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Review of *Larry McMurtry: A Critical Companion* By John M. Reilly

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tip of south Texas to Montana near the Canadian border, and the writer's feeling for the land comes through loud and clear in his descriptive prose.

That McMurtry was chosen as the subject of one of the volumes in Greenwood Press's Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers series testifies to his best-selling status with the reading public. The Greenwood series appears to be aimed primarily at students—particularly high school students. Thus the style and content of *Larry McMurtry: A Critical Companion* are calibrated to what a fairly intelligent adolescent might reasonably be able to read and comprehend.

Let me say up front that I do not consider this circumstance necessarily to be a weakness of the book. In fact, speaking as someone who has had his fill of jargon-laden postmodernist literary criticism, I enjoyed reading a clearly written, straightforward analysis of the work of a writer I have followed for most of my adult life. John M. Reilly, director of the graduate program at Howard University, although not (to my knowledge) a scholar of Western American literature, offers a critical perspective on McMurtry's fiction that is genuinely helpful, even to experts in the field.

Reilly considers each of McMurtry's novels from *Horseman, Pass By* (1961) to *Duane's Depressed* (1999). He tends to focus on technical aspects of the works, such as narrative strategy, character development, stylistic elements, and theme. Instead of proceeding chronologically through the McMurtry canon, Reilly groups novels according to their subject matter: the so-called "Lonesome Dove tetralogy," for instance—*Lonesome Dove*, *Streets of Laredo*, *Dead Man's Walk*, and *Comanche Moon*—is treated in a chapter called "A New History of the Old West."

Though he occasionally offers a negative comment, Reilly is generally highly favorable in his judgment of McMurtry's achievement. He even mounts a spirited defense of the writer against those critics who believe McMurtry is sometimes guilty of thematic confusion and technical sloppiness. Larry McMurtry, if he

Larry McMurtry: A Critical Companion. By John M. Reilly. Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. Photographs, bibliography, index. xi + 193 pp. \$19.95.

In his recent travel book, *Roads: Driving America's Great Highways*, Larry McMurtry declares himself a plainsman born and bred. He makes no bones about his preference for the American West—especially the Great Plains—over the East and the South. Certainly much of McMurtry's fiction implicitly suggests this preference. His Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Lonesome Dove*, for example, follows an epic nineteenth-century cattle drive from the

cares about his reputation, must hope to attract more commentators as sympathetic as John M. Reilly.

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