

Intimate Instances Carved Into the Llano Estacado

By Joshua Medrano



Intimate Instances Carved into the Llano Estacado is about the way time has changed the relationship between people and the naturally formed depressions, typically canyons, that occur sporadically within the Llano Estacado. These spaces are made from drastic topographic changes in the otherwise seemingly flat landscape. How these spaces are perceived differs depending on the individual and on the point in time. While these spaces are currently more for leisure, in the past they would have been used out of necessity and for a specific function. Max Crawford's *Lords of the Plain* takes place on the Llano Estacado of the 1870s. This novel is a prime look into the Llano Estacado's past and provides an excellent way to compare the current Llano to its history. Most people view the Llano Estacado as an unchanging eerily flat landscape that falls into the greater area that is West Texas, no more than a boring setting to drive through when getting from point A to B. I myself have been guilty of this, until I took a closer look at the Llano. I began to recognize instances of intimate space, the depressions and canyons

that provide the Llano character. One might even view this as naturally occurring architecture that passing visitors can appropriate a program or purpose to. Crawford addresses the element of the apparently flat yet vast landscape many times over in *Lords of the Plain*, such as when natives describe the Llano as a place from which “god [himself has] removed all things that were once there, and ... left the earth there as it was before man and beast came onto it.” But as evident in the map on the novel’s endpapers, and later in the novel itself, the canyon spaces are a vital characteristic in the Llano, as powerful an element as the flat plains. The Canadian River is now a place for recreation and retreat: a nice afternoon for family and friends in the area, a place for locals to bring all terrain vehicles, a place for secluded firearm practice, and other leisurely activities. However, in the past areas like this were used out of necessity rather than pleasure. This would often be the only source of water for miles, as well as a path for navigation, both vital for people



traveling on foot or horseback. This place would also become a much needed break from the seemingly never-ending sea of land that makes up the Llano. This break would be the saving grace to people that might lose their sanity to an expanding landscape. Many people, especially locals living in the Llano, consider exploring the canyon spaces to be a fun pastime. They use the space as a retreat. Friends and family travel to these places and use these breaks and cavities in the land as a way to gain some privacy for activities such as cookouts and gatherings. In the past when settlers or explorers, such as the men and women in Crawford’s novel, came upon these spaces they did not view them as a place of retreat but rather as crucial shelter from storms or as a place of tactical advantage in the war against the natives. When used strategically these canyon spaces could turn the tide in battle.

This is just a quick overview of the Llano Estacado and how it has transformed from a harsh terrain, difficult to navigate, to the place of leisure and retreat. We can also see from this brief snip of the Llano's timeline that ultimately we, the inhabitants, are the ones that give these spaces program and purpose.

All photos courtesy of the author.