

PIONEERING THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION:
LITERARY LANDSCAPES OF THE AMERICAN WEST, 1872-1968

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by Caitlin Hudgins
December 2016

Examining Committee Members:

Miles Orvell, Advisory Chair, English and American Studies

James Salazar, English

Sue-Im Lee, English

Andrew Isenberg, External Member, History, Temple University

©
Copyright
2016
by
Caitlin Hudgins
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates why literary dreams of the West have been categorically dismissed as mythical. Western critics and authors, ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Owen Wister to Patricia Nelson Limerick, have sought to override dreams of the West by representing the western genre as, in Jane Tompkins' words, a "craving for material reality." This focus on authenticity betrays an antipathy to the imagination, which is often assumed to be fantastical, escapist, or utopian – groundless, and therefore useless. Such a prejudice, however, has blinded scholars to the value of the dreams of western literary characters. My project argues that the western imagination, far from constituting a withdrawal from reality, is worthy of critical attention because it is grounded in the land itself: the state of the land is directly correlated to a character's ability to formulate a reliable vision of his setting, and this image can enable or disable agency in that space. By investigating changes in western land practices such as gold-mining, homesteading, and transportation, I show that the ways characters imagine western landscapes not only model historical interpretations of the West but also allow for literary explorations of potential responses to the land's real social, political, and economic conditions. This act of imagining, premised on Louis Althusser's explanation of ideology, follows Arjun Appadurai's conception of the imagination as "social practice." Ultimately, my dissertation explores geographical visions in western novels across the 20th century in order to demonstrate the imagination's vital historical function in the creation of the West.

For Panda

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a dissertation is no feat for a Lone Ranger. In completing this project, I have depended on the enthusiastic cheerleading and patient support of more friends, family members, advisors, mentors, and programs than I could have imagined. First and foremost, I could not have gotten to this point without my dissertation advisory committee's guidance. James Salazar helped me to flesh out my options for the project in its beginning stages and offered insightful, challenging comments on chapter drafts. Sue-Im Lee gave me excellent ideas for tightening my key concepts and overall framework, and reminded me to celebrate my progress along the way. And Miles Orvell, my chair, provided much-needed advice on organizing individual chapters, inspiration for tracing the project's larger trajectory, and West-themed encouragement to pioneer onward without letting my writing trail off into the dust. In addition to my committee, I am grateful to Peter Logan, Petra Goode, and all the student and faculty fellows at the Center for Humanities at Temple for providing me with a teaching-free semester, an office with a window, and an intellectual community in which to hone my fourth chapter and begin my fifth. I am also thankful to Temple's College of Liberal Arts for the Dissertation Completion Grant that allowed me to focus on wrapping up my project during this final spring semester. Finally, I am indebted to my students, who were not shy about telling me how bored they were by Frederick Jackson Turner, who challenged me to step up my teaching game, and who turned me on to new ways of thinking about the West.

Unofficial, semi-institutional thanks are also in order. The weekly e-mail shout-outs and check-ins from Jackie Partyka, Beth Seltzer, Sara Curnow Wilson, Leslie Allison, Nicole Priest-Cesare, Tiffany Derewal, and Ted Howell were amazingly

motivating and comforting. Writing a dissertation is hard, and these fascinating, funny, lively scholar-friends gave me the assurance that I was not alone in my struggles, the practical tips for navigating the bureaucracy surrounding the process, and the encouragement to keep pushing through every word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter. This group was especially important during my potentially isolating fellowship and grant semesters, and I am particularly thankful for all the South Philly Work Crew days at various coffee shops and rowhomes that provided both the happiness of human contact and the satisfaction of completing many more pomodoros than I possibly would have on my own. And without Colbert Root – who read every draft as if it were the most important thing on his plate, who was perpetually available to Gchat about ideology, who taught me to *argue*, who made profound statements about democracy over PBR, and who probably knows my project better than I do – I would without a doubt have lost the West.

Finally, I want to thank those beyond Temple for helping me gain perspective on the otherwise all-encompassing bubble of my dissertation. Brittany Root and Juliana Rausch were invaluable in giving me space to let off steam about work and life, usually over margaritas. These ladies have been my rocks. Meanwhile, my undergrad friends Ali Migdal, Megan Pallay, and Tejal Patel have all been amazing at cheering on my progress from afar, long after they all became “real” doctors. From Austin, Stephanie Malak showed me how to be a tough cookie on the path to the PhD. And from Las Vegas, Rita Smith has been the most steadfast BFF I could ask for, and deserves a prize for buying an airplane ticket to Philly immediately after I announced my defense date. To my parents, I owe a lot to your literary blood. I’m grateful to my dad, Chris Hudgins, for taking a job at UNLV in 1976, and for providing the foundation for this dissertation

by falling in love with the West and raising me to do the same. I can't imagine getting through grad school without my mom, Marsha Tarte, who has always provided a shoulder to cry on, whose snail mail brings me joy, and who believes in me across the sky. To my step-parents: Bob Tarte, I didn't accept it as a kid, but you were right: 6am really is the best time to get work done. Pam Egan, Montana is very much on our short list, should we have a choice. And last but not least, I am beyond grateful to my husband, Dave Errigo, who took me on just as I had begun studying for my comprehensive exams. He has borne the brunt of my PhD journey, and I'm thrilled to finally be able to ride off into the sunset with him by my side.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION: ENVISIONING SPACE AND MOVEMENT IN THE WEST.....	ix
1. THE VAGABOND IMAGINATION IN MARK TWAIN'S <i>ROUGHING IT</i> : "QUEER VICISSITUDES" OF ROMANCE AND REALISM IN THE NEVADA TERRITORY.....	1
2. THE SETTLER'S IMAGINATION IN WILLA CATHER'S <i>O PIONEERS!</i> : INVESTIGATION AND SYMPATHY IN AN UNFURNISHED WEST.....	55
3. THE OUTSIDER'S IMAGINATION IN AMÉRICO PAREDES' <i>GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ</i> : STAGING VICTORY AND FLEEING THE SCENE IN THE BORDERLANDS.....	89
4. THE CIRCULAR IMAGINATION IN NATHANAEL WEST'S <i>THE DAY OF THE LOCUST</i> : SEARCHING FOR ORDER IN HOLLYWOODLAND.....	134
5. THE DELIBERATIVE IMAGINATION IN JOHN STEINBECK'S <i>EAST OF EDEN</i> : THE MENTALITY OF FREE WILL IN THE SALINAS VALLEY.....	181
6. THE POSTURING IMAGINATION IN N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S <i>HOUSE MADE OF DAWN</i> : VISIONS OF U.S. INDIAN POLICY.....	218
CONCLUSION.....	271
REFERENCES CITED.....	278

INTRODUCTION

ENVISIONING SPACE AND MOVEMENT IN THE WEST

On January 10, 2016, Disneyland’s American West-themed Frontierland began to be dismantled. Set for the chopping block were Big Thunder Ranch and its outposts, including its “authentic” log cabin,¹ its petting zoo, and its barbecue joint (Ybarra). The closure of Frontierland makes way for an expansion of Tomorrowland, namely a 14-acre *Star Wars*-themed park inspired by the 2015 film *The Force Awakens* (H. Martin). By replacing the mock-up of the historical West with representations of a galaxy far, far away, the most magical place on earth is abandoning a rehashed past in favor of an exciting future. Stories of the West, after all, are attached (however loosely) to actual historical events, putting restrictions on the imaginative leeway available to both the park and its visitors. Indeed, Americans are so schooled in the myths of sand and sagebrush, cowboys and Indians, and saloons and gun duels that these once thrilling western adventures have become so familiar as to be dull. By replacing these worn-out symbols with those of a new “frontier” – fantasies of untold technology, mysterious black holes, and extraterrestrial life – Disney positions its “imagineers” and their audience in a realm in which not even the sky is the limit. In many ways, however, Disneyland is late to the party in shutting down its ode to the American West as a space that inspires imagination. In fact, explorers, politicians, and academics have been aiming to “conquer” the western imagination for centuries, beginning with Thomas Jefferson’s impetus to “demystify” the

¹ According to Bob Ybarra, a building designer who helped to plan the cabin, it was important to Disney’s “imagineers” that any modern elements – bolts and other “structural hardware” – be concealed to maintain a historically accurate aesthetic. The cabin’s logs were real, provided by the Montana-based company Rocky Mountain Log Homes.

western territory of the Louisiana Purchase through scientific exploration (Goetzmann and Goetzmann 434). Disney's closure of Frontierland, then, falls in a long line of expressions of skepticism about and obituaries for the western imagination. This widespread cultural and critical belief in the decline of the western imagination, however, is not so linear – or so final – as it first appears. Rather, I argue, the western imagination has ebbed and flowed over time, in response to shifts in land use and policy, changes in ethnic communities and economic markets, and developments in our understandings of psychology, morality, and history. This dissertation traces the arc of the imagination of the West across a century of western literature to show that the ride is not yet over. Instead, the West follows a rising and falling pattern in which it continues to awaken in its onlookers and its inhabitants visions of a landscape that offers grounds for agency. In short, I show the ongoing social work of the western imagination.

According to the *New Encyclopedia of the American West*, the western novel can be divided into two distinct genres: the romantic “frontier novel,” which treats adventurers’ first explorations of “wilderness perils,” and the realistic “pioneer novel,” which focuses on settlers who engage with the “minutiae of daily life” after frontiersmen “tamed” the land (Folsom). In other words, those on the “frontier” were the idealistic leaders who reached for the possibility of progress they imagined in the open western spaces around them, while the “pioneers” who followed were technically freed from such responsibilities of imagination, since “progress” had already been accomplished. If we apply this logic to actual western literature, however, these definitions thwart our attempts to apply them. Why, after the close of the frontier in 1890 – after the need for

imagination had supposedly been met in the West – do the characters of western literature continue to not only use, but explicitly cite the need for, the imagination?

My dissertation questions the contradiction between western critics' relegation of the imagination to the period prior to the frontier's "closure," and western authors' extension of the imagination beyond that prescribed era. The study of the West has progressed through three stages of scholarship – Old, New, and Post Western theory – none of which have adequately addressed this conflict. Old Western scholars of the 1950s and 60s argued that the West is significant due to its mythical status, predicated on the "winning" of the West.² New Western critics of the 1980s and 90s responded to this scholarship by uncovering the individual "realities" behind the national myths.³ This viewpoint attends to the "defeats" suffered by gendered, ethnic, and religious "others" that made Old Western victories possible. Finally, Post Western scholars of the 21st century have combined the Old and New to claim the existence of "many Wests," including victories and defeats, majority and minority outlooks, and national and transnational perspectives.⁴ Although the Post Western school has begun to recognize the interlocking quality of "real" and imagined perspectives on the West, none of its practitioners have conducted a sustained interrogation of the dreams that interrupt western literature's supposedly "authentic" prerogative.

In attending to the imagination in western literature, I am departing from the trends of western scholarship, history, and politics, which have generally taken a

² See especially Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) and Edwin Fussell's *Frontier* (1965).

³ See Patricia Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), Richard White's *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* (1993), William Cronon's *Uncommon Ground* (1996), and Donald Worster's *An Unsettled Country* (1994).

⁴ See Blake Allmendinger's *Ten Most Wanted* (1998), Daniel Moos's *Outside America* (2005), and Neil Campbell's *The Rhizomatic West* (2008).

quantitative approach to the West in an effort to counter both its mystifying spaces and its mythical aspects. The enumerative approach to the West has been geographically and temporally widespread. For instance, after the Revolutionary War, unsettled land outside the original 13 colonies was measured by “stepping off” plots from geographical landmarks. Such inaccurate systems of property measurement were eventually replaced by the Land Ordinance of 1785, which implemented a standardized system of Federal land surveys that divided territory into six-mile square townships, which were further divided into 36 sections, each measuring 1 square mile, or 640 acres (Potter and Schamel). Following Jefferson in his desire to “demystify” the West, Andrew Jackson in the 1830s called for gridded mappings of the Territories – mappings which Neil Campbell calls a metaphor for “imaginative reduction” (66). Both Edwin Fussell and David Wyatt trace the “fall” of the western imagination in the face of reality – even as they locate that fall at opposite ends of the 20th century. Richard Slotkin teases out the “real” socioeconomic conflicts hidden behind the frontier “myth” of the West. And most bluntly, Jane Tompkins defines the “western” genre as representing a “craving for material reality” (4).

The Imagination in the West

The main focus of this project, then, is how literary characters mark and remark on the landscape of the West through the faculty of the imagination. When I refer to scenes of “imagination,” I am interested in the relationship between the faculty’s metaphysical and physical strains. The first kind of imagination I am concerned with is metaphysical, related to dreams or fantasies. This type of imagination is exhibited when an author describes a character who goes to sleep and has a nightmare, for example, or

who lets her mind wander into the realm of make-believe during a quiet moment. The dreams that result from the imagination are intimately tied to “myth,” which Hayden White defines as “an example of thought working at the extremities of human possibility, a projection of human fulfillment and of the obstacles that stand in the way of that fulfillment” (175). The second type of imagination I explore is physical, related to vision or perception in the literal sense. How does the author portray his character’s sight of the fictional landscape? Are the images he perceives fuzzy or crystal clear? Is he noticing details or taking in a panorama? Are his eyes darting or steady, tearful or swollen? In his *Biografia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge makes a distinction between fancy and imagination that loosely corresponds to the distinction I’m making between the physical and metaphysical imagination. For Coleridge, “fancy” is concerned, in a passive, mechanical way, with the “fixities and definites” of the data of reality, while the “imagination” exerts a “mysterious power” to find the “hidden ideas and meaning” from that data (305).

The physical and metaphysical varieties of imagination overlap in that both are based on reality but also constructed in alignment with the particular identity, experiences, and setting of the beholder. According to Edgar Anderson, these two versions of envisioning a landscape generally take place simultaneously. “When we consider a landscape,” he says, “We are *contemplating* what is before us. The eye is seeing and the mind is perceiving. What we think, what we ask, what we investigate will depend upon how rich is the experience brought to bear on that contemplation. It is not only what we see, it is also what we see *in it*” (13, italics original). Louis Althusser houses this concurrent phenomena of sight and perception under the concept of ideology,

in which “men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form” (110). Although a “world outlook” may “constitute an illusion” that does “not correspond” directly “to reality,” Althusser contends that the imagination does “make allusion to reality.” Thus, dreams “need only [be] ‘interpret[ed]’... to discover the reality of the world beneath the surface of their imaginary representation of that world.” It is this link between physical vision and psychological interpretation that encompasses this dissertation’s definition of “imagination.”

In contrast to western scholarship’s predilection for facts, other fields are becoming increasingly open to investigating dreams as meaningful rather than escapist or inherently unrealistic. According to Frederic Jameson, contemporary theorists no longer regard “narrative, image, [and] fantasy... [as] mere subjective epiphenomena, but objective components of our social world, invested with all the ontological dignity of those hitherto ‘objective’ social materials presented by economics, politics, and historiography.” In fact, Jameson continues, the imagination is “now increasingly seen as having epistemological and even practical functions.” As such, “[f]antasy is no longer felt to be a private and compensatory reaction against public situations, but rather a way of reading those situations, of thinking and mapping them, of intervening in them...” (171). Cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai follows Jameson’s appraisal of the imagination as a pragmatic response to reality, particularly the difficulties of that reality. He contends that the imagination is a “social fact,” which he argues “plays a newly significant role” due to the “epistemological crises” impelled by modernity, particularly electronic mediation and mass migration (5). Similarly, postcolonial literary scholar John J. Su suggests that dreams in contemporary Anglophone novels allow authors to

“explor[e] possible forms of response to prevailing political, economic, and social conditions” (ix). But the act of imagining is not exclusive to contemporary culture – it is not a special response to specifically “modern” issues. As Jameson reminds us, even ancient fairy tales were created in response to “distress.” More than simply a “repository of peasant utopian wishes,” he argues, the fairy tale works to “preserve the most characteristic collective experiences of danger or menace, along with age-old solutions devised to ward them off” (165).

If cultural criticism isn’t convincing enough in its appraisal of the imagination as a tool for negotiating real dilemmas, we can also turn to advances in the science of dreaming to justify this dissertation’s practical approach to fantasy. For Arnold H. Modell, it is precisely the inflexible “algorithmic certainty” of most brain science that compels him to explore how the imagination functions in what he calls “the meaningful brain” (xii). Such “computations,” he says, “cannot be applied to the brain’s construction of meaning,” and therefore “cannot account for thinking in images or fantasy, for error and novelty...” Indeed, says David Gelernter, a computer scientist at Yale, the “full expression of the human mind” relies on two kinds of thoughts: those that are “on purpose” and those that go “wandering off” on their own (King and Drehle). Whether through the conscious pursuit of “a logical argument” or by “inventing stories – as we do when we dream,” we are “putting fragments in proper relationship and guessing where the whole sequence leads and how it gets there.” Despite current cultural assumptions that “up-spectrum” logic would be positioned hierarchically above “down-spectrum” imagination, Gelernter believes that “progress” depends as much on dreams as it does on reason. As neuroscientist Rodolfo Llinás puts it, the brain is essentially a “reality

emulator,” such that “we are basically dreaming machines that construct virtual models of the real world” (94). In sum, whether from a literary, philosophical, anthropological, or neuroscientific perspective, scholars have begun to validate the practical use of the imagination in ways that simply were not acceptable before.

Approaching Western Dreams

My project begins, then, with the observation that dreams, fantasies, and visions are prominent and persistent in the literature of the American West, and assumes that they are worthy of critical attention. Each chapter is concerned with identifying and fleshing out a particular novel’s rendering of the western imagination. The questions driving my research have to do with the content, origins, effects, and significance of the imagination as it is presented in each text. I begin by selecting representative landscape-based visions and dreams for close analytical reading. First, I look for the historical or cultural origin of these imaginative episodes. Where do these characters’ dreams come from? What can they tell us about the novel’s contemporary culture, including its economic, political, environmental, or ethnic structures? Generally, I argue that literary dreams respond to contemporary cultural phenomena, including changes in federal land policy, settlement patterns, or financial crises. In accounting for a dream’s origins, I also look to relevant details of the author’s biography, such as his childhood views of nature, his perspectives on the politics of the day, or his aesthetic theories. Second, I explore the effects of the dream in question. How do scenes of imagination fit into the larger scheme of each novel? Are dreams in these books isolated? What happens after the character snaps out of his reverie? What is the relationship between imagination and plot? How do authors connect their characters’ dreams with their behaviors and actions? How do

dreams impact movements and agency? In short, how does the character's imagination affect the individual's course and the novel's plot? Third, I'm interested in the author's larger literary purpose in portraying his characters' dreams. Why do authors write dreams or visions into their works – to convey what message? What is the significance of dreaming in the work as a whole, and how does that work contribute to its period's take on the imagination?

Beyond the analysis of individual texts, I look on a broader, comparative scale at patterns in imagination across these novels. Despite the fact that scholars of western culture and literature have generally confined the notion of the imagination to particular genres or historical periods, I have found that the prescribed boxes for western dreams fail to accommodate an imagination that waxes and wanes both within and between categorical structures. I thus became interested in discerning patterns in the presence or absence of dreams, as well as patterns in how authors conceive of those dreams, in the literatures of the West. The primary framework I use to trace this trajectory is a historical one. Were any of the critics justified in drawing lines around particular eras? If not, which dates, if any, might be more apt? In order to gain a relatively broad view of the historical course of the western imagination, I look at roughly a century of literature, focusing on five key periods. The first two periods, the Frontier and Pioneer eras, placed roughly on opposite sides of the turn of the century, are particular to the West and western literature, and have traditionally represented the main critical division between a West full of dreams and one devoid of them. The last three periods – the Great Depression, the Post-War period, and the Civil Rights era – can be oriented more generally to America as a whole, but are manifested in slightly different ways in the

West. By investigating how authors during each of these periods have represented their characters' imaginations, I conclude that the scholarship has generally been shortsighted in its dismissal of the western imagination.

A second comparative framework of race, ethnicity, or culture was also an option for discerning the course of the western imagination, but this option ultimately proves somewhat unsatisfactory. When I first approached this project, I was interested in examining how authors might be representing the western dreams of characters from minority cultures differently than those from cultures in power, and if so, how. I also wanted to investigate how the "settlement" of the West affected how authors portrayed their characters as seeing that space. In short, I hoped to consider how the cultural traditions and social positionalities of the two major minority groups in the West, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans,⁵ may or may not play a role in the literary valuation of dreaming. From the late 19th century onward, these groups have been considered "marginal" or "marginalized," whether we are talking about western culture at large, or about the western literary canon in particular. The multi-ethnic bent of this project is interesting in terms of how we corral the demographics of the imagination. On the one hand, the "American Dream" in general, and the myth of the West specifically, is promoted as accessible to all of the "tired, poor, huddled masses," no matter their race or culture. On the other hand, however, it is precisely such "minority" figures who have most often been excluded from dreams of social mobility, which have, in practice, been limited largely to whites. In this sense, we might expect the cadre of dreamers included in this study to be restricted to those of European extraction. In a slight variation, we

⁵ I do not include Asian Americans, such as the Chinese immigrants who worked on the western railroads, because, for the purposes of limiting the scope of my project, I chose to focus on groups native to the territories that would come to be incorporated into the American West.

might also expect that, if the representatives of oppressed ethnic groups were to engage in imagining their landscapes, those visions would never come to fruition.

My research has revealed that none of these assumptions is valid. Instead, I show, first, that social marginalization is not a damper on the subject's imagination, but rather a catalyst for it. As Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge point out, "fantasy may merely serve as an expression of alienation" in "response to unbearable real situations." In fact, they continue, "precisely because fantasy cannot be easily circumscribed or repressed, it can also be the site for an 'unconscious practical critique of alienation'" (32–33). Second, my survey of a century of western literature demonstrates that frustrated dreams tend to have less to do with race or ethnicity than with historical fluctuations such as developments in land policy or economic downturns. The visionaries I study here, then, reside on a "frontier" in which their marginal position is, ironically, the basis for an instability that compels them to imagine anew the landscapes they do not quite fit into comfortably. Rather than isolate minority representatives, then, I integrate them into the larger trajectory of the project in order to show that, while their engagement with the imagination is certainly informed by their particular cultures, they are ultimately part and parcel of broader historical trends in the West.

Landscapes of the West

Defining "the West" could be a project in and of itself, but the two factors I want to focus on as definitive are the region's basis in land and its status as subject to myth, dreams, or imagination. William Least Heat Moon suggests that the West is distinctive simply due to its "space," which he qualifies as "great, pervasive, influential, and awesome" (qtd. in Stegner 26). If only because of weather patterns, Wallace Stegner

explains, westerners are more engaged with the outdoors than most, and the land therefore impacts its residents' needs, tastes, attitudes, and skills (81). Not even geographers can come to an agreement about something so basic as the size of the West's land mass, and this controversy points to just how crucial the concept of space is to the region's meaning (W. L. Fox 10). I use the simplest map of the area, which is based on aridity, and which encompasses the area between the Pacific Ocean and the 98th meridian,⁶ where rainfall averages less than 30 inches per year.⁷ This map can be broken down in various ways. In addition to defining the West in terms of sub-regional divisions,⁸ physiographical or topographical characteristics,⁹ and changing use values,¹⁰ recent scholars have also mapped the West according to international perspectives.¹¹

⁶ This vertical line runs from roughly the bottom-most tip of Texas up through the middle of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas.

⁷ A more extreme starting point for "the West" is the 100th meridian, where annual rainfall amounts to 20 inches (Reavis 70). As Wallace Stegner points out, the West's aridity has broad effects on the region, influencing everything from the flora and fauna to the presence of the federal government (8-9). For a fascinating in-depth study of how federal water policies have shaped the West, see David Cassuto's *Dripping Dry*.

⁸ For example, the Census of 1900 divided the West into Basin, Plateau, Pacific, and Rocky Mountain regions, but today includes only Pacific and Mountain divisions. Another potential regional subsection is the "interior West," which consists of the eight states with the highest elevation, thereby excluding Washington, Oregon, and California. Meanwhile, the "Southwest" is technically made up only of New Mexico and Arizona, but might also incorporate California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. The Great Plains – all of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma; parts of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Texas – might be counted as part of the West, or they might not. And in some cases, the West can even be extended to Alaska and Hawaii.

⁹ Topographical designations show that the West spans both the low desert of the basin and the high desert of the mountain ranges (Veregge 375).

¹⁰ According to Henry Nash Smith, the West has been seen as a space for trading French furs or Asian spices, as a locale for heroic adventure or civilized refinement, and as a Great American Desert or a utopian garden.

¹¹ The boundaries of the West are relative to the beholder's time and place. In the mid-19th century, for instance, Mark Twain's Missouri was counted as western, an unthinkable designation by today's standards. And if all things are relative, the West is really the North to Mexicans, the South to Canadians, and the East to Asians. Or, zooming out even further, we could refer to "the Western world," as in the nations and cultures associated with Christianity, the Enlightenment, and imperialism.

High Country News has even collected maps of the West with boundaries drawn according to culture, watersheds, or population (J. Peterson). Or, in a kind of turning of the tables, we can define the West not in terms of its land at all, but rather in terms of the loss of that land, as settlements increasingly populated its area (T. T. Williams 7).

We can also divide western space in terms of its status as private or public. As Stegner points out, the prevalence of public land in the West causes contradictory attitudes of “impassioned protectiveness” and “fatal destructiveness,” since the territory is both everybody’s and nobody’s responsibility (81). In many ways, the West is unique because the federal government controls 47% of the land (Bui and Sanger-Katz). Much of this land was purchased, won, or seized from foreign governments or native inhabitants, but the U.S. government has had difficulty unloading its acquisitions due to the complications of geography, including the mountains that made it difficult to reach and the aridity that made it difficult to farm. Unlike Cliven Bundy, this dissertation is not concerned so much with the legalities of the land as with the significance with which those legalities have imbued its general atmosphere. While none of the novels I investigate explicitly engage issues of federal land ownership, all of them take for granted such issues in their backgrounds. For instance, when Mark Twain’s alter-ego looks out over a western vista, he does not ask himself whether the property is federally owned or not, but he is nonetheless struck frequently by feelings of opportunity and openness that were fostered by the government’s purchases of and policies about that land. Similarly, N. Scott Momaday’s protagonist, Abel, never directly critiques the historical treaties or contemporary institutions that have manipulated his tribe’s territories, but we nevertheless see clearly the effects they have had on his life. In the chapters that follow,

then, I do not necessarily look at public and private land differently, but rather point to any relevant histories that inform characters' imagination of or engagement with that land.

One final division of western land that is important to acknowledge for this project occurs between the rural and the urban. Frederick Jackson Turner, of course, is well known for drawing a firm line between "wilderness" and "civilization," but my work proceeds from an understanding of this dichotomy as problematic in and of itself. Indeed, it is difficult to establish a clear boundary between the two. As William R. Travis observes, the "footprint" of the human development of nature extends well beyond the city proper: the land affected by the city is 10-20 times the size of the actual built-up area (5). From the opposite perspective, as Nina Veregge points out, even in the built environment of a town, the architectural details of buildings and the atmosphere of city districts still rests on the land, in what she calls a "nested hierarchy" (377). The literary settings I examine in this project span city and country in the West, along with spaces in between.

According to all of these potential definitions of "the West," to what extent do the texts in this dissertation qualify as "western"? What I am not talking about when I refer to a "western" is the stereotypical version of the genre – the Disneyland version, if you will. The books I examine do not necessarily eschew western stereotypes like cowboys and Indians, but neither do these clichéd images serve as focal points. Instead, I am more interested in works that are engaged in or intrigued by the *land* of their western environments. I take the western genre, rather loosely, to mean that the book must be set primarily in the West (according to the 98th meridian definition), and must be written by

an author intimately familiar with the western landscape. Some of the authors in this study were born and raised in the West, while others were transplanted there for substantial periods of time. By the most rigid standards, only N. Scott Momaday and Américo Paredes are “true” westerners: Américo Paredes was a life-long Texan, and N. Scott Momaday rotated among Oklahoma, New Mexico, and California. The other authors in this dissertation are more complicated. For example, Mark Twain was born in Missouri, to the west of the original 13 colonies, and spent nearly a decade in the Far West of California, Nevada, and Hawaii. Willa Cather was born in Virginia but moved to Nebraska at age 11, stayed there through college, and later traveled extensively in the Southwest. Nathanael West stayed in the New York area until his 30s, but only became a literary success during the last decade of his life, after he had moved to Hollywood. John Steinbeck was born in California and spent time in Oklahoma, but ended up serving as a reporter in Vietnam and moving to New York. All of the authors contained by this project, however, have been drawn to the landscapes of the West, and have demonstrated a commitment to using its particular qualities as a foundation for their characters’ visions of and movements across its spaces.

Imagining Western Landscapes

“We have, more or less, conquered our physical ignorance of the region,” William L. Fox says, “but we’re still having trouble coping with it in our imaginations” (13). Due to the wide-ranging understandings of western land – what Veregge calls a “collage of images” – the space often inspires “cognitive dissonance” (Stegner 80, Veregge 374, Fox 11). As Fox puts it, latching onto the vastness of the West is problematic, since the region is “a place where our eyes have trouble getting a grip” (11). This is, after all, the

“frontier,” which can be defined not only as “the fringe of civilization that adjoins undeveloped territory;” but also as a “new thought or learning, an indicator of investigations still taking place” (Campbell 254). This symbolic notion of the West as perpetually unfinished, forever full of potential, tends to lead in one of two directions. The first option is that the complexities of the West can result in even the most academic of scholars to express a kind of mystical awe about the place. As Bernard DeVoto murmurs, “. . . westward we shall find the hole in the earth through which the soul may plunge to peace” (qtd. in Nugent 22). Or, as Shril Henke of the Western Writers Association admits, the West “will never be defined absolutely” because it is “a dream” (qtd. in Nugent 23). The second option can be seen as a kind of overcompensation for the first: it is often precisely the slipperiness of the West that prompts critics to double down in their efforts to “settle” the region according to facts and figures, according to, as Jane Tompkins puts it, “material reality.”

My dissertation questions this division between physical and metaphysical conceptions of the West. Scholars like Audrey Goodman have separated the West’s “physical parameters” from its social, cultural and symbolic meanings (xvi). But I am interested in how these overlap: how those symbolic meanings are mapped onto the land through both physical vision and metaphysical imagination. As such, the most important distinction I make in this dissertation is the one between “land” and “landscape.” I follow William L. Fox’s explanation: “Land is a state of matter, landscape a state of mind” (ix). A similar distinction can be made between space – characterized as empty, untouched, untamed – and place – a space that has been seen, inhabited, or transformed by humans. When speaking of the environment as depicted in literature, as I am in this

project, I take it for granted that I am talking about landscape and place rather than land and space. Indeed, it is difficult to speak of habitat without inhabitants. This dissertation is fundamentally an exploration of the land of the West – how literary characters see that land, how they move across it, and what that tells us about history and culture. Always, then, the land is populated by both people and meaning. The West, therefore, constitutes a landscape.

When I refer to the physical environment of the novels I investigate, I am interested in how that environment serves as “a mirror which makes ‘culture’ visible” (Veregge 453). As W.J.T. Mitchell has warned, “‘landscape’ tends to become a congealed repository of cultural interpretation and power deceptively visited back in upon the observer as frozen, fixed, and ‘independent of human intentions,’” but it is actually difficult to separate the land from the perceptions and fantasies of those who inhabit it (qtd. in Abrams 5). Similarly, Henri Lefebvre says, “space is not a pre-existing void, endowed with formal properties alone” (170). Indeed, even the term “geography” literally means “earth writing,” suggesting that it is humans who mark the land with its characteristics. That land in the West often appears to be limitless, and therefore tends to represent freedom to its onlookers,” results in a “tendency to see the West in its mythic enlargement rather than as it is” (Stegner 81, 68). The connection between nature and the mind has been and continues to be exacerbated in the West. For example, as Barbara A. Campbell shows, the “frontier” has proved especially amenable to ‘New Age’ spirituality, nontraditional sects, and ‘mind’ religion (254-55). This is due to the fact that meaning is “interactive,” says Hillary Putnam: it “depends not just on what is in our heads but also on what is in our environment” (qtd. in Modell 4).

A key question for this project, however, is the hierarchy in the relationship between geographical landscape and human imagination. Does mind or matter take priority? In other words, does the land act as the subject, affecting the way people perceive or move through it? Or is land primarily the object, used and acted upon by humans, whether mentally or physically? Although he does not put it in terms of subject and object, Fox is useful in parsing these questions. On the one hand, he notes, the deserts of the West have no small degree of power over their inhabitants, due simply to their large scale (11). And with little to no contrast in the land in terms of color or shade, along with a general absence of verticals, humans are left with little recourse for “relating to and measuring the land” (12). In this sense, our perceptions and misperceptions of the West originate in its very subjecthood – its ability to overcome our senses, and us. Ironically, it is precisely this cognitive dissonance that prompts us to make the land into our object. Fox identifies three options for dealing with the overpowering nature of the western landscape: we can leave it behind us, break it down into pieces small enough to analyze, or assign it symbolic value (13). Here, suddenly, the human mind finds mechanisms with which to regain its control over space. We put the land-as-subject back in the position of an object by processing it and perceiving it for our own purposes.

The scholarship on cultural geographies, and on western spaces in particular, generally assumes the position of land-as-object, rather than land-as-subject. For example, in her study of mid-19th century landscape paintings, Angela Miller premises her argument on the idea that “nature” is the “object” of paintings that actually reveal more about the “social subject” doing the painting (11). In many versions of this view of the land passive, its objecthood originates in an assumption that the land is empty or

blank. In *A Sand County Almanac*, for instance, Aldo Leopold identifies “a blank place on the map” as “the most valuable part” for those not “devoid of imagination” (294). Similarly, Fox makes empty land the prerequisite for the potentials associated with imagining: “Only in the void, a disorienting space we conceive of as being vacant and thus a landscape of open possibilities, can we imagine ourselves to step outside the boundaries of what we know and receive intelligence from some other place, somewhere alien to the egocentric pivot of our bodies” (4).

What we, the subject, fill the empty spatial object with is up for debate. For Fox, the first step is to overlay the land with orienting mechanisms: “We map the void with a grid of intersecting lines and travel along them, erecting signs to guide us” (ix). Many critics understand the land as a foundation not just for cartographical maps, but also for the more human maps of dreams and stories. For instance, Franco Moretti argues that “a certain kind of space” is a necessary basis for “a certain kind of story” (100). Likewise, Terry Tempest Williams acknowledges that “...the stories we tell about ourselves in relationship to place shape our perceptions of place” (4). As with stories, Dorothee E. Kocks contends, dreams also require a passive backdrop against which to play out. “[D]reamers often use the earth and all it stands for as a visualizing aid,” she suggests (xii).

But despite the general critical perspective on the land as a passive object to be acted upon, many of these same scholars simultaneously express a belief in the possibility that land can also occupy the subject position. For example, Moretti’s *Atlas of the Novel* asserts that “geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history ‘happens,’ but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth”

(Moretti 3). Likewise, Miller explains that, at least in the mid-19th century, human mind, imagination, and character were all seen as “imprinted with the sensory data of particular environments,” thereby positioning humans as passive objects and landscapes as the active subjects that mold society (9). More recent perspectives also recognize the potential for space to occupy a subject position. For instance, in *New Geographies of the American West*, William R. Travis traces how developments in western space in the 1990s and 2000s have effectively changed the mentality of westerners (6).

How, exactly, does the land-as-subject affect its human objects, in this case?

Patrick L. Hamilton suggests that, when the land occupies a subject position, humans can feel an “inability to mentally map their physical surroundings,” indicating “their feelings of disconnection, confusion, and even alienation” (14). This situation is essentially Althusserian, and ultimately brings us full circle back to my initial definitions of imagination. To wit: First, feelings of alienation from the land lead humans to feel the “need” to “represent to themselves” “their real conditions of existence,” through “imaginary transposition.” Their dreams constitute their effort to re-establish, at the least, their understanding of, and at the most, their control over, the land that had overwhelmed them. However, should they find those fantasies troubling, incoherent, or nightmarish, they find themselves stuck in their position of powerlessness. The struggle to construct visions of western landscapes that will allow for progress or forward movement, my research shows, points to larger social problems.

The Social Work of the Western Imagination

What is the significance of the western imagination of the landscape? What is the social work that this act of imagining performs? For most scholars, the purpose of using

the landscape as an object on which to impose maps, stories, or dreams is to envision a way forward, a way to change reality, a way to progress through the world – for an individual, the larger society, or both. In short, the goal is to “contaminate reality with dream,” as Jorge Luis Borges identifies his characters as doing. In this way, argues Robert M. Nelson, the physical landscape acts as a “dependable constant” around which the postmodern, alienated “self” can be “recentered” (4–6). Although Rudolfo Anaya almost grants the land subjecthood in acknowledging its “power” and “energy,” he nonetheless identifies the cause of his characters’ “transformation” in their ability to “define” their own “relationship” to place according to their individual “world view” (qtd. in Gish 139). Anaya’s characters, ultimately, “live off” the earth’s energy, thereby establishing the land as object for the use of the subject. Meanwhile, Dorothee Kocks sees the land as the backdrop onto which the “dreams of a good society” can be “projected” (242).

The notion that dreaming can produce action, or at least a sense of potential action, is not new, of course. In fact, as Jim Cullen defines it, the “bedrock premise” of the American Dream is a “sense of agency,” or “the idea that individuals have control over their lives” (*The American Dream* 10). More particularly, the act of imagining the landscape, according to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, “can give us a feeling of the reality of the freedom of the will.” It is “the natural existence of beauty,” he says, that contributes to the notion “that nature is hospitable to achievement” (311). In the same way, imaginative representations of the land can also function to foment progress. As Angela Miller explains, mid-19th-century landscape paintings “served as an arena of symbolic action, a quasi-utopian endeavor that helped to order culturally a space

inherently open-ended and unstable” (12). Terry Tempest Williams speaks similarly of art, which she says can trick the mind into “believing it is possible to read or paint the world differently” (191).

The lands of the West, in particular, prove amenable to dreams that set a basis for motion. The theme of movement appears again and again in both the literature of and scholarship on the West. For example, Gertrude Stein, though known primarily as a French expat, was raised in California, and perceived America primarily as “a space that is filled with moving” (95). Wallace Stegner qualifies the West of the 19th century as a “civilization in motion, driven by dreams” (21). Offering the material “proof” of this observation in prevalent western phenomena such as the motel, the automotive roadside, and seasonal tourism, Stegner finds in the West a “thirst for the new and an aspiration toward freedom and personal fulfillment” (22).

Any movement, according to Nina Veregge, “is guided by an image of the structure of the whole” environment (377–78). Without such vision, motion might be confused, or precluded altogether. Clear sight of a space is a perquisite for any movement through that space. If we can perceive – through physical or metaphysical vision – that “we have open space,” remarks Terry Tempest Williams, then we feel that “we have open time to breathe, to dream, to dare, to play, to pray to move freely...” (146). This is why, for N. Scott Momaday, the issue of importance is not so much simply a sense of place as the sense of *direction* the imagination of that place provides. The standard Jemez greeting is representative of the belief in the importance of motion. Members of this tribe approach each other not with the American standard “How are

you,” which focuses on the present moment, but rather a land-based, progress-oriented question: “Where are you going?” (“The Morality of Indian Hating” 74).

And what is the point of this *going*? I’m certainly not suggesting that the literature in the chapters that follow is advocating movement for movement’s sake. The movements I locate in the novels in this study can be as simple as the “leap” of “joy” Williams feels inclined to make as she sits “on the edge of a cliff,” “feet dangling” in a space that makes her feel at once “very, very small and very, very large” (186).

Alternatively, characters who dream their landscapes might also find in those visions inspiration for larger, more meaningful motion. If we look again at Cullen’s vision of the American Dream, we can see that the imagination, if held to a “rigorous standard,” can serve as a “powerful instrument of national reform and revitalization” (189). Although Cullen positions such “reform” as laudable on a wide social scale, it is also possible for the action of forward movement to be seen as “transgressive.” Indeed, according to Tim Cresswell, certain movements and behaviors might very well disrupt “normative geographies,” where “everything is in place” (9). By questioning, through the very act of dreaming, the ideologies and histories already mapped onto place, the characters I study in this project occupy what Michel Foucault calls “heterotopias,” or “countersites that challenge hegemonic spatial representation” (LeMenager 4; Foucault xviii). The other option, of course, is that no movement happens at all. Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate this kind of stasis, which originates in a fraught imagination. Whether ultimately effective in producing movement or not, visions of the landscape in these novels function as spaces in which characters can sketch out motions that might move them through their worlds in new ways.

The Arc of the Western Imagination

This dissertation examines six novels across the arc of the 20th century in order to elucidate how the social function of the western imagination has developed alongside the landscapes it envisions. The first two chapters examine two quintessential works representative of the “frontier” and “pioneer” periods, Mark Twain’s 1872 travelogue *Roughing It* and Willa Cather’s 1913 “novel of the soil” *O Pioneers!*. In *Roughing It*, Twain formulates a vagabond’s imagination to document a West full of movement – of migrants’ homes, of artistic practices to capture western terrains, and of the land itself, literally spurred into motion by timbering and mining. Here, the narrator’s vacillations between dreams of the land’s value and nightmares of its worthlessness reflect both the instability and possibility of a West yet to be defined by the Americans settling its territories. Chapter 2 looks at *O Pioneers!*, in which Cather channels Twain’s experimental vagabond’s imagination into an investigative settler’s imagination. Although the land in Cather’s work maintains much of the mystery we saw in Twain’s travelogue, the protagonist’s admiration for imaginative “wonder” is both tempered by and serves as a corrective to the scientific quantification that characterized Industrialization. Thus, while Cather’s protagonist is careful to acknowledge the “great fact” of the land, she simultaneously recognizes the limits of such facts by insisting that, “A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves” (48).

Chapters 3 and 4 find that the same American expansion that allowed Cather’s settlers to bring their imaginations to bear on the “great fact” of the land, also works to contain the geographical visions of ethnic and economic “others” as the century

progresses. In Américo Paredes' *George Washington Gómez* (written 1936-40; published 1990), I identify an immobilized imagination produced by the same land features and practices – a topographically isolated chaparral and a self-governing patriarchal culture – that once preserved the independence of the Rio Grande Valley. If as a child the eponymous protagonist envisioned the landscape of his home as an “enchanted fairyland,” and as a teenager saw his backyard banana grove as nothing more than a “sea of mud,” as a grown man he views the entire region as a “filthy Delta.” Without the geographical spaces on which to ground fantasies for his own future or his people's, George at the conclusion of this bildungsroman is bound to enemy territory by his own lack of vision, which I show was literally and symbolically circumscribed by American surveillance techniques during and after the Mexican Revolution. Chapter 4 turns to Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939), which exhibits a dislocated imagination that trips through a landscape fragmented by the speeds of the Progressive Era, facilitated by Los Angeles highways and Hollywood big screens. Here, characters literally cannot see straight. Their faulty vision impairs their ability to “get [their] bearings,” making it difficult for them to traverse their setting without falling over. More importantly, their troubled focus confounds their capacity to accurately judge the viability of dreams – their own or their nation's.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I trace a rebounding of the immobilized, dislocated imaginations of Paredes and West. Chapter 5 examines John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952), which emerges from the Depression to re-locate the imagination through the idea of a free will which envisions that which “mayest” occur on the land. I suggest that Steinbeck's intimate psychological depiction of the choices his characters make marks

the first step in a reevaluation of the imagination that begins following WWII. By exploring the inner workings of the imagination and its role in perceiving both the self and the spaces in which that self acts, *East of Eden* shows how self-consciousness enables decisions that allow humans to intuit, imagine, and take advantage of the potentials of an imperfect world, and more particularly, of an imperfect West. Chapter 6 focuses on N.Scott Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* (1968), which expands such geographical possibility by positing a spell-bound imagination that correlates the sight of the land to an understanding of and belief in its history. In particular, this chapter demonstrates how the protagonist's ability to see and move through his world is correlated with the federal Indian Policies that regulate his environment.

The land-based visions in in each of these novels interpret a terrain embedded with culture, all attempting, but not all succeeding, to draft promising responses to the present conditions of their western worlds. Rather than demonstrating a general decline in the use and value of the imagination as the 20th century progresses, as western scholarship has indicated, these texts exhibit how the form of the imagination has adapted to negotiate the lands it encounters, forming an upside-down arc across the course of 100 years that embraces, dismisses, and then rediscovers the power of imagination.

In contending that such acts of geographical imagination serve a social function, this project opens up a field of western literary studies that has long been overtly focused on authenticity as the only portal for accurately understanding the West. I believe that using theories of social imagination, ideological construction, and land practice provides a productive new lens for western texts, highlighting that the dreams featured in the region's literature illuminate, negotiate, and even critique larger American cultural

concerns. Ultimately, my project argues that a critical focus on characters' visions of the western spaces around them reveals that the 20th century literature of the American West pioneers a powerful social imagination, in which geographical dreams record interpretations of not only the history that occurred on that land, but also the prospects that western spaces offer for the future.

CHAPTER 1

THE VAGABOND IMAGINATION IN MARK TWAIN'S *ROUGHING IT*: "QUEER VICISSITUDES" OF ROMANCE AND REALISM IN THE NEVADA TERRITORY

Just after the turn of the century, Arthur Rickett looked back at 19th century authors and declared that writers like Henry Thoreau, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Walt Whitman had had a "salutary" effect on the course of literature due to their status as "vagabonds." Defining the "vagabond temperament" as characterized primarily by a wandering restlessness which may manifest itself physically, intellectually, or both, Rickett links his subjects through their opposition to "the routine and conventions of ordinary life" (vii). Although we might initially be turned off by the "peculiarities and extravagances" of these authors, Rickett insists that they have contributed to the "sanity and sweetness" of "life and thought." He concludes that they "have indeed scattered 'a new roughness and gladness' among men and women, for they have spoken to us of the simple magic of the Earth" (16). Mark Twain was not included in Rickett's study of the literary vagabond,¹ but his 1872 travelogue *Roughing It*, which loosely documents Samuel Clemens' 1860s western sojourn, aligns well with Rickett's claims. Dated as its rhetoric sounds to modern readers, Rickett's advocacy for the vagabond is useful for understanding the value of Twain's travelogue not in spite of its "scattered" "peculiarities and extravagances," but because of them. While both past and present

¹ This is not particularly surprising, since humor writing was still considered literature of a "low order," as Clemens himself recognized. On Oct. 19 and 20 of 1865, he wrote to Orion and Mollie Clemens to announce his "'call' to literature, of a low order—*i.e.* humorous." After this self-deprecation, Clemens resigns himself to "excite the laughter of God's creatures" and thereby strive for an "unworthy & evanescent" fame (Clemens, "SLC to Orion and Mary E. (Mollie) Clemens, 19 and 20 Oct 1865").

critics have judged *Roughing It* as lacking in form and function – William Dean Howells called it “kaleidoscopic” and Ron Powers describes Twain’s general style as a “serendipitous” “grab-bag” of “sprawling pastiche” (184) – I see such apparent “roughness” as not merely “antic.” Instead, Twain’s seemingly disparate visions of western land are the result of what I call the “vagabond imagination,” showing us how the late-19th century West acted as a “land of invitation,” a space that solicited multiple interpretations in response to a still unsettled American experiment.

Rickett’s argument for the value the vagabond and Twain’s occupation of that role is controversial in part because the label can be taken as either compliment or censure. In general, the vagabond is someone who “roams” or “wanders,” a person characterized by his own migrations (“Vagabond”). However, cultural acceptance of such wandering depends on its rationale. On the one hand, the term has been applied to nomads, mountaineers, sailors, and soldiers. These career-oriented vagabonds are deemed admirable because their geographical instability serves to accomplish their vocational goals. This kind of mobility was fostered in the late 19th century by the rise of industry, the advent of new forms of transportation,² and the settlement of the American West. However, the growing ease of movement was accompanied by a growing unease about its effects, perhaps best represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s warning that “travelling is a fool’s paradise.”³ Mobility was considered acceptable, then, only if it was professionally productive and took place within the social and geographical lines of

² The transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory Point, Utah by joining the Union Pacific and Central Pacific rail lines with a golden spike on May 10, 1869.

³ Emerson was concerned in 1841 with the dangers of “the circumnavigation of the globe” for the ideal of self-reliance. “[W]hat is imitation,” Emerson wrote, “but the travelling of the mind?” (149–150).

established norms. When applied to beggars, loafers, tramps, and vagrants, the vagabond label becomes a term of reproof denoting disreputability, impropriety, worthlessness, or even paganism. Deemed lazy at best and diseased at worst,⁴ such figures were viewed in the mid- to late-19th century as necessitating reform. The threat of the vagabond, then, appears as soon as he is understood as “not subject to control or restraint” – as unreformable. Though a vagabond can be simply a “rascal” whose “bad” qualities do not necessarily have any “serious implications,” it is the concept of contingency out of bounds that presents “serious” concern.

Which kind of vagabond was Mark Twain? His contemporary critics were not entirely sure. Though Twain has, of course, been widely accepted today as a progenitor of American literature, his mid-19th century readers were often skeptical of the “wild doings” represented in his work.⁵ Even today, Twain’s critics generally agree that unstable dualisms characterize the author and his work, but are divided about the purpose and outcome of his “rough” qualities.⁶ One category of this criticism dwells on the dualities inherent in Twain’s style: the serious and the silly, the fact and the fiction, the

⁴ According to an 1876 case study of Dr. Headlam Greenhow, “Vagabond’s Discoloration” is prevalent in scavengers, whose “dirty habits” include hard drinking and frequent contact with “vermin.” Perhaps not coincidentally, the patient under observation is notable for his “naturally dark complexion” (Greenhow).

⁵ For example, while Americans were elated at the comic relief, following the Civil War, of “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calveras County” (1865), Twain’s publisher sent advance copies of *Roughing It* only to carefully selected reviewers in order to avoid anticipated scorn (though this turned out to be a misjudgment), and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) was criticized for its potential to corrupt the youth with its depiction of juvenile delinquency (Powers 155, 321, Messent 12).

⁶ The concentration on duality begins, of course, with the author’s name(s), with scholars working to distinguish the man from the mask. Justin Kaplan, Hamlin Hill, Andrew Hoffman, and Ron Powers have investigated the split between “Samuel Clemens” and “Mark Twain” along moral, familial, sexual, and economic lines. The outliers here are Peter Messent, who identifies at least five distinct identities in Twain, and Fred Kaplan, whose book *The Singular Mark Twain* (2003) was roundly admonished for its attempt to suppress the general tendency to look at Twain in terms of a “double” theme. Other critics, including Louis J. Budd, Emerson Everett, and Joe B. Fulton, focus not so much on the divisions within Twain as on his reflection of the complex culture surrounding him, a culture Karen Haltunnen characterizes in terms of its flux, its mobility, and even its hypocrisy. These cultural instabilities are discussed in the third section of this chapter.

traditional and the experimental, and the romance and the realism.⁷ In this last grouping, Jeffrey Alan Melton recognizes a split in *Roughing It* in which the narrator cycles through romantic illusion and realistic disillusion, “participat[ing] in a mythic West while demonstrating its limitations and deceptions” (98). Melton sees the narrator’s touristic failure to learn any lessons about the Territory from these cycles as counteracting the supposed victories of Manifest Destiny⁸ and therefore enacts a “losing of the West” (98). Leo Marx has identified a similar divide in the way Twain’s Mississippi books⁹ portray nature, either from the aesthetic view of the passenger or the analytical view of the pilot. Marx, however, does not count this split as a loss. Instead, he sees *Roughing It* as a starting point essential to allowing Twain to eventually render, in *Huckleberry Finn*, “the lovely possibilities of life in America without neglecting its terrors” (143). Marx refers to *Roughing It* only in passing, however, treating the travelogue as a stepping stone. I argue that Twain’s seemingly chaotic territorial experimentation acts not only as a stepping stone toward a particularly American aesthetic, but also as the cornerstone of a particularly western American imagination. Thus, Twain’s combination of realistic and romantic views of the land in *Roughing It* constitutes neither a win nor a loss, but rather a quest for a way to mentally grasp the significance of a region that had yet to be defined coherently by white Americans.¹⁰

⁷ See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Maria Ornella Marotti, and Alan Gribben.

⁸ Proclaimed most vociferously by Theodore Roosevelt’s *The Winning of the West* (1889-96)

⁹ Twain’s “Mississippi books” are *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

¹⁰ Critics within the “new western” school of thought have rightly sought to overturn the notion, promulgated by “old western” critics, that the West was a blank canvas without a past or a void without a populace by voicing the stories of the pre-existing environment and the ethnic “others” whose manipulation and oppression rendered them invisible to those who would “win” the West. Nevertheless, we must

These conflicting perspectives, and the narrator's wandering between them, constitute *Roughing It's* "vagabond imagination." The travelogue's romantic perspectives often occur either from a high point above the land or from the inner bowels of the earth, portraying ethereal or utopian views, accompanied by an elated, awed tone.¹¹ By contrast, the book's realistic visions are generally launched from ground level, quantifying unappealing details, and conveying disappointment or dejection. In *Roughing It*, we can see how Twain uses both realistic and romantic approaches to exploring three primary aspects of the land: its material resources, aesthetic properties, and cultural values. As a vagabond in the early 1860s, Twain's shifting visions of the western landscape are in keeping with the uncertain nature of the frontier itself.

Twain presents his exploration of the West as unstable for reasons of personal choice, but, behind the scenes, historical necessity and cultural anxiety also contribute to *Roughing It's* divergent style. In the Prefatory, Twain's narrator – who I will also refer to as his "alter-ego" or "persona," distinct from the author himself – both insists on the entertainment value of his work and apologizes for the information it includes, resulting in a book that can be qualified both as something that will "help the resting reader while

acknowledge just how empty, unsettled, and uncertain the frontier must have looked to those, like Clemens, who were accustomed to cultural presumptions of white superiority, norms of imperial paternalism, and beliefs in the "disappearing Indian." As Audrey Goodman demonstrates in *Translating Southwestern Landscape*, the region serves as a "battleground" of competing perspectives, with Anglo viewpoints often taking precedence.

¹¹ Whereas Twain's later texts have garnered much attention for their "fantastic" nature, little attention has been paid to the imaginative in his early work. [For more detailed accounts of this later work, see Maria Ornella Marotti's *The Duplicating Imagination: Twain and the Twain Papers* (1990) and Henry Nash Smith's *How True Are Dreams?: The Theme of Fantasy in Mark Twain's Later Work* (1989).] In particular, Twain's simultaneous skepticism about religion and belief in the paranormal suggest that any scenes depicting acts of dreaming, envisioning, or imagining are worthy of attention. Clemens, of course, is today widely considered to have been, if not an atheist, at least a staunch critic of religion – as especially indicated in later works like *The Diary of Adam and Eve* – despite his "conversion" upon marrying Olivia Langdon. Nevertheless, this skepticism did not prevent Clemens from subscribing to a belief in the fantastic, including concepts like "dream pre-cognition" and mental telegraphy (Myers).

away an idle hour” and as a “philosophical dissertation” that “leak[s] wisdom.”

Historically, however, the chaotic atmosphere of the Civil War also prevented Twain from pinning down a clear picture of his adventures. “Out West,” Twain wrote in “The Private History of a Campaign that Failed,” “there was a good deal of confusion in men’s minds during the first months of the great trouble – a good deal of unsettledness, of leaning first this way, then that, then the other way. It was hard for us to get our bearings” (*Mark Twain* 863). As Patrick L. Hamilton recognizes, a subject’s “inability to mentally map their physical surroundings” indicates “their feelings of disconnection, confusion, and even alienation” (14). It is in part because of this broad sense of war-time instability that Twain necessarily feels unsure of his place, leading him to document haphazard “variegations” of the West. Finally, the “vagabondizing” the author records in his travelogue represents a larger cultural concern about “settling.” For Twain, to settle on something – whether it be a plot of land or a narrative plot – is dangerous in that it may portend not so much progress or expansion as stagnation and control. The prospect of such immobilization was daunting.

The romantic and realistic imaginative endeavors of Twain’s narrator are crucial to navigating the physical spaces of the territory as well the mental conception of the West’s role in the nation’s identity. The geographical and stylistic movements contained in Twain’s *Roughing It* are neither haphazard nor stylistically detrimental, then. Instead, I argue, Twain’s vagabond imagination draws on the land of the West in two different senses – both acquiring information and inspiration from the territory and penciling new images onto that space – to reflect, shape, and even celebrate the instability of the American Civil War period generally and the Nevada Territory specifically, in all its

material, aesthetic, and cultural fluctuation. For Twain, the vagabond is an ideal strategic figure with which to parse, process, and present the West, allowing for experimentation and movement – but this figure is threatened by the increasing solidification of the Territory as the turn of the century approaches.

The Material Value of Western Land: Mining a Landscape in Motion

This section investigates how *Roughing It*'s narrator looks at the material resources of the West's land from a romantic, and then, briefly, a realistic, perspective. I argue that these perspectives are aligned with the history of the Comstock Lode, which was discovered in 1859, just two years before Clemens' arrival in Nevada. The discovery qualified not only as the “dominating event” in the state's history,¹² but also one of the most important mining discoveries in American history (Edwards).¹³ Its beginnings, however, were characterized primarily by uncertainty and unpredictability, not only in the land itself, but also in the methods used to extract its resources and the infrastructures and institutions created to manage them. Initially, Twain's alter-ego uses such instability to launch into romanticized fantasy, but he is forced by increasingly rigid systems of resource removal and regulation to consider more practical, realistic responses to the landscape.

Much of the fluctuation in mining materials and methods exhibited in *Roughing It* can be explained by the travelogue's setting *between* two important mining periods: the end of the Gold Rush and the beginning of the Comstock Lode. When the narrator of *Roughing It* arrives in Nevada, he curses his “sad fate” at being labeled an “emigrant”

¹² The Comstock Lode, and the populace it attracted, was crucial to Nevada's bid for statehood in 1864. Its ore, 57% silver, also inspired the state's nickname, the Silver State (Edwards).

¹³ The Comstock Lode produced nearly \$306 million worth of iron ore between 1859 and 1882 (Marschall; Morris 129).

rather than “that proudest and blessedest creature that exists on all the earth, a ‘FORTY-NINER’” (114). Unlike Huck Finn, Clemens did not “light out for Territory ahead of the rest” – he was twenty years too late (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* 268).

Following the Gold Rushers who had struck it rich on the western side of the Sierra Nevada mountains, emigrants like Clemens were relegated their eastern slopes, where flakes of gold flecked the widespread, shifting sands known as “placers” (James 1–2). In Twain’s tale, this is the type of gold the narrator’s partner, Calvin Higbie, collects from a mine claimed¹⁴ by the Wide West company: it is “not hard rock, but black, decomposed stuff which could be crumbled in the hand like a baked potato, and when spread out on paper exhibited a thick sprinkling of gold and particles of ‘native’ silver” (210). Higbie is at first so “puzzled” by the rock’s mysterious character that he uses a glass to “inspect... it in different lights and from different points of view.” His magnification technique¹⁵ is exemplary of the rudimentary tools used to locate the land’s riches in the late 1850s and early 1860s, including simple gravity and rare mercury.¹⁶ Nonetheless,

¹⁴ The methods for “claiming” property were not entirely clear at this point. In part, regulations in Nevada were slow to develop because they had not been necessary in California, where gold was scattered across broad swaths of land rather than concentrated in any particular area. The forty-niners who arrived to mine the Comstock Lode 10 years later, then, were not accustomed to staking claims with any precision. Instead, the miners of Clemens’ era often used ill-defined landmarks like “a rock on the easterly side of Virginia City” or the edge of a neighbor’s holdings, which might also be bounded by temporary points of reference (James 60-61).

¹⁵ Twain tells us that, “although to the inexperienced stranger all the quartz of a particular ‘district’ looks about alike, an old resident of the camp can take a glance at a mixed pile of rock, separate the fragments, and tell you which mine each come from, as easily as a confectioner can separate and classify the various kinds and qualities of candy in a mixed heap of the article” (209). Higbie is just such an expert prospector.

¹⁶ When working with placer sands, miners relied on the simple device of gravity to separate the valuable from the worthless materials, washing the sand in rockers which allowed the heavier gold to settle while the lighter dirt flowed away. In the desert, however, water was often scarce; a shortage would render the rocker method moot. Miners could also use mercury to attract gold, but mercury was also rare, and therefore expensive (James 46). The contraptions developed to excavate mining tunnels were equally unstable. Once prospectors moved beyond the strategy of digging open pits to carving out tunnels, they haphazardly wedged individual timbers between the roof and the ceiling or from wall to wall wherever support appeared necessary. The nature of the ground itself, however, made this jury-rigged system

Higbie's method allows him to determine that his specimen "is *not* Wide West rock!" (210). To prove his theory, Higbie sneaks into the mine shaft, where he finds that a separate "blind lead held its independent way through the Wide West vein, cutting it diagonally... enclosed in its own well-defined casing-rocks and clay" (211-212). This separate vein would have been public property according to what was known as the multiple ledges theory. According to this theory, if a mineral vein descends in "dips, spurs, and angles" across multiple properties, the owner of the initial claim, which might encompass only a portion of the vein, should not be able to claim its extensions. In the early 1860s, the common man – like Higbie – was heavily invested in this theory, which made it easy for him to strike it rich without worrying about whether his discovery might be threatened by its geological connection to an earlier claim.

During the night of Higbie's discovery, the narrator's belief that he has instantaneously become a millionaire leads him "only to lie broad awake and think, dream, scheme" (212). His dream transforms the space around him: his "tumble-down cabin" turns into a palace, the "ragged gray blankets" into silks, and the rustic furniture into "rosewood and mahogany." Such idealizing visions are dependent not on a pre-fabricated, stable definition of the land he mines, but rather on its uncertain potential. By relating the mining logistics depicted in *Roughing It* to their historical corollaries, I want to highlight the dynamism that generally characterized the mining industry in the second half of the 19th century. By extension, I want to suggest that such a fluctuating environment provides Twain with a platform from which to ignite the romantic

unreliable. King observed the dangers of expanding clay "forcing itself through the interstices of rocks, bending and breaking the most carefully laid timbers and filling mine openings with extraordinary rapidity" (King 50, 61). As the size of tunnels grew, efforts to support the shifting earth only became more challenging (James 54).

imagination of his narrator. It is the unexplored, unsettled character of the landscape that makes it an ideal backdrop for dreams (212). More specifically, it is the “blind” nature of the mineral “lead” that represents Twain’s persona’s perception of the land as open to interpretation, ready to be imposed upon with any vision he can come up with.

The spatial transformations the narrator imagines, however, do not come to fruition in reality. Although Higbie and the narrator put up a notice and record their claim according to the “laws of the district,” they fail to “do a fair and reasonable amount of work on their new property within ten days after the date of the location” in order to avoid property forfeiture (214). Instead, their plans are foiled by their own obstinate romanticism. Both are distracted from their practical duties by their dreams: Higbie goes off to satisfy his “fascination” with another “mysterious mining excitement,” while the narrator becomes preoccupied with planning the details of his millionaire’s mansion, including “the propriety of having the billiard-room in the attic” and whether he should have “green [or] blue for the upholstery of the drawing-room” (218, 215). When the mining team appears at their site ten days after they discovered it, they find a notice proclaiming new ownership (219). Sidetracked by their own visions of wealth, Twain and Higbie fail to claim their mine according to real regulations, thereby rendering moot their imagined success.

The “failure” of their dreams to play out in reality can be attributed in part to the fact that the realities of mining were quickly changing. While the narrator and his partner were busy constructing romantic visions, the Territory about which they fantasized was being pinned down according to more rigid frameworks. If the late 1850s and early 1860s were characterized by unstable land, sketchy mining tools, and undeveloped

institutional structures, Clemens' time in Nevada coincided with the beginnings of solidification in all three arenas. The shifting placer sands on the Sierras' surface and the malleable clays close beneath had been picked clean, leaving prospectors no option but to dig deeper, where they hit hard rock. Meanwhile, the tools and infrastructure to manage the land's resources were also solidifying, with the introduction of the square-set timbering system, mechanized mineral mills, and new roads on which to haul the treasure.¹⁷ Such solidification, I argue, serves as an obstacle to the romantic imagination of Twain's alter-ego. Without a flexible setting through which to fantasize, in other words, the idealized visions of *Roughing It's* narrator are stifled.

In order to better understand the vexed relationship between the narrator's proclivity toward romance and his avoidance of an increasingly imposing reality, it is helpful to look at passages in which the concepts collide, often awkwardly. For example, when the narrator is first "smitten" by silver fever, he carefully justifies the romantic extremes of his apparent malady as innocuous, average, and based in reality. By succumbing to the fever, he reasons, he renders himself not an outcast, but rather a patently normal member of his community: "I would have been more or less than human if I had not gone mad like the rest," he explains (152). He continues to give grounds for his fever by calling upon scientific and economic evidence. In order that "the reader may

¹⁷ In 1860, a young German engineer named Philipp Deidesheimer developed the square-set timbering system, which supported wider, deeper tunnels with stable, stackable, mass-producible wooden cubes. In order to extract the valuable minerals from the hard-rock mines, the old Mexican *arrastra* process of animal-driven pulverization was no longer sustainable (James 46). In 1860, Almarin B. Paul gathered investors to build the first mechanized mill in the region, with 24 stamps (47). Dozens followed Paul's lead, and by 1861, the year of Clemens' arrival in Nevada, the Comstock region boasted 76 mills with 1200 stamps, actually exceeding demand (51). In order to haul the one ton of ore that each of these stamps produced every day – as well as the material needed to build new mines – new roads were constructed. One of the most significant of these was the Greiger Grade, which connected the Comstock with what would eventually become the city of Reno and with California (through the same pass in which the Donner Party had perished). Eventually, the Greiger Grade would serve as the route for the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869 (53).

see what moved [him], and what would as surely have moved [the reader] had he been there,” the narrator inserts, verbatim, a *Daily Territorial Enterprise* letter discussing the Territory’s mining potential. Written in a “calm hand,” expressing a “candid” and “honest opinion,” and based on a “thorough examination,” the letter offers financial statistics to argue that “Humboldt county is the richest mineral region upon God’s footstool” (153). Ironically, however, the narrator’s attempts to present his fever as reasonable only serve to underline its “undue elevation” by describing the land’s resources as “profuse,” “immense,” and “incalculable” (153). Even when he’s trying his best to convince his readers that his dreams are realistic, the unquantifiables of romantic rhetoric slip in.

Is the tenacity of romance, despite its apparent mismatch with the increasingly sturdy atmosphere of the Nevada Territory, necessarily detrimental? It is certainly possible that Twain trots out his fantasizing silver miner as a practical warning against romanticizing the West. *Don’t go dreaming; you’ll miss out on real opportunities*, the moral would go. The author might also be cautioning his readers against the mob mentality that leads to participating in such myth making; after all, Twain is well known for lampooning the destructive nature of mass psychologies,¹⁸ and the contagion of silver fever in *Roughing It* is not exempt from satire. However, I would argue that Twain goes beyond reprimanding the dreamer – whether individual or conformist – by critiquing the way dreaming is moralized in the first place. He does this by having his narrator qualify the act of dreaming not as an avoidance of work but rather as “diligent...labor” (219). We often judge dreaming as passive, and this judgment allows critics to assume that the

¹⁸ Twain’s critique of mob mentality is perhaps most apparent in “The United States of Lyncherdom,” written in 1901 but not published until 13 years after the author’s death.

narrator's one-time acknowledgment that "all that glitters is not gold" (162) points to the travelogue's essentially "anti-romantic" moral. As Richard Slotkin puts it, "Twain's persona perceives that the essential nature of the illusion offered by the Frontier myth is its substitution of easy wealth for the necessity of labor" (518). However, this reading does not engage the narrator's rejection of his own aphorism, when he insists that he will "go on underrating men of gold and glorifying men of mica" (163). The continual willingness of Twain's alter-ego to be goaded by new illusions throughout the travelogue, despite recurring recognitions of reality, suggests something more complex than simple "anti-romanticism." Indeed, Twain makes it a point to show how the romantic imagination, in envisioning the dynamism of the land, sets not just the mind, but also the body in motion. For example, when the narrator's silver fever leads him to imagine that "the very world reeled under" him, his visions "burst out" so powerfully that they "whirled" him "bodily over in bed" and "jerked [him] to a sitting posture" with the force of an "electric battery." No idle dreams, the visions of riches here are, quite literally, moving. But this physical movement is not for its own sake. The mining theory of multiple ledges demonstrates that such movement has social and political potential. More than just an institutional regulation, the theory had the power to affect individual social mobility, as well as cultural attitudes about that possibility (James 63). After all, Twain's Hartford mansion eventually did contain all the things he had dreamed of – including the billiard room. Despite the fact that his miner's dream had been based on a flimsy understanding of the realities of land regulation, his later accommodations of reality to that dream did ultimately land the author in a higher class. The interconnected issues of mining regulation and social mobility even became wrapped up in the prospect

of statehood, which came to be associated with the increasing consolidation of claims under wealthy, well-connected corporations. On Jan. 19, 1864, the electorate overwhelmingly defeated the proposal to make Nevada a state, by four to one (James 64). The vote to maintain Nevada's territorial status was a vote to maintain the free-wheeling nature of its land and laws, along with the ways such flexibility allowed its populace to move through – or, hopefully, up in – that world.

The political sentiments of Nevada's populace, however, would soon change. Once the easy-access placer sands had disappeared, common men like Clemens began to recognize just how small their chances at striking it rich were. It would take corporate money to purchase the equipment and develop the infrastructure necessary to extract value from deeper mines and harder rocks (James 65-66).¹⁹ As the earlier bonanza subsided in 1864 into what miners termed *borrasca*, small mine owners were hardest hit, and could no longer afford to employ their workers. The general populace began to see the corporations less as enemies and more as saviors – only their capital could make the Comstock prosperous again. Support for corporate intervention was followed by support for federal oversight, and on September 7, 1864, less than eight months after making the opposite decision, the residents of the Nevada Territory voted for statehood. By the end of October, President Abraham Lincoln had signed the 36th state into the Union.

This is not to say that statehood – or the solidification of land, tools, and structures – completely eradicated romance. Corporations could use romance, too, but for much different ends than Twain would have preferred. In contrast to the narrator's

¹⁹ For example, the 64-stamp mill built in 1861 by the Washoe Gold and Silver Mining Company No. 1 cost \$150,000, or around \$4 million in today's dollars (James 48). When the Ophir Mining Company built a 16-mile road through a pass in the Virginia Range to its mill on Washoe Lake, it cost \$600,000, or almost \$16 million today.

generally unsuccessful efforts to temper his tenacious romanticism with realism, others tried to bolster their claims to the real with superficial applications of the ideal. For instance, built in 1863, the Gould and Curry Mine – a 60-acre complex of offices, shops, stables, and laborers’ cottages – could easily have been mistaken for “the mansion of some wealthy land-owner rather than a mill built in a barren district to crush silver ore” (Lord 124–128). According to Eliot Lord’s 1883 *Comstock Mining and Miners*, such architectural extravagance and financial indulgence – including a 50-foot fountain complete with water-nymphs and swans – were the products of imagination run amok. That “the economy was not a popular study” with the mines’ managers is “in no way surprising,” he writes, since “[m]en walked the streets of Virginia City as if pacing the roof of a fathomless treasure house, and their heads were constantly in the clouds.” Because “the fancy of the imaginative ran wild,” Lord concludes, “all prudent considerations were laughed to scorn” (125). The irony in this case is that if the romantic imagination enabled the construction of the ornate mine, it simultaneously shut down any acceptance of future flexibility. Instead, James asserts, the elaborate mill shows that mine owners wanted not only “to control the entire process of mining and milling” but also that, in the hope of attracting investors, they “wished to project an image of permanent prosperity” (51). The projection of permanence – even if it originated in idealized visions – onto the landscape through such architectural feats as the Gould and Curry complex represents a larger pattern of stabilization, corporatization, and regulation within the mining industry.

It is just such permanence that Twain’s narrator – and a nation anxious about the end of the frontier – seeks to avoid. If dreaming counts as labor, and if the flexibility of

the landscape inspires such work, the corporatization of the Territory would preclude the functioning of the romantic imagination, along with its social work of inspiring change and progress. As such, Twain's persona, having seen the writing on the wall, responds by habitually abandoning those fields that shut down his imagination's work. Following the loss of his neglected claim, the narrator works in a quartz mill, and then promptly quits. In a letter to his brother, Clemens justified this decision by claiming that "It is a confining business, and I will not be confined, for love nor money" (Morris 92). By challenging such structured approaches to the West, Twain's alter-ego provides his reader with a vagabond model for reading the West – one that navigates between ideal and real perspectives, ultimately affirming the power of the romantic imagination to foment social movement. Twain's narrator fails to be moved by any subject which is not itself in motion. Invigorated by the very unsteadiness of the land beneath his feet, Twain's alter-ego freely projects fantasies onto the mining territory. These fantasies physically move the narrator by heightening his view of his own potential social position on that land. After all, even though the narrator recognizes that mines are essentially "holes in the ground over imaginary mines," he also knows that represent real, "salable" stock. The value of the geographical fantasy in the late 19th century West, then, is in its physical and social flexibility. Thus, while Twain certainly is, as Alan Gribben and Jeffrey Melton characterize him, a "man en route out of his comfortable element" (xix), I suggest that Twain actually does find comfort in the supposedly uncomfortable openness of the West, precisely because such openness does not foreclose on social possibility.

While Twain's Prefatory claims that *Roughing It* narrates the "curious episode" of silver mining in Nevada, discussed above, it turns out that this stereotypically western

pursuit of mineral riches occupies only seven of the travelogue's 79 chapters. The relegation of Twain's silver career to such a small portion of his travelogue is in keeping with the Territory's mining trends. By 1870, two years before *Roughing It* was finally published,²⁰ only 42% of Virginia City's male workforce was still employed in the mining industry, down from 71.4% ten years earlier (James 92). The short-lived nature of the narrator's work as a miner is also, however, in keeping with the value he places on movement, whether geographical, imaginative, or social. As such, the disillusion Twain and Higbie suffer after their blind lead is claimed by another company is but momentary. Embracing the notion that he can always say that he "was absolutely and unquestionably worth a million dollars, once, for ten days," the narrator quickly moves on from his quashed visions of carriages, brownstones, and trips to Europe, simply by asking himself, "What to do next?" (220). After failing to succeed in his initial get-rich-quick scheme, the narrator's question looks like a straightforward symptom of any number of maladies: a lack of concentration, an absence of desire to work, a general sense of restlessness, or a need for constant stimulation and adventure. After all, the Rev. Dr. Henry Bellows' conclusion that "Sensation is the lifeblood" of Comstock miners might lead us to believe that Twain's alter-ego is simply looking for a new occupation with a "feverish nature"

²⁰ Twain's travels had extended to the Sandwich Islands (what we now know as Hawaii) and Europe after he departed from the West in 1866. The former trip was included in *Roughing It*; the latter provided fodder for *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). It was only after the success of *Innocents* that Clemens signed a contract for a second book, which would be *Roughing It*, with Elisha Bliss. It had been so long since his western adventures, however, that Clemens wrote to his brother Orion, "Have you a memorandum of the route we took... Do you remember any of the scenes, names, incidents, or adventures of the coach trip? ... [F]or I remember next to nothing about the matter. Jot down a foolscap page of items for me ... I suppose I am to get the biggest copyright, this time, ever paid on a subscription book in this country" (Clemens, "SLC to Orion Clemens, 15 July 1870").

(Stille 209).²¹ But after reviewing Twain's reframing of the romantic imagination as constituting socially progressive labor, we can now see that asking "What next?" amounts to a strategic search for new arenas that will accommodate that work.

Twain's mining failures inevitably give way to other opportunities for striking it rich. All the endeavors he takes on – silver mining, the claims business, the quartz mill – fail once they are physically and imaginatively solidified, but each "failure" is ultimately celebrated as productive for a new start. In fact, it is the failure of the Marion Rangers, the rag-tag team of confederate soldiers Clemens joined and fictionalized in "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed" (1885) that allows for Twain to go West in the first place.²² Upon his arrival in the Nevada Territory, Twain's narrator places his bets not on silver, but on another, decidedly less flashy earthly resource: timber.²³ Along with a partner, Twain claims some three hundred acres of timberland on Lake Tahoe, with plans to start a wood ranch. Those plans promptly end when Twain accidentally sets fire to the forest that was supposed to make him rich. As he watches his dream of wealth go up in flames, though, our narrator renounces his prior concern with the landscape's material value by turning his attention to its aesthetic worth. Observing the fire, Twain notes that "Every feature of the spectacle was repeated in the glowing mirror of the lake! Both

²¹ Bellows, president of the Sanitary Commission and a Unitarian minister in San Francisco, used the "fever" metaphor to characterize Nevadans' mob-like support of the Sanitary Fund. See note 26 for an explanation of Twain's involvement with the Sanitary Commission.

²² John Bird rightly surmises that the pervasive confusion about geographical direction in "Private History" points to a much larger confusion about both war itself and the genre of war writing, ultimately suggesting that the campaign's "failure" is actually a success in its denial of any "great cause" as a rationale for war's inhumanities (7).

²³ That Twain pursues timber before silver does well in placing him in the chronology of the Comstock Lode, as it was not until Nevada mining operations had advanced from the open-pit to the square-set timbering method that timber became a particularly lucrative resource. Indeed, the new system "sounded the death knell for thousands of acres of Sierra forest" (James 55).

pictures were sublime, both were beautiful; but that in the lake had a bewildering richness about it that enchanted the eye and held it with the stronger fascination” (140).²⁴ In this moment, Twain has transitioned from one realm of prospecting – mining the landscape for its material value – to another – beholding the “fine view” offered by the landscape’s aesthetics. J.H. Beadle, in his 1873 *The Undeveloped West* chides his “romantic readers” for defining “prospect” in terms of a beautiful panorama, insisting that they re-orient their conception of the word in a westerly direction to mean a camp of miners (330). Twain, having already been down that shaft, suggests an opposing move. Easily dismissing his economic loss for an aesthetic gain, the narrator pivots from envisioning the land’s rich objective resources to envisioning its rich subjective beauty. Through his fascination with the reflection of the fire more than the fire itself, Twain reiterates his belief in flexible notions of re-presentation that allow for movement and change. If Twain’s silver fever produced idealized visions of the material value of the western landscape, his visions of that landscape’s aesthetic resources result in equally romantic fantasies about its aesthetic value. Just as the narrator’s below-ground mining adventures produce high-flown visions of the territory’s riches that are repeatedly stifled by the solidifications of the mining industry, his mountaintop perspectives of the land’s aesthetic wealth are inevitably brought down to earth with a disillusioning zoom in on the realities to be found at ground-level.

The Aesthetic Value of Western Land: Picture, Portrait, and Perspective

In a seemingly chaotic pattern, *Roughing It* includes both heightened, dream-like pictures of the undeveloped western landscape’s beauty and close-up portraits of that

²⁴ Additionally, Twain’s appreciation of the burning image of the forest reflects others’ recognition of lumber’s aesthetic properties in other realms, as later visitors to the Comstock mines commented that the underground structures resembled buried cathedrals (James 56).

same land that uncover its actual imperfections. In contrast to the narrator's earlier critique of the increasing rigidity of western mining practices for disabling the romantic imagination, Twain's alter-ego censures romantic western aesthetic representations for neglecting reality. Ultimately, I suggest, the narrator's aesthetic ambiguity, in which he moves between mountaintop romance and ground-level realism serves informative, entertainment, and social purposes.

The narrator of *Roughing It* introduces his reader to the beauty of the West from on high, as he looks down on the region from various perches above the sprawling land. In these elevated scenes, like those that take place in the depths of mines, Twain offers a distanced view that enables his imagination free reign to romanticize the land. For example, from the "airy situation" of Virginia City, located in the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the narrator notes that

one could look over a vast, far-reaching panorama of mountain ranges and deserts; and whether the day was bright or overcast, whether the sun was rising or setting, or flaming in the zenith, or whether night and the moon held sway, the spectacle was always impressive and beautiful...Look from your window where you would, there was fascination in the picture. At rare intervals – but very rare – there were clouds in our skies, and then the setting sun would gild and flush and glorify this mighty expanse of scenery with a bewildering pomp of color that held the eye like a spell and moved the spirit like music. (229-230)

No matter the circumstance, according to the idealized picture of Twain's alter-ego, the West is "fascinating," "bewildering," and "spell"-binding. As in the depictions of the material value of the blind lead, those of the aesthetic value of the land contain little in the way of objective "information" to "regret": we are not offered any measurements of this apparently unquantifiable "mighty expanse," nor does Twain's persona attempt to scientifically limit his description to a single, precise moment in time, weather condition,

light exposure, or even window choice. Instead, his view is both literally and figuratively “airy,” relying solely on the romantic imagination of the beautiful western “spectacle” far below him. The narrator’s “fascination” with this “picture,” then, succeeds in avoiding the “metaphysics” of reality he believes the reader would find distasteful, and fulfills his promise to “help the resting reader while away an idle hour” with dreamy views of “our” West.

This idealized perspective, however, would not necessarily be qualified as “romantic,” according to William Dean Howells, perhaps the nation’s most staunch advocate of realism. Quoting Spanish realist Armando Palacio Valdes, Howells insists in his *Criticism and Fiction* (1891) that, even if “romantic, symbolic, or classic poets” appear to have “modified nature,” “they are as much realists as ourselves” as long as “they have expressed her [as] they felt her” (Ch. XIII). Moreover, Howells points out, such supposedly heightened expression is a truthful response to “this new world of ours.” For Howells, a stubbornly optimistic view like that of Twain’s persona – in which even the clouds add to the sublimity of the scene – is an authentic portrayal of “the more smiling aspects of life,” which he explicitly defines as “the more American.” Claiming not to “boast,” Howells explains that the relative absence of “sin and suffering and shame” in American literature can be explained simply by “our well-to-do actualities” (Ch. XXI). In this view, then, the unfailing beauty of the Virginia City vista is not only grounded in reality, but in a particularly American reality that is always already perfect.

Other critics, of course, would protest Howells’ realist reading of this clearly idealized scene as deluded, including Mark Twain himself. For instance, as a fledgling reporter for the *Alta California*, Twain critiqued as decidedly unrealistic an artistic

rendering of a panorama very similar to his own in *Roughing It*. The painting was probably Albert Bierstadt's 1864 "The Valley of Yosemite," which depicts a dream-like landscape of dramatic cliffs, a placid lake, and a glowing horizon. Noting that "the outlines of Mr. Bierstadt's mountains are soft and rounded and velvety," suggesting a "great improvement on nature," Twain labels the painting a fictional "picture" rather than an "accurate" "portrait" (*Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown* 250–251).²⁵ Likewise, Twain mocks impressionism, which had begun in France in the 1860s and spread to America in the 1880s, for its "portrayal of a fancy only" ("Instructions in Art" 127). In a 1903 issue of *Metropolitan Magazine*, Twain's "Instructions in Art" provides his own laughably childish drawings in order, supposedly, to help his readers cultivate their own art critical skills. Carefully explaining these drawings, Twain confirms that a picture that looks vaguely like a woman dancing with a tambourine "has no actual and active existence" that we could perceive with our "fleshy vision." Despite all "the tools of distance and perspective" that aim to convince us otherwise, he says, we can tell that the picture is not "from real life." In the realm of literature, too, Twain reveals himself as an antagonist to romantic visions of nature – especially those created by James Fenimore Cooper, who had originated the genre of the historical frontier romance. In "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" (1895), Twain expresses a general disdain for the author's propensity for the "improbability" of "miracles," demonstrating special concern for Cooper's misunderstanding of the land. "If Cooper had any real knowledge of Nature's ways of doing things," Twain quips, "he had a most delicate art in concealing the fact."

²⁵ Twain was consistent in his dislike of Bierstadt, denigrating his work in his 1872 English Journals as unnatural "nightmares," especially in contrast to the "intense reality" of works by Gustave Doré (*Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 5* 617). Recent scholars like William H. and William N. Goetzmann have likewise analyzed Bierstadt as a "sightseer in quest of the picturesque" whose "idealized canvases" depicted America's expanding western empire as a "wonderland" (204, 201).

For example, a “broken twig” in Cooper’s works becomes an ever-present “stage property” that always seems to function as a battle cry, while a stream suddenly and inexplicably narrows from fifty to twenty feet. Twain, who had long ago developed his own exceptional observational skills as a riverboat pilot, is offended by Cooper’s “inadequacy as [an] observer.” According to Twain, the romantic Cooper’s apparent inability to abide by “the eternal laws of Nature” is due to the fact that he lacks the vision to see reality, perceiving “nearly all things as through a glass eye, darkly.”

Twain’s sporadic interjections of aesthetically realistic perceptions into his narrator’s often illusory views of his landscape are essentially an extension of his critiques of Bierstadt and Cooper’s idealization of frontier spaces. Many chapters after the narrator’s initial picturesque rendering of the vista above, we see him begin to sweep the glitter from his eyes by interrogating the tools of his own imagination. In California, for instance, Twain’s alter-ego explains that the mountains “are imposing in their sublimity and their majesty of form and altitude, from any point of view.” As with his vantage on Virginia City, any perspective affords a beautiful spectacle. Here, however, the narrator qualifies his vision: to get the most “charm” out of this panorama, he comments, “requires *distance*” (304, italics original). The removed stance, he recognizes, serves to “soften” the terrain’s “ruggedness” and “enrich” its “tintings.” Another example of this recognition occurs just a few pages later. As the narrator approaches San Francisco through a mountain pass, he acknowledges the impact of altitude on the picture he sees before him, explicitly connecting the aesthetics of the landscape to his geographical vantage point: As he “looked down as the birds do,” he admits that the scene – “a dreamy, exquisite glimpse of fairyland” – is “all infinitely softened and

spiritualized by distance” (308). By equating his outlook on the Valley to a bird’s-eye view, Twain’s persona identifies his own rose-colored glasses. Any vision, he indicates, would be blurred into a “fairyland” from such a remote perspective.

Once Twain’s alter-ego has come down to earth, we can begin to see the West from a more realistic perspective. Such views are “little graced with the picturesque” (265). Objectively speaking, the conflict is easily explained by considering the narrator’s geographical perspective. Whereas his “fairyland” pictures are generally viewed from mountaintops that allow the viewer to see a “mighty expanse,” his fact-based portraits are normally launched from the ground, where vision is more circumscribed. From this angle, the “expanse” is not “mighty,” but rather “unpretending.” This western “reality,” according to the Twain’s persona, is primarily characterized by lack: a lack of variety, a lack of beauty, and a lack of life. Unlike a heightened view that features various landscapes – “mountains and plains and valleys” – a limited “near view” reveals only a “ceaseless” “sameness.” For instance, “close at hand,” the narrator notes a “sad poverty of variety in species” of trees (304). In addition to its monotony, *Roughing It*’s close-ups reveal the territory’s ugliness. Twain’s alter-ego notes, for example, that “a grassy plain in California...is best contemplated at a distance, because although its grass blades are tall, they stand up vindictively straight and self-sufficient, and are unsociably wide apart, with uncomely spots of barren sand between.” Finally, a ground-based perspective uncovers the fact that the landscape is full of death. Unlike the liveliness of the land according to the narrator’s romantic perceptions, his realistic takes are lifeless: a California forest is carpeted “dead spines of... foliage,” an alkali desert in Utah contains a “lifeless silence,” and “dust-coated” skeletons dot paths throughout the travelogue (304,

143).. This realistic combination of uniformity, unseemliness, and morbidity imbues the western spaces of *Roughing It* with an air of “melancholy” and “solemnity,” such that, like Twain’s alter-ego himself, even the “foliage” seems to “complain” (265, 304).

Twain’s narrator explicitly comments on the mismatch between the depressing facts he finds at ground level and the uplifting fantasies he sees from afar. For example, when he gets to Utah’s Great Salt Lake, he laments, “...we had dreamed about it and thought about it, and talked about it, and yearned to see it, all the first part of our trip; but now when it was only arm's length away it had suddenly lost nearly every bit of its interest” (112). Later, Twain’s persona philosophizes, “The poetry was all in the anticipation – there is none in the reality” (143).

Just as Twain’s frustration with the realities of the increasingly managed mining industry pointed to not only to a superficial desire for change and adventure but also to more serious concerns about social mobility, his contrasting denunciation of the romanticization of the West – whether Bierstadt’s velvety “picture” or Cooper’s “miraculous” literature – was not just a stylistic preference, but also a social message. His conflicting views of the aesthetics of the West – stunningly gorgeous from afar and despairingly uninviting up close – serve three purposes.

First, the combination of fantasy and fact works to render an informative understanding of the West that is authentic in its reflection of the constantly changing nature of both landscapes (in their elevation, geology, flora and fauna, development, etc.) and humans’ reactions to them. By imagining this space as a place that accommodates both the ideal and the real, Twain’s changing perspectives produce a comprehensive

conception of the frontier, so that readers can begin to gain a more holistic understanding of the West's ups and downs.

Second, the narrator's alternating real and romantic perspectives offer the excitement of movement necessary to a dynamic, entertaining character and plot. Twain's persona, in parallel to the author's reader, is easily bored. As the narrator puts it, "...the idea of coming to a stand-still and settling down to a humdrum existence in a village was not agreeable, but on the contrary depressing..." (157). Twain's alter-ego, in fact, becomes physically unstable exactly where his footing should technically be the most secure, on the sturdy forest floor. At ground-level, he "feels like a wandering spirit bereft of a footfall," without substance or direction (304). As with the world-shaking visions induced by his alter-ego's mineshaft silver-fever, Twain's narrator appears to be most satisfied when he is enveloped in the dynamism that accompanies his romantic imagination of the land, which he most often finds at geographical extremes. Twain's persona, then, appears to be in it for the adventure: even looking back, he tells the reader, "it thrills me through and through to think of the life, the gladness and the wild sense of freedom that used to make the blood dance in my veins on those fine overland mornings!" (48). In opposition to his critique of Bierstadt, then, Twain's narrator repeatedly returns to the extreme spaces that afford a romantic picture of the Territory. The views of the western landscape from such vantage points enable the "spirit" not to "wander" aimlessly as a disreputable vagabond might, but rather to "move" like "music," with the purpose of an unpredictable yet productive migrant (230). The comparison of the spirit's movement to music – a lyrical, impassioned, subjective art form – appears to fit neatly into Twain's imaginative, airy reverie. However, while music is often

categorized as art, it also, of course, relies on scientific forms that give it both structure and purpose. It is no coincidence, then, that it is not the sturdy notion of the scientific close-up of the western landscape that produces spiritual movement for the narrator. As the Prefatory warned us, such “information” would only serve to “afflict” the reader. Instead, Twain uses the metaphor of music to imply that “metaphysics” can – and should – be incorporated into forms typically thought of as entertaining rather than educational. The picturesque scene on which Twain’s persona gazes, then, is certainly “moving” emotionally. But if this visionary guise allows the reader to believe the author is fulfilling his promise to help us maintain our state of “rest,” it also enables Twain to “move” the reader away from his ingrained habits of reading the West in only its mythical, romanticized sense and toward a new, more purposeful reading of the West that begins to question those myths even as it invokes them. In this way, Twain has slyly inserted the “facts” he would regret – complaining foliage, mining regulations – into a more fantastic narrative – peerless sunsets, golden riches – in order to prompt his readers to appreciate an authentic land and landscape that is “moving” precisely in its incoherence.

Finally, Twain’s aesthetic movements between fact and fantasy serve a social function, pointing to Twain’s recognition that the way in which the frontier was represented had the potential to have real effects on real people. Twain felt this potential on a personal level on at least one occasion. Having depicted the Nevada Territory with glowing terms in letters to his sister Pamela Moffett, Twain was surprised when she responded with an announcement of her “inclination” to come West herself to see such an

awesome space. Desperate to convince her that his depictions of the Territory in his letters to her had been heavily romanticized, he scolds her:

Don't you know that people who always feel jolly, no matter where they are or what happens to them—who have the organ of Hope preposterously developed—who are endowed with an uncongealable sanguine temperament—who never feel concerned about the price of corn—and who cannot, by any possibility, discover any but the *bright* side of a picture—are *very* apt to go to extremes, and exaggerate, with 40-horse microscopic power? (Clemens, “SLC to Jane Lampton Clemens and Pamela A. Moffett”)

Twain's own tendencies toward the romantic, it turns out, often depend on the author's assumption that his readers will exercise realistic skepticism in regarding his idealized pictures, and is appalled when his sister fails to recognize his satire. Indeed, while he acknowledges that his audience is human in its desire to romanticize western landscapes – and, by extension, their own potentials on those landscapes – he simultaneously demands that they recognize the realities on the ground.

Ultimately, Twain's mocking of his narrator's dreamy panorama, then, hints at a more profound cultural critique of the correlation between romanticism and distance. When Albert Bierstadt painted “The Valley of the Yosemite” in 1864, he did so in his New York studio, one year after his trip to the West. He had written to a friend that Yosemite constituted a Garden of Eden, and used such divine inspiration not only to give the painting the “freshness of studies executed in the field” but also to cultivate a market in the East for pictures of the West (Davis 80). Bierstadt's “The Valley of the Yosemite” sold for \$1600 at the Metropolitan Sanitary Fair,²⁶ the highest price paid for a painting at

²⁶ Coincidentally, Twain had also been famously involved in the Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the American Red Cross that received its national charter in 1861. Whereas metropolitan areas like New York organized elaborate fairs and auctions to solicit funds in support of Union troops during the Civil War, rural territories like Nevada arranged the selling of a flour sack to raise money. When the town of Dayton outbid Carson for the sack, Twain wrote an “explanatory” article alleging that the Ladies of Carson

that sale.²⁷ The view from afar – whether it be the top of a peak or the other side of the country – was a lucrative one, offering increases in both emotional and economic capital. Of course, Twain himself was not immune to such opportunism. Capitalizing on the success of *The Innocents Abroad*, he wrote *Roughing It* nearly four years after his departure from the Territory, 2,500 miles away, in Buffalo, New York.

Although Twain's inclusion of his narrator's romantic perspectives in *Roughing It* can easily be equated with Bierstadt's as exploitative, his travelogue's addition of realistic views of the West indicates that the author aims to prompt his readers' to analyze more intimately the western fantasies being hawked at the time. If the narrator's gilded description of the landscape reflects the version of a region the American psyche had claimed and idealized, from afar, in order to soothe its own anxieties about the nation's postbellum future,²⁸ his unadorned visions of that same land charge his readers with recognizing its realities, including the possibility not only that the West is not always pretty but also that it might not solve all America's problems. The alternative to a romanticism based on distance, for Twain, is a realism based on experience. Unlike the ethereal perspective of many 19th century landscape artists that remove the reader's duty to more closely inspect the facts at ground-level, Twain, despite his promise to the audience of *Roughing It* that the book will enable him to "while away an idle hour," does

diverted the funds to the Miscegenation Society. Joe B. Fulton explains the complicated personal and political motivations surrounding the situation, which concluded with Twain fleeing Nevada at the prospect of several duels (72–81).

²⁷ By 1865, Bierstadt had sold a much larger, even more grandiose work, "The Rocky Mountains, Leader's Peak," for \$25,000. The sale set a record price for an American painting.

²⁸ Richard Slotkin has famously argued that the "myth of the frontier" replaces concerns about economic and social issues with myths surrounding the discovery of new land and the dispossession of Indians. In this way, Americans were able to "avoid recognition of the perilous consequences of capitalistic development in the New World" (47).

in fact force his readers to accommodate the travelogue's pesky inclusion of "information."

Following the author's satire, in "Instructions in Art," of the idea that his "students" can "learn all that is valuable about Art without knowing how it happened, and without any sense of strain or effort" (126), Twain insists that some work is indeed necessary – that we must acknowledge reality, even if that reality is disheartening. Better yet, the author pushes his reader to face facts precisely because such acknowledgments can serve to spur the labor of the romantic imagination, which might work to envision change. For Twain, the point of dreaming was to eventually bring poetry to reality, through optimistic dreams that use elements of reality to compose romantic visions. Whereas the author criticized Cooper's romanticism for failing to provide a "thrill" due to its miraculous character, Twain wants to "thrill" his readers with a balanced style that is believable in its realistic details yet still exciting in its capacity to imagine the potentials of those facts. In the next section, I investigate more closely how Twain moves from the collection of western worth – material and aesthetic – to the creation of western value, by combining both information and imagination in his own unique brand of American writing.

The Cultural Value of Western Land: Information, Imagination, and Influence

The national anxiety around the turn of the century about the status – or even existence – of "American" literature makes it difficult to place Twain, especially in a western work like *Roughing It*, securely in that context. By his 70th birthday party in 1905, attended by everyone from Charles Chesnutt to Willa Cather, it was clear that Twain had joined the ranks of the literary: the *New York Times* commented in its leading

story the day after the celebration that “never before in the annals of this country had such a representative gathering of literary men and women been seen under one roof” (“Celebrate Mark Twain’s Seventieth Birthday”). But the heads of those ranks often doubted the talents of their own membership. For example, although William Dean Howells, as a young assistant to the editor of the *Atlantic*, gave *The Innocents Abroad* a favorable review upon its publication in 1869, Ron Powers points out that Howell’s choice to praise such an “impious” book was a “daring” one, since *Innocents* “lampooned much of what the magazine stood for” (3). The danger of the review from the future “Dean of American Letters” lay in the fact that it was heralding a change – the death of the Victorian novel and the rise of realism – that not everyone was ready for. While F.O. Matthiessen would later proclaim an American Renaissance initiated by many of Twain’s contemporaries,²⁹ Howells regarded many of those authors as threatening to rather than promising for American literary culture. In “Literary Boston as I Knew It,” Howells dismissed their work as “marred by the intense ethicism that pervaded the New England mind for two hundred years and that still characterizes it.” As a result, he announced, “New England yet lacks her novelist, because it was her instinct and her conscience in fiction to be true to an ideal of life rather than to life itself” (117). And if New England was without a literature, America at large was out of luck.

In many ways, Mark Twain appears to have been well positioned to insert himself into the perceived absence of an adequately unique American literature that embraced Howells’ advocacy for replacing the “ideal grasshopper” with the “real” one. To begin with, the author’s home state of Missouri – added to the United States through the

²⁹ Matthiessen includes Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in his *American Renaissance* (1941).

Louisiana Purchase only about 30 years prior to Clemens' birth – placed him at a physical remove from the staid ideals and ethics Howells found so damaging to New England writers. By extension, such a “western” starting point gave Twain literary license to tackle all “that was new and strange,” both in terms of content and style (*Roughing It* 30). When Twain went even further West, to find the adventures of “life itself,” then, he was “lighting out” for a region that had not been cultured by the eastern aristocratic mores that many regarded as a legacy of Europe. In avoiding the old, “proper” literary authorities, Twain foreshadowed his own Huck Finn, who would escape the similarly “sivilizing” influence of Aunt Sally (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* 268). Twain’s western journey thus reflects his condemnation of artists like James Fenimore Cooper and Albert Bierstadt for their outdated romanticism – a critique Sydney Krause calls “a plea for readers to accept the verdict of history that old-style romanticism...was a literary dead letter in post-Civil War America” (134). Rather than looking back, Shelly Fisher Fishkin explains, Twain attended to the details of the nation’s present realities: from his use of dialect,³⁰ to his engagement with racial politics, to his technological inventiveness, “Twain zeroed in on many of the key challenges... that would face his country and the world for the next hundred years.” In the end, Twain’s investment in such issues would earn him pronouncements from the likes of Ernest Hemingway that “All American writing” originates with Twain.³¹

³⁰ As Ralph Ellison wrote in “Going to the Territory,” Twain “transformed elements of regional vernacular speech into a medium of uniquely American literary expression and thus taught us how to capture that which is essentially American in our folkways and manners. For indeed the vernacular process is a way of establishing and discovering our national identity” (Ellison 138).

³¹ The quote comes from *Green Hills of Africa* (1935), and refers specifically to *Huckleberry Finn* (22). Hemingway was no alone in citing Twain as the progenitor of the first distinctly “American” literature. For example, in 1996, authors ranging from Toni Morrison to Arthur Miller to Kurt Vonnegut wrote laudatory introductions to the works collected in the newly published 29 volumes of the Oxford *Mark*

Characteristically, Twain had no doubt about his own national cultural importance, even if his contemporaries did: in response to the question, “Are you American?,” he scribbled in a notebook: “No, I am not *an* American. I am *the* American” (qtd. in Fishkin, *Lighting out for the Territory* 8).

As much as Twain took on the mantle of the American realism, however, he was not prepared to leave behind the European romantic “cult of sensibility.” While Twain became famous for his mockery of European “masterpieces” in *The Innocents Abroad*, that travelogue contained just as many lampoonings of American culture as it did European, and, ultimately, his trip was spurred by no small amount of curiosity about and respect for the Old World. We can see this respect clearly in Twain’s reverence for Oxford, where he traveled in 1907 to receive an honorary doctorate, despite his own vow that he was through with transoceanic travel. “I never expected to cross the water again,” he said, “but I would be willing to journey to Mars for that Oxford degree” (Paine 1379). He would wear his Oxford gown to his daughter’s wedding. Twain’s appreciation for the European is also clear from his choice of domestic furnishings, including his renowned walnut bed, complete with angel-topped columns, which he bought in Venice in 1878. That Twain admired European intellectual institutions and talents in carpentry, of course, suggests a broader appreciation for its culture, including the literary tradition of the romance. Despite Twain’s own frequent insistence on attending to the facts on the ground, he often apologized for realism’s abundance of “information,” and opted for the fantasies associated with romance instead.

Twain. In 2010, media outlets like NPR celebrated the 100th anniversary of Clemens’ death with reaffirmations of the author’s continuing importance.

Twain's simultaneous engagement in seeking out new American literary traditions and acknowledging his indebtedness to European ones makes evident what Karen Halttunen identifies as the cultural flux of the mid- to late-19th century (20). Twain's dual investment also follows in the footsteps of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who writes in "The Custom House," the introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), that romantic fiction should fall "somewhere between the real world and fairy land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (Hawthorne 43). In exploring the relatively broad "somewhere" of this middle ground, Twain opposes the conception of culture as "high art" that Matthew Arnold promoted as "sweetness and light" in his *Culture and Anarchy*, published just six years before *Roughing It* (xvii). Rather than placing culture on a fixed pedestal as "a study of perfection" (xvi), Twain understands culture as a perpetually developing experiment. This fluctuating combination of fact and fantasy aligns with Raymond Williams' definition of "culture" itself. Rooted in the Latin *colere*, "culture" in all its early uses was significant as "a noun of *process*: the tending of something" (87, italics mine).³² As we have seen in the rotations of the narrator's informed and imagined views of the land's wealth and beauty in the previous two sections, *Roughing It* demonstrates this *process* of cultural creation. The romantic and realistic experiences of Twain's persona with mineshaft gold and mountaintop panorama enact the vagabondizing that is cultural change. Twain's narrator is not entirely on board with the pre-fabricated, "civilized"

³² The tensions surrounding how humans developed culture became clear during the Romantic movement. During this period, Williams explains, "culture" was initially used, Huck-like, "as an alternative to the orthodox and dominant 'civilization,'" and later used "to attack what was seen as the mechanical character of the new civilization emerging" in the Industrial age. In other words, at this point, "culture" was used "to distinguish between 'human' and 'material' development" (89). Either way, though, culture is not static or fixed, but rather a dynamic, active, development always in *process*.

romantic literature dragged across the Atlantic Ocean to New England, and then across the Mississippi to the West. But neither is he yet able to formulate an entirely new, entirely realistic American style. Instead, Twain's narrator sets out in *Roughing It* to form his own "cult of experience" based on "life itself," even if that life consisted of both the real and the ideal (30). As such, Twain presents his alter-ego as searching both high and low for that which will *move* his imagination. While we can see the author's inchoate ideas about the negotiation of information through imagination in *Roughing It*, their full development is more explicitly displayed in *Following the Equator* (1897), published closer to the height of the realism movement. Here, Twain deftly combines the two movements, praising "Truth" precisely for its ability to move *beyond* the merely "possible" to which he had insisted Cooper stick. Although Twain depicts his narrator making an effort to locate meaning in both the landscape's material and aesthetic resources, his ultimate discovery of national identity originates not in the *collection* of culture, but rather in the *creation* of it, through the dynamic process of the medium of writing itself.

Although he famously mocked the aristocratic European pretensions of the King and the Duke in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain was not above mimicking the strategies of certain Old World writers. He chose those authors carefully, however – he was not so interested in carrying on the style of gentrified authors like Jane Austen as in following in the footsteps of populist and satirical writers. For example, while working for his brother Orion's *Daily Post* in Keokuk, Iowa in 1856, Clemens carried with him a volume of Charles Dickens (Paine 106). From later letters, we know that the young Clemens was also dazzled by the Irish satirist Johnathan Swift. Twain was particularly

attracted to their whimsical, imaginative styles, which he used in his attempts to process the dynamic western landscape in *Roughing It*. In turn, this imaginative management of the land enabled a subtle commentary upon the cultures – or lack thereof – forming on that land. In combination with the American influence of realism, Twain’s use of European influences like Swift allow him to draw on the material and aesthetic resources of the West’s land, while drawing his own cultural visions of those resources back onto that space.

We can most clearly see Swift’s influence on Twain in Chapter III of *Roughing It*, where the narrator inserts a romantic reverie into a prodigious leakage of realistic information about the western novelty of the “sage brush.” Twain’s persona begins with a general description: the sage-brush is “a gnarled and venerable live oak tree reduced to a little shrub two feet high.” This overview is followed by a veritable catalogue of the sage brush’s data points. The narrator methodically describes the plant’s appearance (“grayish green”), its smell (“like our domestic sage”), and its taste (“like the sage tea which all boys are so well acquainted with”) (39). He goes on to detail its hardness, its topographical tendencies, its measurements, its, and its nutritional value. This epic list of realistic quantifications, however, is sparked by an opposing romantic qualification. Twain’s initial reaction to the sagebrush, in fact, is not to dutifully inform his reader about its dimensions, but rather to share the “lazy” daydream it inspires:

Often...I have lain on the ground with my face under a sage-brush, and entertained myself with fancying that the gnats among its foliage were liliputian birds, and that the ants marching and countermarching about its base were liliputian flocks and herds, and myself some vast loafer from Brobdingnag waiting to catch a little citizen and eat him. (38)

Twain borrows the diminutive Lilliputian and enormous Brobdignagian figures from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) to compose this imaginative episode. The vision, however, serves only as a prelude to the sea of vegetative data noted above. Twain uses this data to lull the reader into a semi-vegetative state, allowing the Swiftian fantasy to get lost amongst facts and figures. The sheer volume of "information" aligns clearly with Twain's Prefatory warning about the author's inability to "retain [his] facts" despite his stated wish to amuse rather than educate his reader. However, it is precisely in these supposedly amusing segments, hidden within mountains of meaningless scientific figures, that Twain reveals the concerns of his era. As in the narrator's visions of the region's material and aesthetic worth, it is the juxtaposition of this information and imagination that tells us the most about the anxieties of the West of the late 19th century.

While Twain's alter-ego might encourage the reader to look at his wandering mind under the sagebrush as evidence of the unproductive laziness inherent in his "variegated vagabondizing" in a lawless frontier that would allow for such indolence, Twain the author uses this daydream to make two more significant points, one about the land itself and the other about the status of American literature and culture in the mid-19th century. First, the sagebrush vision underlines the massive scope of the land Twain's narrator encounters, and his psychological reaction to its size. The dream occurs in Nebraska, long before the Clemens brothers have completed their stagecoach journey, when they are in the beginning stages of their awe of the giant empty spaces that continue to unroll before them. In *The Void, the Grid, and the Sign*, William L. Fox explains that both newcomers to and residents of the Great Basin are inclined to misperceive the void of the desert due to its enormous scale as well as its lack of contrast and verticals, all of

which leave us without a means to calibrate the space (*The Void, The Grid & The Sign* 11–12). One response to such disorientation is to break down the space into small enough pieces to analyze (13). That Twain places himself *under* the sagebrush suggests a desire to shrink the context in which he resides, compartmentalizing the overwhelming openness of the desert to the more manageable space enclosed by the plant. Such enclosure, Fox points out, can ironically create the illusion of limitlessness, which makes the human body feel larger than it really is. Twain's narrator expresses this cognitive sensation by picturing himself as a Brobdingnagian giant. Finally, Fox notes the sagebrush as a common frame of reference which allows us to "obtain comfort from the small sliver of the spectrum it delivers to our color-starved eyes."

But if Twain's persona is pacified by the sagebrush's wash of color, he is also soothed by the comforting European literary tradition it enables him to call forth. Indeed, a second response to the enormity of western land, according to Fox, is to assign it a symbolic value that allows us to ignore it (13). Ironically, however, when Twain reaches for a symbol to attach to the American West, he lands on a European one. Twain's comforting daydream, then, also carries a profound sense of discomfort, in that it points to not only a need for orientation at the level of the land, but also to a need for orientation at the level of culture. Imposing an Irish allusion on an American object creates a disjointed picture that illustrates the paucity of American literature that could support Twain's description of the sagebrush. By re-purposing the Lilliputian and Brobdignagian figures from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to characterize a particularly western element of the frontier landscape, Twain transports European cultural metaphors to describe American phenomena. As in the narrator's vision of himself as a European dandy after

his discovery of the blind lead, the movements of the imagination betray both enthusiasm for and disappointment in the resources of western space and culture. Anna Farrar Hyde argues in *An American Vision* that Americans were slow to move away from “powerful European ideals” even as they geographically moved farther away from Europe after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. But between 1820 and 1920, American explorers, travelers, and tourists gradually developed a new vocabulary to accommodate the “strange, but undeniably spectacular sights” of the Far West (Hyde 9). In doing so, they forged particularly American aesthetic standards (7).³³ Ultimately, Hyde contends, it is this “fusion of eastern visions with western realities” that resulted in a “truly national culture in the United States” (11).

While Hyde focuses on railroad resort descriptions as evidence for western rhetorical development, the written landscapes in Twain’s *Roughing It* provide a literary illustration of a similar development. Twain’s work simultaneously celebrates the West as providing a setting distinct from Europe and, contradictorily, uses European standards to qualify that setting. Swift was a particularly appealing candidate for Twain to use as a model due to the Irish satirist’s use of the imagination for more serious reasons than “whiling away an hour.” And these reasons were fresh in the mind of Clemens, who had re-read *Gulliver’s Travels* in 1869, the year before he began to work seriously on compiling materials into what would become *Roughing It*. Writing to his wife Livy in March of that year, he noted that he was “much more charmed with it than I was when I read it last, in boyhood—for now I can see what a scathing satire it is upon the English

³³ Hyde divides this rhetorical development into three stages. In the early 19th century, the western landscape provided the “history and culture” in which Americans felt lacking in contrast to the Old World. In the middle of the century, still missing any solid New World rhetoric, writers relied on European models to describe the Far West. By the end of the century, Americans were developing new linguistic strategies in close alignment with the western landscape.

government; whereas, before, I only gloated over its prodigies & its marvels” (Fischer, Frank, and Armon 132). Like Swift, Twain uses a highly imaginative form that, on the surface, looks like something simply to “marvel” at. According to Robert Hunting, the book’s success³⁴ was partly based on Swift’s contemporaries’ initial view of the book as nothing more than a humorous adventure (96). More recent critics, however, have challenged the idea that Swift’s readers were so naïve.³⁵ Unlike Twain, whose persona often encourages a light-hearted approach to his work as entertainment, Swift bluntly announced that the aim of *Gulliver’s Travels* was “to vex the world rather than divert it” (Hunting 96).

Technically, Twain’s readers were prepared for satire, as many were familiar, by the time *Roughing It* was published in 1872, with the tone and style established in “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” in 1865 and *The Innocents Abroad* in 1869. However, as with speculations about Swift’s work, those readers were often so distracted by the humor of Twain’s writing that they missed the more serious point. Joe Fulton has been especially critical of scholars who have seen nothing of significance in Twain’s jokes.³⁶ Dennis Todd, in his analysis of Swift, is similarly adamant about the need to acknowledge the power of supposed amusements to divert the reader from the important

³⁴ With marketing help from Alexander Pope, *Gulliver’s Travels* sold out its first printing in 1726 in just one week.

³⁵ Shef Rogers, for instance, tells us that despite the fact that Swift joked in his letters about his readers’ misinterpretations, the book was recognized as satire in both published and unpublished responses (135).

³⁶ Fulton argues that critics’ failure to acknowledge the significance behind Twain’s superficially humorous jokes has led them to skip over the “traumatic” process of Twain’s transition from “confederate bushwhacker” to the “Lincoln of our literature” (xi).

underlying issues.³⁷ Likewise, Twain's mining of data and seemingly entertaining depiction of dreams and visions like those under the sagebrush work to simultaneously distract the reader from the real satire and goad him to pay closer attention to the truths lying within or behind those only superficially amusing episodes. If Twain was inspired by Swift's imaginative rendering of European cultural criticism, he was quick to market his own American work as offering diversion rather than vexation, and imagination rather than information. But in doing so, Twain got the best of both worlds: he used his vagabond writing style to charm his readers and critics while using those same tactics to both mimic and mark the material and aesthetic instabilities of the western American landscape. Unlike Cooper's miraculously inhuman yet improbably coherent romance, Twain's combination of dreams and details, serious and silly approaches to the land, European and American styles stays true to the ongoing, uncertain *process* of culture taking place on the land of the Frontier.

On the overland stagecoach journey from St. Joseph, Missouri to Carson City, Nevada, Sam and Orion Clemens were permitted to bring along 25 pounds of baggage each, six of which they allotted to an unabridged dictionary (*Roughing It* 31). Given the tumultuous nature of the trek, the dictionary frequently "assaulted" the passengers, clobbering their bodies as it flew around the careening stagecoach (42). Not just slapstick humor, the dictionary inflicts more than physical damage. A literal representation of the serious "information" for which Twain apologizes in his Prefatory, the tome proves not only bodily injurious and logistically unnecessary³⁸ but also

³⁷ Todd suggests that Swift's cataloguing of human and animal curiosities in *Guilliver's Travels* "dramatizes the shifts and seams we go through to avoid becoming conscious of the uncomfortable truths monsters have to tell us" (161).

culturally inadequate. The dictionary is rendered moot as soon as the travelers are joined by a western woman who baffles them with her “dislocated grammar and decomposed pronunciation” (34). In order to understand not only the Territory’s speech patterns, but also its larger, similarly “dislocated” culture, the prescribed rules of “civilization” symbolized by the dictionary simply will not suffice.

As with the conventions of the dictionary, those of American literary genres, movements, and regions prove at once necessary and inadequate for Twain’s project in *Roughing It*. Although Twain writes in language intelligible to his mainly eastern audience, he frequently lobs critiques at the dictionary’s failure to accommodate the materials and aesthetics of western land. Although he follows the generic trends of the travelogue – established by authors like Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Powers 203) – he pokes fun at authors who write about faraway locales without leaving home,³⁹ and questions the validity and worth of the “information” the genre was expected to impart. Although Twain often uses the style of the leaders of what would come to be known the American Renaissance, he wrote in an 1866 letter that he regarded all things East as “so far away” as to not “make any difference” (Branch, Frank, and Sanderson 328). And although he was part and parcel of the attempt to conjure up a specifically western American literary mode, he was eager to tear down unsatisfactory efforts by others to do so.⁴⁰ In sum, it is Twain’s

³⁸ The “poor innocents” learn later that such texts could easily be shipped from San Francisco.

³⁹ In his Prefatory, Twain takes obvious pride in his intimate travel experience by informing his readers that “no books have been written by persons who were on the ground in person and saw the happenings of the time [of silver-mining fever] with their own eyes.”

⁴⁰ In fact, Bret Harte’s anthology of California poetry, *Outcroppings*, published in 1866, was so roundly dismissed as “hogwash” that he and Clemens planned to write a burlesque of it (Fulton 109; Branch, Frank, and Sanderson 329). Clemens predicted that such a burlesque would make the “poetical asses here tear

experimentation within and pressing against the boundaries of various literary standards that allows him to negotiate information with imagination in a way that attracts and challenges the reader, parallels the vacillations of the West, and, ultimately, produces a new kind of American literary culture.

With little other than the informative travelogue, puritanical eastern romanticism, or “slop bucket” western poetry to build upon, *Roughing It* makes uneasy use of American literary culture while searching for its own Territorial content, style, and form. If Twain deigns to reference an American author, then, he does so with a fair amount of ambiguity. For instance, when Twain’s alter-ego is both fascinated and aggravated by having to “look up at our scenery” after having climbed ten thousand feet up Maui’s Haleakala volcano at the end of the book, he compares the situation to one Edgar Allan Poe described in an 1844 *New York Sun* article (408). Under the headline “Astounding News by Express, via Norfolk! The Atlantic Crossed in Three Days! – Signal Triumph of Mr. Monck Mason’s Flying-Machine!!!” the article appears to realistically narrate a transatlantic balloon voyage using authentic, precise details, including an illustrated diagram of the craft and the names of familiar contemporary figures like real-life balloonist Monck Mason. The panorama Poe illustrates from the balloon’s basket, however, is more romantic than realistic: Poe notes that viewing the horizon from a great height produced the illusion of concavity (Edemariam). In *Roughing It*, Twain characterizes the illusion Poe described as a “singular fraud perpetrated upon the eye by isolated great altitudes” (408). When Twain’s persona first read Poe’s description, he “had looked upon the matter as an invention of his own fancy.” But when the narrator

around worse than a pack of wildcats,” but it was pre-empted by *Outcroppings*, No. 2 (January or February 1866), an advertising stunt by a San Francisco shirt manufacturer, S.W.H. Ward and Son (Branch, Frank, and Sanderson 331).

experiences this “fraud” for himself in the West, he overturns his original opinion, and comes to believe in the truth of Poe’s seemingly imagined description.

As it turns out, Poe’s truth *was* imagined. Two days after his article was published with the excitement and detail of real “news,” the *Sun*’s editors retracted it as “erroneous intelligence,” at which point it came to be known as “The Balloon Hoax” (O’Brien 149–153). This revelation underlines the complexity of the project Twain undertakes in his travelogue. Twain pays Poe a compliment by presenting as real that which was revealed as fictional after it was initially offered as real. Indeed, Bernard Shaw listed Twain and Poe as the only two geniuses America had ever produced (Paine CCLIX), and we know that, at least in his early life, Twain would have agreed with this appraisal of Poe. Along with Dickens and Swift, the young Clemens also carted around the tales of Poe (Paine 106). Forty years later, Twain pinpointed “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” as the only detective story that an “author needn’t be ashamed of” (Gribben 361). Even later, Twain was offended by John A. Joyce’s biography of Poe, which he labeled as “an affront” in its efforts to “disinter Poe’s remains and paw them over” (Ibid.). On the other hand, Twain also wrote plenty of diatribes against Poe, condemning his poetry as “weird, wild, and incomprehensible,” and labeling his prose “unreadable” (Anderson, Frank, and Sanderson 250–51).⁴¹ Alan Gribben argues that it is the immature age at which the young Clemens first read Poe’s works that eventually led him to dismiss his literary predecessor. “Because Clemens associated Poe with his own early reading in romances,” Gribben reasons, “he conceivably reacted against Poe, along with other

⁴¹ Twain also rebuked Poe on a personal level, denigrating his tendencies to “get booming drunk & sleep in the gutter” (Smith and Gibson 841).

romantic authors, as representing a stage of indebtedness he consciously wished to outgrow” (18).

Despite his conflicting assessments of Poe, Twain’s use of the author in supporting his vision of the western landscape in the early 1860s is evidence of his continuing, if inconsistent, reliance on a kind of nascent American realism which often showed its romantic roots. In a reversal of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, which used imaginative fiction to launch an informative cultural critique, Poe’s “Balloon Hoax” used the trappings of informational realism to create what turned out to be an imaginative tale. Poe’s notion, published in the *The Opal* (1845), that “Some of the most profound knowledge...has originated from a highly stimulated imagination” encapsulates the relationship between romance and realism that he, Swift, and Twain all attempt to grasp (586). When we consider the apology for “information” contained in the Preface of *Roughing It*, which suggests a similar belief in the necessity of the imagination to produce deeper understandings of reality in the first place, Twain’s later discountings of Poe ring somewhat hollow. That Poe is one of the only American authors the travelogue alludes to indicates that Twain was generally unsatisfied with the repertoire of American influences available to him, and must therefore create his own vagabond style in alignment with the western territories he both informs his readers about and imagines alongside them.

As discussed in the chapter’s first two sections, Twain the miner and Twain the aesthete engage in linked but opposing projects: whereas the miner laments the realities that burst his idealized dreams of riches, the aesthete often insists that such realities must play a part in bringing down to earth illusions of the West’s beauty. In this third section,

so far, I have outlined the author's conflicted use of both a Swift-influenced romantic imagination and a Poe-influenced realistic imagination. In experimenting with styles of romance and realism, Europe and America, and fantasy and fact in his efforts to describe the material and aesthetic spaces of the West, Twain's narrator enacts the process of cultural creation. His shifting visions of the land are accompanied by shifting understandings of himself – as a seeker of the Territory's wealth, an explorer of its beauty, and a collector, and, finally, creator of its culture – and of his nation. It is only after years of exploring Nevada's mines and mountaintops from various perspectives that Twain's persona finally discovers the object of his adventures: he receives a letter offering him the position of city editor for the *Virginia Territorial Enterprise*. Shouting "Eureka!" (222), the narrator suggests that he has found what he has been missing all along – that the real treasure, both literal and metaphorical, is not to be found in the material or aesthetic resources of the West, but in how recording those sites and sights through innovative, moving authorship, marrying the informative with the imaginative, creates a new type of literature. In short, Twain's stylistic experimentation in both exploring and representing the West lends to both vocational discovery and cultural creation. By persuading the *Alta California* newspaper in San Francisco to pay for his passage on the Europe-bound *Quaker City*, Twain essentially announced his intent to assert himself as a distinctly American author with a distinctly American, distinctly vagabond culture to share with the world.

Of course, Clemens had worked for newspapers, including the *Hannibal Journal*, the *Keokuk Post*, and the *New Orleans Crescent*, before he moved West. Shelley Fisher Fishkin categorizes this work as Clemens' first phase of journalism, when his style

ranged from parody to skit to anecdote. During this period, Fishkin argues, Twain “would extract great humor...from a common human failing that would become a central concern in his fiction: literalness, or the tendency to accept without question the surface meaning of a text” (*From Fact to Fiction* 58–59). His second journalistic period carries that concern into the West, where Twain began to use burlesque in service of larger political and social causes, largely by providing “object lessons” for his reader in “how to approach a text suspiciously” (63). What Fishkin’s analysis of this western period does not take into account, however, is the effect of the land itself on the author’s growth. As Twain’s narrator shows, the fluctuations in the mining industry’s materials and management, as well as the instabilities of the nation’s aesthetic depictions of western territory, force a particularly unsteady accounting of the region’s space. The resources and representations of the West’s geography, I have been suggesting, provided no small degree of inspiration for his writing. After all, it was in the West (San Francisco) that Twain acknowledged his “call” to literature, and in the West (“on the Pacific Coast”) that he says he “started a peculiar and picturesque fashion of lying to myself,” and, of course, in the West (Carson City) that he began using the nom de plume of “Mark Twain” (Branch, Frank, and Sanderson 322; Twain, “License of the Press” 48).⁴² As such, I see

⁴² In the most recent issue of the *Mark Twain Journal*, Kevin Mac Donnell revealed his discovery of the “real” origins of Samuel Clemens’ pen name, Mark Twain, which the author adopted in 1863. The literary news went viral – a rare thing for literary news to do – and was picked up not only by academic outlets like the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, but also by publications attracting wider audiences, including *Salon*, *The New Yorker*, the *Huffington Post*, the *Atlantic*, and, of course, *Wikipedia*. While previous scholars either have suggested that Clemens took his *nom de plume* from the bar lingo he developed in Virginia City, Nevada – short for “put two more drinks on my tab” – or have taken Clemens at his word – that he “laid violent hands upon” the nickname of Mississippi riverboat captain Isaiah Sellers after his death – Mac Donnell has found, instead, that Clemens lifted the name “Mark Twain” from a character in a burlesque published in 1861 by the self-styled “Phunny Phellows” of *Vanity Fair*, a frontier-era humor journal. Mac Donnell argues that Clemens concocted the Sellers story both to build his own branded persona for his growing readership and to avoid associations with the increasingly unpopular humor of *Vanity Fair*. According to MacDonnell, Clemens’ pen name – and its false attribution – effectively built the Twain brand by “affirming its dual meanings, evoking the storied romance of the

the style readers have become familiar with as both particularly Twain-ian and particularly American as dependent on the unique vicissitudes of western land.

The beginning of the journalistic career of Twain's narrator toward the end of *Roughing It* serves to *test* the reader on how well we have learned from the travelogue's previous lessons, which taught us, first, to hold tight to romance in the face of an increasingly rigid reality, and second, to scour fantastical images for the ugly facts they paper over. Twain's journalist figure presents himself as interested in uncovering "truth" from the outset, but the real moral of his story is that such a truth must balance the real and the ideal, and that finding this balance involves work. The narrator begins his test of the reader with the now-familiar conflict between illusion and disillusion. Although he exclaims that "These were 'flush times' indeed!," he immediately undercuts his own enthusiasm by admitting that, although he "thought they were going to last," he "somehow...never was much of a prophet" (233). The close proximity of the build up and let down here is funny, of course, but it also acknowledges the value of integrating dreams with realities, and validates the labor that doing so requires. Twain shows us just how easy it is to engage in fantasies wholly detached from facts – and tempts us to do so. For example, when his narrator provides an exhaustive breakdown of information about western resources, including the financial information behind the mining industry, he apologizes, just as he did in his Prefatory, for his facts both explicitly and implicitly, both preceding and during their narration (282). Twain's alter-ego even warns the reader in advance that this section will be "instructive," giving him leave to "skip, if he chooses"

steam-boating career that was wrested from him by war, and ascribing his debt instead to the timeless mighty Mississippi, which was flowing, after all, at the vital core of Clemens's own life and was the well-spring that nourished the central narrative of Mark Twain's most inspired truths" (38).

(281). The author provides yet another excuse for neglecting “information” by relegating his fiscal analysis to a footnote. If we take the extra step of actually reading that footnote, we learn exactly how the mining industry calculates its profits: bullion is accounted for by quarters and years before being aggregated, averaged, and prognosticated “to a spot.” If we put in even more work by continuing to read this apparently secondary information, however, we see that these numbers come not from an infallible document, but rather to the “excellent memory” of a Wells Fargo agent. Finally, the footnote ends with a bracketed note from “M.T.” stating that the figures might be a “considerable overestimate” (283).

If *Roughing It*'s Prefatory makes a point to apologize for any knowledge it might impart that would diminish its readers' leisure, it would make perfect sense to relegate such potentially educational facts to a footnote. But by also relegating to the footnote the jab at that information, Twain makes another point: that the responsible reader of both the travelogue and of western land will not only take the time to seek out the facts, but also take into consideration the questionable nature of “facts” that are presented as inviolable. It is not easy for “one's vision [to] pierce through the thick fog of alkali dust” that hovers in the streets of Virginia City (281). That same dust, not coincidentally, collects on the supposedly airtight scales that weigh the miners' bounty, thereby “impair[ing]” their “delicate” accuracy – “somehow.” By explicitly combining this apparently natural fog with the human-made deception also impairing the “truth,” Twain makes clear the purpose of the odd combination of fantasy and fact we find throughout *Roughing It*. While the travelogue obviously trades in satire, it also provides serious lessons in how to

navigate a western territory that requires an optimistic romance tempered by a more practical realism.

Ultimately, the medium of western journalism allows Twain to bring in close proximity the shifting extremes of his prior visions of the landscape's material and aesthetic values. Albert D. Richardson's 1867 book *Beyond the Mississippi*, published five years before *Roughing It*, categorizes miners into two classes: the "new-comers," who were "sanguine and cheery, climbing with elastic step, and beguiling the way with song and laughter," and the "stampeder turning homeward," who were "convinced that gold digging was hard and unremunerative, left their packs and shovels behind, and trudged mechanically with downcast woe-begone faces" (201). Published the same year, *Two Thousand Miles on Horseback* pinpoints exactly zero classes of miners, at least in Colorado. Writing that "Nothing more is left of the gulch miner" in that now-Midwestern state, James F. Meline locates him "eighty or a hundred miles further west, close behind the trapper, whose quiet haunts he invaded" (63). Sixteen years later, Frederick Jackson Turner would remark on a similar procession of pioneers, including fisherman, fur-traders, miners, cattle-raisers, farmers, and, finally, capitalists. In the end, it is this *process* of not only people and professions on the landscape, but also of how they mentally *process* that landscape, through information and imagination, that both reflects and creates the West. It is precisely this rough "palimpsest," in the continual fluctuations of its "living body" of western land, that moves Twain.

Both Richardson and Meline, perhaps, were better prophets than Twain, whose vagabond visionary tendencies purposefully and productively continue to fill up any spaces of disillusion with new illusions. Simultaneously, though, Twain's narrator

recognizes the realities behind his illusions about the resources held both beneath and above the western landscape. If Twain's occasional episodes of disillusion reflect the fact that bullion production in some areas was slipping, mining stocks were down, and holdings were defaulting by 1864, the illusions that rise up to take their place are in keeping with the more general fact that the Comstock Lode nevertheless produced nearly \$306 million worth of iron ore between 1859 and 1882 – and that America did indeed achieve its Manifest Destiny, for better or worse (Marschall). Like Turner, who condemns as a “rash prophet” anyone who might “assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased” with the end of the frontier (24), the perpetual determination of Twain's imagination serves to critique those who would equate disillusion with conclusive failure. Because the “dominant fact” of American life had been “movement,” Turner predicts, “the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise” despite the fact that the “gifts of free land” are no longer available (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Twain asks his readers to consider the possibilities ahead, which arise not necessarily out of disappointments or disillusion, but rather out of an energetic interest in and movement through the “wider field.” By continually moving his visionary scope, looking at western resources from on high, from down low, and from everywhere in between, Twain forges not only a vagabond imagination that both reflects and reinscribes the variegations taking place in the West itself, but also a fresh brand of American authorship that both is informed by and challenges the literary culture in which it participates.

Conclusion: The Value of the Vagabond

When Twain attempts to describe his relief after crossing 23 miles of alkali desert near the beginning of *Roughing It*, he admits that “we were glad, for the first time, that the dictionary was along, because we never could have found language to tell how glad we were in any sort of dictionary but an unabridged one with pictures in it (117). When he tries to find the words to describe his mules’ exhaustion, though, he admits that “there could not have been found in a whole library of dictionaries language sufficient to tell” of their thirst. “To try to give the reader an idea of how thirsty they were,” he says, “would be to ‘gild refined gold or paint the lily.’” The phrase, he acknowledges “does not seem to fit,” but he “let[s] it stay, anyhow.” He recognizes that such phrases are scattered throughout his travelogue, making his “narrative seem broken and disjointed, in places” (117). Again, though, the author deems it best to “leave it in...since this will afford at least a temporary respite from the wear and tear of trying to ‘lead up’ to this really apt and beautiful quotation” (117). It would be easy to dismiss Twain’s self-deprecating avoidance of the “wear and tear” of good writing either as lazy or as an attempt at humor, but this chapter’s discussion of Twain’s vagabond vision of the material, aesthetic, and cultural aspects of the West suggests that *Roughing It*’s “disjointed” quality is necessarily so. Twain’s varied style, I have tried to prove, represents a strategic and productive attempt to describe an unsettled territory, whose land and landscape, along with its residents, institutions, and practices, were still in flux, if well on their way to solidification.

When Twain left Nevada in 1866 for San Francisco, then for the Sandwich Islands and Europe, followed, finally, by a return to the American East coast, the West

was becoming both more populated, more fixed in its ways, and more consistently represented. Such impositions of stability would be challenging for the vagabond, whose transitions between idleness and activity, mine and mountaintop, and realism and romance necessitated a certain degree of space, both geographical and cultural. Indeed, after his departure yet further west, *Roughing It's* narrator looks into the crater of the volcano of Kileuea – “ten miles in circumference!” – and breathes a sigh of exhilarated relief: “Here was room for the imagination to work!” (397-8). As in his dreams at the beginning of his journey to a West he had not yet seen, and as in his visions of the kind of life the riches from the “blind lead” could buy him, it is the idea that “you could not compass it” that proves most moving for Twain. His persona, resistant to being fixed in place, fits precisely into such an unencompassable space. Cast out⁴³ from a mining territory becoming daily more defined in its landscape, institutions, and representations, Twain lives according to his belief in the living, moving body of culture by setting his sights on new spaces that will allow for the productive yet continually processing work of the imagination.

While serving as editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, William Dean Howells reviewed *Roughing It* upon its publication as “kaleidoscopic” in its coverage of Twain’s western adventures (“Review of *Roughing It*”). He recognizes in the work, as many after him would, a duality that threatens its coherence and “literary virtues.” Nonetheless, Howells judges that its combination of “humor” and “tragedy,” relevant and irrelevant anecdotes,

⁴³ Literally. As Joe B. Fulton brilliantly explains (in much more detail than space permits here) in *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain* (2010), Twain’s 1864 story “How Is It? – How It Is” alleged that the Ladies of Carson City diverted funds raised for the Sanitary Commission (a sort of latter day Red Cross supporting Union soldiers during the Civil War) to – horrors! – the Miscegenation Society (74). Said Ladies were, of course, dramatically offended. More threatening, however, were their husbands, as well as Virginia Daily Union publisher James L. Laird and venerated Union war hero J.W. Wilmington (80). Although Clemens privately apologized to the ladies and publicly issued a semi-retraction, the possibility that he faced duels with the offended parties led him to flee the Nevada Territory in “dishonor and disrepute” (81).

and “far-fetched” and “near at hand” events form a “‘harmony of colors’ which is not less than triumphant.” Indeed, such “excursions and digressions” serve as “the very woof” of the travelogue, and it is this variation that makes the book “the work of a human being.” All the while, Howells notes, Twain’s wanderings, supposedly recorded for no more than their entertainment value, allowed him to “surreptitiously acquir[e] a better idea of the flush times in Nevada, and of the adventurous life generally of the recent West, than he could possibly have gotten elsewhere.” The West of the late 19th century, in other words, precisely because the nation had yet to form a “better idea” of what constituted it, was conducive to the imagination of the vagabond.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTLER'S IMAGINATION IN WILLA CATHER'S *O PIONEERS!*: INVESTIGATION AND SYMPATHY IN AN UNFURNISHED WEST

In her 1890 high school valedictory speech, “Superstition v. Investigation,”¹ a sixteen-year-old Willa Cather traced the importance of “investigation” to progress throughout human history, holding up in particular “scientific investigation” as “the hope of our age” (“Superstition vs. Investigation”). As the speech neared its end, however, Cather softened her mandate for pure scientific investigation, denouncing as “unreasonable” those “[i]nvestigators [who] have styled fanatics those who seek to probe into the mysteries of the unknowable.” Instead, the valedictorian insisted, such “fanatics” should be praised for recognizing that, while “[m]icroscopic eyes have followed matter to the molecule and fallen blinded,” it is “[i]magination” that “has gone a step farther and grasped the atom.” Joshua Dolezal rightly points out that, if the rhetoric of the graduate’s speech at first “seems to privilege science over art,” such a clear hierarchy is misleading, as Cather associated investigation not exclusively with the cold objectivity of science, but rather with the “dramatic plot” of “heroic human inquiry” as a “touchstone for art” (231). While Dolezal uses the young Cather’s aesthetic appreciation for discovery as a starting point from which to explore her much later *Shadows on the Rock* (1932), the speech’s careful negotiation of investigation and superstition also proves helpful as an analytical lens for her earlier novel *O Pioneers!* (1913), which features an analogous gap in the ways its characters treat its landscape: on the one hand, as a tangible, material entity to be

¹ The speech was praised by a reporter from the *Red Cloud Chief* as a “great surprise” for its logic, given its female composer.

scientifically examined and governmentally enumerated; on the other, as an ethereal phenomenon to be spiritually and imaginatively revered.

Scholars like David Porter, Hermione Lee, and Marilee Lindemann have recognized Cather's works as balancing "radically disjunctive" regions, styles, and concepts – Europe and America, South and North, and East and West, the Victorian and the modern, artistic vision and material success, permanence and transition, danger and possibility (Lindemann 8; D. Porter xx; Lee 16). In particular, Lindemann conceives of these balancing acts as grounded in the author's inherently "liminal" understanding of place. However, critics have generally neglected to address how Cather's places serve as a meeting ground for the topics she addressed at age 16: superstition and investigation. By examining the uneasy intersections in *O Pioneers!* between the "great fact" of the land and the novel's explicit call to "imagine" that land, and then analyzing those intersections according to the author's aesthetic treatise "The Novel Demueble," I argue that Willa Cather refines Mark Twain's vagabond imagination to cultivate what I call a "settler's imagination" of the West, which sees the landscape as a space not for exploration that bounces between romantic illusion and realistic disillusion, but rather for a more focused investigation that strategically combines the practical with the mystical. Ultimately, Cather's novel formulates a method of interpreting the western landscape that tempers a growing cultural and federal reliance on scientific empiricism with a radical insistence on human sympathy.

The trajectory of Cather's work demonstrates a life-long project of examining human perspectives on and relationships to the land. Indeed, her characters' growing connections to their homes parallel both Cather's western travels and her developing

authorial style. For instance, it was only after, having moved to Pittsburgh in 1895, she vacationed in the Nebraska of her childhood in 1903, that Cather wrote the short story collection *The Troll Garden* (1905), which set soulful artist characters against an unfeeling prairie. And it was only after a long visit with her brother in Arizona that Cather moved from the style of *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), critiqued as imitative of Edith Wharton and Henry James' novels of the drawing room, to that of *O Pioneers!*, a "novel of the soil" which was lauded as presenting a new American voice. Similarly, it was a trip to Mesa Verde that influenced Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925). By the time of *My Antonia* (1918), Cather's characters were so intimate with the land that the eponymous protagonist is widely regarded as an "earth mother." And while Cather's later works, beginning with *A Lost Lady* (1923), retreat to the past in the face of growing commercialism and materialism, the author continued to explore ways in which the land might be understood in light of such threats. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), for example, Jean Marie Latour is introduced as wandering on horseback through a "geometrical nightmare" of a desert "somewhere in central New Mexico," but has learned by the end of the novel to read his initially disorienting landscape.

O Pioneers! fits into the middle of this trajectory by depicting the land of Nebraska in the 1880s as caught in its characters' minds somewhere between dream and nightmare, with each conception triggering alternate modes of engagement. The novel opens with a view of the town of Hanover – a stand-in for Cather's childhood home of Red Cloud – "trying not to be blown away" (9). Hanover sits on "the Divide," the point in south central Nebraska at which two watersheds meet: water to the south flows in one

direction, while water to the north heads the opposite way.² As the book progresses, this hydrological division comes to symbolize a mental division in the way its residents regard the land, either as a space to be tamed through the quantification of investigation, or one to be spiritually revered through the human faculty of the imagination. Cather explores these various approaches through characters who do not always fit securely on one side of the line or the other. After introducing the Bergson family, its patriarch dies, leaving the reins of the family farm, surprisingly, in the hands of John Bergson's young daughter, Alexandra. Alexandra proceeds to manage and be managed by the land using a unique combination of pragmatism and mysticism, inspiring both admiration and admonishment from her brothers, neighbors, and love interests. After a series of expansions, both in property and in farming techniques, she finds herself head of "one of the richest farms on the Divide" (49). Alexandra's economic and philosophical stability is shaken, however, when the space of "progress" she has created suddenly transforms into a space of violence, when her younger brother and her best friend, secret lovers, are murdered. This chapter aims to deconstruct the novel's divided geographical points of view in order to show how Cather's evaluation of investigation and superstition works to construct a turn-of-the-century western space that demands a simultaneously scientific and sympathetic approach from not only its author and characters, but also its readers.

The "Great Fact" of the Land: Pragmatism, Conservatism, and Conformity in Frontier (Mis)Management

Cather portrays the initial stance of her pioneers toward the land as one of fearful miscomprehension and contempt. When John Bergson, the novel's patriarch, arrives in

² It should be noted that this "Divide" is distinct from the larger Great Continental Divide, which runs through Colorado and Wyoming, just to the west of Cather territory.

Hanover, Cather's fictional version of her childhood home of Red Cloud, he "had the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable" (18). But in contrast to the familiar, well-trodden territory of his homeland of Sweden, we learn, "this land was an enigma" (18). Mrs. Bergson goes further in her disdain for her new home, regarding Nebraska as "the end of the earth," characterized by "vast hardness," "fierce strength," and a "peculiar, savage kind of beauty" (22). Depending on the particular region, the land might allow the growth of wildflowers or might accommodate only "a few of the very toughest and hardiest" varieties of vegetation (25). Even the "prince's feather by the door" of the Bergson house refers to the *Polygonum orientale*, a flower bearing crimson spikes that "often escaped cultivation and grew wild" (Lindemann 177). From the beginning, then, the land of *O Pioneers!* resists human efforts to settle it, and its residents are disdainful of its failure to accommodate them.

Cather's characters often approach this overwhelming "great fact" of the land, logically, by attempting to manage or subdue it with their own facts, through the cold, hard science of quantification. John Bergson, for example, becomes obsessed, on his death bed, with the numbers that might prove the worth of his land – and his life: "He lies and counts on his fingers all day," Alexandra tells Carl, her friend and neighbor. "I think he is trying to count up what he is leaving for us" (15). In enumerating his property, Bergson both relies on and encourages his daughter's empirical mind, "her resourcefulness and good judgment," which she has developed by "read[ing] the papers and follow[ing] the markets" (19). Such practicality endures throughout her life, with Cather frequently depicting Alexandra as concerned with figures even when others are out having fun. For instance, "While Emil and Carl were amusing themselves at the fair,

Alexandra was at home, busy with her account-books..." (89). In fact, her head is portrayed as a ledger existing precisely for the purpose of recording information about land management: "Her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather and beasts and growing things" (112). Alexandra's brothers, Lou and Oscar, are also prone to view the land in terms of conventional "facts," but their fixation on this perspective is much more rigid than Alexandra's. The brothers, who are "very happy" with "nothing to think about," are almost more machine than man: Oscar, in particular, is described as having such a "powerful body and unusual endurance" that "you could attach [him] to a corn-sheller as you would an engine" (35). Their mechanized approach to the farm forgoes the qualifications of sentiment or philosophical depth in favor of simple quantification.

These empirical methods for overseeing the landscape of Nebraska can be attributed to both Cather's biography and the historical and literary milieu of the early-20th century period in which the novel was published. Remembering her family's 1883 move from Virginia to Nebraska in 1883, Cather wrote of her shock at being "jerked away" from "woods and hills and meadows" only to confront, at "the end of everything," "a country as bare as a piece of sheet iron" (Peck 10). Such a stark environment, she felt, had the power to invoke an "erasure of personality." As her father told her, this bleak landscape necessitated that she "show grit." In her early career, she would do just that, becoming known as a "meat-ax critic" in her theater reviews for the *Nebraska State Journal* and the *Pittsburg Leader*. She also served as the managing editor for the women's magazine *Home Monthly*. Like Twain, Cather's later writing was markedly

influenced by that training in journalistic fact-finding and incisive, straightforward criticism.³

If the forthright character of Cather's early landscape and career helped her to become more "gritty," so too did the scientific developments that were occurring in the approach of the 20th century. These called for practical methodologies in the face of the mysterious and the overwhelming, whether it be a news story or an empty prairie. Cather, born in 1873, was part of a culture exploding with scientific discovery, from Dmitri Mendeleev's 1869 construction of the periodic table, to Josiah Willard Gibbs' 1876 founding of the field of chemical thermodynamics, to Marie Curie's 1898 discovery of radioactivity. As Cather saw it, these discoveries owed a debt to the Enlightenment's commitment to reason. In her valedictory, she cited *Novum Organum*, written in 1620 by Frances Bacon, generally acknowledged as the father of the scientific method. The work marks the point, according to the young Cather, at which we "ceased theorizing and began experimenting." By the end of the 19th century, the theory of "cultural evolution" held sway (Schedler 109), confirming, as Cather put it in her speech, that "human history" serves as "a record of an emigration, an exodus from barbarism to civilization." In order to proceed along this linear path, cultural evolutionists believed, a continued allegiance the logic of science was necessary. Or, as Cather declared, "scientific investigation" is the "hope of our age."

Federal authorities overlooking the nation's geographical growth in the late 19th century were prone to follow this scientific mandate. Tabulations of land became particularly prevalent as the Civil War approached, as political debates about slavery

³ For a detailed look at Cather's journalistic period, see Janice Stout's "Willa Cather and the Performing Arts."

upped the ante for the quantified value of western territories. The period leading up to the Homestead Act was of 1862 – Cather herself was a homesteader – was characterized primarily by enumeration. Although it was defeated on three separate occasions (1852, 1854, and 1859) by the Senate and later vetoed by President James Buchanan in 1860, the law allotted 160 acres to any U.S. citizen (so long as they had never borne arms against the U.S. Government) who vowed to live on the land for five years, grow crops – and build a 12x14 dwelling (Potter and Schamel).⁴ The government would also grant land titles to those who lived on the land for only six months, but paid \$1.25 per acre. Four-hundred-seventeen homesteaders filed land claims on Jan. 1, 1863. By 1934, over 1.6 million homestead applications were processed and more than 270 million acres—10 percent of all U.S. lands—were given to pioneers like Cather’s fictional patriarch, John Bergson, who, upon his death, owns 640 acres (18). When we next see those acres, 16 years later in the novel’s timeline, they are part of a “vast checkerboard, marked off in square of wheat and corn,” all overhung by “[t]elephone wires” that “hum along the white roads, which always run at right angles” (45).

In addition to Cather’s childhood “grit,” her early adulthood search for journalistic truth, a growing turn-of-the-century reliance on scientific reason, and enumerative federal land policies, both current cultural critics and those contemporary with Cather see the frontier period of *O Pioneers!* as more pragmatic than romantic. Western historian Frederick Jackson Turner, in his famous 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” described the pioneers as “practical,” with a “masterful grasp of material things,” and therefore “lacking in the artistic.” Present-day

⁴ Land speculators sometimes exploited this requirement by taking advantage of legislators’ failure to specify whether the dwelling was to be built in feet or inches.

literary categories tend to agree. According to the *New Encyclopedia of the American West*, the period about which Cather writes – the 1880s – fits squarely under the purview of the “pioneer novel,” which centers on homesteaders who are left to handle the quotidian details of settlement following the frontiersmen’s “taming” of the land (Folsom). These pioneers thus had little use for the imagination, the logic goes, because the foundation for “progress” had already been set up – they could simply ride on the coattails of the idealists, filling in pre-existing structures with the simple, straightforward, practical labor.

Despite attempts to manage the land through the apparently tried and true work of geometric figuring and numerical quantifying, however, the majority of *O Pioneers!* characters are trounced by their environment, which maintains its resistance to human cultivation. In the novel, Cather frequently presents this unwelcoming space as an independent entity, determined to maintain the “binding” of its mysteries by resisting even the most scientific penetrations by its residents. The author’s labeling of the “land itself” as “the great fact” of the novel suggests the self-containment, seemingly self-explanatory nature, and superior hierarchical position of the Nebraska prairie in relation to its new settlers. Cather’s characters thus find the land to be bewildering, “depressing” and “disheartening.” Underlining man’s own “weak” nature, the territory appears to absorb any attempts to establish civilization in its wilderness: “The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them.” The prairie’s desire “to be let alone” is reflected in an “absence of human landmarks” that indicates its pre-emption of any effort to pierce its surface (19). Even after more than a decade of work, the narrator tells us, “the record of

the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings” (17). At the end of “eleven long years,” then, “John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame” (20). Like the “microscopic eyes” of the cold scientist that are doomed to “fall blinded” in Cather’s valedictory, the settlers of *O Pioneers!* fail to “create” anything, the author suggests, due to the rigid empiricism with which they approach the land.

In “seem[ing] to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes,” the “wild land” in *O Pioneers!* often incites what Cather described, in her valedictory, as a wonder based on fear. Even at the end of his life, Bergson continues to be frightened of his own farm, regarding it as “a wild thing that had its ugly moods” (20). Far from understanding it, he sees his property as ruled by unintelligible “mischance,” such that “no one knew when... or why” it behaves as it does. In the end, Bergson excuses his own sense of failure as a farmer by dismissing the land as “unfriendly to man” (20). This fearful view of the frontier as enemy prevents many of the novel’s characters from fully comprehending it, and therefore from managing it effectively. More specifically, this fear manifests as conservatism, through a distrust of newness and an anxiety about difference. Alexandra’s brothers, for example, “hated experiments.” Rather than “break[ing] trails in a new country,” Cather writes, they “were meant to follow in paths already marked out for them” (31). In fact, Oscar’s “love of routine amounted to a vice,” in that “[h]e worked like an insect, always doing the same thing over in the same way, regardless of whether it was best or no” (35). Ultimately, the fear of newness is tied to a dread of sticking out from the crowd: even the relatively

“elastic” Lou “disliked to do anything different from their neighbors” (30). Besides Alexandra, one other character in the novel, Marie Shabata, acknowledges ineffectiveness of tradition, as well as the boredom it incites. However, Marie’s lack of power, as a woman in an oppressive marriage, prevents her from enacting change. Despite Marie’s weary “yearning” to move beyond “the same patient fields, the patient little trees, the patient lives,” her conservative culture weakens and ultimately kills her “instinct to live” a life that is not stagnant (137). The novel’s resident outcast, Ivar, confirms the prairie’s impetus to static conformity: “The way here is for all to do alike....here, if a man is different in his feet or in his head, they put him in the asylum” (53). Conventional perspectives on the land as enemy, and therefore as deserving of taming through rigid quantification, then, are underlined again and again, as when “Oscar reinforced his brother” in accusing Alexandra of the “foolishness” of stepping outside the well-trodden lines of agricultural and social expectation (91). No matter how hard they try to quantify it or how much labor they put into it, however, the land does not yield to such past-bound, disengaged approaches. Despite the “industrious” nature of the Bergson men, it is their failure to “use their heads about their work” in an imaginative way that leaves John Bergson on his death bed, desperately counting out his legacy (19). In the end, such a fear-based wonder – characterized by resistance to change, suspicion of new ideas, and reliance on the certainty of “facts” – places the Bergson family, and their farm, in a rut.

“A Pioneer Should Have Imagination”: Cultivating a Mystical Landscape

The success of a cultural evolution toward civilization, the young Cather suggests in her valedictory, depends on an investigation of the mysterious, and the prerequisite for this

investigation is a sense of “wonder.” Such wonder, according to the graduate, should ideally result from “admiration” rather than “fear.” In her 1890 speech, Cather locates the catalyst for such admiration precisely in the physical world, symbolized as a mysterious book to be investigated. The “chapters of creation [written] upon the pages of the universe,” she explains, are “bound by mystery,” and it is the “most sacred right of man” to investigate such mysterious creation. In *O Pioneers!*, the admiring wonderer is represented by Alexandra Bergson, who looks forward to the future where others look back to the past, exhibits faith where they rely on certainty, and defines dreams as labor rather than in opposition to it. Whereas the novel’s fearful pioneers are bewildered by the land and attempt to tame it using conservative, and ultimately paralyzing – for both themselves and the land – facts, the admiring Alexandra finds the land’s mystery to invite inspiration and reverence. As in *My Antonia*, in which the land serves only as the “material out of which countries are made” (7), the “great fact of the land” in *O Pioneers!* must be holistically perceived by its residents, whom the author credits with collaborating in its “progress.” As such, Cather’s protagonist insists that “A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves” (31).

In order to cultivate such an imagination, first, Alexandra looks forward to the new rather than back to the old. The origins of this orientation are evident in Cather’s valedictory, which alluded to Bacon’s *Novum Organum*. This inclusion marks Cather as being committed, from a young age, to pursuing the new, not only in terms of future time, but also broader space. As the title page of *Novum Organum* shows, the book’s goal was to crush the ancient superstitions of the Old World by pursuing unexplored territories,

ideas, and understandings of the New World. Depicting a galleon passing between the mythical Pillars of Hercules that stand on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, the illustration represents a departure from the familiar waters of the Mediterranean into the uncharted Atlantic, ripe for investigation. Like Bacon's New World explorers, Cather's ideal pioneer is dedicated to examining the "uncharted" western American frontier. While such unfamiliarity could send the fearful back to cling to that which they already knew, homesteaders could also acclimate themselves to the new through adaptation, flexibility, and innovation. Although Frederick Jackson Turner qualified such a pioneers as inherently practical, as mentioned in the previous section, he also described them as "inventive" and "buoyant" (37). Using the resources available to them in new and creative ways, they built windmills to harness the power of prairie gusts and replaced scarce wood with abundant cow manure for fuel. In doing so, they allowed for waves upon waves of settlers to push the frontier continually westward. In seeking out new strategies to accommodate new spaces, Turner's "inquisitive" western settlers align neatly with Cather's imaginative investigator.

Following both Bacon's galleons and Turner's settlers, Alexandra of *O Pioneers!* looks both temporally forward and spatially outward in wondering admiration at the Nebraska Divide. Her approach is directly contrasted with that of the rest of the novel's cast, who generally see the "great fact" of the land as overwhelming and frightening, inducing a reliance on the comfort of the tried and true ways of the past and the insularity of spatial familiarities. For example, when Alexandra's father is dying, he is focused on his past mistakes: "Bergson went over in his mind the things that had held him back" (17). Bergson recognizes this perspective as detrimental, however, and makes the bold

choice to hand his farm down to his daughter rather than his sons precisely because he knows he can entrust to Alexandra the “future of his families” since she can recognize the “possibilities of his hard-won land” (19). The girl’s forward-looking stance is also contrasted with that of Carl, her neighbor, friend, and future husband. As they head back to their farms from town one evening, their “two sad young faces” react quite differently to the sunset into which they ride: “the eyes of the girl...seemed to be looking with such anguished perplexity into the future,” while “the sombre eyes of the boy...seemed already to be looking into the past” (14). During Alexandra’s childhood, we are told again and again, her glance is directed toward whatever is coming down the road. For instance, when she thinks of her father’s impending death, “[s]he looked fixedly up the bleak street as if she were gathering her strength to face something, as if she were trying with all her might to grasp a situation which, no matter how painful, must be met and dealt with somehow” (12). More metaphorically, Alexandra’s lantern, “held firmly between her feet,” illuminates the otherwise gloomy path ahead, making “a moving point of light along the highway,” piercing “deeper and deeper into the dark country” (16). By the end of the first section of the novel, Alexandra “felt the future stirring” (42).

The girl’s ability to confront the future develops exponentially in her adulthood, expanding outward from a personal to a global realm by taking on a historical mandate to lengthen lines of sight and, therefore, move civilization forward: “Our people were better people than these in the old country,” she tells her brothers. “We ought to do more than they do, and see further ahead” (41). Cather is careful to qualify this project of investigating newness. Too microscopic a perspective, she suggests, is just as limiting as one that is too broadly superstitious. “If the world were no wider than my cornfields,

if there were not something beside this,” Alexandra ponders, “I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work” (69). Like her formerly suicidal neighbor Carrie Jensen, who returns to prairie “perfectly cheerful” after exploring the exotic state of Iowa, “contented to live and work in a world that's so big and interesting,” Alexandra believes that “it's what goes on in the world that reconciles me” (69).

Ironically, given her protagonist's future-oriented perspective, Cather is commonly criticized as nostalgic. Looking to the past, some scholars contend, stems from a desire to imaginatively escape the jarring social and economic developments that were enveloping the East around the turn of the century (Slotkin 47). This judgment, however, has recently encountered resistance. For example, Joseph Urgo has cast Cather's work as forward-looking, recognizing her as a writer of the road drawn to and defined by themes of mobility and transition. Guy J. Reynolds, meanwhile, reads Cather's supposed nostalgia not as a “retreat from modernity” but as a radical reformist critique of the growing homogeneity and corruption that characterized the onset of modern industrial capitalism (11, 21). And Richard H. Millington argues against the idea that Cather was disconnected from her own era, categorizing the author instead as a true American modernist whose “anti-novelistic” texts reflect contemporary currents, such as cultural anthropology and revisionary modernism, both in their content and form (52, 62). Clearly, Alexandra's insistence on the pioneer imagination does not necessarily point to pure nostalgia. If Cather is nostalgic in any sense, *O Pioneers!* does not show any fondness for the outlook of the majority of the characters she chooses to represent the frontier period. Rather than glorifying the past, Cather's historical novel seeks to rewrite

it by showing how a single protagonist proves the value of an admiration-based wonder at the land that defies a larger cultural tendency to use “old ways” as a crutch.

Second, in order to use the imagination to appreciate the possibilities of the new and different, Alexandra must have faith in a landscape whose resistance to humanity more often pushes its residents to value certainty. As Alexandra tells her younger brother Emil when they explore potential properties to purchase to expand their farm, “Down there they have a little certainty, but up with us there is a big chance. We must have faith in the high land, Emil” (39). In presenting the novel’s territory as worthy of belief, according to Laura Winters, “Cather transforms secular space into sacred places” (3). By “us[ing] the landscape to suggest possibility,” she contends, “She truly gives land a voice” (100). Winters concentrates primarily on Cather’s post-war novels, but the theme of spiritual, or even mystical, landscape is already present in her works prior to what Cather identified as the moment the “world broke in two.” While many of Cather’s pioneers read the religious power of the prairie as analogous to the wrath of a vengeful God, Alexandra perceives the “Genius of the Divide” as benevolent. Just as in novels like *The Professor’s House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the landscape of *O Pioneers!* provides a spiritual “home” for the exile, in this case the individual outcast for her “different” valuation of newness, her “different” ability to confront the unknowns of the future through techniques “different” than those of her forebears (94).

Just because the Nebraska frontier calls to Alexandra through a spiritual “voice,” however, does not mean that voice is particularly easy to hear or understand. For example, when Carl attempts to explain how he knew something would happen to Marie

(she is shot by her own husband in a fit of jealous rage at the end of the novel), he hesitates:

My dear, it was something one felt in the air, as you feel the spring coming, or a storm in summer. I didn't see anything. Simply, when I was with those two young things, I felt my blood go quicker, I felt – how shall I say it? – an acceleration of life. After I got away, it was all too delicate, too intangible, to write about. (168)

Using ethereal metaphors of the land and its seasons, Carl identifies the foundation of faith: that it cannot be quantified, accurately pinned down, or even clearly seen, much less communicated. Like the land, the humans who live on it are ultimately not creatures of rigid habit, but rather variable, contingent, prone to change and surprise. Such variability and uncertainty, however, does not warrant fear, as Lou and Oscar assume. Despite the incertitude of spiritual faith, human thought, and geographical mood, Alexandra insists that solutions to cohabitating with the land are available, even if those solutions do not fit snugly into the empirical mindset of the era. For instance, when she visits her brother's grave during a storm, she comments that the rain "seems to bring back feelings you had when you were a baby. It carries you back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them" (156). In other words, there is no scientific explanation for "things" that "come to you," that "you can't see."

In examining this imaginative kind of sixth sense, it is helpful to look at Manuel Brancano's concept of the "magical grotesque," which he argues is "the only viable representational mode for coping with the complex reality of the American Southwest" (126). Brancano, in his study of Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, contends that both authors "question the viability of Christian

orthodoxy in the New World, while projecting the profound religious feelings of the population” (127). By extending Brancano’s argument to Cather’s valedictory, we can see that the notion of bringing to bear a “magical perspective on reality” allows *O Pioneers!* to simultaneously engage investigation, which relies on the facts and figures of accounting and certainty, and imagination, which wonders at mystery and the things “you know” even if “you can’t see” them. Indeed, Cather’s own experience of religion clearly influenced her protagonist’s both/and approach to the land. Cather was a member of the Protestant Episcopal church, and Winters argues that her later works, especially, view the West in terms of a Catholic sensibility (24). At the same time, clearly, Cather was devoted to science as “the hope of our age.” The conflict is clear, Winters points out: Cather was simultaneously “religious” and “fatalistic.” Cather herself was aware of the dangers of combining religion and science, particularly as they appeared in the figure of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science.⁵ Cather had ghostwritten “The History of Christian Science” for *McClure’s* magazine from 1907-1908,⁶ and David Porter argues that Eddy served as a primary alter-ego in Cather’s works (70–83). Nevertheless, Cather’s Alexandra demonstrates that having “faith” in the land is crucial to her project of western “progress,” even if it must act in careful balance with her culture’s growing scientific mindset.

Finally, in addition to demonstrating an openness to the new and a faith in the possible, Alexandra views dreams as labor, rather than as escapist leisure. In moving

⁵ Mark Twain was also aware of such dangers. Although Clemens was interested in the “mind cures” of Christian Science that comforted his daughter Susy before her death, his later writing on Mary Baker Eddy was so harsh that *Harper’s* refused to publish it (Powers 614).

⁶ The articles were later published as *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science* in 1909.

beyond a fear-based wonder of the land, Cather's protagonist establishes herself as the novel's resident dreamer – one whose wonder is based on admiration. At first glance, such wonder can look passive, even static. For instance, when explaining the landscape's incredible development to Carl, who left to work in various cities but returns years later, Alexandra denies playing any active role in its transformation, instead giving full credit to the “work” of the land itself:

We had n't much to do with it... The land did it. It had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still.” (65)

Many scenes in the novel lend credence to the notion that this is precisely what Alexandra has been doing throughout: nothing. Indeed, the protagonist of *O Pioneers!* is perpetually depicted as physically at ease while she lets her thoughts wander. After a visit to Ivar, who most deem crazy, we see Alexandra back on her own farm, where she “watched the shimmering pool dreamily” (30). Shortly afterward, she is “standing lost in thought, leaning upon her pitchfork...” (31). Even with the tools of the trade in hand, Alexandra is rarely depicted as actually exerting physical effort on the land. Instead, her figure is generally at rest while her mind is actively engaged. After a fight with her brothers about their wish to move to another farm, for example, she sits in a rocking chair, where “[h]er body was in an attitude of perfect repose, such as it was apt to take when she was thinking earnestly” (37). In each of these cases, her brothers argue, Alexandra is not doing actual labor. Though they recognize that Alexandra is “pretty smart,” and even that “there's no woman anywhere around that knows as much about business” as her, it is obvious to them they have done all the “real work” while she

“always took it pretty easy.” “Good advice, is all right,” Lou mansplains, “but it don’t get the weeds out of the corn” (91).

Alexandra, of course, is insistent that her mental capacities – whether “good advice,” business acumen, or imagination – do qualify as labor. Even if she does not physically bounce around the mountaintops and mineshafts of the West, as Mark Twain’s alter-ego did, her intellectual moves have proved productive. As she tells Lou, her “management” has often “put in the crop” or even bought the fields for that crop “to grow in” (91). Though she acknowledges that “[s]he had not the least spark of cleverness,” she knows that “[h]er mind was slow, truthful, steadfast” (37). In fact, it is because of her intellect – including her ability to see what is not yet there through her imagination – that her father forbids her from traditional modes of labor. When he gives out his deathbed wishes, one is that “Alexandra must not work in the fields anymore” (21). Instead, John Bergson understands, Alexandra, even when she is “...looking thoughtfully away at the point where the upland road disappeared over the rim of the prairie,” is thinking purposefully, even if such behavior does not appear to be physically tasking. “[E]ventually,” we come to learn, Alexandra’s “eyes” always end up focusing on some fresh and practical plan, whether it be a “new pig corral,” a new property purchase, or a new farming technique (30). Ultimately, then, the settler’s imagination, more than the comparatively haphazard vagabond’s exploratory vision we saw in the previous chapter, is practical and directed.

Despite her father’s confidence in the labor of her imagination, Alexandra herself is sensitive to and aware of both the limitations and implications of dreaming. First, Cather suggests, her protagonist is, if anything, *too* practical in imagining the future. It is

for this reason that, even while Alexandra can envision future material developments on her property, she fails to foresee personal ones. This is her “blind side”: Because “[h]er training had all been toward the end of making her proficient in what she had undertaken to do,” her “personal life, her own realization of herself, was almost a subconscious existence” (111). In fact, the personal side of Alexandra’s imagination has been so wholly overtaken by the practical side that the former is described in terms of the latter, as “an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields” (111). Always focused more on land than love – for both herself and those around her – Alexandra never guesses that her younger brother, Emil, might be having an affair with her married friend, Marie. Indeed, the narrator reflects, “[i]f Alexandra had had much imagination she might have guessed what was going on” before it was too late, and both the lovers ended up murdered by Marie’s jealous husband, Frank. But because Alexandra’s “life had not been of the kind to sharpen her vision” of personal emotions, she misses the cues that her keen eye would easily pick up on the land.

This is not the only case in which Alexandra refrains from using her personal imagination in favor of a more practical vision. Twice in the novel, we see that Alexandra does indeed have the capacity for romantic fantasy, but views such “sentimental reveries” as “indulgences” to be avoided. One particular “fancy” began in her girlhood, and consists of “an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by some one very strong” (112). As with her lack of personal imagination about Emil and Marie’s relationship, represented as an underground stream, this daydream is also overlaid by the land: she sees the man of her imagination as “yellow like the sunlight”

and senses that the whole scene has “the smell of ripe corn-fields...” But whenever she finds herself in the middle of this dream, “she would rise hastily, angry with herself, and go down to the bathhouse,” where she would “prosecute her bath with vigor.” If dreams cannot produce tangible and positive results on the land, Alexandra seems to believe, they are not worth having. According to this logic, being “lost in thought” is a pleasure deserving of guilt unless one finds practical, actionable direction in such thoughts.

If Alexandra is suspicious of certain brands of imagination, her brothers, obviously, are more so. But while Lou and Oscar can neither execute nor appreciate an investigative imagination, even after Alexandra’s has reaped enormous dividends for their family, Carl, her childhood friend and adulthood lover, sees the value of Alexandra’s vision even if he is unable to cultivate such vision himself. Upon returning to the Divide after spending years in the city, he gazes at “the wide, map-like prospect of field and hedge and pasture,” commenting, “I would never have believed it could be done. I'm disappointed in my own eye, in my own imagination" (61). Like Alexandra, though, Carl distinguishes between various kinds of imagination, and this is what enables him to admire Alexandra’s vision. Carl’s own imagination is particularly artistic. As a boy, for instance, he is pictured poring over “chromo studies,” offers to bring a “magic lantern” to Alexandra’s house to entertain the ill John Bergson, and is seen “dreaming over an illustrated paper” in his kitchen (11, 15, 23). When he grows up, he becomes an engraver, and makes amateur watercolors for Alexandra’s walls (61). And as the narrator tells us, Carl’s “soft, lustrous black eyes” and “whimsical smile” qualify him as a representative of the “dreamers on the frontier” (166). Nonetheless, Carl’s creative brand of dreaming does not prepare him for the “map-like prospect” that Alexandra’s land-

based investigative imagination has produced.

Because she is unafraid to confront the new, exhibits a strong sense of faith in the land, and recognizes the labor value of the imagination, Alexandra views the landscape's independence and permanence as comforting and promising rather than threatening, and her own relative lack of power over it as relatively unimportant. As she tells Carl, "The land belongs to the future... We come and go, but the land is always here" (169). She indicates that the "great fact" of the land should not be feared, but rather recognized and respected for its self-sufficiency and stability. Even so, the power of the land remains a mystery. Alexandra indicates that this western landscape should be wondered at not in spite of, but rather because of the mysterious nature of its creation. It is this sort of admiring wonder, the young valedictorian suggested, that properly compels investigation.

The Novel *Démueblé* and the Interpretive Imagination

As the two sections above have shown, Cather depicts Alexandra's success in settling the frontier as dependent on her unique method of perceiving the land, from a perspective that is simultaneously factual and spiritual. This combination sets Alexandra up as neither entirely "superstitious" nor entirely scientific, but rather as what I am calling an "imaginative investigator," who tempers rigid pragmatism with more flexible dreams. This still leaves us with a question, however: What justifies Cather in enabling her protagonist of *O Pioneers!* to admire and imaginatively investigate the Nebraska prairie while her contemporaries generally fear it? The answer, like the land itself, remains somewhat mysterious. As Cather cryptically tells us in the novel, "nobody knew why," of "two ears that had grown side by side," only "the grains of one shot up joyfully into the light, projecting themselves into the future," while "the grains from the other lay

still in the earth and rotted" (88). I suggest, however, that we can flesh out an explanation for Cather's imaginative investigator by looking to the author's most well-known declaration of aesthetic principles, "The Novel Démueblé." This treatise can help us to understand the point of the above discussion of superstition versus investigation in regarding the western frontier, and the roles the author, character, and reader play in determining and acting on their relative values.

Published in *The New Republic* in 1922, "The Novel Démueblé" takes to task the "overfurnished" style of writers such as Honoré de Balzac and D.H. Lawrence. According to Cather, "To reproduce on paper the actual city of Paris," as Balzac does, is "a stupendous ambition—but, after all, unworthy of an artist." Instead, she favors the "unfurnished" aesthetic of authors like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Leo Tolstoy, both of whom present "the actual surroundings of the people" such that "they seem to exist, not so much in the author's mind, as in the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves." Cather thus praises contemporary young writers who are similarly trying "to present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration," by "interpret[ing] imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters" (6). The notion of "imaginative interpretation" here is analogous to Cather's earlier understanding of scientific investigation as dependent not so much on material objectivity as on an admiring wonder that sparks the imagination to contemplate mystery. And again, she is concerned with the concept of "creation" – artistic creation, here, rather than the "creation" of the earth – as the object inspiring such wonder. "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there," she explains in her treatise, "that, it seems to me, is created."

Ultimately, Cather suggests that a failure of imagination originates not simply in a failure to wonder, to admire, and to investigate, but that those failures all originate in a failure of “sympathy.” In “The Novel Demueble,” Cather defines realism as “an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague definition of the sympathy and candor with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme” (6). If an artist does not demonstrate the capacity for an intimate understanding of and relationship with her subject, meaningful investigation is precluded. Cather was particularly well-positioned to sympathize with her material, since her works can be categorized as semi-autobiographical fiction. By following the advice of Sarah Orne Jewett to write of her own region, about “[t]he thing that teases the mind over and over for years,” Cather prepared herself to intimately depict her setting (“Miss Jewett” 76).

While Cather only officially used the theory put forth in “The Novel Demueble” for the first time in *A Lost Lady* (1923), we can easily see how *O Pioneers!* is already developing a disdain for “mere verisimilitude”: in writing a “novel of the soil,” Cather quite literally moved away from the furniture crowding the “novel of the drawing room.” Although David Stouk has defined Cather’s “deep sympathy for the figures of her personal past” – including, in my reading, the “figure” of the land – as resulting from a “sentimental perspective,” I see her sympathy as doing more than simply “bath[ing] the humble subjects of the book and the simple facts of their lives with an enduring warmth and affection” (29). Instead, Cather’s rapport with the residence and residents of her novel serves to make a case for the role humans play in history, or, more specifically, the role the human imagination plays in investigating the landscapes that will become the settings for history. This is why, when *TIME* reviewed Cather’s later *Shadows on the*

Rock, the reviewer predicted that "...when you have finished her unspectacular narrative you may be somewhat surprised to realize that you have been living" not just history, but "*human history*" ("Amen, Sinner" 3, italics mine). As her life-long partner Edith Lewis put it, Cather "...saw the country, not as pure landscape, but filled with a human significance, lightened or darkened by the play of human feeling" (Lewis 23). By viewing the landscape about which she writes as something mysterious yet accessible, something into which she could incorporate herself rather than a hard piece of furniture to be catalogued, Cather challenges as insufficient the material enumerations of supposedly "realist" writers, the "reason" of practical science, and the empiricism of federal land policy. Although quantifying one's tangible surroundings is not an evil act in and of itself, such a "mass of brick and mortar" – or, in this case, sand and sage – defeats the end of artistic imagination unless "the literalness ceases to be literalness" by becoming "part of the experience" ("The Novel D meubl " 6).

Cather's unfurnished style in *O Pioneers!* creates a space in which she asks of her own characters that which she asks of herself as an author: sympathy. In other words, her spare style serves to underline her belief that the mysteries that accompany a lack of "furniture" issue a call for imaginative investigation, the prerequisite of which is an interest in and personal connection to that which might be only subtly suggested by the land. As we have seen, however, not all of Cather's personages follow her mandate. John Bergson, for example, dismisses the mysterious "Genius of the Divide" as "unfriendly to man," indicating that he cannot imagine constructing an intimate understanding, much less a close relationship, with his own property. Similarly, Alexandra's friend Marie is unable to recognize any link between herself and the natural

world she inhabits: as she walks, “her face [is] lifted toward the remote, inaccessible evening star” (137). In direct contrast to Marie’s helpless view of the heavens as removed and unreachable, Alexandra’s perspective on those same stars is motivating precisely because she feels personally tied to their pattern. “She always loved to watch them,” the narrator says, “to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security” (42).

Alexandra’s sympathetic ability to see the space around her as incorporative rather than inaccessible enables the imaginative investigation that Cather proposed as ideal in her valedictory. The protagonist’s “new consciousness of the country” is constituted by a “new relation to it” that is admiring rather than fearful (42). Alexandra has secured a personal connection to the land in which the line between investigator and investigated is no longer distinct. Her “new relation” to the terrain is born of a vision of “her heart... hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun” (42). When Alexandra looks upon the Divide with sympathy, she recognizes that “the history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman” (65). As a result of her close bond with the land – in which her body metaphorically bonds with the “wild things” others might view as unapproachable or even threatening – Alexandra’s character becomes fused with her property, such that “A stranger, approaching [her land], could not help noticing [that] ... [t]here was something individual about the great farm, a most unusual trimness and care for detail” (49). It is this sympathetic relationship between resident and residence, which, according to Cather’s aesthetic principles, “perfectly synthesizes” not only the artist’s

mind and her artistic material, but also her protagonist's mind and her geographical material. This synthesis, in turn, allows imaginative investigation to be enacted, for when Alexandra sets her face toward the land with "love and yearning," it responds by bending "lower than it ever bent to a human will before," allowing her not only to analyze it closely, but to use that analysis in her further development of the territory (17, 39).

Much of Alexandra's ability to sympathetically relate to her "actual surroundings" involves her physical sense of sight. For example, Demaree Peck has argued convincingly that Alexandra's incorporation of nature's beauty into her own personhood is analogous to Ralph Waldo Emerson's "transparent eyeball," which "can integrate all the parts" (7). Her incorporative perspective contrasts starkly, as we have seen, with the secondary characters in *O Pioneers!* As Peck points out, her brothers have a "materialistic desire to parcel out nature into its economic units," which serves "merely divide its integrity" (7). Peck does not extend his analysis here back to its sight-based origins, however. As I see it, Lou and Oscar's impetus to quantify the landscape is born of an extremely narrow scope of vision, as when the narrator observes Oscar's "mind fixed on the one point he could see" (91). An even more marked contrast in the capacity for sight can be found in Frank Shabata, who, though he is normally "wont to see himself in dramatic situations," at one particularly low point "did not see himself at all" (146). Because Cather's Alexandra is the only all-seeing "poet-landlord" of the novel, only she "deserves to claim the Nebraska Divide."

Whereas Peck argues that Alexandra's sight of, sympathy for, and subsequent claim of the land results in a transcendental imposition of self over space, I maintain that Cather's character takes a more balanced approach. When Alexandra's eyes "dr[i]nk in

the breadth of [the land], until tears blinded her,” her emotional state does not indicate, as Peck claims, that she can *only* see the territory from a subjective point of view, with her own tears reflecting herself onto the land before her. This reading invokes precisely the type of biased, fearful “superstition” against which Cather reacted in her valedictory. Rather, I suggest, Alexandra’s blurred sight is only an external symptom of her internal capacity for admiring, sympathetic wonder at creation; her temporary loss of literal vision only highlights her durable capacity for imaginative vision. Unlike the overly scientific blinded “microscopic eyes” of the cold investigator Cather renounced in her graduation speech, on the one hand, or the overly romantic, “velvety” outlines Mark Twain denigrated in Albert Bierstadt’s landscape paintings, on the other, Alexandra’s eyes enact neither a domineering, unfeeling analysis nor on a wholly subjective, sentimental rendering of the landscape. Both Kelly Clasen and Laura Winters have recognized this perspective in terms of how it carefully weighs self against space. For Winters, the land in Cather’s works simultaneously serves to “allow people to understand their authentic selves” and acts as “a reminder of the presence...of something larger than the self” (9, 3). Similarly, Clasen sees Alexandra as blending a harmonious land ethic that prioritizes a communal environment with an imperial view of the land as something to be conquered.⁷ Cather’s concern with recognizing the value of both science and sentiment, then, manifests in a parallel investment in negotiating between the environmental prerogatives of the land with the human impulse to develop it.

Cather’s “unfurnished” aesthetic principles have implications not only for the writer, who must “suggest” rather than “enumerate,” and her characters, who represent

⁷ Clasen argues that this combination of the communal and the imperial prefigures Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* (1949).

those opposing methods of interpretation, but also for the reader, who must evaluate, alongside the novel's cast, the landscape of 1880s Nebraska. As Marilee Lindemann indicates, Cather "creates a vital and challenging role for the reader, who is called upon to feel deeply, to listen carefully, to be alert to moods, auras, divinations" (15). In other words, Cather's readers, like Alexandra, must be investigators not always of hard evidence, but of the subtle mysteries of "creation" that lurk behind the unnamed, "beyond or perhaps beneath words." In this sense, Cather calls on the reader to cultivate an interpretive imagination. She issues this call by creating suggestive (rather than enumerative) scenes, and urges her reader to answer it by providing us with examples of what various styles of geographical interpretation look like. The reader is thus forced to actively engage with both the style and content of Cather's novel in order to make sense of its setting and message.

In the end, *O Pioneers!* provides what artist L. Kent Wolgamott, in his 2015 exhibition on *My Antonia*, calls "Instructions for Seeing." Wolgamott's exhibition, installed in Lincoln, Nebraska, is an effort at "'mapping' the novel," a project that involves colored discs and intertwined ropes criss-crossing the venue floor, and an "orientation board" that acts as the map's legend. The map pushes the "reader" to physically experience the novel, to see it from a new perspective, and, finally, to sympathize in a more engaged way with the book's prairie setting and how its characters interact with that space, by physically moving alongside them, allowing the exhibit's participants to experience and experiment with their points of view on the places they inhabit. "Instructions for Seeing" makes tangible the process of the imaginative investigator of Cather's valedictory, who "seeks to probe into the mysteries of the

unknowable.” By sketching the outlines that approximate Cather’s unfurnished western setting, Wolgamott assists the reader in investigating the space of the novel both quantitatively and qualitatively. Through inhabiting the footsteps and sight lines of Cather’s characters, we identify with them and the ways in which they identify with their landscape. And if, as Cather advised, sympathy is a prerequisite for imaginative investigation, this way of seeing will help the reader to move beyond mere enumeration to a more admiring, wondrous understanding that will unlock the mysteries of creation – to “grasp... the atom.”

Conclusion

Cather’s focused view of the relationship between the western landscape and its inhabitants clearly builds on Mark Twain’s vagabondizing, which haphazardly explored, rather than carefully examined, the ways that quantitative and qualitative perspectives might weaken or strengthen the connection between self and space. As in both “Superstition vs. Investigation” and “The Novel Demuéblé,” Cather’s *O Pioneers!* carefully navigates the fine line between fact and fantasy, simultaneously validating the empirical as important and necessary while qualifying that validation by insisting that such a purely investigative approach must be overlaid with the imagination, which enables us to go the “step farther.” Nevertheless, Cather’s formulation of the admiring, sympathetic, imaginative investigator does not provide a foolproof path to unrivaled “success,” “civilization,” or “progress” for her characters. As Alexandra explains the land to Carl, it is only “the people who love it and understand it who own it.” But even that precise combination of reverent compassion and scientific comprehension does not produce a long-term contract between resident and residence, since such ownership is

bound to last only “for a little while” (169). Like Frederick Jackson Turner’s confident yet vague conclusion that the combination of pragmatism and creativity guarantees that “the expansive character of American life” will not cease with the 1890 closure of the frontier, Cather’s celebration of the settler’s investigative imagination falls short of providing all the answers to the continuing mystery of the Divide (37).

While it would be easy to dismiss this somewhat unsettled settler’s imagination as a kind of wishy-washy failure to tie up the loose ends of a western literary tradition that was supposedly turning to a stricter version of realism, Cather’s conception of her own artistic limitations helps to reconsider such assumptions. In “A Chance Meeting,” Cather’s 1933 essay about her serendipitous encounter with Gustave Flaubert’s niece, Caroline, she realizes “that an artist’s limitations are quite as important as his powers; that they are a definite asset, not a deficiency, and that both go to form his flavor, his personality...” (24). In his discussion of the essay, art critic Jed Perl writes,

No point is more important. Great artists are limited, at least nearly all of them are. But their limitations, so Cather is suggesting, are a part of their power, perhaps the key to their power. Art is the intensification of limitations, the shaping of limitations, the transformation of limitations into qualities of form and feeling. (65–66).

In all three of the works I have been considering in this chapter – the valedictory speech, the aesthetic treatise, and the novel – Cather is, finally, supremely aware of the boundaries of any one approach to any one space, by any one individual. Neither imagination nor enumeration is fully functional on its own, just as neither pure experience or pure verisimilitude is able to approximate life in fiction, and just as neither the fantasizing dreamer nor the rigid scientist is always capable of fully comprehending her world.

Alexandra Bergson admits these limits at the end of *O Pioneers!*, telling Carl that, though she “had a dream...It will never come true, now, in the way I thought it might” (308). The protagonist’s clear contentment at the novel’s conclusion, however, indicates that the dream’s failure to come to full fruition is not a deal breaker. Indeed, as Cather warned in her valedictory, it is the “confounding of the literal and the figurative” that is apt to produce dangerous “fanatics,” but those who carefully weigh dreams against realities will acknowledge that both are contingent on each other, and adjust accordingly. The goal is not perfection, nor is the perfect alignment between the empirical and the imaginative really possible. Instead, Alexandra’s considered flexibility suggests, Cather’s valedictory confirms, and the author’s “Chance” essay concludes, it is an acceptance of possibility, a faith in the uncertain, and a recognition of limitations – rather than a grip on tradition, a skepticism of the new, or a hubristic conservatism – that enables humanity to “progress” toward a productive relationship with the land. As she put it in “Superstition vs. Investigation”: “For over six thousand years we have shaken fact and fancy in the dice box together and breathlessly awaited the result. But the dice of God are always loaded, and there are two sides which never fall upward, the alpha and omega. Perhaps when we make our final cast with dark old death we may shape them better.”

To what extent, then, does such a simultaneously idealistic and fatalistic philosophy actually succeed in “grasping the atom”? For the western literary critics who have constructed the genre’s boundaries, any reliance on the imagination, even one based on an appreciation of scientific investigation, was bound to outgrow the space of the frontier once it was “settled.” Although I contend that Cather’s *O Pioneers!* proves that

western dreams persist longer than most critics admit, the novel does represent the beginning of a submission to the “great fact” of the land. Even Cather herself would become more disillusioned⁸ as the West was increasingly “won,” not only by white imperialists (including her own beloved Swedish immigrants), but also by those imperialists’ quantifying tendencies.

In the end, the novel’s Oscar is prescient in his invocation of William Jennings Bryan’s campaign mandate that “The West is going to make itself heard,” although not in the way he would have liked (63). Bryan, a prairie populist who had represented Nebraska in Congress, ran for president in 1896, 1900, and 1908 on an anti-gold standard, anti-Wall Street platform that advocated for the relief of debt-ridden farmers through the unlimited coinage of silver. His defeat in 1896 “symbolically marked the consolidation of wealth and political power in capitalist class” (Lindemann 178). Ironically, the rise of capitalism was both a cause and an effect of Oscar’s reliance on facts, certainty, and tradition; it is his fear-based submission to and emulation of the government’s enumeration of the West that brings about the immanently practical but ultimately unsympathetic policies that would drive the admiring imaginations of investigators like Alexandra to a halt. In other words, despite Cather’s careful balance of investigation and imagination in her writing style, her characters’ approaches to the land, and her challenge to her readers’ own modes of perception, she is working against more powerful economic and cultural forces that will come to dominate the land in the approaching decades in the West, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4.

⁸ Like Twain, Cather burned much of her early writing, including letters and manuscripts.

CHAPTER 3

THE OUTSIDER'S IMAGINATION IN AMÉRICO PAREDES' *GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ*: STAGING VICTORY AND FLEEING THE SCENE IN THE BORDERLANDS

In 1938, in the middle of the period in which Américo Paredes was writing what would become *George Washington Gómez*, the struggling young journalist recorded his frustration at the inchoate ideas he felt would never come to fruition:

In my pockets, in my books, in the corners of my dust-covered desk are piles of little, folded scraps of paper with a few lines scribbled on each. They were to have been masterpieces, each and every one. Instead they lie like pieces of rusting machinery of a project that was begun but never finished... (qtd. in Medrano 28)

Paredes' scraps are reminiscent of the "thoughts, ends of thoughts, beginnings of thoughts" that Doctor Reefy carries in his pockets in Sherwood Anderson's short story "Paper Pills," from his 1919 collection *Winesburg, Ohio*.¹ While Doctor Reefy treats his "paper pills" with levity – he dumps them onto the ground when his pockets get full, throws them at his friend "to confound" him, and laughs after reading them aloud to his new wife – Paredes sees tragedy in his scraps. Despite the divergent views of each figure

¹ I have found no evidence of Paredes' familiarity with Anderson. The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, which houses Paredes' papers, provides an online overview of the author's correspondence, manuscripts, notes, etc. Based on this list, there is no indication that Paredes dealt with Anderson in any way during the course of his personal life or academic career. If he had, I would imagine that it would have been *after* this journal entry was written, during Paredes' undergraduate or graduate classes in English at UT Austin. Although I could not access (if they exist) the syllabi of the courses Paredes took, a list of the seminar papers he composed covers mostly medieval and early modern British literature and poetry (Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Herbert). Paredes wrote about Americans only twice – Theodore Dreiser and, interestingly enough, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* His later seminar papers, when he was clearly finding his niche, focus on Spanish and Latin-American drama, literature, philosophy, and folklore – Unamuno, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, and various ballad writers (Paredes, "Term and Class Papers, 1949-1954").

on his incipient masterpieces, Paredes' identification with one of Anderson's "grotesques" suggests, at the very least, that he sees himself as an outsider. Ralph Ciancio has defined the grotesque as "...a metaphor of the natural condition of man, of his being at cross-purposes with himself, of his compulsive hearkening to the infinite call of transcendence which his finitude makes impossible from the start" (1001). Paredes felt this impossibility keenly, through his perception of himself and his world, as well as his view of his own movement through that environment. His marginalized position, he wrote in his journal, is the result of his own self-division, "bifurcated by two languages and two cultures," such that he finds himself operating on "so many fields of battle" that he is "unable to advance." Paredes' feeling that he is "standing still" while "the world" is "rushing past," leads him to envision himself bound by a "close and enveloping" "harness" that ties him "down more firmly to the place where, Gulliver-like, I sprawl." In his allusion to Gulliver, Paredes refers to Book 1 of Jonathan Swift's 1726 adventure-satire, in which the shipwrecked hero wakes to discover that he has been tied down by the tiny people who inhabit the land of Lilliput. In this scene, Gulliver is unable to eat, drink, or relieve himself, and must act in a reserved, non-threatening manner in the hopes of securing eventual freedom. Paredes thus chooses to picture himself in Gulliver's shoes precisely where Gulliver's sense of self is challenged, or, more literally, bound in a place that offers no outlet for authentic movement. In short, the two allusions Paredes makes in his journal – to Dr. Reefy and to Gulliver – encapsulate his imagination of the borderland between Mexico and the United States as a fundamentally divided, restricting space, and it is this image that forms the foundation for his novel *George Washington Gómez*.

Paredes' vision of the West offers a stark contrast to those of Mark Twain's *Roughing It* and Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. *Roughing It*, recall, also cites Gulliver, but in a very different way. In Twain's travelogue, when the narrator lies down under the shade of a sagebrush, he does not picture himself as a hungry, bound, stifled Gulliver, but rather takes the authorial liberty to combine two of Gulliver's worlds by having his alter-ego imagine himself as a hungry Brobdignagian free to assert his will over a dominion of Lilliputians. He sees himself as a "vast loafer from Brobdignag...waiting to catch a little citizen" – he pictures the sagebrush's gnats as "lilliputian birds" and its ants as "lilliputian flocks and herds" – "and eat him" (*Roughing It* 33). Far from feeling constricted by the space of the West, Twain sees the Nevada Territory as available for his own consumption. Coming from the viewpoint of a white American male in the heyday of Manifest Destiny,² Twain depicts his alter-ego as free to explore and imagine the landscape of the West, as well as his place in it, as he sees fit, with little consequence for his future. Indeed, Twain's vagabondizing adventures³ in western space not only fail to diminish his career as a writer, but secure and propel its success. Unlike Paredes, whose attempts to publish the Mexican perspective of the borderlands and their history led the powers that be to attempt to stifle that viewpoint, Twain's perspective on the West was considered valuable by the likes of William Dean Howells, the "Dean of American Letters." Willa Cather does not name check Swift or Gulliver, but her view of the Nebraska Divide continues in the vein of Twain's generally self-righteous vision of Nevada. Although she takes a more balanced approach to the

² At the time of *Roughing It*, Twain had not yet come to a consciousness of the evils of imperialism, as he would in his later career.

³ At the extreme, these adventures included playing a joke on a fellow reporter which provoked a duel from which he had to flee.

land by simultaneously acknowledging its “Genius” and overlaying the environment with her own human sympathy and will, her farmland, far from holding her down, offers immense and inspiring imaginative potential.

In this chapter, I argue that Paredes marks the beginning of a changing tide in the western American imagination in the early- to mid-20th century, in which the imagination moves from a subject position, acting upon and intervening in the land, to an object position, acted upon by that same space. While the first two chapters showed the positive correlation between the “open” landscape of the West and the imaginations of those (white) Americans who would explore and settle there, this third chapter will exhibit a profound shift in the perception of landscape through the eyes of a minority from whom the West was “won.” Whereas writers like Twain and Cather, positioned on either side of the turn of the century, could imagine their western terrains at least in part according to their own prerogatives, the nation’s expanding borders led to the incorporation of grotesques like Paredes, whose split identities and “cross-purposes” produced more deeply divided views of the spaces that previous authors had succeeded in imaginatively coalescing into spaces that provided for possible progress.

Specifically, this chapter examines Américo Paredes’ *George Washington Gómez* (written between 1936 and 1940 but not published until 1990), a bildungsroman that follows the eponymous protagonist from boyhood to adulthood in the fictional Jonesville, Texas, just north of the border with Mexico. The novel opens at the onset of WWI, on the day of George Washington Gómez’s birth. When his mother says she wants her son “to have a great man’s name,” his father, Gumersindo, suggests that they name him after “the great North American, he who was a general and fought the soldiers of the king”

(16). The confusion that ensues – Gumersindo believes that Washington not only “crossed a river while it was freezing,” but also “freed the slaves,” while other family members can only pronounce the name as “Wachinton” or, roughly, “Guálinto” – foreshadows the cultural clashes that will slowly shape the child’s life. Soon after Guálinto’s birth, his father is murdered by Texas Rangers for his presumed involvement in a seditionist movement, and the child is taken in by his uncle Feliciano. As a young boy, Guálinto is routinely humiliated by both the students and teachers in his linguistically prejudiced school system, and as a teenager, he encounters discrimination in everything from securing a job to keeping a girlfriend to getting into a nightclub. By the end of the novel, Guálinto officially goes by George, is married to a white woman, and works for the U.S. government in border security. Far from becoming a “leader of his people” as his mother wished, he ends up serving a country that excludes “the Mexicans living in it” (302).

Much of the scholarship on Américo Paredes focuses on the development of a fractured identity in *George Washington Gómez*. For example, both Hector Perez and Frederick Whiting have investigated how the genre of the Bildungsroman accommodates or obstructs such an identity. Others have investigated how the dynamics of space play into character development, but this relationship has not been explored in *George Washington Gómez*. For instance, Ramón Saldívar qualifies Paredes's work as “always concerned with ...the sense of place, and most important, with the hope of freedom associated with the structures of feeling tied to place” (9). As such, Paredes’ texts serve “to remind us of the hold of places and times on our social selves” (8). Saldívar exemplifies this relationship by pointing to Paredes’ poem “The Rio Grande,” composed

in 1934, just two years before he began writing *George Washington Gómez*. Here, Paredes “seizes... an instant of historical memory as it flashes in a moment of danger, the danger of cultural eradication, and makes it concrete by grounding it on the reality of regional local space” of the riverbank (Ibid.). Although Saldivar dedicates an illuminating chapter to explaining how George Washington Gómez’s “checkerboard of consciousness” enables a fraught “personal emergence into history,” he does not ground that consciousness in the local space of the Rio Grande Valley in the same way he does in the poem above.

I am interested in filling this gap by investigating how the geographical spaces of *George Washington Gómez* interact with the protagonist’s imagination as he grows up. In looking at specific locales in the novel, I am particularly concerned with how Guálinto views the spaces around him, what those spaces enable him to envision, and why. By examining the geographical features of these spaces and their effects on Mexican cultural, economic, and political history, and comparing those features to the ones in which Guálinto comes of age, we can see how Paredes illustrates the difficulty of escaping a vision of space as binding and limiting. Indeed, such an imaginative project proves impossible for his protagonist. In parallel to physical growth of the boy, then, his vision of his landscape changes, a shift that results from his increasing understanding of his position as an “outsider” and his steady indoctrination into the opposing idea, espoused by one of his teachers, that “we are all Americans now.” Although his initial view of his childhood landscape, based on its historical isolation and its return to ownership by “the people” following the Mexican Revolution, as a “stage” for role-playing fosters a heroic imagination, his experiences of racial and ethnic bias during the

Great Depression lead him to see that same territory as a “filthy Delta” from whose geography and culture he must escape. Like the scraps of paper in Paredes’ pockets that he feels cannot come to fruition given his vision of his environment as divided, the increasingly constricted geographical imagination in *George Washington Gómez* prevents the protagonist from becoming a “leader of his people.” His conception of a split world that prohibits “advance” invites a consideration of how social politics – divisions of the self amongst ideas, responsibilities, languages, and cultures – are tied to geographical histories. In *George Washington Gómez*, the development of the eponymous protagonist relies on his developing experiences in and understanding of the spaces in which he lives. Through what I am calling the “outsider’s imagination,” which envisions the borderlands as limiting rather than freeing, George Washington Gómez finds himself bound to enemy territory by his failure to live up to the dreams his childhood landscape once enabled.

El Seno Mexicano: Isolation, Invaded

Américo Paredes was born in 1915 in Brownsville, Texas, located on the banks of the Rio Grande River, about 25 miles from where it empties out into the Gulf of Mexico. His family had deep roots in the region; his ancestors were members of a 1580 Sephardic Jewish colony that had fled Spain to escape religious persecution. By Paredes’ time, this religious persecution had morphed into ethnic persecution, which was primarily carried out through the forcible seizing of property. Paredes’ father, Justo, was a rancher – and a rebel in the Garza Revolution⁴ – but, seeing others’ land stolen, transferred his farm title to a younger brother and moved his family to Brownsville, where he became a dry goods store owner and a political boss (Medrano 7-8). Américo was one of nine children, most

⁴ The 1891 northern uprising against Porfirio Díaz, led by journalist Catarino Garza, is considered a precursor to the Mexican Revolution.

of whom attended the city's only grammar school, which, despite the fact that the majority of its student body was of Mexican origin, inculcated its students with Anglo-centric values (Medrano 8). By the time he reached high school, most of his Mexican classmates had dropped out, leaving the young Paredes nearly alone to represent the "other" side of history and language in the classroom. It was at this point that Paredes became interested in folktales and folk ballads, many of which he learned from his Uncle Vicente, whose Matamoros ranch, across the border from Brownsville, he visited with two of his brothers every summer (Medrano 11).

Paredes' experiences with traditional Mexican culture on his uncle's ranch profoundly influenced the boy, who during his teenage years began writing and translating poetry. He joined his high school yearbook staff, and began composing his first novel, *George Washington Gómez* (Medrano 16). Unable to afford college, Paredes completed two years at Brownsville Junior College – with his tuition paid for by a student assistantship position – where at least one teacher recognized his "facility with words" (20). Again, however, his financial status prevented him from continuing his education or concentrating fully on his writing. Paredes worked as a delivery truck driver before starting a job at the local newspaper (18). In 1936, he published his first book of poetry, *Cantos de Adolescencia*,⁵ which introduced many of the themes Paredes would circle around throughout his career, including the biased education system, ethnic discrimination, the importance of storytelling, and the natural beauty of the borderlands (24). Paredes' writing continued during WWII. Despite his exemption from the draft,⁶ he chose to enlist, working as a reporter for the *Stars and Stripes* army newspaper in

⁵ *Songs of Adolescence*. Paredes was later embarrassed by the work, and he and some friends took all the copies they could find to the mouth of the Rio Grande River, to burn them.

⁶ The exemption was afforded by Paredes' work with Pan American Airlines (Medrano 34).

Tokyo as then an administrator for the International American Red Cross (36-38). The decision, he later said, served as “the cutting of the rope that kept me riding at anchor in prejudice, smugness, and general littleness of mind” (34). Upon returning to Texas following the war, he enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned, in quick succession, his BA in English and Spanish in 1951, his MA in 1953, and his PhD in 1956. He was the first Mexican American to earn a PhD in English from the school. He would go on to create and direct both the Folklore Center and the Mexican-American Studies program at UT Austin. A Guggenheim Fellow (1962), National Endowment for the Humanities prize winner (1989), and editor of one of the earliest Chicano anthologies (1972), Paredes by the end of his distinguished career was acknowledged with the respectful honorific “Don Américo.” He died in 1999.

If Paredes’ scholarly community regarded his work as highly laudable at the end of his career, however, those surrounding him at the beginning of his foray into the academy were skeptical. Paredes’ dissertation, entitled “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”: *A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, qualified as a first. It was “strange,” as Paredes himself put it, that a dissertation written about a Mexican hero, analyzing a Spanish-language ballad, and researched mostly through documents in Spanish, was conducted in an English department – “yet, they accepted it” (qtd. in Medrano 53). The difficulties of this “strange” text continued when Paredes attempted to publish his manuscript with his alma mater press. “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” had been endorsed by Stith Thompson, the head of the folklore department at Indiana University, whom Paredes recognized as being so “supreme” that he deserved the title “Mr. Folklore.” Despite having such a scholarly superstar on his side, the director of the UT Press, Frank W. Wardlaw, asked Paredes to

substantially revise his dissertation for publication. Specifically, Wardlaw advised Paredes to soften his indicting refutations of “official” Texas history as espoused by scholars like J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb – both of whom praised Texas Rangers as legitimate agents of justice while dismissing Mexicans as mixed-blood degenerates.⁷ However, back-pedaling on his critique of Dobie and Webb would eliminate the entire point Paredes was making: that Mexican history must be reclaimed from Texan-authored mythologies that justified what Paredes called the “ethnic cleansing” of the Mexican Revolution (Medrano 7). As Paredes noted later, carrying out Wardlaw’s suggestions would reduce his research to nothing more than “a pretty story” (qtd. in Medrano 56). Wanting to avoid this, Paredes told Wardlaw that he was not willing to make the changes. “Why don’t you just send me the manuscript back,” the author remembers saying, “and I think I’ll try somewhere else” (qtd. in Saldívar 113). Paredes speculates that Wardlaw, hearing this, envisioned the book being published by a press like Indiana, which could then bolster its own reputation for bold scholarship in publishing “the manuscript that the University of Texas Press would not touch.” Needless to say, Wardlaw “backed down.” If Paredes won the battle to have his book published in-tact by UT, however, there were some caveats. “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” was published in 1958, but with none of the fanfare normally put on for new publication, at least partly due to Paredes’ refusal to make his work “pretty.” Unpublicized, its main buyer was the Texas Folklore Society (Medrano 57).

⁷ The Anglo-Texan legend to which both Dobie and Webb subscribe asserts, specifically, that Mexicans are cruel, cowardly, treacherous, and thieving due to the mixing of inferior races in their blood: the Spaniard (a “second-rate type of European”) and the Mexican Indian (“not to be confused with the noble savages of North America”). By contrast, the Texan is superior in all ways, and the Texas Ranger represents the culmination of this superiority. According to Anglo-Texan myth, the Mexican acknowledges the validity of this hierarchy (Paredes, “*With His Pistol*” 16).

Nonetheless, “*With His Pistol in His Hand*” – one of the first books written about Mexicans by a Mexican in the English language – is today commonly considered a precursor to both the literary and political branches of El Movimiento, or the Chicano Movement, which coincided with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The book would not have been capable of serving as a foundation for El Movimiento had Paredes given in to Wardlaw’s hesitations about calling into question the justice of the Texas Rangers. But Paredes’ main goal was not just to paint that group in a negative light; he also wanted to teach the American public to see its “victims” in a positive light, as a valuable culture with a powerful past. “*With His Pistol*” thus emphasizes the historical strength of the Mexico-Texan and his community. Using what a “historic geographic” methodology similar to Stith Thompson’s approach, Paredes locates the origin of this communal strength in the particular geography of the Rio Grande Valley.

This border community of the Rio Grande would act as the fulcrum for Paredes’ personal and academic interests for the rest of his life, serving as the resource for his ethnographic research, the setting for his short stories and novel, and the motivation for his politics. Given his dedication to this specific region, it is not surprising to learn of its historically cohesive nature. The solidarity of the Lower Rio Grande Valley originates, to begin with, in its geographical isolation, which allowed it to be bypassed for a relatively long period of time by Spanish explorers. Santa Fe and Taos, in what is now the state of New Mexico, had been conquered in 1609 and 1615, respectively. Parts of Texas had also been incorporated into the empire of New Spain in the early 17th century. But as late as the early 18th century, the Lower Rio Grande Valley was still known as the *Seno Mexicano*, or the Mexican Hollow or Recess – because it served as a refuge for

Indians looking to avoid submitting to Spanish rule (Paredes, "*With His Pistol in His Hand*" 7). The "independent spirit" of this region might have been challenged in the middle of the 18th century, when the Spanish viceroyalty realized its lines of communication between Texas and Mexico City were too weak (8). However, when José de Escandón was tasked in 1749 with colonizing the Lower Rio Grande Valley to better connect the north and south sides of the river, he convinced settled Spanish families from nearby regions to relocate not only by giving them free land, but also by assuring them of minimal interference from absentee Spanish officials. Escandón kept his promise: by 1775, fewer than 150 soldiers patrolled a population of almost 9,000 settlers in the province of Nuevo Santander. A thick brush covering the grounds of the chaparral around the area added yet another layer of insulation from external authority. Paredes tells us that, in the 1870s, it was easy to hide herds of stolen cows or horses just a few miles from town. A lack of transportation continued the trend of seclusion: The Valley was not served by a railroad until 1904, and did not get a highway until 1940 (10). The colony of Nuevo Santander, then, remained, in many ways, as isolated well into the 20th century as it had been under the name Seno Mexicano in the early 18th.

The idea that the land is important not only in and of itself but also in its impact on the development of the people in a particular area is prominent in the first lines of many of Paredes' works. We already saw how one of his early poems plays into this idea by imaging the currents and eddies of the Rio Grande in parallel to those of the narrator's identity. Similarly, in *The Shadow*, for which Paredes won the D.A. Frank Novel Award in 1955, the silent isolation of the chaparral provides a backdrop for the action that will occur later. The novella's introductory lines read:

The noon was a glaring quietness. There was no breeze, no movement. People were indoors, waiting for the fury of the sun to pass; outside, dogs and chickens panted in the shade-speckled dust. In the chaparral, life was also still. It had sought the cool, dark places and lay hidden from sight. There was a heavy loneliness in the hour, as if the whole world were dead.
(1)

George Washington Gómez also opens with a picture of the land before placing any characters on it:

It was a morning late in June. The flat, salty *llano*⁸ spread as far as the eye could see ahead to the right. To the left it was bordered by the chaparral,⁹ which encroached upon the flats in an irregular, wavering line. Along the edge of the chaparral wound the road, and down the road four Texas Rangers were riding. Their horses' hooves stirred the flour-fine dust, and it rose and covered their beards, penetrated down their shirt collars despite the blue bandanas around their necks, lay in a thin film on their rifle-stocks and the big handles of their revolvers. (9)

In both openings, the land holds a certain degree of power over those who would live, work, or ride upon it. In *The Shadow*, the heat of the chaparral seems to freeze any would-be plot: without an accommodating environment in which to act, characters are rendered immobile. The hostility of the hot space stops the movement of time, to the extent that the world itself seems “dead.” In *George Washington Gómez*, the landscape is again presented as a threat, this time not only to humans, but to their accoutrements, as well. The chaparral holds precedence here – it encroaches on the flats; it is central while the man-made road is peripheral. The Rangers are placed at yet another remove from the chaparral – they are merely accessories to the road, which is itself peripheral to the chaparral. For presuming to act upon this space, they are reminded of their inferior position, as the land literally covers, penetrates and films both their bodies and their guns.

⁸ “an open grassy plain in Spanish America or the southwestern United States” (“Llano”)

⁹ “an area of dry land especially in southern California that is covered with bushes and short trees” (“Chaparral”)

As in the period of Spanish colonization, when the isolation of the region delayed the infringement of foreign rule, the topography of the Lower Rio Grande Valley proves here, again, its dominion over those who would conquer it.

The Valley's prominence and independence, fostered by its geographical isolation, Paredes notes, was both underlined by and reflected in the types of communities populating its space. A "horse culture," in which little social difference existed between the land owner who worked his land and his cowhand, who also worked on his land, allowed for a self-sufficient economy, a communal sense of equality, and a possibility for class mobility (10-11). Meanwhile, a traditional patriarchal system both highlighted the community as "clan" and enabled the town to govern itself, further minimizing the need for external intervention (13). Both work and play were communal. So intimate were the community's relations that, in addition to "Gringos" from the North, those from the South – Mexico's interior – were labeled *fuereños*: literally, "outsiders."

In the lifetime of the fictional George Washington Gómez, this geographical, communal sense of belonging and individual opportunity for social mobility was beginning to be threatened. To start with, the town itself, Jonesville, is named after one Captain Jimmy Jones, an American soldier whose head, according to the narrator, was "carried off" by a Mexican cannonball in 1846, at the beginning of the Mexican-American War (35). The fort he was defending was thereafter called Fort Jones, and the adjacent *barrios*, Jonesville. This fictional tale is a loosely veiled version of actual history, in which Captain Jacob Brown, under orders from General Zachary Taylor, defended Fort Texas "to the last man," despite the fact that he was outnumbered by General Pedro Ampudia's troops by several thousand men. Though the win cost him his

life, his name lived on: Fort Texas was renamed Fort Brown, and the nearby town followed, as Brownsville (Cutrer). If, as N. Scott Momaday, the subject of my final chapter, says, “we know who we are...only with reference...to the places and points among which we are born, grow old, and die,” and if the names of those places and their “being” are “indivisible,” then the imposition of an American soldier’s name on a Mexican town has a profound effect both on the barrio itself and on the identities of those who live there. Indeed, in the novel, the name is so alien to the residents that it is unpronounceable, rendered “Hon-esbil” (36). After the introduction of the railroad and a Chamber of Commerce advertising campaign hawking Jonesville as “a paradise on earth,” the original Mexican residents are pushed from the space both geographically and professionally, moving to the new “Mexican section” of town to work in manual labor, rather than cattle raising, as their ancestors did. Growing up in a town that always already privileges white American language, commerce, and military prowess over Mexican history, Guálinto grows up in an imperialized space whose very label denies his existence.

Although Paredes admits that Jonesville “remained a Mexican town, though officially part of the United States,” for more than fifty years, he proceeds to chronicle the quick demise of that sense of local ownership thereafter. For example, the town’s horse culture democracy is replaced by white party politics of “reds” and “blues,” and a clear social hierarchy is demarcated onto the land through districts divided by wealth and race. This enumeration of neighborhoods parallels the quantification of land during the period of the Homestead Act, which Willa Cather’s Alexandra was able to manage only through an investigative imagination. While Alexandra finds success in such an

empirical space by adding her own sympathetic wonder to the equation, the same cannot be said for Guálinto, who not only abides by, but also ends up being defined by, the borders set up for him by white American officials. Even in preschool, he recognizes where he belongs amongst these divisions: he is most comfortable in his own neighborhood, “the Dos Veintidós,” or twenty-second district. Despite having a reputation for being a “rowdy” neighborhood – a reputation for which the boys at church make fun of Guálinto – “he felt better” after turning from the largely white Fourteenth Street back into his own territory (63). For the adults in the story, too, certain spaces offer comfort and refuge. While Feliciano, George’s uncle, feels guilty about his work for Judge Norris, a white political boss, the family’s porch after supper provides “restful...darkness for people to whom the day was a constant battle” (82). This is where neighbors gather to tell stories about traditional Mexican figures of myth such as La Llorona. Like the *Seno Mexicano* of the early 18th century, this private space provides safety from “outsiders,” allowing insiders to engage in and re-imagine their own communities and traditions.

Without such safe spaces, Paredes suggests, the Mexicotexan and his culture, which were nurtured in isolation on the *Seno Mexicano* for centuries, cannot survive.

Ironically, though, Paredes implicates his characters in their own doom:

It was the lot of the Mexicotexan that the Anglosaxon should use him as a tool for the Mexican's undoing. The chaparral had been the Mexicotexan's guarantee of freedom. While it existed, it served as a refuge to the rancho fleeing from an alien law...But the American had begun to ‘develop’ the land....And it was the Mexicotexan's brown muscular arms that felled the trees. (42)

While Ramón Saldívar presents Guálinto’s life as representative of a range of options, and as full of choices that may change, given what he interprets as the “open question” of

the novel's conclusion, I see Paredes' novel as a much darker warning about the limitations placed on those deemed to be "outsiders" to mainstream American society (188). Thus, whereas Saldívar reads Paredes' view of the nation as "allowing individuals to imagine broadly a spectrum of possibilities for subjective self-verification" (187), I argue that the realities of George Washington Gómez's landscape prove, to the contrary, to crush his imagination, along with the social work it might do to maintain "the Mexicotexan's guarantee of freedom." By examining the chronological development of the protagonist in conjunction with the geographical spaces in which he grows up, I contend, we can see Paredes' demonstration of the Mexicotexan's undoing through the undoing of his geographical imagination.

The Actor on the Stage: The Mexican Revolution, Agrarian Reform, and the Heroic Imagination

In Paredes' bildungsroman, Guálinto initially views his homeland on the chaparral of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as an "enchanted place" or a "fairyland" (50, 52). The geographical anchor of this fairyland is the banana grove in Guálinto's backyard. Near the beginning of the text, Guálinto is "fascinated" by "the vast jungle of banana trees," which he says "looked like forest giants to him" (51). These plants are friendly giants, though, as the banana grove serves as the boy's "best friend, playground, and playmate" (67). Like the Mexican Seno, the banana grove serves as a literal refuge from authority figures – Guálinto hides from his mother here whenever he does something wrong. More importantly, the sense of isolation and security the grove offers acts as a catalyst for the young boy to dream up and act out roles for himself. For the boy, then, the banana grove also serves as a symbolic refuge in which, perhaps paradoxically,

the very enclosure of the space against a more financially and culturally powerful Anglo world allows for an opening of the individual Mexicotexan imagination. Just as Mark Twain's protagonist rested under the shelter of a sagebrush to enact an imagined superiority over its critters through an invocation of his literary forebears, Guálinto, at least in the beginning of the novel, enacts a similar superiority over the grove's bananas by calling on mythological, genealogical, and cultural predecessors. Indeed, before entering the grove, Guálinto often "paused at its edge as an actor pauses before coming on stage" (67). It is here that the little boy can creatively experiment with various roles for himself and safely and freely develop his understanding of the larger world outside its bounds and how he might fit into it. In his make-believe play, Guálinto hunts tigers and engages pirates. In addition to imaginatively embarking on these stereotypical adventures of boyhood, he also develops his aesthetic and emotional sensibilities in the banana grove, where he "was first startled by the beauty in the brilliant red of a cardinal bird against the wet-green leaves" and where he was "saddened by the cool, gentle whisperings of the evening breeze" (51).

Guálinto's childhood perception of his banana grove as a space almost magically exempt from outside intervention is shaped by two historical events: efforts at agrarian reform during the Mexican Revolution and failed attempts at banana republics around the same time. Although Guálinto's family resides on the U.S. side of the border, the fact there was an "absence of an authentic concept of a boundary between the two nations" at the time suggests that they were well aware of the happenings taking place just across that ambiguous line. In fact, "[w]hile diplomacy and military activity had gone a long way toward defining the boundary, much of the border area constituted a geographical,

cultural, and economic unit” (Hall and Coerver 8). In effect, this meant that it was difficult to “keep the revolution from spilling over the border,” especially since “much of the revolutionary activity centered in northern Mexico near the international boundary” (Coerver 36). Thus, when new policies were implemented or other social changes took place in Mexico, those living on the other side of the Rio Grande, like Guálinto, felt the reverberations.

First, the way in which Guálinto views his childhood hideout as a space for imagination and individuality signals a hazy awareness of the Mexican Revolution, during which the nation’s peasantry exhibited a determination to follow its own cultural and social visions. At the outset of the Revolution, in 1910, half of Mexico’s rural population lived on plantations, where they were tied to the soil “by a system of debts” which Frank Tannenbaum argues “made them slave in fact, if not in law” (240). Although the other half lived in “nominally free villages,” all the residents of rural regions were either “dependent upon” or “subject to” the authority of the plantation. Because plantation owners were generally foreigners – from Spain, France, England, or the United States – they were essentially, “under species of law,” “depriving the mass of the rural population living in villages of its heritage in the land” (241). With the Revolution, however, “...the underlying population... achieved a greater degree of cohesion, self-reliance, and self-consciousness than it ...ever had in the history of Mexico” (242). Whereas the nation had previously “always been defeated and frustrated in its demands” for land, the Revolution marked the nation’s discovery that “it can fight” in order “to satiate its hunger for land.” The success of this fight resulted in what is known as *ejido*¹⁰ legislation, a 1915 decree that was later incorporated into the

¹⁰ “common land”

Constitution of 1917, which redistributed land to “privately-owned small farms located within a four mile radius of a village” (Lissner 448). According to Tannenbaum, the Mexican Revolution “freed about one half of the rural population from a bondage which for practical purposes was equivalent to slavery. For the first time, at least in hundreds of years, the rural population is free in our sense of the word. It can move about, and does so” (243). This physical freedom manifested in a rural populace newly self-confident in its abilities to fend off outsiders to maintain ancestral property. As Mexican economist, historian, and diplomat Daniel Cosío Villegas explains, “Mexico came out of the Revolution a new country: hard-fisted, dynamic, aggressive, with a nationalistic tone that it had lost in the vain and lengthy process of Europeanization during the Díaz regime” (39).

Second, more specifically, the novel’s presentation of Guálinto’s backyard bananas as an exceptional crop able to protect their cultivators from apparently more powerful agents is aligned with the history of the banana industry in Mexico at the time of Guálinto’s childhood. As an 1899 *LA Times* article put it, Latin America was “Uncle Sam’s New Fruit Garden,” ripe for exploitation (Koeppel 64). The United Fruit Company (UFCO, a predecessor to Chiquita), founded that same year, succeeded in creating “banana republics” throughout the Central America by taking advantage of the fact that bananas, given their short shelf life and the distance between their producers and their consumers, require complex, efficient organizational infrastructures – systems which could only be funded by capital from the North, even if the fruit could only grow in the more tropical climates of the South. “Therefore,” James Wiley explains, “control over the industry historically resided in the consuming regions rather than in the

producing regions” (5). This dynamic has led to a more general definition of “banana republic”: “a country in which foreign enterprises push the government around” (“Where Did Banana Republics Get Their Name?”). Mexico, however, was the exception to this rule for several reasons (Wiley 32). First, the Mexican Revolution had fostered a system of land distribution that privileged the peasantry over large corporations. Second, the Mexican economy was diverse, with bananas representing only 2% of its exports. And finally, unlike in the Caribbean and elsewhere, Mexico already had access to overland trade routes, making it difficult for United Fruit to control the transportation of its product. Nevertheless, UFCO made a concerted effort to establish a banana republic in Mexico, buying up several banana export companies and taking over the Cuyamel Fruit Company, another American corporation, in 1929. However, when local banana farmers joined to form a rural cooperative in 1928, UFCO found itself at an impasse, as the corporation was unable to offer terms as appealing as those of the co-op. In the end, United Fruit abandoned Mexico, selling its subsidiaries in the country to Standard Fruit, which we now know as Dole (Wiley 33). In the end, then, the histories of both the Mexican Revolution’s successful agrarian reform and the United States’ failed banana republic bolster Guálinto’s childhood understanding of Mexico as a “fairylend,” and, more particularly, of his backyard banana grove as a stage for imaginative personal heroism.

“Our Eyes Are on Them:” Surveillance, Difference, and Agency in the War “Theater” and the Education System

Despite Guálinto’s confident, independent start to constructing himself in the context of his landscape, however, the calm yet powerful presence of a cohesive

environment is inevitably interrupted, directly or indirectly, by *fuereños* – outsiders. As Guálinto grows up, his vision of the landscape as protective, and thereby as enabling of imaginative explorations of identity, is countered by a much more chaotic vision that has the opposite effect. Indeed, though Guálinto only “half-understood” the “household word” of “Revolution,” it calls to the boy’s mind a “confused picture” of “a tremendous tumult rolling along like a hurricane” (102). If the stage of the banana grove during the boy’s early childhood years reflected the optimism fostered by the ideals of agrarian reform and the defeat of exploitative banana republics, thereby providing a space conducive to the ripening of Guálinto’s imagination and identity, the spaces he inhabits in the later years of his childhood, which coincide with both U.S. interventions in the Mexican Revolution and the failure of revolutionary agrarian reforms, do not always offer room for experimentation or growth, instead foreclosing on his ability to imagine his future in the context of his own culture. Although his Uncle Feliciano’s relative success allows him to shelter Guálinto from many of the social and economic obstacles in the borderlands during the first half of the Revolution, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to do so as the war continues, leaving the boy to question his world, his visions of it, and the possibilities of his motion through it.

First, the constricted spaces that appear toward the middle of the novel, along with the narrowed dreams that accompany them, reflect the United States’ eventual decision to intervene in the Mexican Revolution. Although “the United States shifted its backing several times during the course of the Revolution, depending upon which faction appeared best to protect its interests in Mexico,” scholars tend to identify 1915 as a turning point that marks the “emergence of Anglo-American dominance” on the border

(C. F. Fox 71; Limón 190). This was the year in which several revolts scared the United States into intervening in a war from which they had mostly kept their distance, including the south Texas insurrectionist uprising in which Guálinto's uncle participates and the averted anti-Anglo Plan de San Diego. (Pancho Villa would raid Columbus, New Mexico, killing seventeen U.S. citizens, the next year.) Second, Guálinto's changing visions of his landscape align with the ultimate failure of the agrarian reform that had seemed so promising when the *ejido* legislation was passed in 1915. According to Tannenbaum, "the area taken from foreigners under the state legislation" amounted to "an infinitesimal item." Because the law stipulated that "the right to land is limited to those who live in villages," and, of those, "only certain specific individuals are entitled to land," only "some four per cent of the total rural population" "has been definitely benefited" by the law (244-5). "If we were to pass judgment upon the agrarian revolution in Mexico solely from the point of view of the actual land taken and distributed," Tannenbaum concludes, "we should get a very poor showing for the amount of internal disturbance which the program has involved" (244). Together, these developments – U.S. intervention and the eventual failure of agrarian reform – affect how the space of the borderlands was understood as divided, who had the privilege of perspective on that land, and who was granted the individual agency to act on it.

Whereas, at the beginning of the Revolution, during Guálinto's early childhood, the border line between Mexico and the U.S. was still relatively indistinct, by the mid-point of the Revolution, those on the U.S. side had become eager to draw the line more clearly (Fox 72). There are two reasons for this, one internal and one external. First, the revolts and uprisings of Mexican Americans within the U.S. in 1915 "rekindled"

American “fears” about the “loyalty” of that population, especially its “rural poor” members. Second, the external threat of Pancho Villa, who had “suddenly became the villain,” pushed U.S. media producers “toward manufacturing differences in a region” which was previously viewed as unified (Fox 70). According to Claire F. Fox, “The cultural and spatial contiguity of the Mexican and Mexican American populations on either side of the border was instead replaced by the archetypal confrontation between Anglo and Mexican” (72). Such confrontations were exacerbated, if not outright invented, by various ascendant forms of media at the time, including photographs, movies, and postcards. These media portrayed the “binary oppositions” of Mexico and the United States through depictions of both the border itself and those who lived on either side of it. For example, despite the fact that, often, “the actual borderline was not demarcated by a fence,” one photographer shot his picture through the barbed wire of a refugee camp in order to suggest a physical international boundary that did simply did not exist at that location (74). Other photographers used “bodies, props, or captions” in order to “assert difference in the foreground” even though the background “appears to be contiguous” (78). Even the way space was apportioned in a photograph could denote the uneven relationship between its sides, with the U.S. side generally taking up the majority of a photo’s surface (79). That “photographers and correspondents felt obliged to impose the border by lines and labels,” of course, simply highlights the actual “indistinguishable” appearance of its north and south sides. “National differentiation,” Fox asserts, was thus merely “a process of training spectators by a means of symbolic codes” (78).

These efforts at differentiating Mexican from American spaces along the border is played out most clearly in *George Washington Gómez* through the education system,

which clearly trains both teachers and students to view “American” and “Mexican-American” territories and characteristics as separate. Whereas the U.S. media tended to superimpose inequality on objectively equal spaces, the particular school system in the novel’s Jonesville advertises its highly unequal classrooms as spaces of egalitarianism. While some school systems, Paredes writes, were blatant about their segregation – going so far as to designate structures “built especially” for Mexican children to learn “the rudiments” with the diminutive *escuelitas*, or “little schools” (116) – in Jonesville, the gloss of integration is key to upholding the town’s largely white political system. During election season, politicians stump about the “fully integrated” schools, all the while knowing full well that the first and second grades of the grammar school are divided into “high” and “low” sections that conveniently correspond with the two races of its student body. Increasing the separate-but-unequal theme, the “low” sections of first and second are taught together, “in the manner of the little red school houses of yore” (117).

Though Guálinto is initially thrilled to start his education, the system’s racist underpinnings quickly teach him to view school and its surroundings as a threatening space, in stark contrast to the protection of the banana grove. Despite its veneer of opportunity, the landscape of the school itself hints to Guálinto that he will be considered an outsider within its walls. For example, on the way to his first day of school, his older sister stops along the way “to look for wild flowers that were not there” (111). Even before they reach the school, then, the space has already proven inimical to the family’s familiar landscape, conducive to natural growth that the urban space does not support. Once they arrive at their destination, the need for protection from the threats of this environment becomes even more clear through the particular place the boy chooses to

inhabit, at the top of a set of walled-in stairs. The space has a “fortress-like air,” where “the top step was a turret” and “the wide walls became two parallel arms stretching from the top step outward” (112). Unlike the banana grove, which provided Guálinto with a secure and comfortable space in which to formulate his identity, the school’s cold, hard exterior does not appear to welcome play or exploration, much less inspire confidence. The best that can be said about the school’s exterior is that Guálinto no longer feels like a “captive” there, as he does in the classroom (127).¹¹

Guálinto sees the space of his school as uninviting because, during this period, it was the viewpoint of the United States that reigned supreme, while minority views were deemed unimportant or irrelevant. The U.S. proved particularly adept at asserting its power by disseminating both people and images that would establish the nation’s own superior position and perspective. After all, by June of 1916, President Woodrow Wilson had stationed 200,000 soldiers along the border in response to raids by Pancho Villa. But even if the physical boots on the ground that made up General Pershing’s Punitive Expedition to capture Villa failed, the U.S. maintained its privileged perspective on the region in subtler ways. For one, Fox reminds us, the Expedition is famous for “the debut of aerial reconnaissance,” which offered a bird’s eye view of the landscape, and therefore a strategic advantage over the less well financed and less technologically advanced Mexicans, whose scope of vision was literally limited by their earth-bound position (Fox 74). The theme of dominant or superior vision was also represented in political cartoons of the era, including one published in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1913 that depicts a giant pair of eyes peering out of binoculars atop a massive tank, surveilling Mexico, across the

¹¹ Guálinto’s difficulty in transferring his visionary play from the banana grove to his town’s educational center aligns with Paredes’ contention that adapting rural lore to the urban scene often proves unsuccessful (Paredes and Stekert 17).

border (M. C. Anderson 140). “Our eyes are on them,” reads the caption.

This kind of surveillance is precisely the opposite of what Guálinto would expect, based on his earlier childhood experiences in which his protected landscape supported his free-range dreams. Indeed, when he registers for school, he imagines that he will be watched, but that the eyes that watch him will do so because of his importance, his intelligence, his charm: “His mind was already forming scenes in the unknown setting of Miss Cornelia’s classroom, scenes where Guálinto was the central figure while Miss Cornelia looked on approvingly” (111). Instead, the teacher keeps her eye on the boy in order to pounce on his aberrant, ethnic perspective. For example, when Guálinto gives the correct answer to a math problem, Miss Cornelia derides him for his pronunciation of “equals” as “eckles” (125). When he writes his name according to Spanish tradition, with both his father’s and mother’s last names, as Guálinto Gómez García, the instructor tells the class that he “had married a gentleman named García and that now he was Mrs. Guálinto G. García” (126). More officially, the school’s tests require Guálinto to adopt a point of view that is not his own: “if he expects to pass the course, he must put down in writing what he violently misbelieves” (149). Later, even his much more “democratic” high school teacher, Miss Barton, must maintain a classroom atmosphere that privileges the “American” stance on history. Although she acknowledges that “there are two sides to every question,” the class textbook indicates otherwise, amounting to a “story book” that paints the United States as the conquering hero in all international conflicts (159). While Guálinto is encouraged to express his point of view, the fact that the large majority of his class is Anglo – with hyperbolically patriotic beliefs that “we have always been juster and more truthful than any other country” (160) – organizes the space of the

classroom against the perspective of the “other.” With his own viewpoint denied or quashed, it is no surprise that Guálinto’s role at his high school’s fund-raising carnival is that of “the blind beggar” (163).

The cultural understanding of the borderlands as physically and visually dominated by the United States ultimately renders a parallel understanding of both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as lacking in individuality and agency. Instead, those “outsiders” occupying the liminal space of the Rio Grande Valley were often presented as impersonal objects to be watched for the amusement of white Americans. The surveillance of the U.S.-Mexican border by U.S. powers was not just a political or military exercise, but also a profoundly social one. As Fox demonstrates, watching the Mexican Revolution served as a form of entertainment for middle- and upper-class Americans (81). Despite the reality of stray bullets,¹² hundreds, including ladies in long white dresses holding fancy parasols, swarmed to watch the battles of the war “theater,” “behaving as though they were watching a play or a movie.” That they paid for such entertainment – soldiers “charged twenty-five cents for the opportunity to view the impending battle” – only underlines their economically superior position as consumers of products from which they viewed themselves as “geographically removed” (82-3). In short, as Fox puts it, “from the U.S. point of view, the Revolution was a drama, and its soldiers were actors” (83).

This dynamic of Mexican performance at the pleasure of an Anglo audience appears in *George Washington Gómez* when the protagonist takes the stage for his elementary school’s Armistice Day PTA show. When his class is assigned a speech about Guálinto’s namesake, and told that the first to memorize it will recite it at the big

¹² For instance, four Revolution watchers were killed and nine wounded during the 1911 battle of Juárez.

show, Guálinto's "ears tingled." Rushing to copy the recitation into his notebook as fast as his teacher can write it on the blackboard, the boy repeats the words to himself, quickly committing them to memory. Although Miss Cornelia yells at him to "stop daydreaming" – a demand based on the stereotype of the lazy Mexican – what looks to her like escapism, as Twain reminded us in Chapter 1, is actually work. Overcoming the media's imposition of the physical and social divides between America and Mexico, along with their presentation of the generalized Mexican who lacks individuality, Guálinto sees the speech as "so personal," to the point "that he just could not fail." His recitation goes "exceptionally well" according to Miss Huff, who quickly amends her assessment with a qualifier: "for a little Latin boy" (133).

Clearly, the majority of U.S. spectators preferred that their Mexican actors not possess too much individuality, much less any agency. The postcards of the period point to this objectification of the vague personhood of the Mexican. Geared toward U.S. audiences, postcards featuring American soldiers fighting in the Mexican Revolution often captured specific subjects complete with "details of rank, unit, and location...recorded in their uniforms or in the caption," but the "emphasis on individuality generally did not carry over into U.S. postcards' portrayal of Mexicans" (77). The generalization of the Mexican extended beyond postcards, of course. In the 1920s, according to Abraham Hoffman, "Mexican immigrants found that whatever their background was, Anglo Americans almost invariably made little effort to distinguish between Mexicans of different socioeconomic status, education, or ability" (15). When sociologists studied "the Mexican," however, they tended to make the lower, laboring class the representative of the entire race (Ibid.). In *George Washington Gómez*, the title

character is denied his individual Mexican-American identity again and again. This denial is most prominently symbolized by Anglos who find the very essence of that identity, his name, to be improbable or incomprehensible. When Guálinto registers for school, the office assistant struggles with what she labels a “strange name,” such that Feliciano must falsely explain that “It’s an Indian name” (110). The way in which Guálinto expresses that identity, through language, is also constantly questioned. When he first writes his alphabet at school, his teacher tells him that his additions of CH, LL, and Ñ “do not belong in the American Alphabet,” thereby denying him a voice and rendering him “passive,” just as postcards endeavored to do (Paredes 123, Fox 79). Even a relatively liberal teacher in Guálinto’s high school emphasizes this hierarchy of agency, assuring Guálinto that the United States was “acting as a big brother to a weaker nation” during the Franco-Mexican War (161). In an even less subtle example of constricted voice, vision, or motion, many of the Mexicans featured on U.S. postcards were “maimed or dead,” pictured during “burials, lynchings, and executions.” As Fox writes, “one can assume that the dynamic of looking set up by U.S. media effectively ensured that a Mexican ‘point of view’ remained unrepresented” (85).

In the novel, Guálinto’s performance of his George Washington speech reenacts the dynamics of seeing established by the U.S. postcard industry when he is told that he “can’t be seen” (135); Mr. Baggley, the principal, must lift the boy into the audience’s line of sight by placing him atop a chair. Obviously, Guálinto is a child with a short stature, but Paredes’ suggestion of his inherent invisibility in front of an Anglo audience is unmistakable, while Baggley’s action, if well-intentioned, reeks of paternalism – especially given Miss Barton’s political positioning of the United States as “big brother”

(161). If Guálinto aces his speech, it is to the surprise of some of the school's authority figures, such as Miss Huff, who makes sure to use a "didactic tone" when she praises Guálinto, at the expense of his mother, María, whom the teacher addresses with the assumption that the woman is illiterate and ignorant. María's social position is underlined, of course, by her physical position within the auditorium, not as a main member of the audience, but as one of "the women in the back of the room" (136).

In short, Guálinto's experiences in the Jonesville school system during the second half of the Mexican Revolution provide an education in the power dynamics taking place on the borderlands, spaces which, both culturally and politically, are steadily being overtaken – and often *overseen* – by an increasingly powerful white America and its corresponding media systems. Guálinto's newly complicated sense of the personal, geographical, and cultural hierarchies in which he is enmeshed ultimately leads him to question his own identity, thus challenging the roles he and his family had dreamed up for him during his banana-grove years. When several politically-motivated murders are committed near the boy's neighborhood, Guálinto (despite his mother's efforts to offer the protection of traditional Catholic credos) has an existential crisis. If he was, as his mother tells him, "in Heaven with the little angels" before he was born, why does he not remember this? "Was it me?" he asks, "With wings? How can Mama know? If nobody can remember. Maybe it wasn't me at all. Maybe it was somebody else. Maybe I'm somebody else!" he finally exclaims (51). Guálinto's uncertainty profoundly affects his view of the space around him. As "a cold emptiness settled into his stomach," he notes that "Familiar objects suddenly looked strange to him, as though he were out of his body and looking at himself and all other things from a distance." At this point, the novel has

fully switched gears. If the optimism of increasing political independence at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution encouraged Guálinto to see his space as protected, therefore enabling a heroic imagination that could work to explore identities and actions within the context of specific communal histories, the intervention of the United States in borderland battles, along with the disappointments of agrarian reform and increasingly powerful and divisive media lenses, prevent him from seeing or connecting clearly either to himself or to the spaces in which he exists, thereby challenging his imaginative powers and the concomitant work they previously did in proposing next steps for the individual and the culture. Like Twain's view from a California mountaintop, Guálinto acknowledges the power of distance to simultaneously blur and sharpen his picture of reality. Unlike Twain, however, the boy's racially, socially, and geographically marginalized position often prevents him from wresting his vision for his own benefit. This position only becomes further entrenched in the next section of the book, with the onset of the Great Depression.

Ties That Bind: The Great Depression and the Constricted Imagination

If Guálinto began to question himself and the spaces of his borderland home in elementary and high school at the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution, those questions are exacerbated in the following years. Guálinto, as a child, saw the banana grove as a stage on which to enact victories for himself against tigers and pirates, but that stage has been coopted by Anglo audiences and perspectives as he grows up. By the time Guálinto hits puberty, then, he views the banana grove not as an "enchanted" "fairylane," but rather as a "sea of mud." This new description of the space conveniently justifies the teenager's self-conscious confirmation of his own maturity: "He didn't play there

anymore; he was too old for that sort of thing” (151). The imaginative transformation of the banana grove from a landscape enchanted by fairies to one engulfed by mud, however, is not caused merely by a heavy rain (as Guálinto himself explains it) or by pubescent hormones. Instead, I suggest, his increasingly messy vision of the space, as well as the devolution of the dreams once enabled by his understanding of that space, result from his continuing growth in comprehending the world in which he lives, including its colonial history, its racial politics, and its economic inequalities, all of which are brought into relief by the Great Depression period of Guálinto’s later teenage years. Rather than envisioning himself doling out justice in faraway spaces like the jungle or the ocean as he did during his childhood, Guálinto’s later fantasies respond to problems closer to home. And unlike the fun and satisfaction he derived from the dreams he acted out in the banana grove as a boy, Guálinto’s adolescent visions prove ineffectual. In parallel to the churning “sea of mud” the banana grove has become from Guálinto’s teenage perspective, both his literal eyesight and his fantastical dreams during the middle portions of the novel are unclear, confusing, and violent. As he negotiates through the unstable, often unjust world he is just beginning to discern, his imagination contracts. No longer able to do the social work of identity formation or cultural maintenance, as it had during his boyhood, Guálinto’s adolescent imagination views the space of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as disjointed, thereby preventing coherent movement through its cultural mazes.

Unlike the isolated, cohesive terrain of the Seno Mexicano on which his forebears lived, or even the protected space of the banana grove in which he could picture himself a pure hero, the ground on which Guálinto comes of age does not offer a stable foundation

for such visions. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution prompted a huge wave of immigrants to flee to the United States (Moran, Sherlick, and Hanson). Although the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 stemmed the tide of Southern and Eastern Europeans, with the Immigration Act of 1924 adding East and South Asians to the restricted groups, Mexicans immigrants were not subject to quotas, thanks to the lobbying of agricultural interests. Between 1910 and 1920, nearly 900,000 Mexicans entered the United States. But they were not necessarily welcomed with open arms. Mexicans were required to pass through border stations – set up by the recently established U.S. Border Patrol – to pay a visa fee and head tax. Following the stock market crash of 1929, racial bias against *sebos*¹³ grew as Americans found the Mexican community within their borders to be a “convenient scapegoat” for their own “economic disorientation” (Balderrama and Rodriguez 1). Clinging to the belief that “getting rid of the Mexicans” would “alleviate the unemployment situation,” and thereby “automatically end the depression,” federal, state, and local governments passed laws “depriving Mexicans of jobs in the public and private sectors” (Ibid.). In fact, “the actual end of many anti-alien laws was the denial of employment on public works projects and participation in relief programs” (Hoffman 18). The effect of such political and economic obstacles, according to Hoffman, was that Mexicans “lived their lives in the United States in a shadow of uncertainty” (19). Such shadows, whether political, social, or financial, preclude the functioning of the imagination. As Feliciano succinctly puts it, “dreams are more likely to come true if one has money” (155).

When the Depression reaches Jonesville in *George Washington Gómez*, the

¹³ “Greasers.” For a detailed discussion of the origins, meanings, and extensions of this term, see David Roediger’s *Working Toward Whiteness* (40–41).

implementation of these Depression-era attitudes and policies toward Mexican-Americans is apparent in both the social and economic spaces of the town. Just as Guálinto's elementary school had been divided according to race and language during his childhood, the places he goes to socialize as a teenager are similarly segregated. For instance, when his class visits a local restaurant to celebrate their graduation, the Mexican students are barred from entering. To add insult to injury, the establishment is called La Casa Mexicana, and "was as Mexican as it could be without having any Mexicans around" (173). In addition to relegating Mexicans to certain social spaces, so too are they cordoned into specific economic spaces. We hear snippets of conversation from an employment office that confirm the construction of the economy along these racial lines: "Did you hear McCrory's is firing all their Mexican salesgirls?" and "...They say a department head at the airport was called down for having too many Mexicans in his sections." When the employment officer rationalizes that these "damn greasers" don't deserve jobs because they are "[t]aking the bread out of white people's mouths," another white man confirms the dangers of changing the established social hierarchy: "...they start getting' ideas they're as good as white people" (196-7). When Mexican-Americans do get jobs in the novel, they are given worse opportunities, lower pay, and less flexible schedules than their fellow workers who happen to be white, or even "Spanish." Some, ironically, are sent back to work as laborers on the same land that was taken from their ancestors. Even then, Guálinto overhears, if they pick cotton, "old man Kelly gives the best rows to those Gringos" (198). Similarly, if Mexicotexans work in town, they make less than half the wages of the whites doing the same job (200). And if they hand out circulars, as Guálinto eventually does, they must skip school on Fridays, thus further

entrenching the class system. Mexicotexans during the Great Depression were to be grateful for any employment at all, even if it was clearly discriminatory, because other residents of Brownsville, those who had crossed the border illegally, were subject to “mass deportation roundups and repatriation drives” (Balderrama and Rodriguez 1). Technically, the federal government aimed to drive out aliens in general. According to Hoffman, however, Mexicans who had immigrated illegally “were to find themselves prime targets” for deportation (37). In the novel, authorities present themselves as simply following the rules, despite their obvious personal bias when called upon to justify sending immigrants back to Mexico: “We enforce the law. We don’t mix up in your family affairs” (197).

The landscape of the Mexicotexan barrio during the Depression, with its “rows of vacant store buildings,” reflects this disintegration of the local community and economy. Even the once-thriving shop of Guálinto’s Uncle Feliciano “went broke” (202). With its “empty windows looking like eye-glasses on rows of skulls,” the downtown district symbolizes the loss of vision its residents suffer as the result of the harsh racial and financial obstacles introduced by the Depression (197). In contrast to the vision of the novel’s self-made white “historian” K. Hank Harvey, who views Texas as “his dreamland,” Guálinto has come to think of the Rio Grande Valley, full of economic and social injustices, as constituting a “nightmare” that has become “real” (270, 238). For Guálinto, such a nightmare is qualified by a distorted perspective, in which “everything looked unreal and somehow bigger than usual.” This vision resembles “a drawing made by a small child,” such that “[t]he world seemed all disjointed and fallen into parts...” (225). The narrator qualifies the distinct spatial visions of Harvey and Guálinto

according to an allegory in which the phenomenon of the elephant is researched by two different groups in two different times. “Long ago,” the elephant is examined by “blind men in Hindustan who were exceedingly wise,” resulting in a “picture of an incredible monstrosity.” In modern times, the narrator posits that such research would be conducted in a scientific or journalistic fashion by “someone interested in researching elephants.” The “result” here would be “somewhat grotesque, perhaps,” but “much more convincing since it was done by an experienced and self-assured specialist.” The point Paredes is making is that while information compiled by “outsiders” (like K. Hank Harvey) might appear authoritative, it is often distanced from the subject and obtained for the self-aggrandizement of the “expert.” By contrast, the studies of the blind men of Hindustan produce a more accurate picture of the elephant precisely because it is “close to them.” Guálinto’s view of the land as “nightmare,” according to this framework, is more trustworthy and valuable than Harvey’s vision of the same space as “dreamland” because he is intimately familiar with it on personal, social, historical, and geographical levels. Audrey Goodman identifies a similar divide in how different people see the same landscape in conflicting ways in *Translating Southwestern Landscape*. Arguing that the landscape itself was caught among “competing...translation practices,” Goodman suggests that the region served as a “battleground” between “dreams of self-transformation and fears of irreversible assimilation” (xiv). Where Goodman contends that the regional literature of the Anglo Southwest aims to “mediate” these conflicts, Paredes’ novel is straightforward in its honest, if not resentful, positioning of the outsider’s self-aggrandizing perspective as consuming, rather than mediating, the insider’s cultural awareness.

Each vision of the landscape of the Lower Rio Grande Valley at this point in the novel – Harvey’s conception of it as “dreamland” and Guálinto’s imagination of it as “nightmare” – has profound stakes for its viewers in how they move through their worlds. Whereas Harvey steadily and assuredly climbs the ranks – his “fame grew too big even for vast Texas,” making him “a national and then an international figure” – Guálinto and the other Mexicotexans at the bottom of the American food chain now find their world to be “stifling,” such that they are left stumbling or even motionless in a space that now amounts to a “sea of mud.” This sense of forestalled agency first appears in a nightmare Guálinto has after being prohibited from entering La Casa Mexicana with his classmates. In it, he dreams that “he was running, running through the chaparral, bleeding and with his clothes torn to tatters.” When he “emerged into a moonlit plain,” he “kept running, running, pursued by a mob of people...howling, ‘Alamo! Alamo! Alamo!’” (175). With its linkages between physical and cultural impairment, Guálinto’s nightmare suggests that the Rio Grande Valley’s gradual takeover by the Anglo presence and perspective hobbles the agency of its Mexicotexan residents. Indeed, it is the white perspective on Mexicans as inferior that leads the noble “Spanish” boy who impregnates Guálinto’s sister, Maruca, to refuse to marry into the lower-class “Mexican” Gómez clan, causing all chaos to break loose in the family. In attempting to accommodate themselves to this unprotected, insecure terrain in which they are granted little control over their affairs, the normally upstanding Feliciano gets drunk, Guálinto’s mother curses, and Guálinto himself can do nothing more than “stumble... along in hazy numbness” (238). Others are unable to move at all: Guálinto’s mother refuses to even try to tread such volatile ground, and “she did not go out, even to the backyard or her garden.” A similar “stupor” hangs over the

entire town throughout the Depression, with “groups of dark-skinned men, waiting, waiting. For nothing” (200, 197). Moreover, time itself seems stifled at this point in the novel, adding to the overall atmosphere of stasis: “The afternoon dragged itself along, smearing itself on the ground in shimmering waves of torpid heat. The world had stopped” (225). Given Guálinto’s vision of his world as paralyzed, his mother’s prediction, declared at his birth, that he will become a “leader of his people” just like his namesake, begins to look like an absurd joke.

Predictably, Guálinto lashes out violently against this living nightmare, in which his vision is stifled, his steps are stumbling, and his childhood dreams are immobilized. His immediate response is to take out his anger on the first person who appears to offend him. When Chucho Vazquez, a rough “hanger-on of the *barrio*” insults his illegitimately pregnant sister, Guálinto strikes back – and surprises himself by winning. Perversely reminded of the hero he imagined himself to be as a boy, he returns to the space that initially enabled such vision: the banana grove. The fantasies spurred by his “childhood refuge,” however, no longer align with the realities he now presumes to understand as an adult. Although he “practice[s] thrusts with the knife and defensive footwork,” and imagines piling up victories against neighborhood bullies, these dreams prove impractical (249). As his friend El Colorado reasons, fighting will only result in Guálinto’s “getting sent to the pen,” where his movements would be entirely disabled, a situation which “won’t help [his] family at all.” Guálinto quickly puts his knife away, admitting that his imagination at this point qualifies him not as a visionary or a potential hero, but as “a damn fool.” Clearly, envisioning small-scale retributions against men like Chucho does not help Guálinto to negotiate the larger injustices taking place on the “sea

of mud” he sees the Lower Rio Grande Valley as having become.

If Guálinto fails to imagine ways to envision or move through his adolescent landscape in constructing trifling local comebacks, neither do grand attempts at rewriting that landscape succeed. When Guálinto’s uncle and father-figure Feliciano finally spills the secret of his father’s death – that he was indiscriminately killed by a Texas Ranger – Guálinto believes he has discovered the key to imagining the future for himself: in re-imagining the past for Mexico. In a recurring dream, Guálinto “... would imagine he was living in his great-grandfather's time, when the Americans first began to encroach on the northern provinces of the new Republic of Mexico...He would reconquer all the territory west of the Mississippi River and recover Florida as well” (282). This heroic vision brings to life – and then some – the Zimmerman Telegram, through which Germany made an appeal for an alliance with Mexico during WWI by proposing to supply arms to Mexico in order to re-conquer Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Like Mexican President Venustiano Carranza, who rejected the proposal as unfeasible in 1917, Guálinto ultimately rejects as “Goddam ridiculous” his own fantasy of Mexicans as 19th century colonial victors. This revision of the course of history proves no more fulfilling than his earlier dream of reversing the course of neighborhood bullying. Upon waking up from his imagined Mexican conquest, Guálinto experiences only a “feeling of emptiness, of futility. Somehow, he was not comfortable with the way things ended. There was something missing that made any kind of ending fail to satisfy” (282).

The final straw in Guálinto’s recognition of his own setting as stifling occurs after an insult from his one-time girlfriend, the high-class Maria Elena, sets his world “pin-wheeling” through memories of the various traumatic experiences of his life. In this

world, he thinks, “movement no longer was concentric but shifting, restless, confused” (219). This confusion, as with his earlier confrontations with local bullies, leads Guálinto back to the space where he first developed his capacity for imagination. This time, though, he takes a longer view, realizing “how far he had traveled and how little he had moved since the days when he had been a child playing in the banana grove.” As with Guálinto’s earlier submission to Anglo perspectives of the Mexican as amusing, passive, or aberrant, here he adopts white views of his race as lazy. As displayed in a 1913 *San Francisco Examiner* political cartoon of a Mexican running on a treadmill with “Progress” always out of reach just over the horizon, the white population of the U.S. generally viewed those on the borderland as “expend[ing] lots of energy” without making any “discernible forward progress” (M. C. Anderson 128). Although Guálinto once simultaneously “lov[ed] the Mexican with a blind fierceness” and “almost despise[ed] him for his slow progress in the world,” the latter attitude has clearly overtaken the former by the novel’s conclusion (150). In his submission to this perspective of Mexicans and Mexico as regressive, the protagonist further curtails the power of his imagination to project viable options for the future of his culture and himself.

Near the end of the bildungsroman, however, Guálinto momentarily forms a vision of himself in the image of his forebears. His Uncle Feliciano has returned to the land as a farmer, and when Guálinto begins working there, he finally comes to understand his uncle’s heroism against the Texas Rangers. He acknowledges the value and difficulty of working the land. He even, according to his uncle, begins to walk like his father, with confidence (279). However, following in the footsteps of his father and uncle, ironically, is what leads him to accept his uncle’s advice to go to college, a path that ultimately

sends him away from his family, culture, and values. As in Paredes' observation that it was the Mexicotexan himself who "developed" the land according to the *Gringos'* exploitative plans, encouraging his nephew's Anglo education only enables Guálinto's rebellion against his own people. Whereas Guálinto once believed that young Mexicans could succeed by "clawing their way to the top," his experiences of blindness and paralysis during the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression lead him to believe that the only way to do so is to adopt the perspective of the victor (117). In short, Guálinto decides, "there's nothing to do but take it" (132). Although Guálinto had certainly questioned his worldview previously, it is his move away from the space of the Lower Rio Grande Valley that cements this new perspective in our protagonist. By the time he returns home, he has adopted the Americanized name of "George" and has a blonde wife in tow. Ultimately, these relatively superficial changes indicate a larger ideological transformation: Guálinto has left behind the imaginative capacities he had attempted to develop as a child and teenager, beginning in the banana grove, appropriating instead the Anglos' constricted view of Mexico as a shifty backwater and its inhabitants as lazy peasants.

Fleeing the Scene: Escaping Vision, Envisioning Escape

In abandoning his mother's vision of himself as a "leader of his people" as well as his own vision of himself as a potential hero, Guálinto has also abandoned his vision for his home, both its landscape and its people. When he comes back to the farm, it is Feliciano who first recognizes Guálinto's loss of vision when he bluntly responds to his nephew's negativity by saying, "Then you see no future for us" (300). Unable to project potentially beneficial roles, behaviors, or identities for himself or others, George has

given up on his imagination. If as a child he envisioned the landscape of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as an “enchanted fairyland,” and as a teenager saw the banana grove as nothing more than a “sea of mud,” the grown man George now views the entire region as “this filthy Delta.” Such a dirty space is unsuitable to progress, he reasons, and only those Mexicans who get “as far away as they can” will be able to “get rid of their Mexican greaser attitudes” in order to “make something of themselves.” George believes that his new role as a counterintelligence agent for the United States has made *him* something. What he does not realize is that this “something” has come at the cost not only of his familial bonds and cultural heritage, but also his capacity for imagination, and therefore his capacity for critique. Without the geographical space of the chaparral or the banana grove on which to ground fantasies for his own future or his people’s, George’s concluding position is decidedly “Gulliver-like,” sprawled, bound by his own lack of vision to what he once considered enemy territory.

Guálinto’s switching of sides is a product of the instabilities in his environment, which discourage clear vision, in turn preventing coherent movement. Neither side of the border has ever been an entirely comfortable fit for him. As a child, the same boys who taunt Guálinto for living on the wrong side of the tracks also tease him about his light skin and hair, marking him as an outsider in his own district. As a teenager, the question of what would constitute a “successful” self, and where that could occur, comes into question after Guálinto is awarded a medal for heroism, by his high school principal, for killing a man who turns out to be his mother’s brother (258-262, 273). It is this lack of coherence in defining success, this confused sense of geography, and this arbitrary social hierarchy that leads the character to experience feelings of “emptiness” and “futility”

even when he has dreams that would seem to place him in a victorious position. In *George Washington Gómez*, Paredes shows Guálinto collecting dreams for himself over the course of his life which never coalesce into a clear narrative, precisely because that narrative finds no stable image of a setting on which to occur. Having grown up in a space that has morphed from a self-sufficient and culturally cohesive “fairyland” that encouraged a heroic imagination to one controlled by “outsiders” who impose their own visions onto that space, leaving little room for localized individual dreams, Guálinto is, by the end of the novel, understandably doubtful of the stability of the ground beneath his feet. Although he is able to imagine himself playing various roles on the stage of the Rio Grande Valley – a tiger hunter, pirate chaser, bully killer, and colonial victor – none of those roles prove commensurate to the changing environment in which he lives. The glaring disconnect between the coherent, communal isolation of the banana grove and the chapparal, on the one hand, and the social, economic, and the political dynamics which have invaded that space, on the other, interrupts and renders impractical the protagonist’s once heroic imagination. Guálinto’s continued participation in the same imaginative behaviors he exhibited as a child no longer offer a route through the complicated landscape he now knows he faces. As a young neighbor once taunted him upon seeing the boy playing with an imagined enemy in the banana grove, Guálinto is ultimately “fighting himself” (70). Wrestling with the expectations of the family who raised him and the *fuereños* who at once threaten cultural tradition and dangle prospects for traitorous heroism, Guálinto is unable to produce any satisfying victories or forward movement, either in the divided psychic space of his mind or the fractured physical space of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

By contrast, Paredes *did* recover from the feelings of futility and emptiness he recorded in his notebook in 1938, but only by working to maintain his capacity for critique – his capacity for imagination. Guálinto’s dissatisfaction with his dreams closely parallels Paredes’ response to the folded scraps of paper that once accumulated in his pockets, between the pages of his books, and on his desk, threatening to suffocate him. Considering that Paredes was writing in the notebook and composing the novel around the same time, Guálinto’s social predicament serves as a commentary on Paredes’ artistic one. In both the notebook and the novel, there is a failure of cohesion that originates in opposing pressures from their respective cultural atmospheres. For Paredes, at the time, the promising yet ultimately disconnected ideas hastily scribbled, strewn, and lost in the spaces of his life seemed like they would never come together to form a masterpiece. But whereas the only way Guálinto can see to escape his Gulliver-like binds is to join those who would bind him, Paredes maintains his commitment to representing the perspectives of the Mexicotexans of the Rio Grande Valley. In doing so, he recovers his status as an insider, capable of seeing clearly and using that vision to move powerfully through a world that would eventually recognize his scraps of paper as “masterpieces.”

CHAPTER 4

THE CIRCULAR IMAGINATION IN NATHANAEL WEST'S *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST*: SEARCHING FOR ORDER IN HOLLYWOODLAND

Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) completes the transition from a western landscape conceived as enabling the freedom to imagine the possible to one perceived as disabling such vision. No longer can Twain realize his fantasies about his own Brobdignagian power to eat those who get in the way of his vagabondizing; no longer can Cather will the land to produce simply by virtue of her visionary skills. Twain fits squarely in, and Cather toes the lines of, the literary category of the "Old Western" – a romantic view of "how the West was won." But Nathanael West, following Américo Paredes, is part of a new paradigm. According to William R. Travis, one possible date for the emergence of a "New West" – a more realistic account of the losses of minorities and the environment at the hands of the initial "winners" of the region – is the decade of the 1930s (3-4).¹ During this period, I argue, authors were constructing newly constricted views of the spaces seen as wide open with potential only a few decades earlier. Like Paredes, West traces the restriction of the western imagination by showing that the power of vision can no longer overcome – let alone be inspired by – the West's idealized beauty and breadth. With *The Day of the Locust*, instead, the perception of the West is as unclear and shifting as the path through it.

Following along the lines of the previous chapter, Chapter 4 continues to investigate the increasing threats to the Western imagination as the 20th century marched

¹ In summarizing the debate about when the "New West" came into being, Travis lists the 1930s, World War II, and the 1960s-70s as options.

forward. Here, I analyze *The Day of the Locust* as a repository for the decline of dreams in and of the West. Set in Hollywood, the novella follows Tod Hackett, a graduate of the Yale School of Fine Arts, on his adventures through the fringes of Los Angeles, where he works as a movie-set designer, plans his apocalyptic painting, pursues a second-rate actress named Faye Greener, and attends both gaudy cinema soirees in the city and desperate outings into the spare desert. Along the way, he comes into contact with Harry Greener, Faye's sickly father; Homer Simpson, a lonely Midwestern bookkeeper; the cowboy Earle and the Mexican rooster-fighter Miguel, Faye's suitors; Claude Estee, a screenwriter; and Adore Loomis, an obnoxious child actor. The Hollywood setting – both in its built and natural environs – functions as an object of critical reflection in its capacity to accommodate and produce national fantasies. This critical commentary comes not only from the protagonist, but also from the smorgasbord of characters who are also tangentially involved in the movie industry, as well as from the author himself, who spent the last six years of his life living in Hollywood and writing for its movie houses. These complicated perspectives on the spaces of Hollywood suggest a newly confused and conflicted imagination of the West and its possibilities.

When accounting for this instability of *The Day of the Locust*, most scholars have concentrated on its temporal inconsistencies, but I look at the role inconsistent *space* plays in destabilizing the novella. This chapter traces Nathanael West's representation of spatial confusion to its economic and social roots in the West of the 1930s. First, I turn to the history outside the novella, drawing out the relationship between confused space, faulty sight, and cinematic performance during the Great Depression in Hollywood. What do the urban and rural maps of the period show us about how people were orienting

themselves toward – or losing their sense of direction within – local and national spaces? How is this disoriented sense of place premised on a metaphorical loss of sight? And how does the failure to clearly imagine space contribute to the confusion of movements through those spaces? Next, I leverage these historical conceptions of space to analyze how place, vision, and movement are coordinated in *The Day of the Locust*. What is the relationship between the built and natural environments in the novella? How do the characters envision or imagine these spaces, and to what extent do they live up to those expectations in reality? How do the conflicts within and between these spaces affect characters' agency within them? Why do certain spaces incite violence, or even death, in the novel? And finally, what does all of this mean for a West that had, up to this point – at least for America's white population – appeared to have lived up to many of its mythical promises?

Various visions of the geographies of California, combined through the fiction of *The Day of the Locust*, allow Nathanael West to underline their inconsistencies. The divided values of Hollywood – primarily between urban and rural, and financial and moral – prevent *Locust's* characters from drawing coherent maps of their own setting, and thereby unable to move themselves through that setting with any success. In contrast to visions of the land in Twain, Cather, and Paredes – whose characters often work in close contact with the terrain in order to extract not just material but also personal or even moral value from it – visions of the land in West's novella seem to be permanently confused and disengaged, and often fail to locate any value at all. Without a solid sense of the ground beneath their feet, West's characters become dependent on prescribed, perhaps artificial, paths on which to move forward, or convince themselves that they are

moving forward. In West's novella, many of these paths become circular, ultimately wasting energy and leading nowhere, like the false resolution of a movie plot. Below, I follow West's cast of characters through the spaces of *Locust*, from city to country and back again – to demonstrate the circularity that confounds the novella.

Hollywood and the Great Depression: The Search for American Promise

In many ways, Hollywood provided an outlet for the continuation of the idea, begun over a century earlier, that the West could solve any number of American problems. In the 1930s, then, Hollywood served to accommodate any and all of these idea(l)s by proclaiming itself a stage for the performance of the American Dream, whose “bedrock premise” is a “sense of agency” (Cullen, *The American Dream* 10). Indeed, in *The Day of the Locust*, one of the movies being filmed on Tod's lot is titled *Manifest Destiny*. In the middle of the losses of the Depression, West suggests, Americans felt the need to convince themselves that they could still play the domineering role of American Conqueror to win the West.

Just as the winning of the West in the 19th century depended on a view of the territory as an empty canvas to be painted according to (white, male) American prerogatives, Hollywood's conquering of that same space relied on Americans' conception of California land as a blank slate that invited the imprint of imagination. In fact, Hollywood continues to be encapsulated by the stones in front of the Chinese Theater that bear the marks of the hands, feet, and signatures of those who give life to dreams: cinema stars. This human imperative to mark one's territory was key to the formulation of Hollywood, which came to be the site on which the nation's movies would be shot in large part because of its geographical neutrality, free from the excesses of both

weather and industry regulation. Early movie studios had been founded after the turn of the century in cities like New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Chicago, all of which had enacted strict laws that required producers to pay licensing fees (Starr 274). In the West, however, the law of the land in this regard was that there *was* no law of the land. Hollywood was appealing to movie-makers because it offered distance from the subpoenas that movie houses like Edison were serving to eastern producers who failed to pay requisite fines. In addition to this stereotypical Wild West lawlessness, the rainlessness of southern California was also enticing. When Selig director Francis Boggs needed good weather to film the outdoor scenes of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1908), he and his cameraman headed west. In the following years, other filmmakers made the same move, including New York director Cecil B. DeMille, who set up a studio in 1913 in a rented barn next to an orange grove on the corner of the dirt roads of Selma and Vine. Ironically, it was this kind of *tabula rasa* mentality – starting from scratch in territory whose atmospheric conditions were limited by neither rules nor rain – that allowed for the development of the “Hollywood approach,” whose “taste for pageantry” necessitated a neutral set on which to project its outlandish fantasies (Starr 276). The imposition of the imagination on reality, in other words, necessitated a neutral, accommodating stage.

Hollywood conceived of as a space that allowed for the freedom to dream, and to realize those dreams on the big screen, tag-teamed with other promises, too. California was advertised profusely, for instance, as offering health and vitality. It is on his doctor’s orders, after getting pneumonia in Iowa, that Homer Simpson comes West in *The Day of the Locust*. Hollywood also offered, in the midst of the Depression, the promise of employment. Although John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* famously depicts the

hopes the Midwestern Joad family pins on California to provide them with farming jobs, Nathanael West focuses on an different kind of dreamer: the starving artist of the East Coast.² In *The Day of the Locust*, Tod Hackett arrives in Los Angeles from Yale to take a job with a movie studio as a set designer. It was for employment's sake, too, that Nathanael West went to Hollywood, where he had secured work as a script writer for Columbia in 1933. Ultimately, the promise of the West in the 1930s was pinned on a national expectation for what Rita Barnard calls a "culture of abundance" premised on an excess of production and consumption offered by the seemingly endless possibilities housed in neutral territory. Whether in the form of sunshine or oranges, health or jobs, California offered a regional space that promised happiness and fulfillment to counteract the bleak national landscape of the Depression.

The problem with such promises, of course, is that their projections clashed discordantly with the realities of the national mood in general and the Hollywood scene in particular. Hollywood enticed the American public with fantasies of the good life on the big screen, but Nathanael West, who had acted as both consumer and producer of such fantasies, suggests in *The Day of the Locust* that audiences would revel in these illusions for only so long. Hollywood recognized this unsustainability beginning in 1938, with the onset of declining attendance, negative celebrity publicity, and flat-out bad films (Jurca 2–3). The industry launched a massive public relations campaign, dubbed "Motion Pictures' Greatest Year," in an effort to shore up their losses. In *Locust*, Tod mimics movie audiences' lost confidence in cinematic fantasy by questioning the value of the artificial horse displayed on the bottom of Claude Estee's swimming pool. Whereas

² . The starving artist of West's *The Day of the Locust* and the dust-bound farmer of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* are not dissimilar in their frustrated illusions, nor in the anger that such frustration produces, as indicated by one of West's original titles for his novella, *The Wrath to Come* (Martin 313)].

such questioning leaves Mrs. Schwartzen to pout, “You just won’t let me cherish my illusions” (71), Tod’s impulse – that the prop is not simply “cute” – points to a larger sense of impending disillusionment, not only with Hollywood, but also with the promises California, and America at large, appeared to offer. As Chip Rhodes has put it, “Far from being separate from the most alarming aspects of the Depression, Hollywood is seen as a cause of the discontent and alienation of people rather than something to mitigate it” (38).

Mapping Disorder: The Disorientation of People in Place

Hollywood’s difficulty in maintaining an audience willing to indulge in cinematic fantasy was founded on its audience’s own difficulty in understanding their changing world during the Depression, and their difficulty placing themselves within that world in terms of their needs and desires. In *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (subtitle: *A Western*), which F. Scott Fitzgerald was writing just before his death, Monroe Stahr’s rise to success is enabled by his rare understanding of *placement*: he was “the one who knew where everything was” in a world where “no one knew where anything was” (79). The ability to coherently visualize one’s surroundings, in order to find what one was looking for, becomes crucial to agency and progress in the 1930s – but is a unique characteristic due to the complexity of the landscape Americans faced at that time. Even the prosperous Stahr questions the stability of his own understanding of place, commenting to an airline pilot that we often “choose some one way for no reason at all,” even if we pretend otherwise (20). West’s characters in *The Day of the Locust*, too, are full of doubt about where, how, or even if to proceed. When Homer arrives in Hollywood, for instance, he must “stop for several minutes on the corner to get his bearings” (87).³

³ On the other side of the country, Carson McCullers was also questioning the American sense of place, writing in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), “It is a curious emotion, this certain homesickness I have

Norman Podhoretz uses almost exactly the same language to describe the reader's experience of the novella's internal confusion: it is "difficult," he says, "to get one's bearings in" *The Day of the Locust* (84).

In the 1930s, the attempts of the individual to find his or her place are frequently frustrated by a loss of orientation. According to Josephine Herbst, Nathanael West was one of them: he "had the orphaned look of his generation" (314). West was quite aware of his misfit status, worrying that his Jewish heritage marked him as not quite "American" and that his economic class would not support his desired profession.⁴ As with Américo Paredes' George Washington Gómez character, Nathanael West's discomfort with his own identity and position in society is blatantly evident in his manipulation of his own name. Born Nathan Weinstein to parents who arrived in Harlem from Lithuania in the 1880s, he began calling himself Nathaniel von Wallenstein Weinstein in a failed attempt to win a bid from a Christian fraternity house at Brown University (Meade 54). His final name change, to Nathanael West, is well-known but generally misunderstood. Officially, West adopted this new name in September of 1926, when he acquired the passport that would take him on his short-lived European tour. Publicly, he would say the name was inspired by *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, who famously advised, "Go west, young man." In reality, though, many members of West's family, including his mother, sister, and several cousins, had been Americanizing their name in this way for some time (Martin

in mind. With Americans, it is a national trait, as native to us as the roller-coaster or the jukebox. It is no simple longing for the home town or country of our birth. The emotion is Janus-faced: we are torn between a nostalgia for the familiar and an urge for the foreign and strange. As often as not, we are homesick most for the places we have never known."

⁴ West's family was unable to fund a full Grand Tour for the aspiring young writer. As Joseph Freeman wrote, "bohemianism requires a certain amount of social stability" (285).

28, Meade 71–72). “[I]n searching for a self,” Jay Martin argues, “West was in danger of losing his self” (33). His efforts to create a name that would “fit” some unknown goal are echoed in the author’s inability to “fit” into any particular writing style or literary movement. “Somehow or other,” he wrote to Fitzgerald in 1939, “I seem to have slipped in between all the ‘schools’” (Martin 334, Bercovitch 791).⁵

West’s personal and aesthetic sense of dislocation serves as an individual example of a national or even international problem with the organization of ideas, people, and places during the early 20th century. In his study of social change during the Progressive Era that preceded the publication of West’s novella, Robert Wiebe argues that Americans were searching, simply, for order. Although the “sweeping” uniformity ushered in by “nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization” around the turn of the century appeared to offer such order, these forces of capitalism often resulted instead in a sense of “dislocation and bewilderment” (Wiebe 12). Even popular culture registered this disorientation: 1933 was the year of a great Jigsaw Puzzle craze (Martin 163). A similar atmosphere of disorientation was embedded on the international stage. Looking back on 1929 twenty years later, Thurman Arnold, a member of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust,” suggested that a “series of corporate world estates” had proved unmappable – “no one of them is to be found in an atlas” (237–238).

On a local level, Hollywood, as both a place and an industry, serves as a microcosm of this national and global search for order. If anything, Hollywood’s locale, at the “end of the Frontier,” and its business, as a “dream factory,” make the hunt for

⁵ It was his inability to market his unfamiliar brand of fiction that led West to Hollywood, where he could support himself financially through script writing while continuing to pursue his own artistic projects on the side.

orientation even more complex. “Hollywood's relation to place and place making is a complicated one,” Jani Scandura writes, “in part because the industry that produced it and was produced by it relies on the construction and remaking of spatial and temporal illusion” (191). Finding one’s bearings becomes more difficult, in other words, when there exists no steady sense of just what California land was, was supposed to be, or could be projected as. We can see an attempt to compensate for these complications in the maps and signs prevalent in Hollywood during this period. In 1923, a local real estate company decided to advertise its properties with 45-foot tall white block letters reading “HOLLYWOODLAND.” Just as the neutrality of the stage of California had allowed film directors to reproduce their visions on its canvas, the apparent “blandness” of this sign, Leo Braudy says, “makes it easier to project upon and associate with” (5). But what values were being projected? If we use William Fox’s notion that we are in the habit of “erecting signs to guide us” in an effort to “map” spaces we perceive as “voids” (*The Void, the Grid, and the Sign: Traversing the Great Basin* ix), we can begin to see the blank space of the Hollywood sign not as offering the possibility of projection, but rather imposing the threat of uncertainty. In this sense, Hollywood’s iconic white letters encapsulate a lack of clarity about what kind of space, exactly, it advertised.

One of the main difficulties in defining Hollywood as a place comes from the tension between its natural and its built environments. On the one hand, maps such as Don Boggs’ “Hollywood Starland” (1937) was sold as an “Official Moviegraph of the Land of Stars: Where They Live, Where they Work, and Where They Play,” organizing Hollywood according to the edifices that housed the celebrities who supposedly

represented the space (“Hollywood Star Map: Golden Age Celebrities”; Braudy 267). On the other hand, the “soil soldiers” of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps were, during this same period, busy surveying and mapping millions of acres of nature. The efforts of the CCC were focused especially on the West, and particularly on California, which housed 168 camps and employed nearly 34,000 men by 1933, nearly double the number of any other state (“Civilian Conservation Corps”).⁶ FDR himself took a dual approach to American values when he identified the country’s greatest assets in both “our land and our people” (Flynn 106). The interplay of this divided view of California – as a natural treasure to be conserved and as an urban stage to be constructed – indicates a fundamental confusion about “where everything was” in 1930s Hollywood.

“Trouble in getting...focused”: *Locust’s Problem of Sight*

This sense of Depression-era disorientation – about American place itself (particularly “the West”) as well as about the American identities formed by positionalities *in place* – becomes visible precisely in the way *The Day of the Locust* pictures vision itself. Both Thomas Strychacz and James Goodwin have written fascinating catalogues of the many ways in which West’s narrative both co-opts and critiques Hollywood filming techniques – the way that cameras “see” things. In many ways, obviously, *Locust* is centered on film; in fact, its original cover⁷ featured a movie camera. However, the novella is quite blunt in its critique of film. The only time we see

⁶ The next two most active CCC states were Pennsylvania, which boasted of 19,400 men on 97 camps, and Idaho, which employed 19,200 men on 96 camps.

⁷ West hated the cover – composed of a yellow movie camera on a scarlet background, with the title printed in white on a black strip of film frames – which he believed showed that his work was not being taken seriously (Martin 323-24). Among other things, he thought it could be used as “bait for drunken Mexicans” or for “vampire bats,” or as “a flag when the Day comes.”

a movie in *Locust*, the projection machine encounters technical difficulties: the device “whirred merrily, but he had trouble in getting...focused,” and eventually gets “stuck” (74). This assessment of film’s (in)ability to convey a perspective is straightforward, but West is more subtle in his assessment of his human characters’ ability to do the same. By looking closely at how sight is depicted in *Locust*, we can see how West questions not just the camera eye, but also the human eye behind it.

As with the projector’s lack of focus, the majority of the characters populating *Locust* have trouble seeing the spaces around them directly, clearly, or easily. For example, when Tod sits on a curb after a party, he is unable to perceive the primary scene, and instead must make do with the secondary one: “...he couldn’t see the city in the valley below the canyon,” but only “the reflection of its lights...” (159). In another instance, three cowboys in front of a saddlery store make it their routine to vaguely “stare across the street” despite the fact that there isn’t anything to look at (110). The most extreme example of faulty sight is the non-existent variety exhibited by Homer, who explains that “[t]he lights” of the Hollywood shows “hurt [his] eyes,” leading him to retreat into the “warm, rich darkness” of “uterine flight,” where the absence of light disallows any vision at all (99). Even the songs featured in *Locust* betray its characters’ anxiety about the difficulty of seeing well. For instance, when Faye, wants to irritate her father, she sings “Jeepers Creepers” (96). And in the Spanish song with which Miguel woos Faye, the speaker admits the inadequacy of his vision by asking a woman to “loan” him her “brown eyes” in order to see the destruction of a fallen landscape (116).⁸

⁸ The song, entitled “Cuatro Milpas” (“Four Fields”), is a ballad written by Belisario de Jesús García during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The text of *Locust* includes only one and a half stanzas of the song, which refer to crying palms, a dry lake, and a fallen terrace. The lyrics regarding the lending of eyes are not included in the novella.

The frustrated visions of *Locust*'s characters are intriguing to Tod, who, upon arriving in Hollywood, immediately wants to find a "clue to the people who stared" (76). An artist, Tod has been trained to distance himself from his world in order to portray it through his painting. Like West himself, Tod is empowered by what West's friend Josephine Herbst called the "gift of seeing:" his eyes are "electrically awake," ready for "detection;" they "clicked and sparked" upon perceiving the world (Herbst 312, 320, 324). According to Gerald Locklin, Tod possesses a "painter's eye," which is capable of combining many points of view (68, 72).⁹ Indeed, he finds Faye's affectations charming because he can see them from multiple angles, not only from "in front," where her illusions seem "amateurish" and "ridiculous," but also from "backstage," where he can appreciate "the wires that held up" her fantasies (104). Whereas the majority of *Locust*'s cast views the proscenium arch of the Hollywood stage as "permeable," and therefore has difficulty distinguishing between spectacle and reality (Veitch 128), Tod's removed analysis suggests that he has constructed his own frame through which to see the frame Hollywood has built for its audience and its residents. Tod alone, then, seems to offer the reader's key to "critical ability" – to gaining perspective on the "real" landscape of 1930s Hollywood. At the same time, however, Tod's capacity to see from all angles – he is at once consumer, producer, and critic of his world – he can easily get lost in the details within and conflicts between them. Like West, who wrote to Edmund Wilson¹⁰ in 1939 that he was prone to "forget the broad sweep, the big canvas" (*Novels and other Writings*

⁹ This combination of perspectives originates in West's revisions of *Locust*, each version of which had a slightly different narrator. His second draft took Claude Estee's voice as its guide and the third split Estee in two, with Tod representing Estee's "sensitive side. It was only in the final draft of the novella that West bestowed Tod with full narrative rights (Martin 312).

¹⁰ Some sources indicate the letter was written to Fitzgerald.

792), Tod's vision can be hindered by his alternating extremes of near- and far-sightedness.

In *The Day of the Locust*, West depicts his characters' warped visions as a metaphor for their warped imaginations. Neuroscience tells us that there is a real connection between physical sight and intellectual understanding, and that aberrations in the former can indicate faltering in the latter. As Melissa Hogenboom reports, neuroscientific studies show that "Visual, or optical, illusions show us that our minds tend to make assumptions about the world." Clearly, Nathanael West was no neuroscientist, but his construction of his characters' perceptions of space, their fantasies about what those spaces might allow, and their movements through those spaces, aligns with research showing that illusions "can reveal everything from how we process time and space to our experience of consciousness." As Mark Changizi, a theoretical neurobiologist, explains, the brain may make predictions about its surroundings in order to "perceive the present." As such, the ways in which *Locust's* cast sees their world reveals their capacity to understand and act accordingly within their present time and place. By extension, if they are unable or unwilling to really "see" the spaces of Hollywood – after a long day's work, Claude Estee reasons, people just want to indulge in illusions of "amour and glamor" – their own dreams and behaviors will reflect and reify that disorientation.

From City to Soil and Back Again: Nixing and Mixing the Material and the Natural

Before moving to close readings of *The Day of the Locust's* conflicting perspectives on space, I want to provide a brief review of the novella's similarly conflicted views of time. Many critics have focused on temporal incoherence in *Locust*

as contributing to its characters' discombobulation.¹¹ While most agree that the novella is more or less "plotless,"¹² scholars disagree about its pace, with some arguing for its "Breughel-like stillness" (Ross xxii) and others calling it "too fast for the eye to follow" (Strychacz 193). In any case, it's clear that *Locust's* timing is confusing, full of chronological reversals,¹³ transitionless jumps,¹⁴ re-enactments and repetitions,¹⁵ and moments in which time seems to stop altogether.¹⁶ Scholars have attributed these temporal inconsistencies to various sources, including the "splintered" filming techniques of 1930s Hollywood (Strychacz 194). I would add that the novella's confused sense of time is also shaped by the growing American obsession with speed and progress in the

¹¹ This temporal incoherence also appears in West's previous novella, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, each chapter of which, the author explained, "instead of going forward in time, also goes backward, forward, up and down in space like a picture" (West, "Some Notes on Miss L" 401).

¹² *The Day of the Locust's* narrative has been called a "near plotless plot" (Strychacz 199), "inharmonious" (Goodwin 50), "indeterminate" (Blyn xxv), and "arbitrary" (Lethem 392). Even the author himself was adamant about the fact that his work did not privilege plot. In his 1934 application for a Guggenheim fellowship, West pointed explicitly to his lack of interest in plot, noting that he had made "no attempt...to describe what actually happens to my protagonist because I think an outline of adventures is meaningless" (*Novels and Other Writings* 466). Despite receiving glowing letters of recommendation from Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, George S. Kaufman, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, West's application was rejected in 1935 (Martin 254-55, 263).

¹³ This temporal disjunction is clear from the opening line, which begins "Around quitting time," thus positioning a conclusion, the end of the work day, at its introduction (59). Conversely, the novella ends with a movie debut in which the searchlights seem to initiate a new quest even as they herald an apocalypse (175). Meanwhile, the entirety of *Locust* juxtaposes the idealized search for new beginnings with the actual onset of dead ends.

¹⁴ For instance, Faye's narrative about "how careers are made in the movies and how she intended to make hers" strings together "possibilities," "probabilities," and "inevabilities" "[w]ithout any noticeable transition" (158). Likewise, when Earle is teased, he silently contemplates the "joke" before suddenly kicking his bully "in the rump," thereby moving "from apathy to action without the usual transition" (111).

¹⁵ In the novella, the production of "Waterloo" on a Hollywood backlot exhibits this forced repetition of time. As the narrator explains, the re-enacted battle must be "fought over again the next day" due to a "classic mistake" (134).

¹⁶ For example, Faye dreams up movie plots but stops before getting to "how the picture should end" because she "lost interest" (106). In another instance, the director of Harry's funeral "raised her hand and Bach was silenced in the middle of a phrase" (129). Finally, after Faye moves out, Homer speaks "continuously for about twenty minutes" until he suddenly "stopped in the middle of a sentence[,]...., and seemed to fall asleep" (168).

1920s,¹⁷ more particularly the pace at which the movie industry's contingent labor force moved¹⁸ and Los Angeles' increasing reliance on speedy transportation.¹⁹ Josephine Herbst's observation that "the young were in such a hurry, such a panic" during this period suggests that speed was not so much exciting as anxiety-producing (315). Rather than bringing about "youthful vitality," the fast pace of the era often instead introduced death and destruction. Indeed, Nathanael West himself died from speeding through his own life, crashing to his death in an automobile accident at an intersection in El Centro, at age 37.²⁰ Like Al Manheim of Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941), all

¹⁷ As Josephine Herbst wrote in *Hunter of Doves*, her semi-autobiographical short story about her friendship with West, "[h]is time, the elements in which he had had his chance, was already hopelessly muddled" (310).

¹⁸ The term "movie" was not only the shorthand reference for "moving picture," but also "a general term of contempt for anyone who worked in the 'flickers'" (Braudy 13). Encouraged to churn out scripts at whirlwind pace, screenwriters were "treated like factory workers" (148). Nathanael West was accustomed to spending years to produce a publishable piece of writing, but the fast pace of Hollywood in some ways matched West's conception of literary authorship, since he believed he could "leave slow growth to the book reviewers;" book *writers*, he said, "only have time to explode" (West, "Some Notes on Miss L" 401). When West got his first Hollywood job, with Columbia Pictures in 1933, he had very little time indeed: he signed a four-week contract; they kept him around for six (Meade 147, 150). His next position, with Republic Productions, was even more temporary, offering employment only on a week-to-week basis (201). As fictionalized in Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*, such jobs were comparable to speeding through a marathon at a "mercurial pace" set by "a burning impatience to be further, further on" (186, 80). Although West would land a more temporally stable position with the "big-league" studio RKO after the publication of *Locust* (Meade 249), such quick-moving, short-lived jobs were the norm in the Hollywood studio system. However, the frenetic energy of movie-making was potentially destructive. Such an atmosphere of super-efficient productivity clearly had implications for the quality, purpose, and reception of the "art" it produced, as Walter Benjamin famously theorized in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," published just three years prior to *Locust*. As Edmund Wilson reprimanded Nathanael West, "You're an artist" with "no business" in "a ghastly place" like Hollywood (qtd. in Dardis 174). Similarly, in *Locust*, Tod "grabbed [his job] despite the arguments of his friends who were certain that he was selling out and would never paint again" (61).

¹⁹ By 1920, the region was producing 106 million barrels of oil a year. Los Angeles came in second place for both tire manufacturing (after Akron, Ohio), and automobile assembly (after Detroit) (Starr 182). By 1924, more than 310,000 automobiles were entering Los Angeles daily – more than the total number of cars registered in the entire state of New York (Starr 185). Because the city was built on an integrated plain, it was particularly "amenable" to high-speed automobile traffic. The 1920s saw the inauguration of "great boulevards" like Sunset, and the late 1930s saw the construction of intersection-less roads like the Arroyo Seco Parkway.

²⁰ Ironically nicknamed "Pep" for his exhaustion following a summer camp hike, West's accident, on Dec. 22, 1940, was not really a surprise. West himself once predicted that he would die in a car accident (Martin

of West's characters are ultimately blown away by the pace required of them, even as they attempt to incorporate that pace into their own worlds.²¹ In the end, their counteractive conceptions of time clash throughout the novella, resulting in a chronology devoid of clarity or meaning. My aim is not to dismiss the scholarly focus on the inconsistencies of time in *The Day of the Locust*. To the contrary, this concentration aligns with my own observations, though from a different angle. My goal, then, is to balance the discussions of time that have dominated the criticism on West with what I see as an equally important analysis of space. After all, *where* did the temporal speeds of the 1930s get us? If, as Mr. Propter concludes in Aldous Huxley's 1939 *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, "you're never certain of getting there, even when you've come near enough to see what sort of thing you're going to" (177), the answer is nowhere. In the same way that various conceptions of and expectations for time conflict in the novella to create anxiety and chaos, so too do various understandings of space clash, ultimately creating an uneven foundation for movement.

Partly because Nathanael West has been deemed a more talented creator of characters and dialogue than description,²² few critics have allotted any detailed,

8); his new wife, Eileen McKenney, often did the driving. The author was known to be a horrible driver, at least in part because the life of his mind, free to take its time, was more engaging to him than literal road of his life, with all its pressures to hurry up. According to Jay Martin, West was "quickly bored by the mechanical routine of driving and ...loosened his imagination to drift and daydream" (7).

²¹ For Twain, Cather, and perhaps even Paredes, the notion of timeless wandering is not as threatening as it is for West or his Depression-era readers. Twain's meandering work as a legislative worker, timberer, miner, quartz miller, and finally writer and humorist – each phase drawn out over dozens of pages before moving on – points to a relatively stable sense of the long-term (that the nation would continue to prosper beyond Manifest Destiny) – even as those explorations were founded on unstable spaces. In his careless question of "What's next?" following any apparent failure, Twain's reader can recognize the open quality of time prior to the closure of frontier space. This sense of timelessness allows entire lifetimes of imaginative exploration of possibility. By contrast, time is of the essence in West's Hollywood culture.

sustained attention to West's settings. James Goodwin has pointed out the ways in which the novella reduces the world to tonalities of light and dark, but does so as part of a much larger discussion of West's work as representative of the "grotesque." Jonathan Veitch offers a more focused analysis of setting, arguing that West's environments are never "left neutral," but rather are "always converted into atmosphere, carefully dressed with the appropriate props" (117). Veitch performs close readings of scenes that take place in prop-ridden locales like the Cuban dance club El Gaucho to prove that "*atmosphere prescribes performance*" (117, italics original). However, if California is defined, according to Kevin Starr, in terms of its "dual attractions" – not only "the entertainment industry," but also the state's "natural beauty" (xi) – we should be careful to foreground the former on the latter. I want to add to Veitch's analysis of explicitly staged props by examining, as well, the apparently natural "props" featured in the backyards, neighborhoods, and canyons that punctuate the novella's more stereotypical Hollywood locales. By looking closely at the urban and rural stages on which *Locust's* flashy props are grounded, we can achieve a fuller understanding of West's characters "performances" on those stages.

While Isaac Rosenfeld once argued that West's "characters are by the measure of their own elevation above the mass cut off from the necessary contact with common life," I contend that their disconnection from life originates in their disconnected vision of the ground on which they live (110). Indeed, the ground itself is disconnected, partially constructed, or ill-conceived, preventing any possibility of relation to it. As West himself said, his settings constitute "a peculiar half world" (J. Martin 336). *Books* reviewed this

²² Behind West's back, Bennett Cerf offered this critique of an early version of *Locust* to S.J. Perelman. The remarks apparently got back to West, as recorded in Cerf's letter to him on May 31, 1938 (Meade 243).

same concept as a “two-dimensional” quality that rendered the novella “emotionally inert” (“Review of *The Day of the Locust*”). Although characters like Harry Greener have been analyzed according to this notion of flatness,²³ the idea of the “half world” has not been applied to the spaces in which they live. This not-fully-drawn world fails to cohere due to the confused combinations of its natural and built environments, neither of which prove comprehensible, much less fulfilling to their residents. Like the “trail” of character in West’s short story “The Adventurer,” which “becomes hard to follow” because it is “circular, winding back into itself, without direction, without goal” (*Novels and Other Writings* 445), the trail of geography in *Locust* is twisted, with no clear ends. West represents his novella’s landscape as fragmented, and his characters’ movements as misdirected, resulting in a circular view of the Hollywood setting that both sets up and mimics the characters’ indirections over it. By constructing skewed visions of these spaces, West shows how a failure to find order in a landscape divided both within and between its natural and material elements results in circularity and stagnation, in both dreams and reality.

*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s inaugural address, given in March of 1933, is well known for its bold declaration that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” But the meat of the speech reveals a fear of something decidedly more substantive: materiality, or, more bluntly, the edifices, goods, and services that represent wealth. Ironically, however, Roosevelt was intent on proving the material’s *lack* of substance. We should be

²³ James Goodwin has noted that many of the characters in *Locust* are two-dimensional (85), including Earle, who bears a strong “resemblance to a mechanical drawing” (109), Harry, whose “mask”-like face “had very little back or top” (119), and Faye, who is first introduced by way of a flat photograph Tod keeps stuck in the corner of his dresser mirror.

grateful, he reasoned, that “our distress comes from no failure of substance” – “we are stricken by no plague of locusts.”²⁴ Instead, because “our common difficulties...concern, thank God, only material things,” Roosevelt suggests, the path to success should be a relatively easy one. By advising that we simply substitute “mere monetary profit” with “noble social values,” Roosevelt underestimated the embeddedness of the material in America (Goodwin 87). Far from a manageable, eradicable element of 1930s society, materiality, as depicted in *The Day of the Locust*, is precisely the burden that infiltrates, confuses, and blocks any clear path forward.

By default of both history and family, Nathanael West was well-versed in the material culture of building. From roughly 1900 to 1920, much of America’s success was based on a “boom” of construction. In New York, where West was born and raised, rising demands for housing for incoming immigrants, as well as the availability of loose .profit, made the construction business particularly appealing (Martin 20). West grew up in and around the contracting firm of his father, who expected his son to follow in his footsteps. Although it was with much resistance that West participated in his father’s work,²⁵ he was fascinated by the decorative artistry of construction²⁶ and briefly expressed interest in becoming an architect (Martin 20, 75). In addition to his family’s buildings, West was also familiar with the towers and gables of the Flemish Renaissance Revival style of his high school, DeWitt Clinton, and the Beaux-Arts style of the New York Public Library (Meade 26). As a young adult, West worked as a manager in the

²⁴ James Goodwin makes this connection between Roosevelt’s speech and West’s title, but offers no evidence that the latter alluded to the former.

²⁵ West begrudgingly learned the skills of bricklaying and plumbing (Martin 33).

²⁶ His father was known for his ornamental work in limestone.

hotels his father's company had helped to build, including Kenmore Hall and the Sutton,²⁷ which overlooked the Art Deco Chrysler building, constructed in 1930 (Meade 94). Though more subdued than what he would find in Hollywood, the mix of urban architecture West grew up with on the East coast gave him the lexicon with which to critique the more radical western environment he builds in *Locust*.

West was simultaneously intrigued and disgusted by the building styles in California, which had morphed over the years into quite a gaudy collection. Prior to West's residence in California, in the 1910s and 1920s, the majority of homes were built in an Arts-and-Crafts-inspired shingle style (Starr 295). This same period, however, exhibited experimentation with Tudor, Jacobean, Georgian, and Hansel and Gretel Storybook architecture. As the 1920s progressed, Mediterranean revivals became trendy, and modernism began to appear. When West came to Hollywood in 1933, the "Second Generation" of modernist architects was already at work. The freedom associated with the West – the same freedom that drew Hollywood film directors to its wide-open spaces and tax-free locations – also drew architects to design without limit. Indeed, Hollywood's smorgasbord of styles led the author to call the city "a desert got up to look like Asbury Park" (qtd. in Meade 148).

The buildings that appear in *The Day of the Locust*, from palatial residences to low-class rentals, reflect this excess of architectural style. Clashing designs abound among the many outlandish mansions²⁸ in the area, including "Mexican ranch houses,

²⁷ Both residences were part of the new fad of "club hotels" designed to attract single young professionals with amenities like lounges, concert theaters, and swimming pools (Meade 105).

²⁸ *Locust*'s mansions are reminiscent of 1930s Hollywood both in fact (for example, "Pickfair," the "White House of Hollywood" owned by United Artists founders Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks) and fiction (Jo Stoyte's castle in Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* and General Sternwood's estate in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939)).

Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages,” a “miniature Rhine castle,” and Claude Estee’s mock-southern mansion (61).²⁹ Even the San Bernadino Arms, Tod’s apartment complex, illustrates confused style, pictured, on the one hand, as a “nondescript affair” with “plain, unpainted stucco” walls and “unadorned windows” (3), and, on the other, as ornate, marked by “pink Moorish columns” topped by “turnip shaped lintels” (61). Homer’s house similarly flouts the rules of design, appearing to be an “Irish” cottage on the exterior despite its interior decoration in “Spanish,” “New England,” and “nautical” themes. These design conflicts extend to uncertainties in smaller stylistic elements: the front door’s hinges are “carefully stamped to appear hand-forged,” the “thatched roof” is “paper colored and ribbed to look like straw,” and the dresser was “painted to look like unpainted pine” (81). As Miles Orvell writes in *The Real Thing*, if the 19th century saw factory-created “consumer objects that enthusiastically mimicked handcrafted things,” the Depression-era of the early 20th century carried the imitation of authenticity to the point of “self-parody” (142, 148). To an excessive degree, then, the material constructions in *Locust* – from houses to hinges – have a shaky grip on reality. “Steel, stone and brick curb a builder's fancy a little,” Tod observes, “forcing him to distribute his stresses and weights and to keep his corners plumb.” But the “plaster and paper” that constitute *Locust*’s world defy this notion of balance and permanence, as these materials “know no law, not even that of gravity” (61).

²⁹ In the novella, Claude’s house is a replica of the Biloxi, Mississippi Dupuy mansion (68), but it is Frank Lloyd Wright’s Hollyhock House in East Hollywood that plays the role in the film version of *Locust*. The stand-in is particularly interesting given its “introverted” exterior, which resists analysis or comprehension; its name’s use of the natural environment to describe the built; and its ultimate impracticality, both in terms of its failure as a residential building and its difficulty holding up in earthquakes.

One response to this riot of materiality in the midst of the Great Depression was a “back to the land” movement, carried out in varying degrees of intensity. At one extreme was Ralph Borsodi, whose *Flight from the City* (1933) advocated for an agrarianism that would allow impoverished families to become self-reliant. A more well-known response was that of FDR, who suggested that Americans looking to rid themselves of the material in favor of the moral might do so by calling on “the spirit of the American pioneer” and turning to nature, which “still offers her bounty.”³⁰ Whether in the name of economy, morality, or architectural simplicity, urban Americans during the 1930s were becoming interested in the promise of the land.

Nathanael West was not immune to the attractions of nature. On many occasions throughout his life, West turned to the land in the hopes that nature would save him – or at least his writing – from the chaos of the city. In May of 1931, for example, he spent the summer drafting *Miss Lonelyhearts* in a cabin in the Adirondacks.³¹ His next trip to the country was initiated by the young novelists John Herrmann and Josephine Herbst,³² who described West’s Manhattan penthouse as “little more than a cage, where to see beyond rooftops merely enhanced his sense of being in jail” (321). With Herbst’s urging, West rented a room in Frenchtown, N.J., a covered bridge across from Herbst’s own home in

³⁰ Many of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs were aimed at protecting nature, especially in the territories west of the Mississippi like Oklahoma’s Dust Bowl. The Civilian Conservation Corps, for instance, fought forest fires for 6 million man-days and planting 3 billion trees (Flynn 19). Although Woodrow Wilson officially established the National Park Service in 1916 with the “Organic Act,” it was Roosevelt who, with Executive Orders 6166 and 6228 of 1933, consolidated the National Parks system (Dilsaver). In doing so, FDR was following his own inaugural mandate to go “back to the land,” which assumed that reconnecting with nature would help to solve the moral problems of materiality plaguing Depression-era America (Flynn 118).

³¹ The cabin, ensconced in 1,200 acres of forest, served as a refuge from the city, from West’s family, and from the Sutton, where the author’s writing was frequently interrupted by “deadbeats” (Meade 111, Martin 140).

³² The couple showed up at the Sutton at the behest of William Carlos Williams, with whom West was working on the literary magazine *Contact* at the time (Martin 155).

Erwinna. At the end of his six weeks' country sojourn, he announced that *Miss Lonelyhearts* would be "positively finished" before he returned to the city (qtd. in Martin 157). West was so enthusiastic about the success he had met in the Pennsylvania countryside that, in December of 1932, he purchased an 83-acre property in Bucks County (Martin 200). The sense of freedom for creative imagination that West found in the open air of New York and Pennsylvania had profound implications for his understanding of the relative values of city versus country, even after he moved to the West coast.³³ In Hollywood, West "fled as often as he could to the enchanted woods," and eventually bought a brick farmhouse north of the city with his new wife, Eileen (Herbst 344, Meade 297).

As Jay Martin writes, "West learned not simply to love the outdoors but to regard the wilderness as powerfully curative of city ills. In contrast to the confusing city, where commerce and conformity pressed upon him, the country seemed to provide a place of simple order" (24). The conflation of nature and order is echoed clearly in a film script West wrote for Columbia in 1933 called *The Return to the Soil*. As the title suggests, the film affirms the rejuvenating value of the land. The story follows a farmer's son who, having failed in the city, journeys back to the family farm, where he declares that "Nature will always provide for those who love her. Soon she will give us potatoes, corn, sweet butter, eggs... everything that man needs in this world. Not slimy stuff from cans, but rich, beautiful vegetables and fruits that are loaded with life" (Martin 207).

³³ After all, it is important to remember that California has been, for the long haul, attractive due to its land – its natural environment. Indeed, the original "HOLLYWOODLAND" sign announces this explicitly. The first San Francisco union organized topographers to map the land. The first building in Hollywood was not, as was traditional, a church, but rather a hotel for those who wanted to buy the land. To this day, the state is known as much for that which grows out of its land – its orange groves and vineyards – as for that which threatens its land – its earthquakes.

The fulfillment West projects in *Return to the Soil*, in which a vision of the land offers “beauty “ and “life,” peeks through briefly, prominently, and problematically in the only scene in *The Day of the Locust* that takes place in true “nature.”³⁴ Occuring near the middle of book, the characters’ journey “back to the land” seems to offer an anchor, a space of respite, in the center of an otherwise city-bound landscape. As nowhere else in the novella, this vision of nature provides a seemingly bright picture of the setting. In this scene, Tod, Faye, and Earle are making their way toward the cowboy’s camp, and the nature surrounding them looks to be lovely and lively. The narrator notes that “It was full spring.” The banks of the canyon “flowered in purple, blue, and yellow,” while “orange poppies bordered the path” (113). In the next canyon, the “bare round and jagged rocks were even more brilliantly colored than the flowers of the first.” Here, the path was “silver, grained with streaks of rose-gray, and the walls of the canyon were turquoise, mauve, chocolate and lavender.” The entire scene is lit up by “the air itself,” which “was vibrant pink” (113).

James Goodwin briefly mentions this particular vision of nature in the novella, aligning it with the art of the Fauvist movement. This group was prominent in California, where they “remained preoccupied with the landscape through the 1920s, most of them working in plein air Postimpressionist style” (Starr 290). In particular, the vibrant hues of the flowers, rocks, and air of the canyon West describes are reminiscent of the masculine, bohemian “Society of Six,” a group of East Bay artists painting together beginning in the 1920s, whose canvases are described as “exploding in vivid color,” perceiving “a whole new range of hues in the landscape.” These were the “... colors that

³⁴ Granted, many of *Locust*’s mansions are located on a road called “La Huerta,” meaning “The Orchard,” though no orchard seems to exist here.

Californians knew instinctively to be their own: colors that had been seen in the mind long before they were experienced in the landscape” (290). Like the Postimpressionists, the Society of Six believed that color could be used in an abstract way to “exercise...power...over the imagination of the spectator” (Grove Art par. 8). The dramatic colors with which West paints his novella’s canyon have a similar effect on both the characters and the reader, working to enliven the scene with an air of contentment, or possibly even joy. Our imaginations are held rapt by these colors, which mimic the myth of vibrant California sunsets romanticized by West coast lore.

Goodwin dismisses West’s bright canyon colors as an anomaly, reasoning that the aesthetics of Salvator Rosa, Francesco Guardi and Monsu Desiderio – artists Tod calls “the painters of Decay and Mystery” – are more prominent in *Locust* (88). I argue that this dismissal is a mistake. Far from an irrelevant detail, the brevity of this vivid perspective suggests quite a conscious choice by West, who was so well-versed in art that he was known in college as an artist more than a writer (Martin 64). In *The Red Tablecloth*, the Society of Six’s Selden Gile uses Cubism to depict “simultaneous points of view” to guide the viewer’s eyes to particular elements of the painting. Similarly, I suggest that West uses the bright flowers in his canyon scene to draw his reader’s eyes both toward some details and away from others. In this case, the shock of color – especially in a space where characters have admitted that light can be painful – impels us to pay closer attention to this supposedly natural, supposedly salutary setting, and to question its value. In short, the novella’s colorful canyon impels us to be skeptical not only of material glitz, but also of apparently natural beauty, as well as the belief that the natural environment could offer refuge from the confusion of the Great Depression.

Locust's trek into the wilderness is not so beautiful, colorful, or simple as it at first appears. The trip into the canyon is proffered not as a nature-appreciation tour, like the Fauvist scene above suggests, but rather as an escape from the financial burdens of the city: Earle and Faye are supposed to go out on a date, but Earle "ain't got any dough for supper," and proposes that they go to his camp to dine on freshly caught quails for free. While the trek toward the camp seems promising in its vivid hues and peaceful atmosphere, these qualities prove to be illusive. The colorful flowers turn out to be desperate weeds struggling to "get a purchase in [the canyon's] steep banks." Their petals, rather than dewy with life, are "wrinkled like crepe," while their leaves are "heavy with talcumlike dust." Although the second canyon is described as "more brilliantly colored" than the first, it is in fact "sterile," filled only with rocks. Finally, the "little green valley thick with trees" the characters encounter upon emerging from the canyon is distant and elusive – the group finds themselves "sliding and stumbling down a dry wash" to get there (113). Although Tod momentarily seems to enter a reverie when he notes that a clump of wild mustard "smelled of the rain and sun, clean, fresh and sharp," his other observations overtake this sense of nature as vital. When Tod listens to a bird singing at the conclusion of the scene, the music is not just melancholic, but discordant, like "water dripping on something hollow" or "a stick dragged slowly over the string of a harp." The natural world, it turns out, not only fails to serve as a space of financial or moral refuge, but houses as much emptiness and confusion as the city.

On a literal level, it is not surprising that West would write uncertain geography into his setting, as the land of southern California during the 1930s – like the land of northern Nevada and California in Twain's 1860s – really was a moving, living entity.

Southern California in the decades just prior to the publication of *The Day of the Locust*, for example, witnessed a devastating flood in Los Angeles in 1938; major earthquakes in Santa Barbara in 1925, Point Arguello in 1927, and Long Beach in 1933; and wild fires in Matilija Canyon (Ojai) in 1932 and Griffith Park (LA) in 1933. West himself witnessed fires in the canyons near his Hollywood apartment, as well as a house across the street that he watched burn “like a furnace” (Martin 269). These disasters were often exacerbated by the Santa Ana winds, regional downslope gusts that can exceed 40 miles per hour. While West’s *Locust* takes such natural disasters for granted as appropriate background for the human disasters it narrates, other Hollywood novels of the same period explicitly write the land’s movement into their narratives. For example, the earthquake in John Fante’s *Ask the Dust* shakes the protagonist to the extent that he begins attending Mass regularly, newly convinced that “The world was dust, and dust it would become” (104). In Budd Schulberg’s *What Makes Sammy Run?*, however, Kit complains not about the extreme weather itself, but rather about the *view* of such a natural atmosphere as disastrous. “The Chamber of Commerce,” she says, “boasts about the sunshine and the palm trees and the Chinese Theater...And the things that have the most vitality they’re always on the defense about -- the long rains and the night winds” (Schulberg 155).

West, too, had a complicated relationship with the “vitality” nature offered, which could be both exciting and terrifying. His engagements with nature, in which he often attempted to assert order over its instabilities, ended alternatively with comic disaster or decided darkness. For instance, West’s boyhood jaunts to Central Park found West and his friends hunting small critters according to a Boy Scout manual. But as adolescents, they were not so interested in the park as a place to “play at being in the forest,” as in a

place to spy on illicit rendezvous (Meade 31, Martin 36). Later, when West and his cousin, at age 15, gathered the survival gear ordered from *Field and Stream* with the plan to join a western military unit, the boys were “intercepted” at Grand Central Station by parents who knew that lighting out for the Territory might not be so simple. In adulthood, too, nature was not always benevolent for West. Martin suggests that West’s attraction to the natural environment represents an “unconscious... yearning for reimmersion in the less difficult world of his childhood” (140), but the difficulties of adulthood followed him into the idyllic spaces he sought in nature. Some of these difficulties were financial. His trip to the Adirondacks, for instance, was not only a professional necessity, but an economic one, as well.³⁵ Other problems with nature were more slapstick. After West purchased his Bucks County farm in 1932, he decided to create a swimming pool by damming up the brook that cut through the property (Martin 200). When the project turned into a slimy mudhole, though, he had to destroy the dam – to the whispered amusement of the neighbors who had seen the failure of the “city slickers” from a mile away (Meade 154). Even in California, West suffered from awful headaches that he blamed on excessive sunshine and bougainvillea (Meade 148).

West’s conflicted views of and experiences in nature can be seen in nearly all his works. The imaginary spaces West created in his fiction became more and more open as they moved further and further west, but this extra space guarantees neither the freedom nor coherence of his characters’ movements. West’s first publication, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), takes place in the dark, confined interior of a Trojan horse, where the

³⁵ The seven-room cabin he found rented for \$25 per month – about half the going rate for the average Manhattan apartment in the 1930s (J. Miller). Herbst admitted the financial appeal of nature: “We weren’t in love with the soil, per se. We loved the outdoors but we liked the city also. But to stay in the city meant harnessing yourself to a regular job so you could pay rent” (qtd. in Martin 140).

protagonist moves along anatomical courses that only leave him feeling more trapped. West's second novella, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), is set along the vertices of stairwells and elevator shafts in New York City, resulting in chapters that "cumulatively take on a slanted, compacted quality" (Lethem 392). While the eponymous character escapes briefly from the dark confines of basement speakeasies and dank bedrooms to an airy country cottage, the conviction that "we have no outer life, only an inner one" guarantees that the expansiveness of the country will provide no respite from the thoughts that "revolved inside the pain" of his head "like a wheel within a wheel" (15, 18). In *A Cool Million* (1934), the "All American boy" Lemuel Pitkin progresses, along the lines of the American Dream, from a small town, to big cities, to the wide West in search of Opportunity. As in *Dream Life* and *Lonelyhearts*, though, any expansion of geography made available to our boy-hero ends up working against his idealistic hopes of finding wealth, health, or happiness in the land he traverses. If nature at first appears to have the capacity to assuage both aesthetic and monetary concerns, it is ultimately bankrupt of the morally redeeming qualities West imagined in *Return to the Soil* or Roosevelt envisioned for his CCC.

As with George Washington Gómez in Américo Paredes' novel, a nature that might seem to play an aesthetically pleasing, socially accommodating, or imaginatively inspiring role for the misfit can easily turn into an inhospitable environment. But whereas Paredes pictures Guálinto's banana grove turned "sea of mud" as hastening his departure from his land, his culture, and his imagination, West continued in his attempts to engage with nature in his life and literature. Although the experience of the damned dam was lighthearted enough that Perelman affectionately named the project "[West's]

folly,” Josephine Herbst suggests that these kinds of petty failures point to a much larger concern for the author. Perhaps, she writes, “the mere state of the nation, deep in a depression, awoke in him the desperate struggle of one trying to escape the common fate.” That “[h]e could not summon at will the dream wilderness” that might allow him to do so “wore away some hopeful chance” (334). Although West might at times have viewed nature as offering a “place of simple order,” the disorder he and his characters often find in the spaces they turn to for answers indicates that the landscapes he perceived and created were anything but “simple.” The problematic endings in his own experiences with nature are darkly transformed in *Locust*, where the “return to the land” results not in a sudden infusion of financial freedom or ethical morality, but rather in a barbarism that sends its cast fleeing back to the city, thereby completing a circular path that leaves them with no escape from their confused world.

Having left the apparently vital but actually sterile nature scene, the novella’s characters make their way back to Hollywood proper, where their view of their surroundings is no more clear than it was before their nature trek. Instead, their spatial visions become even more blurry than before: there is no clear dividing line, as Frederick Jackson Turner would have had it, between “wilderness” and “civilization,” between “man-made” and “nature-made.” Homer’s backyard, for example, contains an odd mixture of the natural and the material, all described as carefully staged according to “foreground” and “background: a “sooty, brick incinerator and a pile of rusty cans” lie in front of “the remains of a cactus garden in which a few ragged, tortured plants still survived.” Like the plants in the canyon, the life has been removed from Homer’s cacti, one of which consists of “ugly needles” and a “bright yellow flower” whose “petals never

trembled” (89). Clearly, none of this provides Homer with the health and well-being he was sent to California to find.

A similar mix of environment and industry can be found in the landscape of the Hollywood backlots, including the “Sargasso sea of the imagination” on which past movie sets are discarded (132). The sets, flats, and props of the lot take an entire global “history of civilization” – represented by, among other things, a 30-foot-high Buddha, a Venetian barque, a Greek Temple – and compress it into a “ten-acre field.”³⁶ This spatial compression is complemented by a conflation of the natural and the material. Here in the “dream dump,” shrubs “carried, not flowers or berries, but armories of spikes, hooks and swords,” broken monuments are “half hidden by great, tortured trees whose roots writhed dramatically” in the Hollywood style, and “clumps of sunflowers and wild gum” protrude unexpectedly from piles of flats (132). Much of this imagery is naturalistic, indicating that nature holds the winning hand against the helpless humans who inhabit it and fill it with illusions. Despite the apparent conquering of the land by the Hollywood film industry and its architectural and material smorgasbords, natural elements continue to invade the space, imperturbable as the cactus flower and attention-grabbing as the “dramatic” roots. Nature is not necessarily protesting the onslaught of these discarded dreams, however, as it seems to claim ownership, even if a burdensome one, of the weaponry it “carries.” Instead, the environment seems to remind those who would settle there, and settle it, of its almost god-like presence. This alpha and omega of nature

³⁶ This scene is reminiscent of one in Huxley’s *After Many a Summer*, in which the scholar Jeremy Pordage remarks that the bricolage of Jo Stoyte’s chapel inspires a “no-track mind”: “In the columned Lady Chapel, with its hat racks and its Magnascos, its Brancusi and its Etruscan sarcophagus used as an umbrella stand, Jeremy Pordage began, all of a sudden, to feel himself more cheerful and at home. ‘It’s as though one were walking into the mind of a lunatic,’ he said smiling happily...Or, rather, an idiot,’ he qualified. ‘Because I suppose a lunatic’s a person with a one-track mind Whereas this...’ he made a circular gesture... ‘this is a no track mind. No-track because infinity-track. It’s the mind of an idiot of genius. Positively stuffed with the best that has been thought and said...every item is perfectly irrelevant to every other item” (174).

appear neatly in the “flight of baroque palace stairs that started in a bed of weeds and ended against the branches of an oak” (131).

The cast of *Locust*, then, resides at an impasse: they can turn to neither the natural nor the built environment of Hollywood for solace, clarity, or order, and, perhaps even more problematically, both are intertwined in the novel’s setting. Herbst saw this conflict play out in Nathanael West himself. Although the author was reliant on “civilization” – he “took the pose of the old-time English squire who cannot function without some ritual of living,” “his good clothes, his elegant shoes, his fine gun...his fine dog and...a new car” – he was only “steeped...in content” in the “wilderness,” when he was “wandering over the hills” (333). Despite the potential disasters nature brings – comic or tragic – it is his journeys into nature that give him “the glow of a navigator who has discovered strange ports.” Moving back and forth between the civilized “rituals of life” and “wild” journeys into nature, both West and his work move along a circular path whose entropic lack of clear order leads nowhere but paralysis.

“Too deep in scenery to flee:” Arrested Development in an Unfinished Hollywood

Far from mere background, Nathanael West believed that the elements that make up a space – whether urban buildings or rural flora, or some awkward combination of the two – shape its inhabitants. West recorded this belief in an initial galley proof for *Locust* that included an epigraph from Lewis Mumford: “From the form of a city, the style of its architecture, and the economic functions and social grouping it shelters and encourages, one can derive the essential elements of a civilization” (Martin 309). If a “civilization” is defined by advancement, development, or progress, however, the “form” of West’s settings prevent that movement. When Dorothy Parker reviewed *The Day of the Locust*

as "brilliant, savage and arresting," that final adjective was meant to describe the reader's stunned reaction to the books' brilliance. "Arrested," however, would also be an appropriate description for West's characters, who, whether "whirring merrily" or stuck in "uterine flight," ultimately fail to progress – fail, according to Roosevelt's framework, to "convert retreat to advance." In fact, *Locust*'s cast makes literal Jay Martin's observation that all of West's characters "are *caught* in their own or others' illusions" (131, italics mine). Unable to clearly see their own conflicted surroundings, they find it difficult, if not impossible to move through them.

The first twelve pages of *Locust* exhibit no small degree of spatial movement – we go from Tod's office, to his apartment, to Claude Estee's party, to Audrey Jennings' movie screening. While Tod is interested by the rapid movements of the masqueraders he observes at the outset of the novel, he is more interested by a lack of movement: the targets for his artistic work are the "loitering people of a different type" (60). According to Herbst, West had a "preoccupation" with the "gargoyles of human existence," which she labeled "the *fallen* element" (321, italics mine). This fascination might have partly been self-reflective, as West himself tended to have an unsteady demeanor. Described as "one badly-made boy" by his childhood friend Julian Shapiro, West was small for his age and apt to stumble around (Meade 10). Even as an adult and a professional writer, a pencil between his fingers "became a sixth finger hostile to the other five" (47). At Brown University, West was known for his hesitant mannerisms and slow speech, leading the dean to ask his roommate, "Does Mr. Weinstein take dope?" (54). But West's fascination with physical fallenness indicates a concern beyond his own awkward

movements. The cast of *The Day of the Locust*, whether they spin or loiter, are all “wanderers” who fall, in an endless circle, through the spaces they inhabit.

West sets the stage is for paralysis with his unfocused setting, which provides the rationale for the misdirections, stumbles, and falls of animals and inanimate objects. The novella is populated, for instance, by a lopsided chicken (155), a lizard who “occasionally miscalculate[s]” in his efforts to catch flies (89), and a sadly warbling “trapped bird” (114). Even the searchlights that announce the premier at *Locust*’s conclusion seem to have trouble finding their target: despite their constant movement, their “wide crazy sweeps” suggest a lack of direction that both mimics and perpetuates the fact that the “crowd lacked an objective” (175, 177).

Homer, the novella’s most obviously bumbling character, is often seen “moving blindly” through Hollywood (179). He is described as “sleep-walking” through his life “like a badly made automaton,” “lurch[ing]” from “one side then the other” (88, 178). Like his ambivalent physical movements, Homer’s emotions move in an “enormous wave” that never crashes, forming a “circular...flood” that generally ends in the fetal position, “like a steel spring which has been freed of its function in a machine and allowed to use all its strength centripetally” (87, 168, 171). This static energy is also evident in Homer’s previous employment in a hotel, where he latched on to the comforting permanence of its “warm, rich darkness” (84, 171). While he insists that this space was more like a womb than a “grave,” his “rigid” gestures and movements suggest not so much the possibilities of birth as the inertia of death. Indeed, Tod comments, “If anyone ever lacked malleability Homer did” (178, 136). Even when Homer cries, his tears are “repeated rhythmically but without accent,” achieving “no progress” (167). Just

as he does not “bend... his head” to accommodate his emotions, Homer fails to move his deck chair just a quarter circle, which would give him a view of the canyon rather than the incinerator. Homer’s paralysis is so complete that West describes him at the conclusion as a “stone column” (181).

By contrast, Faye’s uncertain perspective on her surroundings leads her to an excess of movement – but this turns out to be no more conducive to progress than Homer’s absence of movement. Where Homer regards his hands as “a pair of strange aquatic animals” largely out of his control, Faye gesticulates without end, and without meaning. Her movements do not match her words, a contradiction the narrator speculates is designed to “excite her hearers into being uncritical” of the “foolish” nature of her speech (159). Faye’s larger movements are also confused: when she dances with Earle, the couple succeeds only in “stumbling all over the room, bumping into the walls and furniture.” Faye’s reaction is to “laugh...wildly” at the chaos (163). Like the “merrily whirring” projector of Mrs. Jennings’s smut film, Faye seems imperturbable, like a “cork” that can “spin gaily away” even in the roughest of seas (173). Rather than acknowledge the lack of order in her world and hide from it, circling in on herself, as Homer tends to do, Faye revels in the bedlam (173). Even in Tod’s vision of his painting, Faye appears placid in the face of disaster: despite the fact that “her body is straining to hurl her along at top speed” in “complete, unthinking panic,” she has a “dreamy repose” on her face (108). Faye’s ability to “spin away gaily,” however, can easily switch gears into a death spiral. The line between revelry and disaster is a fine one, and, as Tod points out, Faye’s illusions can serve as traps: she “seemed always to be struggling” in the “soft grasp” of her “little daydreams,” “as though she were trying to run in a swamp” (107).

Similarly, Harry's salesman's performance proves problematic when he is unable to control his own marketing moves. Like a "mechanical toy that had been overwound," he "began to spin through his entire repertoire" in "the dance of a paralytic" (92). Crossing the line that separates the actor from his act, he simply "couldn't stop," and finds himself compelled to go through the motions in "one dizzy spasm" before he "reeled to the couch and collapsed" (91-92). Tod, looking over Harry as he rests, remarks that the old man's "worn, dry skin looked like eroded ground," with even the "few beads of sweat" on his face promising not so much "relief" or refreshment, but "rot" (121).³⁷ Drained of vitality despite California's mythical promise to restore health, Harry's spiral, like that of the unfocused projection machine, only gets him "stuck." His performance, put on an endless rotation that loses sight of its own illusive quality, renders him immobile. At the end of the act, he "had to lean against the table for support;" Faye and Homer must help him to the car (101).

Although we might think that Tod's relative surplus of critical sense would free him from the paralysis to which his comrades succumb, he too is prone to stasis. From the outset, the narrator tells us, Tod "wanted to move, but inertia and the fact that he didn't know where to go kept him" from doing so (62-63). In stark contrast to Mark Twain's giddy, forward-looking question, "What's next?," Tod's insecure immobility points to his era's perception of enclosure in geographical, professional, and financial terms. In addition to Tod's own circumscribed vision prohibiting his motion, others' insecure vision also contributes to his paralysis: since Faye "put love on a special plane,

³⁷ West's use of agricultural metaphor to characterize human well-being is a sarcastic commentary on the western promise of intimate connection between person and place, an idea that originated with Jefferson's yeoman farmer and carried through to the marketing of California as a land that would rejuvenate the health of its visitors and residents. Harry's act, of course, defies such a promise – the rain certainly does not follow the proverbial plow in his case.

where a man without money or looks couldn't move," Tod is always already excluded from any potential movements in her world (67). When our protagonist does endeavor to move, his footing is uncertain and his direction unclear. In the desert, for example, "the stones and sand" that "moved under his feet" lead him to "f[a]ll prone" (117). Later, in the mob that brings the novella to its violent end, Tod finds himself surfing the crowd: he is "carried rapidly in one direction and then the opposite. He kept pushing and hitting out at the people around him, trying to face in the direction he was going" (181). He is "terrified" by "[b]eing carried backward," but it "not being able to touch" the ground that proves to be the "more dreadful sensation." Having literally lost contact with the earth, Tod has no sense of stability or order, and therefore no sense of possible productive agency.

Back on the set of *Waterloo*, a whole other cast of characters loses ground. If the historical Roman Emperor failed to see the ditch that would trap his cavalry, the present movie director fails to see that the set's artificial Mont St. Jean was "unfinished...still being worked on by property men, grips and carpenters" (134). When the director orders "Millhaud's cuirassiers" to charge the giant hill for the film, it collapses, leaving the armies "too deep in scenery to flee" (135). The incompleteness of the set, combined with the excess of materials used to construct it, leaves the actors with no solid ground on which or toward which to "charge," thus leaving the dreams of both the movie's producers and audience unfulfilled. The unfinished vision of Mont St. Jean results in humans being literally incapacitated by their landscape.

X Marks the “Dead Spot”: The Performance of Violence as a Destruction of Agency

Isaac Rosenfeld has written that West’s work “showed the death of everything *with* the walls tumbling down”, but I reverse his emphasis to argue that the “walls tumbling down” is not so much *in conjunction with* “the death of everything” but rather *a cause of* such destruction (111, italics mine). Whereas the mysteries of the land inspired Cather’s narrator to investigate and solve its puzzle, the landscape’s lack of clarity in *The Day of the Locust* does not motivate investigation or hope, but rather is comprehensible only through the rhetoric of Tod’s “painters of Mystery and Decay” (132). Despite Hollywood’s conception as a neutral stage for imaginative production, its spatial confusion produces instead a path to imaginative destruction. In other words, unclear visions of uncertain spaces engender a stumbling that frustrates West’s characters into lashing out violently against their arrest. Josphine Herbst was rather appalled by the violence that proceeds from the distress of West’s characters. “When one read what he wrote,” she said, “one stood on the brink of a new Ice Age” (335). When the conflict between fantasy and reality, between the rural and the urban, and between morality and monetization finally becomes apparent, Tod notes, the only recourse is violence: “The Angelenos would be first” to set their city on fire, “but their comrades all over the country would follow. There would be civil war” (118). Based on West’s unfocused construction 1930s Hollywood, which he represents through his characters’ unfocused perception of its spaces, the movements of *Locust*’s cast of characters are hindered. Reduced to falling through their lives, their failure to progress or “advance,” West suggests, incites a desperation that only results in destruction.

Instruments of violence appear in the background throughout *Locust*, which West uses to underline the extent to which the aura of destruction has saturated the landscape. When the electric organ plays Bach's "Come Redeemer, Our Saviour" at Harry's funeral, for instance, it moves from "polite...supplication" to "a hint of a threat" (129). Hodge's saddlery store also peddles in violence with its "large collection of torture instruments," including "fancy, braided quirts, spurs with great spiked wheels, and double bits that looked as though they could break a horse's jaw without trouble" (108). Finally, the main feature of Homer's backyard seems to be its incinerator, which would supposedly be used for burning garden waste, if a garden existed. Instead, the most prevalent tree in the novella, appearing on six separate occasions, is the eucalyptus, a plant whose leaves "contain oils that can actually fuel an intense fire," but whose "thick bark protects its core from damage" (Levine). Even if Homer were to fire up his incinerator, then, much of Hollywood's landscape would prove impermeable. The idea that the spaces which restrict them are not malleable only further frustrates *Locust's* cast, leading them to lash out with yet more violence.

There are two main scenes of violence in *The Day of the Locust*, the first at the end of the characters' trek into the desert, and the second at the novella's apocalyptic concluding movie premier. In the desert scene, the brokenness of the cast's expectations for order and progress is symbolized by a break in the rhythm of Mig's campfire song: when its "beat became ragged," chaos ensues. When Faye flirts with Mig, Earle clobbers the interloper with firewood. Faye, whom West has heretofore described as imperturbable – "spinning gaily" within the era's disorder – makes a linear beeline, running from the violence of the disintegrating stage of the desert. This decisive

movement, interestingly, is not based on any physical vision of the scene: Faye's back is to Mig when Earle's blow falls, and she "didn't turn to look" before taking off. West indicates that she refuses to see the disarray of a reality that does not match up with her pre-fabricated, happily-ever-after dreams. Thus, although Faye appears to have acquired agency in this scene, her movements fail to engage in, much less confront, the confusions that have produced such barbarity. In fleeing a violent scene she herself elicited, Faye's movements work only to maintain her illusive vision of her world as flat and romantic, requiring only superficial gestures rather than authentic, consequential actions.

If West presents Faye as the object of violence at the end of *Locust*, he constructs Homer as an agent of destruction. Unsure of himself and his surroundings throughout the novella, Homer at the conclusion finally breaks out of his sleep-walking death in life by taking out his own insecurities on the easiest of targets: Adore, a child who himself occupies an uncertain place in the world. In the midst of the final mob scene, Homer tramples to death the child, who has played a trick on him (181). Like Faye's escape from violence, Homer's enactment of brutality represents not a change in his understanding of or role in 1930s Hollywood, but rather a preservation of paralysis within that space. In killing Adore, whose mannish childhood complements Homer's childish manhood, Homer has destroyed a version of himself. If Homer was "always afraid he would never get up" after falling asleep (82), he guarantees that Adore never will rise to a coherent world. In short, Homer has gotten revenge on those who dare to progress precisely by precluding any possibility of movement.

Finally, West uses Tod to symbolize both sides of the novella's violence. He acts as both perpetrator and victim, but neither role resolves his confused perception of the

spaces in which he is stuck and which he lashes out against. Tod is compelled to destruction by both the buried struggle for order he sees in Faye and the bald struggle for order he sees in Homer. For Tod, Homer's "servility was like that of a cringing, clumsy dog, who is always anticipating a blow, welcoming it even, and in a way that makes overwhelming the desire to strike him" (143). Tod has a similar desire to attack Faye. When he sees her flee the desert scene, he perceives her not as a victim to rescue, as Faye would have it in her dream deck, but rather as prey to further victimize. He uses his imagination here not to envision potential lines of professional fulfillment, as Twain might; or to dream up possible agricultural fruition, as Cather might; or even to imagine cultural justice, as Paredes attempts to. Instead, Tod imagines "how it would be when he pulled her to the ground" (117). This desire to prevent another's movement continues when Tod returns to the city, whose proprietary notions of civility appear to hold back, at least for the meantime, his inclinations toward violence. In fact, though, it is precisely this superficial civility that impels Tod to consider brutality: Faye's "self-sufficient" nature gives Tod "the desire to break" her "smooth surface with a blow" (141). When he begins to see through her "morbid apathy," he does not want "to aid her to get free" (107). Instead, he wants "to throw her down in the soft, warm mud and keep her there." "Nothing less violent than rape would do," he decides later (141). In addition to perpetrating violence, however, Tod also endures it. Trapped in the angry crowd of the movie premier with no sense of direction and no way to plant his feet solidly on the ground, we see Tod "turned again and again," circling "like a grain between" the "millstones" of the audience's confused visions and desires. Every so often, he escapes the crush of the crowd when he comes upon isolated spaces of neutrality, which he calls

“dead spots” (182). If Tod’s topsy-turvy journey, representative of a much larger search for order and grounding, ends in a missing sense of agency, it ultimately ends in a missing sense of life – in short, it ends in death. Able to find a sense of stability neither within nor between the spaces of city and the country, West’s characters are ultimately able neither to dream nor to move, thus prompting their fury.

Conclusion

Throughout *The Day of the Locust*, West describes the dreams of his characters not so much as inspiring as “troubling” (132). As Tod explains, any dream is both pernicious and expendable: A dream “troubles some unfortunate person, and some day, when that person has been sufficiently troubled, it will be reproduced on the lot.” After being commoditized – “made photographic by plaster, canvas, lath and paint,” and being staged for the audiences of Hollywood desperate to see their dreams realized – it gets thrown in the “dream dump,” the “Sargasso of the imagination” (132). Like the spot in the North Atlantic Ocean whose surrounding currents gather marine plants and garbage into a giant floating morass of detritus, the Hollywood Sargasso is created by the cultural currents of the 1930s that have collected ideas and ideals that conflict with the realities of the Depression era to the extent that they are deemed trash. Nonetheless, the dream never “entirely disappears,” continuing to nag at both its producers and its consumers despite their inability to move to reach it. At the novella’s conclusion, then, the premier of a new movie – a dream that has troubled someone for some time – proves only a catalyst for violence, and eventually death.

Ultimately, West suggests, the combination of disorder, faulty vision, and immobility incite the desire to destroy. The dreams of *Locust*’s cast – Homer’s for

companionship, Faye's for fame and romance, and Tod's for artistic recognition – have failed, undercut by the uncertainties of the Depression era and the confusion of the rural and urban spaces of Hollywood. These individual dreams are representative of more general expectations that have also been broken in *Locust*, including the assumption that California might live up to its mythical promises of restoring health and wealth, that work results in social mobility and happiness, and that nature might provide for aesthetic, economic, or moral redemption. The unraveling of these illusions, which the characters begin to see plainly as such for the first time toward the end of the novella, elicits barbarity. Although this violence sparks an accurate vision of reality, West shows his characters resistance to confronting it. Accustomed to performance rather than authentic action,³⁸ the idea of real agency is confused and overwhelming. Their movements are thus too panicked, too cynical,³⁹ and come too late to stitch together a map that would accommodate them.

The violence carried out by individuals and reflected in their backgrounds builds throughout the novella into an overpowering frustration that ends in mass chaos. Although the 37th U.S. Congress succeeded in overcoming the myth of the deadly desert by legislating into being the myth of the life-giving garden through the Homestead Act of 1862 (Smith Ch. XVI), and although that myth continued (and continues) to hold a large degree of power (“Why, it’s a paradise on earth!” exclaims Mrs. Loomis), the opposing

³⁸ Both Jonathan Veitch and James Goodwin have pointed out that some members of the cast of *Locust* seem to be at their most “authentic” when they’re performing, as with the female impersonator at the Cinderella Bar who becomes awkward only *after* his act ends (West 146, Veitch 117, Goodwin 91). Similarly, Homer is impressed with how Faye’s feigned mannerisms express a very real sense of “vitality” (94).

³⁹ As Chip Rhodes argues, a character who embraces illusions “cynically recognizes the fictiveness of *all* belief systems but chooses to participate in mass culture anyway” (31).

myth clearly rears its ugly head in *Locust*. By presenting these competing myths, along with all their attendant sub-myths of social and economic well-being, West produces an unclear vision of the territory for those who inhabit its spaces, residents who generally “looked very much out of place” (127). They are quite literally misfits, in that they fail to merge with their surroundings. Fighting to literally gain ground on which they can steady their balance, their sight, and their imaginations, the assembled crowd at the theater lashes out, “savage and bitter,” at the realization that “sunshine isn’t enough” (178). Just as the battle of Waterloo, recreated on the Hollywood set of *Locust*, signaled the end of the Napoleonic empire, the mob in front of Khan’s Persian Palace theatre at the conclusion of the novella signals the end – both of the illusion of any coherent version of the American West, and the of the promise of that space.

In pursuit of their dreams, the cast of *Locust* has looked for signs, becoming perpetual “wave, airplane, funeral, and preview watchers” (184). Tod, fascinated from the beginning by “the people who stared,” has been staring back, simultaneously collecting their incoherent visions and adding his own. When they riot, Tod is there, again, to watch the outcome – except he gets caught up in it himself. Just as his fall in the desert in pursuit of one violent episode – the rape of Faye – precipitated his another – his vision of his masterpiece, “The Burning of Los Angeles” – his fall in this city crowd incites him to “think clearly about his picture” (184). At once joining in, recording, and imagining the chaos of the riot, Tod joins the various “cultists” who have signed on for economic or religious hopes that never come to light. They are “stirred by the promise of miracles,” but when “nothing happens,” they turn into “torchbearers” (177). Ultimately, West suggests, the fires they set seek to destroy the illusions that have produced a

disordered sense of the spaces of the West. Indeed, according to Tod's painting, the mob sets out to "purify the land" (184).

Jonathan Veitch has argued that the stage roles that become social roles for the characters in *Locust* "offer protection, but do so at a cost of a derealizing relationship to the world" (117). While I agree that the way West's characters cast themselves on the stage of Hollywood inhibits their connection to their surroundings, I would argue that West constructs their misunderstanding of the stage itself – rather than, or before, their roles on it – as a foundation that sets them up for apocalyptic disaster. Although Josephine Herbst wanted to tell a shaky Nathanael West to gratefully embrace his own life in spite of the uncertainty of his own setting, *The Day of the Locust* implies that the fact that "you *live*" is ultimately precluded by the "quaking" of an unstable "world" (Herbst 328). For West, any "reconciliation scheme" (Herbst 341) between person and place must, if one wishes not to find himself imagining his own voice as an ambulance siren, involve a careful negotiation. West thus navigated the Depression between two extremes of expression: his film scripts, which he wrote out of the "imagination of fulfillment," and his novels, which he wrote out of "the imagination of personal and collective disaster" (Martin 206).

The geographical incapacitation that marks West's novella is representative of *Locust*'s larger point: that a disordered landscape, and an uncritical, discoordinated view of that space, precludes the motions that would enable any contribution to personal or national progress. Such authentic, productive movement would require, as Jonathan Lethem suggests, a negotiation between the "imperatives...of the body" to move coherently and the "commoditized rhetorics" that negate such movements. I have argued

that these rhetorics originate in large part from the unclear boundaries between the novella's natural and the built environments, a blur underlined in *Locust* by characters' lack of focus on either the city or country spaces they inhabit. The aim of the negotiation between character and place, in all of West's works, is to "locat[e] an intimate ground of operation from which an authentic loving gesture might effectively be launched" (Lethem 394). But because this ground is not grounded in any clear vision, whether realistic or fantastic, it proves an unsteady base from which characters might place themselves effectively on its stage.

CHAPTER 5

THE DELIBERATIVE IMAGINATION IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *EAST OF EDEN*: THE MENTALITY OF FREE WILL IN THE SALINAS VALLEY

In the *Saturday Review*, Harvey Curtis Webster declared of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952) that "...it is to be doubted if any American novel has better chronicled our last hundred years, our trek from East to West to discover an Eden that always somehow escapes us and that we as a people yet continue to hope for and believe in" (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 386). As Chapters 3 and 4 showed, authors like Nathanael West and Américo Paredes portrayed paradise as beyond hope, if not entirely lost. From West's *The Day of the Locust* to Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," many writers were depicting this period of cultural change and confusion as inducing people, quite literally, to scream.¹ Meanwhile, Ernest Hemingway – often referred to as a "heavier" version of Steinbeck – didn't so much lash out at the issues of the 1930s and 40s as face them with an "exhausted stoicism" (Heavilin 95). By mid-century, following both the Great Depression and the Second World War, such pessimism had only grown. As Henry Miller wrote in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), the challenges America was facing could no longer be papered over by a "vener of fatuous optimism," which was "now decidedly cracked," bringing into plain sight "[t]he lack of resilience, the feeling of hopelessness, the skepticism, the defeatism" (13). Indeed, Miller was so cynical about

¹ For Ginsberg, the "howl" comes from "the best minds of [his] generation" who "shrieked with delight in policecars for /committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and / intoxication." For West, it comes from Tod Hackett, who crazily imitates a (ambulance or police car?) siren during the novella's final apocalyptic scene.

“the dreams and visions of great Americans” that he regretted “the misfortune” of having once been “nourished by” them. In the 1950s, then, writers were actively hostile to idealized specters of progress, which Miller bluntly qualified as “a false progress, a progress which stinks” (24). At the very least, most mid-century writers were self-consciously wary of such dreamy notions.

Not John Steinbeck. While authors like Miller and Hemingway were busy critiquing the unreality of “dreams and visions,” Steinbeck reserved his criticism for those who would be so careless as to leave those ideals behind. As he reacquainted himself with the nation in *Travels with Charley* (1957), he was mortified to realize that “strong opinions were just not stated,” due “partly [to] caution” and “partly [to] a lack of interest” (109). Americans’ “mental fare,” he remarked, had thus become “generalized,” “packaged,” and “undistinguished.” William S. Burroughs noted a similar phenomenon, writing in *Queer*² of conformity and ambivalence as a “debilitating affliction” that tended to “water down the revolutionary spirit” (106). Soon, he grumbled, “the people won't have any opinions” (106). This absence of American opinion, the hesitancy to define and claim one’s values, Steinbeck suggests, was eroding the capacity of Americans to reach for those beliefs through dreams, much less enact those dreams. By failing to think about what they wanted out of themselves and out of their environment, they neglect the gift of free will. Steinbeck’s 1952 novel *East of Eden* represents his protest against such neglect. In this novel, the author picks up the western imagination, dusts it off, and re-hashes its history in order to re-formulate its neglected potential. In doing so, Steinbeck marks the second turning point in this dissertation: the return of the western imagination portrayed as an object acted upon by outside forces to one pictured as a subject seeking agency in

² Written between 1951 and '53, but not published until 1985.

western space. Steinbeck thus engineers what I am calling the deliberative imagination, which carefully perceives all the elements of a landscape, thoughtfully weighs their meaning and potential, and chooses how to act on its findings in the real world.

Steinbeck's belief in the "perfectibility" of humans – in their capacity to transcend the imperfections of their time and place – was fostered by the tumult that characterized both his cultural milieu and his personal life – in the 40s, the author had divorced his first two wives, lost his best friend, and disappointed his critics (Heavilin 95). He sensed an impending rebirth: "I have too a conviction that a new world is growing under the old," Steinbeck exclaimed in a 1939 letter to Dook Sheffield, "the way a new fingernail grows under a bruised one" (qtd. in Parini 291). This conviction grew following the end of WWII, when General Douglas MacArthur declared that "A new era is upon us" (qtd. in Parini 356). Adding to Steinbeck's sense of newness was the birth of his two sons, Thom and John IV, born in 1944 and 1946, respectively. By the time he began to write *East of Eden* in 1951, writes Jeffrey Schultz, he was attempting "to regain his equilibrium through the therapeutic task of writing a novel about his origins in the Salinas Valley, California (62). By mid-century, the author had developed a keen sense of the kind of writing he wanted to do, and why. In *Journal of a Novel*, the author cemented his notion that writing should serve as a "beacon" in the midst of – or perhaps even as a solution for – a fallen world. He writes,

It is the fashion now in writing to have every man defeated and destroyed. And I do not believe all men are destroyed... The writers of today, even I, have a tendency to celebrate the destruction of the spirit and god knows it is destroyed often enough. But the beacon thing is that sometimes it is not... It is the duty of the writer to lift up, to extend, to encourage... Great writing has been a staff to lean on, a mother to consult, a wisdom to pick up stumbling folly, a strength in weakness and a courage to support sick cowardice...

In *East of Eden*, then, Steinbeck wants to convey that things are not nearly so bad as they might seem – that the “beacon” is not so distant after all: “...although East of Eden is not Eden,” he suggests, “it is not insuperably far away” (*Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* 116). Aware, then, of both a scrambled world order and glimpses of hope, the author sought a reconciliation of these opposing forces. As Parini remarks, Steinbeck had a “mind that naturally wants to scry the world’s random dots and discover a pattern” (508). As an “instinctive shaper of reality,” Steinbeck believed he could write a book that would do just that, depicting the imagination as a deliberative faculty that chooses how to perceive and think about the western landscape and how to move through it accordingly.

Steinbeck’s portrayal of the deliberative imagination is indebted to Frederick Jackson Turner’s notion of American character as energetic and eager to improve. Exactly sixty years before *East of Eden* was published, the western historian claimed that the American qualities of perseverance and inventiveness were forged in the wilds of the West. Following WWII, Steinbeck found hope in this idea of dedication to perpetual improvement: “We have never sat still for long, we have never been content with a place,” Steinbeck writes in *Travels with Charley*. More importantly, he continues, we have never been content “with ourselves” (143). Unlike Nathanael West, who pictures his cast stumbling across a Hollywood desert that fosters only disillusionment, Steinbeck in *East of Eden* creates characters with a profound awareness of self and space that helps them to *choose* how to imagine their landscape and their next moves across it. It is not despite, but rather because of the uncertainty and confusion of their environment – the “many colored dots that make up darkness” (379) – that they act decisively and

pragmatically, using “all the cards in the deck” (262). And it is through these deliberative characters that Steinbeck asserts the importance of imaginative free will in the West.

Ultimately, this chapter points to a reevaluation of the imagination, which, in the 1930s, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4 on Américo Paredes and Nathanael West, seemed to lead to enemy camps or dead ends, respectively. Starting in the early 1950s, as Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* illustrates, the geographical imagination begins to be explored again as a conduit for hope rather than despair, for direction rather than circularity, and for openness rather than confinement. Unlike the majority of scholars, who have located the “fall” of the western imagination everywhere from 1890 to the 1930s, I argue that the western imagination begins to make a resurgence in the 1950s, and that Steinbeck represents a starting point for this incline.

Three Phases of Environmental Vision

In a 1964 letter to Pat Covici, Steinbeck lamented, “I consider the body of my work and I do not find it good...There may be a few nuggets overlooked but the territory has been pretty thoroughly assayed” (Steinbeck and Wallsten 802). Despite this dark perspective on his career,³ Steinbeck’s comparison of his oeuvre to a geographical area plumbed to its depth is telling. Indeed, from his first work to his last, Steinbeck’s writing was thoroughly embedded in its setting. Over the course of his career, the author’s perspective on these landscapes went through three phases: an idealized view, a naturalistic one, and, finally, a “knitted” balance of the two. This development is based not on changes in the land itself, but rather on changes in Steinbeck’s philosophies about

³ Steinbeck’s insecurity about his work is especially odd at this time given that he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964.

reality, perception, and imagination.

The first phase of Steinbeck's environmental vision is an idealistic one. His debut novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), already shows signs of the budding author's facility with the portrayal of ideal landscapes. As Parini points out, Steinbeck's atmospheric descriptions of the Caribbean ocean are "lush but evocative" (108). The romanticism with which Steinbeck envisioned the tropics would remain a core perspective for the author throughout his life, but its hegemony did not last long. In *Dissonant Symphony*, a set of unpublished stories written in 1930,⁴ the relationship between region and resident grew more complicated. Rather than looking at human agency against a natural backdrop, as he had in his first novel, *Symphony* began to explore how nature might in fact control human outcomes (Parini 122). *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), a short story cycle, furthered this exploration, presenting an Edenic landscape that was susceptible to being ruined by as well as capable of ruining its inhabitants.⁵ At the same time, the stories in *Pastures* are full of garden metaphors that represent Steinbeck's debt to his marine biologist friend Ed Ricketts' notions of a universal organic whole, in which mind and environment are allied. But despite the tension between romanticism and naturalism, according to Parini, the former takes precedence, as the "aura of place" here is "almost too idealized to be real" (163).

The second phase I identify is a fully naturalistic one, which straddles Joseph R. McElrath's layout of Steinbeck's apprenticeship and protest phases. This phase begins with *To a God Unknown* (1933), a novel influenced by the primitive vegetation myths of

⁴ In a letter to Mavis McIntosh Montrose in January 1933, "I certainly do not want that mess published under any circumstances, revised or not."

⁵ As in *The Day of the Locust*, weeds are particularly threatening in *The Pastures of Heaven*, growing "as large as small trees," "with a holiday energy, free of fear of the hoe" (6).

James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Parini 181). *To a God Unknown* charts the protagonist's almost pagan connection to his California valley, a connection based not on thoughts "in his mind, but in his chest and in the corded muscles of his legs" (24). Incorporating the Jungian concept of racial memory (taught to Steinbeck by mythologist Joseph Campbell), Steinbeck was locating himself squarely in the camp of naturalism, where human will has little effect on the larger powers that be. "The duty of keeping life in my land is beyond my power," cries Joseph (*To a God Unknown* 144). This lack of control continues to characterize Steinbeck's art through the late 1930s, but these works also testify to the author's growing humanism. The stories of *The Long Valley* (1938), for example, generally portray unhappy couples who "seem forcibly tied to the land rather than rooted in some organic sense" (Parini 259). "The White Quail" bears out this theory. Here, Mary Teller identifies "the world that wants to get in" to her garden, "all rough and tangled and unkempt," as "the enemy," yet her regulations of a chaotic habitat cost her the human companionship of her husband (*The Long Valley* 18). But we can see signals of Steinbeck's difficult negotiation between a nature red in tooth and claw and an environment amenable to human will in "The Chrysanthemums," in which Elisa Allen's broken heart is healed by her appreciation of nature's cycles of death and rebirth (Hadella 61). Similarly, *The Grapes of Wrath* maintains a naturalist bent but begins to hint at human agency against the tripartite monster of the bank, the machine, and the corporation. On the one hand, Steinbeck's Big Book embraces non-teleological thinking, recording "history as it happened" and concluding without a clear resolution (Wrobel 331). On the other hand, the small gesture of generosity in *Grapes'* final scene points to the potential of human choice to better a seemingly unmanageable world.

It was only after the success of *The Grapes of Wrath* that Steinbeck entered his third phase, which I label the “knitted” period. This era saw the author experimenting with a broad array of genres, and left his critics longing for him to recreate the protest literature they had come to expect from him. But having divorced his politically oriented wife, Carol,⁶ the author was not as attuned to that arena as he had been. Apparently, it took removing himself from the details of strikes and the anger at individual helplessness against the forces of both nature and capitalism that propelled Steinbeck to develop a more humanistic philosophy. Unlike critics like McElrath, who have concentrated on the author’s aesthetic innovations in this “virtuoso” phase, I focus on the ways in which Steinbeck’s later writing served as a playing field on which all the belief systems and geographical landscapes he had encountered up to this point could mingle. *The Sea of Cortez* (1941), *Travels with Charley* (1957), *The Winter of our Discontent* (1961), and *America and Americans* (1966) all demonstrate Steinbeck’s continued commitment to the investigation of nature. But in these works, unlike in his first, idealized phase, the author portrays the landscape as containing both pastoral and dystopic elements. And in contrast to his second, naturalistic phase, Steinbeck in his third phase treats the good and the evil in his settings as both necessary and manageable by his characters. Ultimately, Steinbeck’s later writing proposes that geographical exploration must be driven by a human perspective that deliberately processes the all elements of the landscape in order to decide how to see them – and how to move among them.

⁶ Steinbeck met Carol Henning in a hatchery in Lake Tahoe. They married in 1930 and divorced in 1943. The divorce was the product of Carol’s affair with Joseph Campbell and, later, of Steinbeck forcing Carol to get an abortion, since he believed a baby would interrupt his work. The abortion resulted in an infection, which led to a hysterectomy (Parini 155-57, 277). The couple became friendly again later, even traveling together (283).

East of Eden, a fictional novel written in the midst of this two-decade span of mostly non-fiction work at the end of Steinbeck's life, fits into this third phase, and enacts the author's careful exploration of the relationship between self and space. Indeed, his wife Elaine admitted that Steinbeck's "life was different after *East of Eden*," precisely because he felt he had found a meaningful way to connect all the themes and philosophies he had been developing since he began writing (qtd. in Parini 426). Although Mark Schorer, in his review of the novel for the *New York Times*, lamented the apparent vacillation of Steinbeck's "method" of "poetic hesitation and indecision," I argue that what appears to be equivocation is actually a concerted effort to accurately represent what the author sees as the "delicate balance" of the world (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 392; *East of Eden* 462). Steinbeck's view of his work necessitated a negotiation between wide and narrow lenses. Responding to Pat Covici about an early criticism of *East of Eden* that the novel should "get on with the story and not stop for comment," he wrote, "...it is necessary to look at the whole thing now and then" even if that big picture can seem mysterious or overwhelming. Comparing the appropriate balance to "swimming with your head down or up," Steinbeck explains, "[i]t cuts your speed to raise your head but at least you know where you are going" (*Journal* 65). The geographical imagination in *East of Eden* is thus born of a deliberate mixture that takes into account both humanistic and naturalistic viewpoints.

Unlike the unsteady visions of Nathanael West's Hollywood, which led characters to stumble through their world, or the constricted images of Paredes' borderlands, which resulted in narrowly prescribed, self-defeating roles, Steinbeck's careful construction of his characters' dual focal points in *East of Eden* suggests a mid-century need for a sense

of balance and steadiness following the economic and political upheavals of the 1930s and 40s. In *Journal of a Novel*, Steinbeck presents this balanced form of writing as a kind of playful, haphazard “knitting” project that combines multiple considerations (56, 111). The author was fascinated by how the pieces of his world were put together, building his own adjustable writing desk, for instance, or obsessing over how certain types of lead or wood make the best pencils. Though he never actually knit anything, his experience with and interest in the intricate details of everything from carpentry to aviation suggests that the apparently offhand reference to “knitting” together his stories is reflective of a real concern for precise construction and tight pattern. Despite *East of Eden* being “about everything,” Steinbeck wrote in his *Journal*, “... I do want everything to be in balance... so it must rock like a star” (99). It is precisely this carefully considered admixture of perspectives that allows Steinbeck to move the western imagination beyond the constricted, static views of the 1930s and 1940s, of political war and economic depression, toward the perspective of the beacon that is nonetheless within reach. By aesthetically and philosophically knitting together a wide array of apparently contradictory concepts – naturalism and humanism, good and evil, and the mystical and the scientific – Steinbeck represents the imagination as a faculty made precisely to deliberate amongst such concepts, finally allowing for visions of the landscape as amenable to free will.

East of Eden begins by introducing the Hamiltons, a thinly veiled version of the author’s own ancestors, whose beloved patriarch, Samuel, sires a lively brood on his ranch at the edge of the Salinas Valley, beginning in the mid-19th century. At the same time, on the other side of the country, the domineering Civil War veteran Cyrus Trask

lives on a farm in Connecticut with his sons, the delicate, sensitive Adam and the athletic, vengeful Charles. When Cyrus rejects a birthday gift from Charles in favor of one from Adam, Charles attempts to kill his brother. Seeing that Adam is weak, Cyrus forces him to join the Army. When Adam returns to Connecticut, he falls in love with and marries the secretly evil Cathy. Cyrus dies, leaving his sons a huge inheritance. Adam uses his half to move to California with Cathy. The separate stories of the Trasks and Hamiltons merge in Part II, when Adam buys a farm on the advice of Samuel Hamilton. After Cathy bears twins, Aron and Caleb, she shoots Adam in the shoulder and abandons the household, renaming herself “Kate” and setting up shop as a sadomasochistic madam in town. Adam falls into a deep depression, leaving his Chinese servant Lee to raise his sons, who are told their mother has died. Part III traces the growth of the children. Aron and Caleb Trask grow up to be opposites, Aron angelic, cautious, and popular, and Cal arrogant, daring, and tricky. They both hear rumors of their mother’s business, but Aron refuses to believe them while Cal investigates to confirm their truth. Following Samuel’s funeral, Adam Trask visits Kate, where she suggests that his brother Charles might actually be the father of his children. In Part IV, the Trasks move to Salinas. Aron begins a romantic relationship with Abra. When he leaves to attend Stanford, Abra develops feelings for Cal. Meanwhile, Adam starts a refrigeration business and loses his money. Attempting to win his father’s love, Cal embarks on his own business venture to replace his father’s lost investment. In a replay of the prior generation’s birthday competition, Adam rejects Cal’s gift, and Cal seeks revenge by taking the innocent Aron to see Kate. Horrified at his own origins, Aron runs away to join the Army. Kate commits suicide. When Aron dies in combat, Adam has a stroke. A profoundly guilty

Cal seeks Adam's forgiveness; with Lee's help, Adam, on his death bed, grants Cal the free will to overcome the evil in his character and in his world.

East of Eden is a carefully balanced book, dividing itself between two families, two regions, multiple eras, and a conception of the world as simultaneously good and evil. Steinbeck's chapters alternate between narrating the stories of the Trasks and the Hamiltons. The book also balances its generations by repeating the situations of the Trask patriarch in his progeny. The point Steinbeck wants to make, however, is that there exists a possibility, or even a duty, of the next generation to block this cycle of destructive repetition by recognizing the existence of options, and choosing a new path. In portraying the perceptive, deliberative imagination of the landscape as crucial to finding and taking a higher road, Steinbeck himself chooses a new course for the western imagination in mid-century America.

Darkness and Light in the Landscapes of *East of Eden*

Steinbeck's novel works as a container for his complex vision both of space, which he portrays as simultaneously good and evil, and of humanity, which he pictures in subject and object positions to that landscape. The author begins by creating an environment for his novel that reflects this vision. *East of Eden* opens with the backdrop of the Galiban and Santa Lucia mountains, the former "full of sun and loveliness" and the latter "dark and brooding" (3). The simultaneity of good and evil is repeated throughout the novel, from "the church and the whorehouse" to the flowers and weeds that grow in close proximity (217-18). The Salinas community is as "well-balanced" as its environment, composed of "conservatives and radicals," as well as "dreamers and realists" (44). These seemingly opposing elements of the landscape, Steinbeck is careful

to point out, are all “different facet[s] of the same thing.”

Steinbeck explicitly connects the dark and light elements of the landscape to its residents and their work, suggesting a humanistic perspective that grants power over the environment to its inhabitants. For example, after Cal spills to his brother Aron the secret that their mother is alive and running a brothel, a huge storm lets loose (339). In addition to responding to local, individual events, Steinbeck’s landscape also reacts to occurrences on global level. For example, the years of WWI in the novel are described as “wet years”: February of 1915 is “damp, cold, and miserable,” and the winter is “long, with slow spring growth” (516, 431, 588). By contrast, when the Americans win a battle after attacking the Germans, the azaleas bloom, and “freedom” is accompanied by a “calm, contented spring” (334). In all of these instances, Steinbeck positions the landscape as the object, as secondary to, reflective of, or controlled by the humans who carry out their lives on it.

However, *East of Eden* also demonstrates how the environment can inhabit a subject position in its capacity to influence or even overwhelm its inhabitants. Indeed, when Steinbeck created the character of Adam, he wanted “to indoctrinate [him] with the flavor of the valley” (*Journal* 62). According to Eric d'Evegnée, the topographical “layers” of earth in Steinbeck’s novel – packed with shells, whale-bones, and remnants of an ancient redwood forest – “compress upon the individual” to “forge a sense of self and cohesion” (79). On the other hand, Steinbeck pictures many of his characters shutting themselves off from the complexities of their landscapes, although some do so as a rule while others retreat only on occasion. For instance, Kate builds herself a grey lean-to that is intended to shield her from a world she sees as tainted (462). Another habitually

isolated character is Aron, the son with whom Kate most identifies. He shuts himself off from the world in childhood under the branches of an enveloping willow tree, as a college student under piles of books at Stanford, and as a young adult through military service (423, 494). Retreating only periodically are Adam, who isolates himself in his house after his wife runs away, and Cal, who often wants to flee a world he sees as punishing his deeds (562, 599). Whether they hide from the world as a rule or on occasion, these characters see the landscape as hostile to their existence.

Steinbeck fuses his novel's alternating humanism and naturalism through characters who are intimately engaged with their setting, recognizing that it contains aspects of good and evil, which they can be shaped by but also that they can shape. For example, Charles Trask acknowledges that there is a dream of an ideal California, where for "miles and miles...you can't find a stone, not even a little one," but he opts for a more balanced reality: "I don't think there's any farm without something wrong with it. Out in the Middle West it's locusts, someplace else it's tornadoes. What's a few stones?" (121). The point, for Steinbeck, is to accept, analyze, and incorporate all the aspects of the landscape into one's worldview and subsequent actions. Samuel Hamilton is Steinbeck's primary representative for using recognition and curiosity about the world as a starting point for agency. Samuel never passes a stone without looking under it (267). His family settles on the margins of the valley, yet they are "firm grounded" – they understand the land as a foundation for them and their work. Meanwhile, Adam, like his gardening namesake, is determined, despite his concern that the land is "blowing away bit by bit," to "plant" his dynasty in the earth (166, 156). Indeed, just as the biblical Adam was literally of the earth, Steinbeck's Adam is described in terms of geographical solidity, as

a “rock of a man” (256). By accepting its mix of hard and soft elements, Adam builds both himself and his life on this delicately balanced landscape.

The all-encompassing philosophy of place with which Steinbeck imbues Adam and Samuel is built at least partially on the author’s personal experience of living in a wide variety of locales. Aiming to gain what Brian Railsback calls “the immeasurable view,” Steinbeck ventured through an impressive array of geographies over the course of his life (90). Far from the naturalistic advice that Grandfather Tifflin gives to his grandson in *The Long Valley*’s “Leader of the People” (1938) that “there’s no place to go” because “[e]very place is taken” (204), Steinbeck’s later thinking and writing belies a good deal of optimism about the potential of place to accommodate people. In 1949, just a few years prior to the publication of *Eden*, Steinbeck wrote, “I have homes everywhere and many I have not seen yet” (Steinbeck and Wallsten 382). The author’s residences ranged from hovels to estates, from country to city, from West to East, and from leagues under the sea to miles above the ground. There were the tiny bungalows that the author romantically associated with artistic poverty, including “the Sphincter” in Palo Alto and the “shack” on the outskirts of Los Angeles ((Parini 60-61, 122). Then there was the spiritually calming wilderness of Fallen Leaf Lake Lodge in Lake Tahoe, where Steinbeck worked in the summers of 1925 and 26 (Parini 69-71).⁷ Steinbeck had several experiences with living in cities, but even here, he was attracted to the natural geography to be found in the urban environment. When he served what he called his “tour of duty as an intellectual Bohemian” in San Francisco in 1928, he was working on what would become *To a God Unknown*, his first book set in California as well as his first effort to

⁷ These stays were punctuated by a disappointing year in New York City, where *Cup of Gold* was rejected. Steinbeck’s second residence in Tahoe was a “period of psychological... retrenchment,” a Walden-esque return to nature that would become part of a larger pattern in the author’s life (Parini 82, 84).

portray the relationship between humans and nature (Benson, *The True Adventures* 143).⁸ Just as Willa Cather hit her stride by following the advice of Sarah Orne Jewett to write about the places that had most often “leased the mind,” Steinbeck began to find his voice when he decided to write about the natural spaces of the west coast he had grown up in.⁹

Steinbeck further expanded his environmental realm by exploring not only lateral landscapes, but vertical ones, as well. Like Mark Twain, he examined both the panorama and the close-up. On the one hand, Steinbeck “always has his feet on the ground – rooted in the earth and the things of earth” (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw xii). It is in this respect that Steinbeck said of Sag Harbor, “I grow into the countryside with a lichen grip” (493). This kind of environmental rootedness also compelled Steinbeck to accept a commission from *Life* magazine to join a team investigating the Mohorovicic Discontinuity, the junction between the earth's lighter crust and its denser mantle.¹⁰ But if Steinbeck was fascinated by what was going on at the center of the earth, he was also intrigued by what was happening high above its surface. The author was soothed by vistas of all sorts, from the prospect of his fifty-acre Los Gatos ranch, to the scenery from Cannery Row of Monterey Bay, to the view from his little six-sided “lighthouse”¹¹ in Sag Harbor, to the panorama offered by his 72nd floor Manhattan apartment (Parini 490,

⁸ Although *To a God Unknown* was melodramatic and awkward, receiving little critical attention (much less of the positive variety), it served as a kind of testing ground for Steinbeck's later works dealing with the complexities he saw in the connections between of human mind and natural matter.

⁹ California was also the site of the cottage at Pacific Grove, a house on the coastline Steinbeck's sister Beth remembered as a “lucky place” for their family (qtd. in Parini 29), since it was associated with their bounce back from poverty. The children inherited this house, and Steinbeck stayed there whenever he needed to bounce back from his own problems.

¹⁰ As a member of “Project Mohole,” Steinbeck wanted not only to observe how the terrain was put together – he literally wanted to possess a piece of the earth. After geologists drilled samples of the earth's core from beneath the Pacific, 220 miles south of San Diego, Steinbeck stole a piece of the rock – only to later be presented with another piece as a gift (Morsberger 269).

¹¹ Inspired by a similar structure Mark Twain once wrote in.

Railsback 89). Steinbeck even took up flying in 1940, writing, “There's something so god damned remote and beautiful and detached about being way to hell and gone up on a little yellow leaf...not loneliness at all but just an escape into something delightful” (Steinbeck and Wallsten 209).

In addition to his own personal range of residences, Steinbeck’s engagement with place is also indebted to the environmental movement that was just beginning to take shape in the 1950s. In fact, a presidential commission released a report called *Resources for Freedom* the same year that *East of Eden* was published. The document was one of the first to warn of the United States’ “increasing dependence on foreign sources of natural resources,” arguing for “the necessity to transition to renewable energy” (“Earth Days”). Though Franklin D. Roosevelt had established the National Park Service in 1933, his executive order was based on the imperative of administrative consolidation rather than environmental concern. *Resources for Freedom* represents a new governmental acknowledgment of the need to pay attention to human uses of nature, priming the pump for Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). The incipient political recognition of the environment in the 1950s was echoed in pop culture around the same time. Spurred by the Dust Bowl, against what Steinbeck, channeling Prufrock, would call the “yellow smoke of progress” (*Travels* 181), many artists took up the cause of environmentalism: Lead Belly performed “John Henry” in 1939, Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” was recorded in 1944, and Pete Seeger released his album *God Bless the Grass* in 1966. The poets of the Beat movement were also denigrating environmental devastation during this period. Allen Ginsberg’s “Sunflower Sutra” (1955), for instance, pictures his narrator apologizing to the blossom for “...all that civilization spotting your

crazy golden crown...” Steinbeck began to show an interest in nature early in this trajectory of environmentalism. The American Ecology Association was founded in 1915, and by 1923, Steinbeck was studying at the Hopkins Marine Station, where he absorbed the concept of the “superorganism,” in which cells, organs, individuals, and societies all “depend on the orderly cooperation of their component parts” (Tiffney 3). In the 1930s, Steinbeck could see this notion illustrated by the phalanx theories of his friend Ed Ricketts.

Steinbeck’s geographical range and environmental interests represent a craving for both in-depth and above-it-all knowledge that enable him to engage more comprehensively with space, in that the breadth of his experiences with nature allows him to construct a larger picture of place and its significance. The point of outlining Steinbeck’s participation in diverse geographies is to suggest that he felt compelled to explore, discover, and analyze all perspectives and all angles in order to understand his place in the world and convey the importance of that project. Like Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck “Wants to see it all and be everywhere” (Railsback 89). Or, as the author said of Camelot, it is a “wonderful place and structure” precisely because it entails “layer on layer of work and feeling” (Steinbeck and Wallsten 629). It is this layering of perspectives on the landscape that Steinbeck promotes as crucial to the comprehension of and engagement with one’s environment, in all its complexity.

“To Make the Stars Twinkle”: Forging Geographical Vision

The various angles Steinbeck encountered in his exploration of his own connection to the environment are reflected in his characters’ visions of their settings. In contrast to the literature of the 1930s, in which figures like Budd Schulberg’s Sammy

Glick display a “colossal lack of perspective,” *East of Eden*’s characters are brimming with perspective. For Steinbeck, perspective was sacred. And after the death of Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck claimed the scientist’s microscope, encasing it – and the viewpoint it might offer – in a glass cube in his living room, like a relic (Parini 395). Steinbeck conveys the importance of perception through the figures he constructs in his novel, offering his readers various models for how to perceive the world by describing his characters’ physical sense of sight. How they see their worlds, in turn, is correlated to their psychological thought processes, their dreams, and, ultimately, their actions. I will address these next steps in the sections that follow.

Many of Steinbeck’s characters see the world in only one way no matter the situation. Kate is the most extreme example. Her eyes throughout the novel are described as “expressionless and cold” (82). Kate’s vision is projected onto the earth, which she regards quite literally as a container for evil – she buries the instruments she used to murder her boss in the soil behind her brothel (251). At other times, her eyes serve little purpose at all: she “seemed to see no one” (461). In turn, no one really sees her: she becomes “an invisible woman” (461). In her later years, she claims that the light hurts her eyes, just as Nathanael West’s Homer Simpson does in *The Day of the Locust*. Meanwhile, Anderson, a son-in-law of Sam Hamilton, studies photography’s capacity to transfer onto paper “the colors the human eye perceives” in “the exterior world,” but himself does not seem to perceive, much less transfer, those colors for himself: he is “an intense dark man” with “little gift for communication” (275).

Unlike the inflexible visions of characters like Kate and Anderson, Adam serves as Steinbeck’s main conduit for demonstrating a full range of sight. Even as a young

child in Connecticut, Adam is described as seeing his world and its inhabitants through “the long tunnels of his eyes” (20-21). How these “tunnels” work – the ease or difficulty of using them, the objects on which they fix themselves, and how they perceive those objects – varies over the course of the novel. After his wife shoots him and abandons him and their newborn children, for instance, his eyes are “blank like a sleepwalker’s” (207). His depression leaves him feeling that he “saw the world through gray water” (252). Once Adam recovers from the shock of Kate’s actions, however, he emerges from his fog, declaring, “...my eyes have cleared” (331). Aside from Kate herself, one of the first things he sees clearly is his own landscape. Driving along, Adam “found that he was noticing things he had not seen for years” (329). Even on his own ranch, where he had been living for quite some time, “it was all new to him,” from the “wildflowers in the heavy grass” to the “red cows against the hillsides” to “flowered curtains” in his house, “washed so long that the blossoms were pale” (329, 331). His newfound sight is so precise that Lee praises Adam as “one of the rare people who can separate... observation from...preconception” (163). After Adam has a stroke, however, his sight is the main casualty, suggesting that the inability to clearly see one’s surroundings counts as a severe disability, both literally and metaphorically. Adam’s eyes following the stroke are “unmoving,” and he is unable to see well enough to read the newspaper or a postcard from his son (571, 573). Because he has experienced the freeing effects of clear sight, his blindness “really troubled him” (573). Ultimately, Adam’s frustration with his difficulty in seeing at the end of his life is the result of his recognition of the power of perception. The “reality” of the landscape is not what makes it powerful, then, according to Steinbeck’s novel. Instead, it is *how* we see that landscape that matters, a philosophy

Steinbeck underlines when he asserts that “it is the eyes’ business to make the stars twinkle” (429).

"The Thinking Life": The Mental Mechanics of Contemplating the Landscape

Conducting the “business” of seeing the sparkle in one’s landscape is not an easy or automatic task in *East of Eden* – it involves a good deal of thoughtful deliberation. Indeed, the author identifies as the prerequisite for “the whole world [to] glow... outside your eyes,” as a “flash...in the brain” that “lights up the mind of a man” (131). Tracing the path of this light from the brain to the land, however, is complicated, since, as Steinbeck wrote in *Journal of a Novel* on Aug. 20, 1951, “the human mind” is “a dumb brute” (147). Playfully upset and slightly amused by the “rebellious” tendencies of his brain as he tried to get back to work after a vacation, Steinbeck’s remark hints at his serious interest in the mechanics of the psyche. The author’s mock frustration with his own psychology highlights his concern with how and why humans perceive themselves and their environments, and how they mentally deliberate about those perceptions. Essentially, Steinbeck is interested with how the external landscape is processed by the internal mind. As he explained in *Travels with Charley*, “External reality has a way of being not so external after all” (209). Two of Steinbeck’s closest friends and mentors, Ed Ricketts and Joseph Campbell, had written back and forth about this dilemma, as well, with Ricketts eventually replacing the idea of a “world outlook” with that of a “world inlook” (qtd. in Shillinglaw 11–12). Steinbeck’s *Log from the Sea of Cortez* also negotiates the line between the mind and the world it perceives, acknowledging that “what we would see and record and construct would be warped, as all knowledge patterns are warped, first, by the collective pressure and stream of our time and race, second by

the thrust of our individual personalities” (2). Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* illustrates this philosophy of subjective information by attending to the mental processes through which his characters perceive their worlds.

Several critics have recognized *East of Eden* as centering on “the mind of John Steinbeck” (Owens, “The Story of a Writing: Narrative Structure in *East of Eden*” 62).¹² Indeed, Steinbeck himself recognized his inclusion in the novel: “I am in it and I don’t for a moment pretend not to be,” he wrote (*Journal* 24). The author’s fascination with his own psyche is rooted at least in part in his own mental health issues: he was a depressive, psychosomatic hypochondriac who swung between shyness and aggression, self-doubt and self-assertion, and reclusivity and publicity (Parini 25, 522, 46, 54, 84, 98).¹³ Even Steinbeck himself half-joked that he was on the verge of a personality disorder: thinking through his work often involved picturing various versions of himself fighting over ideas. “Under certain circumstances it might be one of those schizophrenic symptoms,” he mused, “but as a working technique, I do not think it is bad at all” (*Journal* 106). Others begged to differ: When *The Grapes of Wrath* was banned by school boards across the country, the rationale was often couched in terms of the mental problems of its author. As Congressman Lyle Boren of Oklahoma put it, the output of Steinbeck’s “twisted, distorted mind” was a threat to every “square-minded reader in America” (qtd. in Shockley 358). For better or worse, then, the author’s novels have been seen as a product of the inner workings of the author’s intellect.

¹² John Ditsky calls the novel “a portrait of the self” (14) and Robert DeMott argues for the import of its “subjective, or reflexive interior dimension” (20).

¹³ Steinbeck’s depression often hit a peak after completing a book manuscript. Parini goes a bit overboard in attributing these emotions and behaviors to Steinbeck’s “weak” father.

While Steinbeck's earlier works hint at an interest in how the mind perceives the world,¹⁴ *East of Eden* betrays an explicit interest in the details of how characters' mental wheels turn. As a contemporary reviewer put it, "Mr. Steinbeck sees this story...through a haze of modern psychology" (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 389). Steinbeck would agree. He identified the novel as primarily concerned with the story of good and evil, or "the basis of all human neurosis," without which "psychiatrists would have nothing to do" (*Journal* 104). Exploiting such neuroses, the author filled *East of Eden* with "strange and secret things," things which "should strike deep into the unconscious..." (118). As his narrator puts it, "I believe there are techniques of the human mind whereby, in its dark deep, problems are examined, rejected or accepted. Such activities sometimes concern facets a man does not know he has" (327). The goal of *Eden*, Steinbeck tells his editor, is to "give an impression not such much of the physical life of the country as of the kind of spiritual life – the thinking life – the state of mind – the plateau of thought...a kind of mood of the Valley" (31).

In order to elucidate the "thinking life" of the Salinas Valley, Steinbeck carefully details the mental processes of his characters as they deliberate about themselves, the spaces in which they live, and the relationship between the two. In sharp contrast to the mental confusion that reigned in the characters of 1930s literature – recall Aldous Huxley's Jeremy Pordage, who delights in his "no-track mind" – Steinbeck's characters arrange their thoughts in clear, organized, self-aware ways. For instance, Adam Trask is

¹⁴ In works like "Fingers of Cloud" (1932) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937), these processes are highlighted through the child-like minds of Gertie and Lennie. Steinbeck extended his interest in the psychology of individual characters to a broader consideration of the collective unconscious in 1933's *To a God Unknown*, to the extent that its main character was dismissed as "a gigantic piece of half-baked mysticism" (McElrath, Crisler, and Shillinglaw 27). Finally, *In Dubious Battle* (1936) was considered by Steinbeck himself a psychological portrait of "man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself" (Steinbeck and Wallsten 98).

described variously as taking “up a thought he hoped was finished,” “panning memories,” and “trying to think like” his predecessors (296, 159). At another point, he is “not conscious of any thought at all,” and instead exists “in a cloud of vague forms and sounds and colors” (327). Meanwhile, the mind of Kate, nee Cathy, goes “skipping among possibilities,” “drifted among impressions the way a bat...swoops,” and “tiptoed her mind around the whole subject” (118, 548, 551). Similarly, Samuel has a mind that “grinned inward at itself” as it prances through thoughts with the facility of “a young lamb leaping in a daisy field” (146, 261, 308). Even relatively minor characters are allotted precise descriptions of their psychological operations: Tom takes an idea and “turn[s] it slow in his brain like a roast of pork before the fire,” Lee’s Chinese scholars possess “proud clean brains,” and Sheriff Quinn “play[s] over” faces, scenes, and conversations in his mind “like a record or a film” (271, 303, 561). Finally, it cannot be insignificant that Adam dies of a cerebral hemorrhage: life is not worth living with a damaged mind (589).

Steinbeck’s close watch over the mental processes of his characters often clashed with his contemporaries’ stance on the “reality” of the world. Steinbeck’s contemporary Jack Kerouac, for example, uses his belief that both heaven and earth are “[a]ll in the mind” to excuse his behavior: “What difference does it make after all?” (246). Steinbeck uses the same recognition to find meaning in such freedom. The way we imagine the world, which affects the choices we make in and about it, he declares, *do* make a difference. By flipping the consequences of the world’s lack of “truth” – such factlessness is not a reason to be apathetic about action, but rather a reason to carefully contemplate perception and agency – Steinbeck enacts his faith in the “pattern-making”

of mental theorizing. In other words, Steinbeck positions the 1950s' skepticism of knowledge not as an obstacle to progress so much as an opportunity to embrace and examine the thought processes that affect how his characters see their environment.

“Plans Are Real Things”: The Pragmatism of Balanced Dreams

Why is Steinbeck so concerned with the details of how his characters' minds work? And what are the ends of their mental processes? The title of the novel points to some potential answers. The biblical Eden, of course, was a perfect place in which humans could be mentally passive, with no need to think or make decisions about their lives. After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge, however, they were granted free will. When Cain, Adam and Eve's son, made the decision to kill his brother Abel, he became the first to take full advantage of this self-determination, as well as the first to suffer the consequences of making that choice. He was cast out of the garden to the Land of Nod, which the Bible locates “east of Eden.” This space is thus intimately associated with choice. In popular culture, the “Land of Nod” is also tied to the act of imaginative dreaming.¹⁵ In calling his novel *East of Eden*, then, Steinbeck is making an implicit connection between free will and the imagination. At the same time, the author's use of the biblical and cultural Land of Nod as a metaphor for Salinas Valley ties dreams and choices to particularly imperfect spaces that simultaneously entail blessing and curse. Located just beyond the divine geography of Eden and just past the “civilized” safety of colonized America, respectively, the Land of Nod and the Salinas Valley are both marginal, frontier spaces that not only allow, but demand free will. All told, then,

¹⁵ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Jonathan Swift first made the pun that combined the geographical space of “Nod” with the sleepy behavior of “nodding” in *A complete collection of genteel and ingenious conversation* (1738) (“Nod, n.1”). However, the phrase did not become common until the 19th century, around the time the notion of childhood as a distinct phase of life arose. Today, “The Land of Nod” is the name of a retail company selling children's furniture and bedding.

Steinbeck's interest in the precisions of his characters' mental functions point to several key messages of the novel. First, that choice, including the intellectual processes from which choice results, matters. Second, that choices can be unconscious, but that this fact should incite a greater awareness and fostering of our mental workings and their capacities, including those of dreams and the imagination. And third, that place matters, in that a flawed residence can spur its residents to mentally engage with their surroundings in order to imagine their potential.

Steinbeck's careful descriptions of how his characters see and think about their worlds, then, serve as preludes to the ways in which they dream about those worlds. The author provides various ways to understand the process and purpose of the imagination, but the crucial point Steinbeck makes about dreams is that they must originate from a thorough and balanced investigation of the environment. Only with clear sight and deliberate thought about what one sees, he suggests, are dreams able to serve their purpose of producing a sense of agency.

In order to fully intuit the wide-ranging characteristics of their environment, Steinbeck's characters use a similarly wide-ranging set of tools, including the apparently contradictory fields of science and myth. For example, Samuel, a "well borer," "knew the earth very well," but this knowledge is partially premised on what looks like mysticism (*Journal* 63). While Samuel uses a "magic wand" to find water on Adam's land, he explains that the stick serves as a crutch for "disbelief" in human instinct that simply "bring[s] up to the surface inherent knowledge" (169). Similarly, Steinbeck sees place as subject to both mythical and scientific interpretation. He distinguishes between these perspectives on place in *Travels with Charley*. In the scientific version, "Most

areas in the world may be placed in latitude and longitude, described chemically in their earth, sky and water, rooted and fuzzed over with identified flora and peopled with known fauna, and there's an *end* to it" (233, italics mine). He was equally interested, though, in the idea of mythical space. These *endless* places are best understood through human experience and emotion. Here, "fable, myth, preconception, love, longing, or prejudice step in and so distort a cool, clear appraisal that a kind of high-colored magical confusion takes hold...One quality of such places as I am trying to define is that a very large part of them is personal and subjective." While we tend to think of the scientist as the one seeking answers, solutions, ends, Steinbeck's definition of the scientist, like Willa Cather's of the investigator, focuses on an appreciation of the endlessness of the spaces that continue to be shrouded in mystery. "A child's world spreads only a little beyond his understanding," Steinbeck writes in *Log of the Sea of Cortez*, "while that of a great scientist thrusts outward immeasurably" (137).

Jack Benson has labeled Steinbeck's visionaries "Merlin figures," or "magical characters who recognize the living whole" and "interpret" it (*John Steinbeck, Writer* 116–117), but the author's dreamers – despite their occasional use of divining rods like Samuel's – are not entirely "magical." Associating imaginative "daydreaming" simply with "planning," Steinbeck writes in *Journal of a Novel* that "Plans are real things" (74). For Steinbeck, the act of imagining is not magical but practical: making plans should involve rehearsing choices, even if they are imperfect. He is realistic in acknowledging potential deficiencies of dreaming up propositions about the land, whether in the present or for the future: "If they [plans] don't come off, they are still a little bit realized. If they do, they may be disappointing..." Nevertheless, he suggests, it is exactly this kind of

fallible hope that marks humanity worthy of free will in pursuing possibility: “Plans are daydreaming and this is an absolute measure of man,” he declares (74). Indeed, Parini defines Steinbeck’s “essential humanism” in terms of “his deep belief in the power – destructive and constructive – of the human imagination” (537).

Steinbeck’s works are all full of practical dreamers, visionaries, artists, and creators, who serve as the philosophical guides of his texts: Slim from *Of Mice and Men*, Doc from *Cannery Row*, and Lee from *East of Eden*. This figure was not always present, however. In *The Wayward Bus* (1947), for example, the absence of a dreamer suggests that, among these “selfish and self-deluding characters,” there is “no common language or shared vision for an ideal society” (Parini 370). Without such a connection, no progress is possible. In some ways, the lack of a visionary figure signals that Steinbeck was beginning to suspect the “moral degradation of American society.”¹ But even his last work, *America and Americans*, Richard Peterson writes, “reiterates his faith in the value of myth, even if the people have lost their visionary powers...he insists that the energy remains for America to rediscover its principles and purpose” (15). In other words, even if dreamers came and went over the course of Steinbeck’s authorial trajectory, he relied on the notion of the visionary – whether present or absent – to promote the value of the imagination. *East of Eden* is clearly a “visionary epic” (Parini 437), but the extent to which its characters’ “visions” play a role in allowing for the epic to proceed has not received adequate attention.

The first brand of dreaming Steinbeck identifies in *East of Eden* is a wholly idealized one. Aron serves as his representative for this kind of overly optimistic imagination, which denies reality. For example, when Aron learns that his mother is

alive, despite the fact that his father has told him she is dead, his mind cannot handle this new reality. His sense of his world, which has been constructed around his father as “the essence of truth,” is shaken by the notion that Adam could be a liar. In order to save his image of his father as “the foundation,” he “pushed his mother back into death and closed his mind against her” (429). Similarly, Aron creates a fictional version of his fiancée, Abra. “He doesn’t think about me. He’s made someone up,” Abra tells Lee, “and it’s like he put my skin on her.” This “made-up” figure is “just absolutely pure. Nothing but pure – never a bad thing” (496-7). In the same way that Aron imagines perfection in the people around him, so does he build perfect images of the places in which he lives. When he goes off to study at Stanford, he has already constructed a “vague and beautiful” “picture” of students in “academic robes,” “converging on a white temple on the crown of a wooded hill in the evening” (523). The reality of the school, of course, does not match his expectation: Stanford instead consists of “a formal square of brown sandstone blocks set down in a hayfield.” In order to compensate for his disappointment, Aron creates another fantasy world, this one of the home he has left behind. Rather than “try to learn the life around him or to enter it,” he “decorate[s] another dream” as a “hiding place.” By imagining his childhood home as “warm and dear,” as a place in which he “could live in purity and peace with the world,” he allows himself to “hide” from the “ugliness” he wants to deny exists in his world. In doing so, he “never really inspected” all the elements of his landscape, and “goes all one way,” toward an ideal image that fails to take into account the many dimensions of reality, and therefore always ends in disappointment (523, 496).

The second type of imagination in *East of Eden* also “goes all one way,” but in the opposite direction. This version of imagination is a profoundly negative and often destructive one, which sees the world as inherently evil. Steinbeck’s representative for this dark dreaming is Kate. Like Aron, Kate dreams in an effort to escape the multifaceted realities of her landscape rather than engage with or negotiate through them. But because her worldview is shadowy to begin with, the images that fill Kate’s mind are often far from pretty: she routinely “tried to think of other things, even unpleasant ones,” in order to distract herself from her “distorted” world (502). She even manufactures such unpleasant dreams for others, for her own benefit. For example, Kate fabricates nightmares for Faye, her employer at the brothel, a good-natured, matronly woman, using an ammonia-drenched handkerchief, an ivory crochet hook, and a glass of cold water. Faye wakes up with a “look of horror,” screaming, “the dreams, the dreams! I can’t stand them!” (239). Kate uses the nightmares she induces as the starting point for a drawn-out murder plot that will eventually allow her to take over the brothel for herself. Even when Kate has “pretty” dreams of her own, they defy a balanced understanding of the world. For instance, her dream of living with Aron in New York is premised on denying her own sordid past.¹⁶ By deciding that “she did not want Aron to know about her” brothel days, and imagining instead that he could “think she had always lived in an elegant little house on the East Side,” she essentially adopts her son’s extreme idealism (513). Even with its focus on the “loveliness” of this reverie, however, the dream ends on a negative note, with mother and son attending the funeral of another woman Kate plans on murdering.

¹⁶ Barbara Heavilin analyzes this daydream as evidence of Steinbeck’s use of Fielding-esque “speculative characterization” in constructing a postmodern work (20). She suggests that Steinbeck uses the dream to gesture toward the “possibility of goodness” even in a character who “embodies evil.” But Heavilin dismisses the possibility as “tiny” because Kate “is daydreaming after all.” Like many critics, and critics of western literature in particular, Heavilin sets aside instances of imagination as insignificant

The idea leaves Kate “filled with amusement.” Steinbeck’s portrayal of Kate’s imagination is, in the end, not only negative, but lethal. That she is entertained by, and that her ego benefits from, such morbid dreams, only underlines the lopsided, perverted nature of her imagination. As Adam puts it to Kate, “You see only one side, and you think – more than that, you’re sure – that’s all there is” (385).

Finally, the third kind of dreaming Steinbeck presents in *East of Eden* is a balanced imagination. Represented primarily by Adam, this type of imagination takes into account all facets of the environment in constructing a dream. Steinbeck presents Adam as “given to dreaming” (181). When he first arrives in Salinas, he “talked and planned and dreamed,” transforming his uncultivated property “in his mind,” so that he “could see the wheat growing tall and square of green alfalfa near the river” (134, 156). His ambition gives him a reputation as “a man of substance” (134). Many of the more skeptical characters in the novel, however, regard Adam’s imagination as naïve: Kate calls him a “sweet dreamer” whose ability to see good in his world amounts to “hallucination,” and the town’s businessmen see him as a “know-it-all dreamer” whose visions would “always g[e]t [him] into trouble” (385, 438). For Adam, however, the purpose of dreaming is not to “know it all,” but rather to explore all options. Although Adam has a tendency to become monomaniacal, “obsessed” with “one idea,” he is careful to round out his dreams with other perspectives (432). For example, when he dreams of starting a refrigeration business, he seeks out the opinion of the town’s local business guru, Will Hamilton. Will is inherently anti-“idea,” convinced that “plans” are more sound than “dreams.” He therefore advises Adam to “kick dust over” his refrigeration idea. Adam buys the ice plant anyway, and his idea promptly fails. However, he is not

disappointed, regarding the endeavor simply as a “game” that he “lost” (543). Because he had closely investigated his dream, analyzing it from multiple perspectives, and still found it compelling, he was satisfied no matter the outcome. In the end, Steinbeck suggests, it is because he “thought in all directions” that his imagination serves its purpose of exploration that leads to understanding and satisfaction, and, eventually, progress (381).

Timshel: The Choice of Geographical Movement

The ability to see one’s landscape fully, to think about those spaces deliberately, and to use those considered visions to construct well-balanced dreams, according to *East of Eden*, are the prerequisites for engaged movement within and across those spaces. The ways in which Steinbeck’s characters use their eyes, their minds, and their imaginations determines their fate in the novel. Although there exists a “ballet of business for men doing nothing,” Steinbeck defines the responsibility of being a person as “more than just taking up space” (55, 455). To illustrate his point, the author shows how those who fail to see, evaluate, and dream about their landscape in balanced ways are ultimately removed from it, trapped by it, or fall out of it altogether, while those who make efforts to see all sides of their world, to deliberate about those visions, and to imagine their spaces according to those findings, find themselves free to move through their environment in fulfilling ways. Ultimately, rather than being “caught in a net of good and evil,” Steinbeck suggests that a deliberative imagination allows one to “choose his course” (413, 303).

The characters in *East of Eden* who fail to move are the same ones who see their landscapes negatively, who think only in one direction, and whose dreams are

destructive. Clearly, Kate is the prime example of this type of static character. Steinbeck portrays her as moving “as though she were surrounded by a glass shell” (461). Kate’s methods of movement are thus qualified mainly by a lack thereof: she is always waiting, sitting, never hurrying (184, 240). Neither her brain nor her body are capable of flexibility: her mind is described as “wooden,” her fingers are curled by arthritis as she grows older (553). Even when she is pregnant as a young woman, her physical presence is more like an “absence,” in which “a breathing doll” seems to have taken her place (185). Kate’s non-action reaches its peak, ironically, in a dream. Imagining herself inside Lewis Carroll’s story *Alice in Wonderland*, Kate finds “freedom” only by envisioning herself as shrunken to the size of a thimble. While this illusion allows her to hide from “the forest of her enemies,” Kate’s diminutive scale soon goes off the deep end (552). Because she views her surroundings as inherently evil, she sees the continuation of this shrinkage as the only way out: “she would dwindle and disappear and cease to exist.” Believing that “whatever she had done, she had been driven to do,” she sees only one path open to her: suicide. In the end, then, Kate’s “all one way” vision, thought, and imagination renders her motionless, the opposite of free to choose, six feet under.

Aron, Kate’s son, takes after his mother in the extreme way he looks at his environment and how he moves through it. Though their perspectives are from opposite sides – Kate sees all as evil, whereas Aron idealizes everything – their severity results in a similar refusal to engage with the worlds in which they live. Aron is thus merely “content to be part of his world,” but does not fully consider or interact with it (349). His “set course” through his dream land is not based on a thorough analysis of his environment, but rather on his own one-sided vision of it. When his imagination of that

landscape is interrupted by its less-than-ideal reality, he flees. Indeed, even as a child, any “change of direction confused” him (422). Given his lack of “versatility,” the news that Abra, his fiancée, is not perfect; that Kate, his mother, is a whore; or that his childhood home in Salinas is not as pastoral as he believed is earth-shaking to Aron. Rather than adapting his vision, his thought process, or his imagination to accommodate such realities, Aron escapes the landscape that hasn’t lived up to his ideals to join the Army, where he is promptly killed in battle. Like his mother, Aron’s unbalanced view of his world finally prevents him from moving through it at all.

In contrast to the motionlessness of Kate and Aron, Samuel, Cal, and Adam represent Steinbeck’s deliberative dreamers, and, by connection, his deliberative movers. Samuel is an “inventor” from the novel’s beginning, and uses his considered perception, analysis, and dreams of his landscape to “always try...to improve” it. Although neither Aron nor Cal fully take on Samuel’s model until the end of the novel, the difficulty of arriving at such a position is part of the author’s point: that recognizing the ability to choose how one sees and moves across his landscape is not automatic, but takes experience and deliberation. Cal, for instance, begins his life with “a wall of self-sufficiency” built around him, “strong enough to defend him against the world” (444). His solitary, isolated stance against his landscape leads him not to interact with his world, but rather to “walk alone” through it (445). Cal’s initially disengaged existence, however, is only a starting point from which Steinbeck will show that such a stance is not written in stone. Indeed, as he grows up, Cal begins to realize that “he wanted to dig out the truth” from his landscape (445). His actions and behaviors spring directly from what he finds, and his moods and movements are thus constantly changing. For example, after

his father turns down Cal's gift, he feels "suspended in space" and then drinks until "the earth tipped and swayed" (566). By contrast, after Cal rejects Kate's claims that he has inherited her evil nature by declaring, "I'm my own," he leaves with "light quick footsteps" (466). Unlike his brother Aron, who is fixed on a narrow vision and equally narrow path, Cal plays what Lee calls a "personal hide-and-seek" in a wider realm (488). His movements are thus closely coordinated with his landscape, his vision of it, and his dreams about it. Even if those individual movements are not always perfectly enacted, Steinbeck suggests that his engagement enables him to move beyond his brother's position of simply "taking up space."

Similarly, Adam serves as a representative for breaking out of a one-sided vision that prevents action. Adam, at first, views his often negative perspective on his environment as inescapable: "My father made a mould and forced me into it...I was a casting but I couldn't be re-melted. Nobody can be re-melted. And so I remained a bad casting" (448). Under this system of belief, Adam goes through periods in which his fuzzy sense of sight "held his thoughts down" and "clothed [him] in a viscosity that slowed his movements" (252). When he remembers the pain of serving in WWI, for instance, the memories he pictures in his head are "frozen," with "no motion or emotion in them" (520). Or when he learns that Cathy runs the local brothel, he trips and falls (306). However, Adam's model of how he has been "cast" relies on the cast with which he perceives his world. Cyrus, the novel's patriarch, envisioned the world as a battlefield that shapes him into a frightened man whose lack of confidence must be buttressed by hubris and violence. What Adam finally realizes, with the help of Samuel and Lee, is that his father's perception of the world, as well as the influence that had on his son, is not

fixed. Thus, like his son Cal, Adam makes the effort not only to “dig himself out of the crashing in his head,” but also to dig in to the world around him (261). Following Samuel’s advice to “go through the motions,” Adam finally acknowledges his “need to do something” (215, 432). Whether he carries out his vision for a refrigeration business or simply plants his long-dormant fields, his decision to look at his environment from all angles allows him to make choices about what to do with it and how to move through it.

Samuel advises Adam, “You’re going to pass something down, no matter what you do or if you do nothing. Even if you let yourself go fallow, the weeds will grow and the brambles. Something will grow” (215). The goal, then, is to “always think...about how to change things” (146). In the end, rather than passing down a hard-cast “mould” as he was once convinced his father did for him, Adam instead passes on to Cal and Abra the blessing of choice, and therefore the possibility of “greatness.” Far from the glass shell in which Kate moved through the world, or the “set course” on which Aron placed himself, Adam encourages Cal to continue to fully see and enthusiastically engage with his landscape according to his vision. Even though “blackness lay ahead of them and the road was unpaved and sticky,” Cal and Abra close *East of Eden* moving forward with recognition, consideration, and acceptance of the complexities of the space. Because Cal has come to understand the truth of his father’s blessing, *timshel* – “thou mayest” – he enacts Steinbeck’s dictate to see, to deliberate, and to imagine the “glorious flux,” all in order not simply “to be part of his world,” but rather to “change it” (602, 600, 349). Whether an act is big or small – even “a stone stepped over in the path” or “a finger-nail nicked in the garden soil” – its “direction” has the capacity to “warp history” (34).

Conclusion

Steinbeck's recalibration of the geographical imagination following two world wars and the Great Depression relies on a new focus on the inner landscape of the mind. By attending to the ways we psychologically process our outer worlds, Steinbeck constructs a simultaneously mystical and scientific system of pattern-making that points not to dead ends or endless circles, but rather to a beacon of hopefulness. The path he lays out for his characters in *East of Eden*, however, does not readily make this beacon visible, as it entails "joy and sorrow felt into one fabric" that leaves them to determine how to negotiate its good and evil (120). Although Steinbeck believes in man's inherent goodness and the "immortality" of "virtue," his novel emphasizes that human choice is necessary to bring those attributes to fruition (414, 415). As Samuel suggests in the novel, that which is left fallow – whether land or man – is "a waste" (295). Both resident and residence must be mentally perceived and carefully considered in order to be outwardly improved, and it is man's prerogative to do this. "Don't you see?" asks Lee, when he considers various readings of the biblical story of free will. While the American Standard translation of the Bible "*orders* men to triumph over sin," and "the King James translation makes a promise in 'Thou shalt,'" it is the original "Hebrew word, the word *timshel* – 'Thou mayest' - that gives a choice" (303). By recognizing that "the way is open," Steinbeck reclaims a deliberative geographical imagination that had – and has – been left for dead. In doing so, he simultaneously opens the way for later writers like N. Scott Momaday, the subject of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE POSTURING IMAGINATION IN N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN*: VISIONS OF U.S. INDIAN POLICY

In N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Abel, the protagonist, arrives in Los Angeles and is given a test:

Please complete each of the following in one or two words. (It is important that you complete this section as quickly as possible, filling in each of the blanks with the first response that comes to mind.)

I would like _____.

I am not _____.

Rich people are _____.

I am afraid of _____.

It is important that I _____.

I believe strongly in _____.

The thing I remember most clearly is _____.

As a child I enjoyed _____.

Someday I shall _____.

People who laugh loudly are _____.

etc. (94)

In reducing identities to simplistic notions of themselves, the social work form provides a helpful distillation of an ideology of exclusion that pervades U.S. culture. By relying on only “one or two words” to define a human being, the brief inventory fails to comprehend the Abel’s intricacies. For example, while the test touches on attitudes toward class and personality, it reveals no concern for race or ethnicity. Although it points to various temporal registers, it glosses over distinctions and connections between past, present, and future. While the test centers on the individual, it does not acknowledge the role of community, nation, or policy in shaping him. And even though the test’s purpose is to help Abel acclimate to his new habitat, nowhere does it question the impact of place on identity. Finally, the test denies that, much less how, any of these issues might be imagined, constructed, or perceived, rather than simply defined. Tellingly, after Abel

takes the test, it disappears entirely from the narrative, thereby affirming its irrelevance to comprehending his problems or tracing his progress. In short, the static, piecemeal test fails to interrogate where Abel's identity comes from, what outcomes it might reach, and the dynamic connections between the two. Ironically, then, the social worker fails to explore the *social work* Abel's imagination does in processing his world, constructing his self, and moving that self forward. Ultimately, Momaday's novel performs a critique of U.S. bureaucracy and its understanding of human subjectivity, in an attempt to revise conceptions of the Native American subject both for himself and within the nation as a whole.

House Made of Dawn is widely known as the marker of the beginning of the Native American Renaissance,¹ a period of significantly increased literary production among that ethnic group during the 1970s and 1980s. The Pulitzer-Prize winning novel serves as an introduction to the modern Native American identity as Momaday understands it. *House Made of Dawn* centers on Abel, a young Pueblo, in 1945, upon his return from serving in World War II, to his childhood home, a Walatowa Jemez reservation in north central New Mexico. Through the local priest, Father Olguin, Abel gets a job working for Angela St. John, a white woman visiting the town for her health, with whom he has a brief affair. In an attempt to reconnect with his heritage, Abel participates in a local ceremonial festival, but ends up killing an albino man, Juan Reyes, and is sentenced to jail. After his release nearly seven years later, Abel moves to Los Angeles, under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Voluntary Relocation Program. In LA, he works in a factory alongside Navajo transplant Ben Benally,

¹ The term was coined by Kenneth Lincoln, whose book of the same name was published in 1983. Lincoln's book covers Native American authors including Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko.

befriends the test-proctoring social worker Milly, and attends the religious ceremonies of peyote priest Tosamah. Feeling disconnected from his new locale, depressed and drunk most of the time, Abel loses his job, is kicked out of his apartment, and ends up badly beaten in a fight. He returns to the reservation to find his grandfather, Francisco, dying. Francisco tells him stories from his youth and encourages Abel to try again to reconnect to the traditions of Walatowa. When Francisco dies, Abel completes his burial rites before participating in a ritual footrace in which he finally begins to reintegrate himself into the “house made of dawn” of his homeland.

In *House Made of Dawn*, then, Abel’s efforts are directed at coming to know, to imagine, and to actively connect himself to his place. These efforts refute the stereotype of the Indian as always already embedded in nature. Although many critics, especially those writing at the beginning of the Native American Renaissance, assumed an inherent connection between the Indian and nature, Lee Schweninger has deftly challenged this stereotype by exploring the often ambiguous ways that Native American characters relate to the land. Even the novel’s peyote priest figure Tosamah acknowledges that this relationship is not inbred. When telling the tale of the migration of the Kiowa from the mountains to the plains, he emphasizes that they did not find immediate harmony with their new surroundings. The tribe had to “wean their blood from the northern winter,” and when they approached unknown territory, they realized that man “must never fail to explain [natural phenomena] to himself” in order to avoid being “estranged forever from the universe” (115). Momaday affirms this philosophy: “You have to spend time in a place, and come to know it as it changes in the hours of the day and in the seasons of the

year.² And if you put yourself into it, it absorbs you and you come to know it and depend upon it in numerous ways” (Woodard 50). Through his tenures as Stanford University and the University of Arizona, Momaday came to depend on the western landscape as both personal muse and fictional setting. “I wouldn’t consider writing about a landscape that I didn’t know intimately,” he told Charles L. Woodard (136). “I do know intimately the landscapes of the Great Plains and the Southwest. I would be foolish to write about any other landscapes.” Like Willa Cather, Momaday believes “that the writer is the intelligence of his soil,” and by extension, that his characters are profoundly influenced by the locales into which he writes them.

What does it mean, then, for Momaday’s Abel to connect himself to and integrate himself within his place? Critics of Momaday’s novel have explored various ways in which the protagonist uses space to overcome his “crisis of identity.”³ Irene Moser, most generally, has defined the spaces of Native American literature as serving to “surround protagonists and interrelate individuals to each other, to history, and to the cosmos itself” (285–6). Robert Nelson, more precisely, identifies land in Native American literature as the “antidote” to postmodern alienation. Momaday has repeatedly underlined the connection between the individual and his landscape, a relationship which had been clear to him since his childhood. Born Navarre Scott Momaday in Lawton, OK in 1934, he adopted the “tribal custom for men to have three names, traditionally given at birth, adolescence, and adulthood.” Momaday’s names were all closely tied to elements of

² In fact, Momaday knew about place, especially its vegetation, more intimately than most: his doctoral dissertation focused on Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, a poet whose works were heavily influenced by his career as a botanist (Morgan 44).

³ Matthias Schubnell identified the “crisis of identity” as the central problem of *House Made of Dawn* in his 1985 book, which was the first full-length work on Momaday. This focus on identity set the foundation for the large majority of the scholarship that would follow.

nature – “Rock Tree Boy,” “Red Bluff,” and “Eagle Alone” (Morgan and Lincoln 20) – thus underlining the idea that identity is premised on the land. As he explains in “Navajo Place Names,” “We know who we are...only with reference to the things about us, the points of reference in both our immediate and infinite worlds, the places and points among which we are born, grow old, and die” (124).

In addition to underlining the literal relationship between self and space, however, Momaday also emphasizes that the connection can be constructed or imagined. Although Momaday’s father, Alfred Morris, was a full-blooded Kiowa, his mother, Mayme Natachee, “embraced an imagined Indian heritage” despite the fact that her descendants were early white American pioneers. This model of how people “must imagine who they are and where they come from” provides the basis for Momaday’s “central statement on the search for selfhood” (Schubnell 100; Woodard 4). As the boy’s family moved around the Southwest, he had plenty of opportunities to dream up identities for himself against different geographical backdrops. As Charles L. Woodard puts it, the Momaday family “centered themselves on several southwestern landscapes across which [the child] could move in imaginative play” (48).

If a sense of *self* is dependent on *place*, however, a sense of *place* is dependent on one’s *perception* of it. In this chapter, I use “perception” in both the literal sense of physical sight through the eyes and in the figurative sense of mental “sight” that can take the form of imagining or dreaming. The two are not mutually exclusive. Momaday suggests that Native Americans are endowed with a special capacity for imagination that is founded on literal sight. “There is a remarkable aesthetic perception in the Indian world,” the author notes, in which one “sees with both his physical eye and the eye of his

mind; he sees what is really there to be seen, including the aesthetic effect of his own observation upon the scene... the shadow of his own imagination” (qtd. in Woodard 152). For Momaday, then, place is not about the “empirical verification” of geography or cartography. “His is much more a personal or ideological connection,” says Lee Schwenger, such that the interpretation of any particular space is an individual creation (147). For example, Momaday has acknowledged that a place like Rainy Mountain “as I have described it” may not align with someone else’s view of it (Woodard 8). *Between Sacred Mountains*, a collection of Navajo stories, explains this kind of personal vision of the land in terms of literacy: because “[a] piece of land is like a book,” a “wise person can look at stones and mountains and read stories” there (qtd. in Scarberry-Garcia 9). Momaday is particularly interested in this act of looking at place, questioning “what it is to see, how seeing is accomplished, [and] how the physical eye and the mind’s eye are related” in constructing space (“The American West” 105). In *House Made of Dawn*, Louis Owens argues, Abel “achieves a coherent self-definition through his ability to see the space surrounding him” (*Other Destinies* 117). Philosopher Pierre Hadot, a scholar of ancient religions, has identified this focus on the development of spatial sight as crucial to the processes of spiritual healing. Using Merleau-Ponty’s dictate to “relearn to see the world,” Hadot explains that “peace and serenity” can be achieved “by becoming aware of [the mind’s] relationship with the world.” Such healing, however, can only happen with a “profound transformation of the individual’s mode of seeing” (83).

A holistic sense of place and a clear perception of its elements, however, are only a means to an end of agency, motion, or progress. Indeed, Momaday defines dreams as “powerful” because they not only “determine who I am” but also “what I *do*” (Bruchac

106, italics mine). “The whole idea,” he says, “is how the human can accommodate himself to... the universe” (Woodard 206). This focus on movement is grounded in many Native American languages, which center on action. In fact, Margot Astrov has called the Navajo language a “language of the verb” (45). For example, the standard Jemez greeting asks, “Where are you going?” (Momaday, “The Morality of Indian Hating” 74). Anthropologist Talal Asad underlines the importance of “body techniques” as a “precondition” for many non-Western religions (76–77). According to Kenneth Lincoln, the Lakota understand their higher power in terms of the motion of “... a Taku or ‘power’ that energetically ‘moves’ (skan) through the ‘sky’ (also skan) of all things...The creation is alive, kinetic, animized, in a phrase, ‘What moves-(all that)- moves’... Interactive motion is all’ (Morgan and Lincoln 3). Given these considerations, Sean Kicummah Teuton argues that the landscape must be bodily engaged in order to gain significance for Native-American characters: “only if the body is in tune with the land can the relationship be communicated” (55). Similarly, it is only by actively positioning themselves in relation to their new landscape that the Kiowa, according to *House Made of Dawn*, are able to be “transformed” (114). In other words, the point of perceiving one’s place and defining oneself within its context is to enable meaningful action.

If the key to connecting oneself to and integrating oneself within a place is perceiving that place both physically and spiritually, it would seem important to understand what that place entails, both in its physical geography and its cultural history. Surprisingly, only one critic, Robert Warrior, takes a new historical approach to Momaday’s landscapes, zooming out from investigations of identity to elucidate the relationship among Momaday’s fiction, nonfiction, and the historical and political

moments out of which those arose. However, Warrior focuses on the moment *in which* Momaday is writing – during the American Indian Movement of the 1960s – rather than the moments and places *about which* he is writing. I fill this gap by looking at how Abel’s vision of and motion through the novel’s landscapes reflect changes in U.S. Indian Policy from the 1930s through the 1950s. Not taking into consideration the specific political debates, acts, and laws that shape the places Abel perceives and moves through results in an incomplete understanding of how his identity develops. Without first accounting for the historical particularities of the Indian Policies that Abel confronts, it is difficult to appreciate the perceptions, movements, and spaces through which he manages them.

This chapter, then, will explore how changes in U.S. Indian Policy sanction Abel’s changing perceptions of place, which in turn impact his movements through his landscape. Although the novel follows a non-linear narrative in order to evoke the protagonist’s confusion as he moves through a journey across physical and mental time and space, I address each phase of Abel’s life chronologically. The main life phases I discuss are 1) Abel’s childhood, in which he develops an understanding of his place at the “center,” where he explores and celebrates his capacity for perception, in preparation for coherent motion, 2) Abel’s early adulthood, in which he experiences a loss of place that disables his vision and suspends his motion, and 3) Abel’s adulthood, in which he regains a sense of place, allowing him to view his landscape holistically, and therefore move in a meaningful way again. Each of these phases corresponds to phase(s) of United States Indian Policy, including the Indian Reorganization Act, Relocation, Termination, and Self-Determination. By coordinating, on the one hand, the way in which Abel’s identity

and motion fluctuates with his place and perceptive abilities, with, on the other, how cultural institutions and regulations affected those abilities, I show that the western imagination around the WWII period was on the incline, envisioning viable grounds for progress even as it harkened back to history to do so. In this final dissertation chapter, we see a hopeful heightening of the possibilities for a western imagination that had been losing ground since Américo Paredes and Nathanael West were writing the land as confining and disordered in the 1930s. Although John Steinbeck deliberates about the potential for choosing good in the West in *East of Eden*, I argue that it is not until the 1960s that those dreams begin to fully come to fruition.

Finding Place: The Indian Reorganization Act and the Exploration of Perception

Federal Indian Policy from 1887 to 1934 was based on the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, which divvied up Indian territory according to European notions of land ownership. Specifically, much of the Dawes Act was based on the property rights theories espoused by the English Enlightenment philosopher John Locke. Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) defined land ownership in terms of the work done on that land. "Men had a right to appropriate, by their Labour, each one to himself, as much of the things of Nature, as he could use," Locke wrote (Ch. 5, Sect. 37). Following from this conflation of individual industry and personal property, the Dawes Act assigned precise plots of land to particular Native American persons:

To each head of a family, one-quarter of a section;
To each single person over eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section;
To each orphan child under eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; and
To each other single person under eighteen years now living, or who may be born prior to the date of the order of the President directing an allotment of the lands embraced in any reservation, one-sixteenth of a section ("Transcript of Dawes Act")

In addition to the meticulous quantification and distribution of land, Locke also qualified how to use that land – not for hunting, mining, or even grazing, but rather for agricultural clearing, tilling, planting, and cultivating.⁴ Locke’s demarcations of appropriate quantities of space, designations of individual owners, and acceptable types of labor are all “peculiarly English and Protestant,” and grant no recognition to native conceptions of space, which regarded the land’s worth more broadly, in terms of the resources it could provide, the users it could support, and the psychological and moral values it could possess (Anderson and Zerbe 305). As Garrick Small and John Sheehan assert, “Indigenous people do not view land as individual property per se but rather as a part of an ethical/spiritual/legal matrix of rights, obligations, and community relationships” (106). Allotment, then, constituted what Frank W. Porter calls “a radical departure from the Indian’s concept of land tenure.” While understandings of space certainly varied across regions and tribes, generally, “to the Indian the land was a whole and individually-owned parcels were unknown” (F. W. Porter 116).

Thus, as Barbara Arneil contends, Locke’s definition of the “natural” right to property effectively “exclude[s] non-Europeans from being able to exercise it” (609). “Unlike the Spanish conquistador or native American hunter,” she explains, “the Devonshire farmer described in the Second Treatise” becomes “the only legitimate proprietor and citizen,” as well as “the only legitimate member of the newly forming civil society” (609). If the American Indian were unable or unwilling to labor in the specific

⁴ Locke’s focus on agriculture as the basis for claiming property is essentially a rejection of the “Strange Doctrine” that imperial conquest through war could somehow grant to the victor the right to the lands of the conquered. Distinguishing his natal England from other, lesser imperialists such as Turkey, Holland, and Spain, he insists that land ownership does not result from “rapin[g] and plunder,” but rather from farming. The English belief in the value of agricultural industry can be traced at least back to Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, published nearly two centuries prior to Locke’s *Treatises*.

agricultural ways Locke and his supporters deemed appropriate, on land divided into the precise plots the Dawes Act determined, he would be dispossessed of that land. Locke reasoned, simply, that if there was more land available than “each one” can till, the remainder would be up for grabs: “Where there being more Land, than the Inhabitants possess, and make use of, any one has liberty to make use of the waste” (Ch. XVI, Sect. 184). In other words, by figuratively challenging Native Americans’ spiritual, communal definitions of and claims to “property,” the empirical, individual Dawes Act literally diminished their territories. Allotment not only allowed for the possibility that “any one” with “liberty” would “make use” of what Locke regarded as “waste[d]” property, but guaranteed it.⁵ As Arneil puts it, “... the transcendence of the state of nature by civil society... becomes a philosophical justification for both the usurpation of Indian land and the assimilation of ‘natural man’ into civil society” (609). More bluntly, James Tully has argued that Locke developed his agricultural philosophies precisely to create a perspective that would render English colonists blameless when they seized Native American lands. Even contemporaries of General Allotment seemed to recognize its not-so-hidden goals. According to Merrill E. Gates, a leader of a “friends of the Indian” organization, the Dawes Act amounted to “a mighty pulverizing engine for breaking up the tribal mass” (qtd. in Warrior 75). This understanding remains predominant today. As Momaday tells us in “The Morality of Indian Hating,” Allotment was “an obvious and efficient means of land robbery” which ultimately claimed close to 100 million acres of

⁵ For a detailed weighing of each side of the debate over just how intentional Locke’s work was in its apparent justification of commandeering Indian lands, see Kathy Squadrito’s “Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian.”

Native American territory (70).⁶

With the onset of the Great Depression and the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, Indian Policy made a 180 degree turn. The change was largely dependent on Roosevelt's appointment of John Collier to the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs. A social scientist, Collier understood the psychological toll Allotment had taken on Native Americans,⁷ as well as the cost of such a program to American beliefs in exceptionalism and supposed opposition to imperialism (Momaday 71, Rosier 65). Using this logic, Collier instituted policies that would allow the Indian to "remain on his own land, in an environment of his own making" (Momaday 71).⁸ The main outcome of this thinking was the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), passed by Roosevelt in 1934 as part of his liberalizing New Deal.

When Abel thinks of his childhood⁹ in *House Made of Dawn*, he is remembering this New Deal era, which Momaday calls one "of mutual discovery and respect" ("Morality" 71). This open attitude, in which the Indian could "be exposed on his own terms and without urgency to the world around him," clearly influences Abel's childhood understanding of place. In contrast to the rigid Lockean thinking of the Dawes Act, this new, relatively laissez-faire policy enables Abel to position himself "right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the

⁶ According to the Dawes Act, the federal government was supposed to hold allotments of land "in trust" for twenty-five years, thereby preventing the property from falling out of Native American hands. However, this trust was weakened in 1891 in a concession to white speculators and settlers, and nearly abolished with the 1906 Burke Act, which explicitly allowed for the land's sale (Rosier 28).

⁷ This toll was confirmed by a Survey of Indian Conditions commissioned by the U.S. Senate in 1943.

⁸ By the 1930s, under the influence of Collier's new Indian Arts and Crafts Board, even assimilationist Indian boarding schools like Richard Henry Pratt's encouraged Native American students to practice the music and art of their own cultures (Warrior 124).

⁹ If we do the math based on the dates and ages presented in the novel, Abel is 13 in 1937.

gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything” (138). Along with the IRA, the already-isolated locale of Abel’s childhood home contributes to the boy’s ability to develop an understanding, at his own pace and according to his own culture, of the landscapes around him. Because the town, “a remote place,” is “divided from the rest of the world” by the physical features of mountains, wasteland, and dunes, but “more than these by time and silence,” it often “seemed to disappear into the earth” (50, 27). This seclusion aligns with how the Walatowa¹⁰ define themselves in relation to their northern New Mexico landscape – the name literally translates to “the people in the canyon” (Schubnell 103). Like the chaparral of Chapter 3’s *George Washington Gómez*, such remoteness is a boon for creating a strong connection to the land and culture. “As a result of their geographical isolation and their cultural conservatism the Rio Grande Pueblos have succeeded in keeping their languages, religions, and traditional customs relatively intact despite the pressures of Spanish and Anglo-American cultural encroachment” (Schubnell 103). Such geographical protection allows for not just the connection, but even the conflation, of resident and residence. For example, when Francisco thinks of ceremonial dancers, he considers “where they were in relation to...the slope of the earth” (76). Similarly, he instructs Abel and his brother to “learn the whole contour of the black mesa ...as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart” (172-3). Just as they are familiar with their own bodies, so should they be intimate with the landscapes on and in which those bodies exist.

During his childhood, Abel’s exploration of the space in which he exists takes the form of a celebration of perception. Abel is particularly self-conscious of his own sense

¹⁰ “Walatowa,” a tribal name, is more or less synonymous with “Jemez.” These tribes are subsets of the larger “Pueblo” population (named by Spanish colonists for the types of buildings they lived in). Their language belongs to the Kiowa-Tanoan Language Family.

of sight due to the particular culture that surrounds him. Although he has Tanoan and Navajo heritage, he is aware of the existence of “the ancient blood” of a “forgotten tribe,” the Bahkyush, that “still ran in the veins” of many of those who live in his town (14-15). The Bahkyush, a “wretched people” who “had experienced great suffering” were marked by “difference.” When the few remaining members of their tribe were incorporated into the Kiowa clan, however, such difference was simultaneously viewed as “superiority.” Their “journey along the edge of oblivion” endowed the Bahkyush with a “tragic sense” that ultimately provided the “dignity and bearing” that led them to positions as “seers and soothsayers,” medicine men and rainmakers, and, most importantly, “eagle watchers.”

Abel is heir to these men, whose roles combine natural and supernatural vision of the landscape. As such, he is fascinated by his own developing sense of perception. Abel has three other models – his brother, his grandfather, and his grandmother – who help to usher him in to an attuned vision of his world. We first see his enthusiasm for sight when Abel and his older brother, Vidal, go hunting for water birds. Here, Vidal demonstrates fully developed sight, which senses with more than just the eyes. As Abel follows his brother, Vidal, “without looking around, motioned for him to be still” (104). Abel “searched the river below” but “could see nothing at first” (105). When Abel does see, it is unexpectedly, but with precise detail. First, he notes the surrounding space that precedes, and is connected to, the vision to come: “the black water shattered and crawled.” Next, he perceives twenty-four gray geese, which

broke from the river, lowly, steadily on the rise of sounds, straining to take hold on the air. Their effort was so great that they seemed for a time to hang beating in the willows, helplessly huge and frantic. But one after another they rose southward on their great thrashing wings, trailing bright beads of water in their wake. Then they were away, and he had seen how they craned their long slender necks to the moon, ascending slowly into

the far reaches of the winter night. They made a dark angle of the sky, acute, perfect; and for one moment they lay out like an omen on the bright fringe of a cloud. (105)

He records, in the slow motion of painstaking exactness, the difficulty of the geese's initial movement, the emotional and temporal weight of their liftoff, the reaction of the river to their sudden flight, the strain of their bodies toward their destination, and their geometrical relation to the heavens. With these specifics noted, Abel cries out in delight, desperate to share his vision, "Did you see? Oh, they were beautiful! Oh Vidal, oh my brother, did you see?" (105). For John A. McClure, Abel's experience represents a progressive development, in which a pragmatic question morphs into an aesthetic appreciation, which yields an "ethical-ontological recognition of connection" between two people (149). What appears at first to be a simple act of perception expands into a larger comprehension of how one fits one's self into a space and a community. Or, in McClure's words, how "local understanding yields a conception of the cosmos" (149).

However, during his childhood, we do not see Abel deploy his growing sense of sight to accommodate his body to the world through movement. The closest Abel gets to physical motion is when he tells us that "you felt like yelling and running and jumping up and down" when "[y]ou put your hands in the snow and rubbed your face with it and it made you come alive and feel good..." (136). Nonetheless, Abel's youth is full of examples of what appropriate physical movement would look like, ranging from slow and deliberate to fast and strenuous. For instance, he remembers his grandmother, Aho, in terms of "the several postures that were peculiar to her," including cooking, "bent above her beadwork," walking slowly upon a cane, and, most often, standing at prayer. Aho's prayers, consisting of "suffering and hope," are particularly notable because they originate in her having "*seen* many things" (117, emphasis mine). In other words, any

motions Aho makes through the world are based on her perception of that world, including her memories. In addition to Aho's "postures" of relative stillness, Abel is also provided with models for postures of speed. His grandfather makes a point of taking the young Abel to see the annual ceremonial "race of the dead" (180). Here, just as the "sun took hold of the valley," Francisco instructs Abel to "listen" to the "one sound of a hundred men running." The motion is not forced; the men run "easily and forever," as a "sudden burst of colors came out upon the land" (180). Again, Abel learns that perception of and motion through space are correlated.¹¹ As a child, then, Abel constructs a sense of sight by studying the movements of the occupants of his environment, thereby preparing for his own action.

When his chance to make a respectable move in the eyes of his community arrives, though, he fumbles. Just as Abel's grandfather gained "a voice in the clan" after performing the "perfect act" of beating a drum during a ceremonial dance (181), Abel's inclusion in a ceremonial eagle hunt – at age 17 – is meant to offer him a rite of passage into his tribe. Instead, Abel's participation in the Eagle Watchers society concludes with him taking the unsanctioned action of wringing the neck of the eagle he captures, resulting in his voluntary departure from the reservation. This act serves as an important pivot point as Abel moves from a largely positive childhood experience of place, perception, and posture to a disastrous early adulthood experience of those same concepts.

Whereas, during his childhood, Abel was learning to perceive his surroundings in holistic ways, his experience during the eagle hunt gradually breaks down rather than

¹¹ Even the animals of Abel's world teach him this lesson: "road runners take on the shape of motion itself," quail use "the imminence of...danger" to "explode away like a shot," and coyotes, with "the gift of being seldom seen," move only at night, "when the whole world belongs to them" (50-51).

builds up his vision of his world. Just prior to the hunt, Abel continues to hold on to the grand perspective on place he had been developing in his youth. Coming upon the Valle Grande, he notes, with awe, that "...all the objects in the landscape were washed clean and set away in the distance...It was almost too great for the eye to hold..." (16) This comprehensive view sets the tone for how Abel sees the animals that inhabit it. When he catches sight of the eagles, he perceives them as "cavorting, spinning and spiraling on the cold, clear columns of air," "screaming with delight." They "swooped and hovered" with "streamlined and perfectly controlled" movements, "rolled and swung," and finally "soared out over the plain" (16-17).

This wide, open view of both the landscape and its inhabitants changes drastically when Abel participates in a rabbit hunt, which will provide the eagle hunters with bait. After Abel nabs a jack-rabbit, he creates a "latticework of beams" atop a hollow shrine, on which he places the rabbit as an offering (19). Upon finishing this work, Abel's line of sight undergoes a profound shift. Whereas his initial vision of the valley had encompassed "the world," his new arena for perception is decidedly bounded: "[h]e could see here and there through the screen," and "the eagles "were almost too high to be seen." His circumscribed perception is contrasted by the "vantage point" of the eagles themselves, which [see] that "the land below reached away on either side," all the way to "the far end of the earth bending on the sky" (19). Momaday himself became familiar with this type of holistic vision when he learned to fly an airplane. In fact, he explicitly connected his sight from above to that of the creatures Abel hunts: "I saw the land as a hawk or an eagle sees it," he explained, "immense and wild and all of a piece" (Morgan 31). But at this point in the author's novel, his protagonist's vision no longer

approximates that of the eagle. By the end of the scene, Abel's vision is blurred in parallel with the "dusk fading quickly into night." Although he can see the eagle "in the mind's eye," he is unable to perceive its one-time freedom, because "his eyes were filled with tears" (20).

Abel's watery vision clearly affects his perception of his surroundings. We first see this shift in sight when he observes an eagle bagged by another hunter, which the group frees. This eagle, far from the soaring freedom Abel registered earlier, is "stoop[ed]", "full of fear and suspicion." Rather than "spinning and spiraling," it goes "clattering through the still shadows of the valley." Even when it reaches the sky, the light that encompasses it enacts a prison, as it "lay like bars" and "set a dark blaze upon" the animal (20). Unlike the eagle that had been "buoyed up" prior to the hunt, Abel "felt the great weight" of his own captured bird as he holds its sack. And in contrast to the earlier "wide and full-blown" character of the eagle's "pivots and wheels," Abel now sees his eagle as "drab and shapeless" (16, 20).

Why does Abel make the "wrong" move of killing the eagle? His act is not a bodily malfunction – indeed, later in the novel, Abel remembers that, during his early adulthood on the reservation, "he had loved his body. It had been hard and quick and beautiful; it had been useful, quickly and surely responsive to his mind and will" (88). When he kills the eagle, this is certainly true – he wrings its neck easily and quickly; the hands that complete this motion are "surely responsive" to his thoughts. Since the problem is not with Abel's body, several critics have looked instead at the connection between his body and mind. Schubnell argues that Abel's actions originate in his "misunderstanding of tribal culture," which causes him to act out in "rebellion against

tribal custom” (107-8). Teuton claims that Abel’s behavior is problematic due to its reliance on an individual, rather than communal, mandate (64). In addition to looking at how Abel’s perception clashes with that of *past* traditions, it is also necessary to think about how the *contemporary* historical moment in which the scene occurs has catalyzed those conflicts. Indeed, all the lessons in space, sight, and motion Abel has received are not enough to hold off modernity. Momaday himself was well aware of the effects of “progress” on indigenous cultures during the 1940s and 50s. As he explains in “The Morality of Indian Hating,”

For three hundred years the pueblos remained nearly impervious to the white man’s interference, but after the Second World War...the old ways were lost. The sense of temporality which has pervaded the old *costumbres* is, one thinks, an illusion produced by the sad certainty that, beyond these sanctuaries, cultural extinction is imminent. (75)

Thus, while Abel’s changing perspectives on the landscape during the hunt can be attributed to an adolescent reaction *against* the “old ways,” those views are also undoubtedly influenced by a pull *toward* a realistic recognition of the inevitable imposition of modernity. Because the development of Abel’s perceptions and postures was never fully completed during his childhood, he is especially vulnerable to this pull. His failure to move in culturally sanctioned ways during the hunt only underlines this vulnerability. Abel’s shifting vision reveals both the ambiguous nature of the Indian Reorganization Act that covered Abel’s childhood and the impending changes to U.S. Indian Policy leading up to World War II. According to Kenneth William Townsend, the IRA actually “concealed a shrewd and cleverly orchestrated plan for assimilation rather than tribal revitalization” (206). This plan became much more blatant during the war.

Losing Place: The Effects of WWII Indian Policies on Perception and Posture

The loss of visual perception and physical stability that Abel experiences on his reservation during the eagle hunt foreshadows changes in how the U.S. government viewed and treated Native Americans, their cultures, and their lands leading up to, during, and following World War II. According to Paul C. Rosier, the war “both diverted attention from and heightened an ongoing ideological battle over Native American self-determination” (73). For Momaday, this internal battle within the larger external battle of WWII “represents such a dislocation of the psyche in our time. Almost no Indian of my generation or Abel’s generation escaped that dislocation, that sense of having to deal immediately, not only with the traditional world, but with the other world which was placed over the traditional world so abruptly and with great violence” (Coltelli 162). Just as the author portrays Abel’s childhood development of a sense of location – made possible in part by the Indian Reorganization Act – through a parallel development of perception and motion, Momaday’s depiction of his protagonist’s loss of that sense is evidenced along similar lines, this time made possible by the new policies that accompanied the war. As Rosier puts it, WWII “brought dramatic changes to Native Americans’ ideas about their literal and figurative place in American society and in the world” (72).

Given the confusing status of Native Americans as simultaneously autonomous and dependent, it was unclear whether and how they would serve in the armed forces during WWII. Debates surrounding the proper “place” for Native Americans during the war involved federal administrators, non-governmental advocate organizations, and, of

course, Indians themselves.¹² The first question was one of citizenship. While the 14th amendment (1868) technically extended citizenship to all those “born or naturalized” in the U.S., this extension was generally not granted to Native Americans.¹³ Even the Indian Citizenship Act¹⁴ granted citizen status only to those Native Americans born after its passage.¹⁵ This was enough for Captain W.B. Palmer of the Joint Army and Navy Selective Service Committee, who was relieved when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier assured him that those of the age most fit for service were citizens (Franco 42). Second was the question of culture. Oliver LaFarge, president of the American Association on Indians,¹⁶ was concerned that many native customs – such as a prohibition on cutting one’s hair or eating fish – would be “incompatible with standard military routine” (qtd. in Franco 44). Nevertheless, LaFarge asserted that Native Americans were well equipped to serve in the armed forces, especially if they could be trained in “special corps” where their “peculiarities could be considered sympathetically.” Finally, there was the question of how to incorporate Native Americans into the troops. Whereas during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and even the Indian Wars, Native Americans had been grouped into “auxiliary units,” they were integrated into “regular” regiments in World War I. Twenty years later, though, the question was reopened for debate. At first, the Bureau of Indian Affairs contended that all-Indian units

¹² Although many of the issues up for discussion had been deliberated during the first World War, they were rehashed all over again in the second (Rosier 72).

¹³ Native Americans were neither counted as members of the population (for purposes of representation) nor taxed.

¹⁴ Signed by Calvin Coolidge in 1924 partly in recognition of Native Americans’ contributions to WWI.

¹⁵ It was not until the 1940 Nationality Act that all those born on U.S. soil (no matter on what date), including Native Americans, were considered citizens.

¹⁶ Originally founded in New York in 1922 as the Eastern Association on Indian Affairs

would make “the best possible use of Indian special skills” (Rosier 91). Many Native Americans aligned themselves with this view, including J.C. Morgan of the Navajo Tribal Council, who reasoned that an “indigenous regiment” would help prepare them to later enter into integrated units, and William T. Snake, a Ponca, who wanted to form an all-Indian troop to “*defend* OUR COUNTRY” (qtd. in Rosier 92). But because of enemy propaganda, the U.S. government had to be very careful about how it treated its minorities. As journalist Carey McWilliams explained, WWII symbolized “a clash between the idea of racial superiority (central to the Nazi doctrine) and the idea of racial equality (central to the concept of democracy)” (qtd. in Rosier 79). As such, Rosier writes, “it became imperative for U.S. officials to ameliorate the racial conflicts that proved useful for German, Spanish, and Japanese propagandists, who seized on the mistreatment of African Americans and Native Americans as evidence that the United States had no claim to the moral high ground.” Another rationale for integrating Native Americans into the general body of the military was logistical: as Assistant Chief of Staff General William E. Shedd insisted, adding a third segment to the two already existing – black and white – would result in “utter confusion” (qtd. Rosier 93). In the end, the BIA changed its position, and supported the military integration of Native Americans.

If the threats of international propaganda and national logistics pushed official U.S. policy to include American Indians to fight within white regiments, what inspired Native Americans to accept such inclusion from a country that had so often excluded them from the nation? Rosier offers multiple reasons: “Native Americans served in the war not only because of patriotism but also because of martial traditions embedded in family or tribal community histories for economic opportunity, and, of course, because

they were drafted” (Rosier 87). These reasons are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the first two can be combined into what Rosier calls “hybrid patriotism,” perhaps best summed up by Lewis Naranjo, a member of the Pueblo tribe who described his service to his country as follows: “We are doing our best to win the war to be free from danger as much as the white man. We are fighting with Uncle Sam's army to defend the right of our people to live our own life in our own way” (qtd. in Rosier 104). In this way, Native Americans “perceived themselves fighting for two linked geographical spaces – their ancestral homelands and the United States of America – both facing a crisis of national security” (Rosier 73).

More precisely, American Indians were interested in protecting these entities as *places*, as “specific piece[s] of ground that sustained a nation within a nation” (Rosier 87). For example, Navajo soldier Cozy Stanley Brown explained, “My main reason for going to war was to protect my land and my people because the elderly people said that the earth was our mother.” Similarly, Albert Smith, another Navajo, reasoned that “This conflict involved Mother Earth being dominated by foreign countries,” and it was the Indian's “responsibility to defend her.” U.S. governmental authorities were not unaware of this sense of responsibility to place. As Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes wrote in his 1941 report, “If the Indian's love of his homeland once proved an obstacle to the white man, today it is making an unique contribution...to the total national defense effort” (Rosier 88). Indeed, by July 1941, nearly 1 in 10 Indians of military age had entered the armed forces, and ultimately 25,000 Native Americans served in WWII.

Abel on the Battlefield: Integration, Incoherence, and the “Goddam *War Dance*”

Abel’s preparation for “inclusion” in the troops that will defend American values abroad gets off to a rough start, characterized by uncomfortable territory, curtailed sight, and conflicted motion. The sheer number of Native Americans soldiers enlisting in the armed forces during WWII is not equated to an easy decision to serve, and the dislocation Abel begins to feel during the eagle hunt of his early adulthood is only exacerbated when he physically departs from his home to enlist in the U.S. Army. As soon as Abel hears the horn of the bus that will carry him away, the “town and the valley and the hills” – “everything he knew and had always known” – seem “already miles and months away, gone long ago” (21). Because both the familiarity of the space and its inhabitants is now absent – “suddenly he had the sense of being all alone” – Abel’s range of vision shrinks accordingly: he “looked straight ahead, centered upon himself in the onset of loneliness and fear” (21). With his unrecognizable surroundings and limited perspective comes a confusion of motion, as “he felt the lurch and loss of momentum” of the bus quickly followed by “a lot of speed and sound” (21). Abel “tried desperately” to reconcile this opposition of forces, but comes to no conclusions about “what it meant.”

Abel’s experiences during the war represent a continuing decline in his sense of place, his ability to clearly perceive that place, and his capacity to posture himself accordingly. In fact, Momaday portrays him as so discombobulated that he later remembers that period of “days and years” as “without meaning,” full of “awful calm and collision,” with “time always immediate and confused,” such that “he could not put [it all] together in his mind” (21). His one clear recollection of the war – despite its supposedly “sharp,” “distinct” character – is plagued by incoherence. First, the setting is

unclear: “he didn’t know where he was, could not remember having been there.” Second, Abel’s spatial vision contains an unsettling mixture of confusion and clarity. Although Sioux scholar Ella Deloria has argued that WWII “wrought an overnight change in outlook...of the Indian people” (qtd. in Rosier 72), Momaday presents such a change, on the individual level, as much more gradual and complex. In Abel’s war flashback, the author describes the shift in terms of oscillating vision. On the one hand, Abel “could barely see” the “bodies of men” “strewn among the pits,” and has trouble distinguishing their “sprawling limbs” from the “litter of leaves” in which they rest. There are multiple obstacles in his line of sight as he “look[s] into the sun,” including “splinters of light,” and “countless leaves” that “dip and sail” (22). On the other hand, the narrator tells us that, in the midst of these blockages, Abel’s “vision cleared” when he sees a tank in the distance, which, at least “for a moment,” appears distinctly as “apart from the land.” Abel’s sight quickly blurs the vehicle with its background again, however, as Marx’s proverbial machine in the garden approaches: it is described as “*nestling* almost into the splash and boil of debris” (22-23). Finally, this unclear setting and confused perception make for equally incoherent movements within it, both by Abel and by the tank. Abel’s motions range from insensible – “He reached for something, but he had no notion of what it was; his hand closed upon earth and the cold, wet leaves” (22) – to inert – he momentarily “played dead” (103) – to chaotic – according to the testimony of a fellow soldier, “he just all of a sudden got up and started jumping around...doing a goddam *war dance*...two-step or something...” (103-4, italics original). The tank that responds to Abel is similarly unpredictable in its movements, beginning with a “concentrated calm” and “slow, steady motion and approach” (22) before it “all of a sudden crunched down

and bounced – yes, sir, *bounced*, actually bounced to a stop – and they all started shooting at him, *pop, pop, ping, ping, pow!*” (103, italics original).

War, by definition, is chaotic. But the lack of consistency that characterizes Abel’s place and positioning during his tour of duty is clearly aided and abetted by the complications inherent in the federal Indian policies at the time – complications espoused by the BIA itself in its definition of “the Indian of today” as “the product of an adjustment of tradition and modernism.” If the decision to include Native Americans in “regular” troops was a conflicted one, so, too was the practice of this inclusion. On the one hand, much of the war effort relied on the preservation of Indian cultural elements, particularly language, which were used to create codes that would unite the U.S. against its enemies (qtd. in Rosier 91). Indeed, the solidarity of units composed of whites and Native Americans is written in the stone of the Iwo Jima Memorial, which recreates the famous 1945 photograph of the American flag being raised over Mount Suribachi by six soldiers, including Ira Hayes, a member of the Pima tribe. However, the logistical inclusion of Native Americans in the operations of WWII did not necessarily promote cultural understanding, much less cohesion, when the boots hit the ground. Momaday makes this clear when Bowker, one of Abel’s fellow soldiers, discusses Abel’s behavior at the warfront. In his testimony, he calls Abel a “chief,” labels his language “Sioux or Algonquin or something,” and describes his gestures in terms of the racialized stereotypes of “jumping around” and “clapping whoops from his mouth just like in the movies” (103-4). Even more problematically, Bowker misinterprets Abel’s erratic motions as originating from hubris rather than confusion or terror. In declaring certainty

that Abel “was not afraid, no sir,” Bowker’s testimony points to an utter disconnect, despite the integration of troops, between these “comrades” in arms (102).

Abel on the Reservation: Termination Policy and the Shrunken Landscape

The conflict between Native Americans’ technical inclusion in WWII and their actual miscomprehension by their comrades grew after the war ended. Like an ethnic version of WWI’s Lost Generation, the Native Americans who had fought in WWII came home to an America where they could find their place among neither Indians nor whites. Having become accustomed to integration (if not cohesion), equal employment opportunity, and foreign landscapes, Native Americans endured reverse-culture shock upon returning stateside, many back to their reservations. If Abel had already experienced difficulties in aligning himself with the traditions of his culture before the war, those difficulties were compounded after the war by both the geographical and demographic changes that had occurred during the war on the reservation, and in the shift of federal Indian Policy from Reorganization to Termination.

When Abel returns to Walatowa in 1945, his geographical and cultural disconnect from the reservation is illustrated in the veteran’s hazy vision and drooping movement, which is placed in opposition to the sharp memory and proud carriage of his grandfather. When Francisco arrives at the bus station to pick up his grandson, he sees clearly and stands tall. He begins by vividly recalling a pencil drawing – made to memorialize his 1889 participation in a ceremonial race – depicting a “straight black man running” (7-8). He has held on to this posture for 56 years, despite a crippled leg. In anticipation of his grandson’s disembarking, “instinctively he drew himself up in the dignity of his age” (8). In sharp contrast, when Abel gets off the bus, he is drunk: his sight is impaired – “his

eyes were half closed and rolling” – and his motions are off- balance – he “stepped heavily to the ground and reeled.” In a reversal of the roles appropriate for their ages, the grandfather must hold his grandson “upright.” On their way home, Abel lies prostrate while Francisco, sitting “bent to the lines” of the wagon, takes responsibility for their motion (9). In addition to the contrast between the postures of Abel and his grandfather on the post-war reservation, Abel’s slumping motion offers a stark contrast to his actions during his military service. Whereas, as a soldier, he threw around his body in a “goddam *war dance*” amongst the “speed and sound” of chaos, his stance following his return to the reservation is closer to “playing dead.” He is even described at this point as a “wooden Indian” (32).

Aesthetically, Momaday records Abel’s static stance on and dulled sight of his place in this section of the novel by leaving his protagonist’s perspective almost entirely out of the narrative. Most critics agree that the author makes this move to underline a loss of some sort for Abel, whether it be his identity, voice, culture, or place. Abel at this point is caught between a rock and a hard place. He is unable to call on or enact the place-based traditions of his culture that he never fully grasped as a child. Neither, however, does he find meaningful or useful the foreign unfamiliar practices he learned from the whites alongside whom he fought during the war. Following his return stateside, then, Abel is pictured as abandoning all pretense of having any beliefs in or knowledge of how to be in a place, how to see it, or how to move through it. Instead, he begins his childhood journey all over again by re-examining his place, perceptions, and postures. Now, as then, he completes this exploration by observing both the place itself and how those around him see and move through it. But whereas Abel during his

childhood could examine relatively untouched land and learn from seasoned residents like his grandfather, his options for study following the war have changed drastically. Together, these shifts in landscape and inhabitants contribute to Abel's difficulty in relocating himself after the war.

If Abel's eyes are "rolling" over the land and his steps "reeling" upon it when he returns to the reservation, this is in part because lands like his had been taken over, changed, or shrunk by federal authorities while he was fighting abroad. In the 1943 inaugural issue of the *The American Indian* magazine,¹⁷ Oliver LaFarge wrote, "I do not want...any...Indians ...to come home with a chestful of medals and a sleeveful of stripes to find their Reservation wrecked" (qtd. Rosier 103). LaFarge's skepticism that "the American people will repay their loyalty" was well-placed. As the Secretary of the Interior's 1942 *Annual Report* noted, "blocks of Indian land ... have been requisitioned for military use, and the removal of Indian families...constituted a direct war service for the [BIA]" (qtd. in Rosier 96). Indeed, the military found many reasons for such requisitions, including gunnery practice,¹⁸ dam construction,¹⁹ and Japanese American internment.²⁰ This land was meant to be returned following the war, but as Rosier reminds us, "To give up more land, and to be 'removed' from it, despite the promise that the situation was temporary, did not appeal to Native Americans, who saw the

¹⁷ Published by the Association on American Indian Affairs

¹⁸ The lack of population and infrastructure made the land appealing: "it could be bombed with little risk," writes Rosier (96)

¹⁹ HR 323 (1943) would authorize construction of dams on the Rio Grande in New Mexico (Rosier 102-104)

²⁰ These included the Poston center on the Colorado River Reservation and the camp at the Gila River Reservation. About 25,000 Japanese Americans were being held on Native American lands by the end of 1942 (Rosier 98).

requisitions as extending military subjugation and government appropriation of their land” (97).

While Abel’s dim sight and immobilized body after his military service functions as a commentary on the usurpation of Native American property in the name of war, his compromised faculties also reflect impending changes to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Following the war, many viewed the BIA’s treatment of Indians as outdated in its continued paternalism. In 1942, the Bureau’s headquarters had been moved from Washington, D.C., to Chicago, and its federal funding cut. Although perhaps the real reason for these changes was that the government needed resources to fund its war abroad, the critique of the BIA as effectively reversing the assimilation many had achieved during their service was used to justify its demise. As pro-integration journalist Oswald Villard explained, “Indians themselves will tire of being considered human museum pieces seeking to keep alive vestiges of a life that was picturesque” (qtd. in Rosier 112). In 1944, the Senate Indian Affairs committee issued a report that affirmed the increasing opposition of Congress to the Indian Reorganization Act’s efforts to protect reservations. In rationalizing the “Liquidation of the Indian Bureau,” the report essentially advocated for the “termination” of reservations (Rosier 103). Many Native Americans who had served abroad could have seen this coming. For instance, when Private First Class Joseph Roybal learned that the ceremonies of Alaskan natives had declined as the U.S. encroached on their land, he wrote that he was “thankful that I came from adobe land where I hope that in the years to come no ill-thinking white man will attempt to change our way of living...in the Southwest, the land I wouldn’t trade for any part of the world...” (qtd. Rosier 102). In response to recognitions, like Roybal’s, of the

connections between tradition and geography, the National Congress of American Indians was formed to safeguard “Indianness” by preserving the spaces on which it was founded (Rosier 102). Despite these efforts, Native Americans lost nearly 1 million acres of land during WWII, effectively overturning the Indian New Deal that had guaranteed the maintenance of reservations and their cultures.

In addition to the new policy of Termination and the changes it rendered on the land itself, Abel’s post-war vision and motion is also confused by his new models for how to see and move through that space. Whereas his grandparents and brother had provided him during his childhood with demonstrations of culturally integrated methods of perception and posture, his post-war examples are unsure of how to see or move through space. Abel’s first model, Father Olguin, a white priest, is displaced, an “alien in an unfathomably pagan colonial outpost” who feels “mocked by the Indians’ cultural persistence, by the subversiveness of their very survival in remoteness” (Owens 107). This sense of isolation inspires a sense of constriction in Olguin, who feels that the pueblo’s “endless succession of steep earthen walls...enclosed him all around” (65). Due to his outsider status, he feels most comfortable enclosed by his *own* set of walls, alone inside his house, reading and writing in near darkness. It is only in this isolated space that “he could take stock of all his resources and prospects, and...could find his place among them” (41). Olguin feels out of place in Jemez in part because he has only one good eye with which to see, and mostly uses it to perceive his own private world, full of European religious texts not particularly applicable to the Walatowa region or its people. When Olguin does venture out, his myopic sense of place makes his motions rushed – “he always awoke with a strange sense of urgency” (40) – as if he needed to get back to

his own realm as soon as possible. For example, as Sean Teuton has noted, when the priest races through the maze-like pueblo during a festival, he nearly crashes into a child. Like his tires, which “lock upon the packed earth,” Olguin’s motions are abrupt and violent. Ironically, just before this incident, Olguin has convinced himself that “he had at last begun to sense the rhythm of life in the ancient town, and how it was that his own pulse should eventually conform to it” (61). Eventually, Olguin does “come to terms with the town,” but only by letting the “fire of his spirit...burn...low, and with it the waste of motion...” (170). Clearly, the priest’s sense of constricted place, halved sight, and rash movements do not contribute to Abel’s ability to find himself here.

Abel’s second model in this section of the novel is Angela St. John. In search of better health, she rents a residence known as the Benevides House – literally, “good life” – near the region’s mineral baths. Her need for recalibration is first evidenced in her descriptions of her world as alternately upside-down and fixed. For instance, she describes the intense blue of the sky as “like water, very still and deep” (25). At first glance, this conflation of air and sea is reminiscent of Momaday’s anecdote in *The Names*, in which the author describes looking up from the bottom of a canyon and seeing a “serpentine strip of the sky...like a river running across the top of the world.” When Momaday explains this passage in his essay “The American West and the Burden of Belief,” however, he mandates that, “[i]n order to be perceived in its true character, the landscape of the American West must be seen in terms of its sacred dimension” (105). Due to Angela’s own “dense, impenetrable world,” she is unable to gain a full comprehension of this space (33). Rather than seeing the connection between sky and sea as an inspirational whole, she describes it as “empty” and “eternal beyond all hope”

(29). Although she learns to be “alive to the black silent world of the canyon,” she does not allow herself to be affected by it, instead using the Benevides house to “h[o]ld the world at bay” (49). Angela’s vision is removed. The Benevides house is located in a town called Los Ojos – “the eyes” – but Angela’s sight is overly focused, either on her own contemplations or on that which she observes. In the first case, we see Angela “lost in thought,” thereby missing the setting entirely (26). In the second case, her hyperawareness leads her to miss the forest for the trees. For example, when Abel chops wood for her, we see her “taking his motion apart.” Or, when waiting for that wood to burn in her fireplace, “she did not see it happen, though she looked hard for it” (32). Or, finally, when she watches a traditional corn dance, her concentration on the dancers’ vision, “intent upon something that she could not see,” leads her to conclude that “they saw nothing after all, nothing at all” (33). Given the emptiness of her world and her inability to see it clearly, it is no surprise that Angela has physical difficulty in traversing it. Pale and “too thin” (26), inhabited by a baby she views as a “monstrous fetal form,” she harbors a “fear and disgust of her body.” At one point, “it was nearly beyond her to walk” (40). Abel and Angela have a brief affair, but it is not only Abel’s “lack of articulation” that prevents their relationship from developing, as Schubnell claims (118). Angela clearly has her own “obstacles,” including her confused senses of space and sight, both of which prevent her from moving coherently, if at all. Neither, however, can Abel “effect” Angela’s “restoration...to wholeness,” as Louis Owens suggests (105-6). At this mid-point in the novel, the blind are leading the blind.

Given the examples of Father Olguin and Angela St. John, that Abel’s attempts to rightly see and move through the spaces of the Jemez Pueblo fail should be

unremarkable. This is not to say that Abel's return to the reservation is for naught. Indeed, there are isolated instances in which we see his efforts to grasp his connection to this place, as when he observes that "The breeze was very faint, and it bore the scent of earth and grain." Briefly attuned to the landscape, he acknowledges that "for a moment everything was all right with him. He was at home" (27). But these moments of feeling in place are short-lived, and ultimately overwhelmed by a feeling of being burdened by place. For example, when Abel feels "the weight of the sun on his head and hands," his view of the valley is correspondingly freighted: "the land became hard and pale" (24). He understands that this is not the vision he seeks, as his "eyes roved after something...something" (23). Gaining the ability to see this "something" in the landscape is the prerequisite for movement; without it, both his mind and body are paralyzed: "He stood without thinking, nor did he move..." (23).

When Abel does make a move, it is with good intention, but inelegant because uninformed. Desperate to regain his place in his culture following his absence, he participates in the traditional ceremonies of the Feast of Santiago, including the rooster pull, symbolic of agricultural abundance (35). The ritual takes place in "the Middle," an "ancient place" that defies the visions of outsiders. Here, the "smooth, packed earth was not level, as it appeared at first to be, but rolling and concave;" although "the space appeared to be enclosed," there were in fact "narrow passages" and "a wide opening" (36). The area is characterized by "the soft contours and depressions of things worn down and away in time." But because Abel's comprehension of the history that imbues the land is uncertain, and his vision of the space therefore unclear, the quick, smooth movements required to win the competition are impossible for him to enact. Instead, he

“sat too rigid in the saddle” and is “too careful of the gentle mare” he rides (37).

Although the reader sees all of this through Angela’s eyes, her perspective acts as a stand-in for Abel’s. She sees a “brilliant disorder of motion,” “a perfect commotion” in which “something was out of place” (39). Like Abel, she senses the possibility of “brilliance” or “perfection,” but cannot coalesce the movements she sees in the space before her.

Later, Momaday presents the more holistic perspective of Francisco on two other ceremonies of the festival, the horse dance and bull run. The old man critiques the bull, which he says had “no holiness to it” (71). His explanation of this critique helps to explain his grandson’s difficulty with seeing the land clearly and enacting ceremonies upon it. Playing the ceremonial role of the bull is “harder now,” Francisco reasons, because “the men of the town had relaxed their hold upon the ancient ways, had grown soft and dubious.” The grandfather is able to carry forward traditions like these only because he has memories and experiences on which to depend, unlike those who joined the military based on second-hand knowledge of a love for the earth. His mental perception is so clear, in fact, that he “knew without looking around” when the bull arrives at the present ceremony: “he could see it perfectly in his mind,” and is carried back to the moment when “he, too, had been the bull” (72).

By contrast, Abel’s lack of experience on the land and absence of understanding of its history render him clumsy. Informed more by war trauma than by the weakened culture in which he finds himself residing, his actions are understandably brusque. Out of frustration at his failure to find his place through ceremonial participation, Abel resorts to violence, killing the winner of the rooster pull, Juan Reyes, a giant albino. For the

majority of critics, the albino represents some form of evil that Abel feels must be eradicated. But while many scholars have examined Abel's vision of this evil creature from philosophical, symbolic, and literary stances, few have asked where his perception originates. Louis Owens is the only one to consider the implications of Abel's war service, arguing that the veteran has adopted the Allied worldview that the Axis forces are "embodiments of an absolute evil that must be destroyed" (105).

It is only after Abel has committed murder, and after he has been sentenced to jail, that he becomes conscious that he has misplaced the centeredness he had begun to establish in his childhood. Following his trial, the narrator tells us, "He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void" (92). It is this sense of displacement, once again, that renders him blind: he "had no real *insight* into his own situation" (93, emphasis mine). This lack of vision becomes literal when Abel is incarcerated, unable even to distinguish the color of the walls that surround him, much less project his vision beyond those confines: "The walls of his cell were white, or perhaps they were gray or green; he could not remember. After a while he could not imagine anything beyond the walls..." (92). And, again, with neither a place in which to situate himself nor the ability to see such a space clearly, Abel is left without recourse to physical movement: during the trial, Abel "sat like a rock in his chair" (90). As when Angela referred to him as "wooden," Abel's reduction to natural materials like wood and stone indicates the imposition of nature metaphors as Indian stereotypes. While those imposing the stereotype might see such objects as inanimate, and therefore denying

motion, much of Abel's stillness is an active refusal to participate in a space regulated by white viewpoints.²¹

Abel in Los Angeles: The Relocation Program and the Polarized Landscape

If Abel is unable to find a stable sense of place, perception, or position in the rural Jemez Valley upon returning from war, neither is he capable of locating himself in the urban space of Los Angeles, where he moves following his release from jail. His move is supported by the BIA's Voluntary Relocation Program, which provided Native Americans with financial and social support to transition from reservations to urban centers in the 1950s and 60s. The program was widely used: between 1950 and 1970, almost 160,000 Native Americans left their reservations for cities like St. Louis, Chicago, Denver, and San Francisco (Rosier 164). Abel's psychological and physical experiences of L.A., like those during the war and back on the reservation, are plagued by confusion. Depending on perspective and position, this section of the novel portrays the city and the reservation Abel has left behind as alternately occupying the opposing poles of new and old, full and empty, and alive and dead. I argue that these unsettling dualities are reflective of the both/and positions taken by many federal authorities at this point in history. As Toby Morris, the Chairman of the House Indian Affairs Subcommittee, told President Truman, more funding was necessary for Native American programs both "on and off reservations" (Rosier 164). Although Morris ideally wanted these groups to "take their proper place in our American society," his proposals for a "hybrid program of

²¹ When he "refused to speak" after "he had told his story once, simply," he chooses not to engage in "their language," through which they "were disposing of him." It is clear to Abel that the court's monologue is lacking integrity, "strangely uneasy, full of hesitation" (90), and that such "reluctan[t]" meaning making will not produce stable ground on which to move. Although Navajo code talkers had used their own language during the war to forward the ideals of American "freedom," Abel's silence ultimately supports the need for the rallying cry of the National Congress of American Indians to "let Indians speak for themselves" and on their own terms (Bernstein 171).

reservation rehabilitation and relocation” suggests that just where that “proper place” might be was unclear (165).

In *Brothers under the Skin* (1943), Carey McWilliams underlined the difficulty of placing Native Americans “properly” by asking, “just what is meant by assimilation?” (74). In a chapter titled “The Non-Vanishing Indian,” he argued that “Indians have already been largely assimilated” in politically, but not culturally. For McWilliams, “cultural uniformity” is not the goal. Instead, he advocates for the continuation of New Deal programs that provide for the “gradual and orderly adjustment of Indian culture to the demands of a modern industrialized society” (73). However, Ruth Muskrat Bronson, a Cherokee cofounder of the NCAI, was not so certain that such a gradual approach would be acceptable to Native veterans. In “What Does the Future Hold?” Bronson predicts Indian soldiers, having gained “a new perspective” abroad, “will come home demanding full status in American life” (qtd. in Rosier 107). But these demands would be difficult to meet, according to BIA official John Embree, who noted that the continuing “color prejudice” of most Americans would prevent Indians from being “accepted into the white world...no matter how fully they adopt white ways” (Rosier 100).

These conflicting post-war opinions about the definition and possibility of assimilation are reflected in the conflicted spaces of Los Angeles in *House Made of Dawn*, which operate in confused dichotomies of old and new, empty and full. Although sociologists at the time believed that “the power of the urban space” was supposed “to dissolve minority cultures into the national fabric,” Momaday counters that the city can only awkwardly accommodate Native Americans like Abel (Douglas 226). On the one

hand, Abel finds himself in a “new” place, both in that he has never been there before and in that the city was experiencing some of its highest levels of growth in the 1940s and 50s.²² In this modern city, “everything is clean and bright and new-looking” (124). Even Abel’s work centers on newness – his job is to make boxes that maintain the freshness of products. As with the underbelly of glitzy Hollywood in Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*, however, an old, dark, dirty side of L.A. also exists. On his first night there, Abel has the option to sleep at the Indian Center, “an old frame building” where “you can see through the cracks in the walls.” It is a last resort of a place, where “you can stay...if you don’t have anyplace else to go,” in contrast to L.A.’s streets, full of “everybody going someplace, going home” (134). The apartment Abel ends up living in, with Navajo Ben Bennally, certainly does not feel like “home,” with its noisy radiator pipes, stale smell, and blank, mostly windowless walls.

In contrast to the history- and culture-laden Jemez Valley, it would seem that L.A. would be considered “empty.” But the economic focus of the Relocation Program on which Abel relies flips the definition of emptiness. As John Collier wrote to Robert G. Caldwell, chairman of the State Department’s Cultural Relations Program, “we have a great potential undeveloped market which, by educating the Indians to desire an improvement in their standard of living and by increasing their purchasing power, would relieve greatly the economic strain caused by the loss of European markets (qtd. in Rosier 81). An urban center marked by consumer culture, according to these values, is full.

Abel’s roommate Ben tells him:

²² Whereas Los Angeles’ population grew by 266,229 people from 1930 to 1940, it added 466,081 from 1940-1950, and 508,657 from 1950-1960.

Everything is here, everything you could ever want. You never have to be alone. You go downtown and there are a lot of people all around, and they're having a good time. You see how it is with them, how they get along and have money and nice things, radios and cars and clothes and big houses. And you want those things; you'd be crazy not to want them. And you can have them, too; they're so *easy* to have. (158, italics original)

Native American reservations, then, come to be defined as empty. As Ben puts it, "there's nothing there, you know, just the land, and the land is empty and dead" (158). Indeed, the rationale behind Relocation policy followed this same logic. In explaining his support for Section 6 of the Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act of 1950, a precursor to the Relocation Program, Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug reported to President Harry Truman that Navajos were experiencing a "material crisis" in which the economic vacuum of their reservations could no longer support their growing numbers (Rosier 148). More radical advocates of impending termination policies were more blunt, using reservations' lack of economic opportunity to label them "prisons" (Rosier 147).²³ It appears at first that Ben has accepted this reversal of definitions, but John A. McClure reminds us that his pronouncements of reservations' emptiness are challenged by the traditional chants he sings for Abel, which extol tribal lands as "beautiful all around" (130). For McClure, these conflicting depictions of place indicate a "profound self-division," propelling an "ambivalence" that has been enabled by "their history of partial secularization" (140-41). Although Ben surmises that he and his fellow displaced Native Americans "could talk about" and "could understand" things "if we all came from the same place" (135), his own unsteady portrayals of a single space suggest that the problem is not so much the lack of a place in common as the lack of a clear communal perception of that space.

²³ If whites did acknowledge the value of these spaces, it was only for their natural resources' potential to be "liquidated" into cash (Rosier 181).

And clear perception is hard to come by in Los Angeles, where the privilege of perspective is generally granted to the whites at the top of the social ladder. Abel's sense of sight in Los Angeles is unsteady, if not blocked altogether. For instance, at a poker game, Ben says that Abel "couldn't get his eyes to hold still" (141). In another case, vision is impossible, since the only lightbulb in his apartment's foyer "blew out a long time ago" (125). As with George Washington Gómez, Abel's compromised vision is set in contrast to, or even subjected by, the hyperfocused surveillance by which he is tracked as an "other." In L.A., "...everybody's looking at you," including Abel's aged neighbor, Carlozini, who's "always watching you" (139, 157); his boss, who "inspect[s] everything he did" (142); and the "Relocation people," who are constantly checking on him. Because of this surveillance, Benally warns, "you have to watch where you're going" in L.A (124).

Ironically, the Relocation Program's offer of economic and social mobility actually achieved the opposite, preventing the movements of its wards by rendering them surveilled objects without their own vision. As Momaday shows, Abel's physical movements in Los Angeles range from paralyzed – "he couldn't move" – to manic – "shaking all over" – sometimes in the space of a few moments (141). These incoherent motions result from his increasingly tenuous sense of place and perception. His uncertainty about movement is in some ways simply a logistical problem of acclimating to the expectations of a new geography, ideology, and timetable. As Ben explains: "you don't know where you're going or why or when you have to get there" (139). National Congress of American Indians president Joseph Garry echoed this sentiment in 1956, writing that the expansion of the Relocation Program had resulted in Native Americans'

feelings of “unrest and fear” (Rosier 193). But when Abel looks for answers to the questions of where, why, and when to move, the responses are mixed. On the one hand, he harbors the Kiowa tribe’s historical “love of going.” On the other hand, Ben denigrates this same culture for its present-day representation by “a lot of old people” who are “going noplac” (140). Another possible model of motion is the city itself, full of lights that “go on and off and move all around” and people who “wonder... why you don’t hurry up” (124, 139). But while Abel knows “he had to do something...he didn’t know what it was” (154). Even the accessories of Abel’s life underline his inability to move, including his shiny but uncomfortable shoes and his suitcase, across which a spider is always making a web (93, 109, 156). Like Benally’s compulsive use of the phrase “I guess,” Abel is plagued by indecision about his direction. Even the pigeon who visits his apartment “couldn’t seem to make up its mind” about whether or not to land on the windowsill (126). We’re a far cry from the grandiose control and joy of the movements of the soaring eagle Abel observed seven years earlier.

Abel’s immobilization, caused by the conflicted nature of the city’s spaces, pushes him to escape to removed locales, both high and low, that appear to offer him new perspectives. As with Mark Twain’s exaggerated visions from mineshaft and mountaintop, the spaces of depth and height in *House Made of Dawn* provide the protagonist with imaginative possibilities enabled by a distanced point of view. Irene Moser has noted that Native American authors “often associate extraordinary powers and experiences with high points in the landscape...as well as with places underground,” arguing that such places allow characters to “gain a self-knowledge that frees and renews them as they return to the ordinary spaces of their lives...” (292). Moser analyzes Abel’s

connection to the “cosmic dimension” of the Pacific Ocean, but does not examine two other spaces in the novel that are crucial to Abel’s process of self-identification: a buried church and a hill above Los Angeles. In addition to adding these spaces to Moser’s discussion, it is important to recognize that Abel’s reason for seeking them out is not only based on his supposed cultural proclivities toward nature, but also impacted by the institutional restrictions he is subjected to under the Relocation Program. Because the underground church and the aboveground hill are removed from the threat of surveillance, they allow for experimentations – not always successful – with sovereign sight.

The one place in L.A. that appears to offer some stability is Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah’s Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission, located in a basement. The Mission’s earthen altar is marked by a “fine groove” that functions to “symbolize... the life of man from birth, ascending from the southern tip to the crest of power and wisdom at the center, and thence in descent through old age to death at the northern tip” (97). Both the symbolic and literal connections between the earth and human life in the basement encourage Tosamah’s congregation to visualize the spectacular during a peyote ceremony. The visions Abel has here, however, are no more steady than those in the rest of L.A.: he sees “hallucinations” and “derangements” that span from the diffuse – “there was no center to it; it was everywhere at once” – to the distilled – a “single... crystalline...brilliant bead of light (97-99). This range of visions is paralleled by a range of feelings, from “exhilaration” to “depression” to “nausea.” If the sights and sensations in the basement are chaotic, however, the movements associated with them are more promising than the urban shaking Abel has experienced at ground level. And unlike the

loss of articulation at his court trial, the underground congregation explicitly (if tritely) expresses its needs through prayers for “prosper’ty an’ worl’ eace an’ brotherly love” (100). Despite the apparently meaningful connections between earth, vision, and motion that take place in the basement church, its isolation ultimately leaves it without impact. At the end of the ceremony, the priest “arose and went out” to “serve notice that something holy was going on in the universe” (101). That universe, however, does not belong to the congregants, so the eagle-bone whistle Tosamah blows must compete with the sounds of traffic and juke-box music. The basement space they’ve carved out of the world for themselves is clearly not exempt from its hierarchical pressures. Even the church’s leader is prone to poking fun of his own parishioners’ status as “longhairs.” And as Robert Warrior points out, an office supply company’s storage facility sits atop the underground meeting place, allowing “the materiel of bureaucracy” to “weigh...down on the everyday realities” of the displaced Indians who inhabit it (169).

The depth of the basement church is balanced by the height of a hill above the city on which Abel and his fellow relocated Indians congregate. More than the basement, this above-ground space provides them with a place to be themselves, out from under the watchful eyes of their “patrons.” From the hilltop, Ben observes, vision is unobstructed: “we could see one whole side of the city, all the way to the water” (127). This far-reaching sight, which enables the group to occupy the position of surveyor rather than surveilled, is buoyed by its freedom from the sounds of the city that challenged Tosamah’s whistle at the end of the basement scene: “we couldn’t hear anything down there” (127). The hill, then, because its remoteness enables sight and disables sound, offers space for uninhibited, intentional motion, including drumming, dancing, and

singing. In fact, the traditional song that Ben sings, the Night Chant, is specifically concerned with space (“May it be beautiful before/behind/below/above/all around me,”) perception (“Restore my mind for me...”), and mobility (“Restore my body for me,” so that “Happily I go forth...Happily may I walk...”) (130). It is this chant that inspires Abel and Ben to hatch a plan for action. Together, they envision “the way it was going to be...we were going to meet someplace, maybe in a year or two, maybe more. He was going home, and he was going to be alright again” (128). Although Ben later admits that he “made all of that up,” this vision of motion, facilitated by the open space of the hilltop, inspires a hope for its possibility in reality for both of them: “he believed in it, I guess, and...then I guess I started to believe in it too” (129).

Following his visits to the extreme geographical locales beneath and above the ground of L.A., Abel finally ends up at the end of the ground, on the “frontier” of a beach. As with most of the places he encounters in L.A., this is a liminal space in which he is pulled in a couple directions at once. On the one hand, he lies in a “depression” which a number of scholars have suggested reflects a grave (it also indicates Abel’s level of mental health). On the other hand, Momaday qualifies the hollow as “shallow,” hinting that Abel is not as entrenched as we might think. While I agree with Schubnell’s theory that a fence on the other side of this beach “is symbolic of his failure to break through the barriers between him and the mainstream of society” (125), it is also important to note Abel’s failure to overcome another barrier: the one between him and natural realm represented by the sea. The beach, then, like the ambiguous Indian policies of the ‘50s, acts as a kind of middle ground that lets Abel see both sides of the equation he is negotiating, neither of which fully makes sense to, is appealing to, or is accepting of

him. It is this middle ground, however – rather than the heights and depths he explored earlier – that allows him to see a potential for his own balance in the world.

Before he reaches that realization, however, Abel is literally unable to see the ground at all because his eyes are too swollen to open (87). With the “backs of his eyelids...black and murky like the fog,” all he can make out are “microscopic shapes” that “vanished in the great gulf of his blindness” (106). His mind “wobbling,” he pinpoints a light on the loading dock only to have “the swirling fog close...over it again” (104). Not only are Abel’s eyes unable to see the land, but his hands – which during his childhood represented his knowledge of the land (153, 173) – have been broken. In fact, his whole body is incapacitated, “contracting, quaking involuntarily” and “flopping like a fish” (87, 101).

This last description is particularly interesting. Although “flopping” is certainly not an ideal motion, its connection to fish is ripe. These creatures appear regularly throughout *House Made of Dawn*, representing Abel’s still-developing comprehension of how creatures inhabit the world. The loveliest passage shows how “the fishes lay out in the black waters, holding still against all the force and motion of the sea; or close to the surface, darting and rolling and spinning like lures, they played in the track of the moon” (107). This vision of the fish, which symbolize both steadfast stillness and playful movement, and, perhaps in between, “flopping” between the two, marks a turning point in the novel. This sight of various models of movement, contained in a single creature, encapsulates all the models he has observed up to this point – from his grandfather to Angela to Ben. In doing so, the fishes spur Abel’s healing, in which he recovers a place he can both see clearly and move through coherently.²⁴

²⁴ On the one hand, the stillness of the fish recalls Abel’s childhood observation of his grandmother’s

The significance of Abel's acknowledging that the fishes act either with stillness "or" with "darting and rolling and spinning," then, is that he recognizes the necessity of interplay not only in the types of motion that are available and necessary, but also between the actor, his stage, his perception, and his motion (*italics mine*). As Schubnell puts it, Abel's new awareness of "the interrelatedness of all elements" allows him to "discover...that he too is tied up in the totality of creation and has a legitimate place in it" (131). In order to claim that place, however, he knows that physical movement is necessary: "[h]e had to get up..." (110). It is only once he establishes an "[u]pright" posture, the narrator observes, that "his mind cleared..." Once again, motion and perception are intimately connected with person and place.

Regaining Place: Self-Determination, Holistic Vision, and Running toward Balance

Abel's decision to "get up" at the frontier space of the beach impels him to return, once again, to the reservation. This move, which takes place in 1952, is aligned with a shifting national mindset toward Native Americans at mid-century. First, Natives' service in the war had helped them to recognize the connection between "their people's struggles against colonialism at home and foreign peoples' struggles against colonialism abroad." This stimulated a pan-Indian nationalist movement that emphasized the need for the elimination of paternalism and the establishment of Native American rights to

prayer posture, reverent of the motions of her world even as she sits motionless among them. On the other hand, this stillness is reminiscent of John Steinbeck's flouting of naturalism in *East of Eden*, asserting that the strength of an individual's choices for how to act in an environment can outweigh the "force and motion" of that environment. This notion of free will, however, is too dichotomous for Momaday, in that it pits good against evil, and man against world. It is also important to note that the idea of choice is a more difficult one for Momaday's Abel than for Steinbeck's Adam. After all, the American Indian Movement was founded the same year that *House Made of Dawn* was published, with the goal of reclaiming the sovereignty that would give Native Americans the authority to choose their own paths forward. Ironically, one type of protest during this time period was the "fish-in," which was meant to raise awareness of the need for Native American fishing rights. Fish-ins were organized primarily by the Survival of American Indians Association (SAIA) in the mid-1960s (Johnson, Champagne, Nagel 15).

determine the paths of their own lives (Rosier 72, 105). This movement called attention to the failures of both assimilationist programs like Relocation and detribalization efforts like 1953's House Concurrent Resolution 108, which officially "terminated" many Native American tribes by withdrawing federal aid, abolishing reservations, and submitting tribal members to the benefits and duties of all other U.S. citizens. In many ways, the National Congress of American Indians' protest of such top-down programs and declarations fulfilled its role as a "national instrument to make [Native American] voices heard in legislation and implementation of federal Indian policy" (qtd. in Townsend 207). Although proposed bills for reservation rehabilitation and self-determination such as SCR 3 ("An American Indian Point Four Program") and S. 809 ("A Bill to provide economic assistance to the American Indians") failed to become law, such proposals steadily chipped away at notions of Termination (Rosier 195). For example, Associate Justice Hugo Black, in a 1960 Supreme Court dissent acknowledged that, while "It may be hard for us to understand why these Indians cling so tenaciously to their lands and traditional way of life... this is their home – their ancestral home..." which is "worth more than money and the costs of a new enterprise" (Rosier 213-214). Even Eleanor Roosevelt publicly sympathized, in 1956, with a Native American woman who had requested "land and work, and not relocation off the reservation" (Rosier 199). Abel's return to the Jemez Valley, then, can be seen as predictive of the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act and the official implementation of the policy of Self-Determination, which would be introduced by Richard Nixon in 1970. Whether they opted for assimilation or tribalization, the point of self-determination was that neither should be forced by the federal government.

Abel's traumatic experiences during the war and his "relocated" time in Los Angeles lead him to take advantage of the impending policy of Self-Determination by determining his own identity not as Milly or Tosamah would have it, but according to his own notions of place and how he fits into it. In doing so, he follows the NCAI's 1955 proposal of a Point Nine Program, which aimed to make "officials recognize native people 'as they are' and not as the government wished them to be" (193). Abel's return to Walatowa is also reflective of Momaday's own predilection for rural western locales, or, in his own words, "this kind of prejudice about nature and the wilderness" (qtd. in Schubnell 121). As the author said of his own move from Stanford back to Arizona in 1980, "I always knew that I would return to the Southwest, to the real world, if you will... To me it's more real than city life." The level of "reality" Abel feels at his homecoming is evidenced by the weight of the land itself. Earlier in the novel, the lights and hustle of L.A. allowed Abel to become geographically and psychically "disoriented." As Momaday explains in "An American Land Ethic," he "may have been perfectly sure of where [he was] in relation to the supermarket and the next coffee break," but his "sense of natural order has become dull and unreliable" (47-48). By contrast, the Jemez Valley upon Abel's return is calmly impervious, covered by "a great, gray motionless cloud of snow and mist," on which "no shadow" and "no impression" could fall (169). The space's undeniable existence makes an impression on Abel. His previous dislocation, and his subsequent blindness and paralysis, is remediable only by re-determining his place. Positioning himself back on the landscape his grandfather had tried to teach him about during his childhood, Abel continues the education of his childhood by re-orienting himself to this space.

We can see Abel's process of reorientation by considering how he looks at it, and how that perception enables or disables agency. An ideal corollary to this process is a story Momaday has told repeatedly, including in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. The version in *House Made of Dawn* is told by Tosamah, who narrates a tale of changed vision upon returning to his grandmother's house. At first, the priest only realizes "how small it was" according to his adult stature, compared to his childhood perception. Later, however, his sight undergoes an opposing change. Observing a cricket on a handrail against the backdrop of the moon, he finds that his "line of vision was such that the creature filled the moon like a fossil" (119). It is this awareness of position and perception that enable Tosamah to say that he has "seen to the center of the world's being" (120). This awareness also permits his physical movement, completing an arduous pilgrimage to Rainy Mountain that allows him to mourn his grandmother. Just as Tosamah relearns the art of geographical perception and motion through a return to his ancestor's territory, so, too, does Abel.

This re-education about the relationship between place, sight, and posture does not happen overnight, however. When Abel first takes up vigil beside his grandfather's deathbed, he feels that "the room enclosed him," his "eyes burned," and his "body ached even with the motion of getting up and crossing the room" (171). Estranged from the reservation's spaces and rituals, he is mentally and physically uncomfortable with his role. Abel is quickly reminded of the import of sight, however, when he notices his grandfather's eyes "open and roving and straining to see." In an acknowledgment of Francisco's efforts to view his surroundings, Abel, rather than laying a cool, damp cloth across his grandfather's line of vision, "laid it on the brow instead" (172). As in the rite

of passage Francisco remembers at this point in the novel, it is only by ensuring that “all the angles of his vision” remain open that he – and, later, Abel in his stead – will succeed in eventually “looking straight ahead” (178). In contrast to Abel’s tunnel vision on his way to war – a vision inspired by fear and loneliness – the directed sight Francisco silently promotes is the product of careful consideration of a holistic perception. In addition to the land itself, such all-encompassing vision must also incorporate its inhabitants. By taking care of his grandfather at the end of his life – and acknowledging the role he played in helping Abel form an understanding of place – Abel enacts the kind of communal vision that was conspicuously absent in Los Angeles: vision as “*looking out for each other*” (143, emphasis mine).

Having recognized the steady weight of the land and the importance of perceiving that space holistically and communally, Abel is finally capable of moving in a meaningful way by participating in the ritual act of running. By the time Francisco dies after six dawns, Abel “knew what had to be done.” This knowledge is dependent on his having reoriented himself to the land by ceremonially sprinkling meal “in the four directions” (183). Quite literally, by recognizing these compass points, Abel positions himself in space. This completes the ceremony, and provides a sturdy foundation from which Abel can launch himself into motion. He further strengthens his relationship to the land by placing its elements on his body, rubbing “his arms and chest with ashes” (184). Situating himself among the runners, we see their line of sight focused on “the clear pool of eternity” ahead (185). Because “they held their eyes upon it,” they are able to see the slow changes the dawn brings to the earth: “pumice, and pearl, and mother-of-pearl, and the pale and brilliant blush of orange and rose” (185). The runners align their motion

with these changes in their perception of the landscape, as they “sprang away” only when “the sudden cold flare of the dawn struck upon the arc” (185).

Again, however, the process of developing an understanding of the land, seeing it holistically, and moving through it coherently does not happen easily or automatically. Abel is not yet completely in tune with his surroundings – he is “startled” by the “soft and sudden sound” of the runners beginning the race, and must “run after them” to catch up. When he does so, “his body cracked open with pain.” He is overtaken by “pure exhaustion,” but is spurred on by the very earth upon which he moves: “there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing.” Just as, during his childhood, he recalls how “you put your hands in the snow and rubbed your face with it and it made you come alive” (136), the intermixture of land and body during the race fuels Abel’s motion. After he falls, he sees “how the rain made streaks upon [his broken hands] and dripped soot upon the snow.” The sight of the earth marking his body and his body marking the earth inspires his continued movement: “he got up and ran on.” In turn, his motion across the landscape invokes a new mode of perception – “he could see at last without having to think” (185). Abel’s final vision – of “the canyon and the mountains and the sky,” “the rain and the river and the fields beyond,” and the “dark hills at dawn” – is far-reaching. Because he has determined himself in a landscape that has historical and familial meaning to him, his vision of it has expanded and deepened, and this newly open scope allows him room to move both freely and intentionally.

Conclusion: Questioning Abel’s “Rise”

Although Abel is not yet capable of voicing his direction in the novel’s concluding race, it is clear that, as he continues “running on the rise of the song,” he is

indeed “on the rise” in several ways (185). First, physically, he has gotten up from a prostrate position. Second, geographically, his line of sight suggests that he is following the contours of the “rise” and fall of the land. Third, genealogically, he has re-located himself in the space of his ancestors’ origin – where they “arose” historically. Finally, however, it’s difficult not to question Abel’s “rising” direction, self-determined as it may be. Schubnell has argued that Abel is “special” because his running – unlike that of other characters of American fiction, from Huck Finn to the Invisible Man to Rabbit Angstrom, whose “alienation” causes them to “run away from something without a viable alternative” – is toward something, “his native culture” (76). But if western literature, as this dissertation has argued throughout, is about exploring potential futures through an imagination that takes into account both the realities and the fantasies of the past and present landscape, Abel’s running toward his roots can look a lot like a move backward. Granted, he has given other “alternatives” a chance and found them not “viable,” in that their spaces failed to accommodate him, disallowing his clear perception of them and coherent movement through them. And, granted, his concluding run restores to him an understanding of his landscape, along with a holistic perception of that space and how he can traverse it well. In turn, unlike Milly’s questions, Abel is spurred to understand himself in a context that makes sense to him. Perhaps this backward movement is a price worth paying for a productive imagination and secure identity.

CONCLUSION

On ranches in the West today, it is not unusual for cowboys to round up their cattle on four-wheelers, or to keep track of their livestock with drones (Turkewitz). New technologies allow cattlemen to brand their herds using liquid nitrogen rather than red-hot irons, and to use a machine called the “calf table” to catch, hold, and turn an animal during the branding process. Modern farmers use iPhone irrigation apps, self-driving tractors, and genetically modified crops to make the most out of the land (Hardy). Meanwhile, Silicon Valley charges ahead with the newest in high-tech software and hardware, from social media platforms to electric cars. All of these western phenomena are exciting and innovative – even, it could be argued, imaginative. What my dissertation demonstrates is that the continual western focus on improvement or “progress” through data and technology – bringing the “Old West” into the 21st century – unnecessarily devalues the very human, very fallible, but very important faculty of the imagination.

Contrary to trends in western scholarship of unearthing facts from and imposing figures on the landscapes of the West, this project has shown that the geographical imagination, in various forms, has continued to hold sway in the region. For authors writing prior to the “closure” of the frontier, like Mark Twain, the imagination functions, alongside a landscape viewed as geographically open, as an experimental medium through which to envision a wide range of aesthetic practices, individual careers, and national trajectories. After the turn of the century, when the landscape of the West had become more densely settled, characters’ dreams enter an investigative mode, becoming at once narrower and more practical. During this period, authors such as Willa Cather

picture the imagination as precise and pragmatic, thus simultaneously coopting and critiquing the era's increasingly scientific quantification of the land. As the Great Depression approaches, however, writers' representation of the imagination begins to shift. No longer an easy avenue for dreaming up coherent visions of or approaches to the landscape, the imagination in the 1930s becomes a cipher for a social sense of helplessness in the face of economic and cultural change. Through characters newly marginalized or disconnected from their environments, the dreams offered up by authors like Américo Paredes and Nathanael West are chaotic and confused. Their characters' fretful visions work to obstruct any paths forward, pointing to frustration and disappointment with a West that had come to clash violently with its mythical promises of freedom, equality, wealth, and fame. It is at this point that most critics of western American literature begin to eulogize the western imagination. My investigation suggests, instead, that the dream of the West makes a resurgence following World War II. As I showed in Chapter 5, John Steinbeck signals a rekindling of the imagination through his gestures toward the biblical notion of free will, through which his characters make the choice to see their worlds anew. Writers of the Civil Rights era, represented in this dissertation by N. Scott Momaday, continue to offer rehabilitated portrayals of the imagination, drawing out the faculty's continued struggle against federal regulations while insisting on its capacity to challenge such policies.

In outlining how authors over the course of a century have envisioned, mourned, and then re-envisioned the social function of the western imagination, this dissertation contributes to a number of critical conversations. Most broadly, my research shows how the 20th century literature of the American West bolsters calls made by scholars ranging

from Frederic Jameson to Arjun Appadurai to take seriously, as both cultural symptom and social influencer, the dreams that have often been neglected as unworthy of critical attention. In the literary realm, my project makes clear the need to reconsider the rigid timeline to which novels dealing with dreams have been confined. Both in American literary studies in general and in western American literary studies in particular, critics have been intent on assigning beginning and end points to the imagination.¹ My work illustrates that the effort to draw hard lines in the sand works against the grain of the faculty itself, which ebbs and flows within and between novels, historical periods, and landscapes.

In the same way that this project points to the need for a more open timeline to house representations of imagination, it also calls for a more flexible definition of the imagination itself. Whereas scholars like Kathryn Hume have qualified the post-1960s “American nightmare” as a sign of the culture’s “lost vision,” I have shown that even the confused dreams analyzed in the middle chapters of my dissertation nevertheless constitute visions – visions that serve as commentaries on the landscape just as much as the more positive dreams investigated at the project’s bookends. By re-envisioning chaotic fantasies not only as signs of “devastating disappointment” but also as spaces through which to test solutions to overcoming disillusionment, my study helps us to

¹ There is little agreement about where the western imagination starts and stops. In fact, critics like David Fussell have practically equated the rise of the Myth of the West with its fall. “The West exerted serious imaginative impact in the United States only so long as it remained a living idea,” Fussell writes,” and thus “the winning of the actual West brought the Westward Movement of American writing to a natural and inevitable end a few years after the closing of the frontier” (24). Others are only slightly more generous. For example, David Wyatt finds that the land’s “encroachment” on “human hopes” begins with those he terms “later naturalists,” such as Norris, Steinbeck, and Chandler (xvii). More recent scholarship, however, has suggested that these death sentences were premature. Although I found no works on the return of the imagination specifically in western literature, critics like John J. Su have begun to recognize the phenomenon in the wider field of the contemporary Anglophone novel. Ironically, where previous scholars tended to see the prevalence of dreams only in the late 19th and early 20th century, contemporary critics tend to relegate the imagination to the late 20th century, arguing that the faculty works as a response to issues of globalization.

understand the imagination as more than a rosy cliché. Instead, this faculty incorporates and processes the realities of the world, whether or not they fit the stereotypical notion of dreams as inherently positive. Acknowledging this broader conception of the imagination enables us to recognize some of the more subtle ways that authors across the 20th century have challenged problematic social, political, and economic landscapes.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to debates over multiculturalism in general, and in the West in particular. While I value studies that attend to how and why individual ethnic communities imagine their landscapes, along with studies that compare how certain groups view particular spaces in contrast to other groups, my project aims to prove the utility of granting the primary power of organization to historical periods rather than to ethnic or racial divisions. Clearly, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and, as my chapters show, I have no interest in neglecting the very real consequences of membership in an oppressed group on that group's view of their environment. Nevertheless, my dissertation demonstrates that it can be as enlightening, if not more so, to analyze geographical dreams of their own accord before looking to ethnic differentiation to justify their origins or their place in the canon.

These chapters, of course, are far from exhaustive. In tracing the path of the western imagination over the arc of a century, my scope is neither broad enough nor deep enough to do full justice to the topic. For instance, it would be interesting to extend the timeline of the project to cover more contemporary literature. Indeed, my initial, overly ambitious vision of this dissertation included Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991), and Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in*

Heaven (1993). I see Erdrich and McCarthy's novels as offering the opportunity to explore how authors use postmodern self-reflexivity to comment on their characters' imaginative negotiation of the western terrain. Interestingly, whereas Erdrich's characters endorse the "dreamstuff" in the western landscape as "powerful," McCarthy's identify such territorial illusions as the deceptive trappings of an "optical democracy." Meanwhile, Rechy and Alexie's texts seem to illustrate contemporary authors' understanding of the imagination as a faculty particularly useful for navigating spaces of social blight. But if Rechy's eponymous protagonist imaginatively "overwhelms" her dilapidated Chicano neighborhood with fake flowers and religious visions, Alexie promotes a "politics of dreams" that positions the imagination as a "weapon" for "survival." Further research is necessary to determine the use to which post-Civil Rights-era western writers are putting the imagination in their works, and to glean the direction in which they see the faculty heading. In addition to expanding this project's timeline into the late-20th century, it might also be interesting to focus in on a narrower historical period. Clearly, I found the 1930s to be a particularly fascinating era in its illustration of a turning point – on ethnic, political, and economic levels – for the western imagination. While the scope of my dissertation did not permit me to delve too deeply into that era, I came across a number of potentially enlightening avenues of inquiry, including a burst of Mexican-American ethnographic and linguistic scholarship during the 1930s, much of which focused on preserving imaginative cultural structures such as folk and fairy tales.² Alternatively, more research could be done to explore how a single

² Examples include Jovita González's "Folklore of the Texas-Mexican Vaquero" (1927), Juan Rael's *A Study of the Phonology and Morphology of New Mexican Spanish, Based on a Collection of 410 Folk-tales* (1937), Cleofas Jaramillo's *Spanish Fairy Tales* (1939), and Arturo Campa's *Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico* (1946).

genre delineates the western imagination. My study unintentionally tends toward the bildungsroman,³ for example, but I have not dedicated any sustained attention to how that genre might be particularly well suited to scenes of dreaming, or, more specifically, to a particular conception of how the imagination functions. It might be fruitful to explore how individual generic categories overlap with particular ways of representing the imagination.

Another possible extension of this project might explore how gender maps on to various portrayals of the western imagination. As it now stands, I have included only one female writer in my study – Willa Cather – and have not looked closely at how her woman’s identity (or, in this case, her partially cloaked lesbian identity) may have influenced her portrayal of her female protagonist’s dreamscapes. Especially given the general cultural tendency to view women as more prone to magical thinking and men as more suited to scientific inquiry, a study of the correlation of gender and the western imagination would be intriguing. A final option for expanding this project would be to focus more intently on the social functions of the western imagination as represented outside of literature, in the realms of painting or film, for instance. Although my current project does touch on extra-literary mediums – landscape painting in Chapter 1, postcard photography in Chapter 3, the 1930s film industry in Chapter 4 – it would be worthwhile to investigate how different artistic modes of representation line up against each other in their conceptions and depictions of the imagination.

³ Which works qualify as members of this genre depends on how we define it. Using Oxford’s definition, “a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity,” perhaps only Américo Paredes’ *George Washington Gómez* and N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* could be described as true bildungsromans. If we take the genre to mean, more loosely, a “novel of education,” we could argue that all the texts featured in this dissertation are bildungsromans, in the sense that their characters learn and progress over the course of the narrative.

Ultimately, I hope that my work here has continued to stretch the conception of the western imagination beyond its stereotype as mythical, escapist, and unworthy of attention due to its sentimental or romantic associations. This dissertation has demonstrated, instead, that the imagination functions as a pragmatic tool for viewing the landscape and its components, understanding its history as well as its future potential, and preparing to make moves through it accordingly. I have shown a wide range of authors across the 20th century American West to be dedicated to representing through their characters' geographical dreams what Friedrich Nietzsche has called an "artist's sense of truth," which privileges "splendid and profound interpretations of life," rather than "sober, simple methods and results." In portraying the imagination at work, in all its "fantastic, mystical, uncertain, extreme" varieties, the writers I study reject objective, scientific "truth" in favor of a more human version of reality – the reality recorded in dreams. In doing so, these authors essentially "fight for the higher dignity and significance of man." The issue is oddly meta. In imagining how their characters imagine their worlds, these western authors ultimately contribute to what Azar Nafisi terms the "Republic of Imagination." The ability to imagine is crucial to maintaining, guarding, critiquing, and strengthening America, in all its geographical regions. As authors from Mark Twain to N. Scott Momaday demonstrate, the American West throughout the 20th century has been, and will continue to be, an important pioneer of that social imagination project.

REFERENCES CITED

- Abrams, Robert E. *Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature: Topographies of Skepticism*. Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Allmendinger, Blake. *Ten Most Wanted: The New Western Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Toward an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 85–126. Web. 4 July 2016.
- "Amen, Sinner." *TIME* 3 Aug. 1931. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.
- Anderson, C. Leigh, and Richard O. Zerbe. "Psychological Entitlement, Reference Levels, and Valuation Disparities: The Case of Native American Land Ownership." *Property in Land and Other Resources*. Ed. Daniel H. Cole and Elinor Ostrom. Lincoln, NE: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2011. 295–316. Web. 6 June 2016.
- Anderson, Edgar. *Considered Landscape*. White Pine Press, 1985. Print.
- Anderson, Frederick, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds. *Mark Twain's Notebooks & Journals*. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. Print. 3 vols.
- Anderson, Mark Cronlund. *Pancho Villa's Revolution by Headlines*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. Print.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. U of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.
- Arneil, Barbara. "Trade, Plantations, and Property: John Locke and the Economic Defense of Colonialism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55.4 (1994): 591–609. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. Alfred J. Drake. 10th ed. Oxford, MS: Project Gutenberg, 2003. Web. 1 July 2014.
- Arnold, Thurman. "The Crash -- and What It Meant." *The Aspirin Age*. Ed. Isabel Leighton. New York: Penguin Books, 1949. Print.
- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Print.

- Astrov, Margot. "The Concept of Motion as the Psychological Leitmotif of Navaho Life and Literature." *The Journal of American Folklore* 63.247 (1950): 45–56. JSTOR. Web.
- Balderrama, Francisco E., and Raymond Rodriguez. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. UNM Press, 2006. Print.
- Beadle, John Hanson. *The Undeveloped West; Or, Five Years in the Territories*. Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1873. Print.
- Benson, Jackson J. *John Steinbeck, Writer: A Biography*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books, 1990. Print.
- . *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer*. First Edition edition. New York: Viking Press, 1984. Print.
- Bernstein, Alison R. *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs*. 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. Print.
- Bird, John. "Metaphors of North and South, East and West in Mark Twain's 'The Private History of a Campaign That Failed.'" *Mark Twain's Geographical Imagination*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 7–16. Print.
- Blyn, Robin. *The Freak-Garde: Extraordinary Bodies and Revolutionary Art in America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Print.
- Brancano, Manuel. "Landscapes of the Magical: Cather's and Anaya's Explorations of the Southwest." *Willa Cather and the American Southwest*. Ed. Joseph R. Urgo. Lincoln, Neb.; Chesham: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. Print.
- Branch, Edgar Marquess, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson, eds. *Mark Twain's Letters. 1853-1866*. Vol. 1. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1988. Print.
- Braudy, Leo. *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon*. 1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Print.
- Bui, Quoc Trung, and Margot Sanger-Katz. "Why the Government Owns So Much Land in the West." *The New York Times* 5 Jan. 2016. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 20 June 2016.
- Burroughs, William S. *Queer: A Novel*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1987. Print.
- Campbell, Barbara A. "Sedona and the New (Age) Frontier." *The Multicultural Southwest: A Reader*. Ed. A. Gabriel Meléndez. Tucson [Ariz.]: University of Arizona Press, 2001. 253–261. Print.

- Cather, Willa. "A Chance Meeting." *Not Under Forty*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1988. 3–42. Print.
- . "Miss Jewett." *Not Under Forty*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988. 76–95. Print.
- . *My Antonia*. Brandywine Studio Press, 2008. Print.
- . *O Pioneers!* New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008. Print.
- . "Superstition vs. Investigation." *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters*. Ed. L. Brent Bohlke. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. Web.
- . "The Novel D meubl ." *The New Republic* 12 Apr. 1922: 5–6. Print.
- "Celebrate Mark Twain's Seventieth Birthday." *The New York Times* 6 Dec. 1905. Web.
- "Chaparral." *Merriam Webster*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2016.
- Ciancio, Ralph. "'The Sweetness of Twisted Apples': Unity of Vision in Winesburg, Ohio." *PMLA* 87.5 (1972): 994–1006. Print.
- "Civilian Conservation Corps." *American Experience*. PBS, 2009. Television.
- Clemens, Samuel. SLC to Jane Lampton Clemens and Pamela A. Moffett. 8 Feb. 1862. E-mail.
- . SLC to Orion and Mary E. (Mollie) Clemens, 19 and 20 Oct 1865. 19 Oct. 1865. E-mail.
- . SLC to Orion Clemens, 15 July 1870, Elmira, NY. (UCCL 00489)". 15 July 1870. E-mail.
- Coerver, Don M. "'Wire Me before Shooting': Federalism in (In)action -- The Texas-Mexico Border during the Revolution, 1910-1920." *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013. Web. 11 Apr. 2016. Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures Series.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria, Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984. Print.
- Coltelli, Laura. "N. Scott Momaday." *Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*. Ed. Matthias Schubnell. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997. Print. Literary Conversations Series.

- Cresswell, Tim. *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. Minnesota Archive Editions edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.
- . *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.
- Cutrer, Thomas W. "Brown, Jacob." *The Handbook of Texas Online* 12 June 2010. Web. 5 Apr. 2016.
- Dardis, Tom. *Some Time in the Sun*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976. Print.
- Davis, Elliot Bostwick, ed. *American Painting*. 1st ed. Boston : New York, N.Y: MFA Publications ; Distributed Art Publishers/D.A.P, 2003. Print. MFA Highlights.
- DeMott, Robert. *Steinbeck's Typewriter: Essays on His Art*. Troy, New York: Whitston, 1996. Print.
- Dilsaver, Larry M. "The New Deal Years." *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994. Print.
- Ditsky, John. "Towards a Narrational Self." *Essays on "East of Eden."* Muncie, Ind.: Steinbeck Society of America, 1977. 1–14. Print. Steinbeck Monograph Series 7.
- Dolezal, Joshua. "Cather's Medical Icon: Euclide Auclair, Healing Art, and the Cultivated Physician." *Cather Studies: Willa Cather As Cultural Icon*. U of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.
- Douglas, Christopher. "N. Scott Momaday: Blood and Identity." *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. 220–259. Print.
- "Earth Days: The Seeds of a Revolution." *American Experience*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 July 2015.
- Edemariam, Aida. "The First Great Balloon Hoax." *The Guardian* 19 Oct. 2009. *The Guardian*. Web. 10 Jan. 2014.
- Edwards, Jerome. "Comstock Lode." Ed. Karen Wikander. *Online Nevada Encyclopedia*. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Going to the Territory*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self Reliance." *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. 2000 Modern Library pbk. ed edition. New York: Modern Library, 2000. Print.

- Fischer, Victor, Michael Barry Frank, and Dahlia Armon, eds. *Mark Twain's Letters*. Vol. 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Print.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Print.
- . *Lighting out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture*. New York ; Oxford, [England]: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Flynn, Kathryn A. *The New Deal: A 75th Anniversary Celebration*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2008. Print.
- Folsom, James K. "Western Novel." Ed. Howard Roberts Lamar. *The new encyclopedia of the American West* 1998: n. pag. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Reissue edition. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.
- Fox, Claire F. *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print. Cultural Studies of the Americas v. 1.
- Fox, William L. *The Void, the Grid, and the Sign: Traversing the Great Basin*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000. Print.
- Franco, Jere Bishop. *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*. University of North Texas Press, 1999. Print.
- Freeman, Joseph. *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936. Print.
- Fulton, Joe B. *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain: How a Confederate Bushwhacker Became the Lincoln of Our Literature*. LSU Press, 2011. Print.
- Fussell, Edwin S. *Frontier: American Literature and the American West*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965. Print.
- George, Stephen K., Barbara A. Heavilin, and Eric d'Evegne, eds. "The Unspoken Heritage: The Influence of Family in Steinbeck and Faulkner." *John Steinbeck and His Contemporaries*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2007. 77–84. Print.
- Gish, Robert. *Beyond Bounds: Cross-Cultural Essays on Anglo, American Indian & Chicano Literature*. 1st ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Print.
- Goetzmann, William H., and William N. Goetzmann. *The West of the Imagination*. 2nd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. Print.

- Goodman, Audrey. *Translating Southwestern Landscapes: The Making of an Anglo Literary Region*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002. Print.
- Goodwin, James. *Modern American Grotesque: Literature and Photography*. 2nd ed. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009. Print.
- Greenhow, Headlam. "A Case of Vagabond's Discoloration Simulating the Bronzed Skin of Addison's Disease." *Transactions of the Clinical Society of London*. Vol. 9. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876. 44–46. Print.
- Hadella, Charlotte. "Steinbeck's Cloistered Women." *The Steinbeck Question: New Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Donald R. Noble. Troy, N.Y: Whitston Publishing Company, 1993. Print.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995. Print.
- Hall, Linda B., and Don M. Coerver. *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910-1920*. 1st ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. Print.
- Hamilton, Patrick Lawrence. *Of Space and Mind: Cognitive Mappings of Contemporary Chicano/a Fiction*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. Print. Cognitive Approaches to Literature and Culture Series.
- Hardy, Quentin. "Working the Land and the Data." *The New York Times* 30 Nov. 2014. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 6 July 2016.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Simon and Schuster, 2004. Print.
- Heavilin, Barbara. "Steinbeck's Spirituality: A Sense of the Ending." *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*. Ed. Stephen K. George. Westport, Conn. ; London: Praeger, 2002. 93–98. Print. Contributions to the Study of American Literature no. 15.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Green Hills of Africa*. Reprint edition. New York: Scribner, 1996. Print.
- Hoffman, Abraham. *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression; Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974. Print.
- "Hollywood Star Map: Golden Age Celebrities." *Big Map Blog*. N.p., 2012. Web.
- Howells, William Dean. "Literary Boston as I Knew It." *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*. New York: Harper & Bro., 1901. 117. Web. 7 Jan. 2014.
- . "Review of Roughing It." *The Atlantic* June 1872. Web.

- Hunting, Robert. *Jonathan Swift*. New York: Twayne, 1967. Print. Twayne's English Authors Series 42.
- Huxley, Aldous. *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1939. Print.
- Hyde, Anne Farrar. *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920*. New York: New York University Press, 1990. Print. The American Social Experience Series 17.
- James, Ronald M. *The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode*. Reno, Nev.: University of Nevada Press, 1998. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. "On Negt and Kluge." *October* 46 (1988): 151–177. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Jurca, Catherine. *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures' Greatest Year*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. Print.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print. Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. Print.
- King, Cubie, and David Von Drehle. "Encounters with the Arch-Genius, David Gelernter." *Time* 25 Feb. 2016. *time.com*. Web. 23 June 2016.
- Kocks, Dorothee E. *Dream a Little: Land and Social Justice in Modern America*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2000. Print.
- Koepfel, Dan. *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World*. Penguin, 2008. Print.
- Krause, Sydney J. *Mark Twain As Critic*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967. Print.
- Lee, Hermione. *Willa Cather: Double Lives*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Print.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. 1 edition. Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992. Print.
- LeMenager, Stephanie. *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. Print. Postwestern Horizons.
- Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac: With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1970. Print.
- Lethem, Jonathan. "The American Vicarious." *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions, Etc.* Reprint. New York: Vintage, 2012. Print.

- Levine, Barry. "The Call of the Kakadu." *Nature*. PBS, 1995. Television.
- Lewis, Edith. *Willa Cather Living; a Personal Record*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf, 1953. Print.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1987. Print.
- Limón, José E. "Texas, the Transnational, and Regionalism: J. Frank Dobie and Américo Paredes." *Regionalists on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West*. Ed. Michael Steiner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 184–203. Print.
- Lindemann, Marilee. "Introduction." *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather*. Ed. Marilee Lindemann. Cambridge University Press, 2005. 1–16. Print.
- Lissner, Will. "Land Reform in Mexico." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 20.4 (1961): 448–448. Print.
- "Llano." *Merriam Webster*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2016.
- Llinas, Rodolfo R. *I of the Vortex: From Neurons to Self*. Reprint edition. Cambridge, Mass.: A Bradford Book, 2002. Print.
- Locke, John. "Second Treatise Of Government." *Gutenberg*. N.p., 28 July 2010. Web. 3 Oct. 2015.
- Locklin, Gerald. "The Day of the Painter, the Death of the Cock: Nathanael West's Hollywood Novel." *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Original Essays*. Ed. David Fine. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. Print.
- Lord, Eliot. *Comstock Mining and Miners*. Reprint of 1883 edition. Berkeley, Calif: Howell-North, 1959. Print.
- Mac Donnell, Kevin. "How Samuel Clemens found 'Mark Twain' in Carson City." *Mark Twain Journal* 50.1–2 (2012): 9+. Print.
- Marschall, Peter. "Aurora." Ed. Karen Wikander. *Online Nevada Encyclopedia* 23 Feb. 2010. Web. 6 Jan. 2014.
- Martin, Hugo. "Disneyland to Close Some Attractions to Build 'Star Wars' Land." *Los Angeles Times* 26 Dec. 2015. Web. 16 June 2016.
- Martin, Jay. *Nathanael West: The Art of His Life*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1984. Print.
- Marx, Leo. "The Pilot and the Passenger: Landscape Conventions and the Style of Huckleberry Finn." *American Literature* 28.2 (1956): 129–146. Print.

- McElrath, Joseph R., Jesse S. Crisler, and Susan Shillinglaw, eds. *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print. The American Critical Archives 8.
- McWilliams, Carey. *Brothers Under the Skin*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943. Print.
- Meade, Marion. *Lonelyhearts: The Screwball World of Nathanael West and Eileen McKenney*. Reprint. Boston: Mariner Books, 2011. Print.
- Medrano, Manuel. *Américo Paredes: In His Own Words, an Authorized Biography*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2010. Print.
- Melton, Jeffrey Alan. *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism: The Tide of a Great Popular Movement (Amer Lit Realism & Naturalism)*. 1 edition. University of Alabama Press, 2009. Print.
- Miller, Angela. *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. Print.
- Miller, Henry. *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. New York: New Directions, 1970. Print.
- Miller, Jonathan. "Change in the Constant in a Century of New York City Real Estate." *Elliman Magazine* 13 Oct. 2011. Web. 6 Nov. 2014.
- Modell, Arnold H. *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press, 2003. Print.
- Momaday, N. Scott. *House Made of Dawn*. Reprint edition. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010. Print.
- . "Navajo Place Names." *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 124–126. Print.
- . "The American West and the Burden of Belief." *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 89–107. Print.
- . "The Morality of Indian Hating." *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 57–75. Print.
- Moran, Michael, Jeremy Sherlick, and Stephanie Hanson. "U.S.-Mexico Relations (1810-Present)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Apr. 2016.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. London ; New York: Verso, 1998. Print.
- Morgan, Phyllis S., and Kenneth Lincoln. "Introduction." *N. Scott Momaday: Remembering Ancestors, Earth, and Traditions: An Annotated Bio-Bibliography*.

- 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. Print. *American Indian Literature and Critical Studies* v. 55.
- Morris, Roy. *Lighting out for the Territory: How Samuel Clemens Headed West and Became Mark Twain*. 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Print.
- Morsberger, Robert E. "Steinbeck under the Sea at the Earth's Core." *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Ed. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney. 1st Edition edition. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2007. 266–77. Print.
- Moser, Irene. "Native American Imaginative Spaces." *American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Contemporary Issues*. Ed. Dane Anthony Morrison. New York: P. Lang, 1997. Print.
- Myers, Joshua. "Skeptics Who See Things." *The Humanist* Aug. 2014. Web.
- Negt, Oskar, and Alexander Kluge. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print. *Theory and History of Literature* v. 85.
- Nelson, Robert M. *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993. Print. *American Indian Studies* v. 1.
- "Nod, n.1." *OED Online* June 2016. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 16 Apr. 2015.
- Nugent, Walter. "Where Is the American West? Report on a Survey." *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 42.3 (1992): 2–23. Print.
- O'Brien, Frank Michael. *The Story of the Sun, New York: 1833-1928*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918. Web.
- Orvell, Miles. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*. UNC Press Books, 1989. Print.
- Owens, Louis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Print. *American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series* v. 3.
- . "The Story of a Writing: Narrative Structure in East of Eden." *Rediscovering Steinbeck: Revisionist Views of His Art, Politics and Intellect*. Ed. Cliff Lewis and Carroll Britch. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989. 60–76. Print.
- Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912. Print.

- Paredes, Américo. *George Washington Gómez: A Mexican Novel*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990. Print.
- . "Term and Class Papers, 1949-1954." : n. pag. Print.
- . *The Shadow*. Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1998. Print.
- . "*With His Pistol in His Hand*": *A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958. Print.
- Paredes, Américo, and Ellen J. Stekert, eds. *The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition*. Austin: Texas University Press, 1971. Print.
- Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: A Biography*. London: Heinemann, 1994. Print.
- Peck, Demaree. "'Possession Granted by a Different Lease': Alexandra Bergson's Imaginative Conquest of Cather's Nebraska." *Modern Fiction Studies* 36.1 (1990): 5. Print.
- Perl, Jed. *Antoine's Alphabet*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008. Print.
- Peterson, Jodi. "What the West Would Look like with State Boundaries Drawn by Culture, Population, or Watersheds." *High Country News* 14 Jan. 2014. Web. 22 June 2016.
- Peterson, Richard F. "The Mythology of American Life: America and Americans." *Steinbeck's Travel Literature: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi. Muncie, Ind: Steinbeck Society of America, English Dept., Ball State University, 1980. Print. Steinbeck Monograph Series no. 10.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "Observations." *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. J. Gerald Kennedy. New York: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Porter, David. *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2008. Print.
- Porter, Frank W. "In Search of Recognition: Federal Indian Policy and the Landless Tribes of Western Washington." *American Indian Quarterly* 14.2 (1990): 113–132. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Potter, Lee Ann, and Wynell Schamel. "The Homestead Act of 1862." *Social Education* 61.6 (1997): 359–364. Print.
- Powers, Ron. *Mark Twain: A Life*. New York: Free Press, 2005. Print.
- Reavis, Dick J. "The National Tour of Texas." *Texas Monthly* Feb. 1987: 68–74. Print.
- "Review of *The Day of the Locust*." *Books* (1939): n. pag. Print.

- Rhodes, Chip. *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008. Print.
- Rickett, Arthur. *The Vagabond in Literature*. Ed. David Price. London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1906. Print.
- Roediger, David R. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*. Basic Books, 2006. Print.
- Rogers, Shef. "Exploring the Bibliographical Limits of Gulliver's Travels." *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-Century Book*. Ed. Paddy Bullard and James McLaverty. Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.
- Rosenfeld, Isaac. "Faulkner and His Contemporaries." *Partisan Review* 18.1 (1951): 106–114. Print.
- Ross, Alan. "Introduction." *Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust*. New York: New Directions, 2009. Print.
- Saldívar, Ramón. *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print. New Americanists.
- Scandura, Jani. *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, American Depression*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008. Print.
- Schedler, Christopher. "Writing Culture: Willa Cather's Southwest." *Willa Cather and the American Southwest*. Ed. Joseph R. Urgo. Lincoln, Neb.; Chesham: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 108–123. Print.
- Schubnell, Matthias. *N. Scott Momaday, the Cultural and Literary Background*. 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. Print.
- Schulberg, Budd. *What Makes Sammy Run?* New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.
- Schultz, Jeffrey D., and Luchen Li, eds. *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts On File/Checkmark Books, 2005. Print. Facts on File Library of American Literature.
- Shillinglaw, Susan. "A Steinbeck Scholar's Perspective." *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Ed. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney. 1st edition. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2007. 8–13. Print.
- Shockley, Martin Staples. "The Reception of the Grapes of Wrath in Oklahoma." *American Literature* 15.4 (1944): 351–361. JSTOR. Web.
- Slotkin, Richard. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890*. 1st ed. New York: Atheneum, 1985. Print.

- Small, Garrick, and John Sheehan. "The Metaphysics of Indigenous Ownership: Why Indigenous Ownership Is Incomparable to Western Conceptions of Property Value." *Indigenous Peoples and Real Estate Valuation*. Berlin: Springer, 2008. 103–119. Print.
- Smith, Henry Nash, and William M. Gibson, eds. *Mark Twain-Howells Letters: The Correspondence of Samuel L. Clemens and William D. Howells, 1872-1910*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1960. Print.
- Starr, Kevin. *California: A History*. Reprint. New York: Modern Library, 2007. Print.
- Stegner, Wallace Earle. *The American West as Living Space*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987. Print.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Gertrude Stein's America*. Ed. Gilbert A. Harrison. W. W. Norton & Company, 1996. Print.
- Steinbeck, Elaine, and Robert Wallsten, eds. *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*. Reissue edition. New York: Penguin Books, 1989. Print.
- Steinbeck, John. *East of Eden*. Ed. David Wyatt. Reissue edition. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992. Print.
- . *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*. New York: Viking Press, 1969. Print.
- . *The Long Valley*. Ed. John H. Timmerman. Reprint edition. New York: Penguin Classics, 1995. Print.
- . *The Pastures of Heaven*. Ed. James Nagel. Reprint edition. New York: Penguin Classics, 1995. Print.
- . *To a God Unknown*. Ed. Robert DeMott. Reprint edition. New York: Penguin Classics, 1995. Print.
- . *Travels with Charley in Search of America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980. Print.
- Stille, Charles J. *History of the United States Sanitary Commission*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1866. Print.
- Stouck, David. "O Pioneers!: Willa Cather and the Epic Imagination." *Prairie Schooner* 46.1 (1972): 23–34. Print.
- Strychacz, Thomas. *Modernism, Mass Culture and Professionalism*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Print.
- Su, John J. *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.

- Tannenbaum, Frank. "Land Reform in Mexico." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 150 (1930): 238–247. Print.
- Teuton, Sean Kicummah. *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print. New Americanists.
- Tiffney, Wesley N. "A Scientist's Perspective." *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Ed. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney. 1st edition. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2007. 1–7. Print.
- Tompkins, Jane P. *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.
- Townsend, Kenneth William. *World War II and the American Indian*. 1st ed. Albuquerque [N.M.]: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. Print.
- "Transcript of Dawes Act." National Archives and Records Administration. *OurDocuments.gov*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 July 2016.
- Turkewitz, Julie. "Branding Day, Fading Elsewhere, Still a Ritual on Colorado Ranch." *The New York Times* 4 July 2016. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 6 July 2016.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. Henry Holt, 1920. Print.
- Twain, Mark. "Instructions in Art." *Mark Twain at His Best: A Comprehensive Sampler*. Ed. Charles Neider. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1986. Print.
- . "License of the Press." *Mark Twain's Speeches*. Vol. 24. New York: Harper & Bro., 1923. 45–51. Web. 4 July 2014.
- . *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, Vol. 1: 1852-1890*. Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992. Print.
- . *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 5: 1872-1873*. Ed. Lin Salamo and Harriet Elinor Smith. University of California Press, 1997. Print.
- . *Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1940. Print.
- . *Roughing It*. New York: New American Library, 1962. Print.
- . *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Lexington, KY: SoHo Books, 2010. Print.
- "Vagabond, Adj. and N." *OED Online. Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 29 Apr. 2014.
- Veitch, Jonathan. *American Superrealism: Nathanael West and the Politics of Representation in the 1930s*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Print.

- Veregge, Nina. "Transformations of Spanish Urban Landscapes in the American Southwest, 1821-1900." *Journal of the Southwest* 35.4 (1993): 371–459. JSTOR. Web.
- West, Nathanael. *Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2009. Print.
- . *Novels and Other Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1997. Print.
- . "Some Notes on Miss L." *Novels and Other Writings*. New York: The Library of America, 1997. 401–402. Print.
- "Where Did Banana Republics Get Their Name?" *The Economist* 21 Nov. 2013. *The Economist*. Web. 7 Apr. 2016.
- White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Print. 1.
- Wiebe, Robert. *The Search for Order*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967. Print.
- Wiley, James. *The Banana: Empires, Trade Wars, and Globalization*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. Web. 5 Apr. 2016.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*. Revised 1st ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1983. Print.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2001. Print.
- Winters, Laura. *Willa Cather: Landscape and Exile*. Susquehanna University Press, 1993. Print.
- Woodard, Charles. *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Print. American Indian Lives.
- Wrobel, David. "Regionalism and Social Protest during John Steinbeck's 'Years of Greatness,' 1936-39." *Regionalists on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West*. Ed. Michael Steiner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. Print.
- Wyatt, David. *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print. Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture.
- Ybarra, Bob. "Projects Remembered - Disneyland Big Thunder Ranch." *Building Designer*. N.p., 10 Oct. 2015. Web. 16 June 2016.