguably the Pulitzer Prize awarded for *Lonesome Dove*, his historical saga about a cattle drive from the Texas-Mexico border to the frontier of Montana.

In April of 2012, McMurtry reviewed M. G. Lord’s book, *The Accidental Feminist: How Elizabeth Taylor Raised Our Consciousness And We Were Too Distracted By Her Beauty to Notice*, for *The New York Review of Books*. About Taylor, McMurtry wrote, “Husband management may be a feminist skill…” and “Though not so good at marriage, she was a wonderful friend.”[1] He refers to Taylor’s strong roles in several movies, “M.G. Lord trots us through this mélange, briskly stopping to pry loose nuggets of feminism when she notices them,” but is quick to add that “the lines she speaks and sentiments she dramatizes belong not to her but to the writers, mostly, or sometimes directors. The credit for whatever streaks of feminism turn up in the films goes to them.”

As is often the case with McMurtry’s reviews, this article takes on the voice of Larry McMurtry, the author, and drifted far away from the actual book to be reviewed. By the end of the article, we know little about Lord’s book, beyond the title, which caught my eye as a descriptive thesis statement for a study of Larry McMurtry and the women in his world. Yet the title of the book stuck in my head, along with McMurtry’s quick overall comment about the credit for her streaks of feminism in various characters belonging to the writers.

That said, the phrase, “accidental feminist” could be used to describe several of McMurtry’s characters through his half-century of published works, and this paper will attempt to study these women as well as McMurtry himself as what could be described as an “accidental feminist.”

The purpose of this paper is to examine the women in McMurtry’s life, through a study of the fictional characters, critical writing, and real life relationships of Pulitzer Prize winning author Larry McMurtry. Would his focus on strong women characters and interest in opinionated, forceful and dominant female characters prove him to be a mid-twentieth century pioneer in American feminist literature?

**Fictional Characters** will focus on a handful of the standout female characters in McMurtry’s novels, describing their strengths and dimension;

**Non-Fictional Characters** will describe McMurtry’s treatment of some of America’s real legends through essays, reviews, memoirs and biographies, though with dry humor, his son, James McMurtry maintains “all of Larry’s characters are fictional;”

**Real Life Relationships** will focus on a select few women who have had great influence on Larry McMurtry’s life; and,

**What Others Say** will offer a sampling of literary review, comments from subject matter experts on McMurtry.

McMurtry’s fictional characters are the foundation for this study. After multiple failed attempts to organize this section and remain within the space limitations of the assignment, I decided to limit the character study to these ten novels. Some are stand-alone novels and others are parts of a series. I am including the publication dates chronologically, because, culturally, the time in which he created these characters is an important factor in the feminism movement.[2]

1961: *Horsemn, Pass By: Halmea*

1963: *Leaving Cheyenne: Molly Taylor*

1966: *The Last Picture Show: Lois and Jacy Farrow*

1970: *Moving On: Patsy Carpenter, Eleanor Guthrie, Emma Horton*

1972: *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers: Sally, Emma Horton, Jill Peel*

1975: *Terms of Endearment: Aurora Greenway, Emma Horton*

1983: *The Desert Rose: Harmony*

1985: *Lonesome Dove: Lorena Wood, Clara Forsythe*
The last sixty pages of Terms of Endearment are arguably the strongest of all McMurtry's characters, perhaps with the exception of Sam The Lion. Lois, a survivalist ice queen who scares her husband into exceeding financial expectations toward her, brings a survivalist balance to the early 1960s – of being committed to the family for whom she works on a personal level, yet strong enough to leave and completely break ties with that family when that is clearly her only option. This character was completely rewritten for the screenplay (Black Halmea became white Alma, portrayed by Patricia Neal), and one thought is that it is simply because the topic was too volatile for the movie at that time.

Molly Taylor in Leaving Cheyenne is one of my favorites of all of McMurtry's characters. Molly is both a strong and independent woman, and proves her frontier survival skills as she comes of age in the 20th century.

Is it plausible? Could it happen? Yes. Marshall Sprague writes in "Texas Triptych," in The New York Times, "If all this sounds like a tale about some misplaced Kentucky hillbillies, please stand corrected. The people in Mr. McMurtry's Texas triptych are acutely intelligent. The book's comedy is rare, the tragedy heart-rending--and, over all, there is an atmosphere of serenity and wisdom. Gid, Johnny and Molly were unconventional, but they knew about love and life and seized both without hesitation or regrets." Sprague also says, "(I)t occurred to me that if Chaucer were a Texan writing today, and only 27 years old, this is how he would have written and this is how he would have felt."

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Of all the female characters in The Last Picture Show - and there are several who deserve a nod - mother and daughter Lois and Jacy Farrow are the standout characters in this book. The realistic, albeit tenacious, mother-daughter relationship, their sexuality, and the small town, class-conscious fervor come together to build these characters into females who will do what they have to to survive at the level to which they aspire. We see McMurtry grow out of post-frontier pioneerism and into fact-based modern reality in this, his third novel. I believe his self-confidence catapulted in Leaving Cheyenne, as he created a believable voice for a woman in Molly Taylor. His women characters in Last Picture Show are arguably the strongest of the characters, perhaps with the exception of Sam The Lion. Lois, a survivalist ice queen who scares her husband into exceeding financial expectations to provide well for the family, and Jacy, the beautiful, popular, flirty, and yes, bitchy ice princess - heir to the throne her mother has devoted a lifetime to prepare for her.  [4]

Moving On, All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers, and Terms of Endearment are part of the Houston collection. While McMurtry danced around characters of his age and generation in The Last Picture Show, the Houston series sets the bar at a new high level in his writing career, when McMurtry writes of women who would be his own contemporaries, as they all come of age during the dawning of the sexual revolution, the women’s movement and drug culture.

The epic journey of Moving On begins with Patsy Carpenter, a wealthy young woman who doesn’t need to work for a living and is not yet compelled to follow the natural progression of have babies yet. Patsy is one of McMurtry’s most multifaceted characters to date, as he stretches his writing skills to new heights.

In June of 1970, in a New York Times book review focusing on "Books of the Times," John Leonard writes, "Is Patsy Carpenter worth 794 pages? Patsy is young, pretty, recently married, financially secure and psychologically adrift on a sea of qualms in the American Southwest, circa now. She reads a lot, she cries a lot, she worries a lot about her sex life. ...It is, however, a novel of monumental honesty, about people as real as your sister, consisting of insights as undeniable as this morning’s weather. Attention must be paid."

Indeed, as McMurtry himself says, "Moving On was not the Great American Novel but for a time I thought it was." Literary Life, 77).

And what of lusty, earthy Emma Horton and her eccentric, narcissistic mother, Aurora Greenway? McMurtry fans come to know them like old college pals or backfence neighbors. McMurtry labels the Houston series his "Exodus cycle," and deems Terms of Endearment the best of the lot. Literary Life, 73).

He adds, "Although I think the last sixty pages of Terms of Endearment are among the very best pages I have written, it was while I was writing them that I began to sour on my own work. The minute I finished that book, I fell into a literary gloom that lasted from 1975 until 1983, when the miracle of The Desert Rose snapped me out of it" (Literary Life, 84).

One of the factors he blames on that literary gloom was the loss of Emma Horton. "...for ten years, I had been writing about Emma Horton, a character I had come to love, but now Emma was dad. Characters who have long been with you become your friends. When I put a final period on Emma and her family I lost presences that had been in my life for a long time. In some way, I had leaned on them, but that was over. They were gone." (Literary Life, 84).

I tend to agree with Celia Morris in her essay, "Requiem for a Texas Lady," in Range Wars, when she says, "...I decided on the basis of the fiction written by its native sons, that the old Texas myth about women finding happiness in the home has not panned out. The two women one would judge most
Limerick, the University of Colorado professor and director of The Center for the New West, and describes her as a “representative of revisionist historians. In a review of McMurtry’s collection, will return to the with the likes of J. Frank Dobie, Lon Tinkle, John Graves, Tom Lea, Roy Bedichek, Walter Prescott Webb, and the good old boys of Texas literature.

There were - and still remain - few women writers of the caliber to merit listing McMurtry wrote two of Greene’s “Fifty”: published in Southwestern Literature. In addition to McMurtry’s deeper consideration about Texas literature in “Always a Bridegroom,” (originally presented as a valuable, and are treated well. He was absolutely right about women, though; the country was simply hell on them, and remained so until fairly recently (93). He writes in depth about the evolution of women and their roles on the frontier, specifically in Texas, as the state, and the genre grows more sophisticated.

In “Eros,” he writes, “The discrepancy between what the cowboy expected of women and what they needed of him accounts for a lot of long rides into the sunset, as the drifting cowboy drifts away, not so much from what he might want as from what he is not sure how to get. Women shook his confidence because it was a confidence based on knowing how to behave in a man’s word and even the West isn’t entirely a man’s world anymore” (97).

In A Narrow Grave was McMurtry’s first collection of nonfiction essays. Most of the chapters were repurposed from other publications and writings, but arguably, the three most powerful essays were created especially for this, his fourth book. McMurtry explains in the preface that the essays on sex in Archer County, southwestern literature and the McMurtry family are the three written specifically for Narrow Grave. In “Eros in Archer County,” McMurtry writes, “Years ago, someone pointed out that Texas is hell on women and horses. He was wrong about horses, for horses are considered to be valuable, and are treated well. He was absolutely right about women, though; the country was simply hell on them, and remained so until fairly recently (93). He writes in depth about the evolution of women and their roles on the frontier, specifically in Texas, as the state, and the genre grows more sophisticated.

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Range Wars: Heated Debates, Sober Reflections and Other Assessments of Texas Writings, published in 1989, two decades after In A Narrow Grave questioned Southwestern Literature. In addition to McMurtry’s deeper consideration about Texas literature in “Always a Bridegroom,” (originally presented as a lecture at the Fort Worth Art Museum and first published in the Texas Observer), editors Craig Clifford and Tom Pilkington bring together several interesting voices about feminism in the genre. Among the often-cited pieces in this collection is A.C. Greene’s “Fifty Best Texas Books,” originally published in Texas Monthly in 1981.[7] It bears mention that of the fifty books listed in this definitive collection, only six are written by women.

McMurtry wrote two of Greene’s “Fifty”: Horseman Pass By and Leaving Cheyenne. This brings even more value to McMurtry’s portrayal of the strong, significant, female character voice as developed in all of his novels. There were - and still remain - few women writers of the caliber to merit listing with the likes of J. Frank Dobie, Lon Tinkle, John Graves, Tom Lea, Roy Bedichek, Walter Prescott Webb, and the good old boys of Texas literature. We will return to the Range Wars collection to examine Celia Morris’ “Requiem for a Texas Lady” in a later chapter of this project.

In his collection, Sacagawea’s Nickname: Essays on the American West, McMurtry spotlights several remarkable western women, historical figures as well as historians. In a review of Sacagawea, for Colorado Central Magazine, western historian Bill Hays writes that McMurtry is clearly a fan of Patricia Nelson Limerick, the University of Colorado professor and director of The Center for the New West, and describes her as a “representative of revisionist...
In a conversation about the mythical west, and women’s roles, McMurtry includes an essay about Limerick’s Sacagawea, in which he writes, “It has been Mrs. Limerick’s task — and that of her revisionist colleagues — to continually restore the contexts which the romanticizers just as continually dissolve. She is, I’m afraid, the Historian as Sisyphus, endlessly rolling the rock of realism up Pike’s Peak, only to watch it roll right back down into the pines of romance. Hers — theirs — is a noble but thankless task; rain though they may on the rodeo-parade model of western history, it’s still that parade that people line up to see; there’ll be an Indian or two, if any can be located, and a couple of faux Conestoga wagons, maybe a stagecoach, with a tottery old-timer riding shotgun, then a riding club, with a number of bankers and businessmen nervously clutching their saddle horns, and, finally, several Cadillac convertibles with pretty girls in them. There you have the beloved story.” (86).

McMurtry continued in his often-backhanded admiration for women writers in another New York Review of Books essay entitled “Almost Forgotten Women.” In the review he praises Theodora Bosanquet and her biography of Paul Valery. In a relatively short article, McMurtry highlights Bosanquet’s career with a sprinkling of awe and admiration, as he shares her comments about her enviable work with great literarians including Edith Wharton, Ezra Pound, and others, the least of not being her mentor, Henry James. [8]

In yet another essay for the New York Review of Books, he writes about Gail Collins, the editorial editor of The New York Times, who wrote what he deemed a “long, ambitious history of America’s Women” in American’s Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates and Heroines. McMurtry wholeheartedly agrees with her introduction and reprints it in his review:

“The history of American women is all about leaving home – crossing oceans and continents, or getting jobs and living on their own. Some of our national heroines were defined by the fact that they never nested – they were peripatetic crusaders like Susan B. Anthony. Clara Barton, Sojourner Truth, Dorothea Dix. The center of our story is the tension between the yearning to create a home and the urge to get out of it. [9]

McMurtry is highly complimentary of Collins’ book, and unlike many of his “reviews” in the New York Review of Books, this focuses much more on Collins’ writing than on his thoughts on the subject – or perhaps the book he would have written differently. He reviews this with sensitivity and homage, and concludes with the opinion that, “Today the situation is far from perfect, but it would hard to read this book and not conclude that, for women, things have improved...” adding, “And Hilary Rodham Clinton has a real chance to win the presidency. She wears slacks too – but unlike those female aviators of World War II, no one is rushing to arrest her.”

IV. Real Life Relationships

The study of the real life relationships in Larry McMurtry’s life leans heavily on his memoirs and secondary sources. While his series of memoirs provides some insight into the women in his life, little is written about his recent relationships. With that, this chapter is limited to snapshots of the real women who had impact on his life, and therefore deserve a mention, albeit brief:

Louisa Francis McMurtry – LJM’s grandmother, frontier pioneer. In Walter Benjamin At The Dairy Queen, McMurtry describes his grandparents as “...potent word – pioneers. They came to an unsettled place, a prairie emptiness, a place where no past was – no Anglo-Saxon past at least...” (21). He also mentions that Louisa Francis McMurtry was “through with talk, at least conditionally. Now and then I heard my grandmother talking to my father – her favorite of twelve children – but although she lived with us until her death (when I was eight) I cannot recall her ever addressing a single syllable to me.” He adds, “Louisa Francis had raised twelve children on a stark frontier with a husband who was at times erratic (that is, drunk); but the time I came along her interest in children was understandably slight, and that’s putting it mildly. (Walter Benjamin, 20).

Hazel Ruth McIver McMurtry – LJM’s mother. Defined in several of McMurtry’s recollections by a story in which she, as a young bride living with her husband in his parents’ home, was slapped across the face in 1935, by Louisa Francis for what he recalls was “some domestic trifle,” but he goes on to say that was a slap that echoed through his parents’ marriage until that marriage collapsed some forty-four years later. Though his father nearly husband in his parents’ home, was slapped across the face in 1935, by Louisa Francis for what he recalls was “some domestic trifle,” but he goes on to say that was a slap that echoed through his parents’ marriage until that marriage collapsed some forty-four years later. Though his father nearly

Sue and Judy – LJM’s sisters; McMurtry was seven years old when Sue (Deen) was born, a year after the family moved into Archer City from the ranch, and twelve when Judy was born. Despite wide age gaps as children, the McMurtry siblings (including youngest brother Charlie) maintained close relationship in adulthood. Judy ran a title company in Archer City until her retirement; and Sue Deen has been the day-to-day proprietor of the bookstore enterprises in Archer City for several decades.

Jo Scott McMurtry – LJM’s first wife; mother of his son, James. Jo and Larry met in Denton, when she was a student at Texas Woman’s University and Larry at the University of North Texas. In Books, McMurtry writes:

In 1959, I married Jo Ballard Scott of Florence, South Carolina. Jo spent our marriage reading Proust and Gibbon. Proust she read in French in the Pleiade edition. That was fine with me. I was happy to have a wife who read Proust and Gibbon, rather than, say Ladies’ Home Journal. [11]

Today, Jo is a retired university professor, specializing in Shakespearian Studies, and has published several books on Victorian fiction and Shakespeare's England. (Books, 49)
Marsha Carter – LJM’s one-time significant romantic relationship and business partner. Carter and McMurtry were in a significant relationship early in their friendship, when Larry and James moved to the Washington, D.C. area. The law in that region required a two-year residency in the state prior to divorce being finalized.Jo already lived there. By the time the divorce was final, Marsha and Larry’s romantic relationship had lost its passion, but they continued to be close friends, highly successful and longtime partners in the book-selling business for more than thirty-six years. [12]

Diana Ossana – LJM’s companion and writing partner. Acquaintances since the mid 1980s in Tucson, Arizona, Ossana stepped in as a companion as McMurtry was suffering from depression and recovering his heart attack and quadruple bypass. She officially became his writing partner in 1992, on the Pretty Boy Floyd project. According to biographer Mark Busby, in 1993, McMurtry’s longtime agent, Irving “Swifty” Lazar died, leading to a new agent new contract with Simon and Schuster that included Ossana (Busby, 29).

In Literary Life, McMurtry also writes of that post-bypass era, when either he or his “ghosts or some combination of the two produced more than twenty more books, most of them novels but some of them nonfiction. He adds:

All this plus the post-surgical screenwriting, I did with my writing partner, Diana Ossana. Before we knew it we had done twelve scripts, and were soon to have the luck of a lifetime when we obtained the rights to Annie Proulx’s great short story, “Brokeback Mountain,” which won us each a screenwriting Oscar (149).

Ossana has been instrumental in most of McMurtry’s recent work, credited with much of the heavy lifting in bringing the work to life. His recent triptych of memoirs (Books, A Literary Life, and Hollywood) is no exception, as he writes in Hollywood, A Third Memoir:

At seventy-three, with Diana’s help, I’m still pecking them out. Most of what I’ve done is journeyman work, or at least it was until she came along... Diana should tell her own version when she’s ready. My purpose here is to write about Hollywood: the town and the culture rather than any given film. So over to Diana, and lots of luck (118).

Faye Kesey McMurtry - LJM’s lifelong friend and wife. The least has been written about Faye Kesey McMurtry. Her marriage to Larry McMurtry on April 29, 2011, (the same day as the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate) in Archer City, Texas was written about in newspapers and magazines from San Francisco to New York. McMurtry had met Faye when he and her late husband, Ken Kesey were classmates in the prestigious Stegner graduate writing program at Stanford University in the late 1950s. Faye had been Ken Kesey’s high school sweetheart and they eloped in 1956, and remained married until his death in 2001. The wedding in the bookstore in Archer City was her first “formal” wedding. As they exchanged vows, she promised to keep his books organized in his preferred style, and he said he loved many women, but vowed to love her as long as he can and to the best of his ability. McMurtry’s philosophy about women could be best described in the conclusion of Roads, where he writes:

Some years ago I had a sobering realization about women which was that there are just too many nice ones. One simply can’t fall in love with, sleep with, or marry all the nice women. One of the saddening facts of life is that there is always going to be a delightful woman somewhere who for whatever accident of timing or attraction simply slips by and recedes to return only in dreams (Roads, 204).

V. What Others Say

This two dimensional chapter highlights what others say about McMurtry and his writing as it relates to female characters, as well as what they say about women and feminism in general, as it relates to the culture, the times, and that which historian Don Graham calls “Lone Star Literature.” Again, in the interest of space, I whittled this review of literature down to a sampling of seven voices over a twenty-five year span of publication:

1986 - Molly Ivins: “Texas Women: True Grit and All The Rest” (Lone Star Literature)

1989 - Celia Morris: “Requiem for a Texas Lady,” (Range Wars)

1991 - Halley Stillwell: “The Bride” (Lone Star Literature)

1999 - Betty Sue Flowers: “Why Texas Is The Way It Is” (Lone Star Literature)

2001 - Caroline Fraser “Pretty In The Sunlight” (New York Review Of Books)

2011 - Don Lechman: Larry McMurtry (A Master’s Thesis)

2011 – Ruth Pennebaker “Unearthing Aurora” (Texas Observer)

Don Graham’s Lone Star Literature: A Texas Anthology should be required reading for any aspiring Texas culturist. He brings together some of the best
twenty-first century Texas writers in one belt-busting volume. McMurtry writes in the foreword, “Graham is probably as familiar with Texas literature in all its protean forms as anyone now writing... Grumpy indeed would be the reader who didn’t find much to enjoy.”

Molly Ivins made a career of sucker-punching contemporary Texas heroes while building upon the mythology of the Lone Star State. In “Texas Women: True Grit and All the Rest,” she writes, “They used to say that Texas was hell on women and horses – I don’t know why they stopped” (Lone Star Literature, 698).

Ivins goes into a definitive description of the strains of Texas culture, noting that they are all “rotten for women.” Among them, she lists the Southern belle nonsense of our Confederate heritage; the sultry machismo of our Latin heritage; the perennial “good-ol’-boyism” and their “virgin/whore” attitudes toward women (either your “Good-Hearted Woman” or “Your Cheating Heart”) with an emphasis on honky-tonk angels; and the jock idolatry that hoists the woman-as-pretty-cheerleader role (LSL, 699).

And “last but not least,” Ivins describes the legacy of the frontier – “not the frontier that Texas women lived on, but the one John Wayne lived on.” She writes that anyone who knows the real history of the frontier knows it is a saga of the strength of women. They worked as hard as men, they fought as hard as men, they suffered as much as men.” But she goes on to write of the cowboy movies and how myth built the strong Texas men as protecting the little ladies or “the gals” from the ever-present dangers of the West (700).

Molly concludes this must-read chapter on Texas feminism with the reality that “when its all over, if we stick together and work, we’ll come out better than the sister who’s buried in a grave near Marble Falls under a stone that says, Rudolph Richter, 1822-1915, and Wife” (703).

McMurtry has done much of the heavy lifting in that effort - allowing his women characters to take the lead in many of the aforementioned novels, and offering them the heroic voice, if not always the voice of logic or reason, in his body of work.

Betty Sue Flowers, longtime director of the LBJ Library and Museum at the University of Texas, writes another of the essays in Lone Star Literature, “Why Texas Is The Way It Is.” She writes of the power of our Texas myth – or the four myths that have shaped us into the West: the hero myth, religious myth, enlightenment myth ad economic myth. Among them, she credits the hero myth as that which has shaped this state and its writers most particularly (LSL, 694).

As we prop this theory up against the backbone of McMurtry’s writing, we see that the heroes do stand taller in Texas literature than in the novels of other states. McMurtry allows his women characters to share in that rugged individualism, risk taking and wildcatting – if not only on the frontier or in the burgeoning oil industry, then in the urban landscape of nouveau riche Houston.

Authentic West Texas pioneer Halley Crawford Stillwell contributes an essay entitled “The Bride” to Graham’s anthology, an excerpt from her I’ll Gather My Geese memoir. As she writes of her own experiences in 1918, when she chose to marry Roy Stillwell against her parents’ advice, she eloped with the frontier rancher. But Stillwell had proven her spirit of adventure and fearlessness long before the elopement. Upon earning her teaching certificate, she was offered a job and moved from the more civilized Alpine down to the badlands of Presidio, just across the river from where Pancho Villa was assembling his troops. A brave move for a single Anglo woman of any age, she writes:

“My father thought this place was too dangerous for a young lady. He didn’t want me to go, and stressed this point often.

“Daughter, I think you’re going on a wild goose chase,” he said.

I finally replied somewhat flippantly, “Then I’ll gather my geese,” ... and armed with a six shooter, her father’s favorite and most dependable weapon, packed up her new teaching certificate and headed for the badlands of Presidio to teach school. (LSL, 108).

An educator, rancher, pioneer, frontier woman, Stillwell could have been a character in any of McMurtry's novels – set from the 1800s through the 21st century. I would be curious to follow this question and find out if their paths ever crossed. Further study of his novels and influences might reveal a Stillwell influence in some of his character development. [14]

McMurtry is not without criticism for his portrayal of women. Celia Morris writes in her “Requiem For a Texas Lady” essay in Range Wars, “If you knew Texas only through its best known writing, you would be hard-pressed to believe that competent adult, self-defining women exist here – women, that is, who do not define themselves by their relationship to man” (91).

She points to McMurtry as an exception, describing his work as illustrating that “he sees women – and even on occasion, finds one to admire,” but still criticizes him as tending to think stereotypically about them in terms of what they do or feel in relation to a man.” (92). She quotes McMurtry in his “Ever A Bridegroom” essay when he says of John Graves, “If nature continues to stimulate him it maybe because it too is elusive, feminine, never completely knowable.” (93). And perhaps it is this un-knowable factor that has made women so elusive in many American novels.

Caroline Fraser reviewed McMurtry’s Paradise for the New York Review of Books in 2001. This in-depth article offers a thumbnail biography of McMurtry, as Paradise affords a few unique glimpses into his personal life that had been heretofore untold. When Last Picture Show, his third book, was released, Larry’s mother confessed that she read the first hundred pages and then hid it on a closet shelf, picking up the phone and calling her son to ask, “Larry, honey, is this what we’re sending you to Rice for? Those awful words! And those awful..."
Sigmund Freud has been credited with saying, “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.” Perhaps I should take a giant step back from the academic study of what, who and why McMurtry was writing, and look at all of his characters, not just the females.

To pigeonhole McMurtry into that of a feminist, accidental or not, based on the strength of his characters, is to undercut the credit due a great American writer, who knows how to develop characters for characters’ sake.

Yes. Halmea, Molly and Lois, Jacy and Patsy and Aurora, and Clara and Maggie and Lorena and Jill and all the rest are surely strong female characters. They would never have survived in their worlds – or through even a chapter or two of McMurtry’s books – were it not for that frontier strength and survivalism – and yes, that southern/Texas ambivalence toward their lots in life.

So yes, McMurtry effectively gave women their due in his writing and in his life. But to attempt to force a label on him as someone who sought to embrace a political movement or social ideology through his development of female characters or his critical writing of women would be selling McMurtry short.

So yes. Whether Freud uttered this phrase or someone else just offered him the credit, “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.” Sometimes a strong character is just a strong character. Sometimes that character stays with us and becomes a part of our world, just as real as a favorite uncle or a distant cousin. A pioneer in American feminist literature? Perhaps not, but it is clear that McMurtry put no limitations on the roles of women in 20-21st century American literature.

More than an accidental anything, Larry McMurtry has proven himself as a purposeful creator of characters – male and female, good and bad, came and epic, who are so strong and deep and dimensional that it is clear that there is nothing accidental about them at all.
Work Cited


Notes on fictional characters: So much more to write in this chapter– the dynamics between Aurora and Emma; more on Jill Peel and Patsy Carpenter, and Eleanor Guthrie, and yes, a book could be devoted to the women of Lonesome Dove. This was the last chapter I completed. I started with a concept title, began researching this paper, outlined the project, and stumbled onto the conclusion, which I wrote first. Then I went back and fleshed out the meat of the project, leaving the familiar faces of the fictional characters to last. With each paragraph, I found myself eying the page count at the
After a moment of silence, he sighed and said, "Maybe he wasn’t.”

Mark asked, “Is this a good time to talk about Larry McMurtry and your thesis of his accidental feminism?” I said, “Sure. I have to finish this paper at Texas State University. That career has afforded him a way of cutting through the pomp and circumstance of theory, supposition and illusion that often weighs heavily in the writings of academicians, and dig for the newsworthy facts of the story. Working to prove this “accidental feminist” thesis.

I found myself challenged by trying to "prove" something that was just beyond my grasp. Along the way, my husband, Mark Hendricks, tripped over, and critical essays by and about Larry McMurtry around my office, by the end of this project, they had spilled over into the living room and the dining table.

McMurtry added, “As I read America’s Women, I kept a running tally of women mentioned by name — in the case of slaves perhaps only one name — and the total came to roughly 475, about one woman to a page. Of course the superstars — Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sojourner Truth, the major suffragettes, Eleanor Roosevelt — get more extended treatment as do a few exceptional characters such as Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to obtain a medical degree from an American medical school. It seems to me that if Miss Collins had chosen to slow her narrative a bit, and go into even gentler details, the result might have been fewer rather than more readers. For the story of America’s women is not, by and large a pleasant one. It’s principally a story of abuse, heavy drudgery, inequality violence, suffering, and early death’ and the distance traveled, in terms of equality, was purchased at a very heavy cost.”

McMurtry, Larry. "Lady Sings The Blues.” The New York Review of Books (November 2003) (downloaded 11/16/13). While McMurtry praises Collins’ book, he also sees frontier-sized gaps in the history. He says, “Though plenty of diaries and letters having to do with the westering movement are now in print, westering interests Ms. Collins less than the South. She does almost nothing with Native American women, or the Hispanic women of California and the Southwest, although in both instances there were interesting lives to be examined. Most white women captured by Indians suffered horribly, but there were a few examples of what might be called successful captivities. Ms. Collies briefly mentions one of those, that of Olive Oatman, who with her sister, was captured by Apaches but sold to the Mojaves, with whom she happily raised a family; the same was true of the famous Texas captive Cynthia Ann Parker, once returned to “civilization,” soon wasted away. A little consideration of why “savage” life worked for some few women would not have been amiss.”

Note: In further comparison to the Tolstoys, McMurtry writes: “In the Tolstoys’ case, it was the too-frank diaries that the young count insisted his sheltered bride read; in my parents’ it was a slap in the kitchen, occasioned by some trifling argument over who would cook my father’s breakfast.” (48).

McMurtry, Larry. Walter Benjamin At The Dairy Queen. NY. Simon and Schuster: Touchstone, 1999. Note: In further comparison to the Tolstoys, McMurtry writes: “In the Tolstoys’ case, it was the too-frank diaries that the young count insisted his sheltered bride read; in my parents’ it was a slap in the kitchen, occasioned by some trifling argument over who would cook my father’s breakfast.” (48).

McMurtry, Larry. Books: A Memoir. NY: Simon and Schuster: Touchstone (2008) Notes: Regarding Jo, Larry goes on to say, Jo came to the end of those great works about the time we came to the end of our marriage, though we weren’t divorced or even widely separated for several more years.” (49)

McMurtry, James – Interview. November 2013. Much more could be written about James’ insight into Larry, women, feminism, and relationships, as garnered in this interview, but space is limited here. More will be forthcoming should this develop into a larger project.

Stillwell, Halley. “The Bride." Lone Star Literature: A Texas Anthology. Don Graham, ed. NY: W. W. Norton & Company. 2003. Halley Stillwell was a real live Texas hero, who I had the pleasure of befriending (and in fact, my youngest daughter is named for her.)

Hendricks, Mark – (11/15/13), San Marcos, Texas As I researched and wrote and stacked books and printouts of archival materials, book reviews and critical essays by and about Larry McMurtry around my office, by the end of this project, they had spilled over into the living room and the dining table.

I found myself challenged by trying to "prove" something that was just beyond my grasp. Along the way, my husband, Mark Hendricks, tripped over, picked up, and waded through stacks of articles, books, notepads and copies of archival records.

A fan of both Larry McMurtry and the Southwestern Writers Collection, he finally broached the subject of this seminar paper, late in the semester.

As my greatest champion, editor and sounding board, Mark is celebrating retirement from a successful quarter-century career as the spokesperson for Texas State University. That career has afforded him a way of cutting through the pomp and circumstance of theory, supposition and illusion that often weighs heavily in the writings of academicians, and dig for the newsworthy facts of the story.

Mark asked, “Is this a good time to talk about Larry McMurtry and your thesis of his accidental feminism?” I said, “Sure. I have to finish this paper at some point and am sort of stuck.” After a moment of silence, he sighed and said, “Maybe he wasn’t.”
And thus began a long into-the-night conversation about strong characters and great American writers who have an inborn knack for developing strong, believable characters. And who deserve more than catchy labels. What? Yes. Perhaps McMurtry deserves a much larger scope of credit than I set forth to offer him. And I thank Mark for leading me to this light at the end of the tunnel.

“While the famous quote is often repeated and attributed to Freud, there is no evidence that he ever actually said it. Freud was a lifelong cigar smoker, smoking up to twenty a day according to his biographer Ernst Jones. As the story goes, someone once asked Freud what the cigar he so often smoked symbolized. The response is meant to suggest that even the famous psychoanalyst believed that not everything held an underlying, symbolic meaning. In reality, the quote is most likely the invention of a journalist that was later mistakenly identified as a quote by Freud.

For more information about this project, presentations and speaking engagements, please contact Diana Hendricks.

I. Introduction
II. Fictional Characters will focus on a handful of the standout female characters in McMurtry’s novels, describing their strengths and dimension;
III. Non-Fictional Characters will describe McMurtry’s treatment of some of America’s real legends through essays, reviews, memoirs and biographies, though with dry humor, his son, James McMurtry maintains “all of Larry’s characters are fictional;”
IV. Real Life Relationships will focus on a select few women who have had great influence on Larry McMurtry’s life;
V. What Others Say will offer a sampling of literary review, comments from subject matter experts on McMurtry and on feminism, and an overview of the thesis statement from a broader view.
VI. Conclusion
VII. Sources/Endnotes

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By Diana Finlay Hendricks. With more than a dozen autobiographies and collaborations — and a world-class definitive non-authorized biography — already on the shelves, why another Willie Nelson book? Because, as the title explains, ’It’s a long story.’ It’s A Long Story: My Life is easily worth the $30 investment if for no other reason than that it should be read twice. It will take a solid read through and then a revisit to catch the authentic voice and nuances of the book. On first read, the cynical reader may be quick to criticize David Ritz as a hired gun ‘autobiographer,’ having pseudo-gho View Diana Hendricks’ profile on LinkedIn, the world's largest professional community. Diana has 6 jobs listed on their profile. See the complete profile on LinkedIn and discover Diana’s connections and jobs at similar companies. Edited by Craig Clifford and Craig D. Hillis Chapter: James McMurtry: Too Long in the Wasteland Diana Finlay Hendricks. Many books and essays have addressed the broad sweep of Texas music its multicultural aspects, its wide array and blending of musical genres, its historical transformations, and its love/hate relationship with Nashville and other established music business centers. David Hendricks San Antonio Express-News This team can write. In fact. Zeke and Ned is astonishing...a literary achievement of high order for McMurtry and Ossana. Read more. If you are a fan of McMurtry then you will be a friend of Zeke and Ned. This world is inhabited by the normal McMurtry curious eccentric cast of common characters, aptly named. If you have read Boone's Lick you know of them. The storyline although fine, was there more to showcase this fine troupe, and the places they lived, roamed and pondered at.
Larry McMurtry and his family moved from the home ranch into the small town of Archer City. He was an honors student in high school and was active in many school activities, but the bitter love affair with the ranching country of his uncles found its companion in his own disillusionment with the small town. McMurtry examines a central myth shaping American consciousness, that of the Old West, of the cowboys and ranchers, the cattle drives and open range. The myth took form from values that Americans brought with them to the West and then took on its own potent life to shape values in new ways. McMurtry also describes what happens to people who live on beyond the age and the social order that spawned the myth. Larry Jeff McMurtry (born June 3, 1936) is an American novelist, essayist, bookseller, and screenwriter whose work is predominantly set in either the Old West or in contemporary Texas. His novels include Horseman, Pass By (1962), The Last Picture Show (1966), and Terms of Endearment (1975), which were adapted into films earning 26 Academy Award nominations (10 wins). His 1985 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel Lonesome Dove was adapted into a television miniseries that earned 18 Emmy Award nominations. McMurtry writes frankly and with deep feeling about his own experiences as a writer, a parent, and a heart patient, and he deftly lays bare the raw material that helped shape his life’s work: the creation of a vast, ambitious, fictional panorama of Texas in the past and the present. Throughout, McMurtry leaves his readers with constant reminders of his all-encompassing, boundless love of literature and books.