

REHTINKING RESISTANCE: RACE, GENDER, AND PLACE
IN THE FICTIVE AND REAL GEOGRAPHIES
OF THE AMERICAN WEST

by

TRACEY DANIELS LERBERG

DISSERTATION

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Supervising Committee:

Stacy Alaimo, Supervising Professor
Neill Matheson
Christopher Morris
Kenneth Roemer
Cedrick May, Texas Christian University

Abstract

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Supervising Professor: Stacy Alaimo

This project traces the history of the American West and its inhabitants through its literary, cinematic and cultural landscape, exploring the importance of public and private narratives of resistance, in their many iterations, to the perceived singular trajectory of white masculine progress in the American west. The project takes up the calls by feminist and minority scholars to broaden the literary history of the American West and to unsettle the narrative of conquest that has been taken up to enact a particular kind of imaginary perversely sustained across time and place. That the western heroic vision resonates today is perhaps no significant revelation; however, what is surprising is that their forward echoes pulsate in myriad directions, cascading over the stories of alternative voices, that seem always on the verge of slipping away from our collective memories, of

being conquered again and again, of vanishing. But a considerable amount of recovery work in the past few decades has been aimed at revising the ritualized absences in the North American West to show that women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans and other others were never absent from this particular (his)story. Their presence has been revealed in the recovered works of fiction, life writing, and the historical record. There is compelling evidence that narratives proffered by women and minority writers during the nineteenth century resist the grand narratives authorized by the tenants of Manifest Destiny—a paradigm that continues to infiltrate the literature, scholarship and political landscape of the American West. But recovery efforts and explorations of contemporary westerns written by women and minorities remain incomplete and under theorized. Our perceptions of the American West and its past continue to be fueled by a limited number of highly popularized fantasies that provide the foundation for many cultural beliefs and attitudes. Only in continuing to examine the alternative narratives and attending to even small acts of resistance can we disrupt traditional models of thinking about and responding to the place of the American West.

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Dedication

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication	viii
List of Illustrations	xii
Chapter I Introduction: The Rise and Proliferation of the Mythic North	
American West, its Heroes, and the (not quite) Empty Frontier World	
He Claimed	1
The Mythic Hero.....	1
Genres of the West.....	5
The Place.....	15
Others	21
Literary Modes	25
Everyday Lives	33
Conclusion	36
Chapter Summaries	38
Chapter II Taming the West: Narratives of Captivity and Displacement	
in the American west	46
Captivating Narratives	52
Frontier Fantasies: Mothers and Children in Peril.....	55
A Fate Worse than Death	85

White Men Into Red.....	94
Chapter III Captive to Kin: Adoption, Accommodation, Transculturation and New Captivities	105
The Western Captive.....	111
Liminal History	114
Revising Captivity	122
Transcultural Dreams	133
Native Dispossession	144
Indian Removal, Boarding and Adoption	154
Boarding Schools	160
Lost Birds and Lost Sparrows.....	168
Indian Adoption Project	172
Chapter IV Natural Resistance and Reconciliation in the Shaping of the Place and the People in the American west	182
Natural Matters	187
Toil and Tenuous Triumph	196
The Plow on the Plain	206
Withering Under Western Winds.....	216
Harnessing the Wind.....	241
Chapter V ‘A Place of Little Rain’ Watershed Ethics, Dam Politics, and the Fight For Environmental Justice in the American west	255

Brief History and Significance of Watersheds.....	263
Rethinking Water	269
Chapter VI : ‘The Past is Never Dead. It isn’t Even Past’: Race, Memory, and the Unsettled Borders of the American west.....	301
Surviving History.....	321
Disrupting Time	333
Even Now.....	348
Conclusion	355
Chapter VII Conclusion: The Future of the Western Past	360
The Battle in/for the American west Continues.....	370
Eternally Daniel Boone.....	371
gopherus agassizii v bos taurus or mano a mano?	375
Works Cited	405

List of Illustrations

Illustration I-I: Cowboy Hero.	1
Illustration I-II: <i>Malaeska; the Indian Wife of the White Hunter</i>	6
Illustration I-III: The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains (1902).	9
Illustration I-IV: Scenes in Indian Country.	15
Illustration I-V: Our First Great West.	18
Illustration I-VI: “Trans-Mississippi West with some Posts, Tribes, and Battles of the Indian Wars 1860-1890.”	20
Illustration I-VII: Woman Making Tortilla.	21
Illustration I-VIII: Mary Carpenter Diary, 1861.	33
Illustration II-I: <i>American Progress</i>	46
Illustration II-II: The Rescued.	52
Illustration II-III: Frontier Life (ca. 1875).	55
Illustration II-IV: <i>A Comanche Warrior Dragging to Death Mrs. Plummer’s Child</i>	72
Illustration II-V: Too Near the Warpath (ca. 1874).	87
Illustration II-VI: The Trapper’s Bride (ca. 1850).	94
Illustration III-I: The Western Captive.	105
Illustration III-II: Death of Tecumseh: Battle of the Thames Oct. 18, 1813 (ca. 1846).	119
Illustration III-III: Native.	128

Illustration III-IV: The Prisoner.....	137
Illustration III-V: Lost Bird.	154
Illustration III-VI: Indian Training School students.	160
Illustration III-VII: Wounded Yellow Robe, Henry Standing Bear, and Chauncy Yellow Robe.	161
Illustration III-VIII: A Happy Group.....	166
Illustration III-IX: Pease Ross, ca. 1861.....	169
Illustration III-X: Tyler, Bobby, Lana, and Janelle.	175
Illustration IV-I: Sand Storm.	182
Illustration IV-II: J.D. Semler.....	191
Illustration IV-III: In Line at the Land Office.	193
Illustration IV-IV: Plowing on the Prairies Beyond the Mississippi.	196
Illustration IV-V: The Plow that Broke the Plains; Look at it Now.	208
Illustration IV-VI: Native ground.	212
Illustration IV-VII: Field of dreams, 2015.....	214
Illustration IV-VIII: A Prairie Wind-Storm.....	216
Illustration IV-IX: Western Pioneer Women.....	222
Illustration IV-X: Laying Tracks.	227
Illustration IV-XI: Cimarron County, Oklahoma.	233
Illustration IV-XII: Hereford steers in feedlot on Tom Reed farm.....	236
Illustration IV-XIII: Welcome to Sweetwater, Texas.....	241

Illustration IV-XIV: Wind farm near Snyder in Scurry County in west-central Texas.	245
Illustration IV-XV: Windfarm in Texas.	251
Illustration V-I: Irrigation ditch in Arizona, 1886.	255
Illustration V-II: Tau-Gu, Paiute Chief and John Wesley Powell.	263
Illustration V-III: Arid Region.	268
Illustration V-IV: Triangulation of the Plateau Region.	276
Illustration V-V: Arid Region, showing drainage districts.	297
Illustration V-VI: Lake Powell, Utah-Arizona border. 1999 (l). 2014 (r).	299
Illustration VI-I: Wounded Knee Burial.	301
Illustration VI-II: Oscar Micheaux.	310
Illustration VI-III: African American homesteaders.	319
Illustration VI-IV: The Silenced Warwhoop.	321
Illustration VI-V: Peaceful Negotiations.	355
Illustration VII-I: John Sontag as he lay dying.	360
Illustration VII-II: <i>The Cowboy</i>	369
Illustration VII-III: Your Hero.	370
Illustration VII-IV: Wood carving accompanying Timoth Flint’s 1868 updated biography, <i>The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone: The First Settler of Kentucky Interspersed with Incidents in the Early Annals of the Country</i>	372
Illustration VII-V: The desert tortoise.	375

Illustration VII-VI: On the brink of disaster in the desert.	376
Illustration VII-VII: The West Has Now Been Won.	380
Illustration VII-VIII: Has the Fight Just Begun.	384
Illustration VII-IX: Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon.	386
Illustration VII-X: Jordanian King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein.	395

Chapter I

Introduction: The Rise and Proliferation of the Mythic North American West, its Heroes, and the (not quite) Empty Frontier World He Claimed



Illustration I-I: Cowboy Hero.¹

The Mythic Hero

“Myths and legends die hard in America. We love them for the extra dimension they provide, the illusion of near-infinite possibility to erase the narrow confines of most men’s reality.”
~Hunter S. Thompson²

The ghostly specter of the lone “white male hunter,” who during the nineteenth century heroically claimed his place in the vacant American west, that great expanse of “free land” that provoked a sense of “perennial rebirth,” haunts the American imagination and its literary, cinematic, and cultural landscapes in significant ways even in the technology-rich twenty-first century.³ He pervaded the consciousness and literature of the nineteenth-century, but he neither began there, nor faded away as the

¹ Cowboys. History.com. 2010. <http://www.history.com/topics/cowboys>.

² From *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time*.

³ Annette Kolodny. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1984), 5; and Fredrick Jackson Turner. (1893) “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996: 1-38), 1 and 2.

century came to a close. He became a thing of legend in the twentieth, and he returns to us again in the twenty-first through a series of narrative, cultural and intellectual repetitions and rebirths. He is an apparition. But he is also a powerful reminder of how American notions of masculine ideals were formed, and how they have transformed as they have persisted. Wallace Stegner argues that this man is defined by a “rootlessness that expresses energy and a thirst for the new and an aspiration toward freedom and personal fulfillment” above all else (22). The idea of this man, and the complex cultural, political, and social structures that he represents, continues to inform and shape America, but “has just as often been a curse” as a blessing (Stegner 22). The masculine dominance that he symbolizes also shadows American interactions around the world and much of the world’s perceptions of America and Americans.

Indeed, although American Studies scholar Richard Slotkin, declared that the western hero’s hold on the American imaginary seemed to have waned during the second half of the twentieth century, the western hero and his place in the American west has undergone a series of recent cultural permutations. The western hero has been reprised in new considerations of the iconic territory of the American west. The actual and fictionalized accounts of those who crossed the cultural divide, moving from what was identified as civilization into what was seen as the untamed territories, became incredibly popular and influential as the print culture gained traction in the Eastern part of the United States. At the same time that they challenged the codes that had been established in the early colonies, they were “recognized by an eastern establishment” as

commercially significant, and the stories about them “were devoured” by nineteenth century readers (Estelman 21).

In the context of the myth, which developed around the themes of wildness, endurance, masculinity, adventure and expansion, the man of the west “became conqueror of nature, [...] a great rebel whose independence was as sacrosanct as his individualism” (Simonson 2). Many only dreamed of the kind of freedom and independence the western man seemed to have found out west. He is the most praised, powerful, and privileged individual in the prevailing fantasies of the American west that have, quite remarkably, “remained intact” across place, and time, and borders, according to feminist scholar Annette Kolodny (9). For unlike many of the other cultural relics of the nineteenth century, the western hero has not ridden quietly off into the sunset to become only a part of our collective past. Instead, the western hero has remained entrenched as a critical, if complex and contested part of American ideology, whether he was envisioned as an explorer, a trapper, a gun-toting rebel, a cowboy, rancher, farmer, or a ranger, his stories were worth telling and they came to dominate the imagination of Americans. He is resurrected and employed as a rallying point for political gains: the rugged individualism of the frontier cowboy foregrounded the campaigns and political careers of Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, John McCain, George W. Bush, and Ted Cruz. That these deployments were not always entirely successful does not negate the fact that these very prominent and public men with influence deemed these historical tropes as a readily available rhetorical vocabulary that had broad-based appeal. And the trope of the horse riding, gun-slinging, hat-wearing

triumvirate has been used commercially to sell cigarettes, high-heeled shoes, Doritos™, hotels and more.⁴ From politics to products, the allure of the western hero still carries weight in the American imagination, as is seen in ongoing conflicts over rights in the Nevada desert and Oregon, which erupted in an old style shoot out. The transnational nature of the American west has also become clearer as its violent past has been taken up by those in conflict overseas.

This project considers the significance of the heroic vision of the man of the American west to the formation of a masculine national identity, but will focus on the role that women, Native and African Americans, and the environment played in fomenting and resisting the white masculine standard, and what has been lost by the narrowness of the masculine-centered narrative that gained and sustained traction in the American imaginary. Scholarship is clear that the desire of the standard American western script focuses on a particular set of characters, but the mythic hero is but one of many who participated in the movement west. The absences and exclusions of so many others is potentially more significant in reconsidering the American west and the western as a literary genre. The grand-narratives of the American west create a fairly singular myth through the exclusion of the many petite-narratives that were not absent, but have been less often retold, remembered, and revered. *Reconsidering Race, Gender, and Place* focuses primarily on those who have been left out of the popular representations and western American narratives, both in fictional and actual accounts

⁴ See Marlboro man, Gilt.com commercial, and ‘Cowboy Kid,’ 2015 NFL Superbowl commercial.

during the movement west and into the present. These often excluded individuals played an important role in the movement west and its later developments and were not silent in their positions. While many writers engaged in the myth building, many others resisted them, or at least described the movement and cultivation of civilization in less mythic terms. Many women and minority writers also began to reconsider their presence in myriad and dramatic ways in the twentieth and twenty-first century retellings of the mythic period of the nineteenth century. These are the stories at the center of this exploration. In doing so, this project also seeks to understand what cultural function the American western heroic figure can possibly continue to serve in a world laden with technological advancements and increased global flows and markets. How can we read contemporary Westerns that refigure, reinterpret, or recast the traditional heroes in unanticipated ways? And, finally, what can the dialogue between these two forms help to tell us about America, its people, its history, and its future?

Genres of the West

Given its prominence to the American and global historical consciousness, it may at first appear counterintuitive to consider the place of the American west, a place that has “been more fantasized and imagined” perhaps than any other region, and its former and present occupants (human and not) as a site of scholarly and intellectual neglect (Ibarrarán, Simonson, and Rio xv-xxii). Yet the neglect of the American west, both as a literary site of exploration and an actual place of consideration, is one of the critical claims that gives rise to this project. While it is true that the genres of the American west and its heroic figures have been and remain immensely popular

narrative objects in both the United States and abroad, that popularity has not resulted in the production of significant or sustained scholarly interrogations because the work of the west until relatively recently was “rarely taken seriously.”⁵ This was true well into the twentieth century. When the literature of the American west was finally taken up, it was considered only as a minor literature among more important works in the American literary canon and earned brief, if condescending, mentions but did not merit serious or sustained theoretical attention.

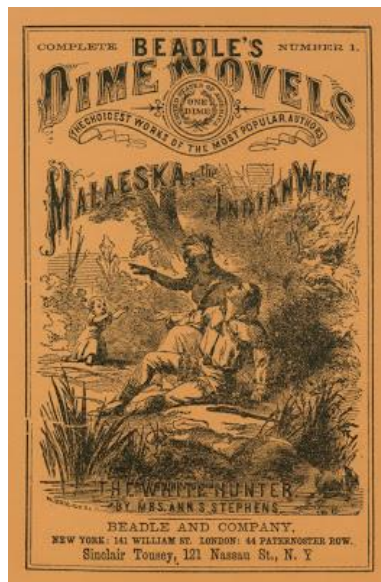


Illustration I-II: *Malaeska; the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*.⁶

⁵ See Dee Brown. *The American west*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994). Brown argues that “one of the remarkable phenomena of the enduring and endless story of the Old West is its expanding reach around the earth.” He claims that despite the temporal and geographic gap, many individuals “know the story better than they know their own legends” (409); and Madelon Heatherington. “Romance Without Women: The Sterile Fiction of the American west.” *Under the Sun: Myth and Realism in Western American Literature*. Ed. Barbara Howard Meldrum. (New York: The Whiston Publishing Co., 1985), 75.

⁶ By Ann Sophia Stephens (1860). While James Fennimore Cooper’s ‘Leatherstocking’ novels are considered the precursors to the traditional western genre, Stephens’ dime novel is considered the first western. It was also the first dime novel published by Beadle’s, which became one of the most popular pulp fiction publications with highly formulaic plots. Dime

Among the first scholars to treat the American western frontier and the literature produced in and around the concepts of this place with significance was Lucy Lockwood Hazard, whose *The Frontier in American Literature* (1927) was received variously as “only a beginning” to a “vast and little explored field” that attempted to do for literature what Fredrick Jackson Turner did for history, or a book that contained “not much [that] is new.”⁷ One colorfully worded, incredibly condescending review by an anonymous writer stated that Hazard “hunted from his lair every writer who presumed to delude the public” and takes aim at “this woman professor” for calling on literary scholars to ‘decanonize’ Emerson.”⁸ Yet in a 1980 scholarly review, William Pilkington noted that Hazard’s text “remains a generally sensitive and convincing examination of the role that frontier individualism played in the social and political excess” of an important period of American development (Pilkington x). Hazard, not unlike many of the women and minority authors of the American west, is nonetheless all but forgotten.

novels were cheap to produce and to purchase. One of the arguments about the lack of attention to the western genres has been its association with the insignificance of dime novels and other forms of pulp fiction, which dramatized the American west as a site of melodrama and violence. Frank Norris, in “A Neglected Epic,” described the period of expansion in the American west as the “last great epic event in the history of civilization,” and was deeply disappointed that such a stunning victory of humankind was relegated to the “Dime Novel! The Dime Novel and nothing else [...] nothing better.”

⁷ F.P.W. “*The Frontier in American Literature* by Lucy Lockwood Hazard”. Review. *Journal of Education*, 6.1 (1928) 51; Jay B. Hubell. “The Frontier in American Literature by Lucy Lockwood Hazard”. Review. *The Saturday Review of Literature* (Sept. 10, 1927), 105; and “*The Frontier in American Literature* by Lucy Lockwood Hazard”. Review. *The American Mercury* (May 1927), xxvi.

⁸ “*The Frontier in American Literature* by Lucy Lockwood Hazard”. Review. *The Bookman* (April 1927), XXII.

In 1950, the narrative of the Western was taken up as a subject of serious interest with prominent American Studies scholar Henry Nash Smith, whose *Virgin Land: The American west as Symbol and Myth*, “has been both praised and damned” for arguing that the place of the American west was an important starting point for considering American policymaking and provided an antidote to New Criticism, which took as its purpose the aesthetic merits of the text and disregarded other cultural flotsam (Pilkington xi). But “myth and symbol was [the] quiet shame” of those who followed because it was deemed to lack the rigor of English Literary or American History scholarship and lacked a theoretical model to support the claims he outlined (Fabien 542). Smith, drawing on a wide ranging of texts, argues that there have been “two quite distinct Wests: the commonplace domesticated area within the agricultural frontier, and the Wild West beyond it” and thus acknowledged the significance of this contact zone to American consciousness (52). Other scholars have since picked up on Nash’s divided west.

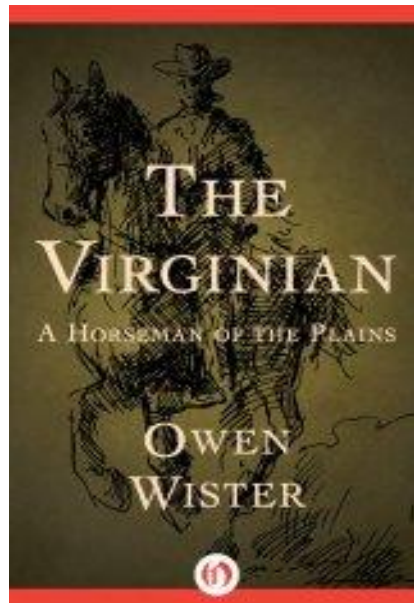


Illustration I-III: *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (1902).

Nash examined texts for the tropes and figures that appear in the literature at this collision between “savagery and civilization” (52, 251). For Smith, the ultimate question emerging from the narrative of the Western is one of nationalism for “every generation” has repeated Hector Saint John de Crevecoeur’s question, “What is an American?” (3). Smith proffers a starting point for considerations of the landscape in the formation of a national identity, but his desire for a broad interdisciplinary approach to the place was tempered by his own limited cultural point of view. He concerned himself with “how writers maneuvered their way through rhetorical positions and not how people negotiated the rough relations of race, gender, or class” and so failed to negotiate the expanse of the literary terrain (Fabien 545). Nash attempted to find artistically distinguishing characteristics so that the literary work out of the American west would be taken seriously among outside scholars. Although he draws on a variety

of sources, he puts forth arguments secured from readings of male-authored texts and so he describes almost entirely a white masculine response to the place of the American west and draws his conclusions based on how these men symbolized relations and viewed belonging.

Until relatively recently, the American west was “being judged by its worst writing—the cheap fiction of Indian, cowboy or road agent” (Coleman xv). Some scholars, like noted critic James Folsom, argue that its popularity may even have worked against the viability of Western fiction as a genre worthy of serious scholarly examination. Folsom first exposed the genre of the Western to a serious critical consideration in 1966. He complained that when the “imaginative literary record of the Western experience [was] approached at all, it [was] usually peripherally and with condescension” chiefly as the result of what he identified as two critical objections: (1) the Western genre negotiated a culturally irrelevant terrain; and, (2) the depictions “of western life given by the Western [was] by and large a false one” (16-8). Such claims were based on an unsophisticated conception of the “opposition between fiction and reality” as two very separate modes of artistic and ethical engagement in narrative expression—a notion that no longer has the same traction it once did (Iser *The Fictive* 2). In an effort to rescue the genre from what Folsom considered a “sub-literary” abyss, he called on other scholars to consider the western as a form of “fable” whose truth value is of little concern (32). Against these claims, other scholars have noted that despite its fictive depictions, ultimately “Westerns satisfy a hunger to be in touch with something absolutely real,” according to Jane Tompkins, whose *West of Everything*

marked a new understanding of western film (3). This is but one of the many conundrums of scholarship on the genres of the American west: the literary explorations of this territory and its people are often perceived as mere fables that fascinate a facile longing for a place that does not exist, or reveals a painful cultural truth from which we have yet to escape.

Although the literature of the American west gained some scholarly attention in the years following Folsom's sharp criticism, it remained principally under the guise of popular rather than critical considerations. One scholar argues that literary scholarship concerning the American west in particular "limps along on the academic blacklist, lower than Women's Studies and Science Fiction" (Heatherington 75). Charges that "Western literary criticism [remained] woefully behind the times" were recently leveled again. But the relevance of the terrain, real and fictive, of the American west, can hardly be in doubt as it is a site of ongoing social and political contestations, according to literary critic Janet Dean (950). And we cannot take for granted that even among literary scholars there is agreement that the "antithesis between fiction and reality" is an easily defined terrain where either lies are explored, or conversely where authentic stories are recounted (Iser 4). To linger on this binary is "inadequate and even misleading" when we take up the multiplicity of the narrative modes about the American west (Iser 4).

In tracing the transformations of the genres of the American west, this project resists engagements with most traditional westerns and western writers, because they have already received their due attention as a "dominant literature" (Vizenor 2). Instead

this project engages with texts not traditionally taken up as exemplar models of the west, beginning with captivity narratives and diaries in Chapter II, to later nineteenth-century transcultural formulations and modern Native reinterpretations of captivity in Chapter III, to twentieth century engagements with a supposedly tame land in Chapter IV and twenty-first reformulations in Chapters V and VI. This project is one of recovery, remembrance, and reconsideration of the multiplicity of stories and genres that make up the literary and historical setting of the American west, while at the same time resisting the “perverse determination” that is often at the heart of traditional westerns (Vizenor 2).⁹ It is not simply a reinterpretation of already canonized western narratives, but is perhaps an effort to make the field anew, to redefine what is a western text and who might be considered western authors. This project integrates a variety of alternative voices into the American west, picking up on important goals offered by feminist and minority scholars over the past several decades to bring the writing of a more diverse group of writers into public awareness. The project interrogates the ongoing cultural silencing that produces reification rather than disrupting traditional models of thinking about and responding to the place of the American west and its iconic literary inhabitants, and those how have remained creatively absent. In order to do this effectively, this project will “include a consideration of male and female writers together: of their mutual influences, their alliances and alienations, and their

⁹ Scholars Richard Slotkin and Denise Mary MacNeil have suggested this narrative form as the precursor to the traditional American western. See Denise Mary MacNeil. *The Emergence of the American Frontier Hero: 1682-1826; Gender, Action, and Emotion*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Print; and Richard Slotkin. *Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1973). Print.

construction of the terms” of narrative production, whether private or public, as feminist scholar Karen Kilcup demands (*Soft Canons* 6). Why have these alternative voices failed to gain traction in the narrative of the American west? Why are these other stories continually displaced and erased from critical narrative awareness? Is it simply that “the text that comes from culture and does not break with it is linked to a comfortable practice of reading” and so is dismissed as abhorrent and unworthy of more consideration? (Barthes 14). Or, is this particular form of blindness simply a result of the phenomenon of cultural memory whose “horizon does not change with the passing of time” because it is “maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments).”¹⁰ And, what is at stake nationally, even globally, in failing to recognize the totalizing character of the controlling narrative of the American west that has been taken up to enact a particular kind of imaginary that is perversely sustained across time and place?

Reconsidering the Americans of the past and the many writers of the west may act as a corrective not only for our literary selves, but also our historical selves. Can they help scholars and historians better understand the most recent revival of the American west? This project demonstrates that the messiness of the American west’s literary and cultural history—examining how the intellectual activities that developed simultaneously, producing and reaffirming one another with sometimes disastrous, and long-reaching outcomes—constitutes a rich field of play that deserves serious attention

¹⁰ Jan Assmann. “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.” Originally published in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*. Eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Holscher (Franklin/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988) 9-19. Trans. John Czaplicka. 125-33, 129.

and theorization. This project will negotiate the balance between “inclusiveness” and “a penetrating attention to literary, historical, and cultural detail” by negotiating the rhetoric of formation with the rhetoric of fracture—the two poles that are at the heart of national discourses (Dean 951). Such reconsiderations have already begun with noted feminists scholars, Nina Baym, Annette Kolodny, Jane Thompkins, Krista Comer, and Susan Kollin, and it is upon their labor that this project is built. The particular and already over determined tropes of the western genres serve a unifying function, but they tend to work toward the creation of singular narratives at the expense of broader modes of understandings. The outliers are too often discarded despite the fact that they may offer valuable sites of divergence that expand rather than contract critical understandings. And because gender and race continue to be such prevalent sites of demarcation, whose origins are embedded in our past and are likely to continue long into the future, this project takes as its focus the writing of women and minorities in an effort to reinsert them into the imaginative and historical record. This survey of texts is not meant to be a primarily masculine/feminine, black/white, East/West, old/new reading of the narrative modes of the west, because discussions that take as their starting point particular “territorial affiliations” or other culturally constructed binaries, which although they avoid falling prey to the master narrative are always at risk of giving way to their own uniqueness and of becoming a separate thing: fractured, and therefore a site of so much political instability that there is almost nothing culturally relevant that can be said of the texts (Dean 953). Yet, it is clear that a great number of writers attempted to negotiate the popular genres of the American west, to participate in

what they recognized was an important dialogue. Most of those who have been left out of the field of inquiry to this point are women and minority writers, whose omission provoked them to take up their pens and enter the narrative territory of the American west. “As the frontier is a zone of cultural conflict, so is hybrid frontier literature” and it must be examined as such (Lape 7). Whether these writers take on a predominantly subversive dialogue that transgresses boundaries and argues against an idealized American place, or instead attempt to take up the same narrative forms in order to write themselves into the larger frame of nationalism, their texts deserve to be treated seriously as important artifacts and objects of literary, cultural and personal histories in ways no less important than those whose work has persisted in our memory.

The Place

It is a dream. It is what people who have come here from the beginning of time have dreamed. [...] It's a landscape that has to be seen to be believed [... and] it may have to be believed in order to be seen.

~ N. Scott Momaday

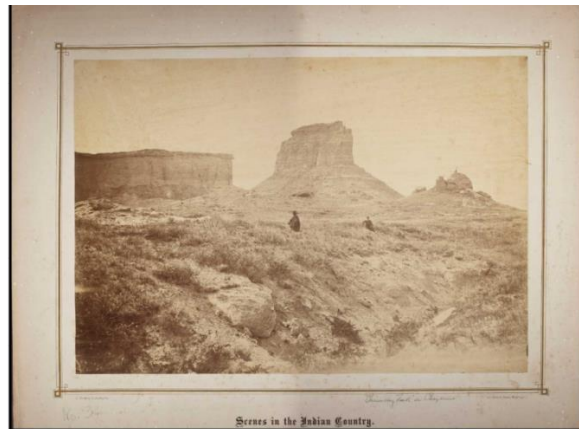


Illustration I-IV: Scenes in Indian Country.¹¹

¹¹ From Christopher C. Augurs *Collection of Photographs of Western United States, 1846-1889*.

The western frontier, as an actual geographic boundary and as an imaginative site, has come to stand as “the most American thing in all America,” argues Nelson Beecher Keyes (9). And while by “definition, the geographical scope of this [work] represents a geopolitical anachronism” the place has had a significant impact on the development of a broad American cultural identity, even if there remains a significant difficulty in defining the preciseness of ‘where’ it is (Weber 8). Despite the desire to precisely define the geographical margins of the place, the inherent mutability and ongoing regional and political shifts have often refused the kind of precision required of mapping.¹² The American west, especially as its political, cultural, geographic, and literary development intersects “is breathtakingly complicated,” especially given its relatively brief existence as a moving zone of cultural contact and cultural possibility.¹³ Cultural differences in ‘reading’ the place of the American west, and understandings of what features most contribute to establishing the peculiarities that ‘mark’ the frontier make it difficult to establish with any accuracy the particular boundaries of the American west. Indeed, even as scholars and writers take up the place of the American west, they do not all speak of the same place: “In broad brush and fine detail, [...] authors portray the old West, the new West, the rural West, the urban-oasis West, the wilderness West, the coastal West, the mythic West, and other wests too numerous to

¹² Wallace Stegner. *The American west as Living Space*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 5; and David Henry Miller and Jerome O. Steffen, eds. *The Frontier: Comparative Studies*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 12-3

¹³ Noreen Groover Lape. *West of the Border: The Multicultural Literature of the Western American Frontiers*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), especially “Introduction”; and Max Westbrook. “The Western Esthetic.” *Critical Essays on the Western American Novel*. Ed. William T. Pilkington. (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1980). 73-85.

name.”¹⁴ Yet, to take up the American west demands recognition of the slippages that are inevitable, of boundaries and borders, of endings and beginnings. Political historian Temple Bodley, in *Our First Great West*, argues that the first American west “extended from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi” (“Introduction” i). In Bodley’s account, and the accounts of many authors writing accounts of the movement west during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the first west was a testing ground dominated by a frightening wilderness frontier that signified both danger and desire. Written after the fact, these accounts mapped nicely with those offered by Turner, but failed to account for the complex interactions between peoples and the place, nor the ongoing nature of movement in multiple directions that has not ended with the supposed closure suggested by Turner. Yet, once it had been rendered habitable, Americans found themselves upon the precipice of the great west: of a point of no return. The first west included portions of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi.

¹⁴ Stuart L. Udall. *Beyond the Mythic West*. (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith in Association with the Western Governor’s Association, 1990), 1. I recognize that choosing geographic boundaries is only one interpretive lens from which to consider the American west and clearly eliminates some of the authors who entered wilderness territories and encountered native peoples in areas that they identified as the West. Caroline Kirkland, who has been identified as a pioneer author and wrote both *A New Home, Who’ll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839) and *Forest Life* (1842), clearly considered herself as embarking on a remarkable western journey when she moved from New York to Michigan in 1835. And she undoubtedly helped shape the works of later writers, like Dorothy Scarborough, who is taken up later in this text.

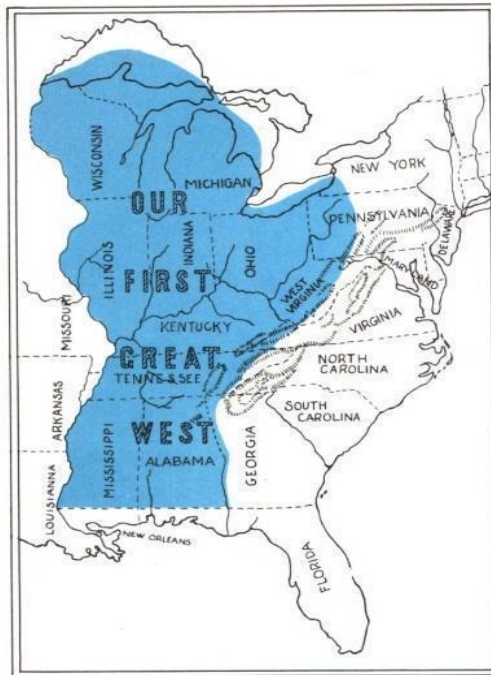


Illustration I-V: Our First Great West.¹⁵

But for those who had previously “pushed relentlessly westward,” the next step in the journey was not a given (Dale 97). The next step was taken tentatively. There was a pause, a moment of hesitation “at the edge of the dry, treeless plains” (Dale 97). The plains marked a geographic and topologic anomaly, a place where the lushness ended and a great expanse opened, and it was a terrifying site for colonial settlers. For Bodley, the pause was but a minor blip in the progress west, and it was the securing of the first western territories during the Revolutionary period that “this nation first became great” and eventually enabled the “winning” of the “wilderness west” (“Introduction” ii) (see Map I-I). And while there had been a reluctance to “cope with a land so unlike any which they had known in the past” a great number forged into that wilderness west of

¹⁵ From Temple Bodley’s historical analysis of movement west.

the Mississippi. Bodley's examination does what many others do: take as a matter of course that 'the rest is history'—the winning of the west was inevitable and conclusive. The procession was inevitable, necessary, and was simply the fulfilling of the mission of Manifest Destiny—a concept thoroughly rooted in European exceptionalism and unfriendly to cooperation and diversity in the American west. *Rethinking Resistance* takes up the narrative territory of the second great west—the place where the myths were made—at the most readily available natural geographic markers often adopted by the scholars and theorists who have negotiated this ground as a site of significant inquiry. The land after the first great west consists of those “vast areas of undeveloped land stretching from the Mississippi river to the Pacific Ocean,” and it was upon these lands that a uniquely American narrative began to take shape and form around the ideals of white masculine identities (Lackmann 1) (see Map I-II).

The frontier territory that followed the 'first great west,' which supposedly opened and closed so quickly as to be ripe for its forgetting, became a thing of myths in its own right. The history of the American west has been tied to an actual material territory with particular geographic features mountains, “fertile and favorably situated soils, salt springs, mines”—it has also developed into a specular space that became “the construction and exportation of an idea, as well as of its assimilation and perpetuation through time and location,” which transmigrated across both temporal and geographic borders precisely because “the American energy [...] continually [demanded] a wider

field for its exercise.”¹⁶ Many argue that this voracious demand, understood as an accepted and valued progression, has led to the “region’s victimization” (DeVoto xxi). That this continues to be true—natural gas extraction and fracking are only the most recent exploitations—is an extraordinary statement on the enduring implications that the human identification with places and people of the past, even those that might never have been, can have when naturalized in the historical record through the repetition of myth that remains essentially unchallenged in the record, but not uncontested among many writers of the American west before, during, and after the frontier period.



Illustration I-VI: “Trans-Mississippi West with some Posts, Tribes, and Battles of the Indian Wars 1860-1890.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Turner, 16; Ibarra, xv; Ralph Willet. “The American western: Myth and Anti-Myth.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4:2 (1970) 455-63; and Turner, 27. This demand for a “wider field” continues still as demonstrated in one of the Discovery Channels adventure series offerings, *Alaska: The Last Frontier*, and Animal Planet’s *Wild West Alaska*.

¹⁷ This map highlights the boundaries of the American west from the Mississippi River on the eastern boundary to the Pacific Ocean on the western boundary; Canada is the northern boundary and Mexico on the southern boundary. The map highlights important conflicts of the

Others



Illustration I-VII: Woman Making Tortilla.¹⁸

Western cultural values have long been suspicious of the “individual warps in the tapestry of knowledge” that have informed other practices of cultural and worldly engagement, preferring instead the repetition of hegemonic discourses that better substantiate a unified origin myth, according to scholars Polly Schaafsman and Will Tsosie, who engage with Native stories of place as an act of collaboration rather than the Euro-American narrative of individuality (15). Such unification fulfills the desires of a singular national identity. It embraces homogeneity. It struggles against inclusion and ignores stories of resistance. Literary and history scholar Amy Greenberg argues that nowhere in America did this coalesce more solidly around the valorization of

American west during the nineteenth century with current US state boundary markers. The dates indicate the significance of Native Americans resistance to the frontier ideology in US history.

¹⁸ Sweetwater Texas, 1910.

“masculine virtues” and “aggressive expansionism” than in the American west (17). Exclusiveness fomented around the “qualities of strength, aggression and even violence” in the American west during the nineteenth century (Greenberg 12). And many scholars recognize that the American west offers “some of the most enduring images of American national identity” (Kollin *Postwestern* “Introduction” x). The Old West has also remained an enduring source of entertainment, even as it replicates a cultural fallacy. The artistic and literary production that circulates around the narratives of the American west have been “prized and read by millions around the world for more than a hundred years.”¹⁹ The forms of masculinity so lauded in the past are reenacted in a myriad of culturally dramatic ways even in the twenty-first century.²⁰ Despite its popularity and its ongoing repetitions, the American west and its conquerors present an incredibly narrow, stagnant cultural field that eschews the multiplicity that always marked the contact zone on the frontier, and remains, at least in our collective cultural consciousness, “closed” as Frederick Jackson Turner famously declared in 1893. The closure was the fulfillment of a dream then, a “eulogy” for a lost place and time that

¹⁹ John Jakes, ed. *A Century of Great Western Stories: An Anthology of Western Fiction* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2000) 11. Jakes’ book actually covers stories published between 1923 and 1994 and includes entries from 30 writers. Owen Wister’s, *The Virginian*, published in 1902 is considered by many to be the greatest literary western. Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage* followed in 1912. Since then, writers like Elmore Leonard, Louis L’Amore, J.A. Johnstone, and Terry Johnston have written hundreds of western novels and produced dozens of western book series with millions of books in print.

²⁰ On October 12, 1998 in Laramie, Wyoming 21-year-old Matthew Shepard, succumbed to injuries he suffered during a horrific beating administered by 22-year-old Aaron McKinney and 21-year-old Russell Henderson. During their trials it became clear that Matthew’s sexuality outraged the two men and drove them to violence. During George W. Bush’s presidency, he was often photographed wearing his cowboy hat while riding a horse on his ranch in Texas. John McCain ran for president with the battle cry of a ‘Maverick.’

was in actuality neither an origin, nor lost, according to Justin Driver who examines the impact of the 'idea' of the American west on the construction of constitutional law. And it remains a fantasy still. This project is one of recovery and remembrance that seeks to engage in the openings, the collisions, the messy geographic and symbolic terrain of a contested and shifting place. It joins other feminist, post-colonial and multicultural efforts to understand the stories, in all their narrative forms, not just of the one but of the many (Schaafsman and Tsosie 15).

Such explorations are necessary because in many significant ways, the American west has emerged as one of the most enduring sites of white masculine origin stories in America. In the United States, "at least as far back as James Fennimore Cooper's novels we see a wilderness lover turning his back on a noxious civilization and fulfilling his psychic needs in wild nature."²¹ Much of what is argued about the American west as a place and the genres that narrate its history are centered on male figures and male writers who were the "mythmakers and legend makers" almost to the prohibition of all others who remain hidden figures "in the shadows of history."²² This exclusionary practice emerges as an open wound in Willa Cather's popular 1913 western, *O' Pioneers!*, when Carl Linstrum returns after a 16-year absence only to discover that "the old story has begun to write itself over." He muses over what

²¹ Peter Wild, "Sentimentalism in the American Southwest." *Reading the West*. Ed. Michael Kowalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 127-143, 130. See also John R. Milton, "Overview of the Western Novel," *Critical Essays on the Western American Novel*, 1980. Milton argues that Cooper may have "accidentally" ignited the "the exploitation of western material for the benefit of naïve and awe-struck eastern readers" (7).

²² Vardis Fisher and Opal Laurel Holmes, "Fact of Fiction: The Blend of History and Legend." *The Western: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ed. James Folsom, 95; and Dorothy Gray. *Women of the West*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 5.

Alexandra Bergson has been able to accomplish in his absence, but recognizes the persistence of a particular historical privileging that tends to erase some cultural stories, and prefer others. “Isn’t it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before” (40). His comment comes even as Alexandra has worked to write/right the story and exhibits the difficulty that emerges when we “remain obscurely entangled in philosophies of history” even among those we can “no longer profess” to accurately reflect the actuality of human experience (Klein 7).

Such is the truth of the America West, where there are but a handful of characters at the heart of its literary and cultural history: the frontier and wilderness men, mountain men, pioneers, gold diggers, gunslingers, cowboys. These are the men who are believed to have single-handedly conquered and remade the American west out of an expansive wasteland. And because the activities and stories of the American frontier, as a site and a time, significantly shaped the American west, and continue to emerge in conflicts even today, as recent battles in Wyoming, Utah, and Oregon demonstrate, the frontier spaces of the American West remain open. Or, as Tim Flannery writes, the frontier remains eternal. Whether these beliefs are factually accurate has been irrelevant for they have been retold so often that they have become the legends underwriting the American myth. Thomas Leicht, who interrogates the fallacies of literary adaptations and the ways that the original informs claims to authenticity, writes that “the question to ask is not why this assumption is wrong but

why it is so stoutly, albeit tacitly, maintained,” and reproduced to the omission of so many other possibilities (154).

Literary Modes

Instead, the West of history, literature and film does not celebrate “history” and its people, but rather “the themes of history” that are already encoded as valid and therefore remains fertile ground for reconsiderations of identity, place and literary, economic and biopolitical production and exploitation (Folsom 204). And while scholar Susan Kollin correctly notes that there are always difficulties in discussing the importance of regional concerns in the context of a globalized world, others have proffered a productive use of regionalism as “both a critique of and a resistance to the cultural ideologies that realism naturalizes” and has been a particularly productive apparatus for women writers, as feminist scholars Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse highlight in their explorations of women’s regional writing (4). And despite the difficulties, the regional remains a deeply rooted geopolitical site for considerations and contestations that have not yet been fully exhausted because so many continue to be left out of the narrative horizon of the history of the American west.²³ Even in the early

²³ Jakes. Of the 30 excerpts and stories he includes in his anthology, only three are written by women and none appear to be written by minorities. The exclusion of females and minorities is true of nearly all of the collections of Western writing except for rare collections that focus exclusively on a small number of women. See Stephen Brenna, ed. *The Greatest Cowboy Stories Ever Told: Enduring Tales of The Western Frontier* (Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2006); Michael McCoy, ed. *Classic Cowboy Stories: 18 Extraordinary Tales of The Old West* (New York: MJF Books, 2004); Jon Tuska, ed. *The American west: The Greatest Tales From The Masters of Western Fiction* (New York: Bristol Park Books, 1999); Jon Tuska, ed. *Shadow of The Lariat: A Treasury of The Frontier* (New York: Carroll & Graff, 1995); E. N. Brandt, ed. “The Saturday Evening Post Reader of Western Stories” (New York: Doubleday Press, 1960); Harry E. Maule, ed. *Great Tales of The American west* (New York: Random House, 1937).

days of westward movement women were treated “only in passing, for they were, at best, peripheral to the tale of adventure in the wilderness” that seemed so tantalizing and provocative to readers (Jeffrey 17). The exception appears to have been captivity narratives, which “frequently focused directly on women” and their “uncertain fate” in the untamed places of the American west (Jeffrey 20). Women often appear to be absent in the “mission on the frontier” as the progressive project became an exclusively masculine endeavor thought to be “full of hardships, unsuitable for the ‘weaker’ sex.”²⁴ Even now, women continue to be among those whose artistic and literary narrative gestures remain obscured in the literary and cultural history of the American west.

Feminist scholars have eloquently argued for the need to “move the study of American literature away from the small group of master texts that have dominated critical discussion” for much of our history (Tompkins xi). Women were excluded on aesthetic concerns. Many traditional scholars described the artistic work of female writers as “flawed in many respects” with “obvious” and unforgivable “faults” (Folsom 80-81). It is perhaps not surprising that even those who attempt to bring women writers into the literary history demonstrate their embarrassment at the dreadful aesthetic quality of the writing, describing the fictional efforts as “third and fourth-rate works” (Folsom 246). Many “were nonetheless popular and brought the authoresses a good deal of attention” during their lifetimes (Folsom 246). This project takes the artistic and literary production of women of the American west seriously, not as tropes, but as

And, it seems that Zane Grey, Ned Buntline and Louis L’Amour are collected, anthologized, disassembled, reassembled and repackaged every decade.

²⁴ Jeffrey 14; and Sandra L. Myres. *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience: 1800-1915*. (University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 98.

individuals and as authors, without insisting that the category “woman” is a singular construction that creates its own singular narrative. The recovery projects that began in the 1980s and 1990s have done a great deal to reposition discussions by urging that scholars consider the work of female writers, especially their literary texts “not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order” (Tompkins xi). These efforts have gained traction, particularly among Eastern and Southern writers, but the experiences of women of the American west continues to need further exploration. Women in the west have often been taken up in one of two contexts that work to contain them within the already established paradigm of the American western’s mythic patterns: the configuration of aggressive agents in keeping with their male western counterparts, as gamblers, prostitutes and other kinds of wild women; or conversely as passive and docile subjects, gentle, patient and quiet women who operated only in the domestic sphere and therefore outside the sphere of the wild west and whose influence, therefore, was largely unnoticed and marginalized.²⁵

²⁵ See Ann Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American west, 1865-90* (University of Illinois Press, 1997); Chris Enss, *The Lady was a Gambler: True Stories of Notorious Women of the Old West* (Connecticut: A Twodot Book, 2008), which further divides the women into the tropes of pioneer, outlaw, bandit, etc., and *Pistol Packin’ Madams: True Stories of Notorious Women of the Old West* (Connecticut: A Twodot Book, 2006); Rosemary Neering, *Wild West Women: Travellers, Adventurers and Rebels* (New York: Bristol Park Books, 2000); Glenda Riley and Richard W. Etulain, *Wild Women of the Old West* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003); Anne Seagraves, *High-Spirited Women of the West* (Treasure Chest Books, 2003) and *Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West*. (Idaho: Wesanne Publications, 1994); Josie Washburn and Sharon Wood, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871-1909* (Bison Books, 1997). And Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958); Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Women in Waiting in the Westward Movement: Life on the Home Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); and, Silvia Pettem, *Separate Lives: The Story of Mary Rippon* (Longmont: The Book Lode, 1999).

The repetition of these tropes simply solidifies rather than disrupts already established patterns of American western cohesion.

As feminist theorist Judith Butler argues, the “insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ is constructed” (19-20). In agreement with Butler that “*woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end,” this project also recognizes racial, economic, political and other social markers that influenced the experience of women (43, emphasis original). In both their published and private writing, women demonstrated that “where [they] were supposed to have been silent, they were not. What they were not supposed to have done, they did.”²⁶ And yet, they have often been forgotten or discounted. This project considers their particular engagement with the social concerns that emerged out of the specific regional conflicts. While some scholars have argued against the use of regionalism as a frame of inquest, “regionalism represents that point where women recognize their locatedness within the dominant discourse, accept the concept of location, and use it to critique received meanings and construct new ones” (Fetterley and Pryse 37).

Women, of course, are not the only significant absences in the literary and historic narrative of the American west. Like women, until “fairly recently, the

²⁶ Nina Baym, *Women Writers of the American west, 1833-1927* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011) 2. Baym identifies at least 343 women writers of western genres, both life writing and fiction. She argues that more writing by women has been lost and yet to be recovered. Baym’s text divides the women by territory and provides brief bibliographic entries for each, but does little critical work on the texts. Instead, her text serves as a provocation encouraging other scholars to further excavate.

American west's minorities have abided in the margins of 'the story' of the making of the place. Among the most conspicuous absences are those of the Indian, who has often served only as a "subplot in the [American] national epic."²⁷ Or, worse the Native American was taken up as a "savage" foil to European "civilization" (Klein 138). Scholarship on other subjects of Western progress has been equally neglected. Given that the European enterprise of the American west was consolidated around the theme of "winning of the continent" it is not surprising that Native Americans seemed to disappear (Calloway 8). They were transfigured into the "vanishing ancestors of their presumably advancing white heirs," according to multicultural critic and ethnographer Yael Ben-Zvi (212). Their absence, and therefore their silence, was naturalized as a form of ordinary familial inheritance to which they had already provided a tacit acceptance. Native Americans were sometimes faulted for their own "muted" status in American culture. Some historians claimed that negative stereotypes of Native Americans persisted because they held the sacred in cloistered trust: "For centuries, Indian people reserved for themselves, a voice that" they did not share with the outside

²⁷ Shannon Applegate, "The Literature of Loneliness: Understanding the Letters and Diaries of the American west." *Reading the West*, ed. Michael Kowalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 63. In this project I do not intend to enter the dispute over the so called "naming wars." I will use the terms "Indian," "Native American" and "Indigenous people" interchangeably and without preference to refer to the general populations of peoples who were present in the territories now identified as the contiguous United States when European settlers encountered them on the North American Continent. I do this even as I recognize and am sensitive to the great variety of tribes and cultural attributes, beliefs and behaviors of these people and the persistent concerns over who has the authority to determine how these individuals should be addressed. I will refer to specific tribes or particular groups whenever possible; and Colin G. Calloway, ed. "Introduction." *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996) 1-30, 1.

and so their world remained incomprehensible to white interpreters.²⁸ In this clearly Eurocentric view of the Native American people, they are blamed for not revealing themselves to their would-be white interpreters.

While many scholars have already discredited the error in this evolutionary social development plot, meaningful and critical engagement of early Native American voices in the narrative history of the American west continues to be anemic. Discovery of this lack has not resulted in a reorientation of the American consciousness of Native American presences. Their vanishing is an ongoing myth of America. But Native Americans demonstrated an incredible “determination and ability [...] to adapt, to create, and, above all, to continue,” according to historian Peter Iverson (xi). Gerald Vizenor identifies these Native American strategies of resistance as “survivance.” Indeed Native Americans did not vanish into the mist of history, but instead found a way—despite European “invasion” and its resulting “dispossession”—to persevere, to adapt, to fight back and to reclaim their history (Calloway 8). From William Apess, whose early writing from the East coast served as a model of critique and resistance, to Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, M. Scott Momaday, Zitkala Ša, James Welch, and Winona LaDuke, Native Americans have used their oral traditions to enrich the literature of the American west and to resist claims to their disappearance. Today, many tribes and their memberships are flourishing—both on and off the reservation. Others have turned to the European model of jurisprudence in an effort to reclaim land. It is

²⁸ Matthias Schubnell. *Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*, ed. Matthias Schubnell. (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1997), 149.

true that Native American culture did not develop along the same literary trajectory as white Europeans, but this does not mean they were not there or that they did not contemplate their place in the history of the American west. Tracing their initial forms of literary production, which is both oral and complicated by a desire to “hear as many versions as one can” of culturally important stories, has been difficult for American scholarship (Schaafsman and Tsosie 15). And it has resulted in “a resounding silence in the canon of Native American literatures,” despite their temporal importance to the development of the American west and their ongoing importance to the American national story.²⁹ This silencing continued through the “nineteenth century,” as only a small number of stories have been canonized (Wyss 4). It was not until “well into the twentieth century” that the variety of Native American literary production began to be taken seriously by scholars.

Like women and Native Americans, “black people were unceremoniously dropped” from the historical “cast” of characters in the “fantasy frontier” that developed around white masculine dominance (Katz xiii). African Americans, like James Beckwourth and Delilah Beasley, “barely registered” in the narrative history of the American west until very recently, according to Dan Moos (153). Recovery efforts have only recently begun to act as a corrective, but “African-American westerners tend to remain obscure” (153). In 2001 PBS created a supplemental instruction sequence on *The West* for educators of high school students, and their intervention offers to eliminate

²⁹ Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity and Native Community in Early America*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 3. Wyss traces the marginalia in bibles owned or used by Native Americans.

historical absences. The program notes that the “role of African Americans in the movement towards westward expansion has been largely overlooked in American history books” (*The West*). It is an absence that has perpetuated an “incomplete and slanted” historical imagination that faced “no serious challenges” for over one hundred years (Katz xiii). Indeed the “literature of the African American west is the last racial discourse of the region that remains unexplored,” according to Blake Allmendinger, who has completed extensive recovery work on African American writers on the American frontier, including James P. Beckwourth and Oscar Micheaux. Percival Everett, Ishmael Reed offer radical reinterpretations of the traditional western that underscore these literary and cultural failures. Scholars argue that the absence of African American cultural history and literary production in this region originates from several competing prejudices. The most egregious of these was that “black writers were historically denied publication in white journals,” so very little of their written material gained a broad readership until the twentieth century (Glasrud “Introduction”).

Everyday Lives

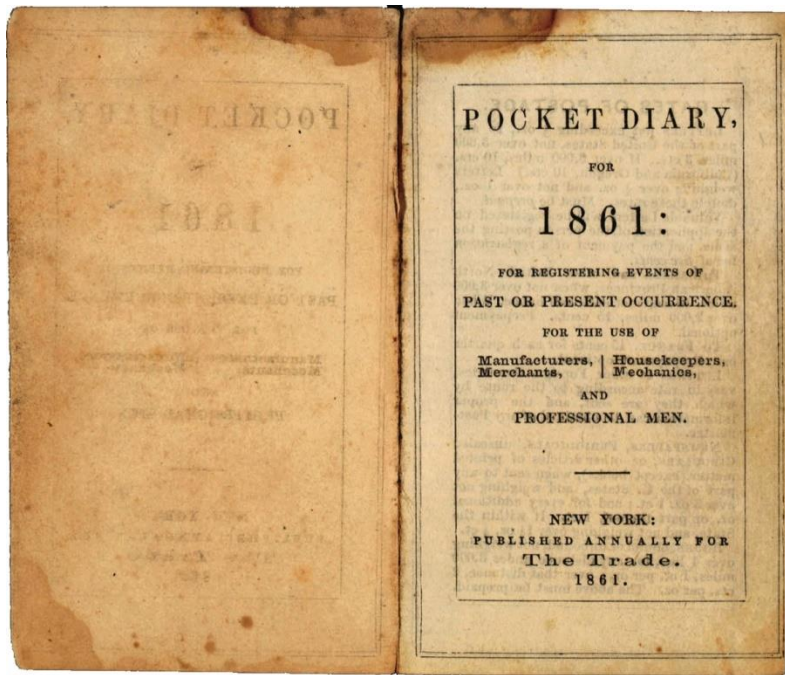


Illustration I-VIII: Mary Carpenter Diary, 1861.³⁰

The heavy reliance on published and popular materials has naturalized an historic fallacy of absence of minorities and women on the frontier, for the best known and most often anthologized male writers rarely included these figures in their stories and historians tended to repeat this absence as they analyzed and responded to western writings. Women and minorities rarely featured in these masculine-driven literary texts and since few women or minorities were considered foundational, they were also frequently left out of the actual histories of the west. “Most histories of the American west are heroic tales: stories of adventure, exploration, and conflict. While these are fine stories, with narrative drive and drama, their coherence is achieved by a narrowing of

³⁰ UC Irvine Special Collections.

focus” Armitage and Jameson 10). Worse, these histories perpetuated an intellectual absence in the American west as an ideological space because the absences in the literary material, at least implicitly, describe a place that simply did not stimulate the interests or imaginations of women or other minorities. Indeed if “a person wishing to know the history of the American west were to read a few hundred books and articles about it, chosen at random, he would come out of it with his head well crammed but there might be few historical facts in it” (Fisher and Holmes 96). Readers of literary production in the American west would come away with this same dearth, or at best with a sense of the “great confused West,” which seems always to reenact its singular story—one in which women and minorities are dominated and disenfranchised and where they left nothing of their experiences (Eutalin 139). Neither the history of the American west, nor the examinations of the narrative production in and about the American west represents the breadth of the experiences that were had there. For even the study of the west and “the western” as a literary and historic tradition is primarily a “territory claimed by men” of a particular color (Rosowski 157).³¹

As a corrective, the lives of everyday women and minorities in the have in the last few decades become the subject of significant consideration, after nearly a century of neglect, as scholars and historians took up the feminist recovery project initiated in the 1980s. Scholars began to scour archives and personal collections in an effort to (re)locate the women of the American west. A great many more women, most often

³¹ I could list the male scholars who have interrogated the West and the Western as a narrative genre since it came under scrutiny in the 1920s, but instead it is considerably easier to name the handful of female scholars who have taken up the challenge: Nina Baym, Annette Kolodny, Jane Thompkins and Susan Kollin are among the most notable.

posthumously, have been recognized for their participation in the making of the American west, even if they continue to garner little appreciation in the official historical accounts of the frontier. Scholars turned from the traditional “textual records” to other remnants of “material culture” associated with women’s lives to locate women’s pasts; as a result, their “history remains a relatively new field” (Woodworth-Ney 16 and 25). Their lives, experiences, and diaries were recovered in an effort to discover the “dramatic dimensions of their everyday existence” (Schlissel 9). As an enjoiner to masculine practices, they are described as being “caught up in a momentous event in history” (Schlissel 9). Enough diaries and letters have been recovered to prove, once and for all, that women were always a part of Western progress and not merely as the figures of the domestic goddess or saloon whore as so often described in popular accounts of the American west.³² But somehow this has done little to alter the perceptions of the American west as a white man’s land and women’s positions as outside this influence has remained relatively static. Some scholars believe that what “has perhaps confused the various interpretations of woman’s place and the westering experience is that the *reality* of women’s lives changed dramatically as a result of adaptation to frontier conditions while the public *image* remained relatively

³² See Lillian Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1992); Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, *The Women’s West* (1987); Laura Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American west* (2008); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (1988); Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell, *Women of the West* (2001) which includes many images of western women in unexpected roles. Sandra L. Myers, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (1982); Joanna Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (1982); Linda S. Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: Lives of Women on the Frontier* (1996); Kenneth Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails* is comprised of eleven volumes.

static” (Myres 269). Tompkins argued that in the narrative of the American west well into the twentieth century, the presence of women, like Indians, remains “suppressed.”³³

Conclusion

This project joins other explorations and considerations of the literary and historical imaginary of the western hero and the place of the American west that came to reverberate in the American consciousness in the nineteenth century, before quietly riding off into the sunset only to be reborn again and again in the films of the early twentieth century. But questions linger about how and why this cultural territory has been reprised in the twenty first century. Perhaps the perennial rebirth of the Western hero and his dusty lands results from a crying out of white masculine desires that have yet to be fully heard. Or perhaps it is the consequence of a competing desire: for those who imagine themselves as now slipping into a cultural morass to reassert the dominance that was played out fantastically in the myth of the American west. In either case, little has been written about these most recent reconfigurations or of how we might begin to understand these changes given convincing evidence that the original progenitors of the mythic heroes of the American west, those rugged men who dared to cross the Mississippi, may never have existed in the forms that have come to dominate our literature, or that if they ever did, they were few in number and their reign was

³³ Tompkins, 6. Interestingly one of the questions Tompkins takes up is “Why does it hate women” (6) and so she focuses on the important absence of women in the “outstanding examples of the genre” (7) that she chose to examine in her study and yet she avoids the question of the Indians, who she recognizes are included in Western films only as a way to remind the viewer that they are indeed watching a Western.

fleeting.³⁴ Brief as the period may have been, however, the western hero and his territory are a lingering influence that authorizes the way that Americans respond to history, people, places, events and to the non-human world. That their stories resonate today is perhaps no significant revelation; however, what is surprising is that their forward echoes pulsate in myriad directions, cascading over the stories of alternative voices that seem always on the verge of slipping away from our collective memories, of being conquered again and again: not merely as a closed historical moment that cannot be reclaimed, but as an eternal silencing bound to repetition. And while a considerable amount of recovery work in the past few decades has been aimed at revising the ritualized absences of the American west by demonstrating that the land, its animal inhabitants, women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexicans and other others were never absent from this particular (his)story—their presence has been demonstrated in fiction and life writing and the historical record—the recovery efforts remain underdeveloped as recent theoretical groundwork begins to provide meaningful entry points for contextualizing the of non-canonical narratives and histories within the network of traditional western fantasies.³⁵ So rather than expanding the features of the American west and its inhabitants they have been conceived problematically as creating

³⁴ Among some recent westerns include the expanding body of women's life writing in the American west, two reality television series *Mountain Men and Prairie Woman*, and television dramas *Justified*, adapted from Elmore Leonard's short story "Fire in the Hole," and *Longmire*, based on the Craig Johnson novel series of the same name, and the film adaptation of the *Lone Ranger* television show into a motion picture starring Johnny Depp.

³⁵ The list of fictional narratives, the recovered diaries, letters and memoirs written by both men and women in the American west, and history books that take the territory of the American west is too long to be recounted here, but many of these will serve to inform the arguments made throughout this project.

separate Wests—a problematic conundrum that continues to insert borders and boundaries.³⁶ “History is lived in the main by the unknown and forgotten,” but is remembered again when “voices ring out of the darkness—voices that historians never expected to hear, whose existence they had almost forgotten” (Schlessinger 11).

Chapter Summaries

Chapter II: Taming the Wild West: Narratives of Captivity and Violence traces the significance of the captivity narratives deployed by white Euro-Americans along the shifting frontier borders of the North American Continent that ultimately authorized violence across the first and great wests, and the subsequent removal of Native Americans to reservations during the nineteenth century. White captivity violated the Euro-American beliefs in their superiority over indigenous people, and their demands for racial and gender purity. Early Euro-American captivity narratives, which focused on wilderness and offered narratives of salvation, were later taken up in the service of Manifest Destiny. The earliest of these were primarily “symbolic” tales of religious captivity and restoration, as was Mary Rowlandson’s 1682 *Narrative*; they served as an archetype for later captives, their biographers, and fictional writers. Considered among

³⁶ I borrow this term from Separate Spheres ideology that grew out of the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1835 observations that in America “two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes” predominated and an entire structure had been developed “to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways that are always different” that he described in his *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, 3rd edition. Trans. Henry Reeve (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863), 259. See *No More Separate Spheres!: A Next Wave American Studies Reader*, Eds. Cathy N. Davidson, Jessamyn Hatcher, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplen and Robyn Wiegman (Duke University Press, 2002); *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930*, Ed. Monika Elbert (University of Alabama Press, 2000); and, Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*. (Yale University Press, 1983), which demonstrate that this gendered ideology was always tenuously constructed and that women in America transgressed allotted spheres in a number of ways.

the earliest published accounts of captivity on the North American continent, Rowlandson was attentive to her religious transformations during her many ‘removes’ from home. The repulsion her narrative expresses toward wilderness was later projected onto Native Americans. Mercy Harbison, whose narrative of captivity on the Pennsylvania frontier was altered significantly during its publication history, Lavina Day Eastlick’s narrative of conflict in Minnesota, and Rachel Plummer’s captivity in Texas, illustrate how the stylized narratives tended to duplicate the more horrifying and salacious moments, while becoming more secular in their interpretation of events, demanding a juridical rather than a spiritual response, and thus they were often used to justify violence against Native Americans. Nineteenth century narratives of captivity provided women a direct route to participate in the politics of Manifest Destiny, even as they were excluded from other forms of political participation, through publication opportunities that allowed them to make direct appeals to their readers.

Chapter III: Captive to Kin: Adoption, Accommodation and Transculturation examines the intriguing and often subversive alternative narratives of Anglo and Native American interaction along the shifting and increasingly violent frontier. These narratives, fictional and autobiographical, work to recast Native Americans in more positive relation to colonial settlers, embracing the transcultural possibilities of frontier alliances and rejecting the inherent violence that undergirded traditional captivity narratives. Counternarratives offered by Elizabeth Oakes, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Mary Jemison, Herman Lehmann and others demonstrate that cultural crossings were not only possible, but could be desirable and might provide alternative routes not

traditionally granted to white women or minorities. Their narratives disrupt the binary formulation of savage/civilized, foreign/American, and violence/benevolence that often framed traditional captivity narratives. The captive's refusal to be reintegrated into their original family also extends the idea of kinship from one of blood lines to one of affiliation, from descent to amalgamation and acculturation/accommodation in non-traditional trajectories in the nineteenth century narratives.

The traditional narrative of captivity is further disrupted by Native Americans, including William Apess, Sarah Winnemucca, and Alice Callahan joined Narcissa Owen, Lucy Hoyt Keys, who draw on the language of captivity to describe the removal of Native people from their homelands during Indian removal. And more recently, Native Americans have begun to narrate the stories of their lives, drawing on the tropes of the captivity narrative to describe the violence, capture, escape, and the hope for an eventual return that has marked their modern understanding of their historical dispossession. Taking up the narrative of Zintkala Nuni, the first identified Lost Bird, and the films *Reclaiming Our Children* (2007) and *Lost Sparrow* (2009) the chapter also explores the often occluded racist policies that authorized nearly a century of removal of Native American children into boarding schools, and their placement in foster care and permanent adoptions that not only harmed individual Native American children, but also destroyed Native American families and desecrated tribes.

Chapter IV: Natural Resistance and Reconciliation in the Shaping of the Place and the People in the American west interrogates the entanglement of humans and the material agency of non-human matter on the Great Plains. The chapter attends to the

complicated relationship between the people and the place of the Great Plains that is marked by the coexistence of human and non-human agencies. The Great Plains, and much of the American west, remains an unsettled territory, both imaginatively and materially. The landscape has often been taken up as a rhetorical symbol, an empty site of inert possibility awaiting human intervention. The landscape, as a rhetorical symbol, is most often considered by those who interrogate the use of landscapes in motivating tourism and constructing national identity—that is they contemplate the significance of the commodification of particular landscapes in signifying nationalist identity among a disparate and otherwise fragmented citizenry. Writing against the grand narrative of psychosexual desire and masculine conquest exemplified in traditional narratives of the American west, Willa Cather and Dorothy Scarborough, along with the diaries and letters of westering women, government films and plays, demonstrate the reciprocal and relational nature of humans to non-human elements. Relying on Karen Barad’s conception of “agential realism,” the chapter explores the impact of natural forces like the wind and the soil on the early pioneer settlers and the technological and material practices, including the plows and windmills that shaped the land and people. The unceasing, driving wind and the dry, charred soil remain iconic features of the North American landscape. And the human ability to manipulate it to a particular purpose has significantly changed the visual rhetoric of the landscape in dramatic ways. Such a conception requires a modification in focus from the people, the human agents, to the other agents that occupied and shaped bodies and the landscapes of the American west. This does not mean refusing the humans who viewed the American west as a “land of

opportunity” and a “place” where many could begin again; rather, rather it means examining more closely how non-human forces fueled the notion of the American west as “unsettled” and dangerous (Myres 13).

Chapter V: A Place of Little Rain: Watershed Ethics and Dam Politics in the American west surveys the history of water resources in the American west from Native American tribes to early pioneer settlers to modern-day ranchers and farmers. While relatively small numbers of Native Americans accommodated themselves to the ebbs and flows of water, wave after wave of Euro-American migration has meant increasing demands on fewer and fewer resources. And as demand has continued to increase, water has been deployed as a weapon along predictable and well-worn cultural tributaries. Water-as-weapon, rather than resource or agent, unambiguously demonstrates the corporeal “precarity” of marginalized cartographic subjects—human and other-than-human. However, in deemphasizing the cartographic aesthetic that stresses boundaries over affiliations, *Sleep Dealer* and *Watershed* adopt a biopolitical aesthetic that highlights ecological entanglements and collaborations. The novel and film challenge the seemingly eternal “barricades” imposed by aesthetic regimes of race and class differences, thereby providing a dialectical mode of resistance “against discipline, docility and repression” through unexpected allegiances that disrupt the traditional flows of power. This chapter follows the historical development of the language of water and irrigation, as an ethical and aesthetic imperative, to the movement of water resources in the advancement of particular communities in the American west. Deploying strategies similar to the “excavation” of “landscape memory” described by

scholar Simon Schama, this chapter highlights the ways that *Watershed*, *Sleep Dealer*, and other texts narrate “landscape’s past traditions as a source of illumination” for the significance of the present man-made ecological crisis related to water poisoning and depletion. Water is a prized resource with a history, a past, a present and a future guided by aesthetic and ethical implications related to race and resistance. This is not an act of nostalgia or a desire to enact “zealous” guardianship over past claims on the water, a scholarly error that Schama warns against, but as a way of bringing forward that which seems no longer visible: the technologies which make access to necessary water supplies a luxury for some, and a standard for others especially in the North America west, where resource distribution is often inflected by ongoing racial hierarchies.

Chapter VI: A Legacy of Violence, an Uncertain Future: Race and the (dis)Placement of Memory in *Reconsidering the American west* takes up modern minority writers as their narratives of resistance expose the limits of the frontier myth in satiric relief, chipping away at what they identify as the false claims of expansion and prosperity that have for too long been accepted as historically accurate, unavoidable, and available only to the few. Minority writers trace the implications of fabricated cultural absences that have been sanctioned by a suspect historical record, and echoed in narrative accounts of the American west. They confront the often porous boundary between fact and fiction, and categories of race, gender, and status in their narratives. They negotiate a difficult terrain where the politics of gender, sexuality, race and truth are intimately intertwined with imagined frontier boundaries, and locate some of their most scathing critique of traditional American values, which these texts argue displace,

erase and exploit, at the very site of their creation: the locales of the fantastic dramas of the American imaginary rooted in historically implicated places. Confronting both the old myth of a frontier void filled once and for all by an unstoppable European ingenuity and determination, and perhaps its more pernicious offspring, the myth that all is past, emerge as the central undertakings of these novels. These writers resist “attempts at settled assumptions about its identity because of inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt [...] an individual, a community, or a nation.” These literary works promise to unsettle the American west through what are perhaps the most inventive retellings of the drama of frontier expansion past and present. The novels confront long-held American western mythos in both jarring and humorous notes, which may finally begin to undo the fabrications that led to the singular legends of the west through the establishment of firm boundaries, and create an opening where difference may finally be remembered and welcomed.

Chapter VII: Conclusion: The Future of the Western Past interrogates the ways in which the myths of the American west, which have been taken to be grounded in place, are deployed across borders. Instead of being exclusively or especially American, these myths demonstrate how inflected they are by the conflicts of emerging contact zones. On February 2, 2015, members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria released a video that purported to show the brutal slaying of Jordanian national 1st Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh, who had been drugged, placed in a cage, and burned alive sometime in January after having been captured a month earlier. Many American news outlets reported the gruesome details of al-Kaseasbeh’s death, but not on the other contents of

the 22-minute professionally produced video, which includes footage of Jordanian King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein meeting with and shaking hands with US President Barack Obama. A day after the video's release King Abdullah II had a private meeting with members of the House Armed Services Committee, President Obama and other members of the US government to discuss the ongoing "scourge" of ISIS extremists. Following those meetings, it was widely reported—by reputable and less reputable news sources alike—that King Abdullah invoked the spirit of Clint Eastwood's character in the 1992 wild western drama *Unforgiven*. California Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter told reporters that Abdulla quoted William Munny, an aging gunslinger who had hung up his holster only to be pressed back into service. "He's ready to get it on," Hunter was reported as saying of Abdulla. Although Hunter refused to state exactly what part of the film Abdullah quoted, many news outlets speculated that Abdulla reiterated Munny's warning that "Any son of a bitch takes a shot at me, I'm not only going to kill him, I'm going to kill his wife and all his friends and burn his damn house down." Whether Abdulla provided a direct quote or merely alluded to the concepts in the film more generally, his ready reference to the violent rhetoric of the wild western demonstrates that the American west remains a highly portable ideology that is readily taken up to fit a variety of national and transnational goals. Indeed the quick deployment of the rhetoric in discussions of Middle Eastern conflicts demonstrates the migratory and porous nature of the tropes of the American west, whether actual or imagined, even to those who seem outside its historical, geographical, and political sphere.

Chapter II

Taming the West: Narratives of Captivity and Displacement in the American west



Illustration II-I: *American Progress*.³⁷

“And that claim by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and

³⁷ By George A. Croftt (ca. 1893). The work also has been variously identified as *Westward the course of destiny*, *Westward ho!* and *Manifest destiny*. Image depicts a white female dressed in a diaphanous gown floating above pioneers as they move across the American west. The only other women in the painting are the half-dress Native Americans, whose exposed breasts mark their uncivilized natures. The Native Americans and buffalo are moving away from the signs of progress of civilization, which include livestock, coaches, wagons, and trains. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97507547/>. The painting came to symbolize the divinely sanctioned Anglo progress across the continent.

federated self-government entrusted to us.”
~John O’Sullivan³⁸

The “mythology of manifest destiny” was seen, until very recently, “as a cosmic struggle between civilization and barbarism” and “figured into the process” of a hegemonic discourse on human advancement, according to history and literary scholars.³⁹ Nowhere was the belief in progress deemed more natural and inevitable than in the United States, where Euro-Americans confronted what they deemed a vast untamed world inhabited by feral beasts—both human and non-human. This untamed wilderness represented both physical danger and also the intellectual degradation of civilized man. But this new world with its new lands also held promise and opportunity for proper stewards. Those who were identified as bad stewards at best and brutal savages at worst had to be dealt with quickly. In the first case, they might be trained in the proper civilized manner and brought into the disciplined fold through an

³⁸ John O’Sullivan, a newspaper reporter, is credited with the first use of the term ‘manifest destiny,’ which appeared in the *Democratic Review* in the fall of 1845. In his essay, he provided a defense of the United States in the pursuit of Mexico territories, which later became the state of Texas. He warned that the moment had arrived “for the opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease.” O’Sullivan first used the term manifest destiny as a defense of the US annexation as part of a larger directive and divine purpose. He wrote that it was “manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” O’Sullivan repeated the phrase later that year in a column in the *New York Morning News* in defense of the US movement into Oregon Territory in opposition to the British government. While his essay was a justification, he apparently did not support the violent take-over of these territories, believing that the exchange could be accomplished through political agreement. For more on O’Sullivan and his career, see Robert Sampson. *John L. O’Sullivan and His Times*. (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003). For more on manifest destiny and US expansion, see Amy Greenberg. *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2011); David Hains and Carol Ann Mortland, eds. *Manifest Destinies: Americanizing Immigrants and Internationalizing Americans*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001); and, Anders Stephanso. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang Critical Issues 1996).

³⁹ Bordewich, 27-8 and Simonson 1.

appropriately stern religious and intellectual education, as was the case initially with the five ‘civilized’ tribes of Native Americans. As feminist historian Glenda Riley’s seminal research on women pioneers and settlers demonstrates, during the colonial period Euro-Americans “attempted to enslave, civilize, [and] assimilate” the indigenous populations of North America into what they believed to be a superior European-based cultural system (17). Anglo women, although frequently left out of the historical record in myriad ways, often played a vital role in the objective “to promote civilization and christianity [sic]” as missionaries and teachers (Callahan 2). However, this effort proved only moderately successful and movement into the first west ignited skirmishes between new settlers and the indigenous populations, who at least initially pressed ever westward in an effort to maintain their own lifeways and to avoid confrontation. But by the nineteenth century, as the number of Euro-emigrants slipping westward across on the trans-Mississippi migration exploded, the “anti-Indian sentiment” had ignited into a sometimes ravenous disgust, according to Riley (17). Native Americans who resisted the proper education, and there were scores, were seen to validate Euro-American prejudices against their base natures.

Racialized hatred was further stimulated as cultural ideologies coalesced with scientific theory to support existing notions of Euro-American superiority. Scientific proofs often “provided a solid basis for the new assumptions” about the destiny of European descendants in America and vindicated expansion, according to historian Reginald Horsman, who offers an important examination of American racial mythology in *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (159).

Thus the drive toward cultural and environmental improvement was a matter of reason and science and could not be denied simply by the presence of primitive groups. The mythology of natural racial difference was bolstered by facts that proved the superiority of Europeans and conversely the inferiority of Native Americans. While much of the scientific proofs that originally buoyed the mission westward have long been discredited, they provided powerful validation for nineteenth century Euro-American beliefs about intellectual, cultural, and political progress. Racialized ideology was so firmly ensconced early in the development of an American identity that it continues to plague contemporary race relations in America.⁴⁰ Horsman argues that however faulty both the science and attendant assumptions may have been, they translated into a “sense of national racial destiny” in the US that fit European expectations and reinforced claims to the superiority of European American cultural values over those of all others (160). Unfortunately, cross-cultural interaction between Anglos and Natives often increased rather than eased tensions between the two groups. Although “Indian patience” was sometimes described as “remarkable,” the Indigenous peoples on the North American continent did not simply evacuate the land, nor willingly cede their

⁴⁰ See Horsman. *Race and Manifest Destiny* for an historical overview; Gary Nash. *Red, White and Black in America: The Peoples of Early North America*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974), which traces the interaction of race, politics, and economics in establishing identity in America; and, Michael Eric Dyson. *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line*. (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1996) which demonstrates how the mythologies of race seeped into twentieth century cultural and social ideology. And, a recent spate of police violence against minorities, which ignited into the Black Lives Matter campaign demonstrate how raw ongoing racial politics remain in the US.

way of life and communities to the destiny of Anglos.⁴¹ In many cases, the North American Indians resisted colonial efforts to civilize, Christianize, or otherwise “improve” them and take over the land.

Instead, indigenous tribes often attempted to protect the lands that had supported them and their ancestors for centuries through various methods of refusal and resistance. While some Native tribes assimilated to settler colonial ideologies, many tribes attempted to protect their cultural heritage and life ways rather than submitting to colonial pressures for “reform” and “liberation.” Indeed, up until the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the indigenous people were successful in maintaining much of their cultural traditions even as they were forced westward into often unfamiliar territory. Up until that time, when military intervention increased significantly, the certainty of Anglo superiority was tested repeatedly and “most of the West was not a goal, but a barrier” to be overcome, according to Americanist scholar and writer Wallace Stegner, whose work on the American west has been important to both historians and literary scholars (18). But once it became a goal, the battle for scarce resources on desirable lands often led to all out warfare. While Indigenous peoples presented a significant challenge to the European idea of progress and of civilization, they also provided the proof of its necessity. The more conflict that erupted between European Anglos and the indigenous people living in the much desired and needed territories on the North American

⁴¹ Jack Schaefer. *Heroes Without Glory: Some Good Men of the Old West*. (New York: Donald I Fine, Inc., 1987), 96. Paiute Tribes living in the American Northwest recently reasserted claims to lands now controlled by the US Bureau of Land Management, reminding officials that they never gave up their lands and never will.

continent, the more it proved necessary to convert the unruly tenants to the proper cultural values or to destroy them entirely for their refusal.

Euro-Americans became ever more convinced that “ultimately, the frontier savage, whether Indian or mestizo, must yield to the press of civilization” as defined by the more powerful newcomers, according to historian Richard Slatta (28). Such firmly held racialized views meant that skirmishes erupted between Anglos and Indians in the first west, and continued, ultimately with greater and more catastrophic results for both settlers and Native Americans.⁴² Despite the fact that many Indian bands and settlers lived together peacefully, the more salacious accounts of “White-Indian contact increasingly proved to whites [...] that civilization and Indianness were inherently incompatible,” and that Anglos must gain victory by any means necessary, according to historian Robert Berkhofer, Jr. (29). The increasing rhetoric of the irreconcilable nature of these relations during this period materialized in the growing print culture of the nineteenth century that included what many have described as the “first popular American literature”: the captivity narrative.⁴³ The two most frequent scenarios of captivity proved especially generative in pushing Anglo American sentiment in support

⁴² See Chapter I for a more thorough discussion of the connection between the first west and the second west.

⁴³ David Harry Miller and William W. Savage. “Ethnic Stereotypes and the Frontier: A Comparative Study of Roman and American Experience.” *The Frontier*. Ed. David Harry Miller and Jerome O. Steffan. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 109-37. 124. See also Frances Roe Kestler. *The Indian Captivity Narrative: A Woman's View*. (Garland Pub., 1990). Many scholars have argued that the captivity narrative is a uniquely American literary genre; however, some historians have argued convincingly that such claims represent the ongoing tale of “American exceptionalism” that contributed to its colonial enterprise. See Linda Colley. “Perceiving Low Literature: The Captivity Narrative.” *Essays in Criticism* 53.3 (2003): 199-213. Colley demonstrates that American captivity narratives, in many cases, follow those of English and European captivity narratives.

of Indian removal and extermination: the separation of mother from child, often through the brutal death of the child, and the unprotected woman precariously in the hands of savages. A third form of captivity also proved troubling, the captivity of marginalized men, who were susceptible to ‘becoming’ Native. All three forms of Anglo captivity threatened to destabilize and unseat US national dominance and unity and were widely popular.

Captivating Narratives



Illustration II-II: The Rescued.⁴⁴

The captivity genre is especially instructive in considering the development of violent Anglo responses to Native Americans, and the place of women and Native Americans in the history and development of the American west as aggression

⁴⁴ An I.A. Ralph engraving based on a John Gadsby Chapman painting. Chapman, an American Painter, was recognized for his historical paintings and is most famous for his 1840 painting, *The Baptism of Pocahontas*, which was commissioned by the US Congress for the rotunda at the Capitol Building, where it remains on display.

increased along with the movement westward. The earliest captivity narratives written on the content were by Puritan colonists and were symbolic tales of religious captivity and restoration. They were shared, often during religious sermons, as a way of instructing readers on how they might overcome their hardships, and not only retain but also strengthen their religious convictions. The texts performed a religious purpose that fit with the Puritan ideals of the first American pilgrims. Mary Rowlandson, whose book *The Sovereignty and Goodness of GOD, Together With the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, combines the religious, the personal, and the specificity of place as she recounts her ordeal in the wilderness. The bulk of her published story, written in 1682 and six years after her captivity among the Wampanoag Indians, centered on her religious quest as she endured repeated “removals” from her family, her faith, and the comfort and security of the civilized world.⁴⁵ As prominent feminist scholar Annette Kolodny notes, Rowlandson’s seminal text provides the first “public record of American women’s encounter with the wilderness places of the new world landscape” and its inhabitants, but more importantly it “demanded a new appreciation of the conflicting images guiding the physical removal of the Puritans from the spiritual Babylon of England to the uncharted forests of New England” (17, 20). Rowlandson documents twenty such removes as she is taken further and further away from her home—the civilized world—and deeper and deeper into Native land—wilderness—and ultimately her “redemption” back into the white community. As much as Rowlandson’s

⁴⁵ See Chapter III for more on King Philip’s War.

narrative recounts her captivity, it marks her heroic efforts in maintaining her identification as a faithful Christian woman. Rowlandson's written account is widely considered to be the first popular American captivity story, going through four editions and selling 1,000 copies in 1682.⁴⁶ The text "performed a personal and public service", according to Kathryn Zabelle Derounian, since it offered Rowlandson a "therapeutic" opportunity to "confront her past journey outside conventional society," while serving as a public "devotional" since it also "documented" her "reentry" into conventional society (240). Although Rowlandson describes ill treatment, she also includes stunning moments of her captor's kindnesses to her, remarking on her "admiration" for native women and admits that without them, she could "not [have] survived" her captivity (Kolodny 18-19). She describes being offered a bible after her young daughter's death, and describes the comfort that the particularly significant act of kindness brought her during her removal from her family and friends. Furthermore, her narrative describes the daily activities and customs of her captors with whom she remained for three months. Ethnographic elements captured within Rowlandson's narrative became a hallmark of the genre and often provided a counterpoint to tales of cruelty. Although Rowlandson comes to view her captors as more than savage, and she ultimately questions the sharp distinctions between civilized and uncivilized, it was also taken up as a "direct statement of frontier experience" that further supported the claims that settlers were "part of a divine scheme" in a new "paradise" that undergirded the

⁴⁶ See Kathryn Zabelle Derounian. "The Publication, Promotion, and Distribution of Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative in the Seventeenth Century". *Early American Literature* 23.3 (1988): 239-261.

premises of manifest destiny.⁴⁷ Native Americans ceased being individuals, but instead simply provided “the larger drama and the vision” of the Puritan view of their place in the new world (Berkhofer 81). Thus began their first literary erasure.

Frontier Fantasies: Mothers and Children in Peril

*If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
~Rudyard Kipling*



Illustration II-III: Frontier Life (ca. 1875).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Roy Harvey Pearce. “The Significances of the Captivity Narrative.” *American Literature*, 19.1 (1947), 1-20: 3; and Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, see chapter 1.

⁴⁸ Engraving depicts a Native American taking two small infants as a mother desperately clings to one child and her husband, holding a pitchfork, attempts to fight off the savage. Another man lies dead underneath the ongoing battle. Images such as these often accompanied the captivity

Justification for violence against and removal of the indigenous peoples of the American west often coalesced around the need to protect those seen as the most vulnerable Americans: mothers and their small children. Rowlandson's young daughter was injured during the King Philip's War that led her captivity, but it took one week for the young girl to succumb to her injuries. Rowlandson in describing her third remove wrote of the suffering she experienced at being forced to leave her deceased daughter behind without a proper burial. The barbarity of the Natives is revealed as she explains she had no choice since there was "no resisting" her captors on the matter. Noting that she had taken the "first opportunity [she] could to go look after [her] dead child," she learned "what they had done with [the body]" (18). Her captors "had buried it," but Rowlandson could not help but grieve the circumstances of her daughter's final resting place. "There I left that Child in the Wilderness, and must commit it, and myself also in this Wilderness-condition, to him who is above all" (18). Rowlandson's narrative does not dwell on the brutal nature of that death, but rather on the pain of eternal unrest that Rowlandson's daughter will experience in her wilderness grave. Her geographic displacement causes Rowlandson the greatest suffering, and it is only her faith that keeps her from becoming insensible over the untenable predicament.

If Rowlandson's descriptions of child death were tempered by her Puritan faith, later writers would capitalize on the repulsion that Euro-Americans felt at the image of the dead child and the terribly suffering mother left to mourn her. The later narratives

narratives published in dime novels. The Library of Congress.
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003673049/>

provided the first real American horror stories. The aesthetics of sympathy were deployed in the sentimental novels that had become increasingly popular in the nineteenth century and worked to engage reader's affective responses. According to Glenn Hendler, whose analysis of sympathy in *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-century American Literature*, the sympathetic relationship between reader and subject created a "fiction of the public sphere" that was integral to establishing a sense of community among colonial settlers. The "logic of sympathy" demonstrated the importance to sentimental writing as a political instrument that depended on "the publics' willingness to imagine themselves as participating in transparent communication" with the author (145). But while much of the extant material, letters and diaries of both men and women during the period of expansion adopt the narrative of Anglo exceptionalism and the hope of domestication on the western field, captivity narratives and the diaries and letters of Anglo-Indian contact by both men and women offer important sites for interrogating the doctrine of domesticity that put Republican motherhood and "restrained manhood" at the pinnacle of America's civilized society, according to historian Amy Greenberg, who examines how violence and masculinity coalesced during the nineteenth century (11). Literary and history scholars have shown that the most popular narratives of both seduction and captivity were written by amateurs, often women, which provided an outlet for the description of female experience in their own terms. Captivity and seduction narratives were genres in which female writers participated in remarkable numbers.⁴⁹ And, when they did not, male

⁴⁹ See Kate McCafferty. "Palimpsest of Desire: The Re-Emergence of the Captivity Narrative of

writers took over the narration, using the victimization of virtuous women, in order to play on the public's sympathy. Nowhere was this more evident in the public's willingness to engage in affective relations with the poor mother's suffering.

And authors included ever more descriptive scenes of the poor babes battered and bloodied body left on display for the mother, and her readers, to mourn. The captivity narrative in its many iterations during the colonial period introduced important themes that would be taken up by later writers and became a "well-developed art" by the nineteenth century (Riley 17). Factual, pseudo-factual, and fictitious accounts included various versions of captivity that frequently depicted "American Indians as savage barbarians" whose behavior might turn white men wild and placed white women's natural purity at peril (Riley 17). One of the American west's most noted early scholars, Leslie Fielder, argues that among the most terrifying and most "compelling recurrent images in the legends of Indian warfare [...] is that of the just-born babe, [...] swung by the heels—in a Red fist, of course—against a nearby tree trunk, even as [his mother] is being dragged off into slavery" (92). There are many examples of the vivid descriptions of child death that were included in the published captivity narratives. The successively more gruesome depictions of Mercy (Massy) Herbeson/Massey Harbison/Massy Harbison's capture and very brief captivity provides a stunning example of how the wounded mother and the dead infant and child came to serve a rhetorical and political purpose. Harbison was alone with her children in

Pulp Romance." *Journal of Modern Culture* 27.4, (1984): 43-56. McCafferty is concerned with what she defines as 'low' art and how the modern romance writers have picked up on the themes of the captivity narrative. See also Cathy Davidson. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. (Oxford University Press, 1987).

Pennsylvania at the time of a Native American raid. Her narrative provides an example of how one woman's harrowing tale was made to serve a larger political purpose: to emphasize the potential danger on the frontier and to highlight the barbarity of North American Indians, who were depicted as always lying in wait to murder small children as their mothers looked on in horror. There are at least three versions of Harbison's days-long captivity in the spring of 1792. All versions present terrifying accounts of the attack on her home and her brief stay with Native Americans before she escaped with her only surviving child and made her way back to civilization. But they don't all tell the story in the quite the same way, or with the same level of detail.

The first account of the attack came when "Massy Herbeson," gave an official deposition soon after the incidents.⁵⁰ This account, which was a brief four pages, was first published in 1793 and appeared in the *Manheim Anthology*, "a commercially inspired potpourri of captivity horrors," and was later reprinted in full in Richard Vanderbeets collection of "unaltered" captivity narratives.⁵¹ The *Manheim Anthology* as it has come to be identified had a much longer and cumbersome title: *Affecting history of the dreadful distresses of Frederic Manheim's family: to which are added, the*

⁵⁰ It is unclear if the difference in the spelling of her name is a typographical error, or if it was done intentionally to protect her anonymity during the early printings as the original text may have been lost.

⁵¹ See Richard Vanderbeets. *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1973; and the original four page deposition manuscript published in 1794 in *Affecting history of the dreadful distresses of Frederic Manheim's family : to which are added, the sufferings of John Corbly's family. An encounter between a white man and two savages. Extraordinary bravery of a woman. Adventures of Capt. Isaac Stewart. Deposition of Massey Herbeson. Adventures and sufferings of Peter Wilkinson ! Remarkable adventures of Jackson Johonnot. Account of the destruction of the settlements at Wyoming* text <https://archive.org>.

sufferings of John family. An encounter between a white man and two savages. Extraordinary bravery of a woman. Adventures of Capt. Isaac Stewart. Deposition of Massey Herbeson. Adventures and sufferings of Peter Wilkinson ! Remarkable adventures of Jackson Johonnot. Account of the destruction of the settlements at Wyoming. It is included here to demonstrate that the even prior to the nineteenth century, writers and readers were already anticipating the perils on western territories as potential expansionist enclaves. The visions of Manifest Destiny may not yet have been fully formulated as a nationalist move, but the activities in the first wests certainly made the move more readily available. Pearce notes that there are two versions of the original deposition, one given in third person, and a second offered as a third person summary, but with virtually the same language (Pearce 11). Feminist scholar Susan Faludi describes a 30-page expanded version of the original testimony as “unadorned” compared to the revised and fictionalized one published in 1825. In 1825, the Herbeson account was remade and had been expanded to 86 pages presented with another lengthy and exhausting example of the titillating details that told a story of its own: *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Massy Harbison, from Indian Barbarity Giving an Account of her Captivity, the Murder of her two Children, her Escape, with an Infant at her Breast; Together with some Account of the Cruelties of the Indians, on the Allegheny River, & During the Years, 1790, '91, '92, '93, '94.* Pearce describes a fourth edition, published in 1836 in which the “miscellaneous material has practically smothered the original narrative” and that the narrative had become an opportunity for “blood and thunder”

(12).⁵² And finally a 1915 version restored the trimmed down first-person account, but included an editor's note describing the military failure that led to her abduction.

The 1825 version went through at least four editions, and eventually managed 206 pages as more historical documents were attached to the narrative. Just as the title attempted to provide more detailed descriptions of the horrors it would extrapolate, so too did the actual narrative, which had become exceedingly graphic in its details of Indian savagery and maternal helplessness, in addition to providing extensive information on the lengthy war campaigns that precipitated Harbison's captivity. Mercy Harbison has been transformed into Massy Harbison. And, while some scholars argue that the 1825 and the subsequent editions of this version, published more than thirty years after the events has "little or no pretense to authenticity," the document went to great lengths to establish its faithfulness to the actual events suffered by Harbison in a preface directed "To the Reader," who are told that she recounted the events only after "repeated solicitations" (Harbison, *Narrative*, 1825). The 1825 Harbison text, like many of those of the nineteenth century, came to "dwell on Indian horror and cruelty," the perseverance of the white captive during his or her imprisonment, and his or her ultimate restoration to civilized society (Pearce 10). Written as the US government implemented more aggressive policies aimed at preparing the way for more European settler colonials to the American west, it mattered little that Harbison's captivity was decades old. Pearce argues that both male and female authors during the nineteenth century often "dwell on Indian horror and cruelty," the perseverance of the white

⁵² I have been unable to locate a copy of the 1836 text.

captive during his or her imprisonment, and his or her ultimate restoration to civilized society (10). These narratives also often “employ elaborate strategies of separation” between Native and Anglo-Americans “in order to construct” and maintain “foreignness” and to “resist potential erosions of cultural boundaries,” that at least emerged as potentially significant in Rowlandson’s earlier text, according to Yael Ben-Zvi’s ethnographic approach to captivity narratives (x). Harbison’s extended text served as an important reminder of the savages at their most vile and depraved and ensured to quiet those who might sympathize with Native Americans (Pearce 12). This narrative version includes Massy’s family “history,” but the account is increasingly about the extended battle between Native Americans and US soldiers, and it has been transformed to “comply with the new model” of the frontier woman as a helpless victim in need of protection, rather than a failed Christian in need of salvation (Faludi 266). The Harbison text includes few details about Indian life and certainly includes no accounts of the kindness of her captors as Rowlandson’s text had. And although her ordeal lasted only six days, the text describes her “emaciated and haggard look, her wretched and helpless condition and her sun-burnt and mangled body” as the “full evidence” of her having survived the “savage warfare in the Western country” (Harbison, *Narrative*, 1825).

Rather than merely recounting the events of Harbison’s captivity, as her deposition does, the expanded, fictionalized text includes an editor’s note attesting to the “veracity of the facts narrated by the widow,” a certificate of authenticity from an attorney, and a justification for the inclusion of the history of the events that led to the battle and St. Clair’s defeat as Massy’s story would have been “incomplete” without

such supporting documentation.⁵³ Ironically, the first-person perspective is restored in Harbison's narrative portions of the text even as the surviving reprints of the deposition remain in third person. The narrative is broken into chapters and includes descriptions of earlier Indian aggressions, and it is even interrupted by an address from the US President. Indeed, the narrative seems to have very little of Harbison left in it, except the "itemized [...] miseries" of a poor widow (Faludi 266). And the Indian savage had become an animal that cannot be rescued from his own base nature As Faludi notes, the narrative shift as the published versions progress in the nineteenth century is remarkable. In the deposition, Harbison begins by explaining briefly why she was alone in the home and the subsequent events. "Shortly after the two scouts went away, a number of Indians came into the house and drew her out of bed by her feet, the two eldest children, who also lay in another bed, were drawn out in the same manner, a younger child, about one year old, slept with the deponent" (Vanderbeets 213). The statement clearly indicates that she was awakened and removed from her bed in an abrupt and harsh manner, but it does not capitalize on a desire for sympathetic identification of Harbison as a victim of especially cruel Indians committing

⁵³ The incident was part of the Northwest Indian War fought on the Wabash River on Nov. 4, 1791 in response to the 1783 Treaty of Paris in which the US Government and Great Britain recognized US sovereignty over lands east of the Mississippi and south of the Great Lakes. Members of the Delaware, Miami and Shawnee tribes disputed the treaty. They attacked Gen. Arthur St. Clair and about 1,000 American troops were sent to roust Native Americans from the land and secure the border. The battle resulted in one of the worst losses on the American side. See John P. Bowes. *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West*. (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Colin G. Calloway. *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army*. (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015); Leroy V. Eid. "American Indian Military Leadership: St Clair's 1791 Defeat," *The Journal of Military History* 57.1 (1993): 71-88; John F. and Winkler and Peter Dennis. *Wabash 1791: St. Clair's Defeat*. (Oxford: Osprey, 2011).

particularly heinous crimes against an unprotected white female. But the same events are described in much greater detail and with significantly heightened emotional flourishing in the subsequent narrative reinterpretations: “I then looked up and saw the house full of Indians, every one having his gun in his left hand and tomahawk in his right. I immediately jumped to the floor on my feet, with the young child in my arms” (Harbison, *Narrative*, 27) The dispassionate descriptions of the deposition take on new significance in the subsequent rendering. Rather than the ambiguous description of a “number” of Indians who merely drag her from her bed, the house has become overcrowded with twice-armed Indians. The shift demonstrates the desire to cast Native Americans as increasingly more dangerous and hostile, and women as more pitiful victims in need of protection.

In the deposition, the death of her son is described in the following manner:

They then began to drive the deponent and her children away; but a boy, about three years old, being unwilling to leave the house, they took it by the heels, and dashed it against the house; then stabbed and scalped it. They then took the deponent and the two other children, to the top of the hill (Vanderbeets 214).

The narrative version shifts from third person to first and expands extensively on the original account, drawing on the suffering of the poor child and Harbison’s extraordinary loss at the hands of the “monsters” who had invaded her home.

The Indians when they had flogged me away along with them, took my oldest boy, a lad about five years of age along with them, for he was still at the door by my side. My middle boy who was about three years of age had by this time obtained a situation by the fire in the house, and was crying bitterly for me not to go, and making little complaints of the depredations of the savages. But these monsters were not willing to let the child remain behind them; they took him by the hand to drag him

along with them, but he was so very unwilling to go, and made such a noise by crying, that they took him up by the feet, and dashed his brains out against the threshold of the door. They then scalped and stabbed him, and left him for dead. When I witnessed this inhuman butchery of my own child, I gave a most indescribable and terrific scream, and felt a dimness come over my eyes, next to blindness, and my senses were nearly gone (Harbison 28-30).

The narrative description expands more than three times on the original account, lingering on the child's suffering and Harbison's witnessing as the cruel intruders ignore their pleas for mercy. The body of the deceased child, linked readers and authors (non-fiction) and authors and readers with characters (fiction) in an effort to shape public sentiments.⁵⁴ Although the first account is disturbing, it is in the narrative version that the distance between the victims and their assailants increases and any hope that the Natives might be retrieved from their savagery become increasingly unlikely. Additionally, that Harbison indicates that he had "been left for dead" seems to indicate that he had been mortally wounded, but not summarily killed as was indicated in the deposition. In the 1825 narrative version, the lengthier scene above is repeated for a second time later in the text, again moving readers to sympathize with Harbison for having witnessed the horrifically painful death. And Harbison returns to the deceased child's mutilated body again after her escape, upon being told that the poor babe survived for two days before succumbing to the catastrophic injuries. In the narrative version, is it is not enough that the child is dead, he haunts the narrative, returning again

⁵⁴ See Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 94. Kete examines the relationship of the piling up of dead infants and children in Harriet Beecher Stowe's pivotal text *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) and poems written to dead children and the political shift in considerations of the mores of slave holding.

and again as a reminder of the cruelty meted out against him. While the deposition was nearly lost, the last iteration went through at least four editions, demonstrating that the genre became increasingly popular as anti-Indian sentiment gained traction in the public imagination. Despite the traumatic events that are so thoroughly recounted in the pseudo-autobiographical version, the reader is reassured in the opening pages that there are “many more, which from their nature, will not admit of being recorded.” Readers are left to wonder what horrors might have been omitted, especially since incredibly graphic details had been described in meticulous detail.

The publication history of Harbison’s story of captivity demonstrates the shift in the meaning of captivity for women on the frontier. It also demonstrates the increasingly violent political goals that motivated the writing, reprinting and reconfiguration in this genre, and in the growing appetite of its readers for the most salacious and gruesome details. The Indian captivity narrative came to require such explicit details to validate its recounting and its consumption by readers in the Eastern United States. Rachel (Parker) Plummer’s narrative, much like Harbison’s 1825 narrative, contains a statement of purpose that moves beyond mere description of events. Plummer takes an even more shrill tone as she notes in her “Preface” to the second edition that her story is meant to “acquaint” the reader with the “manners and customs of the largest nation of Indians” in America, and “to warn all who are, or may be placed in a situation where they may fall a prey to savage barbarity,” in order to help

others “avoid” her “fate” (91).⁵⁵ Her captivity narrative, which was the first published account of captivity in Texas, depicts the treachery and trickery of Indians along the highly contested western frontiers, and she hopes to “excite a sympathy” for those who may remain “among the Indians” in order to “induce greater efforts for their release” (91). Plummer remained concerned not merely with exacting revenge on Native Americans, but in restoring those who remained with the savages. The narrative is highly invested in describing western Native Americans as more brutal and terrifying even than those who might be remembered by the inhabitants of the Eastern states.

In the 17-year-old’s account of the May 19, 1836 attack on Fort Parker, she describes no less than 800 Native Americans, mostly Comanche, waging an assault against the white settlement. The intruders raised a white flag, initially confusing the settlers, but it did not prevent them from attempting to take shelter. Plummer’s first instinct was to flee with the other women and children who had gone to hide in the woods, but fearing that she would “not be able to take her little son,” she chose to remain with him in the fort, risking her own safety (92). Plummer, who was pregnant at the time of her capture, was one of five settlers taken during the raid. The most famous

⁵⁵ Rachel Plummer. (1839) “Narrative of the Capture and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer: During a Captivity of Twenty-One Months Among the Comanche Indians; with a Sketch of Their Manners, Customs, Laws, etc., with a Short Description of the Country over which She Traveled Whilst with the Indians.” quoted in *The Rachel Plummer Narrative: A Stirring Narrative of Adventure, Hardship and Privation in the Early Days of Texas, Depicting Struggles with the Indians and Other Adventures*. First edition was published in 1838. It was later incorporated into her father’s narrative and republished in 1926. Like Harbison’s, Plummer’s narrative was subsumed under more powerful masculine narratives of ongoing war and conflict.

of these was Cynthia Ann Parker.⁵⁶ Plummer's describes her attempt to escape only to be hit over the head by one of the raiding party and dragged away. Worse than the physical abuse, she writes of "their taking [her] child out of [her] arms" (92). The repetition of Native American cruelty is displayed prominently. In these narratives of captivity, Native Americans are repeatedly represented as showing an absolute disregard for the mother-child bond and proved their barbaric status as violent predators, unlikely to be turned away from their savage existence.

Plummer, like Harbison, juxtaposes Native violence against children and mothers with the Anglo sentiment of attachment that Lavina Day Eastlick picks up on in her narrative in the following decades. Although bleeding profusely from a gaping head wound, she "looked for [her] child [...] convinced they had killed him." She was only briefly relieved to discover that her toddler son was alive and seated upon a horse with an Indian. She recalls the boy calling out "mother, oh mother!" (Plummer 93-94). As she wept for her terrified child, she was whipped by two of the Native American women who were present during the raid, thus proving that Native American women could be as savage as their male counterparts; even the female savages had not attained the sacred appreciation for the mother-child relationship that was the hallmark of the Euro-American family structure. Gone are any descriptions of kindness and support. During the Republican period, the mother-child bond embodied "a peculiar emotional intensity" (Lowe 202). Plummer's narrative takes on the same intensity as that of the

⁵⁶ See more on Cynthia Ann Parker in Chapter III.

Harbison narrative in describing her maternal torment at the hands of the vicious captors, and she repeats the rhetoric of purposeful, targeted torture. She writes:

I suppose it was to add to my misery that they brought little James Pratt so near me that I could hear him cry. He would call for mother; and often his voice weakened by the blows they would give him. I could hear the blows. I could hear his cries; but, oh, alas, could offer him no relief [...] Often did the children cry, but were soon hushed by such blows that I had no idea they could survive (Plummer 95).

In the brief passage, Plummer repeats the term “blows” three times. With each blow, the reader is engaged in imaging the Indian as a cruel actor and the poor child as a meek and helpless victim whose own mother cannot protect him. The blows become a salient gesture that demands sympathy. The repetition of the blows is accompanied by four instances of “call,” “cry” or “cries” of her separated child. What is most significant is that the cries precede the violent blows and are not a response to it. He does not cry out in pain as he struck. Instead, the very desire for his mother’s comfort, the sign of civilized domesticity, ignites the cruelty of his captors. And, notably, she is helpless to provide the comfort the child so desperately seeks. She “I could hear the blows. I could hear his cries” and in this way, although she is not herself struck, she experiences the pain of the blows. Plummer later writes of the last time she saw her son, asking her readers to “bear with” her as she describes “the continued barbarous treatment” of her captors. “My child kept crying, and most continually calling for “Mother,” though I was not allowed even to speak to it” (96). Eventually, as the group rested, however, they removed Plummer’s ties and allowed her boy to join her temporarily. Plummer addresses the audience directly as she as she describes their reunion. She embraced “the

mutilated body of my darling” boy as he trembled (96). Plummer assumes that the reunion is permanent and is crushed to find it is but a fleeting sabbatical in her dreary captivity and is permitted only to stop the small boy from his continuing whimpering. “As soon as they found that I had weaned him, they, in spite of all my efforts, tore him from my embrace. He reached out his hands towards me, which were covered in blood, and cried, ‘Mother, Mother, oh, Mother!’” Plummer too “sobbed aloud” as the small boy was snatched from her embrace. She never saw him again (96). Not knowing what happened to little John Pratt was certainly painful, but she was not spared the knowledge of her second son’s fate, and this was far worse.

The weeping child is often silenced in the narratives of captivity through much crueller and far more visible methods. In Harbison’s account, one of her sons is murdered for weeping too loudly and resisting attempts to quiet him. Of her crying son, she recalls a “hard scene” as the eldest boy, who was “still mourning and lamenting” his brother’s brutal death was “killed and scalped” as his mother was ordered to keep moving so she would not witness the “horrid deed.” But she nevertheless witnessed the “scene of inhuman butchery” (31). Plummer, too, gives witness to the cruel death of her child. Five months after being taken captive, she gave birth to another boy. Initially, Plummer is surprised that the “Indians were not as hostile” as she had anticipated they would be (97). Yet she is aware that she must devise some plan to save her child, or he will suffer a terrible fate. She seeks maternal guidance from one of her Indian mistresses, but it was in “vain” as the Indian woman provided her no measure of direction on how she might protect the infant. When the babe was just seven weeks old,

on a “cold morning,” as she was “suckling [her] infant” a group of six “large Indians” took him from her. The horror in the scene derives from the sexual threat implied. Plummer is confronted by a group of “large Indians” as her breast is exposed. The scene is marked by the threat of sexual violation. She extends the scene of terror, as she describes the feelings that came over her as the men entered: “fears agitated [her] whole frame to a complete state of convulsion; [her] body shook with fear” (97). Plummer arouses the narrative of exceptional fear that often defined the Euro-American experience of the frontier, entertained the growing eastern readership, and inflamed ongoing political debates about how to deal with Native Americans. “Frontier violence usually evoked fears, some of them almost pornographic, about the depredations that enemy men might commit against the women of a frontier community” (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin 21).



Illustration II-IV: *A Comanche Warrior Dragging to Death Mrs. Plummer's Child.*⁵⁷

The body of the infant becomes fetishized as well in her account of his death and her futile attempts to “revive” him. She recounts that one of the Indians “caught hold of the child by the throat; and with his whole strength, and like an enraged lion actuated by its devouring nature, held on like the hungry vulture, until my child was to all appearance entirely dead” (97-98). Plummer writes that she fought against the Indians in order to assist her child, but she was held at bay by a number of them and she was forced to watch the continued barbarity when they discovered the child was indeed not yet dead. The boy’s lifeless body is resurrected only to be slain once more in an

⁵⁷ Engraving accompanying Rachel Plummer’s story in John W. Wilbarger. *Indian Depredations in Texas: Reliable Accounts of Battles, Wars, Adventures, Forays, Murders, Massacres, etc., Together with Biographical Sketches of Many of the Most Noted Indian Fighters and Frontiersmen of Texas.* Austin: Hutchins Printing House, 1888.

increasingly barbaric manner. They “threw it up in the air, and let it fall on frozen ground until it was apparently dead” (98). Plummer was presented with what she and the Indians believed was the boy’s carcass, but alas he remained alive.

They gave it back to me. The fountain of tears that hitherto given vent to my grief, was now dried up. While I gazed upon the bruised cheeks of my darling infant, I discovered some symptoms of returning life. Oh, how vain was my hope that they would let me have it if I could revive it. I washed the blood from its face; and after some time, it began to breathe again; but a more heart-rending scene ensued. As soon as they found it had recovered a little, they again tore it from my embrace and knocked me down. They tied a platted rope around the child’s neck, and drew its naked body into the large hedges of prickly pears, which were from eight to twelve feet high. They would then pull it down through the pears. This they repeated several times. One of them then got on a horse, and tying the rope to his saddle rode, rode a circuit of a few hundred yards, until my little innocent one was not only dead, but literally torn to pieces. I stood horror struck (97-98).

In an aesthetic exercise that illuminates difference, the child’s fetishized body haunts the scene through extended repetitions of his tortured body, temporary resurrections, and recurring death scenes that reenact those offered in the narrative version of Harbison’s captivity. It is not enough to illustrate that he was violently murdered, but that he was murdered again and again. In the end, she hovers on the brink of madness at the endless suffering.

Since one of the significant and “defining ambitions of feminism” is the transformation of “gendered power relations,” these narratives help to reframe the history of relations between men and women in the American west, even as they address racialized power relations. For instance Hannah Duston, taken captive by Indians in Haverville, New Hampshire in 1697, fought back against her attackers

scalping ten and escaping. At the time, she was hailed a heroine for her bravery.⁵⁸

Captivity narratives in particular also call into question contemporary understandings of the place of women and the so-called “women’s sphere,” which was often used to “reinforce the notion of the distinction between a superior male world and a subsidiary female world.”⁵⁹ And as captivity narratives became more popular, both men and women wrote factual and fictionalized accounts of their imprisonment at the hands of Native Americans, and indeed the published accounts became “notorious for blending the real and the highly fictive” (Namias 23). While most scholars agree that captivity narratives became “mélanges of fact and fiction,” the “production, reproduction, and use” of these narratives are culturally relevant for thinking about race and gender during the period even if their absolute truth value remains highly questionable (Pearce 6 and Namias 23).

Lavina Day Eastlick’s first-hand account, which appears in many early compilations of captivity narratives, also documents the brutal deaths of the children of a Murray County, Minnesota settlement when a band of Sioux Indians attacked in 1862. The violence was part of what has become known as the Sioux Uprising or the Dakota War of 1862, which began as a treaty dispute and culminated in the deaths of as many

⁵⁸ Although praised during her lifetime and hailed as an exemplary model of the pioneering female spirit, she has also been called a bloodthirsty murderer for having lain in wait to massacre her captors before fleeing. See June Namias, *White Captives*; Sara Humphreys, “The Mass Marketing of the Colonial Captive Hannah Duston.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41.2 (2011): 149-78; and Barbara Cutter. “The Female Indian Killer Memorialized: Hannah Duston and the Nineteenth-Century Feminization of American Violence.” *Journal of Women's History* 20.2 (2008): 10-33.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Robinson. “Feminism and the Spaces of Transformation.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 25, (2000): 85-301. 285; and, Julie Roy Jeffrey. *Frontier Women: Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 5.

as 800 settlers, the removal of Sioux tribal members from the area, and what remains the largest recorded mass execution in US history: 38 of the 308 Dakota Indian men set to hang were executed on December 16, 1862.⁶⁰ Like Harbison's deposition, Eastlick's account gives no indication of the ongoing conflict, but instead documents what appears to be an unprovoked Indian attack against the settlers made more horrific by the fact that the settlers did not foresee such an event. Her autobiographic descriptions closely align with the narrative 1825 version of Harbison's captivity. She writes that while she was apprehensive about the move to Minnesota, where her husband felt he could better support his growing family, she soon overcame her fear of the Indians along the settlement. She writes that "quite a number of [Indians] had lived by the lake all winter, and had been accustomed to come to our home almost every day."⁶¹ She records no frightening incidents, nor any aggressive behavior on the part of the indigenous people. Prior to her captivity, she describes the Native Americans as "very friendly," and she observes that they "played with our children and taught them to speak the Indian language a little," thus highlighting the transcultural possibilities that existed prior to

⁶⁰ The number of settler deaths remains disputed, but most historians agree the number is on the lower end of the figures most often cited: 400-800. The higher number was invoked by President Abraham Lincoln during his annual address. For more on the history and implications, see William Marvel. *Lincoln's Darkest Year: The War in 1862*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008; John Christgau. *Birch Coulee: The Epic Battle of the Dakota War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012; Roger Nichols. *Warrior Nations: The United States and Indian Peoples*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013; Mary Butler Renville, et al. *A Thrilling Narrative of Indian Captivity: Dispatches from the Dakota War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012; and Julie Humann Anderson. "Reconciling Memory: Landscapes, Commemorations, and Enduring Conflicts of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862." ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2011.

⁶¹ Mrs. L. Eastlick. *A Personal Narrative of Indian Massacres*, 1862.
<http://www.rrcnet.org/~nordbyc/social/eastlik.html>

the Native betrayal (*Narrative*). An examination of the cultural exchange prior to the siege indicates a rather comfortable bicultural community in which Anglo women trusted Native women with their children, not as servants but instead as neighbors and guests. Remarkably, given her later descriptions, Eastlick demonstrates that both Natives and Euro-Americans were interested in cultural and linguistic exchanges. Frederick Drimmer's introduction to Eastlick's narrative indicates that there had been great hope that the Sioux Indians "would settle down and become farmers" and work the land alongside the immigrant settlers just as the members of the five civilized tribes had done previously ("Revolt" 314). It became clear that they would not, according to Drimmer since only "one Indian in ten cut his hair, put on trousers, and tilled the soil" ("Revolt" 314). Of course, as the Trail of Tears had demonstrated, short hair, farming, and other assimilation tactics did not protect Native American communities from the demands of encroaching pioneer settlers.

And, despite the tolerably warm friendships Eastlick had developed with her Native neighbors, her descriptions of the attack indicate that during the siege, it was for the mothers and children that the Indians seemed to savor in exacting a special kind of cruelty. As she hid in the swamp during the attack, she writes that "I thought then, and think now, that they were torturing the children" ("Revolt" 322). Eastlick never makes clear whether she believes this was done in an effort to be cruel to the children, or to exact revenge against the adults. Even those Indians she had formerly identified as friendly were brutal to the children and their mother's. "The Indians, who had pretended to be friendly at the house, had deserted us, and joined their fellow savages in there

demoniac quest of blood and plunder” (*Narrative*). Such a description reminds readers to be suspicious of even the friendliest Indians, who were likely to demonstrate their vicious natures as soon as they were given the opportunity. She describes being ordered by one the natives to leave quietly so she might be saved, only to have the same man shoot her in the back. And the bodies of the children pile up so quickly, that Eastlick wrongly assumes that nearly all of the children are dead in the immediate aftermath of the initial attack. While wounded and in hiding, she is surprised to learn that many of the children are indeed alive—her awareness comes as they convey their terror. She writes that she “heard Willie Duly [...] cry out” for his mother even after she had “supposed [him already long] dead.”

Eastlick’s brief narrative, much as Plummer’s narrative does, lingers on the child’s bond with its mother, which by the second half of the nineteenth century had become one of the most vital relationships in the survival of the young republic, and had come to signify the only role that women could fulfill in its development since they had been excluded from other forms of political participation.⁶² Eastlick’s narrative exemplifies the growing emphasis that had been placed on the mother-child relationship during this period. She writes that Frank’s bitter wails of “Mother! Mother,” as the blood ran “out of his mouth in a stream,” were the most gut wrenching she heard (“Revolt” 319). She goes on to describe the children’s increasing suffering and her own helplessness to ease their anguish. “During the day I heard the children crying most of

⁶² See Linda Kerber. “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly*, 28.2 (Summer, 1976), 187-205 for more on how mothers came to embody political meaning during the early national period.

the time; sometimes I heard them screaming and crying” (“Revolt” 322). Eastlick’s emotion continues as she addresses the reader. “No one can image my feelings,” she writes (“Revolt” 322). She was so horrified that she wished to die, but “feared to die by the hands of the Indians” (“Revolt” 322). And it was for the “innocent sufferers” that she remained alive even as she feared she could provide them no comfort. She describes the desire of the frightened and sometimes wounded children to move through the swampy field in an effort to locate their mothers, even as she understood that they would not find protection nearer to their mother. “Poor little dears! they did not know how much they were destined to suffer, and they seemed to think if they kept close to mother, they would be safe” (*Narrative*).

Eastlick’s narrative draws on the collective sympathy of her readers, understanding that as feminist historian Elizabeth Mattock Dillon argues, the “mother-child bond” provided the “eminent symbolic value” during this period (205). The mother-child relationship even exceeded the significance of the marital bond as Eastlick’s account demonstrates. When another captive recounts the death of her husband and her fear at being alone in the world, Eastlick’s response recapitulates the primacy of the mother-child bond. She provides comfort by telling her how much worse it might be if she also had children whose suffering or death would become her sole burden.

Mrs. Cook, with tears rising from her eyes, told us that of the sad fate of her husband. My heart was touched with sympathy for my dear friend. I threw my arms around her neck, and begged her not to weep, telling her that, perhaps, ere night, I should be left a widow, with five children, and

that would be still worse, for she had no children. Mrs. Wright gave her some dry clothes, and she was soon made comfortable.

The loss of a spouse was clearly a sad event, evoking the sympathy of others, but it did not compare to the pain suffered by those women who were also mothers and suffered the loss of their children, or who were left to raise them on the frontier on their own. Even as she uses the children to highlight the horrors of the Natives who show them no special regard, she imagines them as a burden from which she may not be able to escape. Like many other amateur writers who became victims of Indian attack and captivity on the frontier, Eastlick penned her narrative immediately upon her “restoration.” The speed with which their stories were told often meant that they were heavy on the gory details, but light on context and lacked any reflection on the events that precipitated them. There is much evidence that Eastlick’s narrative provides an accurate account of the events she witnessed and survived, but it fails to provide other significant details. Scholars Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and Carrie Reber Zeman note the events of the Dakota War were so “sensational that many captives capitalized on their own experiences as soon as they could” for a variety of personal, political, and financial reasons (132). Eastlick, for instance, unlike Rowlandson, Harbison or Plummer, sought monetary gains through the publication and sale of her story. By the publication of her narrative, the reading appetite for such stories had increased and she was able to take full advantage of that demand. While there is little doubt that many colonial settlers suffered during the violent Indian confrontations, the growing demand for narratives of the violence among the reading public shaped the

genre and increased its demand, and thus opportunities for victims to be compensated. The captivity narratives written during westward expansion in the American west were so popular they were “quite literally read to pieces,” at least in part because they provide a familiar “archetypal journey of initiation” of the hero that had been previously reserved for men.⁶³ Women could become victims and heroines on the frontier in ways that were not available in the Eastern US. One of the features that made them so desirable was the salacious accounts of Native brutality. Eastlick’s narrative was successful and she used the money she earned from her story to move away from the Minnesota territory where the uprising occurred. In addition to monetary gains, she also hoped to persuade the public to move more quickly in responding to settler demands for government protection on the frontier. And her story, which was “one episode in the history of the bloodiest massacre of the West,” was not merely intended to document the incident, but to persuade her readers to take action in order to protect other vulnerable settlers who could not protect themselves from ruthless Native Americans (314). She writes in her “Preface,” that she has “given merely a plain, unvarnished statement of all the facts that came under [her] own observation, during the dreadful massacre of the settlers of Minnesota” (*Narrative*). Although published after the conflict had ended and more than 1,000 Dakota had been taken prisoner and the remaining Sioux expelled from Minnesota, Eastlick makes no mention of the resolution. Instead,

⁶³ Richard Vanderbeets. “The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual.” *American Literature* 43. 4 (1972): 548-562. 548 and 553. Vanderbeets provides a thorough description of the history of and the ritualistic implications for cannibalism and scalping described by many captives in their narratives. Vanderbeets includes these to demonstrate how the native acts are used to support the “primary unifying [...] pattern” of captivity narratives.

she writes that she was compelled to give her account of the story, which is but one of “hundreds,” because “it is only from explicit and minute accounts from the pen of the sufferers themselves, that people living at [a] distance from the scene of those atrocities can arrive at any just and adequate conception of the fiendishness of the Indian character” (*Narrative*). Eastlick and Harbison, like many other women who found themselves outside the political power structures of the American government, inserted themselves as they used sympathy as a rhetorical strategy to identify North American Indians as the greatest and most dangerous obstacle to successful homesteading on the frontier and advocated for their discipline.

Harbison’s and Plummer’s stories were coopted by male editors, while Eastlick joined a growing number of amateur writers, whose efforts at describing their suffering did so decidedly as a political gesture that joined with those proffered by the male reinterpretations of female captivity. Captivity narratives, especially as the century progressed, became more and more politically motivated. Their efforts often pick up on and echo those of their professional counterparts and further demonstrate how the boundaries between genres, between fact and fiction, were often blurred. Jane McManus Storms Cazneau implored the government and other US citizens for support for settlers in Texas, whose lives remained under constant threat, and who might at any moment become a victim in the magnitude of Plummer or Eastlick. Cazneau, a prominent writer whose father had briefly served as a congressman, moved to Texas to improve her economic opportunities. She originally wrote under the pen name of Cora Montgomery and described the perils of living on the Texas frontier. She believed that

those who were part of the grand mission to expand the US reach had all but been abandoned by the politicians in Washington. In her 1852 book *Eagle Pass; or Life on the Border*, she describes a life of hardship, fear, and bravery. Although Cazneau did not draw on the image of the wounded and dying child, she laments that the “the government forgets to take care of us,” and writes that those under siege on the frontier “will try to take care of [themselves]” in the absence of proper military protection (119). Much of the book is a complaint about the hardships that settlers along the Texas – Mexico border faced from both Mexicans and Native Americans. She openly blames the increasing number of deaths of innocent citizens and the increasing peril of private property on the inaction of the politicians in the east. She accuses those in government of failing to protect American citizens who are in jeopardy on the frontier and can no longer defend themselves against a growing number of aggressive heathens.

The old Texas style of border defense was exceedingly simple and effectual. They gathered at the first note of danger—for every colonist had something dear to protect, and no means of protection except what lay in his own stout arm and sure rifle—and they all went on the trail of the savage with the single and direct intent to exterminate him wherever found. As the outer edge of settlements pressed deeper and deeper into the wilderness, and their herds and flocks—the chief wealth of these frontier farms— multiplied around them, they became a perpetual fountain of supply to these roving Indians” (141-12).

She conjures the image of the brave frontiersman, determined to protect property against blood-thirsty marauders at the “outer” edges of the frontier. She demands “protection for this blood-stained frontier” and bemoans the “Indian-infested country”

that separates the “coast and our home in the wilderness” (142, 11).⁶⁴ Even the historical writer Mary Austin Holley, whose writing is arguably more ethnographic in nature and who demonstrated greater interest in understanding the original inhabitants of the western frontier, could not escape the racialized language that had become embedded in the American imagination during the nineteenth century. After her first visit to Austin, she published *Texas: Observations, Historical, Geographical, and Descriptive, in a Series of Letters Written during a Visit to Austin's Colony, with a View to a Permanent Settlement in That Country in the Autumn of 1831*. She returned to Texas several times, although she never lived there permanently, and wrote *Texas* in 1833 and the expanded *History of Texas* in 1836, which are considered the first English texts on the region. In a letter she wrote in 1831, she describes the increasing importance of trade moving from west to east and notes that it must pass “through a wilderness infested with Indians” (210). Furthermore, she invokes language similar to Cazneau’s in describing the “fortitude” of the white settlers in dealing with the ever-present threat of violence. She describes the members of the Tankaways and Lepans Indiana tribes as “beggarly and insolent” and accused them of committing “constant depredations.” She notes that these bands were “restrained from violence” only temporarily because the settlers offered gifts and because they recognized that “one imprudent step with these Indians would have destroyed the settlement.” Holley gives

⁶⁴ During her time in Texas she became a committed proponent of manifest destiny, believing peace could be achieved through annexation. See Edward P. Crapol, ed., *Women and American Foreign Policy: Lobbyists, Critics, and Insiders* (New York: Greenwood, 1987) and the Jane Cazneau Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

no credit to the Native Americans for their “forbearance” in accepting newcomers onto their territory, but instead saves praise for the settlers (154).

These writers demonstrate that their “records and observations of the natives reflected [their] sociopolitical goals and [their] own cultural biases,” and should not be taken as providing entirely accurate accounts of Native American behavior, according to James Axtell (14). The diaries and letters of lesser-known pioneer women who did not expect to publish their observations appear to demonstrate how inflected their experiences were by the cultural bias that often fueled their worst fantasies even when Native Americans did not meet these expectations. Sarah Smith’s diary from 1838 provides an example of how often the Anglo American perception was modulated by the literary tropes described in captivity narratives. In one of her diary entries, she writes that the group spotted “some war Indians” as they travelled near the Platte River. She writes of her fear as the group enters the territory of the “Pawnees.” Indeed, the “brave [Dr.] Satterlee” was rumored to “have been murdered by the Pawnees” despite there having been no evidence of any such hostility to support the rumors. The group looked unsuccessfully for “his bones” and Smith imagines that they “lie bleaching somewhere” beyond the safe reach of his travelling companions, likely hidden in the wilderness by the Indians (77). The editors of Smith’s journal, however, point to newspaper accounts and other extant documents to show that while the pioneers blamed the man’s death on Indians, “evidence clearly implicated a white man” in Satterlee’s death (77 n9). But even evidence that exonerated Native Americans often failed to quell the fears of women on the frontier. Smith, in a later entry, describes an actual encounter

with Native Americans. She writes that her “small” company” had “fallen in” with “a large village of Indians” made up of “more than 100 men, women & children going for buffalo.” She recounts absolutely no hostility, but writes of the horror that might have been had “this been a hostile tribe.” She fantasizes that “they might easily cut us all in pieces.” That the Indians did not mutilate them demonstrates that “they are the friendly Snakes” whose chief is “one of the best Indians in the mountains” and not that the Indians of her imagination may have been far more dangerous than those with whom she was most likely to have contact (102). Smith’s diaries demonstrate that she was aware of the narratives of captivity and had accepted the fact of Indian barbarity, even when actual Indians proved to be anything but hostile.

A Fate Worse than Death

The image of the mother and her babe coming under horrifying attack at the hands of savage beasts certainly motivated strong reaction against Native American Indians; however an even worse fate was often imagined to befall the lone white women. Captivity narratives often expanded the limits of a definitive feminine space since they thwarted the “expectation, or hope, that the norms could function on the frontier,” or that women could function only in the domestic realm, according to historian Sandra Myres whose important work on letters and diaries demonstrates the extent to which women participated in the westering project (24). And as more women moved onto the frontier, their potential as an “object of lust” by the heathens became a frequent image in the descriptions of frontier life (Fielder 92). As Julie Jeffrey notes, nineteenth century “readers were given their fill of sensationalism,” in stories of the

frontier, but nothing was more compelling than the “dramatic impact” of the “uncertain fate of women captives” (20). Mary Smith Jordan provides one such example. Her sister had the terrible duty of sharing the sad news of her sister’s abduction with her family. Jennie Jordan recalls her mother dropping to the floor “in a dead faint” when she heard the terrible news that the young woman had been captured in Kansas in 1872. The family waited for years, hoping for the woman’s return and believed that the military had continued the search for her for as many as ten years; however, an earlier military account noted that Mary, who had been taken by a band of Cheyenne Indians, had been dead for some time. In describing her death, the report noted that she been taken “for the purpose of gratifying their fiendish desires and after having exhausted their animal desires in outraging her person, killed her” (Barnett 180). The language is vague and the proof of what happened to Jordan during her brief captivity is quite thin, but the tales of her abuse and her death caused great outrage among the soldiers sent to protect women and families on the frontier. The potential sexual violation of female captives was a recurring theme if not a reality on the frontier.

As Namias notes “white women suffering from Indian male brutality were commonly depicted in popular culture” and “even if only a small number of women were physically and sexually abused [the] rumors of rape were common” (Namias 102, 47). Scholar Christina Snyder writes that “women captives often had other complaints” about their lives among the Natives after their return, but they “rarely accused their captors of rape” (88). She argues that this is not merely the result of women refusing to admit or account for sexual violence, but because the women were often taken captive

during wartime and many North American Native tribal culture strictly prohibited warriors from engaging in sexual activity when they might be required for battle.⁶⁵ While it appears that sexual abuse was infrequent, it nonetheless became a “frequent subject of discussion among western” narratives of captivity during the nineteenth century (Derounian 4).



Illustration II-V: Too Near the Warpath (ca. 1874).⁶⁶

Sexual threat, which seemed absent in Harbison’s deposition, becomes a central theme of the 1825 narrative. In the deposition she describes a “number of Indians”

⁶⁵ See Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, Chapter 4 for a more in depth analysis.

⁶⁶ William Henry Simmons. Print shows a frontiersman holding a rifle in protection of pioneer woman holding a bonnet. The two huddle together, hiding behind trees, as shadowy figures of Native Americans appear in the background. Engraving is based on a George Henry Boughton painting. Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006691542/>

intruding her home, but they appeared to be more interested in her belongs than in her. But in the final account the house had been “filled” with Indians and they had become a sexual threat as her nakedness, or near nakedness, takes on greater importance than protecting her own children. She struggles against the savages, not in the hope of escape or protecting her three sons, which appeared to be her main concern in the original deposition, but in an effort to protect her body from their peering eyes. In the narrative account, the Indians attack her children “while [she] was struggling with some of the savages for clothing” (Harbison 27). She covered herself in a petticoat only to have the Indians remove it, putting her naked body on display once more. The heroine explains that “As many [times] as [she] attempted to put on [a robe], they succeeded in taking from [her], so that [she] had to go just as [she] had been in bed” (37). Her nakedness and the implicit sexual threat becomes an increasing concern. But while Harbison writes that one of the Indians later “claimed” her as his “squaw,” she never describes a sexual encounter or exactly what it means to be claimed in such a way (Harbison 28). Again, just as seduction narratives often avoided direct discussion of sex, so too did many female captives when they returned. For even if female captives were portrayed as symbolically useful on the western frontier, “occasionally to be abducted, raped, or murdered in order that the men might avenge” their fair maidens and prove their superiority over the heathen Indians, women who were restored to their Anglo communities were careful to protect themselves from claims that they had been violated (Heatherington 78 and Namias 65).

A woman who had failed to protect herself from savage advances would likely have faced difficulty in reintegrating into her Anglo family and community. Mollie Sanford's diary recounts the "harrowing" captivity of a family from Nebraska who after having been ransomed visited her home in 1864. She writes that "Miss Roper was subjected to all the indignities usually given white captives, and the children were brutally treated by the squaws." Sanford was so moved by the account that she considered adopting one of the survivors, a girl named Bell, but did not because she "could not stand" to be with the tormented girl. "She would wake from a sound sleep and sit up in bed with staring eyes, and go in detail over the whole thing." The child was finally adopted by a nearby doctor in whose home it was supposed the girl would "have medical care and good care otherwise" (189). Again, the language is coded and veiled. What Bell went over is left to the imagination, but it is only at night and from her bed that she relives the trauma, thereby signaling at least the potential sexual nature of the abuse.

The shocking accounts of captivity consistently "exaggerated stereotypic images [of the] Indian as savage and the white woman as [a] delicate vessel" that would be shattered by her exposure to the wild beasts who were described as "worse than monsters" and often compared to "demons" (Namias 43).⁶⁷ In fact, Riley argues that

⁶⁷ Namias' book has some intriguing arguments and relies on important statistical data; however, she acknowledges that some of the data have been drawn from woefully incomplete records, and that the conclusions she draws are taken only from those who escaped rather than those who chose to remain with the Native American groups. Furthermore, she over simplifies the range of writing produced by men and women who did return, placing them in rather staid categories. She places female authors into three characteristics: Survivor, Amazon, and Frail Flower; that she argues coincides with emerging time periods in American history; and men into

many of the most popular captivity narratives “drew heavily upon the theme of the weak and unfortunate woman who was destroyed by the frontier” and tended to show the white female as always the victim—either of her white male counterparts who dragged her into a frontier existence or the Indians who dragged her into the terrifying wilderness (9). Namias concludes that captivity narratives that showed women as frail, weak, and otherwise always ready to be broken “functioned to warn women that following husbands everywhere might prove dangerous” (40). Harbison’s captivity narrative certainly seems to make this claim. Her captivity occurred only after her husband had refused her requests to “remove” her to some “more secure place from Indian cruelties” (27). Harbison left behind no written documents prior to her captivity that indicate that she had been treated cruelly by the Indians, nor that she had blamed her husband for the terror she faced. But it is clear that this becomes the fantasy. Although Harbison’s deposition never explicitly blames her husband for the death of her two sons, or for her own captivity, the implications are strong throughout the 1825 narrative edition. And that white men in general were to blame for the abduction is reflected in a 1915 reprinting of the Harbison account, which was included in the collection, *Captive Among the Indians: First-Hand Narratives of Indian Wars*,

two Heroes and White Indians. She argues that these typologies are garnered from a close reading of fifty narratives. I’m reluctant to accept these typologies as I see them as reductive, a criticism Namias recognizes when she notes that the “line between actual response and literary and artistic style makes it hard to say categorically that women of the three periods in question actually and consistently behaved in distinctly different ways” (46); however, I do not attempt to refute these since I am less concerned about the typology of the white female captives than I am in what they say about Native Americans. See Chapters 1 and 2. Namias provides close analysis of three captivity narratives written by women, but none by men. Eastlick, *A Personal Narrative*. (Abbie Gardner-Sharp. *The History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*. (Des Moines: Iowa Printing, 1885) 176.

Customs, Tortures, and Habits in Colonial Times. The reprint adds a letter from the editor, Horace Kephart, in which he blames the military for even attempting to take women into the savage wilderness.

The utter incompetency of the officers commanding this expedition may be judged from the single fact that a great number of women were allowed to accompany the troops into a wilderness known to be infested with the worst kind of savages. There were about 250 of these women with the 'army' on the day of the battle. Of these, 56 were killed on the spot.⁶⁸

While it is true that many women were killed in this instance, "survival rates among white captives was actually quite high."⁶⁹ This reality did not serve to soothe or comfort, but rather fueled even more terrifying fantasies about what it meant to be a white woman living among Native Americans. The possibility brought on a sense of utter revulsion that often exceeded that of concerns of death. The Harbison narrative includes a statement that she often devised ways to force "the savages to kill [her]" because she believed "death would be exceedingly welcome" over her continued captivity (Harbison 32).

Even those who were not subject to abduction often could not resist in engaging in the fantasy of their own capture, humiliation, and death. In an 1851 letter to a friend Louise Clappe from California, writes of having been "congratulated" by everyone upon their arrival at "not having encountered any Indians" on their journey westward (21). Only after having completed her travels did she learn that it had been upon "Indian

⁶⁸ "Capture and Escape of Mercy Harbison." *Captives Among the Indians; First-Hand Narratives of Indian Wars, Customs, Tortures, and Habits of Life in Colonial Times*. (New York: Outing Publishing, 1915), 210.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 10: "Crossing the Cultural Divide: Indians and New Englanders, 1605-1763" in *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience*.

trails” (22). In the letter, she describes the danger she imagines might have befallen her, especially after hearing that only a few weeks earlier a couple had been taken and murdered by Indians. She writes that the natives “generally take women captive,” and so is relieved after considering “how narrowly [she] escaped becoming an Indian chieftainess” (22). Contrary to what one might expect, had she been taken captive, Clappe does not articulate a fear of being raped or killed, but of “feeding for the rest of [her] life upon roasted grasshoppers, acorns, and flowerseeds” (22). Her playfulness in the last sentence indicates that she recognizes that she is participating in an imaginative construction of herself as victim and the Native American as threat and that she was familiar “the captivity literature” with its salacious descriptions of “gang rapes, mass murders, and disfigurements” even as she discounts them (Collins 227). Lewis’ account also demonstrates that many of the “white women were terrified of Indians, even though relatively few settlers ever had a violent encounter with them” (Collins 227). The fear or fantasy of Native American abduction remained a consistent theme in the diaries, letters, and literature of the American west in the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century and underscores the way in which “Native Americans have been dominated through an oppressive use of language” that began early in the American historical narrative and was dispersed across gendered and classed boundaries, according to Holly L. Baumgartner.

Compelled to protect white women from the onslaught of the savage men who populated the wilderness frontier, white men were called to violent action. “For whites, the abuse of those women belonging to men made the most compelling case against the

Indians,” but certainly it was not the only motive (Barnett 180). The demand for a serious and swift response suited the desires of the new “martial men” who had moved into the American west and “hoped that they could reify their masculine virtues through aggressive expansionism” (Greenberg 17). As one pioneer woman recalls, “the men who were left in charge of western women in those times took their trust very seriously” (Alderson 79). In the honor of white women, white men on the frontier demonstrated the “qualities of strength, aggression and even violence” that would not have been tolerated east of the Mississippi where men were supposed to be “morally upright, reliable and brave” (Greenberg 12). And despite the popularity of narratives describing the depravity that befell white women in captivity, historical documents demonstrate that “more males than females were captured” and taken hostage on the frontier (Namias 50). This, however, was no consequence as it presented another dramatic account of untenable relations on the frontier.

White Men Into Red



Illustration II-VI: The Trapper's Bride (ca. 1850).⁷⁰

"I consciously went native while an adult."

~Dan Flores

The slaughter of women and children and their tortured captivities provided harrowing nightmares for potential Anglo settlers on the North American frontier, and

⁷⁰ Alfred Jacob Miller (American, 1810–1874). Miller painted several versions of *The Trapper's Bride*. He was one of the first artists to explore the Rocky Mountains during an expedition along the Oregon Trail. In *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller*, he writes that the scene "represents a Trapper taking a wife, or purchasing one." It is unclear whether his statement demonstrates that he sees no difference between taking and purchasing, or whether he was commenting on the nature of a white man's purchasing a Native woman, which he clearly found distasteful. Purchasing seems the more likely since Miller includes the sales price. He also writes that the "free trapper" was much desired, but "ruined" following the marriage. Permanent collection of the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha. <https://www.joslyn.org>.

provided a strong impetus for initiating military involvement in eliminating the threat posed by Native Americans. As settlers moved further into the American west during the nineteenth century, Namias argues “the western frontier” becomes “the ground of female trivialization and male supremacy” (67). But she also notes that while the “unsettling nature” and material consequences of “westering” is significant in understanding captivity narratives, so too is the “challenge of others, women and Indians,” whose presence on the frontier provided a direct assault to the “direction of gender and national hegemony” being so carefully scripted on the American political front east of the Mississippi (67). Anglo men on the frontier also proved increasingly problematic in the assault on national hegemony, even if their shifting identities did not garner as much immediate public outcry. According to Greenberg, the frontier called to a certain kind of masculine identity that seemed almost as foreign, mysterious, and threatening as the Natives themselves. “The appeal of the frontier, where the strength, will, and bravery counted for more than a good appearance, was understandably great among those” whose skills were no longer valued as industrialization swept the east coast (13). These men were eager to throw off the shackles of the civilized world they had fled and to disassociate themselves from the mandates of the government. Many of these men found a more welcoming world among those living in the wilderness. And they proved that white men could become “red” men. Civilized members of the Anglo community could choose to become uncivilized; they could regress, and this too posed a growing threat to the mission of US expansion even on the frontier that often reproduced the conservative political values that defined eastern states.

Holley, writing from Bolivar, Texas in 1831 notes that the “character of Leather Stocking,” the highly romanticized white man raised by Delaware Indians in James Fenimore Cooper’s famous novels, “is not uncommon in Texas” (19).⁷¹ She describes the “privileged characters” of the rough hunters on the frontier, noting that they are often “Indians and Mexicans,” who are “the best qualified” for the particular hardships of living alone or among only other men. However, “it sometimes happens that a white man from the *States*, who has become somewhat de-civilized” serves as the substitute man of the wilderness, tracking and hunting for other white settlers (19-20, emphasis original). Although much has been written about the desire of settler families to duplicate acceptable nineteenth century domestic patterns on the frontier, “roughness of manners, and a rudeness of speech are tolerated” among all these men regardless of race, including transgressive white men, for they “form a distinct class” according to Holley. The term class certainly had a different connotation for Holley and her contemporaries than it does today, but that a group of individuals of differing races could be classed together on the frontier demonstrates the troubling transcultural potentials that threatened the stability of national identity that was fomenting as absolutely necessary to American success.

While Holley remarks that these men were treated in kind with their Mexican and Indian counterparts, the white ‘Indians’ still had the power to provoke ire among

⁷¹ The Leatherstocking series included: *The Pioneers: The Sources of the Susquehanna; a Descriptive Tale* (1823); *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (1826); *The Prairie; a Tale* (1827); *The Pathfinder: The Inland Sea* (1840); and *The Deerslayer; The First War Path* (1841). Leatherstocking was the name given to the protagonist, Natty Bumppo, who was known to Natives as Hawkeye.

the women settlers with whom they had even brief encounters. Sarah Smith's diary of 1838 makes no pretense at hiding her disdain for the white men whose appearance and behavior do not fulfill the hegemonic values. While near Fort Laramie, she remarks on the few Indian women who have remained unaccompanied near the fort. She believes they are "probably wives of white men" and she notes that their dress was "trimmed in beads and other ornaments" and believes the embellishments "showed the barrenness of her mind." The meeting only confirms for Smith what she already suspects. She writes that she has heard that "trappers take great pleasure in dressing their Indian brides but care not for their minds." And the transgression is not limited to the wild trappers who have already extracted themselves from civilized vestments. Smith writes that she suspects that more of the men at the fort "will take [Indian] wives from here to go with them to the mountains," and abandon their white companions (80-85). Smith's fears were not entirely unfounded. As *Wahnenauhi*, a Cherokee woman whose English name was Lucy Hoyt Keys, writes white men were often enthralled with the Native American women they encountered along the western frontier. White men "soon found themselves so much pleased that they persuaded the Cherokees to adopt them and give them wives" and writes that *Lah-to-tau-yie* became the "first Cherokee converted to Christ" through her marriage to an Englishman (79).

Like Smith, Sarah Herndon felt a sharp distrust for the white men who took Indian brides. Her diary includes entries on a series of wigwams that her small group had come across in Nebraska. The sight of the wigwams was disturbing to her, but it did not cause the group to move on or to flee in terror. After a brief hunting trip, the men in

Herndon's group stopped at the wigwams to make contact with their neighbors. She writes with considerable disgust that the men reported that the wigwams were "occupied by white men with squaws for wives. Ugh!" Her diary entry the following morning continues to contemplate the problem of the white men who lived with the squaws. She worries that because they had debased themselves, they had likely also lost all moral character and believes they might be thieves. "Somehow I felt a little suspicious of those white men living with squaws, and feared some of our horses might be missing" (207). She awakens to find that her "suspicions were groundless," but she cannot shake the uneasiness that she felt at being so near to these transgressive others.

The uneasiness may have emerged out of a sense of how easily it seemed that Anglo men could adopt not only the ways of Native American, but also their appearance as well. William Gray, who traveled with Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding as they crossed into the Rockies, noted their alarm at a welcoming committee "of some ten Indians and four or five white men, whose dress and appearance could scarcely be distinguished from that of the Indians" who greeted them as they reached their camp.⁷² Although the men posed no real harm, they demonstrated how easily the white men could immerse themselves into Native communities, and in doing so align themselves with the treachery of the savage. The Harbison captivity narrative demonstrates the potential danger of the white Indian against traditional Euro-American families. In the narrative, when Harbison counts the number of Indians who had raided her home on the night she was taken captive, there were thirty two. Of these, two were

⁷² Whitman and Spalding and Drury. *Where Wagons Could Go*, 193, n29.

“white men painted as Indians” (37). White men who became red were as dangerous and as savage as the Native Americans themselves.

Another pioneer woman, Margaret Carrington, illustrates how the Anglo community viewed the transformation of white men into Native men through their associations with Native Americans. In her diary of her time in Montana, she expresses similar disdain for the white men who adopted Native American life ways. In 1859, the Ogallala Sioux refused to let her party pass over their land until their “demand” for the “white chief” had been met. She writes that the man, Jack Stead, “whose wife was a Cheyenne squaw,” served the purpose as an interpreter “when mastered and held to his duty” (104, 115). Stead’s relationship to a Native American woman, had produced an embodied transformation that marked him as other. Carrington writes that he had “hair and eyes black as an Indian’s, and a face nearly as tawny from hardship and exposure” (115). Carrington’s description emphasizes the way in which the wilderness and the savage were linked geographically in the colonial imagination. Living in the wilderness could make a man wild, not merely in dress, but in behavior and appearance.

Herman Lehmann’s autobiography of life first with the Apache and then Comanche Indians in Texas and New Mexico during the 1870s includes a chapter titled “I Became an Indian.” He was taken captive, but he recounts the ways in which the transformation occurred, not seamlessly, but slowly and through small, everyday gestures, so that he eventually became a full member of the tribe. In a moment that enacts Claude Lévi-Strauss’s articulation of the difference between natural and social,

Lehmann recalls being offered two kinds of meat: cooked and raw.⁷³ The cooked meat symbolized the civilized white world from which he had been taken, while the raw represented his current status with the uncivilized Natives. He “seized the raw meat” that had been offered to him and ate it eagerly. He writes that his behavior “pleased the Indians,” but that the outcome could have been quite different had he not chosen the bloody offering (20). He writes that had he “touched the cooked food [...] the food of civilized man” his captors “would likely” have “tortured [him] to death” (21). The moment symbolizes the complex relationship that Lehmann would develop with his captors and his own identity that would inform the remainder of his life. On the one hand, he devoured the meat eagerly, illustrating his own bodily urges and desires, on the other hand, he writes that it was merely a choice designed to ensure his own survival. Unlike the accounts of most female captives, Lehmann’s includes descriptions of his participation in raids on white settlements and even his involvement in one of the most gruesome Native American rituals: scalping. He writes that he was ordered to kill a “Mexican” while his tribe was at a mixed race buffalo hunting camp, and he was forced to scalp him as well (44-46). He justifies his willingness to carry out tribal demands, noting that “a boy can’t answer such arguments” (33). That the man he scalped was a “Mexican” serves to further mitigate the harshness of the act. Lehmann’s account demonstrates that the transgressive potential on the frontier was more than merely unsettling.

⁷³ Structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss takes up the significance of the raw and the cooked to the cultural production of myths in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), which explicitly examined myths in South America. He argues that mythology draws on binary terms and the human endeavor to bring oppositions into alignment.

It raised serious questions about the survival of the Anglo way of life on the frontier. This fear is also reflected in Smith's diary. She writes of a small company "of about 100 men and perhaps [sixty] Indian females [and] a great number of half breed children" (102). The appearance of this family group did not provide comfort, nor remind her of the families she had left when she traveled west. Instead, she describes their appearance as "rude [and] savage" and is disturbed by the "hideous manner" in which they are painted (106). Smith articulates the concern that miscegenation would destroy the strength of family bonds and the purity of the union. But it also provided evidence that Anglo culture and life ways on the frontier were tenuous, and that it would take a great deal of effort and control to maintain discipline and order.

As stories on the frontier made their way back to the East, they fueled speculation, fantasy, and fears about the national future. Those living out west demonstrated that white women could be taken by Indians as their brides, and white men could become Indians, begetting mixed-race children who might threaten the course of the nation's future. The peril of these transgressions was explored in *Beadles* first dime novel, *Malaeska; The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, in 1860. The longevity and popularity of the narrative is exemplified by the fact that Ann S. Stephens' fictional exploration of cross racial possibilities had previously been serialized in 1839 in *The Ladies' Companion*.⁷⁴ The narrative blends the sentimental novel with frontier adventure and the captivity narrative, beginning in "the

⁷⁴ See Richard Aquila. *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American west in Popular Culture*. (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1996). Christine Bold. "Popular Forms I." *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. Eds. Emory Elliott, Cathy N. Davidson, Patrick O'Donnell, Valerie Smith, and Christopher P. Wilson. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 285-308.

neighborhood of a savage Indian tribe” where a “band of pioneers remained unmolested” in a “sublime” and Edenic setting yet untouched by the “spirit of decay” (Stephens 62, 67, 63). It is in this idyllic atmosphere that William Danforth and Malaeska had secretly married—in a traditional Mohawk ceremony and not under the provisions of US legal codes—and had a boy. But even as Danforth adores his son, he knows that it is a “pity the little fellow is not quite white” (72). The peaceful paradise is enjoyed by both Natives and white settlers, and represents the promise of a bicultural future in the American west that runs contrary to singular purity of the national mission. In Stephens’ narrative, paradise is broken not when the white community is molested by Indians, as so many captivity narratives describe. In a reversal of the captivity narratives, it is explicitly white violence that gives rise to escalating cross-racial tensions. The peace is destroyed only after Arthur Jones shoots a “half-naked savage,” killing the “red devil” (66). And in a not-so-subtle act of white savagery, Jones scalps him (66, 67). Like Lehmann, Jones adopts the violence marked the “first [...] shedding of red blood” and the end of their peaceful coexistence. Interestingly, this account mirrors the language often employed by Native American writers to describe their happy and peaceful lives prior to Euro-American settler colonial invasions.

Danforth is characterized by ambivalence and contradiction, and ultimately he rejects his wife and son, failing to fulfill the promise that cross-cultural affiliation and bi-racial marriages might unite Native and white into one American national identity. As hostilities between the two groups mounted, his “affections” for his Indian wife and child “struggled powerfully with his pride” (76). Danforth remained unwilling to

present his wife and child to his family, fearing their reaction at his “disgrace” (91). As violence breaks out, Danforth joins the white settlers against the Natives. Danforth kills Malaeska’s father, and is himself mortally wounded. The racial symmetry that could not be achieved through the dangerous erotics of Danforth and Malaeska’s union, are accomplished only through the mutual destruction of the two powerful leaders. Stephen’s narrative exemplifies the peril of mutually destructive forces brought about by masculine violence that will be the ruin of both settlers and Natives. Malaeska and her son survive, and she takes the boy to Danforth’s parents, who overcome their outrage to raise the boy in Manhattan, erasing any signs of “the race from which his disgrace sprung” (95). Malaeska is doomed to be a “mother, yet childless” (95). Named William Danforth, the boy lived happily in his ignorance of his heritage until an adult, when Malaeska returns to him and shares his true history—and his racial heritage—before his pending nuptials. The “Indian blood” that had been “strong in his young veins” had been early sublimated to his “grandfather’s prejudice” (96). He cannot escape the hatred that leads to “madness and evil” and upon hearing the truth of his biracial birth, throws himself off of a cliff before he consummates his marriage and produces more mixed race children. William’s self-immolation, restores order, and ensures that the product of a cross-racial union does not gain inheritance into the national project (160). Furthermore, Stephen’s narrative remains troubling as William ultimately becomes responsible for his own vanishing.

Miscegenation provided a significant threat to the homogeneity. The “fate of the next American generation, in fact the fate of America’s mission on the frontier was at

risk” if Indians and Whites continued to transgress boundaries (Namias 112). One of the most enduring and retold myths of the nation rests on the promise of fathers as the rightful national stewards and sole progenitors of proper citizens. Fatherhood and nation building were tightly woven together. Beginning with George Washington, fatherhood was seen as the penultimate mission that would sustain the development of the country. Although Washington had no known biological children, he became father to all—the progenitor of an entire nation. Fatherhood, well into the twentieth century, signaled the appropriate “evidence of maturity, patriotism, and citizenship,” according to historian Thomas A. Foster. Transgression could only lead to national instability, according to these narratives.

Chapter III

Captive to Kin: Adoption, Accommodation, Transculturation and New Captivities

*“Neither dead nor alive, the hostage is suspended by an incalculable outcome.
It is not his destiny that waits for him, nor his own death, but anonymous
chance, which can only seem to him something absolutely arbitrary
...He is in a state of radical emergence, of virtual extermination.”*
~Jean Baudrillard



Illustration III-I: The Western Captive.⁷⁵

The popular published accounts of white captivity were often socially and politically motivated to garner public support for the protection of Anglo American settlers and pioneers against both the perceived and the actual threats of Native

⁷⁵ “The Western Captive.” The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1845. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-16c9-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>. Cropped from original.

American peoples living in the contested frontiers during the nineteenth century. And they proved to be a powerful tool in demonstrating the potentially terrible fate that might befall those who moved westward when confronted by the wild savages who lurked in the wilderness of the frontier territories. However, many captivity narratives, both the fictionalized versions employed in the service of writers capitalizing on their popularity, and those that provide actual descriptions of first-hand accounts of captivity, either openly resist the trope of the savage Indians and the degradation of white captives, or inadvertently explore the possibility of cross-cultural adaptation even as they advance the gendered and racialized narrative standards developed during the period. Women's writing reflected both a sense of danger and a sense of desire that were interspersed with "critical and subversive agency" that threatened the prevailing cultural paradigms, argues Michelle Burnham. And for some captives, the transgressive impulse was not merely an imagined one, but instead it provided an opportunity to achieve a kind of freedom that was not available in the traditionally Euro-American world. These alternative narratives of captivity were perhaps more disturbing for they offered a striking resistance to the traditional narrative of captivity, and like the white men who embraced their wilderness selves, it proved that white women might prefer a life among the roaming red men of the wilderness as well—that they could be integrated into the Native American cultural traditions; that they could desire Native men.

These texts test the sharp racial division between men and women and between Anglo and Native, and even African, and Mexican. They demonstrate the always liminal status of cultural and material boundaries between human subjects. That is,

captivity narratives that depict even the possibility for Anglo integration into Native communities threatened the perceived racial, scientific, and political differences that had been so carefully drawn out for Euro-American citizens. Intimate cohesion among Anglo subjects and non-Anglo others during the early American period had been deemed forbidden and yet many writers demonstrate that it was not only possible, but that it could be desirable, not just for the men who became ‘white’ Indians, but for women as well. The captivity narratives written by women also offer important insight into how women viewed themselves on the frontier, how they responded to Native Americans, and their role in the contact zone on the shifting frontier. Captivity genres not only incorporated women, but demonstrated the extent to which they participated as settlers and pioneers, and the significant, if sometimes vexed role they played in the movement westward on the North American continent.⁷⁶ Along with the seduction novel, the captivity narrative featured women in peril and demonstrated the extent to which their protection was necessary for the development of the nation.⁷⁷ While much

⁷⁶ Like Pearce, I use the term genres to indicate that there were always a variety of styles and features in these stories. I also want to be clear that the captivity narrative was a pliable narrative form, and as such this mode encompass an array of styles, motivations, and outcomes that are sometimes contradictory.

⁷⁷ Seduction narratives were often framed as a purely feminine dialogue argued among and expressly to women as part of a greater Republican moral fable that adopts and reinforces warnings to young women on the dangers of promiscuity and independence. The texts often highlight “the ideal of rational marriage [and] the importance of filial obedience” and explore a new model of “the loving partnership of man and wife” presumably so that readers, imagined as women, would learn the perils of failure and the rewards of the successful transition from girl to respectable young woman, wife, mother, widow. The standard textual landmarks attributed to tales of feminine virtue in distress: a young woman unwisely leaves the protection of her family, finds herself duped by an unscrupulous male, often a European interloper, becomes pregnant, and dies alone leaving an orphaned child. The seduction narrative served as a warning to women in the civilized world. Both the seduction narrative and the captivity narrative demonstrate the growing obsession with protecting white women. See Julia A. Stern. *The Plight*

of the literature “by and for women” written in the nineteenth century “consciously attempted to fit the Western experience into a framework which promised [women] the opportunity of fulfilling their social role” as had been defined by a growing republican idealism, captivity narratives disrupt the idealized domestic pattern for Euro-American emigrants into the American west (Myres 24). So, while many narratives of frontier experience tended to demonstrate an “acceptance of the social norms of domesticity” that emulated the experience of women who remained in eastern states, where the Republican notion of domesticity “idealized women as virtuous domestic beings who could change society for the better through their positive moral influence,” captivity narratives suggest other possibilities (Greenberg 7 and Myres 24). Such a reading has important implications, especially for feminist scholars working to dismantle the gendered west. For, “when Turner wrote of pioneers and speculated on the interaction between pioneers and the wilderness, the pioneers he had in mind were men” rather than women (Jeffrey xii). The persistence of this masculine view remained and was fueled by the “assumptions about the marginality of women [...] in the West,” which tended to “portray gender as a determining and debilitating variable” that precluded women from participation outside the traditional roles established inside the home, according to Janet Floyd who works to dismiss such claims by highlighting the

of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Sarah Emily Newton. “Wise and Foolish Virgins: ‘Useable Fiction’ and the Early American Conduct Tradition.” *Early American Literature* 25.2 (1990): 139-67; and Jan Lewis. “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic.” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 689-721.

intellectual activity of Mary Hallock Foote, who embraced her own form of independence in the American west.

Furthermore, because the captivity narrative has always demonstrated a “semiotic plasticity,” it has often been taken up as a powerful rhetorical tool of resistance and a site of transgression that portends to disrupt the dominant colonial yearning to construct and maintain impermeable cultural, racial and gendered borders (McCafferty 44). Scholars have linked the narrative traditions of the American Indian captivity and slave narratives, as both rely on the extensive use of sympathetic language, blend autobiographical and fictional elements, and ultimately demand freedom.⁷⁸ Sympathy became an important tool, especially for woman and African slaves, in their attempt to be recognized subjects and to gain “an appreciation of the need to understand and plan [...] for humans” (Lowe 118). Sympathy also disrupts the reader’s “internal equilibrium” and thus becomes “disorderly and transgressive,” opening up new possibilities for imagining the victim of captivity and slavery not as entirely differentiated political problems (Noble 124). Although often less explicitly and decidedly less frequently, the slave narrative also sought to justify “necessary violence against oppressors” in the same way that the authors of Indian captivity narratives demanded retaliation against their captors. Slave narratives, which gained the support of white readers, are often credited with gaining broader support for abolition from white

⁷⁸ See Audrey Fisch. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for a more thorough examination of the cross-pollination of the two genres.

readers, thus demonstrating the rhetorical value of narratives of sympathy in establishing affective bonds.

The “variety of cultural adaptations,” while less popular and less frequently articulated in early American print culture relating the sometimes volatile encounters in the contact zone, provide a great deal of information about the possibility of “cultural borrowing” that was taking place among and between Native people and Anglo settlers well into the end of the nineteenth century, according to historians Alden Vaughan and Daniel Richter (213). Vaughan and Richter are aroused to their inquiry by a provocative question posed by Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer*. Crèvecoeur puzzled over why “thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of these Aborigines having from choice become European!” The truth of the statement remains difficult to establish during this period, but that it became a widely accepted fact, illustrates how sure early Euro-Americans and outside observers were that identity shifts were frequent and threatened what would come to define the nationalist enterprise of manifest destiny in the nineteenth century. Crèvecoeur’s astonishment demonstrates the high level of anxiety about the implications of transcultural exchange, and how deeply troubling the thought was to those who had so completely embraced the notion of progress as being a singular pathway: from primitive to civilized, from wild to tame, from dark to light—both abstractly and materially. Furthermore, it appears that the statement, which was not a novel idea at the time, supports the belief that “Indian culture incorporated strangers far more thoroughly and enthusiastically” than did the Puritans living in the New England territories and

even much later on the shifting frontier of the second American west even after conflicts intensified and became more violent (Vaughan and Richter 215).

The Western Captive

In *The Western Captive; or, the Times of Tecumseh* (1842), Elizabeth Smith, rejects as absolute truth two foundational principles that guided the Early National Period: first, that American expansionism would increase opportunities for “freedom”—even as her “Original American Novel” appeared in *The New World*, a weekly paper whose masthead included the motto, “No pent-up Utica contracts our powers; for the whole boundless continent is ours,”—and second, that domesticity provided the proper place for the civilizing natures of women.⁷⁹ While Smith’s reputation as a “feminist reformer [...] eclipsed her achievements” as an author, according to Caroline Woidat, Smith takes a radical literary position as she brings race and gender together to test the limits of freedom in this nearly forgotten fictional text (“Puritan” 21). Smith’s refusal to engage in “the elaborate strategies of separation,” that many captivity narratives deployed to “represent” Native Americans and Europeans as “mutually foreign” allows her to draw them together in reciprocal sympathy, depicting the diversity of individual desires among Native Americans and women.⁸⁰ In doing so Smith takes up the feminist mantle proffered by other better-known writers like Catherine Maria Sedgwick and

⁷⁹ Jonathan Mitchell Sewell. “Independent,” (ca.1788) in *The Living Age*, 156.

⁸⁰ Yael Ben-Zvi. “Ethnography and the Production of Foreignness in Indian Captivity Narratives.” *American Indian Quarterly*, 32.1 (Winter, 2008) ix-xxxii, x. Ben-Zvi uses two male-authored captivity narratives written and published in the mid- to late eighteenth century as his models.

Lydia Maria Child, but presents a far less nationalistic projection of American westward expansion into Native American lands.

The Western Captive, which has thus far received little scholarly attention, offers one of the most intricate, elegant, and extended interventions on the traditional nineteenth century captivity narratives, and even on those written prior to the nineteenth century that were proffered ‘after the fact’ as evidence of the long struggle against an uncivilized people. Smith’s elaboration of a hybrid textual form that disrupts generic expectations, and her persistent and insistent examination of adoption as an alternative narrative of cultural exchange on the frontier mark a radical shift. *The Western Captive* represents the Republican model of family as potentially unsuitable for women, some Native Americans as “generous” and “humane,” and finally some Native communities as a welcome retreat, a kind of protective enclave for white women against the mundane “duties” and the “useless work” of the lives that had been mapped out for them (Smith 19, 11).⁸¹

As Woidat notes many women writers, including Smith, Sedgwick, and Child, “were intrigued by the potential *freedoms*” they could explore in “assuming the perspective of ‘wild’ Indians” (“Puritans” 22, emphasis original). The historical novel in particular provided a vehicle for imaginatively testing these freedoms, as it permitted

⁸¹ See Karen Woods Weierman. “Reading and Writing “Hope Leslie”: Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Indian ‘Connections.’” *The New England Quarterly*, 75.3 (2002). 415-443, 415. Oakes Smith uses similar language throughout *The Western Captive* to describe domestic labor. All textual references to *The Western Captive* are taken from a printed version of the digitized text of the original publication. *The Western Captive; or, the Times of Tecumseh*. New York: J. Winchester, 1842. <https://archive.org/details/westerncaptive00smitrich>; Woidat’s 2015 critical edition notes that in a mere four days, the paperback novel sold 2,500 copies. See *The Western Captive*.

the blending of fact and fantasy, and as such allowed writers to reshape and reframe the drama of white and Indian contact. In traditional American captivity narratives, the outcome is often already understood: a white captive has been held by heathen Natives, has undergone great abuse, but has managed to escape, or has otherwise been restored to her white community. The especially descriptive and sometimes lengthy titles that accompanied them assured readers of the contents.⁸² Although the first person accounts were often mediated through male writers and male publishers, so that the narratives were framed in the politically appropriate position, the events were presented as first person accounts—this is true whether the stories were based on actual events or were completely fictitious. Smith gestures toward the familiar captivity genre, the title after all includes a “Captive,” but she refuses the tropes of captivity and instead engages the familiar frames of the captivity narrative within the more authoritative rhetorical positioning of the historical novel. She then blends in elements of the romance novel and the supposedly benign domestic tale. In doing so, Smith creates a space with which to tease out a complex national narrative that works to integrate the varied subjects that traditional novels and narratives worked to reform or exclude. Furthermore, her complex hybrid form provided a position from which to rethink the role of women and Native Americans in the unfolding of history. This can be best understood if we accept

⁸² Examples Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of GOD, Together With the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) and the fictionalized account of Mercy Harbison’s *A Narrative of the Sufferings of Massy Harbison, from Indian Barbarity Giving an Account of her Captivity, the Murder of her two Children, her Escape, with an Infant at her Breast ; Together with some Account of the Cruelties of the Indians, on the Allegheny River, & During the Years, 1790, '91, '92, '93, '94* (1825).

George Lukács supposition that there are no vital differences that distinguish the historical novel from the fictional one. The historical novel grants the writer “certain liberties” with respect to “falsifying characters or events,” within acceptable limits, while at the same time allowing her to insert intensity and emotion that would be a violation in the traditional historical novel, according to Cristina Mihaescu, whose article on the historical novel examines the potentially subversive characteristics of the genre. The historical novel, then, can take up the shape of fact rather than mere fantasy, inviting the reader to reinterpret important historical events from a position of safety as he accepts the ambiguity that emerges as the “facts” of history are undermined through an alternative interpretive rubric. The hybrid genre and complex narrative creates what Homi Bhabha would later describe as a “third space.” Fredrick Fahlander describes this third space as a “social encounter” in which a “wide range of different responses may emerge” (15). As examples, Fahlander provides the following: “confusion, misunderstandings, tension, trauma, and possibly social change” (15). Smith invokes each of these.

Liminal History

She capitalizes on the liminal genre, inviting the reader to reimagine important historical events from an interpretive position of safety as he accepts the ambiguity that emerges as the “facts” of history are (re)presented and (re)interpreted. *The Western Captive* then acts as a potential corrective to misunderstanding, tension, and perceived trauma—on both sides of the cultural divide—in an effort to facilitate social change. It is important to remember that Smith’s text comes only a few decades after the events

that she describes actually occurred. And it was published after President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, forcing Native Americans to relinquish lands east of the Mississippi, and the devastating removals of 1838 and 1839 that led to the removal and deaths of Eastern tribal members. The historic events, and the national discussions that circulated around them, might have acted as the catalyst to one of the most important ambiguities in *The Western Captive*—the identity to whom the title refers. Who is the ‘western captive’? Unlike traditional narratives, the captive remains unnamed, but the subtitle refers to Tecumseh rather than a familiar female victim and thus disrupts nineteenth century reader expectations about captivity. Smith refuses the ritualized narrative of captivity that contributed to racial hostilities and gendered expectations that coded women as eternal victims, Native Americans as perpetrators and savages, and thus justified or explained ongoing US aggression against native people. Instead, she simultaneously weaves together the histories of not only the white woman taken as a child during an Indian raid, but also the unlikely captive subjects of a Shawnee leader, and a young white orphan girl ‘taken’ in by the idealized Republican family. Furthermore, Smith’s narrative entanglements illustrate that theirs are not separate stories, not individual histories, but rather are interconnected and intertwined. In *The Western Captive* lives are drawn together in reciprocal sympathy, and the diversity of individual desires among Native Americans and women are highlighted. Having opened a liminal space to ‘play’ with the tropes of captivity, she foregrounds connections rather than ruptures. Captivity is defined as a state of being held, imprisoned, enslaved, or confined. Very often, the persistent threat of violence

compels the subject into submission. Captives yearn to be free; to be returned to loving members of their family and community. Adoption, on the other hand, has at its root an ‘option.’ There is choice. There is an act of adding to, of negotiating together. Adoption is the desire to bring another person into a relationship, of welcoming one into the family, of grafting one to the other. Smith inverts the predominant narrative of captivity to one of adoption. *The Western Captive* represents adoption as a potentially appropriate alternative to cultural and racial conflict.

Smith’s narrative distances Tecumseh, and other Native Americans, from charges of a ‘savage past’ and instead links them to “reformers” and to a “pure and engrossing” practice of “patriotism” no less deeply attended to than that which is rooted in Rome during the “proudest days of her freedom” (Smith 1). This is similar to what is perhaps one of William Apess’ best remembered works, his 1837 self-published *A Eulogy on King Philip*, in which Apess begins by arguing that he does not intend to “spread before” his readers the “fame” of a “noted warrior” the likes of Philip of Greece, Alexander the Great, or George Washington, and yet his ready reference to such men of historical note immediately links his subject to these men (1). Apess, a mixed-blood Pequot Indian, clearly recognized that representing Indian heroism would not be acceptable to his readers, or at least that it may present problems. However, he proceeds to recuperate King Philip, known as Metacomet among his people, from white accounts of his savagery, and ultimately argues that Philip indeed behaved in a manner “equal, if not superior to that of Washington” (30). King Philip’s War, which raged from 1675 to 1678, began after colonists hanged three Wampanoag Indians accused of

killing a Christianized Indian. King Philip led his men against the colonists, attacking village after village, leading to death and destruction on both sides. Some scholars argue that it was King Philip's war that gave rise to the first notions of a Euro-American identity. But Apess, like Smith, writing after the battles has ceased and Native Americans no longer posed a threat in the Eastern US, attempt to prepare the way for Native people to be adopted into the American national project as full and productive participants. Yet, both *The Western Captive* and the *Eulogy* describe the "often unwarranted and summary character" that marked the "prejudice" and demand for "justice" against the "prowling beasts of the woods" (Smith 12). The narrator is careful to negate these decidedly discriminatory sentiments by representing the difference between patriotic Indians and cruel ones. Tecumseh, who "spread his shield" over the white captive, Margaret Durand, rescued her from certain death at the hands of brutal Indians (17). But while Margaret and Alice were saved, most of their family died in the attack and they were orphaned into different communities. Smith's narrative places a significant portion of the blame not on the Native Americans who attacked, not even on those more cruel than Tecumseh, but on the Euro-Americans, whose failure to understand basic native cultural differences places families and women at risk. The Durand family was attacked by Winnemac Indians, the very tribe with whom the male colonial settlers had befriended. In Smith's text, Tecumseh, speaking for himself, insists that unlike the descriptions of other Native Americans, and particularly those that punctuated the traditional captivity narratives of the nineteenth century, he never wet "his tomahawk in the blood of women and children" (17). Tecumseh refuses the symbol

of the bloodied tomahawk and its association with the white child. Furthermore, Tecumseh makes it clear that he and his people avoided violence whenever possible, going to war only in defense of his own tribe when under imminent threat (17). Tecumseh is narrated as the victim, not only of prejudice but violent attacks. He is a man who asks only that his “rights” be respected after watching with “dismay” the “encroachment of the white man upon the soil of his people” (16, 1). Indeed, a great deal of the text is designed to gain sympathy for the life of a “remarkable man” whose only desire was to “throw off the yoke of dependence” on white intruders—language that would gain traction and become more and more central to both abolitionist and women’s rights advocates as the century progressed (1). But Smith carefully details his betrayal by fellow tribal leaders and unscrupulous US government representatives that highlight the futility of his efforts to be adopted into the American national project, despite the social and intellectual markers that parallel the demands of proper citizenship. There remains “no home” for Tecumseh despite his yearning for cross-racial and cross-cultural affinity (5). Even his willingness to recognize European forms of government and to assimilate to Euro-American culture does not ease the suspicions against him. Smith’s narrative appeals to similar arguments made by Apess and members of the five so-called ‘civilized’ tribes, who earned the prestigious designation by colonial settlers since these tribes adopted Euro-American customs, sought to comply with US demands, and generally had positive early encounters with settlers. Many also became slaveholders as they were pushed into the southern states. As US expansion efforts became insatiable, these tribes found their way of life threatened, and

moved to distance themselves from the more aggressive tribes on the western frontier in order to maintain their sovereignty and their land.⁸³



Illustration III-II: Death of Tecumseh: Battle of the Thames Oct. 18, 1813 (ca. 1846).⁸⁴

Tecumseh's plight, and that of his family and tribe, is not ancillary to the narrative, as was so often the case in traditional narratives of captivity, where snippets of Indian life are revealed only in service to describing the life of the captive and to expose the gap between Native and Anglo lifeways. Tecumseh's fate is central to the story, and the narrator pines for the time when "the prejudices that must always cloud the fame of a reformer" will be eradicated from the historical record (38). Although

⁸³ The term civilized is a highly problematic one, but the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes continue to embrace the designation.

⁸⁴ The *Currier and Ives* color lithograph depicts Col. R. M. Johnson using a pistol to kill Tecumseh during the War of 1812. Although the date indicates Oct. 18th, Tecumseh was killed on Oct. 5th. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. LC-USZC4-1581. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>.

Smith includes Tecumseh's defeat at the Battle of Tippecanoe, which she describes as his "last effort at peace and union," she glosses over The Battle of the Thames four years later (38). Tecumseh was killed in the War of 1812 at the Battle of the Thames just north of the US-Canada border. Many men claimed to be responsible for his death, but ultimately Col. Richard Johnson took credit for killing Tecumseh.⁸⁵ While so much of Smith's narrative remains solidly on Tecumseh and his efforts to coexist with whites, her narrative refuses to engage in the white mythology that began building immediately after the Shawnee leader's death. Tecumseh quickly became a mythological figure in his own right after his death, in part because he was seen as a savvy political leader, a passionate orator, and a brave man, but also because his body was never found and the mystery surrounding the actual circumstances of his death intrigued colonial settlers. Smith avoids over-romanticizing Tecumseh, however, as her narrative leaves off after Tippecanoe and returns only after his death, which had "annihilated the bands of confederation" that he had given his life for. The narrative refuses to recount the battle that resulted in his death, instead leaving a gap in his history. Smith's text skips forward, imagining a time in which monuments will be erected to Tecumseh and other Native leaders of equal merit, who will one day be revered rather than reviled for fighting for the "liberty" of their "wives and children" with no less vigor than their white conquerors (38). Again, Apess draws on similar language, invoking Philip as one who should be "honored" among "patriots" for becoming a "martyr to his cause, though unsuccessful, yet as glorious as the American Revolution" (6). Philip and Tecumseh are

⁸⁵ See John Sugden. *Tecumseh's Last Stand*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

not mediated through the figure of the noble savage, nor the glorified warrior, but as venerated American patriots who are a part of a long history of service. Smith's narrative imagines a future in which Tecumseh and his people might achieve freedom, when he will be adopted as a "patriot" and not remembered as an "enemy" (38). Remarkably, for Smith, Tecumseh's and the Shawnee people's story is not one of a vanishing, but a returning and a welcoming—a grafting one to the other without Republic hierarchies.

Henry Mansfield, the young man charged with counseling Tecumseh on behalf of the US General, also imagines a return, but for him there is also a reckoning of a biblical nature that seems more in keeping with Rowlandson's Puritan text. He muses that the "blood of the red man will call from the ground as did that of Abel of old, and wo [sic] to us when the great Parent shall demand, 'where is thy brother?'" (6). Mansfield invokes what Smith articulates as the proper familial status of Native and Euro-Americans, recognizing a lineage that predates even the Greeks. Smith's treatment of Tecumseh, one that demands cultural empathy, "reveals the lively cultural interchange of voices and perspectives" that she enjoyed and that informed her utopian transcultural vision for America (*The Western Captive* 12). Smith's narrative places blame, not with the Native people, but rather with an intolerant culture that cannot graft brothers and sisters one to the other into the larger fold of the national narrative, cannot recognize in the Native people their own family members. Remarkably, Smith's vision was partially if unsatisfactorily realized. Monuments to the Tecumseh, who has come to

be revered as one of history's fallen heroes, have been erected both in the US and Canada.⁸⁶

While there was no place for Tecumseh in the US during his lifetime, no way of accepting him into the Republican community, Anna Spaulding and Margaret Durand/Swaying Reed represent two extraordinary accounts of what are decidedly successful adoptions; but while Anna's supposedly traditional adoption perverts the traditional narrative of domesticity and of fatherhood, Margaret's unconventional adoption is liberating. Anna's story exemplifies the twisted ideals of the romance novel and the domestic tale that appears to provide endless comfort and safety, but is achieved only through the toil and labor of women whose power and agency remains sequestered within the home—and as Anna's story shows, sometimes is absent there as well (9).

Revising Captivity

Anna spent her childhood at an orphanage after her parents died. Her extended “well-to-do” family members, who had “children enough of their own” refused to adopt

⁸⁶ In 1866 a wooden statue was removed from a boat that sank during the Civil War and was taken to the US Naval Academy. It had been carved to represent a Delaware chief, but those at the academy eventually came to identify the statue as Tecumseh, who had already become revered as “a great warrior and thus heroic and appropriate to the midshipmen” who attended the academy. In 1891 funds were raised to have the decaying wooden statue made into bronze. See Naval Academy website. Another bronze statue of Tecumseh stands above Glen O. Jones Lake in Illinois. In Canada, the first Tecumseh Celebration, in October 1913, was a “patriotic” affair that drew 8,000 attendees in Moraviantown. There it was decided after “fierce competition” that a Tecumseh Monument would be erected in Thamesville and other locations. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada commissioned the Tecumseh Monument in Thamesville in Ontario, Canada. The site includes a bilingual plaque and an engraving of Tecumseh. In 1941, what was left of Tecumseh's remains were interred on First Nation Walpole Island. See Guy St. Davis. *Tecumseh's Bones*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005. And in October 2015, a statue of Tecumseh was erected on Walpole Island at the Veteran's Memorial. The statue stands on the bank and overlooks the St. Clair River facing back at the US.

her (11). Anna is not an orphan by necessity. She is abandoned by those who should come to her rescue, who should recognize and respond to the pull of kinship, but who refuse her. Anna's orphaned history places her narrative in opposition to that of Margaret Durand, who was eagerly taken in by members of Tecumseh's tribe. Although initially rejected, Anna was a "cheerful" girl who learned to "read and write, to do needlework, and perform all domestic duties" so that she might one day be useful (11). But useful to whom? And for what purpose? At the age of twelve, she is 'bound' to the Mason family "until the age of eighteen" (11). The promise of adoption into the ideal Republican family might serve to recuperate the values of the national project, but it is complicated by the narrator's use of the term "bound" and the necessity of formal documentation to establish a permanent bond. Furthermore, the legal documents align Anna with indentured servitude rather than the appropriate affective bonds. Nevertheless Anna traveled with the family westward, where Mary Mason's health declined rapidly. And although Mary and her husband were kind to Anna, Mary's mother was cruel treating her as nothing more than a servant. Mrs. Jones taunts only worsen after her daughter's death. But, who could blame her? The 'adoption' plot takes an incestuous turn when Anna, who was not yet 18, attends to the needs of her widowed "guardian" and his son, "never [dreaming] of the result" that would follow (11). But the result is a highly predictable one for the readers of romances.

What follows is a marriage proposal. But "poor" Anna, recognizing that she is indeed "indentured" declares she cannot marry him for it would be inappropriate (11). With that, Mr. Mason immediately destroys the papers, assuring the girl, whom he

desperately needs to ensure that his domestic tranquility continues, that she had been “bound to them by no ties other than those of mutual kindness and affection” (12). Of course, the text offers no evidence that Mr. Mason ever attempted to prevent Mrs. Mason from treating Anna as a servant, or reminding her that the young girl was their family. Anna is “duly installed as mistress of the mansion; and little Jimmy began to call her mother” in a dizzying succession (12). Anna marries her widower father, transforms from an adopted sister to stepmother, becomes pregnant, and proceeds to fulfill her maternal duty by producing a baby boy. She moves seamlessly from orphan, to servant, to daughter/wife and sister/mother. The conversion of the adoption plot to the marriage plot is complete, but it does not provide comfort to Anna or to Smith’s contemporary readers. Anna does not find domestic bliss. Mrs. Jones continues her cruelty, providing the punchline on the national joke that is perpetuated against women. “A mother’s a mother all the days of her life—A father’s a father, till he gets a new wife” to the young Anna, eliciting tears that her husband cannot alleviate (10). Cannot is perhaps the wrong term since Mr. Mason outright refuses to warn Mrs. Mason against upsetting his new wife, and instead tells the younger woman that it would be cruel to ask the woman to leave. Mrs. Mason’s taunt is inflected with humor, but it also highlights an ironic truth that exemplifies the tenuous status of women as always expendable and replaceable. Anna’s adoption narrative is ‘successful,’ but only in the most brutal and utilitarian sense. It is not until another orphan, Alice Durand, resides with the Mason’s that Anna experiences any relief from the “vulgar” drudgery of the “household duties” that mark her days as a young married mother (13).

The language that typically peppers the domestic sentimental and seduction novels, especially as it is related to the young woman attempting to master her unbridled passions, as Jane Tompkins argues in *Sensational Designs*, is absent in Smith's *The Western Captive* (172). Seduction and domestic novels from the end of the eighteenth century through to the start of the twentieth century often pitted the idealized married woman against the youthful girl on the verge of making, or indeed after actually making the wrong choice. Susana Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1879), provide examples of the wayward young woman whose improper choices are set against the proper married woman. Married women are shown in domestic bliss, while the young women who refuse the constraints of proper marriage are destined to die for their transgressions. Other novels, such as Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854) and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) provide examples of the young woman choosing the right man, choosing marriage, and thus living happily. On the one hand, the seduction plot served to warn young female readers of the perils of improper romantic choices, while the later domestic tales highlighted the benefits of choosing a proper mate.

Instead of finding herself positioned in the idealized domestic bliss that signaled the successful transition from youth to womanhood in the traditional domestic novel, Anna's domestic paradise is a site of regular tortures and turmoil. Her absolute entombment in the domestic realm is offered as a grueling form of captivity. Smith's *Women and Her Needs*, published in 1851, argued that it was the duty of a society to

address “grievances” and take action against known abuses against women, which she believed occurred regularly (266). She praised the “intellect and strength” of women who sought a “larger sphere” in an effort to bring about a permanent change for the plight of women (267). Like Tecumseh, women in the US could not penetrate public life. She picked up on the problem of marriage again in her autobiography, published in 1885. She warns that the girl forced to sacrifice her youth, “the most beautiful” time of life, to a “premature marriage will carry in her breast, to the end of her life, the sense of loss—the sense of desecration” (qtd. in *The Western Captive* 259-60). Anna Spaulding embodies the desecrated Republican wife and thus upends the location of captivity, placing it in white family settings. Marriage, according to Smith, did not provide a sanctuary for white women, but instead was the site of individual destruction that would ultimately lead to a lifetime of sorrow. She does not link this misery to abusive husbands or poor matches as was sometimes the case in domestic tales. Instead, marriage itself was destructive to female identity. She was certain that “to be rushed from the cradle to the altar is to make the great life-long mistake” (260). Smith remained committed to women’s rights throughout her writing life. In her narrative of Anna’s symbolic captivity within the domestic realm, Smith nods to the identity of the ‘western captive’ who had been perpetually ensconced within the life of familial servitude and was made to suffer in silence.

Set against the toil of Anna’s adoption into domesticity, is Margaret Durand’s narrative of childhood freedom among the Shawnee, in which she is encouraged to move about and speak freely, even to voice her complaints. In the traditional narrative

of captivity, Margaret would be the ever-suffering victim, lamenting her circumstances and detailing her perpetual desire to return home. Instead, she is “beloved by the tribe” and, like the other tribal women, she “is her own mistress, and goes and comes at the bidding of none” (7). Unlike Anna, who through indenture and then through marriage, remained the legal possession of a man, Margaret enjoys an incredible amount of freedom within the Shawnee tribal structure. Even in a brief moment of reverie for her lost past when she hears a visitor speak English, and she demands to be called by the “name of her childhood,” she continues to declare her “love” for Minaree, who welcomed the young girl and became her “mother” (5). And, when Tecumseh recognizes her sadness, he is quick to offer a corrective, promising to “restore” her to her people (5). Yet, Margaret/Swaying Reed refuses, identifying herself as “one of the red people,” and appropriating “their wrongs” as her own (5). Smith punctuates the possibility of racial unity, noting that this might only be achieved if women are given appropriate opportunities to make choices outside of those currently available to them.

Tecumseh and Margaret/Swaying Reed are liminal figures who inhabit an exciting, if unfulfilled, bicultural moment. Margaret/Swaying Reed repeats her desire to remain with those who make her “happy” when her would-be white rescuer, Henry Mansfield offers to “restore” her to the civilized world. Mansfield, a liminal figure himself, is described as a “demi-savage,” but he cannot shake off the vestments of white cultural normativity. Although he seems inclined to live peaceably beside Native Americans, he remains committed to the project of racial hegemony. Mansfield’s determination to see Margaret returned to civility is punctuated by his desire to protect

her from the potential of “cross-racial attraction” that would put a “stain upon her purity” (3, 6, 7). Indeed, Margaret’s sister, Alice who has risked everything to bring Margaret back to the civilized community, worries that her sister is “proud and beautiful, but in all respects like an Indian maiden” (19). Still Alice does not abandon her attempt to “redeem” Margaret/Swaying Reed until she confirms that Margaret is in love with Tecumseh. In that moment Alice loses all hope that her sister can be redeemed. Alice accepts that her sister has become “henceforth a stranger to her” and could never return to a civilized world (24). Margaret/Swaying Reed, who has so thoroughly embraced the opportunity of her transcultural experiences, is no less disgusted by her own sister’s conformation to racial purity.



Illustration III-III: Native⁸⁷

⁸⁷ An undated photograph of a traditionally dressed Anglo woman and traditionally dressed native man. [Cropped from original]. Sam Salt, private collection. Photograph purchased at a

The “distinctions” between the two societies have eroded so thoroughly through her extended contact with the Native people, that she finds herself attracted to, rather than repelled by, the “manly and elevated” Tecumseh (25). Margaret recoils at her sister’s visible disgust, viewing Alice’s ignorance with “abhorrence,” but that does not keep Margaret from retaining her sense of affiliation with her sister (25). Alice, of course, is unaware that the sister whose sexual mores repel her, is the same uncivilized woman who has traded her life for Alice’s. Margaret learned that Alice “was the victim designed” to fulfill a blood sacrifice and restore glory to the tribe. But Margaret/Swaying Reed’s knowledge of Native rituals, and Native practices that granted women full participation in community decisions prevents Alice’s death. Margaret offers her own life instead, arguing that she “has loved the red people,” and will “die for them” (31). In one gesture, Margaret offers to save her white biological sister and her adopted red family. Feminine self-sacrifice is often invoked in these narratives as the appropriate source of reconciliation. The act of self-sacrifice that emerges in women’s fictional accounts of captivity work against the racialized feminine body often depicted in traditional narratives of captivity. Native women and white women are doomed to offer themselves up to the demands and forces of community in a way that male subjects are not required. In Stephen’s *Malaeska*, the title character

sale. Photographer and date of photograph are unknown. The image appears to be posed and to show a white woman and an Indian man holding hands and staring into one another’s eyes as he sits and she rests her arm on his back. It appears a friendly, rather than sexual gesture, and provides a ‘safe’ depiction of contact. Collector asks, “It’s a studio set so is it just a man in fancy dress or is he ‘real’?” So much about this image, like the lives of so many Native Americans, remains unknown, and what has been real to their experiences continues to be revealed.

suffers “her woman’s destiny, not the more certain because of her savage origin. Civilization does not always reverse this mournful picture of womanly self-abnegation” (103).

Scholar Richard Aquila identifies this moment as marking a particularly female experience, as well as a particularly Native female experience. However, Stephens’ narrator makes it clear that it is not Malaeska’s origins that increase the demands on her bodily performance. Stephens, like Smith, Child, Sedgwick and Winnemucca, recognize that while national origins and cultural values certainly impact the embodied experiences of women on the frontier, the progress of civilization has not worked to mediate the sacrificial requirements of women. As other scholars have argued, this language, even as it attempts to dislodge the construction of race, by displacing these onto gender, the rhetorical move ultimately privileges the experiences of white middle-class women at the expense of minority women.

Elizabeth Oakes Smith does not escape the language of seduction, or the problems of miscegenation. Margaret is doomed to die not merely as part of a ritualized female experience that crosses cultural demands, but for her specifically problematic cross-cultural desires. When Tecumseh saves her from the sacrificial stake, she let out a “faint cry” and “fell into the arms of Tecumseh” (37). Fainting and falling are tropes that symbolize a woman’s mental frailty, but also her bodily sexual control. Fainting represented the loss of physical control, but it also signified a heightened emotional awareness. “Fainting indicated physical fragility, vulnerability, and infirmity; but of equal importance, it referred to a mental state and hence epitomized sensibility’s notion

of a heightened perceptibility and emotionality in women” (Zschirnt 48). More importantly, in seduction narratives, fainting often recorded a woman’s attempt to protect her virtue, which seemed always under direct assault. Zschirnt analyzes one of the first seduction novels Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1790), which became a template for later writers. “Taking place in situations of sexual harassment or even threat of rape,” fainting ensured that the female heroine did not submit to sexual desire (49). Fainting provided women an embodied response that negated their sexuality, or at least offered to postpone copulation. For Margaret, it was but a “moment of weakness,” yet one moment is a death warrant. Margaret’s successful adoption into the Shawnee family, rather than being celebrated as a transcultural moment that might harmonize two disparate groups, marks her as utterly unsuitable to the Republican agenda. Like Tecumseh, she cannot be at home in either community. Margaret dies in the end and she is thus saved from consummating her sexual desire for Tecumseh. Smith’s ending seems less promising than Child’s *Hobomok*, since her heroine, Mary Conant, after believing that the man she loved had died at sea, consents to marry Hobomok, and clearly consummates the relationship since they have a child together. Yet, Child describes the consent as arising out of Mary’s state of grief that that has made her utterly irrational. While Hobomok expresses romantic desire for Mary, she does not articulate reciprocal desires in the way the Margaret does. And although Mary and Hobomok have a young boy, order is restored in Child’s novel as well when Charles Brown is found alive and returns to claim Mary as his proper wife. Hobomok sacrifices himself, leaving his wife and son so that proper family unit can be constituted

through the marriage of Mary to Charles, the appropriate choice in order to ensure cultural homogeneity. The ambivalence in these stories is apparent even as they attempt to authorize a public space for new transcultural histories.

Margaret/Swaying Reed who serves to “complicate” the nationalist vision that perpetually places Natives and whites in opposition may have been based on the “transcultured captives such as [Mary] Jemison,” according to Woidat (*The Western Captive* 25). Jemison’s narrative, written by James Seaver, was first published the same year as *The Western Captive*.⁸⁸ Jemison was twelve when she was kidnapped by the Shawnee in 1755 and given to the Seneca. Jemison provides a narrative of “transcultural experience” that reverses some of the standard tropes of captivity, according to literary scholar Karen Kilcup (32). Jemison said it was her “happy lot to be accepted for adoption” and described being received “with joy” and installed as a “sister” soon after her captivity (Jemison 37, 38). Like Swaying Reed, she became “attached to her sisters,” but upon hearing that English speaking whites had come looking for her, she too experienced a “second captivity” (51). Jemison insisted that had she been adopted as an infant, she would have suffered no hardships during her life with her Native family. Furthermore, Jemison like Smith, describes the Indians as “temperate in their desires, moderate in their passions, and candid and honorable in the expression of their sentiments on every subject of importance” (64). And when one of her Indian brothers offered her “liberty” from her tribal family as Tecumseh had Margaret, assuring her it

⁸⁸ James Seaver. *A Narrative of Mary Jemison: The White Woman of the Genesee*. New York: The American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, 1918. 37.

was her “choice,” she too refused (92). She feared returning to her white family would mean she would have to leave her “Indian children” behind, or worse that they would come with her only to be treated with “cold indifference” or “as enemies” (9). Jemison was aware that while she might be returned to her family of origin, her children would not be adopted into the Anglo community with “joy” and her boys would never be “brothers” to the white boys of the so-called civilized community. Jemison’s refusal to return to the civilized bosom of the white community from which she came was “not uncommon,” according to Kilcup, and therefore presented a direct challenge to the homogeneity that defined Euro-American ideals and caused “anxiety, if not consternation” among the white settlers (31).

Transcultural Dreams

The “evidence for occasional transculturation” remains fragmented and thin, but generative in considering ongoing contestations to hegemonic political discourses, especially those that authorized violent masculinity that continues to be a pervasive part of the American consciousness (Vaughan and Richter 213). Although Anglos often expressed their fear of Native American violence, contact often stimulated sympathetic responses. Carrington, who expressed her repulsion at the cross-cultural exchange exemplified by Anglo-Indian marriages, writes with great sympathy after meeting Black Horse, a Cheyenne chief. Of the encounter, she writes that it provided a stunning opportunity to debunk her preconceptions “of the red man as a wild beast to be slaughtered” (116). After the brief encounter, she writes that her fear and repulsion “quickly vanished in prompt sympathy with his condition” (116). She understood Black

Horse's desire to stave off the Anglo intrusion into his lands and save his people from further losses (116). While white men seemed susceptible to the charms of Native women, Anglo women seemed to be particularly sympathetic to Native Americans. Sarah Smith also describes feeling sympathy for the Native Americans she encountered, despite the anxiety she expressed at her close contact with them. She writes that it is "dreadful to hear how the whites treat the Indians" (102). She was disgusted to learn that fifteen Natives were shot and killed "without excuse but to please [the] wicked passions" of white men (102-108).

Even Harbison's narrative, which is clearly aimed at ensuring sharp cultural divisions, tentatively articulates the ease with which Anglo Americans could be joined to some Native American communities. Embedded within the Harbison narrative is a brief account of 16-year-old Elizabeth Flails. Her story, as is Harbison's, is taken up as fact in George Dallas Albert's 1882 *History*, Carl Wilhelm's 1891 *History*, and later in Thomas Jefferson Chapman's 1900 *Old Pittsburgh Days*, in which he writes that he "aimed" at providing an account of the "origins" of the city "correct as to matters of fact and as attractive as possible." In all of the publications, Flails recalls seeing "white people every day" as she was transported across the frontier by her captors. And remarkably she understood that not all of them seemed to be prisoners among the Indians (Harbison 47). According to the Harbison account, Flails describes being "claimed" as a "sister" as a replacement for an Indian girl who had been "lost by death" (48). Flail's account is not unlike that of Jemison and others, and fits with the traditional practices of some tribal cultures. And in the semi-fictional Harbison narrative, Flails is

said to have described herself as having been “adopted into the family” as a full member and was not treated very differently from the other members of the tribe (48). Unlike Plummer, whose narrative dwells on the ceaseless labors of her servitude among the Comanche tribe, Flails writes that she was required only to “hoe corn a little,” but otherwise notes that her Native family had been “remarkably good” to her during her sixteen month captivity (48). She was eventually “rescued,” put in traditional American attire and returned to her family, but her time with the Native people was one of relative comfort and ease.

Abbie Gardner-Sharp, whose predictably gut wrenching narrative of captivity includes the tale of another of the women taken during the 1857 Spirit Lake Massacre in Iowa. Gardner-Sharp, who was just 14-years-old and the youngest of the four women taken captive during the Sioux raid, writes that one of the women was sold to another group of Indians and taken away “in full Indian costume” soon after their capture. Gardner-Sharp never saw the woman again, but a rumor “circulated” that the other woman had died in an “insane asylum” after having survived unspeakable depredations at the hands of her captors (182). In 1885, the same year she published her memoir Gardner-Sharp was surprised to receive a letter from the woman, identified as Margaret Marble-Silbaugh, agreeing to “tear away the veil that [had] shrouded those scenes” in the intervening years (184). Gardner-Sharp reproduces the letter in its entirety within her own narrative and it provides a remarkable counterpoint to Gardner-Sharp’s own story, in which she writes that she can hardly call the Indians human.

In her letter, Marble-Silbaugh claims to recall some of the same “agonies” and “atrocities” that the Gardner-Sharp remembers, and describes in detail the violent raid that left her husband dead. But in describing her exchange between the two groups of Indians, she writes in a near romantic refrain of her “rescue.” She stepped out and saw “two fine looking, well-dressed Indians, and soon perceived that they fancied” to take her with them. The exchange was arranged and she was soon “the property of the two strange Indians” (186). Marble-Silbaugh, who describes the men who purchased her as “friendly” in contrast to the men who had invaded her village, and she believed the men, who were later identified as Wahpeton, “feared the savages” as much as she did (187). Much of her focus on the exchange, which included a 60-mile journey, uncharacteristically reflects on the differences between the ‘good’ Indians and the ‘savage’ ones. She identifies the men who purchased her as her “rescuers” and that upon being with them her “fortunes vastly improved.” The two friendly Indians, who were apparently brothers, took her to several encampments as they headed toward their home. At each stop, she reports being treated with welcoming kindness. They eventually arrived at Yellow Medicine, and the men presented her to their parents with some ceremony. “They had shortly before lost a daughter, and it seems their intentions were to adopt me in her place” (188). Rather than describing the horror and brutality of existence among the tribe, she writes that they bestowed every “kindness possible” upon her (188). Furthermore Marble-Silbaugh indicates that she found herself “in the position of Indian princess” (188). It is unclear whether this was true or not, but that she interpreted her treatment as such indicates the level of freedom and acceptance she

experienced. She lived in Yellow Medicine but a few weeks after her “rescue” before white missionaries discovered she was there among the Natives and sought to visit with her. She writes that they were quick to purchase new clothes and other items to ‘recivilize’ her in appearance before taking her back to her parents. When she writes of her return to white society, she does not describe it as a further rescue. Instead she writes that she “was formally passed over to the whites by [her] Indian father, who accompanied [her], and in the presence of a number of white people, kissed [her] and shedding tears bade [her] farewell” (189). Marble-Silbaugh’s account is not unique, although it was certainly less sensational than those most coveted by nineteenth century readers.

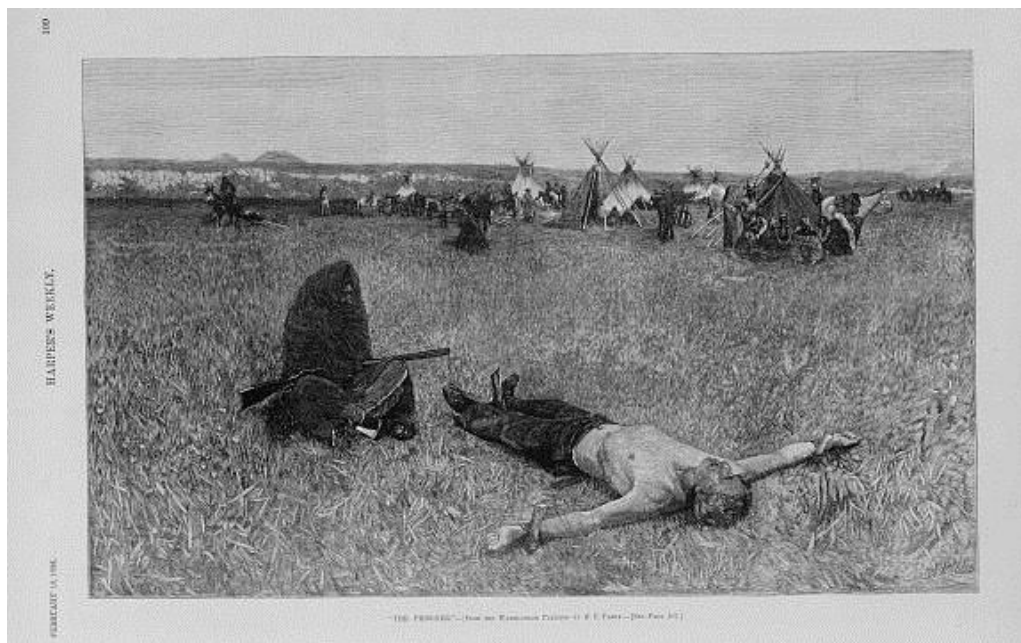


Illustration III-IV: The Prisoner.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The print shows what appears to be a Euro-American man stripped to the waist lying on the ground with arms spread out from his sides with his wrists staked to the ground. His legs are tied together and are also staked to the ground. Near his feet a Native man bundled in what

It is important to recognize that the age, gender, time, and place of captivity play important roles in how captives were treated, and how the captive might perceive his or her relationship to Native Americans. White children were often “adopted into Indian families” and remained with them, especially during the colonial period (Axtell 192). This pattern continued, however, throughout the period of Indian-white contact on the American west. Axtell argues that Native Americans often “chose captives carefully so as to maximize the chances of acculturating them to Indian life” in many cases (193). The desire to ensure acculturation was often because captives were taken specifically to replace lost members of the tribe, just as Marble-Silbaugh recounts. In such cases, the new members were treated as family members rather than as captives. Christina Snyder argues that “Native Americans enjoyed tremendous success at transforming strangers into kin” and they did not limit these to children (110). She argues that many tribes were successful in converting adult captives because tribal communities welcomed the new knowledge that these members contributed to the tribe and did not insist on complete acculturation (111). Other captives were taken to be used during negotiations with Euro-Americans, and would be used in prisoner exchanges, or in order to garner ransoms. These captives often were not treated as well as the adopted captives.

At least as important to how a captive might be treated, however, were the Native American tribes responsible for the abduction. Herman Lehmann makes this

appears to be a buffalo skin holds a rifle as he watches over the prisoner. Black and white wood engraving print based on water color painting by Henry François Farny. First appeared in *Harper's Weekly* 30.1521 on February 13, 1886. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-133428, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003675413/>.

clear in his autobiography, *Nine Years among the Indians: 1870-1879: The Story of Captivity and Life of a Texan among the Indians*. The title marks a significant shift in how narratives were presented to the public as the twentieth century progressed. First published in 1927, he does not describe himself as a captive, but instead as one living among a tribe. He was initially taken by the Apaches before being turned over to the Comanches. He describes a marked difference in the customs and behaviors of his two sets of captors. “As a rule the Comanche’s are a fun-loving people and enjoy a good laugh, while the Apaches are morose and never laugh except when someone is hurt or some calamity befalls them” (142). Yet he also recalls his “wild life” among the Apache with fondness and describes the bond he shared with Laughing Eyes, the wife of his Apache captor, who “was very good” to him and treated him “as her own” (22, 28). He writes that she lavished “affection upon [him],” even after she had a child of her own. That Lehmann remarks on this moment, indicates that he had at least believed that her kindness had been bestowed upon him as a result of Laughing Eyes’ having had no other children, and that he assumed she might treat him with indifference once she did. Laughing Eyes, however, continues to treat him as her own, thus indicating how fully integrated he had become, and how fully she had embraced her role as his mother.

Lehmann willingly returned that affection. He writes that “when she died” he suffered a great loss (28). So even among a group of Native Americans that he found unpleasant and unfriendly, he enjoyed familial bonds with some of the tribal members, indicating that individuals within tribes also responded differently to captives. Once he was with his Comanche family, he was more completely integrated into tribal customs.

He writes that he “was adopted into the tribe” and named *Montechena*. (146). He proudly proclaims that he has “remained a Comanche ever since” and is a “recognized tribesman” (146). Lehmann’s relationship to his Indian past is often vexed and contradictory. Lehmann, although he had become “thoroughly Indianized” and had “joined his adopted people in their wars and horse-stealing raids,” had after nine years been “restored to his mother.”⁹⁰ Lehmann writes that rather than feeling comforted at his home coming, he was introduced to a woman he “did not know” and considered nothing “more than a white squaw” (195). Indeed, he writes that he had to be “restrained” when the soldiers who had brought him “home” were about to leave as he preferred to go with them back to his adopted Indian family (203). Lehmann’s description of his homecoming in many ways articulates the same rhetoric of his captivity. He writes that he was very often “homesick” and determined to return to his Indian family, plotting to “run away” from the Anglo community that had become foreign to him (206-7). He remained only because his diligent brother kept a constant vigil. But “over the course of time,” Lehmann returned to his civilized ways and became “a good citizen” (Gillespie qtd. in Lehmann 112). He recognizes himself as a transculturated man who was “a white man by birth, but an Indian by adoption” (143-

⁹⁰ Lehman includes an account of the Concho Plains battle between Apache Indians and Texas Rangers in 1875 written by Captain Thomas P. Gillespie. The original was published in *Hunter’s Magazine* in 1911. It offers a third hand account of the fight, which included a Lehmann/En Da sighting, but did not lead to his immediate capture. In the account Gillespie describes how one soldier, believing he had trapped an Indian, nearly shot and killed the boy before another of the Ranger’s shouted “Don’t Shoot!” “Don’t you see he is a white boy?” Lehmann presumably includes this account in an effort both to ‘prove’ his captivity and the extent of his Indianization, but also to demonstrate that he had fully reintegrated into white society.

44). He remained caught between these worlds for the remainder of his life, according to his biography. Writing long after his return to “civilized” life, his book contains self-portraits in traditional Indian headdress and letters of support showing him to be a “good” American citizen and also a member in good standing among the Comanche tribesman. At the time Lehmann finally agreed to write his autobiography, the Native American threat to American progress had ceased, and with it the fear of the threat that Native peoples had been to earlier generations, thus making it safe for him to adopt his Indianness without fear of retaliation. And it made him something of an aging celebrity since he was one of the few persons living who could lay claim to an authentic knowledge about a people and a time that was both important to American history.

Some adoptees, however, found themselves more firmly committed to their Native families. Lehmann writes of a German boy, Rudolph Fischer, who had been “adopted into the Comanche tribe” a year before Lehmann in a raid on settlers in Fredericksburg, Texas. The boy lived with his adopted family for a decade before he was “redeemed” by his brother Otto. Fischer, however, like Lehmann and others found the adjustment to Euro-American customs very difficult. Lehmann writes that Fischer “had become so thoroughly Indianized that he was not content to remain and resume the white man’s ways” and after spending a year in the futile attempt “he returned to the Comanches, where he had a squaw and a child” (106, 105). In 1941, when Fischer died near Apache, Oklahoma, *The Milwaukee Journal* ran his obituary, “Lived with Redskins 82 Years, Refused to Leave for Whites’ Civilization.” The story briefly

describes Fischer's life, but much of the article describes what little was known of Comanche customs among the white community.

Fisher, like Jemison, assimilated fully to his adopted community and preferred to remain with them rather than his white community when given the chance. One of the most intriguing accounts that attracted national attention was the abduction and return of Cynthia Ann Parker, taken in the same Comanche raid on Fort Parker as her cousin Rachel Plummer. Parker was not yet ten when she was abducted.⁹¹ Like Jemison before her and Fischer, she was adopted into a Native tribal community and became so fully integrated into tribal life. Naudah, her Comanche name, became the wife of Peta Nocona, a chief with whom she had three children. But the Parkers never ceased searching for her, and after a military raid on a Comanche encampment twenty four years after her kidnapping, an unrecognizable Parker was one of "three prisoners" captured, according to a report filed by John Spangler. Parker, her infant daughter, and a young boy perhaps the age of Cynthia when she was first abducted were the only Comanches taken in the raid (Carlson and Crum 41). Parker was eventually identified as the white woman they had been looking for and she returned to her white family.⁹² Parker's life among the Comanche, her capture, her life among the Euro-Americans, and her death have fascinated historians and readers, perhaps because so little is actually

⁹¹ Her exact birth date is not known.

⁹² The recapture of Parker by Texas Rangers was known as the Battle of Pease River, but many historians later noted that the Comanche were caught by surprise, ran rather than fought, and nearly all the Comanche were killed, making it less of a battle than a massacre. See Paul Carlson and Tom Crum. "The 'battle' at Pease River and the Question of Reliable Sources in the Recapture of Cynthia Ann Parker". *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 113.1 (2009): 32-52.

known, or because so much of what is known is contradictory. But when she returned to ‘civilization,’ she no longer spoke English, or remembered very little, and her brothers were made her guardians. Her return to her Euro-American family meant her separation from her two sons, and although she lived with members of her white family for her remaining eleven years, there was much evidence that unlike Lehmann, Parker never readjusted to her new life and longed to return to her Comanche family. Lawrence Jones argues that the icon images of Parker indicate the depth of the “depression and grief” that she suffered (381). Jones, like many other scholars, accept accounts that she “literally grieved herself to death” following her daughter’s death, which marked her last connection to her former Comanche life.

A great number of the actual accounts of captivity, and fictional accounts like *The Western Captive* depict potential cross-cultural intimacies, and demonstrate that boundary crossings were not only possible, but that they might prove suitable, desirable, or liberating for some Anglo subjects. Adoption offers a counter narrative to the formulation of captivity and deconstructs the simplification of the categories of savage or civilized, foreign or American, and violent or benevolent that had often been staked out in in captivity narratives. The radical narrative extends the idea of kinship from one of blood lines to one of affiliation, from descent to amalgamation and accommodation in non-traditional trajectories, and recognizes that nineteenth century assimilation was not transmitted in a uni-linear direction.

Native Dispossession

Native American writers of the nineteenth century also adopted the dominant discourses of Anglo culture in an effort to ease the tensions and demonstrate that they could be written into the national discourse. “Native American texts from the nineteenth century challenge the ideology of Manifest Destiny in its belief that ‘America’ required the destruction of native peoples” in much the same way that slave narratives challenged the image of their oppression as necessary to national economic success (Walker 15). For instance, Native American activist William Apess “seized” on the “terms of the dominant discourse” in an effort to “control of the language of signs that would shape a nation’s understanding of itself and its possibilities” (Walker 58).⁹³ Apess, a mixed race Pequot Indian, became a Methodist minister and published, *Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apess, A Native of the Forest, Comprising a Notice of the Pequot Tribe of Indians, Written by Himself*, in 1829. The book is considered one of the earliest Native American autobiographies and was written, he declared “under many disadvantages” (“Preface”). In it he engages the language of captivity used by Rowlandson, writing of the “removes” that followed the betrayal of a “peaceable and happy tribe” (7). Sarah Winnemucca, in her 1883 bicultural autobiography, *Life among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, writes of the fear her people experienced as rumors about white visitors swirled around cannibalism, and she remembers fearing that they would bury her alive. But she also writes of a time when

⁹³ ‘Apess’ is also spelled ‘Apes,’ especially earlier in his public life. ‘Apess’ is the preferred spelling today.

“white people were loved by [her] people [... and they] lived together, and were as happy as could be [...] in peace” (59). For Winnemucca, the peaceful time ended when two white men were rumored to have been killed by members of the Washoe tribe, who denied participating in the crime. The accused Washoe men were nonetheless killed by the Anglo people seeking justice. Only later did they learn that the white men had been killed by their white “brothers.” For Winnemucca the deaths of the innocent Washoe ended the peace and happiness (64). Apess marks the first “injustice” against his people as the loss of lands that “opened the way for the whites to possess” it, but writes that they suffered even “more intense and heart corroding affliction” (7-8). In a response to the greatest fear described by whites in their captivity narratives, Apess describes the horror of “having their daughters claimed by the conquerors” (8). Apess also wrote several other books, including *The Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts, Relative to the Marshpee Tribe: or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835), in which he gathered the numerous printed articles regarding the debate over the Mashpee Indian campaign for self-governance.⁹⁴

Winnemucca and Sophie Alice Callahan also attempted to publicize the poor treatment of Native Americans and gain sympathy for a wrongly vilified people through a number of narrative strategies. Winnemucca describes cultural loss and attempts to humanize the Paiutes within the frames of traditional Anglo sentimental discourses even as she protested against a “bitter period of removal and dispossession,” according to

⁹⁴ ‘Marshpee’ and ‘Mashpee’ were acceptable spellings during the nineteenth century. ‘Mashpee’ is the preferred spelling today.

Native American Studies scholar Cari Carpenter (3).⁹⁵ But while Winnemucca may have had “faith” in the “capacity of language to mediate between cultures and to effect change,” just as Apess had earlier hoped, she also recognized “the ways written language [...] fails to work” (Kohler 49, 50). *Life among the Paiutes* which often highlights the use of paper documents as a tool of white communication and control, provides an “historically specific critique of white constructions of writing” as she attempted to serve as a “female cultural broker” (Kohler 53). The supremacy of written discourse is often undermined in Winnemucca’s text as she describes the “rag friend” that her grandfather received from Captain Frémont for assisting in the US military campaign in the Mexican American War.⁹⁶ Often, when meeting whites, her grandfather would display the “rag friend” and it seemed to please and satisfy them in a way that Winnemucca does not fully understand. Although the words seemed to have no meaning, she describes the fear that many of the Paiutes felt at not having a rag friend as protection against white invaders. The “rag friend” not only protected her grandfather, but increased his importance among the tribe. In addition to her autobiography, Winnemucca toured the country, speaking out about the needs of Native Americans. Again, she often engaged in the rhetorical strategies of white speakers and attempted to use humor to gain the trust of her audiences. But rather than rendering the

⁹⁵ Winnemucca used the spelling above, but the common accepted spelling today for the Northern and Southern tribes living in parts of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah is Paiute.

⁹⁶ John Charles Frémont was a captain in the US Army. He led campaigns in California during the Mexican American War in 1846. Winnemucca’s grandfather assisted and earned a letter of commendation from Frémont for his service. For more on Frémont, see *Andrew Rolle. John Charles Frémont: Character as Destiny. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).*

“Paiute cause acceptable and important to white readers,” Winnemucca was often portrayed as a filthy drunkard who could hardly be trusted to provide an accurate narrative (Hanrahan 118). Carpenter, drawing on published newspaper accounts of Winnemucca’s lectures across the country, highlights the numerous accounts of Winnemucca’s incivility. A Chicago paper reported the “truth” about Winnemucca, writing that she was “a drunken strumpet; her royal father” as a “dirty old beggar” who would gladly accept “any petty charity from whites” (Carpenter 6). Another article described her as having “a careless habit [...] of never washing,” which allowed them to guess her age “by the number of scales of greasy dirt which naturally accumulated” on her face (Carpenter 7). Even as she attempted to elevate the cause of the larger Native American community in her calls for health and education reforms, she recognized she would be portrayed poorly by white journalists and attempted to use this in her public ‘performances.’ In *Life Among the Paiutes*, she writes, that “a woman must suffer who undertakes to act against bad men. My reputation has been assailed, and it is done so cunningly that I cannot prove it to be unjust” (258).

Callahan’s novel, *Wynema, a Child of the Forest*, is a highly didactic text that attempts to provide such proof—of the doubled wrongs committed against women and Native Americans. The novel, published in 1891 was hailed as a victory for Native people as it is among the first fictional texts written by a Native American woman, but the book has served as a great “disappointment” for scholars who find the work “dangerous” for its portrayal of a Creek girl who seems altogether too white, as Melissa Ryan notes in her critique of the novel (23, 24). Callahan, a mixed-blood Muscogee

joined other Native writers in attempting to highlight the prejudices against her people and to recover them from the rhetoric of savagery, while at the same time presenting a familial relationship to whites. She dedicated her book to the “Indian tribes [...] who have felt the wrongs and oppression of their pale-faced brothers.” Her fictional account begins, much like the autobiographical accounts of Winnemucca and Apess, in a place of “quite habitations” that white settlers turned “into places of business and strife” (1). But the narrative fixes upon the promise of the boarding school, where a young white teacher encounters the bright child Wynema, which does, as some scholars complain, “privilege the Anglo perspective” (Ryan 25). Janet Dean describes the genre as “sentimental literacy” and argues that it works to present the promise of education in redeeming Native Americans, while at the same time subverting it. There is little in the text that might be read as subversive, but because it does provide a native perspective, it remains important for considering how early Native writers negotiated the demands of publishing, of their own histories, and their new worlds.

Craig Womack is far more critical, arguing that “total whitewashing seems to be the book’s highest aim” (110). Womack is especially disapproving of Callahan’s portrayal of Wynema, who marries a white Non-Indian and her “loss of self and culture is so complete” that she never appears to have a “single moment of doubt, irony, or resistance” to her white instructor Genevieve (110). But as Ryan indicates, Callahan was constrained by the historical moment and was likely “speaking a code intelligible to her white readers,” drawing on familiar tropes as “indicators not of specific Creek life, or actual tribal experience but of the monolithic concept of ‘Indian’” as a way of

bridging the racial gap (27). Dean recuperates Callahan, arguing that her effort does not assign her to a category of mere “assimilationist” who spoke on behalf of white ideas. Dean focuses on the moments that “Callahan registers the ways literacy can abet dominant cultural strategies for maintaining racial hierarchies, and her novel at once deploys and interrogates the conventions of sentimental reeducation to advocate a more politicized literacy for white *and* Native American readers” (“Sentimental” 204). Dean’s intervention is an important one and resituates Callahan’s work. Wynema experiences “deep wonder” at the ideas presented during her ‘reeducation,’ and her teacher, Genevieve, in turn expresses deep wonder at the “remarkable” and “bright minds” her pupils have despite the ongoing national rhetoric of ‘savagery’ (6, 8). Callahan does not overtly criticize the white cultural mission in the same way that Winnemucca and Zitkala Ša do in their writings, but her work should not be entirely dismissed as purely assimilationist.

Callahan was certainly more sentimental than either Winnemucca and Zitkala Ša. She centered her narrative on two female characters and their concerns regarding the needs of women in an attempt to capitalize on “the moral authority of women” as had Winnemucca, Oats, Child, and Sedgwick (28). But she closes her small text with a return to conflicts on Native American lands in the final four chapters. She turns what “man proposes and God disposes,” to what “the Indian proposes, the Government disposes” (89) This can certainly be read as a critically subversive move. Callahan’s sentimental education text has been criticized for her failure to accurately depict the historical trauma that Natives experienced, but she nonetheless demonstrates Native

hardships under white authority even though they have never “troubled their white neighbors” (71). Callahan repeatedly calls into question the written accounts of the South Dakota conflict, even as there continued to be much conflict among Eastern tribes attempting to distance themselves from the bloodthirsty tribes of the American west. “Here is what the papers say,” which repeats many times in various forms: “another paper says,” (72), “the papers say” and the “the papers tell us” (92). Although these published accounts are believed to have the superiority of white authority, Callahan’s continued enjoiner to the term ‘says’ undermines the credibility and supposed authority of the written accounts. In this way, Callahan’s account demonstrates the same kind of distrust for the written word that Winnemucca describes in her autobiography as she recalls her grandfather’s “rag friend.” White people seem to be motivated by the written words, but they hold little value or truth for Natives, especially as these very words have been used to trick or abuse Native American tribes from Eastern and Western tribes regardless of Native attempts to assimilate and adopt Euro-American customs and values.

Furthermore, Callahan’s chapter titled “Civilization or Savage Barbarity” contains a great deal of irony and trauma. Readers might initially approach this chapter with the expectation that she is writing on behalf of white civilization, making a claim upon other Indians to recognize that civilization is the only choice. But the chapter provides a stunning critique of what stands for civilization among the white community. She juxtaposes the prior written account with an eyewitness account: “three little papooses [...] all wrapped up snugly in their dead mother’s bosoms” (92). She

discredits the “great writers” who have “burned the midnight oil telling [the story of the brave US soldiers] to the world” (92). Despite Womack’s complaint that Callahan lacked irony in her writing, her narrative ironically presents the bravery of those “civilized soldiers to slaughter indiscriminately, Indian women and Children. Doubtless it was brave, for so public opinion tells us” (93 emphasis original). Callahan’s mockery is not subtle here, and she certainly does not veil her distrust and disgust for the murderous behavior of white soldiers. Callahan’s final sentences linger on a future written history and what it might ultimately reveal about both whites and Natives in “the Indian’s story—his chapter of wrongs and oppressions” (93). Callahan may indeed romanticize the value of a white education to serve the Native people, but subverts it as a method of civilizing a savage group. Instead it is a way to “tell the story” to learn to write in the oppressors tongue so as to overwrite the narrative of savagery, and to rewrite a history of wrongs.

But because the Anglo community largely believed that the “savage, at his best, was not responsive to the motives of civilization,” Native Americans did not engender the same level of sympathetic identification of many of their white readers during their lifetimes. Ironically, these Native authors would later be dismissed as “overly assimilated and sympathetic” with white culture and therefore failed to provide accurate accounts of Indian life (McClure 29). But as post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha argues, the vexed positioning as a Native American moving and writing within Euro-American cultural frames is not a sign of confusion, nor of having traded in a cultural past. Indeed what is especially valuable about the insertion of minority voices, according to Bhabha,

is that “social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (3). Apess and Winnemucca participated in offering a contradistinctive account of contact that drew heavily upon the familiar rhetoric of white settler colonial narratives. Native Americans continue to reside in “a place of cultural liminality, where his position as an icon is exploited (either negatively or positively), but where the actualities of his humanity are either invisible or ignored, precisely because the transforming image dresses what it transforms in the vestments of its own culture,” according to Richard Poulsen’s psychological study of the imaginative transformations that provided a narrative framework for understanding the American west (39). As a response, many contemporary Native American narratives of reservation life and adoption take up the form of the highly productive nineteenth century captivity narrative to describe the fate of their ancestors and their ongoing battle to be included in the historical record, and as a reminder of their continued presence in the national narrative. In narrating their own stories they work against Anglo authorship that places “Native Americans into a constructed category that suggest their disappearance” from the American historical landscape and the land itself (Tisinger 97). Native American stories represent the many “contradictory and often competing historical visions” that have contributed to the story of the American west and the American frontier, thus reinserting their voices into the framework of the National narrative (Finnegan 4). And although the narratives vary in demonstrating the success of these cultural crossings they resist the standard narratives of progress that

undergirded the ‘natural movement across the American west authorized by the tenants of manifest destiny.

Captivity narratives and other documents of early encounters between Euro- and Native Americans often demonstrate the extent to which Anglos “invented the Indian as a conception and provided its fundamental meaning through imagery” that was not often faithful to the actual (Berkhofer 29). And while there has always been two relatively disparate images of the Native peoples in America, the noble and the savage, the image of the bloody thirsty savage “prevailed because it had a political application,” according to history scholars Miller and Savage Jr. (25). The image of the savage predicated the “premises of Indian inferiority and the necessity for the disappearance of Native Americans [even] before the westward movement of White civilization” (Berkhofer 109). The Indian as a political invention served to justify the taking of land and the removal of Native Americans. Berkhofer, in recognizing the necessity of the image to the formation of a singular national mission, remains troubled that “later generations” of Anglos continued to “perpetuate that conception and imagery without basic alteration” (29). He argues that the “remarkable thing about the idea of the Indian is not its invention,” which undoubtedly served as an important tool during the migration west “but its persistence and perpetuation” (Berkhofer 31).

Indian Removal, Boarding and Adoption



Illustration III-V: Lost Bird.⁹⁷

It is important not only to historicize the moment that inscribed the Native subject as un-American, and therefore subject to the disciplinary actions of the state, but also to examine and contextualize the intertextuality between nineteenth century narratives of Anglo captivity—often identified as Indian captivity narratives—and the twentieth and twenty- first century Native American accounts of their experiences at boarding schools, in foster care, and with non-native adoptive families. Many of these

⁹⁷ Portrait of General L. W. Colby of Nebraska State Troops Holding Baby Girl, Zintkala Nuni (Little Lost Bird), Found On Wounded Knee Battlefield, South Dakota, 1890 n.d. (BAE GN 03198 06527000, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution). (ca. 1890).

modern narratives demonstrate a deep awareness of the tropes associated with Anglo literary practices and their accounts of displacement follow the patterns of capture, torment, and transformation often associated with the captivity genre as exploited by white captives. Native Americans also consciously project back the themes of lost innocence, desires for freedom, fantasies of escape, failed resistance, and the pull between assimilation and retention of original cultural identity as a means of survival.

Despite the transcultural potentials that emerged during contact in the American west during the nineteenth century, “the baseline view of American history remains a triumphal narrative that traces a virtually unbroken chain of successes in national expansion, in which the fate of the Indians was a sad but inevitable part” (Bordewich 29). Often this history is based on “generalizing” all Indians into a single group, and identifying “deficiencies” of indigenous tribes “according to White ideals” rather than attempting to understand indigenous “cultures” and values (Berkhofer 25-26). Berkhofer argues that according to the “deficiency image” of the Indians, it was necessary to transform them into proper Americans through the traditional colonial-settler practices of “acculturation and assimilation” (169). Acculturation and assimilation, however, are not neutral terms of engagement, and they engender and support overt and covert acts of coercion and violence often associated with the transactionist policies of the colonial mission.

Under the guise of legal authority, the US government took measures to contain, re-educate, and separate Native Americans. The reservation provided a swift and efficient means to consolidate, control and monitor Native people. The Indian Removal

Act of 1830 legalized the forced relocation of Native Americans to lands west of the Mississippi.⁹⁸ Between 1830 and 1850, at least 100,000 Native Americans had been forcibly moved to reservations with the promise of sovereignty.⁹⁹ Relatively small pockets of land were set aside for Native American communities, but a fairly large reservation identified as “Indian Territory” in present-day Oklahoma was set up for the forced removal of members of the Five Civilized Tribes. In 1831 the Choctaw became the first to be marched into Indian Territory. Those who witnessed the removal describe it in the most dismal terms. French philosopher Alexis deTocqueville writes that there was “an air of ruin and destruction” as the Choctaw were led away from the lands they had previously called their homes. He observes that “no one could witness” the removal without “being sick at heart” even as the Indians remained “calm, but somber” as they resigned themselves to an uncertain fate in a new home despite having made every effort to respond to Euro-American cultural demands (73). The tribes were among those who became farmers, embraced education, adopted constitutions, and had even become slave owners.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ See Stuart Banner. *How the Indians Lost their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009 for an extended analysis of how the US government used treaties and legal maneuvering to appropriate land; and Echo-Hawk’s *In the Courts of the Conqueror* for an analysis of judicial measures that maintained American dominance.

⁹⁹ Russell Thornton, “The Demography of the Trail of Tears Period: A New Estimate of Cherokee Population Losses.” *Cherokee Removal: Before and After*. Ed. William Anderson. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1992. 75. Because data on Native Americans was limited and records are fragmented, actual figures are difficult to ascertain, but drawing on estimated figures and extrapolations of demographic data, Russell argues that the commonly accepted figure of 4,000 deaths far too low. He concludes that the number may be as high as 8,000.

¹⁰⁰ See William Loren Katz. *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*, 150-156. Although some tribes and clans adopted the Euro-American stance in their treatment of African American slaves,

The Cherokee removal was one of the most tragic in a series of disturbing cultural amputations resulting in thousands of deaths in what became known in English as the Trail of Tears. Narcissa Owen, a Cherokee woman, writes that the “transportation of those people to the west was the most cruel piece of business” imaginable. The scenes were so traumatic that another Cherokee woman, Lucy Hoyt Keys/*Wahnenauhi* wrote that it was “useless to attempt to describe the long, wearisome passage” that the “exiled Indians” endured during their removal (86). The failure to locate language sufficient to describe cultural suffering opens a space of traumatic reflection that engages with the narrative failures first expressed in Rowlandson’s captivity narrative. For Rowlandson, Harbison, Plummer, and other white captives, the separation or loss of their children was often so difficult that they chose silence as no word could provide an adequate account. Keys drew upon the power of what psychiatrist Alexander McFarlane describes as “the vacuum of language to convey the depth of emotion” that no amount of “struggling” with the written word could adequately duplicate (55). The narrative silences in Cherokee texts are significant for another reason, as Arnold Krupat argues. The written descriptions of suffering satisfied white romantic ideals rather than and could not reduce the suffering of those Natives who survived it. “The Trail of Tears commemorates the sorrow of the whites who watched the Cherokees pass,” rather than the bodily horror experienced by those who walked the trail, often with their dead loved ones in their arms (Krupat 25) Furthermore, Cherokees did not participate in the

many did not. Katz demonstrates that many of those taken as slaves were actually adopted into the tribes and thus the increasing number of ‘Black Indians.’

construction of the terms that came to define their “dispossession” (25). Keys eventually finds the words, writing that “every camping place was strewn with the graves of the dead” (Keys 86). Keys was instrumental in documenting Cherokee history in “The Wahnenuhi Manuscript: Historical Sketches of the Cherokees, Together with Some of their Customs, Traditions, and Superstitions.” Jack F. Kilpatrick, who edited the manuscript, writes that her “verbiage” was “replete” with “finishing school posturing” (182). Kilpatrick finds her “posturing” remarkable given that other members of her tribe continued to live a more primitive life even as she had embraced a more sophisticated one (182). The manuscript describes a surprisingly sophisticated people, their laws, faith, and medicine. While Keys avoided placing blame for the horrors she witnessed during removal, Owen went so far as to accuse the US government of demonstrating “cruelty and inhumanity and bad faith” during their negotiations with Native American people of the Eastern tribes (96). In her narrative, she explicitly holds the US government responsible for the tensions that led to the deadly outcome.¹⁰¹

During the period of removal, tribal populations dropped dramatically. The Creek population suffered the most devastating decline, as their numbers decreased by 43 percent, the Cherokee followed with a population decrease of 31 percent, the Choctaw experienced a 27 percent drop, and the Chickasaw an 18 percent decline, according to Katz (154). Despite the tragic outcome of removal, many Native Americans quietly surrendered as they envisioned reservations as sites of Indian

¹⁰¹ In 1851 the US adopted the Indian Appropriations Act, which set aside more land for Native Americans. Ultimately, 154 million acres of land were dedicated tribal lands.

sovereignty that might ultimately end the violent confrontations that seemed only to promise their annihilation. Native Americans expected to live freely upon the reservation lands and operate as self-governing entities, and thus make decisions about their property, tribal customs, families, and children, etc.¹⁰² However, US officials had little faith that Native Americans understood how to educate and care for their children. In 1867 the commissioner of Indian services, in a report to Congress, “declared that the only successful way to deal with the ‘Indian problem’ was to separate the Indian children completely from their tribes.”¹⁰³ In response to this claim, military-style boarding schools were created, and Native children were taken to institutions to be educated in the mode of the civilized culture as defined by the American government.¹⁰⁴ During that same year, as to further ensure Native assimilation into Anglo culture, a “written policy made it illegal to use any native language in a federal boarding school.” The policy of forced assimilation remained in place through the mid-twentieth century, and thousands upon thousands of Native children were separated from their families and their tribes. According to one report, a staggering half of all Native children between 1880 and 1930 were living in institutional settings away from their families (Evans-Campbell, et al 421).

¹⁰² Native lands dwindled following the Dawes Act of 1887, which allotted land to individual Indians at 160-acres and could not be sold for 25 years. Any reservation land not claimed, however, could be sold to non-Indians. Indian Reservation lands were depleted fairly rapidly by 1950.

¹⁰³ From Senate Report No. 569 and House Report 1082 presented to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and House Resource Committee, June 18, 1997.

¹⁰⁴ According to the American Indian Relief Council, the US “operated 60 schools for 6,200 Indian students, including reservation day schools and reservation boarding schools,” by 1880. See <http://www.nrcprograms.org>.

Boarding Schools



Illustration III-VI: Indian Training School students.¹⁰⁵

Among the most well-known Native American commentaries on the emotional price that Native children and tribal communities paid for the boarding school policies are found in the autobiographies of Francis La Flesche and Zitkala Ša. Zitkala Ša, born Gertrude Simmons on the Yankton Indian Reservation in South Dakota, was taken from her home in 1884 when she was eight and educated at White’s Manual Institute in Indiana until 1887. She was among the children whose lives were altered by government institutions that operated under the widely-accepted belief that “isolation was necessary to remove children from the harmful, counterproductive influences of

¹⁰⁵ Forest Grove, Oregon, 1882. 75-IP-1-23. <http://www.archives.gov>.

their homes and communities” (Iverson 19). In 1900 she published a series of three autobiographical essays in the *Atlantic Monthly* about her childhood at home and away. “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” and “An Indian Teacher Among Indians.”¹⁰⁶ That same year, La Flesche’s autobiography describing life at a Presbyterian mission school in Nebraska, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, was published. Both writers engage in narrative strategies similar to the captivity narratives previously penned by white captives.



Illustration III-VII: Wounded Yellow Robe, Henry Standing Bear, and Chauncy Yellow Robe.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ These stories were later collected with other short vignettes in a single volume, *American Indian Stories*. All references hereafter are to the

¹⁰⁷ Left taken when they arrived at the Carlisle Indian School 1883; right taken a mere three years later after all signs of their Indianness had been stripped. The image of the Sioux Indian members is typical of the photographs taken of students as they arrived, and after they had been appropriately appears in John N. Choate’s *Souvenir of the Carlisle Indian School* (Carlisle, PA: J.N. Choate, 1902). Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, CIS-001, box 2, folder 3. <http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu>.

In “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” Zitkala Ša describes an ideal life in which she happily recalls “many summer” days filled with joy and independence (15). She writes that her “wild freedom and overflowing spirits” were her mother’s greatest joy (7). She experienced happiness and comfort, and describes the activities that filled her days, which by Euro-American standards are unconventional at best, and dangerous at worst. But the peace she experienced did not last. “The first turning away” from happy childhood, comes in her “eighth year” (15). Before this time, she writes that she “knew but one language [...her] mother’s native language” (15). Just as in the nineteenth century narratives of white captivity, she describes the encounter that removes her from a time of happy innocence and family connections as an emotionally brutal transition. In “The School Days of an Indian Girl,” Zitkala Ša recounts the train ride from her home to a new school. She and the other children were eager to go to the “land of red apples” that had been promised them even as her mother begged her not to go (47). Their loss of innocence is quite abrupt as she recalls being “scrutinized” by the white mothers aboard the train (47). She reads the unease of the white women as they look upon the “children of absent mothers” (47). She is at once an object of “intense” interest and of scorn, and she becomes aware of her status as a motherless child—an inversion of the childless mothers of nineteenth century captivity, whose descriptions of horror and suffering often accompany the sudden and traumatic loss of their children either through death or separation.

When Zitkala Ša enters the school, she experiences bewilderment at the foreign environment. “The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes.

The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears” (50). The school setting is so utterly disorienting and unsettling that she experiences vertigo, grabbing onto the wall for safety for fear that she might fall. The allusion to the fall is another glaring reference to her loss of innocence and her coming into a world of white knowledge. La Flesche’s narrative also describes a sense of bewilderment and loss in a remarkably similar way. His narrative begins as a third person account of “a boys” first day at a new mission school. The strategy of invoking an anonymous boy universalizes the condition of the experience before he reveals that it was his first day, his experience of dislocation. He describes a profound sense of sadness as “a young boy” sits alone on the school play yard “sobbing as if his heart would break” because he missed his parents so much, and although he was allowed to visit them on Saturday’s, he could not be comforted in his extended absence (3). Inside the building, La Flesche describes the same pattern of sensory overload that Zitkala-Ša recalls. “Everything was strange to the little new-comer and he kept looking all around. The lamps that were fasted to the walls and posts, the large clock that stood ticking gloomily on a shelf, and the cupboard with its tin door perforated in a queer design were objects upon which his eyes rested with wonder” (La Flesche 4). The strange setting was purposefully constructed to minimize any similarities between their Native lives and their new Anglo ones. The goal was simple: disassociate the child from his Indian past. This often meant that students spent an entire year away from their reservation homes in order to “avoid contact with their families, language, and culture” (Engel et al. 281). Although some schools were located on the reservation and run by missionaries,

many were purposefully located far from the reservation in order to “discourage students from running away and returning home” (Engel et al. 281). Zitkala Ša describes the desperate fear that consumed her, and her desire to hide from her captors. Her only desire was to return to her mother. Although her emotional struggle was significant, she also describes what can only be read as violence. Her description reveals her understanding of the Anglo stories of captivity as she narrates a scene that recalls the terror of Harbison’s narrative of being dragged by her feet from the comfort of her bed. She remembers “being dragged out” from under the bed where she had been hiding from those who ran the boarding school (55). She resisted by “kicking and scratching wildly,” but despite her efforts, she was “carried downstairs and tied fast to a chair” to keep her in place (55).

Zitkala Ša’s stories of school were collected with her other writings and republished in *American Indian Stories* in 1921. In her collection, Zitkala Ša, musters a rhetorical move that none of the writers discussed previously had been able to manage—she brings her Anglo and her Native heritage together. She is American. She is Indian. She establishes a “common ground of shared humanity” (Stromberg 99). She writes both of and from this hybrid position, and refuses to shrink from either of these identities. Unlike Stephen’s character, the young William Danforth, she is not willing to engage in self-sacrifice to protect the purity of America and save it from its biracial/bicultural heritage that emerges out of the violence against her people. And writing against Callahan’s sentimental vision of the power of an Anglo education to prepare the Native for proper American citizenship, Zitkala Ša provides an account of

profound loss, even as her education provides her the mastery necessary to write her objections.

The 1921 collected edition further reveals her growing sophistication and her awareness of her place in the publishing world. The collection begins with the epigraph “There is no great; there is no small; in the mind that causeth all.” The poem to which the line belongs first appeared in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1841 *Essays: First Series*, she thus begins her autobiographical selections by joining what, V.F.N. Painter describes as the “unbroken line of idealists and mystics running through the ages” in addressing himself to the work of Emerson (Painter 210).¹⁰⁸ The poem itself links Emerson to an important past:

*There is no great and no small
To the Soul that maketh all:
And where it cometh, all things are;
And it cometh everywhere.*

*I am owner of the sphere,
Of the seven stars and the solar year,
Of Caesar’s hand, and Plato’s brain,
Of Lord Christ’s heart, and Shakespeare’s strain.
~Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Ernest Stromberg argues that the “issue of difference confronting Native writers made one of their first rhetorical requirements the bridging of these differences and the establishment of an identification with white readers” (99). Zitkala Ša links herself

¹⁰⁸In F.V.N. Painter’s 1917 edition of *Introduction to American Literature including Illustrative Selections with Notes*, he includes a note on Emerson’s poem. Painter, who was a professor of education at Roanoke College, specifically put his text together for the use of educators with their students. Painter does not include Zitkala Ša in his work, nor any other Native American writers, and very few women.

Emerson, and through his work to a great tradition of writers and philosophers. Painter describes Emerson's entire collection as a repository for "History, Self-Reliance, Compensation, Spiritual Laws, Love, Friendship, Prudence, Heroism, The Over-Soul, Circles, Intellect, and Art" (218). Zitkala Ša, and her 1921 text addresses many of the same themes. She became one of the most prominent Native American figures in American literature and politics at the turn of the century. The choice of epigraph not only clears the way for readers to find likeness rather than difference, or at least to accept how minimal the difference is given the greater expanse of life, it also highlights her engagement with intellectual thought, thus authorizing her to narrate her story and to describe the lifeways of a people that many had tried to forget.



Illustration III-VIII: A Happy Group.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Girls Quarters at the Carlisle Training School. Date unknown. John N. Choate, Carlisle, PA. Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections. PC CIS-001, folder 30. <http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu>.

Zitkala Ša also published a collection, *Old Indian Legends* (1901), which received praise from scholars and ethnographers, but was criticized by some Native Americans for making public what had been perceived by many of her tribe to be sacred oral stories not meant for non-native speakers. The book contained a collection of childhood Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota folk tales that she had heard as a child. In her “Preface,” she describes the value of storytelling, sharing, and community to the Native oral traditions. She writes that the Iktomi cycle of tales were “told over again by a new storyteller,” and though the story changed these variations restored “some lost link in the original character of the tale” (v, vi). She justifies the publication, arguing that the “old legends of America belong quite as much to the blue-eyed little patriot as to the black-haired aborigine (vi). The tales demonstrate the “near kinship with the rest of humanity and points a steady finger toward the great brotherhood of mankind,” according to Zitkala Ša. In addition to these publications, she also co-wrote an opera, was a violinist, a teacher, and an Indian rights activist, who drew on her education to argue against boarding schools and other racist US policies. Her life and her stories insist on Native presence and affiliation rather than disappearance and isolation, while at the same time embracing the uniqueness of the cultural values she learned from her tribal community.

More Native voices joined those of Zitkala Ša and La Flesche to express their anger at being raised in boarding schools, which they saw as a “deliberate attempt to destroy American Indian Cultures” (Robbins, Rockey, et al 69). And as they described themselves as hostages lost among a strange people in a strange land, their complaints

began to be noticed. The Indian boarding schools, and their policies, came under greater scrutiny. Few could argue that the institutional setting of the boarding school was an appropriate academic setting, nor that forced assimilation was a reasonable tactic to use on young children. More and more schools closed, and by 1970 “the remaining schools shifted away from overt assimilation” tactics, although many Native youth continued to attend boarding schools and “endure separation from family and community,” according to a study of the lasting mental health impacts on boarding school attendees (Evans-Campbell, et al 421). But even as the schools were closing and shifting their practices, adoption continued to be a method of separation for a much longer period. And just as the boarding school attendees made their stories known, more Native Americans have begun to narrate their adoption stories through the autobiographic mode, adopting the language of captivity. They have come to identify themselves as the Lost Birds and Lost Sparrows.

Lost Birds and Lost Sparrows

Pease Ross and Zintkala Nuni are among the first known ‘Lost Birds’ and ‘Lost Sparrows.’ Pease Ross was a young Comanche boy taken when Cynthia Ann Parker was captured in 1860. One of the Rangers who led the charge against the Comanche post near Pease River, 22-year-old Sullivan Ross, took the orphaned boy as his own, naming him for the place of his capture and giving him his surname. Ross, who often took credit for killing Parker’s husband Peta Nocona, although those claims have been disputed, saw the young boy as a “prize” because he was thought to be the son of a chief, according to Ross’ own report to Sam Houston following the raid (Selcer 54).

Ross became famous for his participation in the raid, and later was president of what is now Texas A&M University and was the 19th Governor of the state of Texas. Pease Ross' was thought to be about ten at the time of his capture. Ross took his "ward" home in McLennan, Texas, where the boy joined a girl named Lizzie, a "light skinned" Comanche girl adopted by Ross in a similar raid in 1858 (Selcer 56). Pease likely remained a stable boy, and later joined Ross in battle during the Civil War, and it is reported that he declined offers to be returned to his Comanche family. His Comanche name remains unknown and his life remains a relative mystery (Jones 382). He is remembered primarily for being with Cynthia Ann Parker when she was 'rescued.'



Illustration III-IX: Pease Ross, ca. 1861.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Tintype of Pease Ross shortly after his adoption by Sullivan Ross. His Comanche name is not known. He was captured at the battle at the Pease River by Texas Ranger and soldier Sullivan Ross (1838-1896), who adopted and raised the boy. The collectors note that this is possibly the earliest known photographic image of a Comanche, if one discounts the images of

More is known about the youngest survivor of the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 at the Lakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.¹¹¹ She was found lying under the bodies of her dead relatives. Like Pease Ross, she was subsequently adopted by the US Army General responsible for the deaths of her family. She was taken to live with the general and his wife. Renamed Marguerite, she was raised as a white girl in an Anglo-American community. According to her biography, she did not experience a life of warmth and love, but instead became a “living symbol of white victory” over Native Americans (Flood 70). She was yet another “prize.” She was the last relic that proved that the Native people had been conquered, subdued, and

Cynthia Ann Parker taken at the same time. A part of the Lawrence T. Jones III Texas photography collection at the DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University.

¹¹¹ The Wounded Knee incident marked one of the final large-scale conflicts between the US military and Native people on the western plains. The statistical outcome remains uncertain, although most estimate that between 200-300 Lakota men, women, and children were killed and wounded immediately. In the end thirty-one US soldiers were dead and thirty-three were wounded and many were awarded the Medal of Honor. The site has remained an important touchstone for the Lakota and other Indian people. In 1965 a portion of the site was designated a National Historic Landmark and in 1966 it was listed on the US National Register of Historic Places. In 1973, about 200 Sioux members joined the American Indian Movement and occupied the site for 71 days. They took eleven hostages and exchanged gunfire with FBI agents. They demanded an investigation into the US Bureau of Indian Affairs and a US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee hearing to review of all of the broken treaties. In 2001, the National Congress of American Indians forwarded resolution SPO-01-100, a request to revoke the Medals of Honor conferred on the soldiers in the 1890 massacre. It has since been tabled. More recently, in 2013 James Czywczynski, who owns two 40-acre tracts of lands on the Pine Ridge Reservation worth approximately \$7,000, notified the Oglala Sioux he intended to sell the land and offered them the first opportunity to purchase, at an astounding \$4.9 million. Czywczynski argued that the historical value of the site and that he had been forced from the land during the second siege merited the asking price. See Jeffrey Ostler. *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Akim D. Reinhardt. *Ruling Pine Ridge : Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. Roger L. DiSilvestro. *In the Shadow of Wounded Knee: The Untold Final Chapter of the Indian Wars*. New York: Walker, 2005; Dee Alexander Brown. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American west*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972; Rolland Dewing. *Wounded Knee: The Meaning and Significance of the Second Incident*. New York: Irvington Publishers, 1985.

assimilated into American society. She died at the age of 29 without knowing her real name. Her body was finally returned to her homeland in 1991 to be buried near the other Wounded Knee victims including her own mother. Zintkala Nuni never told her story. She didn't know it to tell, and even if she had, she might have remained silent or been silenced. The autobiographical mode works against the cultural traditions and values that inform Native American life, which circulates around tribal communities rather than the individual, and thus it has sometimes been difficult for Native Americans to tell their own stories. But more and more Native Americans are pushing back against the traditions that have denied them the “‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege” (Bhabha 3). As Bhabha argues the very “power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are ‘in the minority’” becomes the source of their utterance (Bhabha 3). Zintkala Nuni's life was painstakingly pieced together by Renee Sampson Flood, a social worker in South Dakota, who spent eight years documenting the life of the lost Wounded Knee victim.

Zintkala Nuni's story is one of violence, capture, adoption, escape, and eventual return, just as many Anglos described in their narratives of captivity in the nineteenth century. While she is the first, there have been many others. *Reclaiming Our Children* (2007) and *Lost Sparrow* (2009) illustrate that there have been many Native American children who have shared, at least in part, Lizzie Ross, Pease Ross, and Zintkala Nuni's fate. The two independent documentary films, and recent online video blogs, explore the often occluded racist policies that authorized nearly a century of removal of Native

American children first into boarding schools, and then their placement in foster care and permanent adoptions that not only harmed individual Native American children, but also destroyed Native American families and desecrated tribes. Because the traditional extended family in Native tribes was devalued by Anglo social workers, and because Native Americans could not function properly within the narrowness of the “nuclear family” proscribed by Anglo American cultural values, Mary Crow Dog writes that Indian families were left in incomprehensible tatters. She writes that nothing remained after the white interventions on the reservations except “Indian kids without parents” (Crow Dog 14). The shattered lives are laid bare in the first person accounts, crinkled black and white photos, and grainy, halting film typical of early home movies that the modern Native American captivity narratives. These modern stories focus on children removed through the “repudiated social experiment” of the Indian Adoption Project (Engel, et al. 290).

Indian Adoption Project

The Project ran from 1958 to 1967 and coincided with a “frightening period” in US policy when “powers [of the state] were absolute” and went “unchecked” (Echo-Hawk 189).¹¹² Official records were not adequately maintained during the period, and so the estimates of the number of children adopted remains woefully unclear. But in less than a decade, between 400 and 700 Native American children were placed primarily with white families in the Midwest, far from their families of origin and their extended

¹¹² “Indian Adoption Project.” *Encyclopedia of United States Indian Policy and Law*. Ed. Paul Finkelman and Tim Alan Garrison. Vol. 1. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009), 390-391. Gale Virtual Reference Library.

reservation families. While some Native American adoptees could not escape their difference, others did not become aware of their status as adoptees, or their Native American heritage, until they were adults thus living removed from their origins. Until very recently, silence has marked their existence. They have lived at the margins of cultural awareness, but narratives and films have given voice to the forgotten, and may mark the tentative first steps toward healing and reconciliation, not only for the Native American children effected by policies meant to erase indigenous pasts, but also for their Anglo-American families and those responsible for their removal.

Lost Sparrow is an independent documentary made by white filmmaker Chris Billing. The film is the culmination of Billing's three-year excavation project to make sense of what seems to be an isolated family tragedy, and to finally "bury" his adopted brothers "where they belong" with their Native American ancestors. Like Flood, he was determined not to allow their deaths to remain silenced and unnoticed—and he was determined not to allow them to remain severed from their sacred pasts. The search reveals how little Billing knew his brothers, and how little the Lost Sparrows knew of their own beginnings. Their history, like the history of their ancestors, had been so thoroughly occluded, not only from their white adoptive family but even from them as well. This lack of cultural awareness is echoed by one of his surviving siblings who tells Chris that she only came to realize she was an Indian much later in her life. As Billing seeks to understand how his brothers, Bobby and Tyler, managed to be hit by a "44-car Conrail freight train" in 1978, he discovers painful truths about his supposedly ideal "racially integrated family" living the American dream. What he discovers is more

“disturbing and more painful” than he had “ever expected.” Much like the arc of the Indian Captivity Narratives written in the nineteenth century, *Lost Sparrow*, begins with the a time of peace, the horror of removal, recounts hardships and further removes, sufferings, and culminates in a return—although certainly a return that remains painfully without resolution and utterly dissatisfying.

Bobby and Tyler, along with their sisters Lana and Janelle, were removed from their home on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana and put in a state facility after their biological father—supposedly in a drunken stupor—stabbed their mother. Their adoptions were finalized in 1971, during a period when “one in four Indian children in America were separated from their families” (Echo-Hawk 217). The vast majority of these children were placed with “non-Indian families, foster homes, or other settings” (Echo-Hawk 217). By the time that the “large-scale removal of Indian children” from their native homes led Congress to declare a “crisis” on July 24, 1978, it was already too late for the Billing adoptees and so many others previously caught in the system (Echo-Hawk 218). Bobby, Lana, Tyler, and Janelle had already been thoroughly cut off from their cultural heritage; Bobby and Tyler had been dead for a month; and Lana and Janelle would continue to experience a nightmarish captivity far removed from their tribal family.



Illustration III-X: Tyler, Bobby, Lana, and Janelle.¹¹³

What Chris, who narrates the film, remembers of the first time he saw the siblings is four “little brown kids” getting off the plane and looking tired and scared. It is difficult to comprehend the level of fear the young siblings must have felt. In a very brief time they had been removed from their parent’s home, entered a foster facility, and got on a plane to be flown across the country to live with white strangers. There is no indication that they received any counseling to help them cope with the crisis of their separation or to help them through the many transitions they faced. Their adoptions demonstrate the impeccably smooth and efficient mechanization of the Indian Adoption Project. Bobby, Tyler, Janelle, and Lana, as wards of the state whose bodies could be readily transacted across boundaries, were not considered as the fragile children that they undoubtedly were. Instead a system that had been put in place to protect them

¹¹³ Crow Indian children. Photo taken of the siblings shortly after they were removed from their parent’s home and before their adoption by the Billings. Image used in an adoption flyer that highlighted their plight (ca. 1971). Billing family photograph. Used with the permission.

instead completely disregarded their fragile status. They would join an already large family that included four biological children and two previously adopted minority children—one an Apache Indian girl—in New Jersey. They later relocated to “Overlook Farm,” a sprawling estate in upstate New York. Surrounded by hundreds of acres, Chris Billing said he and his siblings first embraced the move to the idyllic setting, but their tranquil paradise quickly became the site of horror for at least one of his siblings.

Mrs. Billing, who admits that she knows “a lot more now,” tells her son that it was important to her to adopt Native children. She tells him that she was “very aware that the American Indian was in a bad way and [she] felt that [she] could help children in [her] own country” rather than adopting children from outside of the United States. She envisioned the transracial adoption of Native children as an opportunity for her to improve the lives of those close to home. Her response, though it demonstrates the ongoing paternalism of post-colonial stewardship over Native peoples, represents the “genuinely humane attempts to offer children opportunities for fulfilment of their potential and for material comforts that were unavailable in impoverished native communities” (Engel, et al 287). Such views also highlight Anglo ignorance of the “strong family ties” that bound Native communities together beyond the nuclear family (Crow Dog 12). Yet, much of the desire to help arose out of even more insidious misunderstandings regarding Native community needs, poor response to poverty, and resulted in continued practices of assimilation that insisted that Native Americans change to fit the Euro-American pattern of modernization. Marcell Ernest, describes these practices as the “quiet abduction” of Native American children from their families

since there were often no efforts undertaken to reunite children with families following separation or to provide resources to help families remain intact.

Of their transracial family, Mrs. Billing states that she regarded them all as “a unit” without regard to the racial differences that so obviously marked their lives. To be fair, the Billing family received no support or training on Apache or Crow customs, and received no state guidance on how best to help the children adjust. They simply completed the appropriate paperwork, demonstrated a desire to adopt, and confirmed satisfactory income. Mrs. Billing’s desire to create a unit seems to completely disregard the prior experiences of her adoptive children, or to acknowledge the value of the culture from which they came. And even as she attempted to raise them without differences, she could not help but project such differences upon them. Kimmy, the Apache adoptee, recalls being dejected by her mother’s obvious ode to their differences, when during the 1976 bicentennial celebrations the children were all required to wear costumes to school in celebration of contact and colonization. Kimmy remembers all the students at the school being dressed as pilgrims, including her white siblings. But Mrs. Billing insisted that her adopted children dress in Indian costume. The difference in costumes confused the adopted children. “We didn’t understand Indians,” Kimmy states. Her Indian identity was completely foreign to her, except as a projection of a particular Anglo view of cultural history. The mandate to wear pseudo-Indian attire at a celebration of her cultural debasement was a stunning blow to Kimmy and her non-white siblings.

There were other important differences too. Chris finally discovers what his mother and father have been ignoring for decades: Bobby made the discovery that his little sister was being sexually assaulted by their father. While this is supposedly the moment that changed the family forever, the reality is that Mrs. Billing already knew about the abuse and had done little. Despite her protestations that she had made “every effort” to protect her adopted children from her husband, Bobby caught his adopted father sexually molesting his sister, so it is clear that the abuse continued relatively unabated even after Mrs. Billing first ‘discovered’ the sexual abuse. Bobby, a small boy in a foreign land, was determined to provide the protection his sister needed, and deserved, even if her adoptive mother could not or would not. He grabbed his brother and ran away to get help. Their efforts obviously failed when they were struck and killed by the train. And Lana continued to suffer abuse until she left home much later.

Chris locates Lana after a 20-year estrangement. And as she recalls her childhood, it is difficult to know how much she has punished herself for being an Indian who did not belong in a white community, or for being sexually abused by the man charged with protecting her, or for her brother’s deaths. It is painfully and unmistakably clear that she has all but been destroyed by the circumstances of her childhood away from the reservation. And Lana, like so many of those torn from their reservation communities, she has turned to alcohol to ease her suffering. That Native American adoptees might exhibit behavioral abnormalities in response to the trauma of separation should not be surprising. Dr. Judith Herman argues that “far too often secrecy prevails and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative, but as a

symptom” (1). Alcohol is the symptom, not the condition. “It was different, especially to go to, like a white man’s world,” Lana mumbles as she attempts to explain to her adopted brother the horror of her childhood, even as he had recalled mostly happy memories. Her words are halting and difficult to understand. She speaks reluctantly, as if still the child captive. She said she felt like an outcast, but did not understand exactly what made her the outcast. She wanted to belong, and she wanted to be at home. She was much older when she “learned” she was an Indian and should have been grateful that she had lived in an affluent community. But Lana didn’t feel lucky. “I never had a childhood,” she says. Her sister, Janelle, who remembers the day her brothers ran away, and “begging” them to stay or to take her with them. But Bobby asked her to be “strong” and to take care of Lana until he got back. She recalls he kept promising that he would be back. Janelle did not suffer sexual abuse, but on the day her brother’s died, she said she “left.” So did Lana, who remembers her whole life being “shattered” in that moment. “We didn’t grow up in poverty, but it felt like we did inside,” Janelle says.

It took the state nine months to notify Bobby and Tyler’s father of their deaths. The extended family immediately wrote a letter “begging” to have the girls brought back to the Montana reservation so that their tribal community could help them through the trauma. They tell Chris that they were informed by the local social workers that Mrs. Billing did not want to return the girls because they had already been traumatized enough and that she felt another move would be worse for them than remaining where they were. But Chris learns the letter was never forwarded to the Billing family and

instead remained in a file at the Montana Child Welfare Office in Helena for 28 years—the time it took Chris to see his brothers home—even if posthumously.

The Billing story is tragic, but it is not unique. Ernest’s 29-minute documentary film examines the lasting effects of Native American adoption by including brief accounts of adoptees that are punctuated by the historical and political circumstances that authorized the adoptions. Ernest (Ojibwe) argues that killing Indians did not satisfy the conquering spirit of Euro-Americans, they moved to kill the Natives sense of “being Indian.” Ernest’s complaint is echoed by Crow Dog, who writes that too often Native children “are given to *wasičun* strangers to be ‘acculturated in a sanitary environment’” (16-17). She argues that Native people are “losing the coming generation that way and do not like it” (17).¹¹⁴ Although laws now provide for tribal authority over the education and placement of Native children, Terry Cross, the founder and former director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association warns that the “overrepresentation” of Native children in the US welfare system “persists” as a result of an ongoing “lack of cross cultural understanding” of Native American family practices. The decades of removal to boarding schools, and large scale transcultural and transracial adoptions, have had a lasting impact on tribal cultures and reservation life. Today, fewer than 25 percent of the 5.2 million Native Americans currently live on

¹¹⁴ Sioux word meaning “non-Indian.” It includes the variants, *Wasicu*, *Wašicun*, *Wasichu*, *Washicun*, or *Washichu*. The original meaning was neutral, merely descriptive; however the word did come to have a negative connotation among native Sioux speakers. Crow Dog seems to use the term in the latter form as she also describes one of her teachers as a “white *wasičun* teacher.” See www.native-languages.org. See also, *Lakhota: Dictionary of the Sioux Language*, which lists *wah-see'-chon* and *wah-see'-chon-wee-ahn* as the words for specific reference to white man and white woman.

these lands, perhaps because as historian Donald Fixico argues, American Indians were more like “prisoners of war on reservations” than sovereign people (*Rethinking* 221). “The whites destroyed the *tiyospaye*, not accidentally, but as a matter of policy” because the “traditions and customs” of the *tiyospaye* “was a stumbling block” to what the “white man called ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’” (Crow Dog 12).¹¹⁵ But Native Americans did not vanish. Despite the hardships, they have persisted in fighting against the erasure of their way of life. Many adoptees, like Janelle, are finding their way home, and are sharing their legacy just as their foremothers and forefathers attempted to do soon after Euro-Americans arrived.

¹¹⁵ Sioux Indian word that Crow Dog defines as the “extended family group.” This included those who were blood relations, but also tribal members who were given the designations of ‘aunt,’ ‘uncle,’ or ‘cousin,’ for instance and did not include blood ties.

Chapter IV

Natural Resistance and Reconciliation in the Shaping of the Place and the People in the American west

*“The White Man knew no truce. He came as a conqueror first
of the Indians, then of Nature.”
~Report on the Great Plains¹¹⁶*



Illustration IV-I: Sand Storm.¹¹⁷

The US government, through legal and military means, moved to eliminate the “Indian problem” on the North American continent. Despite the autobiographies and a few fictional narratives produced by Native Americans that resisted such efforts, as the

¹¹⁶ United States. Great Plains Committee, Morris Cooke, Chairman. *The Future of the Great Plains: A Report of the Great Plains Committee*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936. Web.

¹¹⁷ A photograph showing a sand storm that passed over Midland Texas, February 20, 1894 at 6:00 p.m. Windmills and houses visible just below the whirling sand and plowed fields in the foreground. 27-S-2. <http://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/>

nineteenth century came to a close it seemed the lands in the American west had been duly vacated and prepared for Anglo settlement. With Indian removal, the frontier landscapes were believed tamed and ready for quick submission. Hence why Turner's "thesis resonated with popular images of an empty western landscape that was 'free' for the taking" (Finnegan 5). But despite the nineteenth century belief that Native Americans posed the most significant obstacle to the swift and successful westward expansion of Euro-Americans, other forces also presented a sustained challenge. Natural forces, like the wind and the soil, proved they could not be wrangled through legal means or sheer brute force. Even as they were often dismissed as insignificant impediments, the wind, soil, and rainfall levels seriously hindered the progress of destiny in the American west as is evident in the diaries, letters, and literature of nineteenth century migration. The place of the American west, especially the wide expanse of the Great Plains proved a site of significant resistance.

As theorist Karen Barad argues in *Meeting the Universe Half Way*, places—and therefore, the matter and the natural forces that inhabit places—play an “active role in the unfolding of events” (224). Few of the early settlers, however, were “respectful of the entanglement of ideas and other materials” that interacted on the frontier (Barad 29). Neither did they have a conception of place as “a dynamic process that links humans and nonhumans in space at a variety of scales” (Moore 435). In adopting Barad's understanding of “agential realism” to focus on the materiality of the land and the wind, this chapter takes “into account the fact that the forces at work in the materialization of bodies” are not merely discursive constructions, and furthermore recognizes that “the

bodies produced” through the material interaction in place “are not all human” (225). This reading does not negate arguments that the body, human and not-human, is a “politically inscribed entity” as highlighted in Chapters II and III, nor does it dispute feminist claims that particular bodies are “shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control.”¹¹⁸ Feminist scholars Annette Kolodny, Stacy Alaimo and others demonstrate that the initial enterprise was fueled by a masculinist language constructed symbolically upon the female body, first as a virgin and then a mother, and finally as a spoiled female overused and no longer fecund or nurturing, and perhaps even menacing.

Movement into the second west then was initially conceived of as a pursuit by individual men seeking harmony in the wilderness, away from the self-inflicted spoilage. Kolodny argues that because women were not allowed to participate in the early conquests of lands, they were not subject to the same sense of “guilt,” nor the same need to escape into a wilderness, but instead confined themselves to the local enterprise of gardening, and thereby extending the domesticating enterprise to the outdoors. However, as Alaimo suggests not all women adopted the garden as a method of extending the domestic, and that nature even for women held “a multitude of conflicting, ever shifting meanings” (17). This chapter examines rather than ignores the complexities of these meanings, and takes up the interactions between humans and nature and the human activities and technologies that have altered great expanses of the

¹¹⁸ Susan Bordo. “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body.” *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. New York: Routledge, 1999. 246-57. 251. Originally appeared in *Up Against Foucault*. Ed. C. Ramazanoglu. London: Routledge, 1993.

American western landscape in both minor and significant ways, but even these have occurred frequently with little acknowledgement of the biological and ecological impacts. Once the particularity of the landscape changes or a feature disappears from view, “it becomes a ghost, nearly possible to ignore” (Scott 1-2). Nature, as an agent has often been too easily ignored in the history of American progress.

A shift from the purely discursive attends to the “trans-corporeal” complexities highlighted by literary and science studies scholar Alaimo, whose theoretical position moves toward an understanding of the contact zone “between human corporeality and more-than-human nature” (“Trans-Corporeal” 238). Such a conception requires a modification in focus from the people, the human agents, to the other agents that occupied and shaped bodies and the landscapes of the American west. This does not mean refusing the humans who viewed the American west as a “land of opportunity” and a “place” where many could begin again; rather, it means examining more closely how non-human forces fueled the notion of the American west as “unsettled” and dangerous (Myres 13). As Alaimo writes, “wildness may well be defined as nature’s ongoing material-semiotic intra-actions—actions that may well surprise, annoy, terrify, or baffle humans” and it is in that context that the wind and the dirt become the central agents under consideration in this chapter (“Trans-Corporeal” 249).

Furthermore, the amended focus appropriately gestures toward the “rich and tangled arena” that includes “environmental materiality [...] social [...] construction, and individual affect” as environmental theorist Lawrence Buell argues is most productive in considering the emergence of places in the human imagination (63). And

it is important to remember that “migration is a process full of imagination” that reflects on a particular “state of mind and to a past left behind” that frequently inspires a longing for a return to a place that can never be—perhaps never was (Wolff 197, 198). But migration is also an act of forward projection that represents a kind of fulfillment of future desires—a need for a world better than the one left behind. The literature and private writings of migration in the American west often linger on the liminality that is borne of these competing desires. During the height of the trans-Mississippi migration westward, the future was met headlong with natural resistance. The wind, dry grasses, and soil emerged as serious adversaries that threatened to subdue even the hardest pioneers. These natural landscape agents plagued and harassed settlers, driving some back, and others mad. As agents, they were not inconsequential during the nineteenth century, nor have they become inconsequential today. The landscapes of the Great Plains did the “rhetorical work of symbolizing a common home and, thus a common identity” and therefore participates in the creation of a “collective past, present, and future,” according to Gregory Clark in *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke*. Clark is primarily interested in the way that landscape tourism, especially that occurring in majestic landscapes, contributed to a sense of national identity. Among the landscapes he explores are Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Canyon. However, Clark is guided by Burke’s claim that “American history was propelled by the rhetorical power of land made symbol, a power that some wielded as others learned to read in the land particular claims about who they collectively were” (qtd. in Clark 10). The Great Plains, because they were initially confronted as a foreign

land, both contributed to and resisted human claims, while at the same participating in the creation of a particular notion of American national identity just as the Native Americans had.

Natural Matters

“The wind has its reasons. We just don't notice as we go about our lives. But then, at some point, we are made to notice. The wind envelops you with a certain purpose in mind, and it rocks you. The wind knows everything that's inside you.”
~ Haruki Murakami

The landscapes, the places of wilderness and nature, of the American west have been shaped and reshaped, etched by “both the physical and literary act of inscription” (Hunt 129). These acts of conquest and domination, both imaginative and actual, began even before the first western frontiers in the eighteenth century, but increased dramatically as Euro-American settlers confronted a potentially “howling wilderness” territory that was presumably occupied by “savages and beasts of prey.”¹¹⁹ Just as early settlers initiated a vigorous campaign to civilize the savage Native American occupants of the lands, so too did they seek to exert control over the wilderness themselves, searching always for “signs that [...] settlement might soon be possible” (Kolodny 37). And for those who saw opportunity in it, the land “was open and wild, and its freedom and dangers had a strong attraction” especially among those who had been “bred in the restless tradition of the frontier” (Brown and Felton 13). But the optimistic narrative that sprang up around the landscapes of the American west often ignores the

¹¹⁹ Mrs. Benjamin Ives Gilman, Cincinnati, Ohio, to Elizabeth Hale Gilman, New York, October 30, 1823, in Mrs. Charles P. Noyes, ed., *A Family History in Letters and Documents, 1667-1837*, 2 vols. (St. Paul: Privately Printed, 1919), 1: 446. Qtd. in Annette Kolodny. *The Land Before Her*. 35.

“contradictory portrayals” offered by women and other minority writers of the western regions of America (Slatta 10). Fredrick Jackson Turner, for instance, focused on the claims of exceptionalism that “quickly and permanently altered” the landscape. Rapid human development proceeded with little regard to place: mapping, large scale farming and ranching in dry regions are just some examples from the American west. Few acknowledge that the terrain itself can “resist geographical control” mandated by Anglo American desire and supremacy over the natural world (Hunt 137).

The land and wind, and the settler pioneer struggle to tame these, are taken up as significant concerns in Willa Cather’s Great Plains trilogy: *O Pioneers!* (1913), *Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918). The agricultural novels helped build her status “as an author of the American west” no less significant than the male writers who had created the fantasy of the place (Yenor 29). And while Dorothy Scarborough has received less critical acclaim for her fictional work, she too took up the plains in her most controversial work, the novel *The Wind* (1925). *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* are set in fictional towns in Nebraska, while *Song of the Lark* is set in a fictional Colorado town. *The Wind* is set in West Texas. All of the novels take up a pivotal geographic and temporal moment on the western landscape, when the outcome of westward emigration was uncertain for the Euro-American newcomers. The Great Plains provided “a place of sharp contrasts where the land can yield sudden success or failure” and where the always-present risk of catastrophe provided an important motivation for the westering pioneers (Quantic 71). These novels prove that our “human landscape” can serve as an “unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even

our fears, in tangible, visible form” (Lewis 11-32). That this autobiography, like those of minority writers, has been deemed less important has not meant its erasure.

Each text is set in the final decades of the nineteenth century and focuses heavily on the experiences of women pioneers on the plains. Cather and Scarborough were both imminently qualified to write from the place as each of the women were intimately familiar with the landscapes of the western prairies. Cather, like *My Ántonia*'s protagonist Jim Burden, was born in Virginia and moved to Nebraska as a youth. Scarborough was born and raised in Texas, spending much of her youth on the West Texas plain that emerges in spectacular fashion in her novel. Like their first west predecessors, Alice Cary and Caroline Kirkland, they refused the purely optimistic rendering of western life that were popularized by male writers. Cary, whose *Clovernook; or Recollections of Our Neighborhood in the West* (1852) “forced readers to acknowledge struggle and toil” in the Ohio Valley where the “popular imagination decreed only a bountiful garden,” and Kirkland foregrounded “frontier realities” in her *New Home, Or Who'll Follow?* (Kolodny 180, 150). Like Cary and Kirkland, Cather and Scarborough force readers to acknowledge the power of the natural forces in the vast territories of the great west. For Cather and Scarborough, like Cary, their “stories are [...] shaped by the places and events that shaped” their lives (Kolodny 181). In fact, Cather once said that when she began to compose *O Pioneers!*, she abandoned the programmatic effort to “write,” but instead was determined “simply to give [herself] up to the pleasures of recapturing in memory people and places [she] had believed forgotten” (Carroll 214). Scarborough's *The Wind*, like Kirkland's *New Home*

exemplifies the enduring “emotional truths” and “impact” that her many critics continue to find compelling in her most “controversial” work precisely because she drew on the real hardships she had witnessed and experienced.¹²⁰

The novels, because they take as their immediate concern the plight of young women immigrants in the pioneering effort, are not often considered as stories of place, or more specifically of pioneer encounters in places that were fraught with hazards, but rather as studies of gender out of place—that is displaced and renegotiated domesticity in the nineteenth century American west. The critical lens on the gendered frontier is perhaps not surprising given that the American west has emerged “historically” as a “place of disrupted gender relations” conceivably because “the consolidation of the ‘American west’ as a masculine preserve” was so thoroughly fused with the nineteenth century imagination, according to Susan Lee Johnson (93, 104-5). The temporal and geographic literature perpetuated this myth since most of the authors of the American west were “male writers” so completely disinterested in the lives or concerns of women that they created female characters who were “so formulaic, so diluted, so single-dimensional that their functions in various novels are usually as interchangeable as assembly-lined carburetors” (Riley 9 and Heatherington 77). But because woman’s place was so systematically associated with domesticity and the home, it was difficult for many to conceive of how women could be anything but “helpless” and “hapless” on

¹²⁰ Sherry Lutz Zivley “West Texas Wind, Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Wind*, Texas Quilts, and Madness.” *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*. December 15, 2009; and Carole Slade. “Authorship and Authority in Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Wind*.” *Studies in American Fiction*, 14.1 (1986): 85-91, 85.

the frontier. And yet, women did move to the frontier in fairly impressive numbers, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century.



Illustration IV-II: J.D. Semler.¹²¹

Movement of women to the American west was often induced by optimistic male writers who glorified the way west and discounted the hardships that women might encounter. “Most of the widely read publicists for the West were men, and it was from their writings that women gained most of their [...] ideas about the West” (Myres 16). And because these were most often “positive and optimistic,” women were enticed

¹²¹ Taken outside of a modest dwelling near Woods Park, Custer County, Nebraska, ca. 1886. Solomon Butcher. Depicts Lillie Semler holding daughter, Daisy, son George standing next to chair, and J.D. Semler standing with donkey, sod house in background. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-ppmsca-08370. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005693377/>.

to make their way westward (Myres 16). The idealism was associated with the promise of new lands and new opportunities following the Homestead Act of 1862, which gave Americans—men and women—the opportunity to make claims on up to 160 acres of “public lands” for as little as \$1.25 an acre.¹²² The relatively small parcels of land fit with the understanding of land practices in the Eastern US. The act induced many seeking a better way of life to “go west to become landowners,” according to historian William Holden. Despite the enthusiastic view provided by the westerns of male writers, the reality “was beset by a number of difficulties, including treacherous roads, raging streams, and violent storms” and the dry, arid climate that proved hostile to farming (Myres 17). The promise of abundance in the American west that led to significant population increases rarely accounted for the harshness of the western landscapes. And not all of those who moved west were successful, whether man or woman.

Cather’s and Scarborough’s texts provide an excellent rendering of the impact that westering and the unfamiliar landscapes of the American west had on some pioneers. Both Cather’s and Scarborough’s texts offer an important bioethical counter narrative to the sublime wonder and awe that is often punctuated in western narratives written by men, and they reject the promise of the domesticating role of women in the American west. They reflect the “style of Great Plains writing,” which often reproduces

¹²²The Homestead Act 1862. It is important to note that the language included “his or her” thereby recognizing a woman’s right to claim land during this period. But because of the gendered definition of head of household, reserved for men only, single women who wished to make land claims under the act were required to remain single for five years while working the land. The act, which includes eight sections, also provides for and establishes land inheritance.

the writers' "visions of space, light and wind" as asserted by literary scholar Diane Quantic (71). *The Wind, O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* as well as the diaries and letters of women who migrated across the American west illustrate that the lived experiences did not always match the idealized image provided by a significant cadre of male writers. Furthermore, these novels demonstrate that both men and women often failed to tame the land or reproduce the kind of domestic bliss described so thoroughly by those in the eastern states.



Illustration IV-III: In Line at the Land Office.¹²³

Because pioneer women in the American west were “not the inhabitants of any kind of discrete sphere, but rather engulfed, like men, by the experience of migration and the dawning recognition of its meaning,” gender does not always emerge as the

¹²³ A large group of men crowd outside the land office Sept. 23, 1893. 9 o'clock a.m. waiting to file claims in Perry Oklahoma.

most compelling marker of difference in the western literature written by women (Floyd 149). As Nina Baym notes in her exhaustive tome, *Women Writers of the American west*, most pioneers who had uprooted their lives, regardless of gender, wished to be “successful” on the frontier and that as such it “meant changing the landscape” rather than decorating the sod house according to the most recent *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (8). This does not mean gender is taken as neutral in the western novels written by women. In *O Pioneers!*, for example, Mrs. Bergson, who had willingly followed her husband to the desolate Nebraska prairie, “had never quite forgiven” him for uprooting her and transplanting her to what she describes as “the end of the earth.”¹²⁴ Mrs. Bergson was never able to accept her relocation and she never felt at home on the prairie, which remained a foreign land. Her complaint is not unlike many of those lodged by women who followed their husbands into the wilderness territories of the American west. And yet, it isn’t John Bergson who ultimately succeeds on the prairie, but his daughter Alexandra. And while the protagonist of *The Wind*, Letty, is often focused on the plight of women in the harsh West Texas winds, the men in the novel, while less afraid are hardly more successful in their efforts to exert their control over the natural world. Certainly neither of the stories follow the optimistic trajectory of the “romanticized adventure” offered up in traditional frontier novels penned by male writers of the American west, which typically “rewards effort with a successful new life,” according to literary scholar Carole Slade. Instead the novels depict the hardships that women and

¹²⁴ Willa Cather, *O’ Pioneers!* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913). 30. All subsequent references are to this edition.

men faced on the prairie. It is not the goal of this reading that gender becomes invisible in the landscape, or in the westerns written by women, but “studying gender” in, rather than out of the place of the American west in this chapter moves toward the “the project of denaturalizing gender and dislodging it from its comfortable moorings in other relations of domination,” particularly over the natural world (Johnson 93).

Neither Scarborough nor Cather felt compelled to offer the comfort of traditional domestic tales penned by other women writers of the nineteenth century, which tended to highlight “the ideal of rational marriage [and] the importance of filial obedience,” and often explored a new model of “the loving partnership of man and wife” presumably so that readers, imagined as women, would learn the perils of failure and the rewards of the successful transition from girl to respectable young woman, wife, mother, and finally widow (Newton 150 and Lewis 689). Furthermore Cather and Scarborough push back against the “masculine tradition [that] dictated that women writers [...] not transgress beyond certain imaginative boundaries” that had been constructed around the domestic space of the home (Kilcup 9). For while the home retains its importance in the American west, the “anticipatory dreams” that the manicured garden extends the domesticating force of women onto the frontier is not fulfilled in these tales (Kolodny 241). And unlike Riley’s assertion that “frontierswomen's responsibilities, life styles, and sensibilities were shaped more by gender considerations than by region,” the texts taken up in this chapter demonstrate that region, at least the particular natural forces of soil and wind in the expansive prairie regions, shaped human lives on the frontier more dramatically than did gender (2). The

natural forces become significant agents of their own, suppressing the promise of universal feminine domestic transplantation and forestalling the reproduction of masculine mastery.

Toil and Tenuous Triumph

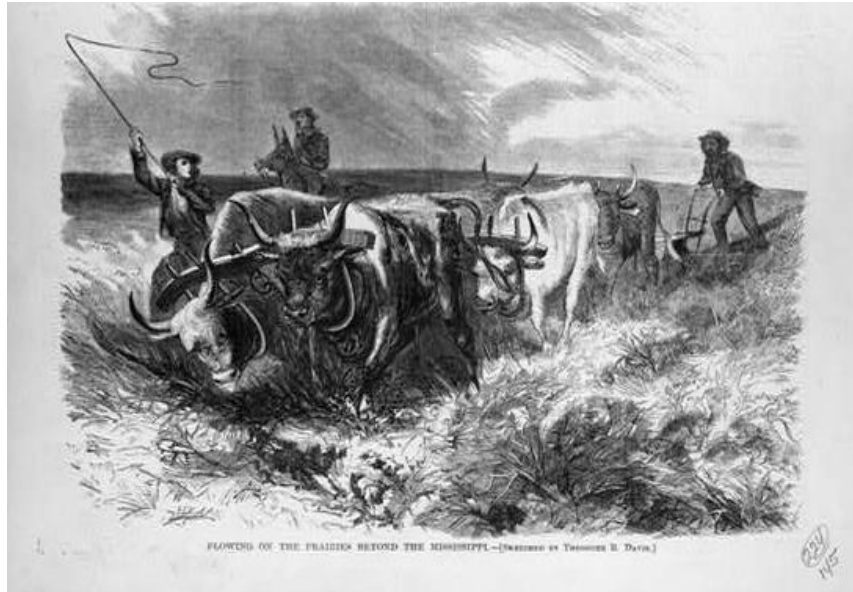


Illustration IV-IV: Plowing on the Prairies Beyond the Mississippi.¹²⁵

O Pioneers! opens not with the men or the women on the prairie, but instead with “The Wild Land” itself. Set in the fictional town of Hanover, Nebraska in the late nineteenth century, the novel follows the lives of Swedish immigrants as they attempt to carve out a productive life in the “tough prairie sod” on the “Divide” (3). While the novel tends toward a more “homocentric” rather than “biocentric” understanding of place, as Patrick Dooley notes in his environmental critique of the novel, Cather’s

¹²⁵ Drawing shows men working oxen to work the hard land, ca. 1868. Theodore R. Davis. Appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, May 9, 1868. Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-100542. <http://www.loc.gov/item/90712909/>.

“divided alliance” beckons a reconsideration of the agency of the land itself rather than merely of the people living on it. The narrator identifies “the great fact” of “the land itself” (8). While some have argued that the human effort to “tame the land” is the “central story” in *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, such a reading tends to underestimate the significance of the role the land plays in the novel and in the pioneering project (Meeker 79). The land is a presence, not simply a backdrop to the pioneering project. The “land itself” threatened to “overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its somber wastes,” according to the narrator (Cather *O Pioneers!* 8). Jim Burden, the transplanted orphan, in *My Ántonia* echoes a similar sentiment. As he peers “over the side of the wagon” on his journey toward a new home in the American west, he describes his feelings of despair at what is absent and more importantly what is present (7). He remembers that there “was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land—(7). Joe’s description is a salient reminder that a land absent of recognizable human rhetorical markers remains a foreign place, seemingly vacant. But it also recalls Clark’s description of rhetorical markers as necessary for constructing a local and national identity.

The land of Cather’s novels does not contain the “romantic beauty” that propelled Mary Austin Holley and other travelers to the “*land of promise*,” but instead engendered a deep sense of uneasiness in those first encounters on the Great Plains (Holley 106 emphasis original). The land emerges as a natural force of great significance, and that it could be subdued was of no certainty to the settlers. Cather’s

novels convey how the sense of uncertainty imposed itself on the human psyche as those moving westward sought to come to terms with the unfamiliar terrain. Scholars note that Cather's novels establish that the successful taming "requires the farmer to read a landscape and visualize a story on it" even before a nationally recognizable one had been written upon it (Goggans 168). Even after John Bergson had worked the land on the Nebraska plains for "eleven long years," he had managed only to end up where he had begun: "with the land" (20, 21). During his time on the land it had remained a "wild thing" with "ugly moods" that were often "unfriendly to man" (20). Modern readers might gloss over this description, consigning it to an error in the anthropomorphic imagination that has become a dangerous suspect in feminist, literary, and animal studies; or, even to metaphor. But Cather's novels capture the place of the Great Plains in the imagination of early pioneers and that means that the "gestures [...] toward environmental materiality" cannot be ignored or subjugated to other forms of discursive practices (Buell 63). To do so would relegate the environment to "little more than tokenism."¹²⁶ Furthermore, to dismiss so quickly Cather's choice to devote Part I, a full 70 pages of her book to the soil, would be to reject her creative and novelistic choice.

The land confounded and constrained the pioneer effort at farming, because the land itself was "genius" (Cather 20). In this and other passages in *O Pioneers!* it is

¹²⁶ Ted Steinberg. "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History." *The American Historical Review*, 107.3 (June 2002), 798-820. 800. Steinberg's argument is concerned with the lack of natural and environmental history that emerges in textbooks. Because political, literary and human history are so closely related and have in many cases continued to perceive and discuss nature as the "backdrop" to human concerns, Steinberg highlights a persistent problem in discussing and theorizing nature as agential.

difficult not to see nature as “an active, shaping force” in the history of the Great Plains that was of at least equal or greater significance as those first, hardy pioneers (Steinberg 800). Bergson and many of the other early immigrant farmers, treading into unfamiliar territory, had little notion of how to work the land or how to grow crops. And despite the fact that many of the pioneer families had continued to maintain a “belief that land” was a “desirable” thing, even when they were struggling to survive, they also told one another that “the country was never meant for men to live in” (47, 21). Their failure is not a failure of place, but the failure of the men to read or respond to the demands of the land, to recognize the insignificance of man in the larger temporal plane of existence that is not squarely centered on human progress as Turner would have had Americans believe.

The land does not merely resign itself to a human plot. The narrator stipulates that Divide “tolerates the human imprint,” but not all human residue makes a lasting impression or carries the same weight. Many of the early farmers fail to convince the land to accept their inscriptions and there were many who were forced to “give up their land” because they could not make it productive (*O Pioneers!* 47). Cather’s narrator positions the land as a more significant and lasting historical subject than do the men who occupied it only briefly. Such a preoccupation with humans is an error that is reinforced as the narrator describes the “record of the plow” as “insignificant” (19). Cather’s novel provides an important intervention on the Turner thesis and the accepted supremacy of the human on the frontier, as her narrator considers the plow of no greater significance to the plains soils than the “feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric

racers” (19-20). And just as some of the farmers may misread or misunderstand the land, so too may scholars misread the evidence of human residue as they attempt to build the story of human history. As the narrator muses over those “feeble scratches” she concludes that their indeterminacy may have nothing to do with humans after all, and may be “only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human striving” (20). The claim is pivotal to understanding the environmental ethic in Cather’s novel that provides a radical reinterpretation not only of the pioneer project on the Great Plains, but of the interpretation of the whole of human history. Cather undermines the historical claims to human supremacy over the natural world, and suggests that interpretations that foreground human desire, creativity, and advancement may very well be fictions that respond more to the masculine desire to encode human supremacy rather than to the material remnants of human activity. As Alexandra Bergson muses, people “come and go, but the land is always here” (308).

Cather’s positioning of the land “directly challenges” constructions of “matter as a passive and blank slate awaiting the active inscription of culture” (Barad 150). Alexandra, unlike many of the other settlers, recognizes that life on the plains requires an ongoing negotiation that requires something of all the participants. Barad in describing the strengths of scholar Judith Butler’s feminist philosophy, argues that matter “is not an individually articulated or static entity” and, more significantly here, it does “not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it”

(Barad 150-51).¹²⁷ Cather's narrator calls into question the descriptions of place that remain heavily inscribed by a reading of the cultural artifacts as signifiers of historical meaning in place without recognizing the agency of the place itself in determining and defining its own history. Furthermore, Barad argues that "matter is always already an ongoing historicity" (151). The land is not inert, but participates in its own creation which arises out of the intra-activity of material and discursive practices.

The land requires something of the farmer, and only the settlers who understand the demands of the land ultimately find success. Part of what prevents the Bergson patriarch from cultivating a productive soil on the Divide is his failure to embrace the mutuality of existence on the plains. His three sons Oscar, Lou and Emil, "who had been dragged into the wilderness when they were little boys," are no better equipped to understand the demands of life on the harsh soils of the Great Plains (48). Oscar, the oldest boy, had a "powerful body and unusual endurance" but he is often described by his feminine traits (55). His "pale face was as bare as an egg" because he could not grow hair and like his mother he is "heavy and placid" (55, 28). But his greatest failure is a dogged determination to do the "same thing over in the same way, regardless of whether it was best or no" (55). So while Oscar could physically work the land, he could not respond to changes on the land, nor adjust his behavior. Lou was "fussy and flighty" as a boy and "tricky" as an adult (56, 98). But worse, like his neighbor Frank Shabata, he "neglects his farm," refusing to take on the work dictated by the timing of

¹²⁷ Barad finds Butler's theory incomplete as it remains bound by "anthropocentric limitations." Barad pushes toward agential realism, which she argues more thoroughly "recognizes matter's dynamism" (151).

the seasons, preferring politics over the demands of farm life (98, 151). Emil, the youngest, was “tender-hearted” and did “not stand up under farm work very well” (54, 125). He benefited most from his sister’s accomplishments on the land, however, and becomes spoiled and selfish (54). He falls in love with a married woman, and is murdered by her husband. Each of the boys lacked the respect, fortitude, and attentiveness necessary to work the land (48).

The dying father recognizes the shortcomings of each of his boys, but his eldest child possessed the appropriate “fierceness” to carry on the family project, which replicates in petite form the national project (8). Alexandra had begun to help her father with the land when she was only twelve years old, and it was with her that he had “shared” all his “wishes” and with whom he had left everything (26-27). She, he knew, would “manage the best” (27). And although Bergson was incapable of forcing his own will on the land, becoming more bitter and depressed as his crops failed each year, Alexandra fulfills her promise of keeping the land even when she becomes “tired of standing up for the country” while others flee, and she ultimately transforms it into a prosperous land (*O Pioneers!* 20-21, 53). For the elder Bergson the land remained mute, refusing to share its secrets, refusing to yield. But Alexandra, who is the embodiment of Alaimo’s “trans-corporeal” consciousness, embraces her bodily enmeshment with “the more-than-human” (238). Alexandra’s happiness is not derived primarily from her relationships with other humans, but rather she is happiest when she is “close to the flat, fallow world about her” (204). Cather’s description of Alexandra’s material connection to the land reflects what many Native American and women writers of the nineteenth

century describe. William Apess, for instance, begins his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, by declaring that he is “a Native of the American soil” (7). Apess’ 1829 self-published autobiography is considered the earliest example of its kind. Apess spent much of his life in Massachusetts before moving to New York as an adult. He is not merely concerned with a geographic marker, but with a psychic connection with place that seemed too often to escape Euro-American colonial settlers, but was often used to inform descriptions of the proper connection between people and their place in the American west. Gertrude Atherton enunciates a similar bodily engagement in her 1890 novel, *Los Cerritos: A Romance of the Modern Times*.¹²⁸ The narrator in describing why the protagonist, Carmelita, is special, lingers on her attitude toward nature. “Carmelita was Nature’s own child. She would lie on the ground for hours among the wild flower, fancying she could see them grow” (46). Although Carmelita’s natural inclinations include pure fantasy rather than the kind of material work required of Alexandra, she nevertheless experiences a similar sense of “sympathy and indignation” for the natural world that often seemed reserved only for other human beings (47). Alexandra, Apess, and Carmelita, recognize a deep psychic link among and between the land and all the living beings that inhabit a particular place. Alexandra, through her fleshy connection to the land, is able to feel “in her own body the germination of the soil” (204). Alexandra does not have to be convinced that her “material fleshiness is inseparable from ‘nature’

¹²⁸ *Los Cerritos* is fraught with many of the problems associated with nineteenth century novels that coupled romance and conquest and in the end celebrates US conquest of Mexico through the language of romance; however, the chapter “Nature’s Child”

or environment,” but rather revels in the connectivity and Cather’s narrator explains this relationship as reciprocal (Alaimo “Trans-Corporeal” 238).

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before (65).

Alexandra’s relationship to the land brings her happy memories, but she fears this will be wrongly deemed “impersonal” and unimportant by the other settlers (205). But to Alexandra, her relationship to the land is “very personal” and it has shaped her existence more meaningfully than most of the human relationships (205). Alexandra had “never been in love: and had never indulged in sentimental reveries” thought to be the proper domain of women (205). And even after she and Carl Linstrum agree to marry, the decision for Alexandra is pragmatic and practical rather than impulsive or romantic. Cather’s work, much like Mary Austin’s, “struggles to portray nature as both a place of feminist possibility and an independent force that exceeds and resists mastery” (Alaimo *Undomesticated* 27). *Ántonia*, who also lost her father at a young age, certainly does not share Alexandra’s natural affinity for the land and the place, yet she has an independent spirit and is no less committed to working on the land to support her growing family. She tells Jim with great pride that she helped “make this land one good farm” (61). Cather at once recognizes the contingent status of women upon the land, while at the same time representing the mastery of the human over the natural world, albeit in unlikely western protagonists Alexandra and *Ántonia* Shimerda. But

Cather's delicate treatment of the heroines juxtaposed with the harsh place does not lead to their infantilization nor their destruction, which provides a strong counterpoint to other western narratives. Cather's close association with Sarah Orne Jewett, for whom *O Pioneers!* is dedicated, likely influenced her regionalist impulse and her treatment of women in the natural world. Cather's exploration in these novels, like Jewett's before her, illustrates a continued interest in "the relations of humans to nature and associates females with the expansive natural world" rather than placing these in opposition (Alaimo *Undomesticated* 41).

In the end, of course, *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia* are stories of human triumph. "The Divide is [...] thickly populated. The rich soil yields heavy harvests" to those who refuse to give up (76). And as Meeker argues, the plow is the "instrument of cultivation and the symbol for human civilization" in the American west (78). The plow, he argues, represents the "image of the human spirit triumphant" over the barren lands (78-9). Even in human triumph, however, Cather's *O Pioneers!* continues to linger on the vital role the land played in bringing farming practices to fruition. The narrator describes the land as containing the "power of growth and fertility" that yielded the kind of production that ultimately sustained homesteaders on the Great Plains (76). Certainly the view uses highly sexualized language as the narrator notes that it is the land that "yields itself eagerly to the plow [...] with a soft, deep sigh of happiness" in a fashion not unlike Turner (76). And *O Pioneers!*, written before the Dust Bowl swept across the region, certainly embraces the "notion that in some fashion—either by the operation of inscrutable natural forces or as a result of man's own activities—the rainfall would be

increased sufficiently to allow the agricultural frontier to continue advancing” across the American west (Nash 170). While rainfall sufficiently increased for short periods, “overconfidence concerning the rainfall was leading to dangerous over settlement of the Plains” and in only a few decades, the land had returned to dust due to a significant period of over grazing, over plowing, and extended drought (Nash 170). And contrary to the optimistic, and erroneous, climatological theory of the period, ‘Rains did [not] follow the plow.’¹²⁹

The Plow on the Plain

“Sometimes [...] on the Great Plains especially—I find myself in a place too unimportant for people to pay it much attention [...] yet it’s a real place, unlike any other and specific to itself, and it always makes me wonder what the lost Indian name for it was.”
~Ian Frazier, *On The Rez*

The plow etched deep grooves into the land, defeated the dry, stiff grasses and changed the horizontal rhetoric of the Great Plains. At first with single blades attached to livestock and guided by farmers, and then through increasingly complex mechanized instruments that dug row after row into the dry earth allowed more land to be tilled and planted in quicker and quicker succession. According to the US Government’s *Report on the Great Plains*, the Plains states had become home to nearly 5,000,000 farmers by

¹²⁹ “Rain follows the plow,” was another myth that emerged during the great migrations in the American west. A pseudoscientific theory was put forward that argued that tillage would increase rainfall and thus those who crossed the 100th meridian needed only to begin working the land to improve rates of rainfall to support crops. This proved incorrect and was largely the result of “social” pressures rather than scientific methodology. See Henry Nash Smith. “Rain Follows the Plow: The Notion of Increased Rainfall for the Great Plains, 1844-1880.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 10.2 (1947): 169-193. Web; and Wallace Stegner. *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*. (New York: Penguin Group, 1954), 1–7.

the time of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s.¹³⁰ These farmers oversaw 282,096,014 acres of land, of which 107,269,187 acres were devoted to crops. The plow certainly changed the landscape, materially and discursively, but not always for the better. The agricultural revolution led to “unprecedented [...] human appropriation of ecosystem services and Earth's natural resources” (Lal, et.al. 2). As the black and white documentary film *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and the short-lived play *Native Ground* (1936) highlight, US Agriculture officials employed unique strategies to create public discourse about the aggressive taming of the soil that nearly brought the fleeting prosperity of the Great Plains to a catastrophic end. The Prologue to the film suggests that like *O' Pioneers!* it is a story of the land. In sweeping, poetic refrain, white letters against a black background scroll up the screen to Virgil Thomson's “slightly ragged and rustic” score¹³¹:

This is a record of land...
of soil, rather than people—
a story of the Great Plains:
the 400,000,000 acres of
wind-swept grass lands that
spread up from the Texas panhandle to Canada...
A high, treeless continent,
without rivers, without streams...
A country of high winds...
and sun...

¹³⁰ United States. Great Plains Committee, Morris Cooke, Chairman. *The Future of the Great Plains: A Report of the Great Plains Committee*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936. 39. Web. The Great Plains in the US includes Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The great plains continues north into Canada.

¹³¹ Julie Hubbert. “‘The Plow that Broke the Plains’ and ‘The River.’ Pare Lorentz, director; Virgil Thomson, music. Post-Classical Ensemble, Angel Gil-Ordóñez, music director; Joseph Horowitz, artistic director. Naxos DVD 2.110521, 2007. Review. *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2 (2008): 131-134. 132. Web.

and of little rain...

By 1880 we had cleared
the Indian, and with
him, the buffalo, from
the Great Plains, and
established the last frontier...
A half million square
miles of natural range...
This is a picturization of
what we did with it.



Illustration IV-V: The Plow that Broke the Plains; Look at it Now.¹³²

The, grainy, twenty-five minute film, marked the first time the government considered the commercial possibilities of producing and distributing a film for the

¹³² Arthur Rothstein. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-fsa-8b38304 (digital file from original negative). Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998019009/PP/>. Rothstein provided important photographic documentation of life on the plains for both Anglo and African farmers during the 1930s.

general public, according to Daniel Leab (41). Director Pare Lorentz, a film critic from West Virginia, had become upset with Hollywood filmmakers, who he accused of ignoring important social events in the name of entertainment and escapism (Lean 41-42). In 1935 Lorentz was approached by members of the Resettlement Administration, a US government agency charged with providing “relief or reform” to farmers struggling through the extended drought of the 1930s, to produce a film.¹³³ Government officials expressed their concerns that the film would be nothing more than a tool to force the US Congress to fund President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s highly contested New Deal programs. Although Lorentz wrote the script himself, he relied on the nearly 200-page report from the Great Plains Committee, which concluded that because “droughts could not be prevented [...] agriculture must adapt itself” to the environment” (1). The report also noted that contemporary “cultivation” methods “were so injuring the land that large areas were decreasingly productive even in good years,” and much of the land was lapsing “into desert” during “bad years” (1). It identified the “urgent necessity of more detailed knowledge of the land” and a “more thorough inventory of the water resources” (3).¹³⁴ US policies that had contributed to the destruction of lands on the Great Plains were also noted in the report, but were only briefly credited with producing the dire circumstances.

¹³³ See Blaine Allan. “Canada’s ‘Heritage’ (1939) and America’s ‘The Plow that Broke the Plains’ (1936).” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19.4 (1999): 439-72. 440. *ProQuest*. Web. Allan provides a history of the compilation and production of the two films including extended research on the letters exchanged among those involved in both projects, which were highly controversial at the time they were conceived and completed. Allan’s work also does important work in establishing the close relationship between documentary and social justice films during this period in both the US and Canada.

¹³⁴ Water resources are taken up in Chapter IV: A Place of Little Rain.

The report is rife with contradictions consistent with contemporaneous discussions and negotiations of resources in the American west. The report declared that the people of the plains must learn that they cannot “conquer Nature” (6). Yet, in recognizing the power of nature in influencing the lives of humans, the men who drafted the report remained rooted in gendered understandings, calling on the people of the plains to learn to “live with her on her own terms” (6). And even as they suggest wiser understandings of resources, this is needed simply so that humans could “extract all its values” (6). The report identifies “mining” as a viable alternative to the destructive consequences of wheat farming (8). While mining hardly seems an appropriate response, Zimbabwean Scientist Allan Savory argues that “agriculture is the most destructive industry that we have. More than coal mining and other extractive industries.”¹³⁵ The history and descriptions of the problem on US grasslands, which had devolved so rapidly, were secondary to the purpose of the report, which was to gain support for funding to take “emergency steps to rescue dying cattle, relieve destitute families and safeguard human life” (1). Restoration of the land was certainly necessary, but contrary to the film’s Prologue, the film was meant to describe the human tragedy. Lorentz certainly appears to have understood the mission, as did members of congress.

Film production was halted at least once when officials refused to provide funding for the project. And it took significant negotiations to get the film completed

¹³⁵ See *Holistic Management: A New Environmental Intelligence*. Albuquerque: Allan Savory Center for Holistic Management, 2001. Print. Savory, who is described as a “grassland ecosystem pioneer,” first introduced the “Holistic Management” theory in 1999. Although controversial, Savory’s approach has earned him several awards and his plan has been implemented on grasslands around the world.

and released.¹³⁶ Initially, criticism was levied against Lorentz and his documentary for two reasons: (1) it placed the blame for the Dust Bowl solely on “on human modification” of the land; and, (2) it promised to “resurrect nature’s harmony” (Lovely 769). Critics objected to both claims. Bolstered by “significant” evidence that there had been “drought and dust storms in the 1830s, when Indians controlled the prairies,” critics rejected claims that the “coming of the white man,” and with him the plow and herds of cattle were responsible for the conditions of the plains (2). Furthermore, opponents of the proposal rejected claims that the prairies existed as a kind of “supraorganism,” which seemed a preposterous romanticization of the prairies and their inhabitants (Lovely 769). Despite the criticism, “President Roosevelt was brimming with enthusiasm, and had a long talk with Lorentz, praising him for his work” following the first screening.¹³⁷

The film has since received more favorable reception as a “classic” in “government expository film” and it “remains [...] fresh and lively” depiction of the consequences of resource manipulation (Lovely 768 and Brown 205). Furthermore, even those who objected to the government funding for a movie project, could not deny the devastating consequences of “overextending the range of arable land and exposing soil unfit for cultivation to the erosive effects of the winds” (Lovely 768). And the film promises scholars an opportunity to bring together environmental history and ecological

¹³⁶ See Richard Barsam. *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Robert Snyder. *Pare Lorentz and the Documentary Film*. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994) for a more thorough description of Pare Lorentz’s influence on documentary film making.

¹³⁷ Pare Lorentz Film Center. <http://www.parelorentzcenter.org>.

history on the American Great Plains in order to better understand how “altering the flow of energy, water, and momentum between land and atmosphere [...] for human needs has changed [the] climate.”¹³⁸

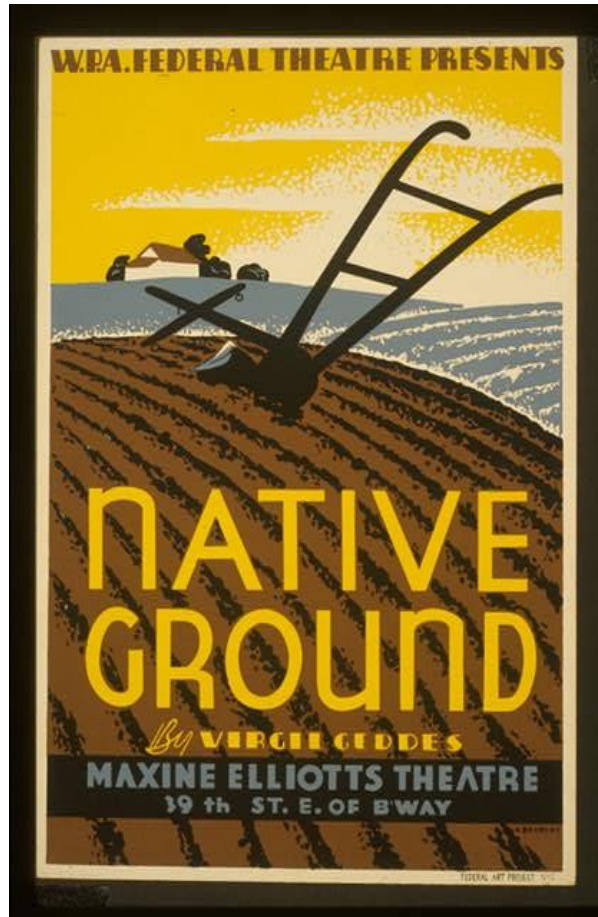


Illustration IV-VI: Native ground.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ See Gordon Bonan. “Frost Followed the Plow: Impacts of Deforestation on the Climate of the United States.” *Ecological Applications* 9.4 (1999) 1305-15. 1305. Web. Bonan’s study focuses on the climatological implications of the shift in the “natural forests of eastern United States and the natural grasslands of the Great Plains” to crops since the settlement of North America.

¹³⁹ W.P.A. Federal Theatre playbill, by Virgil Geddes/ DeColas, ca. 1936-39. Emanuel DeColas. Poster for Federal Theatre Project presentation of “Native Ground” at Maxine Elliott’s Theatre, 39th St. east of Broadway, New York City, showing a plow in field, farmhouse in the distance. LC-USZC2-5370. Library of Congress. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98516417/>.

The Plow that Broke the Plains was not the US government's only foray into the arts as a tool in representing the disaster on the Great Plains and the plight of farmers in the region. During four "turbulent and exhilarating years" the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), under the guise of Roosevelt's New Deal programs, attempted to provide "emotional and moral support for a struggling nation" often through the exploration of "national catastrophe" (Osborne 52, 49). Virgil Geddes' *Native Ground* was among the socially and politically motivated plays commissioned by the short-lived Federal Theatre Project (FTP).¹⁴⁰ Geddes, who was Director of the Experimental Theater wrote and produced a cycle of three plays, *Native Ground*, *Chalk Dust*, and *The Earth Between*. Like Cather, he had been born in Nebraska, and wrote from "native" experience. The play "attempted to raise to tragic proportions" the lives of those living on the Great Plains and fit with Geddes "maverick" notions of a socially "engaged" theatre that moved beyond pure art and aestheticism (Kazacoff 109, 110). However, even Geddes admitted that Nebraska and Dakota served as "backdrops" to the dramatization of a confused farmer whose "individualism" prevents him from making meaningful human relationships. For Geddes, the greatest problem in the American west was that it fostered an unbridled individualism that was in direct conflict with the national project, especially as it had come to be defined by under Roosevelt. The play was poorly received with critics arguing that the play was a "self-conscious" attempt to portray a people and region and was therefore both "derivative" and "inauthentic"

¹⁴⁰ See Angela Sweigart-Gallagher. *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project* for a thorough analysis of the exploration of regional concerns addressed by those .

(Kazacoff 110-11). Despite the play’s obvious failings, however, the image of the poster and playbill designed by Emanuel DeColas demonstrated the significance of the plow in establishing a visual rhetoric of the Great Plains and the human engagement with the land and place. The artistic representation foregrounds the stark image of the plow high above a deeply grooved brown earth. A single homestead takes up the background of a far off horizon. Not a single person is depicted. The position of the landscape’s rhetorical value is made clear in the image. Below a recent photo engages in the perennial nature of the human inscriptions on the land as it reproduces the iconic imagery of the plowed field.



Illustration IV-VII: Field of dreams, 2015.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Ashley Davis. “Community Joins Together to Help a Farmer in Need.” KWQC. 28 September 2015. Web. A photo taken by a drone shows 10 combines harvesting corn in Galva, Illinois. Friends and neighbors of terminally ill farmer Carl Bates came together, harvesting 450 acres in 10 hours. Rumbold & Kuhn, Pioneer, Yargher Machinery Sales, Roger Luft & Jason Bates. As the article gained national and international attention, some online readers responded

The importance of the plow to the cultivation of land in taming the American west and establishing a horizontal rhetorical vernacular is unmistakable. But because the “homesteads were few and far apart,” the “windmill gaunt against the sky,” proved an important rhetorical marker of belonging and human connection (Cather, *O Pioneers!* 8). And the manipulation of the wind through the invention and implementation of the windmill may prove even more emblematic of the triumphant spirit in marking the place of the American west. For even in Cather’s *My Ántonia*, the Shimerdas only became “fairly equipped to begin their struggle with the soil” after they had finished building a “comfortable” home and buying “a new windmill—*bought on credit*” (60, emphasis mine). So significant was the need to harness the wind for the fruitful production of the land, immigrant families could not begin to do the work of farming until they had properly suited themselves with a windmill. Even Alexandra, who often worked until she was “aching with fatigue” could not help herself but to listen with joy to the “windmill singing in the brisk breeze” (207 and 206). And just as the plow dug deep grooves onto the land and changed the horizontal plane, the windmill spun its mark into the skyline, breaching the empty vertical plane.

with messages of support and pride in their fellow Americans, describing the kind act as the “real America,” while others responded with anger, noting that “This isn’t 1880, Farmers are corporations, not families.”

Withering Under Western Winds

“At times the plains are bright and clam and quiet; at times they are black with the sudden violence of weather! Always there are winds.”
~N. Scott Momaday



Illustration IV-VIII: A Prairie Wind-Storm.¹⁴²

O Pioneers! opens on the land, but even before they can try to overcome the land, the pioneers had to survive the wind. Neither the cultivated crops, nor the human inhabitants could survive against the violent winds if the blustering currents could not be tamed. For even the homes, the bastion markers of human civilization, might at any moment be swept away by the “howling wind” that “blew under them as well as over them” (3). The tenuous nature of pioneering meant that at any moment, homes could be

¹⁴² Frank Johnson, engraver. Paul Frenzeny and Jules Tavernier. 1874. New York Public Library Picture Collection Online. Web. 15 August 2015. Originally published in *Harper’s Weekly, A Journal of Civilization*.

blown away, and with them the dreams and hopes and sorrows of those living there. Indeed, the homes themselves were “trying not to be blown away” by the incessantly-driving winds (3). And despite their valiant attempts, many of the small “dwelling-houses [...] looked as if they had been moved overnight” as they were repeatedly battered by the wind (3). The wind has power. It is a force that seems uncontrollable and it places the human project of taming the land at risk. The homes, the traditional symbol of domesticity, comfort, and durability, lacked “any appearance of permanence” (3). But while the wind proves variously menacing, inconvenient or useful in *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, it remains positioned somewhat in the background, on the fringes of the narratives that are more thoroughly devoted to the “the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching plowshare” (Cather *O Pioneers!* 47).

In contrast, the wind is never absent in Scarborough’s “experimental” western, *The Wind*.¹⁴³ The story follows the compelling character of an unyielding, unbearable wind. Scarborough’s western novel presented an exemplary and compelling character of an unyielding, unbearable wind. The novel was initially published anonymously over fears that it would be poorly received, particularly by those in West Texas. And it was. The novel was seen as a scathing critique and an indictment on the place and people as it failed to highlight the endurance and ingenuity that continues to fill the people of the region with pride. To be sure, the novel is bleak. Scarborough’s harsh depictions of the West Texas winds and their constancy reflected the grittiness of existence on the plains.

¹⁴³ Grider, Sylvia Ann. "Dorothy Scarborough." *Updating the Literary West*. Ed. Thomas J. Lyon, et al. Fort Worth: Texas Christian UP, 1997. 588-94. 593.

The novel also confronts the sometimes unfulfilled promise of the frontier, for the settlers in the text are neither triumphant, nor rewarded. Set in the late 1880s, during one of the worst droughts in American history, the wind is described as “the hardest thing a woman is up against,” and indeed the “violence” of the wind drives one woman to madness and murder.¹⁴⁴ The “tyranny” of the relentless, hard-driving wind described in Scarborough’s novel shaped the land and the people of west Texas, then and now, in much the same way that the “unfriendly” land of the Nebraska prairies of Cather’s texts shaped farming practices and farmers. The grittiness is reflected in the diaries and other accounts of tenuous settlement in these territories during the great migration west. Even today much of the west Texas landscape remains a “rural, agrarian region” with “wide stretches” of “dusty” range punctuated only by “oil pump jacks and towering wind turbines” placed there to harness what little there is that thrives there (Wright 151).

The West Texas wind was so prevalent a force that it became the object of western folklore, and even the subject of poems and songs.¹⁴⁵ Charles Masey Martin describes flags as “stiff as knives” in the “grip” of an “ill-tempered West Texas wind”

¹⁴⁴ Holdon argues that because “there were few people living in [the West Texas area] at the time, and no newspapers at all [...] the information concerning the conditions is limited,” prior to the terrible droughts of 1886, which is the period of Scarborough’s novel; and Dorothy Scarborough. *The Wind*. (1925) Foreword by Sylvia Ann Grider. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979. 194 and 295. All subsequent references are to this text.

¹⁴⁵ “Tall-Tale Purveyor.” *Western Folklore*, 6.3 (1947): 281. Includes the following: “Tall-Tale—Boyce House, Texas booster on the grand scale, receives special mention in Life magazine, March 17, 1947, pp. 6 ff. The braggadocio of the West still maintains a high average in Texas, and old tall-tale elements play no little part in this exaggeration.” Among the several examples is one that includes reference to the West Texas’ wind contribution to the people and to the ‘shape’ of the land with traditional folkloric humor and exaggeration. It further exemplifies and celebrates the ingenuity of the people of West Texas to make the best of the bitterest of circumstances. On the subject of “Postholes.” Gib drilled a well three thousand feet into a hill in West Texas. A terrific wind blew all the sand away, leaving the hole standing three thousand feet in the air. Gib cut the hole into four-foot lengths for postholes.

in a 1993 poem. The landscape has been altered, people come and go, but the wind remains. And though it has been much maligned, the wind is turning the drought-stricken prairies into an energy rich field—this is particularly true for Sweetwater, the setting of Scarborough’s novel, and may ultimately revive the land and people from their parched existence, at least temporarily.

The Wind “conveys [the] intense conflict” that marked the great risk associated with the pioneering project on the prairies. Literary scholars typically focus on the plight of the novel’s protagonist, eighteen-year-old orphan, Letitia (Letty) Mason, as she struggles to adjust to life after moving from Virginia to Texas (Grider 593). Her circumstances and journey are similar to those of *My Ántonia*’s Jim Burden and the many real-life pioneers, including both Cather and Scarborough. Feminist readings of the novel perceive the novel as a corrective along two important trajectories: (1) the patriarchal dominated narrative of nation building in which men demonstrate their mastery over the natural world; and (2) the predominantly masculine production of the western genre in literature, in which men confront and conquer the western wilderness only to find a new Garden of Eden. In highlighting Letty’s story, Slade calls the text “gynocentric” and argues that “Letty is the center of the novel; the subject is her defeat.”¹⁴⁶ While it is true that Wirt Roddy warns Letty that “[w]omen get lonesome” and their faces get “ruined” in west Texas, where surviving is a “man-sized job” not

¹⁴⁶ Slade 86. Slade is concerned that too much attention has been concentrated on the place of the story, an argument that seems overstated since so little has been written about the novel in general, and her only reference to writers with a concern over place refer back to Grider’s introduction of the novel—and critics in this sense really refer to newspaper reviews rather than literary critiques. Place has hardly been central to critical interventions in understanding the text.

easily accomplished even by the toughest and most rugged men, I do not entirely agree with the notion of feminine “defeat” as the subject of novel (Scarborough 22). Letty certainly does not find the strength that Cather’s Alexandra displays in taking over the family farm from her deceased father in *O Pioneers!* Unlike Alexandra, who “expresses herself best” in the soil—it is the site of her artistic expression—Letty shrinks from the “dirt” (Cather 84). Sherrie Innes points out that while *The Wind* clearly speaks against the triumphant male hero on the plains, the novel also disrupts “the myth of the heroic frontier woman” that “was in full blossom in the mid-nineteenth century” (25).

Letty never experiences anything but a sense of alienation from the dirt upon which she has been transplanted. *The Wind*’s dismal view and refusal to provide even a glimmer of hope has prompted some scholars to identify it as an “anti-western” as noted feminist literary scholar Susan Kollin argues in “Race, Labor, and the Gothic Western: Dispelling Frontier Myths in Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Wind*” (675). Although Kollin offers an important intervention on the western novel, I want to resist the label of anti-western, a term formerly reserved for texts and films coming after the 1960s. To attach such a label does things that I am not interested in doing here: first, I have come to love westerns—all of them—the good, the bad, the ugly, the well-written, and the dime novels, too. I think each of them tells an important part of the American western narrative. And like Kollin, I believe it is important to “continue carefully assessing and evaluating the political burdens placed on western spaces in national discourse” and as such I want to position it within rather outside of that dialogue (*Postwestern* x).

The western genres continue to have value in the discourse on American identity and only through critical understanding of their significance to current American culture can Americans begin to reconstruct a new significance, which is what many feminist theorists have already begun to take under consideration in their efforts to reinsert women into the narrative history of the American west.¹⁴⁷ This is true even for those who have lived their lives primarily in the Eastern United States and use the Western United States as their foil. Secondly, if we accept traditional definitions of the genre of the American western, it would exclude all women, and nearly all minorities, from participating: they would all necessarily write anti-westerns since their writing rarely centers on heroic white men succeeding in the west. Excluding all of these other authors is a highly problematic proposition since their exclusion is one of the central concerns of this project precisely because their historical exclusion has led to an incomplete and often false record of experience on the American western frontier. Women writers whose westerns do not fit the traditional tropes are westerns from another, no-less valuable standpoint.

¹⁴⁷ See Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books), 2007; Nina Baym. *Feminism & American Literary History*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press), 1992, and *Women Writers of the American west, 1833-1927*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2011; and, Annette Kolodny. *Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* and *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. (University of North Carolina Press), 1984.



Illustration IV-IX: Western Pioneer Women.¹⁴⁸

The inclusion of non-traditional writers and their stories holds the promise of a corrective that might demystify the American west. Scarborough's western story provides a less optimistic rendering than either Cather's or Kirkland's. But as a writer, her narrative goal is perhaps more closely aligned with Kirkland. Kirkland, whose narratives "made the west available for literary treatment of women," was not interested in duplicating the fantasy of western experience that had been sketched out by male writers (Kolodny, *The Land* 157). Kirkland believed she bore a responsibility to "alert prospective female emigrants to the enormity of the changes" they would face on their westward journey, and to "ameliorate" the "dangerous delusions" that male western

¹⁴⁸ Photograph, n.d.; (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph44477/> : accessed February 28, 2015), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>

writers “who wrote so exuberantly about the West” had created (Kolodny, *The Land* 134 and Myres 21). These men often were mere “tourists rather than settlers” and thus faced no significant threat to the carefully constructed ideals they embraced and held most sacrosanct (Myres 21). Furthermore, Kirkland’s novel, in an anti-Turnerian move, resisted the positive narrative of the frontier as a new democratic space, and instead showed that the prejudices exemplified in the eastern states had migrated westward with the new inhabitants.¹⁴⁹

The Wind does, as Kollin suggests “intervene” on the standard trope of “heroic triumph” and disrupts the “confidence of the national narrative” of manifest destiny; however, it is important to recognize both the nuances in the novel that disrupt binary gendered readings and that the intervention is not entirely successful and does not track along exclusively gendered nor generic lines (676). Letty heads toward the Texas prairie with a mixture of fear and excitement, but the Texas frontier did not turn out to be the “extended family” of Mary Austin Holley’s vision (Kolodny, *The Land* 111). Yet it is important to affirm that Letty is not the only victim of the wind and the harsh existence on the west Texas prairie. Nor were women the only victims in the great migration west. And while Letty’s seeming obsession with the wind might be read as a simple description of a woman’s descent into crippling madness, Letty’s awareness of the elements and their implications is not out of step with the way that women emigrating to the American west engaged with the natural world. Many diaries left by

¹⁴⁹ See Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, Chapter 7 for a full treatment of Kirkland’s wilderness novel 131-58.

women traveling across the plains and western trails were filled with references to the material implications of nature. Sarah Smith's diary from 1838 demonstrates how much the blustering winds could impede travel. After going only twenty-five miles up the Platte River, she writes that it "had been a wind day" and that it had "fatigued" all the travelers (77). The fatigue she and the others felt took precedence over the "war Indians" the group spotted. Sarah Herndon's diaries reflect an ongoing preoccupation with the elements that not only impeded their progress, but posed a great threat to the safety of those emigrating to the west. In an August 1865 entry, she and her party suffer from a wind that was "blowing as cold as Greenland," and she writes that she suspects the group "will have to go to bed to keep from freezing" even though it was not yet evening (188). Herndon expresses her real fear of the wind and the damage it can do to her and the other vulnerable members of her party.

Many of Ruth Shackelford's diary entries made during her journey to the west began and ended with descriptions of the weather, particularly the elements that made the journey more challenging and imposed hardships they found difficult to endure and, in some cases, life-threatening. During her days near El Paso, she wrote, of a remarkable "wind storm" that buffeted her party "about sundown" (183). The following day the group had suffered "quite a wind and rain storm" (184). Trepidation and fear were ever present during this period and while many early pioneers "won out over the environment, forcing it to allow their habitation, others succumbed to it, going home, going mad, dying" (Underwood 52). Ultimately, Letty goes mad and dies, but her failure is that she never learns to sink "into the season," to become "a part of it" as

Mabel Dodge Luhan, a native New Yorker who moved to Taos pronounces is a necessity for learning to live in the American west. Luhan describes often forgetting to “sink into the season” and having to remind herself to live with the land rather than fighting it. “Only in resistance there is melancholy and a sort of panic” (102). Luhan recognizes her own fragility and her own futile objections to the elements that produced only sorrow. Acceptance of the material agents of place, including changing seasons that alter both the visual rhetoric and material engagement in place, allows Luhan to interact in a more meaningful and appropriate way. But Letty does not have the strength characterized by those from the area, who learned to appreciate rather than resist it, and she spends the entirety of the novel in a sort of panic that began to set in even before she arrived.

As Letty rides the train nearer to her destination, she laments the “path to the West.” Rather than being filled with excitement and anticipation, she sees a “trail of broken bodies, its threats of storms and unknown perils, its winds” (32). The bodies here are not gendered, and indeed some are not even human. Letty is nearly brought to tears by the number of cattle carcasses she sees lining the rails en route to her new west Texas home and finds it “perfectly terrible” that the trains keep going after hitting the “poor creatures” (30). Sophia Hardy Goodridge, like Letty and many other women traveling westward, made extensive references to weather and to the lives lost along the route, both human and non-human. In her July 15, 1850 diary entry, Goodridge documented the arrival at Fort Childs, which was followed by a terrible thunderstorm in which one of the party, William Ridge, “was struck by lightning and instantly killed”

(217). Goodridge also notes that “three of his cattle were killed at the same time.” She places no greater emphasis on William’s death than she does on the cattle. Lucena Parsons diary entries also keep careful track of the number of “lame cattle” alongside the number of [human] graves she “passt” each day as the group moved westward [sic] . Boundaries between animals and humans were not imagined as rigidly distinct, at least among many of the women moving across the prairies, and sickness and death among animals and humans were yoked together.

Shackleford’s diary also carefully documented “the not very pleasant” part of her journey through El Paso, Texas in 1868 when every “now and again [the group] would pass a pile of dead cattle seven or eight in a pile” and was relieved when they found only 300 dead cattle rather than the 3,000 that they had expected as they went up the canyon through the river (192). While the diary entries tend to chronicle the number of dead, human and not, they do not mimic the sentimental literature of the nineteenth century. Letty is not a mere chronicler of the dead. She finds the cattle deaths due to the new technology abhorrent and does not understand the callousness with which the animals in the west are treated. Roddy, a successful west Texas rancher and businessman, does not embrace Letty’s sentimental attachment to the animals, and instead takes the economic stance often associated with the masculine engagement with animals and places. He reminds her as a matter of fact that the thin animals “aren’t worth much a head” anyway and therefore were no real “loss” (30). The progress the trains provided to the people of the area was of much greater value than the paltry sum the cattle might bring. “Too bad, but it can’t be helped” (30).



Illustration IV-X: Laying Tracks.¹⁵⁰

Highlighting the confluence of Letty's domestic sensibilities, and the “quintessentially western values of rugged individualism,” John C. Orr argues the text intersects at the traditional western and the traditional domestic tale, incorporating and disrupting important generic functions of each.¹⁵¹ Rather than reading the text as gynocentric, Orr demonstrates that Scarborough “negotiates a place between the masculine mythos of the Western and the feminine sphere of the domestic novel that allows her to critique the essentialist gender identity of each” (108). In this view *The Wind* is neither anti-western nor anti-domestic. Indeed part of what is absolutely

¹⁵⁰ National Archives. Photographs of the American west: 1862-1912. 92-F-79B-21. Web. <http://www.archives.gov/>.

¹⁵¹ Richard B. Wright. *West Texas: A History of the Giant Side of the State*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014). 166.

maddening to Letty is the inadequacy of her attempts to perform domestic duties once she marries and her “youth” abruptly ends. She is unprepared for married life and ill-equipped to perform domestic duties in the west, despite her desire to fulfill what she identifies as her role. She finds herself “appalled” at the “intrusions” and “intimacies of married life” (180, 187). Although she feels as if she is in a “dreadful dream” she is determined “to learn” (188). She puts up wallpaper to cover the holes of the small cabin, sweeps often, and keeps the cookery covered, “but even so, despite all her efforts, they ate sand with every mouthful of food they tasted” because the wind brought in “such piles” of sand that she could not keep it “swept out” of the room (198). Letty’s experiences were not very different from those of other female settlers, who described their lives on the frontier as unappealing, exhausting, and dirty. Nanny Alderson, a pioneer woman who moved west from West Virginia to Montana recalled going past terrible looking homes as she journeyed with her enthusiastic, if too honest husband. As she saw the homes, she writes that they “looked primitive and uninviting enough to be the habitations of Indians, or of animals, and my heart sank lower and lower as I saw them” (26). She finally “screwed up the courage” to ask her if their home would be as bad as the ones they were passing. His response provided no comfort. “Worse,” he told her. “Ours is as unattractive as a shack can be” (Alderson 26). As she writes in her autobiography, *A Bride Goes West*, her husband was not merely teasing. But as ugly as the place was, nothing was worse than the level of dirt. She writes that “there was no canvas spread in the kitchen, and the dust just couldn’t be kept down though I sprinkled it, and swept it, and even scooped it up with a shovel” (Alderson 42).

Like Letty, Alderson spent a great deal of her time attempting to reproduce the domestic patterns of her eastern upbringing, but to no avail. Alexandra, on the other hand, never minded that her house remained “curiously unfinished and uneven in comfort” and she rarely concerns herself with the domestic chores associated with women (*O Pioneers!* 83). She kept her home as tidy as possible and set out domestic signs because she knew her “guests like to see about them these reassuring emblems of prosperity” (*O Pioneers!* 98). Although Letty attempts to transport the eastern US domestic sensibility in her frontier home, she clearly fails to claim the West Texas frontier as a “sanctuary for an idealized domesticity” (Kolodny, *The Land* xii). Domesticity in the frontier of Scarborough’s text does not prevail against the unrelenting wind. But if *The Wind*, which clearly represents pioneer experiences related to the westward expansion of the nineteenth century, isn’t domestic or anti-domestic and it isn’t a western or an anti-western, what exactly is it? And why is it so difficult to “fix” a reading of what is not an altogether complicated text, particularly in terms of plot and structure?

The Wind is characterized by its ‘westernness’ not merely in setting, but also in topic and iconic imagery. But it is also an exemplary piece of naturalist regional literature of the plains of west Texas that rivals the writing of both Kirkland and Cather, even if it does not ultimately conclude with the same sense of optimism.¹⁵² This is not a

¹⁵² For this assertion I am using what is now considered a fairly ‘ancient’ definition, but one that aptly describes Scarborough’s text. “A closer definition of regionalism would require the work of art not only to be nominally located in the region but also to derive actual substance from that location. This substance will be derived from two sources. In the first place, it will come from the natural background -the climate, topography, flora, fauna, etc.—as it affects human life in the region. In the second place, it will come from the particular modes of human society which

very exciting or revolutionary assessment, but much of the scholarship about Scarborough's novel does a great deal to avoid calling it such. Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse argue that regionalism has often been "burdened" by its reputation as a co-conspirator of local color fiction and it has also been "overshadowed" by writers, mostly men, of other genres (4). But regionalist writings become "the site of a dialogical critical conversation" (Fetterley and Pryse 4). And even male writers of the period, who did not write from a particular geographic location demonstrated what Millicent Bell calls "the conviction that human events grow out of the soil of a particular time, place, race"; and of course, I would argue gender as well (470). And while the text is not as rich as Cather's *O Pioneers!*, *Song of the Lark*, or *My Ántonia*, it demonstrates the hardship of pioneer life and illuminates the hazards, not merely the rewards.

Orr approaches the most significant regionalist interpretation of Scarborough's novel. Picking up on Kolodny's groundbreaking work, he notes that her text, much as Cather's had, offers a significant departure from masculine identifications of American wilderness landscapes, particularly those in the American west, as virginal sites open and waiting. Orr also credits Scarborough with providing something other than a mere contrivance of a domestic tale told in an unusual place. He writes that "instead of garden or virgin land," which often performed as the backdrop to masculine tales of conquest and heroism, "the environment is forbidding and hostile" (113). Letty does not

happen to have been established in the region and to have made it distinctive" (371). George R. Steward. "The Regional Approach to Literature." *College English*, 9.7 (1948): 370-75.

find transposed onto the west Texas landscape the “strong and generous parent” of her Eastern homeland as Eliza Farnham’s narrator described in her 1846 *Life in the Prairie Land*. Instead, the west Texas landscape continually fails to deliver the nurturing that Letty fondly recalls having in the natural world of her Virginia home.¹⁵³ She recalls with sadness and longing the “friendly woods” and seems lost without the “healing comfort” of “quiet valleys” and “still peace and loveliness” (105). Letty’s sadness and longing and sense of displacement serves as a response to Alexandra who “never indulged in sentimental reveries” (*O Pioneers!* 205). Instead, Letty is confronted again and again by the “icy wind” that seemed always to be “lying in wait” (105). Like Slade, and even Grider, who acknowledges that the “wind itself is a main character in the book,” Orr argues that the wind merely stands in by-proxy for masculine forces that can crush women and prevent them from telling their own stories (Grider v).

The wind is described as a supernatural “demon set upon Letty’s destruction, driving her toward one of the most startling conclusions in the literature of the west” (Grider v). These scholars often quote the narrator’s description of the wind as “a wild stallion” and a “demon lover,” which provides evidence of a masculine destructive force bent on subduing Letty (Scarborough 3 and 4). A “demon lover” and a “wild stallion,” are certainly aligned with the masculine forces at large that were regularly employed in domestic fiction, but the next lines are no less important and they complicate a direct link between the wind and patriarchal or masculine authority. While

¹⁵³ Although Letty certainly does not have this view of the West Texas prairie, her lengthy daydreams about the place of her childhood, Virginia, are reminiscent of the ‘garden’ view of the natural environment whose “friendly woods” had long provided “refuge” and “healing comfort” 105.

the wind is described like these masculine forces, its ability to impose itself on humans is “to be feared *more than man*” (Scarborough 4, emphasis mine). The narrator here does not address women alone, but her male readers as well and they are critically important, even if they are often glossed over. I wish to pick up on the narrative and symbolic importance of these often overlooked lines. I want to “place” the wind as central to the to understanding the novel, not merely as a metaphor for the masculine, but as an agent of its own that imposed itself and shaped the people and the land of west Texas. In doing so, this project explores the ways in which Scarborough adopts the regionalist mode of focusing “on the relationship between the natural world and human consciousness” in *The Wind* in a way that “critically foregrounds the issue of agency, rather than taking it for granted” (Fetterley and Pryse 2, 4 and Nash 68). Scarborough adopts a narrative stance taken up by Cather, whose narrator describes the land as not a purely inert pile of unimportant matter, but instead as a complex entity teeming with potency. In *O Pioneers!* Carl’s mouth had “become bitter” not from the failure of romance, but “from facing [the] vast hardness” of the land (Cather 8). The youth felt certain “that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness” (Cather 8). Cather’s pivotal text, which is often identified as one of the best American western novels, tempers the optimism of western expansion. In the text, the land has agency, and human success is not a guaranteed right. Alexandra declares that people “come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it—for a little while”

(Cather 158). Indeed there is much despair in *O Pioneers!* despite ending on a rather happier note than *The Wind*. The greatest difference between Alexandra and Letty is fear. At the end of *O Pioneers!* Alexandra hasn't "any fears," while Letty is consumed by them.



Illustration IV-XI: Cimarron County, Oklahoma.¹⁵⁴

Scarborough, like Cather, recognizes the impact of natural forces on those moving west and wrote about the pushing of those forces on people. Scarborough's text begins at a historical moment just before those in west Texas began to harness the force of the wind into a useful tool for their survival. Focusing on the same natural force as

¹⁵⁴ Severe wind erosion made this farm uninhabitable. Arthur Rothstein. LC-USF34-004101-E. Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998019013/PP/>. Cropped.

Scarborough does, allows us to see beyond Letty to the other characters, both women and men, and even the animals as also being subject to the agency of natural forces, particularly the wind, and its tool, sand. To do so, I wish to move Letty and all other human characters to the periphery for the time being, just as Scarborough did in the first pages of her novel.

Just as *O Pioneers!* begins with the land, *The Wind* opens and closes with the wind. It doesn't open or close with the story of Letty. It opens with the story of the wind and it closes with the wind and "the woman" (1, 331). Scarborough's choices here are narratively significant. The text begins with what I think is one of the most powerful opening declarative sentences in American literature: "The wind was the cause of it all" (1). The wind has a "will" and can press people into action or submission. A full and frightening description is offered in the introductory pages of the novel, not merely as an aside that might give way to more important characters, or as mere background that emerges as a proving ground, but as an agent in the human drama itself.

And it is important to remember that, as an agent, it not only condemns Letty and Gran'ma, an elder pioneer stateswoman, who recalls for the younger woman "the winds that had harassed her" in her youth, but many of the male characters as well (194). Scarborough devotes the first four pages of the text to a lengthy description of the wind, which continues to blow "in blinding fury" through much of the novel (1). And as if to stave off those who might not believe in the agency of the wind, or that it might indeed be the cause of it all, Scarborough's narrator addresses the readers directly and warns against such human penchant for discrediting the acts of nature, particularly in

this place: “perhaps you do not understand the winds of West Texas” she warns (1). Furthermore, the narrator, anticipating the cynicism of a modern reader, or what Val Plumwood identifies as “nature skepticism,” advises readers that “even if you knew them as they are now, that would mean little” in comprehending what they had once been like (Plumwood 119 and Scarborough 1). Here Scarborough seems to anticipate a readership already adjusted to the tamed winds that were employed in the service of drawing water. The narrator admits the changing world, writing that humans had “encroached on the domain of the winds, and gradually, very gradually, is conquering them” (2). And in conquering the wind, humans have changed the visual field as well.

Even so, Scarborough was confident of her novel’s commercial success not because it offered a counter narrative of pioneer experience, but because it offered a “genuine” depiction of life on the plains (Grider “Forward” vi). And the reality was that many early settlers of the plains were underprepared for the frequent, and often unexpected “types of destructive winds, including cyclones, tornadoes, and northers” that threatened the “lives and property of pioneers on unprotected Texas ranges” (Slade 86). The wind and the sand it moved was a reality of existence that left “a coat” of “impartial yellow grayness” in prairie homes, shifted the lands so that it became “an arid waste,” and even made the cattle “thin” with the resultant lack of water and grazing (99, 67). Throughout the novel the two bachelor cowboys who fight for Letty’s affections are employed in the task of moving their cattle from one small water hole to the next as each dries up in turn because they did not yet have windmills to aid in refreshing their cattle.



Illustration IV-XII: Hereford steers in feedlot on Tom Reed farm.¹⁵⁵

But Scarborough writes of the time before the windmills, and her narrator describes a time when the “winds were wild and free, and they were more powerful than human beings” (2). These are the winds of *O Pioneers!* where “the howling of the wind” had the power to blot out the sounds associated with human inhabitants (18). Throughout *The Wind*, however, the wind possesses an even more potent form of menacing agency and is described as “a demoniac wind lying in wait to torment its victims” (105). It is possible to see only female victims, especially when Letty wonders

¹⁵⁵ Marion Post Wolcott. “They are fattened and ready for market. Mr. Reed said that all of the trees in the background had been planted by farmers and ranchers not very long ago as wind breakers. His mother told him that when his father first brought her there from Iowa she used to stand at the window and cry when she looked across the plains and saw the train going back east. That was about six or eight miles away, but now you can only see a mile or two. He has seventy head of cattle in feedlot and 250 head on grass.” LC-USF34-059636-D. Library of Congress Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000040319/PP/>.

if the wind hated women in particular “because they saw in them the symbols of that civilization which might gradually lessen their own power,” but because narratives of the American west traditionally demonstrated that men were immune to these powers, it is important to remember that women are not the only victims (3). In a strange, but subtle way, this relationship between women and the wind seems to give both a great deal of agency and power in the place of the prairies: it is a contest of wills to determine who will rule. Women and the wind are engaged in a bitter battle over which will eventually drive the other out of the landscape. The “winds were the enemies of women” and were “cruel” to them in all seasons “trying to wear them down” and “drive them away” (3). And the dominance of men appears to be part of the epic struggle. The male characters in the *The Wind*, as in *O Pioneers!*, at times seem to be mere backdrop figures who are pressed into submission—either by the will of the women or the wind.

This submission seems especially true for Beverly, Letty’s cousin, who married Cora after “she set eyes on him” (123). Beverly had made his mind up to move to Texas after suffering a lung “hemorrhage” in his beloved Virginia home (72). He struggled desperately to make a go of it until “he was blue, and sick, and discouraged” (123). Indeed, Beverly was ready to succumb to the wind and “give up and go back to Virginia to die” before Cora determined that he should stay (123). Cora dominated Bev as she dominated her home. Cora reminisces that Beverly “didn’t know what he wanted, but [she] knew darn well what [she] wanted” and so the two had been married and he had stayed in west Texas to raise their children and their cattle. The marriage had “meant a spiritual [smothering]” of Bev, because Cora could not stand talk of his Virginia past

(105, 93). Cora's "overpowering personality," which Letty describes as "a battering ram of beauty and sex and self-assertiveness," aimed at anyone in her presence (94). But as challenging a woman as Cora is, she does not measure up to the punishment of the wind. Letty notices immediately that the wind had not been kind to her cousin Bev in the intervening years. When Letty encounters him later, he no longer has the lively expression or handsome countenance she remembered and admired. She describes him as looking "older—older" than his years after having spent the previous twelve in the "sand desert" being "tormented by the wind" whose "cold chilled" and "violence battered" and "bruised" the "body and mind" (74, 170). The wind took its toll on all but the hardiest dwellers.

Lige Hightower and Sourdough, two bachelors who live in a meager shack built on their shared property line, suffer even greater abuse meted out by the harsh winds. The two men provide the vernacular dialect typical of regional literatures, using terms like "bobashillies," a southwest interpretation of a Choctaw word meaning "friend," "leettle" instead of little, and "cayuse," a slang term for a poor quality horse (40, 46, 52). Sourdough is a caricature: he wears garish, colorful clothing often purchased from a "Mexicano," and tells jokes and long winded stories. Nonetheless, Lige and Sourdough also serve as models of the so-called independent cowboy that arose from the masculine initiated movement west. Lige tells Letty that he "is more of a man when [he] is out on the plains" (53). Unlike Roddy, who warned Letty of the hardships on the land, Lige remains optimistic about Letty's ability to embrace her new western home and its customs. Like Wirt, Lige dismisses Letty's sentimentality toward the other creatures on

the plains. As they travel by horse, Letty spots a herd of antelope and admires them. Lige agrees that “they’re right pretty,” but is happier that “they make good eatin’, too.” When Letty expresses her repulsion at the idea, he dismisses her as “tender-hearted,” and tells her that “Lots o’ girls out here have their rifles and shoot game as good as the men” (66). Scarborough here joins Kirkland in criticizing the western masculine desire to translate nature into commodities, without appreciating the beauty. Lige is incapable of appreciating animals except as they might benefit him and he hopes to convert Letty, who he fantasizes might become just like these other women hunters given time. And she might learn that the open range “makes you feel you own the universe,” he shares happily (55). But despite his apparent freedom, the novel exposes the hardships that even the men in the west endured. Sourdough and Lige are hardly successful ranchers. They struggle to maintain their cattle and are literally “dirt poor” and on the verge of losing the few head of thin cattle they have. They take turns around the clock to stay with and move the cattle from one dry patch to another. The seeming uselessness of the effort recalls John Bergson in *O Pioneers!*, who in eleven years “had made but little impression upon the wild land that he had come to tame” (Cather 11). And after his death, the Bergson family “prospered” only briefly before being driven to “the brink of despair” (26). In *The Wind*, Lige and Sourdough are up against the wild wind and the wild sands and a desperate loneliness almost too unbearable to stand.

Both Lige and Sourdough pursue Letty, her being the only single woman around. Letty eventually marries Lige, a tired, unsuccessful but hardworking rancher, who “wasn’t handsome” and “never could be” (111) merely because “she was afraid of

the wind!” (179) and he had ridden ten miles through it to rescue her. Letty had refused his previous offer of marriage, telling him quite frankly that she was not in love with him and could not marry him (147), and had “even on the night of the storm, before her surrender,” reminded him “that she didn’t love him” (187). But Lige, who is surprised and angry when for the third time she declares she “didn’t love” him, abandons her to another terrible, raging wind. Lige, stunned and humiliated to “learn” of her lack of feelings flees their home to go drinking and leaves her frightened, alone, and vulnerable (285). Just as Lige had rescued her when she had been left alone during the previous wind storm, Wirt comes to the rescue during her final abandonment. Wirt, a handsome, successful west Texas rancher, was the first to declare that the “wind was the worst thing about [...] life [...] on the plains!” (106). Although Letty often believed that Wirt had put the fear of the wind in her mind, she nonetheless takes him as her lover before killing him and trying to bury him in the sand.

Scarborough’s novel ends in death, bitter disappointment, and ultimately Letty’s madness as she runs out into the wind “like a leaf blown in a gale” presumably to meet her own demise. The novel demonstrates the regionalist exemplification of “the close emphasis on nature [...] that] has more than a descriptive function, [and] is a reminder of the immemorial linkage with all life” (Bell 473). Humans do not stand outside of natural forces and despite attempts to control and conquer, humans are also the subject of these forces and demonstrate the potential problems with what Plumwood identifies as “over-estimating human control and agency” over the natural world.

Harnessing the Wind

*“Father, out back, near your grave,
The windmill throbs,
a sawed-off airplane that never leaves.
Most days I just sit
at the table & watch it –
that, & the wind
going field to field grazing on dust”
~Lawrence Kearney*



Illustration IV-XIII: Welcome to Sweetwater, Texas.¹⁵⁶

Letty did not underestimate the wind, nor did she over estimate her ability to control it. She lamented that “Nobody could kill the wind” (333). Letty’s understanding of natural agency echoes many of those fighting to tame the land in *O Pioneers!* John Bergson, for instance, describes the land as “an enigma” that humans do not know how to “break” (21-22). And even Alexandra, who kept her promise to her dying father not to “lose the land” recognizes the agency of the land (26). When Carl Linstrum returns to the farm land in Nebraska and asks Alexandra how she had made the barren land productive, she responds that “the land did it” (116). Scarborough and Cather recognize

¹⁵⁶ A sign of the times. A wind turbine arm has become the iconic image of Sweetwater, Texas. From the Sweetwater Chamber of Congress. <http://sweetwatertexas.org/>.

a mutuality in the human experience in place. Poor soils and heavy winds certainly contributed to the discomfort and even the deaths of pioneers and their livestock during the great migration to the west. But efforts to harness its relentless force had begun quickly. Scarborough's narrator, in those important but often overlooked opening pages, joins the "spirit" of the western novel and the spirit of manifest destiny in the westward expansion as she writes that the civilizing forces "changed" the winds and "tamed" them. Like the "wild horses that roamed the prairies," the wind had been harnessed and controlled by hardy and persistent pioneers (1-2). For Scarborough, who had grown up in the setting of her novel, understood how important the wind had been, and how important it continued to be in reshaping the landscape and the people. Indeed the ability to tether the wind in order to extract water, a far more precious and scarce resource, ensured the success of many settlers in West Texas and has guaranteed the future survival of humans and their livestock on the plains—at least for now.

In the United States, Daniel Halladay is credited with the first manufacture of windmills in 1854, according to Terry Jordan (81). And it "promised" to help west Texas ranchers convert their dry and dusty lands, which held no promise of life, into a "paradise."¹⁵⁷ Many bet their lives on that promise, and between 1850 and 1970, more than six million mechanical windmills were installed in the United States.¹⁵⁸ The wind and the human ability to manipulate it to a particular purpose significantly changed the landscape of west Texas. Scarborough's narrator foregrounds the changing world,

¹⁵⁷ Texas Almanac, 1870 (Galveston: The News, 1869), 154.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.thirdplanetwind.com/energy/history.aspx>

writing that pioneers have “encroached on the domain of the winds, and gradually, very gradually, is conquering them” (2). And in doing so, changing the visual field of the landscape as well. For while Letty lamented seeing “everywhere sand, in wind-blown waves stretching out like a vast sea, and dead grass bent over in the wind like the curling foam of the waves,” the architectural feature of the windmill transformed the landscape into something far more appealing (53). The coming of the windmill was both a useful technological tool and a comfort to those on the prairie. The windmill provided a marker of human settlement that could be seen from a distance, finally abating the “most depressing and disheartening” feeling that early settlers experienced at “the absence of human landmarks” on the prairie (*O Pioneers!* 19). Windmills became a highly romanticized feature that harkened, for many, the lush wilderness forests that they had left behind. “From a distance, the settlements on the barren plains often appeared as a forest of wooden towers and whirling wheels,” according to Jordan (83). Even into the middle of the twentieth century the windmill remained “one of the most prominent objects seen in the country side of west Texas—a vertical aspect of an otherwise horizontal landscape,” and with the construction of each new vertical monument to the power of the wind, the slow and steady capturing of the land and wind progressed (80).

Jordan credits the windmill, along with barbed wire which was introduced concomitantly with the windmill on the plains, with “a dominant role in the economy” (80). After all Texas created the greatest demand for windmills during the period, and thus created an entire industry around building and maintaining them. But the windmills

were not always popular as “many farmers and ranchers complained” about the noise, especially as they moved from wood to steel” (83). Jordan, writing for the *Agricultural History Journal*, noted that the passing of an era was already underway at the time of his writing in 1963. Electricity was taking over. He wrote that “The trend at present, then, seems to indicate that eventually the windmill will disappear from the Texas landscape, to take its place in museums alongside other obsolete mementos of the settling and development of the West” (85). Despite his predictions, the windmill has hardly vanished from the west Texas landscapes, and indeed has experienced an incredible resurgence.

Jordan was clearly more than a mere documenter of the windmill, for in mourning its passing, which he described as a “pity,” he argued that “never has man invented a machine that is in more beautiful harmony with the physical environment than is the windmill in western Texas” (85). I can’t help but wonder if Jordan would be as poetic about the rebirth of the windmill more than fifty years after he offered his fond farewell, for certainly as the images below demonstrate, the modern wind farm does appear to be a “forest” of “whirling wheels,” but they have all but completely severed their connections with the farms, farmers, and local concerns.

Today, Texas, largely due to the constancy of the driving winds that plagued Letty and the other inhabitants of Sweetwater in the nineteenth century, has become one of the largest producers of wind energy in the US.¹⁵⁹ In 2013, Texas generated enough wind energy to power more than 3.3 million homes, which is more than double that of

¹⁵⁹ www.awea.org/Issues/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=5806&RDtoken=22166&userID

Iowa, the next highest wind energy producer.¹⁶⁰ And in March of 2014 the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) reported a record daily output. And, in the past five years the capacity grew 140 percent, while output increased by 200 percent in the US.¹⁶¹ Despite these impressive figures and the increasing number of wind turbines, wind energy provides a mere 2 percent of the total consumption of energy across the US and it is projected that it will only increase to 20 percent by 2030.¹⁶² These figures certainly do not match the optimism that Paul Gipe had when he heralded the coming of age of wind energy in 1993 and declared that “wind power plants [had] joined the ranks of conventional energy resources.”¹⁶³



Illustration IV-XIV: Wind farm near Snyder in Scurry County in west-central Texas.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Dennis Y.C. Leung, Yuan Yang. “Wind energy development and its environmental impact: A review.” *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 16 (2012): 1031– 1039, 1032, 1033

¹⁶³ Paul Gipe. “The Wind Industry’s Experience with Aesthetic Criticism.” *Leonardo*, 26.3 (1993): 243-248.

¹⁶⁴ Carol Highsmith. *The Lyda Hill Texas Collection of Photographs* in Carol M. Highsmith’s America Project, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division LC-DIG-highsm- 29810 Library of Congress. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2015630047/>

Like Gipe, however, energy producers have continued to offer a very optimistic view of the impact of wind turbines on the future of energy. Wind energy is touted as an environmentally responsible and economically viable energy source of the future, but reducing dependence on rapidly diminishing fossil fuel resources and highly volatile and dangerous nuclear energy sources will require “more powerful and larger-scale wind turbines” than those currently in use around the world” (Leung and Yang 1034). In order to successfully and economically collect wind energy, turbines need to be placed in areas with a minimum average wind speed of 11 miles per hour, making the west Texas land prime ground for additional wind farms since the “force of the wind’s will” there has been captured, but not quieted (Scarborough 207). But despite industry calls for more opportunities to increase wind-turbine fields, the “environmental impact [...] on humans and non-humans have not been studied” thoroughly or sufficiently (Leung and Yang 1036). While no long-term studies have yet been completed on the impact of wind turbines on cattle and humans, preliminary reports indicate that there are no substantial harmful effects. A modest study commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and Massachusetts Department of Public Health in 2012 released findings in a meager nine-page report.¹⁶⁵ Study authors noted that “finding scientifically documented connections between health impacts and [wind turbine] operations is almost an impossible task - not because such health impacts are non-existent, but rather because scientifically sound studies on this subject are sparse (2). Furthermore, they found that there was very little literature to review for impacts.

¹⁶⁵ http://docs.wind-watch.org/MassDEP-wind-health-2-Alves_Pereira.pdf

“Peer-reviewed studies investigating the impact on human health of WT noise exposure practically do not exist (4). And while the lead researcher concluded that the “authorities who requested this Report (MassDEP and MDPH) will most likely not find it very useful if their priority is the health of populations living near WT,” that has not kept the industry’s largest organization from using the results to support their claims that turbine fields are harmless to humans (9). Humans living near wind turbines have complained about the noise and more and more grassroots campaigns are being launched by those who believe their lives are being negatively impacted by these “steel woodland” areas either because they create visual and noise pollution, or because they dramatically impact the value of their property.

Although the impact on humans and other ground animals has not been fully documented, the turbines, like the trains that indiscriminately rammed into roaming cows during westward expansion, are “heartless things!” that lead to animal deaths (Scarborough 41). Turbine industry leaders claim proudly that that only “about 2.8 birds per wind-powered megawatt are lost annually as a result of US wind energy generation.” This figure, which they identify as “modest” seems minimal but is misleading since it means that about “200,000 birds per year” are killed by wind turbines, according to their own data.¹⁶⁶ These 2007 figures are woefully out of date. Significant additions to wind power in the intervening years will surely mean the increase in these figures. The consequences to human and non-human animals living in

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.awea.org/Issues/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=856>

proximity to windfarms will become clearer as more studies are conducted, but the far-reaching effects are already becoming more apparent.

The climate itself may be at stake, according to the National Science Foundation, which found that ground temperatures have increased near the windfarms in West Texas. The study co-authored by Anjuli Banzai, program director in the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Division of Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences, discovered a “persistent upward trend” in land temperatures during the study period of 2003-2011.¹⁶⁷ The increase is likely related to the increasing “number of operational wind turbines” during the study period.¹⁶⁸ The findings are particularly troubling since windfarms have been employed as an antidote to the overreliance on fossil fuels, which have been linked to global warming and climate change.

Others are concerned about how the language of energy capture reifies human dominance and ignores other forms of agency. Val Plumwood calls on scholars, scientists, and those that control technology “to observe and value nature's creativity and services,” and to resist the urge to exaggerate “the potential for control of natural systems and processes, denying the need for negotiation with nature, and reinforcing settler traditions of forcing the land to adapt to us rather than vice versa.” The reality is that this negotiation has been a long, ongoing affair in the west Texas prairie, and has marked by human success and failure. Compromise and cooperation has given way to a particular kind of character among the people in the place, one that is often defined by a

¹⁶⁷ “Scientists Find Night-Warming Effect Over Large Wind Farms in Texas.” NewsRx Science (2012): 184. Web.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

rugged determination and stoicism. When former President George W. Bush left the Whitehouse and headed back to his home in west Texas, he gave a speech reflecting on a proud heritage in west Texas that had sustained him and his wife during his sometimes troubled presidency. “The values that Laura and I learned here in West Texas have guided us” he said. “This is the place where people treat each other with dignity and respect [...] and where character counts and awful lot” (Wright 165). One of the people there to support the president when he first arrived back home was 60-year-old African American woman Lois Graham. She told a reporter “You know, President Bush did his best for our nation.” Graham, who attended the event wearing an Obama T-shirt did not see the irony for she noted that in “Midland, we love everybody.”¹⁶⁹

Glen Ely argues that the “the harsh environment that prevails” in west Texas will ensure that it remains a place of toil and challenge and that it will never fully succumb to the demands of human needs. The West Texas wind is one of the most significant and enduring environmental factors that contributes to a unique identity of the place and those living in the region. Former first lady Laura Bush described it as the “sort of stiff upper lip style that a lot of people in the West have,” because they have seen and endured so much hardship and have learned not to dwell in sorrow. Nature writer Gretel Ehrlich, in her travel autobiography, *The Solace of Open Spaces*, writes that this remains a significant feature of the people in the American west. Writing about Wyoming, she notes that the residents “still feel pride because they live in such a harsh

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.chicagotribune.com>

place” (3). That harshness ensures burdens, but also a sense of attachment that Buell accounts for in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* because the identification with place is both about its present and past.¹⁷⁰ And the American west has been a site that Plumwood would identify as a “mixed landscape” that has been shaped by combined creative “human and nonhuman influences” over time, and is particularly revered among those who call the place home (121). Climate has exerted significant force on cultural patterns of development in West Texas and the rest of the Great Plains.¹⁷¹ Geography makes the man, so to speak, which is perhaps why Scarborough’s novel was so insulting to early readers and has fallen out of our literary consciousness. According to Grider, it was the harsh treatment of the place in *The Wind* that made so many Texans furious, for they felt that it provided a “brutal and unwarranted attack by an ignorant outsider on the land they loved” and identified with so completely (Grider “Foreward” v).

¹⁷⁰ See Buell, pages 72-6.

¹⁷¹ *Where the West Begins: Debating Texas Identity*. By Glen Sample Ely. Foreword by Alwyn Barr. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011).



Illustration IV-XV: Windfarm in Texas.¹⁷²

The symbolic and material implications of the wind on the landscape and the people were taken seriously in the literary and private writings of pioneering men and women who often suffered under the constancy of driving gusts that threatened the future settlement in the American west. Both the autobiographical and fictional accounts examined in this chapter reveal the ways in which the Euro-American battle against the wind gave rise to an obsession with the “middle landscape.” Identified by Leo Marx in his influential text *The Machine in the Garden*, “the middle landscape” represented the competing and often irreconcilable desires of the “pursuit of rural happiness” with “productivity, wealth and power” (226). The aspirational goal to resolve the problems of the “middle landscape” is obvious in the swift deployment of

¹⁷² U.S. Department of Energy. Web.

technologies on the land and the wind that have turned the dusty earth and uncontrollably pounding winds in the nineteenth century into useful and productive resources for human enterprises in the twenty-first. Technological interventions on the landscape today seem to have fulfilled the early tenants of manifest destiny, which included and almost unbridled “optimism [...] concerning the power of man over physical nature.”¹⁷³ But the large swaths of earthen prairie and unceasing wind remain iconic features of the American landscapes of the west. And the human ability to manipulate natural resources to a particular purpose has significantly changed the visual rhetoric of the landscape. Converting the land and wind from an obstacle to a resource useful to progress on the American frontier provides one example of the way in which human technologies transformed the landscape and privileged control and mastery of the natural world by and for human desires.

The ongoing disputes over the development of these technologies in place prove that the middle landscape continues to be an unresolved site of complex interactions between humans, technology, and place, especially in the American west. Edward Abbey, in *Desert Solitaire* remarks on the “pioneers who subdued half a continent” through technology and quotes western painter Charles Marion Russell, who defined a pioneer as one who “destroys things and calls it civilization” (147). The damning view of pioneers is perhaps too harsh, but they certainly did not adopt Pueblo writer Simon Ortiz’s desire to “recognize / the relationship” that humans “share with everything”

¹⁷³ Frederick Merk and Lois Bannister Merk. *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). 192.

(68). Instead the pioneers worked to subdue the natural resources, to bend these to their will, and in doing so separated themselves from the land. The division created a uniquely American landscape that alienated Ortiz, who warned his fellows to keep “to the hills / and avoid America” (111). Ortiz suggests that the advent of European technology divided America. The plow and the windmill shaped the plains lands in ways that were no longer recognizable to the former inhabitants, but served to ensure the sustained settlements of newcomers into the those wild frontier territories. And technology has turned this place, which was once much maligned as a wild and uninhabitable expanse, into useful and a much desired place.

Some of the drought-stricken areas of American Plains are now an energy rich field that may ultimately revive the land and people from their parched domain. Despite its current revival, however, human interventions provide only one measure of the inventive process upon the land. As Berleant argues, the “history of a particular landscape, for example, may help explain the configuration of the land, the kind of tree growth as an aggregate in the arboreal cycle, the presence of stone walls and foundations, rock jetties and rotted pilings. As the temporal process is an active force in any landscape, a region that people have occupied retains their traces on its face, and the geomorphic analysis of land forms introduces a still larger history” (*Aesthetics* 136). The history of land is not merely a history of the people who have moved through or temporarily occupied the place. And it is not merely a history of the advancing technological repertoires used to etch its surfaces, nor even those employed to extract valuable resources from deep within its crusty skin. The land cannot write its own

“Material Memoir,” to use Alaimo’s term, but the landscape has its own story, one that is both independent of and co-orchestrated with humans and other inhabitants. In the American west, the landscape’s history is often obstructed, and yet it is the place in which we can most easily recognize “the faults inherent in the human interaction with and on this landscape” (Deverell 47).

Chapter V

‘A Place of Little Rain’¹⁷⁴ Watershed Ethics, Dam Politics, and the Fight For Environmental Justice in the American west

*“He supposed that even in Hell, people got an occasional sip of water,
if only so they could appreciate the full horror of
unrequited thirst when it set in again.”*
~Stephen King, *Full Dark, No Stars*



Illustration V-I: Irrigation ditch in Arizona, 1886.¹⁷⁵

This chapter follows the historical development of the language of water and irrigation to the movement of water resources in the advancement of particular communities in the American west in much the same way as wind and the land were taken up in Chapter IV. In doing so, the chapter explores the “many forms of thirst” that

¹⁷⁴ Intentionally and gratefully borrowed from Mary Hunter Austin’s *Land of Little Rain*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987)

¹⁷⁵ Members of the San Carlos Indian Agency. 111-SC-83712
<https://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/>

haunt the human imagination.¹⁷⁶ In America none seem so parched as those individuals who exist along the cultural and economic “borderlands,” to borrow Gloria Anzaldua’s freighted but especially generative term, where they seem to reside perpetually out of view, evaporating from our collective consciousness.¹⁷⁷ Along the “borderlands,” the very dearth of resources makes them ever more precious and there is little opportunity for what Alice Walker calls a “revolution to love what is plentiful” (237). And while the “fading out of raw frontier qualities took place fairly rapidly” in American history, “it was the most precocious, unruly, noisy, flamboyant, and well known,” and sparked a literary genre filled with dusty men in cowboy hats sitting upon their trusted steeds; pistols at their hips and spurs upon their feet (Athearn 21). The qualities that ignited the American cultural imagination continue to be taken up as a rhetorical framework by writers and filmmakers attempting to address ongoing contestations in the American west spurred by the particular history of the place. This theoretical trajectory employs strategies similar to the “excavation” of “landscape memory” described by scholar Simon Schama (17). Schama articulates a process by which there is an understanding of the “landscape’s past traditions as a source of illumination for the present and the future” (17). In this project the same will be applied to the water as a prized resource with a history, a past, a present and an uncertain future. This is not an act of nostalgia or a desire to enact “zealous” guardianship over past claims on the water, a scholarly error that Schama warns against, but as a way of bringing forward that which seems no

¹⁷⁶ William Langewiesche. *Sahara Unveiled: A Journey Across the Desert*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 5.

¹⁷⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd Ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

longer visible: the political and technological frameworks that make access to safe water supplies immediately available to quench the insatiable desires of a few, but are denied to others. A bio-historical approach reminds us that “all of our landscapes” from the most incredible to the most mundane have been “imprinted with our tenacious, inescapable obsessions” (Schama 18). And as in the previous chapters, this one interpolates the historical with the biopolitically inflected treatments of the water in the place of the American west that makes evident our cultural imprinting on the land and other natural resources, and how this imprinting shadows our memory about place and our ongoing relationships to place.

Many Native American tribes living on the lands of the American west prior to the Euro-American migration accommodated themselves to the patterns of the water. Among these are the Shoshone. Their homelands included as many as 24 million acres of arid lands in parts of what later became Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and California. The Shoshone are but one tribe that lived in the American west prior to Euro Americans, but they represent the kind of engagement with the natural resources that defined the lives of many Native Americans before being moved to reservations. The land and the natural resources offered periods of abundance, but also periods of scarcity. The Shoshone were long accustomed to the ebbs and flows of the *baa'*, which dictated the rhythms of their lives, and they remained flexible and responsive to the limits of the resources.¹⁷⁸ The Shoshone, who called themselves *Newe*, lived in small, extended family groups that could be supported by “reliable water sources” that were often “widely scattered”

¹⁷⁸ Shoshone word for water.

(Oswalt 171). They moved through their ranges, relying on “springs, marshlands, small lakes and Ruby Lake” as supplies and seasons demanded (Oswalt 171, 177). Although the Shoshone people are among the Native American tribes often depicted as primitive, uncivilized, and incapable of properly harnessing their vast resources, they are “representative of environmental adaptation that led to sustained survival in notably austere surroundings” (Oswalt 171). The Shoshone did not map the land, but rather their lives were mapped out according to the customs of the water and the natural world the waters supported.

But because the water supplies were limited, they were also highly coveted by the Euro American settlers moving into the territories occupied by the Shoshone and other Native American tribes. Water in the American west has long been a battleground and while many traveled westward in search of lands of opportunity, clean water was always a primary concern to settlers, whose survival depended on claiming the natural resource. Gaining access to it was an absolute imperative, even if it meant diverting it from other people. While some theorists argue that “the American west has become prime ground for both economic and cultural exploitation,” the historical record demonstrates that it began as an enterprise built on exploitation (Poulsen 17). Beginning mid-century, Euro-American settlers began traveling in increasing numbers along the Oregon and California trails, which cut through territories occupied by the Shoshone and other Native American tribes. By 1850 the areas designated as Nevada and Utah territories, which had long sustained the Western Shoshone were “increasingly settled by white ranchers and farmers, who chose the best lands” (Oswalt 171). And the best

land was always marked by access to “reliable water sources” that could be quickly converted to agricultural use (Oswalt 171).

To be fair to the individual settlers who embarked on what was a long and difficult journey rife with hardship and peril, water also meant the difference between life and death, failure and success, both as they traveled and as they attempted to make new homes. Their diaries and letters often indicated the scarcity of good water and of its importance. For instance, one settler wrote regularly in her diary about the access, or lack of it, to water. One entry states that the “water is scarce and what we have is nasty, muddy water, hardly fit to drink” (Shackelford 186). Pioneer Sarah Raymond Herndon documented her ongoing thirst as she migrated across the west. In one of her diary entries she wrote that she and her party had stopped at “Bitter Creek” to get what they had hoped would be a much needed “drink of nice, cold spring water,” only to be horribly disappointed. After taking only “one swallow,” she wrote exclaimed, “Oh, oh, oh; the horrid stuff.” Despite her thirst and desperate need for water, she declared that she had “never swallowed a more disagreeable dose.” And because they could not get good water at the Bitter Creek location, the group continued on “through sand and dust” well into the night hoping to find water to sustain them on their continued journey.

While Herndon’s thirst and disappointment was the subject of her earlier diary entry, in the next she turns her grievances to the condition of the livestock, which were suffering under the limits of the water. She writes that the “horses almost gave out” as they approached another water sources. She writes that one of “mule was almost crazy for water. They could hardly hold her to get the harness off” (189). And Mary Ann

Hafen, who was only six years old in 1860 when she and her family loaded up their belongings and rations and migrated west, wrote that water was the first priority of settlement. The trip was one of hardship and difficulty, according to Mary Ann's diary entries, but they made it safely and began to homestead in Southern Utah. When they arrived, she writes of her mother's complaint about the "roily water" and the "red hills" that her mother believed would not adequately sustain the newcomers. The family was not adequately comfortable or certain about their survival in Utah until a dam had been "built across the creek" (62). And as "irrigation ditches [were] dug" the family began to believe in their own persistence on the land (62). Herndon writes that although the family experienced a period of anxiety as they attempted to build and prosper, "things looked more promising" for the family only after they had claimed the water (62).

Individual accounts consistently reveal how desperate settlers were to find water and how important it was to their success on their new lands. They did not think to ask who owned the water, because of the assumptions about the emptiness of the land that had already been imprinted on the American consciousness and the implied and government-sanctioned natural rights of Euro-Americans over any others who might also require access to the rivers for their lives and livelihoods.

The number of settlers in the American west increased dramatically following the Homestead Act of 1862. Although many of the lands had not yet been surveyed, and so could not be claimed under the provisions of the act, it did not deter settlers from staking out land drawing on precious water resources as they waited for official surveys to file their legal claims. Although the "overt violence" that marked the early frontier

was an effective means of eliminating Native Americans, and was often employed against indigenous people especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, “justified land taking” became a more effective and permanent solution, according to scholars William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (15). Winona LaDuke, whose historical novel *Last Standing Woman* chronicles the Ojibwe/Chippewa tribespeople after their removal to the *Ningaabii’ anong* and finally to the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota.¹⁷⁹ The book begins with the “white man’s law” that “was all paper” (24). According to historians, taking land with the support of legal documents permanently altered the relationship and the language of the transfer of those lands between Euro-Americans and Native peoples and gave “the invaders a permanent sense of entitlement to the landscape around them” that continues to be employed in territorial disputes even today (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin 15). Walter R. Echo-Hawk’s *In the Courts of the Conqueror: The 10 Worst Indian Law Cases ever Decided* argues that continued disputes over resources resulted from the systematic errors in the US legal system that began in 1823 with *Johnson v. M’Intosh*.¹⁸⁰ Echo-Hawks identifies more than a dozen sometimes ideologically conflicting “legal fictions” (46-48). The vast majority of these are related to land, including that it was “vacant and thus owned by no one,” that the

¹⁷⁹ *Ningaabii’ anong* means the water to the west.

¹⁸⁰ The Supreme Court prevented private US citizens from purchasing lands from Native Americans. In the ruling, Chief Justice John Marshall outlined what would become known as the doctrine of discovery. See Echo-Hawk, Chapter Four, 54-84; Lindsay G. Robertson, *Conquest by Law: How the Discovery of America Dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Their Lands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Blake A. Watson, *Buying America From the Indians: ‘Johnson v. McIntosh’ and the History of Native Land Rights* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2012).

continent was a “worthless [...] wasteland” and that the land was “acquired by force” (44-48). Clearly, these claims are problematic.

A vacant land, and a great many of native peoples and scholars have already sufficiently argued against this claim, would not need to be taken by force, nor would a worthless land be desirable. LaDuke describes “the good land that was theirs” (23). But as Echo-Hawks argues, the ongoing “perversion of justice” is the result of colonial settler practices that continue to imbue the legal system with the “vestiges of racism and colonialism” (31, 27). LaDuke offers an eloquent, if disturbing description of these summary practices that functioned to dismiss Native conceptions intellectually and then subsume them under the law. “The white man’s government would have flicked the *Anishinaabeg* aside, flicked them all aside with the stroke of a pen on a sheet of paper. Except the paper, the *masiniaigin*, was not the land and it was not the people and it was not the magic. It was just the paper” (24). Paper, as it does in Winnemucca’s narrative, emerges as a site of government sanctioned bondage and domination rather than freedom for Natives. The removal of Native peoples then became legally justified rather than morally problematic and opened the way for the acquisition and manipulation of valuable resources upon the lands that had been opened to Euro-American settlers. And just as the plow and the windmill changed farming practices in the American west, the damning and diverting of water resources altered the material and socio-cultural landscape.

Brief History and Significance of Watersheds

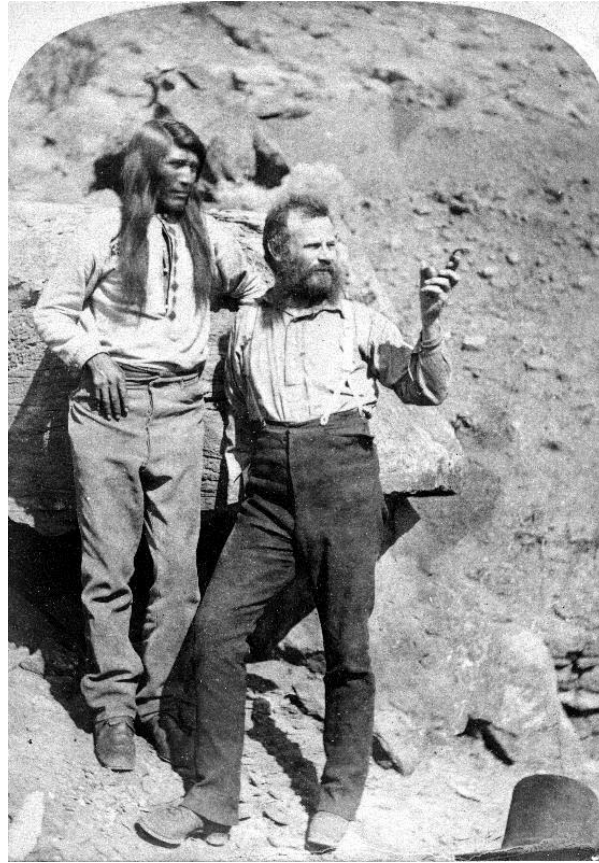


Illustration V-II: Tau-Gu, Paiute Chief and John Wesley Powell.¹⁸¹

A watershed is a geologically and hydrologically significant bioregional feature of all landscapes, and the identification and manipulation of watershed zones was indeed a watershed moment in the transformation of the American west. However, very few people recognize the material and political undercurrents that flow from the historical and categorical use of watersheds and other landscape features even as these can participate in marking “spatially restricted, geographically bounded lives,”

¹⁸¹ Second Colorado River Expedition, 1871. The Powell Expedition. National Park Service. <http://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=F7BE1F5D-155D-451F-679F22A39AD87BEA>

according to feminist geographer Linda McDowell (29). The Environmental Protection Agency and the US Geological Society define a watershed as an area of land where all water in, on, or under it flows to a single location.¹⁸² More generally defined it is “a region or area bounded peripherally” and “draining ultimately to a particular [...] body of water.”¹⁸³ Although all watersheds have natural boundaries, the water itself seeps and weeps across county, state, and even national boundaries making it difficult to define rights or even to determine starting and stopping points. In the contiguous United States alone there are more than 2,000 watersheds.¹⁸⁴ In the American west, controlling, diverting or otherwise employing them began even before they had been formally claimed by the US.¹⁸⁵

Among the first scientific pioneers to recognize the importance of watersheds was John Wesley Powell.¹⁸⁶ During expeditions he led in 1869 and 1871, he became one of the first Anglo-Americans persons to travel the Virginia and Colorado Rivers through what is now known as the Grand Canyon (Brewer 377-82). Powell, who is often described as an early conservationist, provided one of the most famous and

¹⁸² <http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds> and <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/watershed.html>

¹⁸³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/watershed>

¹⁸⁴ <http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds>

¹⁸⁵ Many settlers simply squatted on the land, claiming it informally until official representatives of the US brought deed claims. And, many Native American tribes continue to dispute whether the US has yet to formally possess much of the land in the American west that is currently considered US territory. During the period between 1765 and 1865 there were nearly thirty treaties signed by the US government with tribal leaders representing various nations and tribes. In some cases these peace agreements included clauses for the ceding of lands in return for just compensation.

¹⁸⁶ In addition to his geologic work, Powell became interested in the Native Americans he encountered during his many expeditions. He documented many of the languages and customs, and organized and directed the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution.

persistent ecological definitions of a watershed. He described a watershed as “that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of the community,” in his 1879 report. Powell’s definition is so ubiquitous that nearly every teaching site, every city, state, and natural resource site that takes up watersheds as a topic will include this quote. Despite Powell’s early recognition that lands, and flora and fauna, and waterways and animals, human and otherwise, large and small, seen and unseen, were “inextricably linked” and that humans must “logically” be a “part of the community,” actual geographic, political and development practices in the American west often failed to embrace these ideals.

Upon Powell’s death in 1902, one of his biographers called his mission a “brilliant success” and confidently claimed that “never was a bolder voyage planned or executed” (Brewer 380). Powell, who had been a Union soldier and a teacher before becoming an explorer, drafted a report consistent with the language of conquest prevalent at the time. The management of water resources was one of his greatest contributions to the development of the American west, but he also mapped, described, and made the land available to those in the American east. “The land is literally invisible, enigmatic to the culture unless it is transformed into a predictable image” (Poulsen 22). Powell did not look upon the lands in these regions as the Native Americans had, as “the good land.” He saw barrenness, and he saw how the land could be transformed so that it could provide a new home to increasing numbers of people if it were placed in the hands of proper stewards. Powell assumed that neither Native

Americans, nor early American settlers offered examples of proper use. His first report noted that the lands of the west “may eventually be rescued from their present worthless state” (Preface viii). He claimed that what he had found in the west were lands left in a “valueless condition” that would not adequately support future settlers and farmers. Powell’s assessment disregarded the tribes already living in and around the area. Along with the Shoshone, the Hopi, Pueblo, Hualapai, Havasupai, Navajo, Ute, and Apache occupied these western lands.¹⁸⁷ To his credit, Powell understood that it was only a matter of time before the area would be flooded with more permanent residents as more and more Americans took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862.¹⁸⁸ Powell believed that early farming practices would not work in these regions and would waste precious water supplies. He worried that colonial settlers would create ecological burdens that would be passed on to those who would claim the remaining territories of the west.

Powell noted that the lands would generally “require drainage or irrigation for their redemption.” (Powell, “Report on the Lands,” vi) He argued that attempts at irrigation involved “engineering problems” that would “require for their solution the greatest skill” and so could not be undertaken by those already working the land.” (Powell, “Report on the Lands,” vi). By 1890, Powell observed that in practice, greed had already begun to replace the logic of shared resources in the arid regions. As settlement continued to move west, those needing water simply moved upstream, thereby choking off water supplies to those in lower portions of the plateaus, where they

¹⁸⁷ The Navajo are among the largest native tribes with 250,000 *Diné* living on about 27,000 square miles; the Hopi have twelve villages on 1.5million acres; the Hualapai have 2,300 members with about 1,700 living on the one million acre reservation.

¹⁸⁸ See more about the Homestead Act in Chapter IV.

had always been tenuous and often scarce. Powell argued for government intervention, fearing that water corporations would come to dominate the region and would exploit those with limited power and tenuous economic standing. And indeed it did not take long before Powell's fears had been realized. The land laws often failed to promote the "settlement by yeoman farmers" as had been the intent. Instead the laws were "often manipulated by speculators and corrupt public officials who promoted the concentration of landownership in the hands of a few large corporations or landowners" (Nash 40). Upon his urging, Congress funded a geologic and topographic survey of the Colorado River and its tributaries. Powell headed up the survey and also became the first director of the US Geological and Geographical Survey whose main objective was to map that "vast empire" that lay in what Powell described as the arid regions.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ John Wesley Powell, director. Eleventh annual report of the United States Geological Survey to the Secretary of the Interior, 889-90. Part II—Irrigation. 1891. 255. For more information on the life and long career of John Wesley Powell, see Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West* (1954); John Wesley Powell and William Eno DeBuys, *Seeing Things Whole: The Essential John Wesley Powell*. (Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2001); Richard A. Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American west* (1962); William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American west* (1966); Donald Worster, *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Michael Elsohn Ross and Wendy Smith. *Exploring the Earth with John Wesley Powell* (Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 2000); Paul Meadows. *John Wesley Powell: Frontiersman of Science* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1952).



Illustration V-III: Arid Region.¹⁹⁰

The American west is a particularly generative site for the interrogation of colonial and postcolonial biopolitics because even today, “language that can easily express [...the] ideas of inclusion and continuity” remain elusive in this place. And, many science scholars remain uncomfortable with the kinds discursive and material “collisions and convergences” that feminist scholars argue might ultimately produce a more balanced relationship between humans and the environment (Berlant 5 and

¹⁹⁰ Map indicating eastern and western boundary, which is marked by the 100th meridian, of the arid regions. The map shows the wide swaths of land west of the Mississippi that required proper development. The green areas represent the relatively small areas of land useful for growing, according to Powell’s analysis. From Powell’s Report.

Alaimo “Trans-Corporeality” 237). Furthermore, the American west highlights the ways that the “transformations of nature seem to lead [so] naturally to vestments of power, to overt and vicious exploitation of the other” (Poulsen 2). The American west is marked by regimes of surplus and forced scarcity, where state-sanctioned hoarding of resources by the government itself or by the elite often dictates networks and flows, and authorizes new forms of control that validate the needs of the privileged at the expense of those who may need access to resources the most.

Rethinking Water

The problem of water’s history and the continued manipulation of water resources emerge as the single most significant crisis in Percival Everett’s 2003 novel *Watershed*, Alex Rodriguez’s not-so futuristic film *Sleep Dealer* (2008), and Gore Vidal’s animated western, *Rango* (2011). *Watershed*, *Sleep Dealer*, and *Rango* unambiguously demonstrate the corporeal “precarity” of marginalized and racialized subjects, but also the vulnerability of those vested with pseudo-authority who are not fully realized subjects in contradistinction to racialized others, but who stand in as gatekeepers. In deemphasizing the hegemonic cartographic aesthetic that stresses boundaries over affiliations, “barricades” over flows and seepages, *Sleep Dealer*, *Watershed*, and *Rango* adopt a biopolitical position that refuses to embrace authoritative controls or to replicate asymmetrical relations of power as has been the tradition of the American west and the western genre. Instead they work to make visible the hidden socio-political and economic apparatuses, Foucault’s “techniques of governmentality,” that turn water resources into tools of state control—through practices of hoarding or

poisoning—along predictable and well-worn cultural tributaries. These artistic renderings of the historical and actual lived experiences in the American west reveal that it was and is a ripe “ground for both economic and cultural exploitation” that includes the natural world (Poulsen 17). The book and films represent powerful descriptions of the problem of uneven distribution and access to dwindling and diverted water flows, tenaciously reject narratives of embodied detachment, and implicate those traditionally seen as having power, and even those who refuse to recognize their place in power relationships in the fight to ensure that the “future is not a thing of the past” as Mr. Cruz warns his son in *Sleep Dealer*.

It is no accident that Percival Everett’s *Watershed* is set in the “Plata” Indian Reservation. The “Plata” of Everett’s fictional novel is only a thinly disguised version of the Colorado Plateau, an historically significant temporal and geographic location in the development of the American west. It was the site of one of Powell’s greatest discoveries. But Powell’s ‘discovery,’ however embedded in Euro-American history, is but one of the ongoing myths of the American west that retains its shape and power despite abundant historical evidence of an ancient, but sophisticated Pueblo civilization that lived on the Plateau for centuries.¹⁹¹ Further evidence also indicates that Powell did not produce the first maps of the area, but that these were in fact created by Franciscan

¹⁹¹ See Cordell. *Ancient Pueblo Peoples*. (Smithsonian Books, Washington, D.C. 1994); Sebastian. *The Chaco Anasazi: Sociopolitical Evolution in the Prehistoric Southwest*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Lister and Lister. *Those Who Came Before: Southwestern Archaeology in the National Park System*. 2nd Edition. (Tucson: Southwest Parks & Monuments Association, 1994) for descriptions of the people who populated the plateau. These also include theories on why these ancient peoples abandoned or otherwise disappeared from the region about 800 years ago.

monks and a cartographer trying to make their way to California in 1776.¹⁹² More recently, the Colorado Plateau served as a contested site, where extensive uranium mining during the twentieth century led to one of the largest ‘accidental’ poisonings of a waterway in US history.¹⁹³ *Watershed* operates on several levels of significance, encompassing the scientific, economic, historic, and colloquial. A watershed often marks an important moment, a turning point, a time of significant change, or a disruption in the status quo. Such can be true for an individual, a group of individuals, or an entire society. A watershed of this type can be seen as positive by some, disruptive or dangerous by others. In the case of Everett’s novel, each of these meanings is at play.

Everett explores the persistence of the myth, too often constructed around race, gender, sexuality and economic status in the novel, which explores a contemporary water dispute between the Plata Indians and their white neighbors as it is revealed through an African-American hydrologist. That these three racial groups are brought into contact in the novel is also of no small consequence to the novel, nor to the development of the American west. Historian Gary Nash, in tracing the history of the

¹⁹² See Carl I. Wheat. *Mapping the American West, 1540-1857: A Preliminary Study*. (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1954). Wheat’s preliminary work explores the “rise of cartographic understanding in respect of the American west” that began long before Powell (20); and Paul E. Cohen, *Mapping the West: America’s Westward Movement, 1524-1890*. (New York: Rizzoli, 2002).

¹⁹³ The term accident here is a troubling one as there is significant evidence that even by the date of the human and environmental poisoning, scientists and other experts were aware of the potential hazard. See The Natural Resources Defense Council’s 2012 report, *Nuclear Fuel’s Dirty Beginnings: Environmental Damage and Public Health Risks from Uranium Mining in the American west*. Interest in protecting water resources is among the greatest concerns of those responsible for the report, which argues that in “the high plains, Rocky Mountains, and intermountain West [...] where water resources are already scarce, it is inevitable that water-intensive uranium extraction poses significant risks to the region’s environmental and public health.”

“social mingling” of these three racial groups, argues that their interactions shaped “the course of American history for generations” (8). The novel initially appears to highlight a western landscape and people who have recovered from the historical traumas of the past. But the tensions that have been simmering below the surface erupt into violent confrontation. *Watershed* reveals that many of the contemporary problems of place, including a disregard for people, the land, and animals, may be better hidden and less explicitly rendered than they were in the past, but this is a result of their being made deliberately more opaque, and not a condition of the historical problems having been resolved.

Early in the novel, Hawks, who is charged with surveying the plata, is confronted by a group of townsmen who demand that Robert tell them who has the right to the water. The men are upset because their water flows are drying up and they believe the Indians are responsible, claiming that “them injuns” are “just fuckin’ greedy” (30). The irony of course is that the Plata Indians have had water and other resources extracted from their lands for nearly two centuries in order to satisfy the wants of those living off the reservation. But the white men, who have comfortably embraced their ‘naturally’ sanctioned rights, suspect the hydrologist is on the side of “them injuns” because he is black. Hawks doesn’t fare much better with the Native Americans, who are suspicious of his government affiliations. The Plata people recognize that their mountain and their people are sick and dying, and they correctly suspect that the US Government is responsible. They believe Hawks, a man of science who is imbued with a form of pseudo authority, is just another government agent sent to

'cover' up the sickness. Members of the tribe excavate past betrayals to interrogate Hawks.

"You know about the Buffalo soldiers?" Kills Enemy, a Plata native, asks.

"They were colored soldiers who fought against us. The white men sent them to do their dirty work. You know about them?"

"Yes, sir," Hawks responds. "I know a little."

"Are you a Buffalo soldier?" Kills Enemy wants to know. The implication is clear: Hawks stands in for the state and has aligned himself with white privilege even if the color of his skin undermines such an affiliation. And he is indeed there to observe, record, report. But Hawks does not recognize the significance of Plata's social history, nor his own historically marginalized status—he has been fully incorporated into the state regimes and simply wants to escape the implications of his history, and the problems of the present. But Hawks wants nothing to do with the political implications of his work. His response to both the whites and the natives is that he doesn't "get involved in political stuff" that has underwritten his past, the country's past, the nation's past. Yet, he has never been free of the political undertow. His physician grandfather and radical father were often at odds over the value and need for the civil rights movement in improving the status of African-Americans in the US. As he recalls his politically charged history, he remembers the eldest Hawks warning his father not to bring a minister to the house because the man stood for that "Christian bullshit that encouraged "black people" to "run around after some white man's invention" (112). Later, Hawks was sent away from his father's home for his own safety while "Dr.

King” visited (120). His father, then, was a pivotal figure in the support of the Civil Rights Movement, but Hawks has distanced himself from this past. He does recognize the significance of this history and simply wants to escape it. He is the all too familiar independent man of western myth, and he declares that his “blood is [his] own” in a misbegotten effort to eschew his lineage and his own historical marginalization (3). But, as the title suggest, something remains etched beneath the surface. The problems of his history, Native history, American history have not been erased and they cannot simply be forgotten. Rather than being eradicated, the cultural entanglements of the past have simply migrated into the present along cultural tributaries that leak into all aspects of the lived experiences of those still banished to the margins. Furthermore, race and environment in the American west cannot be seen as completely independent categories.

Despite this, Hawks continues to believe he operates in a neutral position, declaring that he “seldom involved [himself] in the use of [his] findings or any kind of agenda promotion” he states. He cloaks himself in the detachment of a scientific enterprise which demands neutrality that he is more than happy to hide behind (56). And besides, he argues, “Terrace formation and sediment evaluation were simple, observable things and meant only what they meant” he declares (152). Hawks, like Powell, is a man of science and reason, and he does not want to be side-tracked by the problems of the people involved—those who call it home and see it in terms other than merely scientific. Hawks believes in the standard scientific belief that its findings, measured in specific selected data points, are neutral. Hawks believes that the place

exists independently of the people. The study of place does not necessary include the people who live in place, according to Hawks myopic view. In his scientific estimation, facts and figures are intrinsically impartial. The myth of scientific neutrality is deeply embedded in the notions of rationality and progress that informed the development of the American west, but science is “never neutral,” nor is it ever “value free.”¹⁹⁴

Hawks is charged with taking measurements and providing detailed cartographic and topographic notes about the geologic features of the Plata. His ‘formal’ reports follow the language and form of those produced by Powell. Many of the fragments—descriptions set off by italicized text that contribute to and interrupt the human narrative—in Everett’s novel take the form of hydrology diaries or reports that mimic the style and language, with some notable differences, of those written by Powell during his early excursions

During the field study, 23-27 September, examinations of the geology, hydrology, and soil-erosion processes were made of the Plata Mountain watershed. Observations of the Plata and Silly Man Creeks were made from Rural Route 13 above the confluence of the Silly Man and Red Creeks, from the mining road numbered A-28 traversing north-south along Silly Man Ridge and from various locations along the two main creeks (Everett 18, emphasis original).

Excerpt from Powell’s report:

On August 19, 1889, the river was discharging at Willow Creek, 202 second feet, and on October 15, at Three Forks, 333 second feet. There is no permanent gauging station on the Jefferson itself, the work being confined to measurements of Red Rock Creek at the town of Red Rock on the Utah and Northern Railroad. At this point the bed is of gravel, the

¹⁹⁴ See Rita Arditi, Pat Brennan, and Steve Cavrak, eds. *Science and Liberation*. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 28. Arditi founded the Science for the People movement and was a scientist, activist and women’s rights advocate. The book examines the history of scientific method, government sanctioned scientific enterprises, and the corporatization of science.

banks about 4 feet high and the channel very tortuous. This locality was selected from the fact of its being one of the places on the river which were not dry during the summer in 1888 and 1889. This creek is the headwaters of the Missouri, or, in other words is the stream which is farthest removed from the mouth of the river, as the water flows. It rises in a loop in the Continental Divide, about 15 miles west of the National Park and it continues nearly due west for 60 miles before turning northerly, passing on its way through the open and elevated Red Rock Valley (Powell, Eleventh Annual Report, 40-1).

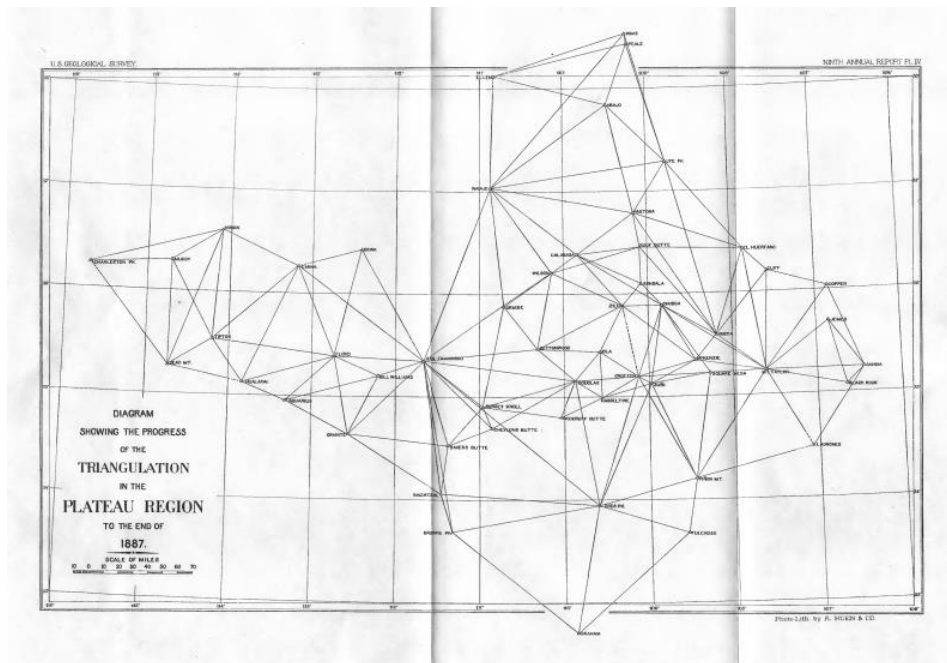


Illustration V-IV: Triangulation of the Plateau Region.¹⁹⁵

Hawk's 'reports' draw on the same distilled language of Powell's reports in which the information is abstraction. The reports are meant to provide purely descriptive language of observations made at a particular time in a particular location. The map that accompanied Powell's report is hardly recognizable as a land (see Map V-I). But just as sentimental and sensational novels manipulated feelings and heightened

¹⁹⁵ Another scientific view of the Plateau in Eleventh annual report of the United States Geological Survey to the Secretary of the Interior, 1889-90, by J.W. Powell, Director. Part II—Irrigation 1891.

emotions for purely sensational reasons, the extraction of highly scientifically sanitized language creates a void. The rationalist and instrumentalist language of observation creates an ocular understanding of the place, but such language fails to reveal the cultural and symbolic understanding of the relationships, interactions, and conflicts that are important to it.

Everett's other fragments even adopt the formal identification of documents Powell later submitted to the USGS that included recommendations and even court proceedings:

Observed also were expansive structural relations in the region, including the Silly Man Ridge monocline, a fault running north-south, several east-west faults, and a portion of Plata Mountain. Another fault, which is suggested by the topographical features of the west face of Plata Mountain, may have some impact on surface drainage. The major north-south fault and the east-west structural facets in Plata Canyon have impacted the Plata Mountain watershed itself, evidenced in the field, and confirming Fran Rucker's work on the geology of Plata Mountain watershed (USGS Paper 45679-T [1981]).

In adopting the formalist, scientific language, Hawk's works to distance himself from the environment he observes. In doing so, he internalizes the logic of the paternalism and embraces his role in subordinating both nature and other marginalized subjects to the demands of the privileged. The fragments also include an occasional diary entry from a pioneer or a Native American, but more often the technically detached examples above are duplicated in fragments that describe disease in medical terms, equations in mathematic terms, court cases in judicial terms, and treaties, articles, and presidential and intelligence directives in governmental terms. From the distance of formalized language, knowledge and power, all things can be seen in aseptic terms.

Feminist science scholar Londa Schiebinger argues that there is a historical practice of using science and pseudo-science as “justifications for social inequalities” by marking bodies differently and then mapping knowledge over those differences in an effort to support social ideologies and practices of domination (22). Scientific evidence is frequently employed as a tool to reify standards of difference, rather than to eliminate them. Schiebinger demonstrates the way in which science can be implicated in insidious acts of defining, identifying, marking, and categorizing to create hierarchies of control that tend to withstand, at least initially, discursive strategies of resistance by marginalized identities.

The excerpts, which also diverge into scientific or medical reports, often interrupt the present action of the text, in which Native American peoples are working to uncover the governmental abuses that threaten the land and the people of the Plata Mountain. The mystery is interrupted by Hawk’s childhood memories in which he recalls his father’s reluctance, and his grandfather’s exuberant participation in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. In overlaying these three historically significant, often violent, moments of American life, Everett establishes a link among marginalized categories across space and time. In a telling moment in which the past collides with the present, Hawk’s learns that Hiram Kills Enemy’s son “was killed by Korea” (69). Hawk’s is perplexed to discover that Bertram died in 1966, well after the U.S. conflict with Korea had ended and a new conflict had been undertaken. He attempts to correct the old man by reminding him that, in fact, it must have been the Vietnam War that killed Bertram. Hiram stands firm: he is clear in his recollections, and unwilling to

concede to the narrative of his son's death that the government would prefer. That his son did not die during the war does not mean that it did not kill him. His son died in 1966 in Rivertown. There is no mistake. "I said he was killed by Korea. The white army and the killing of those people [... they] look like us you know [...he] was never the same" (69). Wars do not end with the official declarations, proclamations, or military pull outs. They do not end when government officials sign documents. War seeps into the present, into the future. [expand on this point]. Traditional frames of time are not allowed to segregate events. The past is not over as marked by temporal flows. Its story is never told once and for all; the face of the storyteller simply changes. The past remains present, unfinished, incomplete. In providing parallel stories, Everett fills the space opened by the racial void created by [particular] American mythologies [of the Western ideal]. Indians did not simply vanish. African Americans are not free, perhaps none of us is.

William R. Handley, in "Detecting the Real Fictions of History in *Watershed*," argues that "the Western [...] often responds to the history of American expansion and colonialism with reductive typologies, Manichean morality, and neat plot resolutions—all of which Everett's work dramatically eschews" (305-6). Everett deploys the conventions of the genre only to disrupt the obvious homogeneity of its mythologies of people and place and independence. *Watershed* is a New Western that revises the frontier thesis, and concerns itself not only with the myths of the past, but also with the myths of the present. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes argues that "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear

eternal” (142). Everett incorporates the old American mythologies, but reconfigures the Anglo-European generic form, inverts its tropes and asks his readers to reconceptualize its history and extend these new ideals into the present: their origins are difficult to trace and their end is almost impossible to imagine, but nonetheless it is something Everett undertakes in order to stop what Barthes identifies as the bleeding out of history. If the “function of myth is to empty reality: it is literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence,” as Barthes contends, then Everett is determined to stem the flow of history that gives way to myth and forecloses the possibility of others (Barthes 143).

Hawks initially refuses to see the potentially damaging implications of data as it is deployed by particular individuals, industries, or governments even as he describes himself as “an objective, hired gun” (152). This is an intriguing admission on Hawk’s part. As a “hired gun” he aligns himself with an assassin, recognizes that there are targets, and that he has been sent to eliminate the threat. As Judith Butler argues, even as the nation-state is charged with protecting populations, it often designates the very condition that places “certain populations” into “failing social and economic networks of support” and they thus “become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.” The main narrative in *Watershed* reveals that Hawks himself has been subjected to these regimes throughout his life, has belonged to a “population at risk” that his education and profession cannot protect him from. He recalls his own racial victimization. Just as water itself can move across county, state, and even national boundaries making it difficult to define rights or even to determine starting and stopping

points, institutionalized and government sanctioned racism is diffused in a way that tracing its history becomes nearly impossible. The novel highlights the complicated entanglements that have underwritten violent histories and racial hatred in the American west, and more importantly, that these bleed out across porous geographic and temporal boundaries. Like water, it weeps and seeps, drips and drizzles. And sometimes it pours.

The conspiracy of denial that emerges in *Watershed* interrogates the ways that science and pseudo-science have been used to obfuscate and deny the material implications for questionable environmental practices that target communities of color. Reports often claim that the evidence does not prove a connection between particular activities and increased number of health problems, just as in the case of windmills, or that not enough evidence exists to determine a connection. This has been true for the Native American community whose reservation lands have been resource rich even as those living on them have suffered “pervasive poverty” (Brook 106). Much of the uranium mining in the US in the twentieth century was conducted on lands “supposedly reserved for the exclusive use and occupancy” of native peoples (Moore-Nall 15). The most significant mining occurred in areas of the greatest concentration of Native people living in the Four Corners area of the Colorado Plateau. In addition to extracting resources from the grounds, the government contractors exploited the labor of reservation residents who were “extraordinarily vulnerable” and had been chronically unemployed” (Brook 132-34). The ongoing material repercussions for Native Americans and reservation lands have been tremendous. But “Native Americans, like all other victimized ethnic groups, are not passive populations in the face of destruction

from imperialism and paternalism” (Brook 106). Many tribes, financially motivated and having few other opportunities for economic improvement, have accepted the risk. Vocal Native American representatives have expressed repeated complaints over the long-term effects of “environmental spoliation” on reservation lands at the hands of the US government and businesses contracted by them (Brook 105).

Hawks only begins to reconsider his position when he ‘discovers’ what he describes as an ‘improvisational’ dam, a neutered term for an unauthorized and illegal dam, up on the Plata Mountain and realizes the effort that had been put into diverting what he suspects is contaminated water away from the town and onto the reservation, thereby selectively poisoning the Plata Indians and protecting the white residents below. Hawks, who had refused to “believe” that the US government “had been illegally storing anthrax” and other “biochemical agents” on the Plata Reservation, who had “done so much to remove all things political” from his life abandons his stronghold on detached objectivity (140, 152). Hawks finally bridges the gap, connecting his vulnerability and the exploitation of his African American ancestors to the vulnerability and exploitation of the Plata people. He is finally mobilized. He tells one of the Native American rebels that “apparently they don’t give a shit about Indians” in describing what the government has done to the reservation’s water supply (189). And he realizes they don’t give a shit about him either. The revelation leads Hawks to reflect on his own vulnerable position. He remembers the Tuskegee experiments on African American men, and is amazed by his own failure to believe: “the scariest part of all, that in spite of knowledge of past transgressions, I still resisted belief in a new one” (140). This is

Hawk's watershed moment as he declares that he had believed that "[his] country was somehow [him ...]. But it wasn't [his] country" (140). He joins the Plata Indian fight, carrying supplies to those holding another FBI agent hostage, while they demand answers about why their people and their land are dying. Hawk becomes "a little angrier and more determined" to expose the truth (189). This is his watershed moment: his valance of detachment dissolves. He joins the Plata Indian fight, carrying supplies to a group of Indians holding FBI agents hostage in exchange for the truth about why they are dying.

As the scientist, Hawk's discovery is the key to getting the word out to the public. As he escapes the compound on a mission to deliver the evidence, he realizes he has ultimately sacrificed his life to a cause he never intended to join. Forced to crawl through the poisoned water in order to make his way down the mountain, he wonders "how long it would be before the symptoms of anthrax" would ravage his body as it had already done to so many of the Plata Indians and their lands (198). Hawk gazes back at the mountain as he drives away from the town for the last time, and it still "looked so peaceful, so clean, so inert," and yet it has become an actively deadly site. As Stacy Alaimo argues the novel ultimately "corrodes the boundaries between science, activism, and even one's own corporeal integrity" (Alaimo, *Bodily* 65). It also works to disintegrate the reader's own protected positions as his corporeal vulnerability is illuminated. Objective dispassion is untenable. Disobedience becomes the only appropriate, ethical response, which promises not only to save others, but ourselves as well even if this requires sacrifice; requires disorder.

Unlike Hawks, *Sleep Dealer's* Rudy Ramirez is not a man of science, but he too operates under the guise of distance. He is a man of action; a man of violence. He has trained his entire adult life to protect the American way of life from those who would threaten it. Rudy is literally a hired gun, but he is separated from the “dry, dusty, disconnected” places where he and his fellow fighters administer justice on behalf of the private Del Rio Water, Inc., which has dozens of Rudy’s safeguarding their water storage. While *Watershed* examines the local water supply that is being purposefully poisoned, *Sleep Dealer* imagines the sweeping transnational corporatization of the government, and the misappropriation of resources, natural and human. *Sleep Dealer* focuses on the slow removal and consolidation of resources away from the most vulnerable populations and those least able to strike. The massive multi-national conglomerate is interested only in potential profits. People are a means to this end, but are otherwise insignificant to the corporation. Rodriguez’s film builds on the fears Powell expressed upon his subsequent trips into the American west. He identified widespread misuse and wasting of natural water sources to be an increasingly urgent problem. “The matter thus left to itself is becoming a striking instance of the survival of the man highest up the stream, irrespective of his rights or the best use of the water.”¹⁹⁶ In the future of Rodriguez’s world, Del Rio Water, Inc. is the “man highest up the stream” and individual “rights” and needs matter very little.

The film opens with a young Mexican man, Memo Cruz, drifting in an out of a watery dream about his past as he works at a virtual labor “factory” in Tijuana, Mexico.

¹⁹⁶ Powell, Eleventh Annual Report,” Part II—Irrigation, 75.

His boss tells him and others like him that he is participating in “the American Dream.” Neither the boss nor any of the factory workers have ever been across the highly fortified US-Mexico border, which has been permanently closed; thereby forever settling the ‘immigration issue.’ Node workers, who are literally plugged into networks by ‘Coyoteks,’ transport their virtual labors to many large cities. The technological interface creates an aseptic border that is never penetrated; thereby giving “the United States what they’ve always wanted [...] all the work without all the workers.”

Memo’s bodily plight, like his Native American counterparts in *Watershed*, can be traced to the water, as can the plight of the land. The Cruz family had lived and successfully worked their Santa Ana corn field for generations before Del Rio Water, Inc. built a dam that choked off their water supply and killed the land, forcing the thriving farmers into corporatized submission. In one of his watery flashbacks, Memo recalls his final argument with his father, refused to surrender. His father, like the Plata elders, remembers a lush past; a land of health and plenty, and he will not abandon his fields. Memo does not understand his father’s attachment to the now useless land in Santa Ana. He wants his father to give up, to give in, to move on. “We had a future,” he reminds his son. One that was stolen “When they dammed up the river.” But Memo doesn’t remember a world without the dam. He has lived his entire life in its shadow and under its control. The dam is a highly fortified militarized ‘no-man’s’ zone patrolled by heavily armed militia, there ostensibly to protect the water and the profits of Del Rio. In order to gain access to water, Santa Ana residents must march across their own parched earth and stand before an electronic gate as a security camera

'searches' them. They are warned in Spanish and English, not to "make any sudden moves!" before being ordered to insert \$85 for 35 liters of water.

Lest the viewer feel safe that this is about those people on the other side of the border, she soon learns that all water supplies are at stake in *Sleep Dealer*. A multinational conglomerate, Del Rio Water, Inc., has amassed a fortune gathering up water resources in at least twelve massive projects around the world. The film never makes clear whether Del Rio Water, Inc. operates completely independently as a commercial enterprise, or whether it has accumulated its holdings with the assistance of government authorities. The obscuring of these two sources of authority is consciously constructed and the viewer never sees those responsible for building the dams where the world's water supplies are being hoarded. The nebulous conglomeration is anonymous and disinterested and it leaves those on the cultural and economic borderlands in a perpetual state of subservience. The nebulous conglomeration is anonymous and disinterested and it leaves those on the cultural and economic borderlands in a perpetual state of subservience. The film contemplates the water's "vulnerabilities," which have now reached a potentially "global" scale. In addition to natural disasters, susceptibilities include the "loss of water-dependent ecosystems and biodiversity," but also "the insecurity and even violence that arise from perceived injustices over contested waters, can all reach across borders" (Sadoff, Kemper, and Grey 1). Insecurity and violence erupts in *Sleep Dealer* as the injustice of hoarding of resources leads to further entrapment of the most vulnerable. There are no channels or otherwise that individuals can have their complaints heard; nor any person who might provide assistance. What is

made clear is that Del Rio Water, Inc. is not interested in wasting a single drop of the water it controls. People around the world are welcome to it, so long as they can afford the rates, which often increase without warning. What is made clear is that protecting those supplies from a growing and dangerous “Aqua-Terrorist Insurgency,” falls to American pilots. The faceless jet fighters are glorified as “high tech heroes” using “cutting edge technology” to “blow the hell outta the bad guys” on *Drones*, a reality TV show with a live studio audience. Ramirez is stationed in San Diego, and like Robert Hawks, is one of the hired guns.

On his first mission, Ramirez targets the Cruz home after Memo is caught using ‘unauthorized technology.’ Memo, dreaming of a different future, jumps onto satellite transmissions to listen to what is happening in other worlds; worlds that call to him from across the borders that he is not allowed to breach with his material, bodily self. But his dreaming is captured by those with better technology and he is identified as a potential terrorist threat. His family home a safe house for terrorist activities. Ramirez is sent to eradicate the threat. He strikes the home in spectacular fashion and the studio audience erupts with applause. Memo’s father, who is the only person at home at the time of the precision airstrike launched from nearly 500 miles away, is wounded but survives the initial assault. The elder Cruz crawls from the rubble of his small home, turning his bloodied face up to the unmanned weapon. A disembodied female voice breaks into to the live television broadcast and in bemused excitement declares that “this is unusual.” She reminds *Drones* viewers that an “agent” rarely comes “face-to-face” with one of his targets. Rudy hesitates, but ultimately obeys his military training,

maintaining a psychological distance that dehumanizes the bloodied man before him. He is a professional and as such does his job, firing a final shot and killing Memo's father; thus becoming a national hero.

But Rudy is changed by his first kill. It is his watershed moment. The carefully constructed boundaries employed to keep Ramirez from empathetic identification with Del Rio's victims is shattered. Like Hawks, Rudy closes the distance between himself and the victimized other, traveling back into Mexico "at his own risk" in order to find Memo, who has finally escaped Santa Ana in shame. Forced to leave his home to support his family following his father's death, Memo heads to Tijuana, where he becomes a node worker. The laborers of Memo's world no longer need coyotes to transport them covertly over the border. They rely on node pushers, the coyoteks, who can get them plugged into the system so that their labor can be swiftly exported, even as their scarred bodies remain firmly in place, out of sight.

Just as manifest destiny focused on the potential that new lands offered those emigrating across the American west in the nineteenth century, those who champion the promise of technology can overlook the way that these emerging technologies are sometimes used to replicate rather than mitigate contemporary constructions of power. Feminist scholars have warned that despite the promise, "virtual reality technologies are implicated in the production of a certain set of cultural narratives that reproduce dominant relations of power" rather than offering new modes of escape for the oppressed (Balsamo 123). Balsamo argues that "a better approach for evaluating the meaning of these new technologies and, more importantly, the use of such

technologies,” is needed and suggests that technological shifts be examined based on the “broader social and cultural forces” that give rise to their implementation (123). Balsamo’s call rejects the oversimplification of technological advances. And it refuses overly idealized attitudes, and forces us to consider the broader implications: to see the people in the technology and to recognize that technological advances do not happen outside human interactions and in many ways technological advances simply duplicate or overlay relations of power that already exist rather than wresting power from the privileged. Only after Rudy and Memo meet do the two young men realize they are both node workers. They become friends and together they destroy the Santa Ana Del Rio dam, restoring water to the people living there in a temporary victory. Memo and Rudy recognize that it is only a matter of time before the dam is repaired and the supply cut off once again. And while neither man can ever “go home,” the running water opens both men to the possibility of a new future. For the first time Memo believes that if he can connect, not to the machinery but to the people, they can all have a future worth fighting for.

While *Watershed* and *Sleep Dealer* offer serious accounts of water manipulation, *Rango* tackles the subject in sardonic and humorous tones as it takes up the problem of water resources. Rango, a chameleon, becomes an unlikely sheriff through an “ironic, unexpected event” after falling out of the back of a station wagon—a clear tongue-in-cheek reference to covered wagons—heading down the highway in what might be considered the new Oregon Trail. A highway accident, an all-to-familiar feature of the new American west, propels Rango on his wild western journey to “find

the Spirit of the West.” Thrown into the heat of the Mojave Desert, the chameleon is out of place and is immediately thirsty. A sage armadillo tells him that in order to “find water, you have to find dirt,” which turns out to be an old western town, where the lack of water is threatening to choke of an entire way of life for the animal inhabitants.

The townsitters—a term which comes as close as possible to describing the animated inhabitants which are all animals—are desperate for a leader who can protect the scarce supply of water that remains, and someone who can lead them in a campaign to find new resources. In a move that echoes the positions of Hawks and Ramirez, Rango has no real power, and gains his authority only through his willingness to enforce rules by those who care very little about the consequences of their desires and manipulations of the most vulnerable and underrepresented members of the community. The position of sheriff in *Dirt* has never held any real authority or status, and historically achieved only a moderate level of prominence by turning a blind eye to the mayor’s nefarious business dealings.

*All day I face
the barren waste
without the taste of water,
cool water
Old Dan and I
with throats burned dry
and souls that cry
for water,
cool, clear, water...
The shadows sway and seem to say,
tonight we pray for water,
cool water
And way up there
He'll hear our prayer
and show us where there's water,*

cool, clear, water
~Bob Nolan

“Power has its privileges,” the mayor of Dirt, an ancient desert tortoise, tells Rango as he shares a shot of “vintage water from the great deluge.” The Mayor indulges in his craving even as the remaining residents of the dusty town are dying of thirst and their lands and crops are drying up and blowing away, just as they had in Santa Ana after Del Rio Water diverted the resources from the poor farm workers. In Dirt, water has become so precious that it has replaced gold and coins as the unit of exchange. The ‘reserve’ is held in what looks suspiciously like a five-gallon water bottle inside the vault at the bank. Few of the parched townsitters are aware of exactly how depleted the supply has become. Only Bean, a female lizard whose drunken father has died and left her to tend to a meager farm, has any idea that something “unnatural” has happened to the water supply. Like the Plata Indians of *Watershed*, she has spent her life responding to the ebbs and flows and recognizes the water’s failing health. She tells Rango that the town “is dried up” and she believes someone is dumping water out in the desert. Bean’s proclamation makes no sense to Rango or the others since they all believe there is no water to dump, and they cannot fathom anyone being so wasteful of something so absolutely necessary to life. She declares that those living in Dirt are headed for an “agricultural meltdown,” but because she has “spells” her warnings are ignored. Because it is everything, the desire to control water has become a powerful incentive for the privileged few who have turned it into an economic tool against the many. One of the most important priorities to future water supplies is “sound

institutions” committed to a *pragmatic and principled* approach that respects efficiency, equity, and sustainability (Sadoff, Kemper, Grey 3 and 4). The Town of Dirt represents the trouble with the most corrupt institutions that have little respect. The wheel-chair bound Mayor tells Rango as a point of pride and as a matter of truth, “control the water, you control everything.” For the Mayor, control even comes with the privilege of wasting it at the expense of others. The Mayor of Dirt operates with the same sense of autonomy and entitlement as the anonymous owners of Del Rio Water, and believes he is justified in hoarding the water supplies for a more economically prudent purpose.

Rango is determined to discover the truth in the desert by tracking the town’s “aquatic conundrum [...] back to its hydraulic origins” [sic]. Rango only begins to recognize the extent of the victimization in Dirt when he listens to the history shared by Bean. She, much like Letty in *The Wind*, can see the implications beyond her own suffering. For Letty, the sight of the already dead and starving cows causes her unimaginable suffering, for Bean it is the dying cacti that bring her further sadness. She calls them “poor things,” and recognizes the significance of their needs and their losses. “All they wanted was a little water,” she laments meekly. Bean does not translate this into a harbinger of her own precarious state, but Rango immediately extends the peril of the desert cacti to the predicament of all the other critters in the Mojave. “Cactus dying of thirst don’t bode well,” he states. But the mayor is not disturbed by these losses. He does not connect their dying to his own risky position. The Mayor of Dirt is concerned only with enhancing the well-being of those able to purchase his paradise, and those

who will fall in line and accept that they are powerless. There is “no need for further suffering,” he argues, so long as those remaining are willing to cede their land to him. The mayor attempts to make the people of Dirt culpable in their own suffering because they have failed to recognize the “march of progress” and refused to “learn a thing or two” from it. He warns Rango that the sheriff is expendable. “One day soon this is all going to fade into myth. The frontier town, the lawman, the gunslinger, there’s just no place for them anymore. We’re civilized now.” The language of civilizing has long meant the language of domination rather than affiliation or mutual accommodation.

Rango follows the thirsty cactus on their slow march toward the water and discovers an oasis of green, where automatic sprinklers are ever maintaining lush lawns, resorts, and luxurious golf courses. Rango also discovers a valve that has diverted the water from the Dirt to the desert island paradise that looks a great deal like Reno or Las Vegas. He returns to Dirt, determined to do something good for the town. He has a good old fashioned gun fight with the bad guys, running them out of town and restoring the balance of water, and thereby the balance of power to the town.

Watershed, Sleep Dealer, and Rango illustrate the concerns over the demand and distribution of water resources that Powell acknowledged in his many reports. While land in the American west has been a site of conflict, especially as Native American tribes were forced onto smaller and smaller parcels to satisfy the needs of Euro-Americans, “no issue [has] ever triggered more savage interstate conflict than the question of water rights. And no state was uninvolved” (Lamm and McCarthy 191). But if resistance is a condition of possibility for emancipatory practice, as Andrew Robinson

argues, *Watershed*, *Rango*, and *Sleep Dealer* provide models for the creative impulse that gives rise to it. They remind us that many of the traditionally segregated categories that define our relationships and interactions are the product of politically motivated desires aimed at perpetually marking and highlighting difference, to maintain boundaries. And while “Transforming the world [...] will take much more than bringing people to an awareness of their differences or to a consciousness of environmental crisis,” (Adamson 83). *Sleep Dealer*, *Rango*, and *Watershed* illustrate that it is possible—that it is critical. As Hawks father states, “things are changing. They’re changing slowly, but they’re changing. It’s happening” and we can all become a part of that change, but only if we, like Hawks and Rudy, risk our own privileged positions and shake off the protective vestments of neutrality (Everett 112). This mobilization could be “the living power of the people” that Hannah Arendt dreamed of.

Watershed, *Sleep Dealer* and *Rango* demonstrate that the “landscape is not only the complex system of environmental elements such as air, water, soil etc.,” which it certainly is; it is also a “mental institution” that has been constructed by those in power (Drexlar 9). The way that human technologies become “part of the everyday landscape, making its drastic alterations [...] seem ordinary” and inevitable; invisible (Scott 1). The stories also highlight the long-lasting and broad-sweeping implications of America’s early constructions of the “mental institution” of landscapes to our nation and highlight the intra-dependence among traditionally segregated categories that remain permeable and leaky, bleeding and crossing into one another despite strong political efforts to establish, or more precisely, to manufacture distinct boundaries, that

will tremendously difficult to undo even if the imaginative field provides fertile ground for our reconsiderations. “Transforming the world [...] will take much more than bringing people to an awareness of their differences or to a consciousness of environmental crisis,” as Joni Adamson argues, but “things are changing. They’re changing slowly, but they’re changing. It’s happening” and we are all a part of that change even if we feign neutrality as Hawks does (Everett 112).

Change begins by recognizing how all bodies and places are implicated as participants and victims of the relations of power that define our status and that the relations of power that define us and others are often “the self-perpetuation of question dictated by answer” rather than the result of some natural forces (Poulsen *Landscape* 4). In the landscapes of the American west, these relationships have been mapped onto the land and people. “Cartography selectively emphasizes boundaries over sites” (Kirby 46). Although maps often provide the basis for our understanding of places, it is imperative that we remember that “what we see reflected in the landscape of the Great West as it becomes transformed into humanly comprehensible images is a reflection of ourselves, of our fears, desires, defeats, and successes,” and not a “reflection of the land itself” (Poulsen *Landscapes* 21). Alex Hunt, who is concerned primarily with the US-Mexico border as is Rodriguez in *Sleep Dealers*, argues that the review of historical maps and surveys reveal “the extent to which the production of geographical space hinged on the relationship of imaginative, scientific, and political constructions” (128). Indeed, Hunt believes that the US-Mexico border “demonstrates the difficulties and tensions involved” when officials working for the government attempt to provide so-

called accurate depictions of the land. Ultimately the survey itself reveals “in romantic fashion attempts to map the space of the nation in such a way that it confirms the ideology of Manifest Destiny” (128). It is stunning to imagine how different the American west would have looked to us today had it been divided with boundary lines drawn in keeping with what Powell believed would maintain adequate resources and reduce conflict. Powell was “a powerful advocate of reform in laws affecting the permanent welfare of the West” (Brewer 382). His greatest concern was for wastewater resources and he argued that the “monopoly of the land need not be feared,” because the land “will maintain but a scanty population” given the environmental conditions and the geological limitations (Powell, *Eleventh* 41, 22). Instead he predicted that the “monopoly of water rights will be an intolerable burden” (Powell, *Eleventh* 40). His scientific reports on the problem of land and water resources are credited with changing legislation in the US because of his position that the “general subject of water rights is one of great importance” (Powell, *Eleventh* 40). He advocated for laws that would attach water rights to the land itself and would therefore prevent hoarding by large monopolies, and would ensure that those who settled first would not be taken advantage of later. Powell noted that arguments over water supplies had led to “rancorous disputes, and are threatened with interminable litigation as the questions of priorities have been complicated by shifting settlements, enlargement of ditches [for containment], and transfers of water rights, and the effect of water diversions in one part of the river upon any part of the water below cannot be easily foreseen” (Powell, *Eleventh* 75). He advocated for “natural districts” where those who are dependent on the

water have rights and introduced a “theory” to “organize the [US] around another unit of government.” (Powell, *Eleventh* 255).

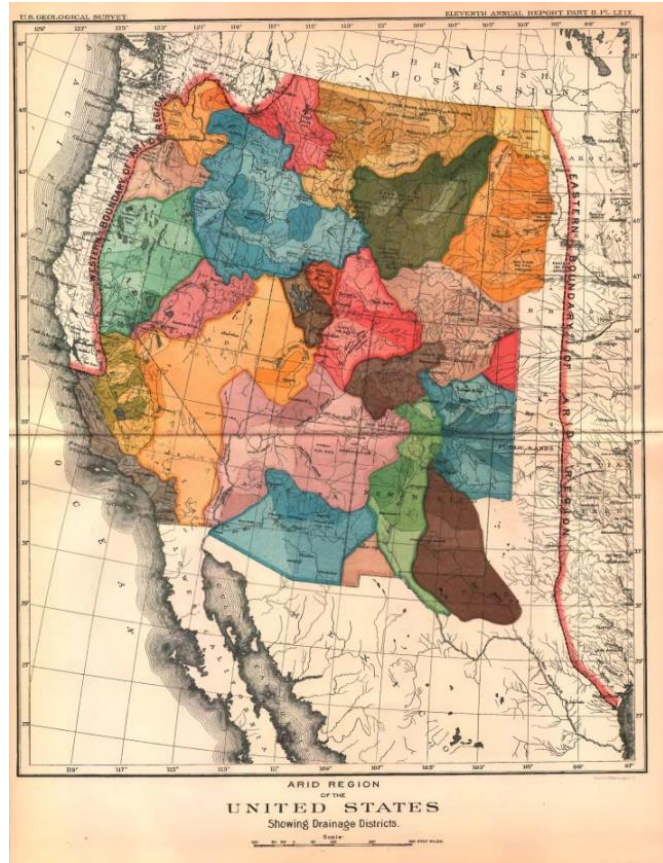


Illustration V-V: Arid Region, showing drainage districts.¹⁹⁷

But Powell saw as Turner did, a vast wasteland, open and vacant and ready for the redemptive possibilities of civilizing practices that only Euro-Americans could deliver. And like Turner, and many other US leaders, he often embraced the ideals of manifest destiny and the masculine constructions of lands and wilderness as feminized objects ripe for conquer and improvement. But it does not mean that we should read this

¹⁹⁷ Powell’s proposed map of the western states based on drainage districts.

cultural movement as inevitable, or as the only trajectory available. It is important to remember that this was not the vocabulary of the Native American tribes who had lived in these regions for centuries, or even for those living along other ethnic and cultural borders who did not speak or write of relationships, but lived them. For them, the land offered “a kind of plenty,” since they maintained a different kind of relationship to the land, and they read it and described the land in different terms (Poulsen 36). Maria Chona, a Papago Indian, demonstrates how important the land and water was to her people and their conception of themselves. She recalls being amazed at the white people who wasted the water cleaning their dishes. For her, the water was much too precious. And the land as well was precious. “I was born there, on the land,” she tells her ethnographic biographer, Ruth Underhill (Chona and Underhill 3). For Chona and her people, the land is where their stories begin, not a site identified on a map or described in a report on watersheds and waterways. This is true also of Navajo people, whose cultural and personal stories often indicate how “imagery and myth conflate with landscape” (Schaafsman and Will Tsosie 16). The Navajo people recognized what theorist Berleant would later argue in considerations of place: “environment [...] is neither sharply bounded nor is it an object. Environment includes the participant as an integral part, and its scope varies according to geographical and function factors, all influenced by an active human presence” Berleant (*Aesthetics*, 136).

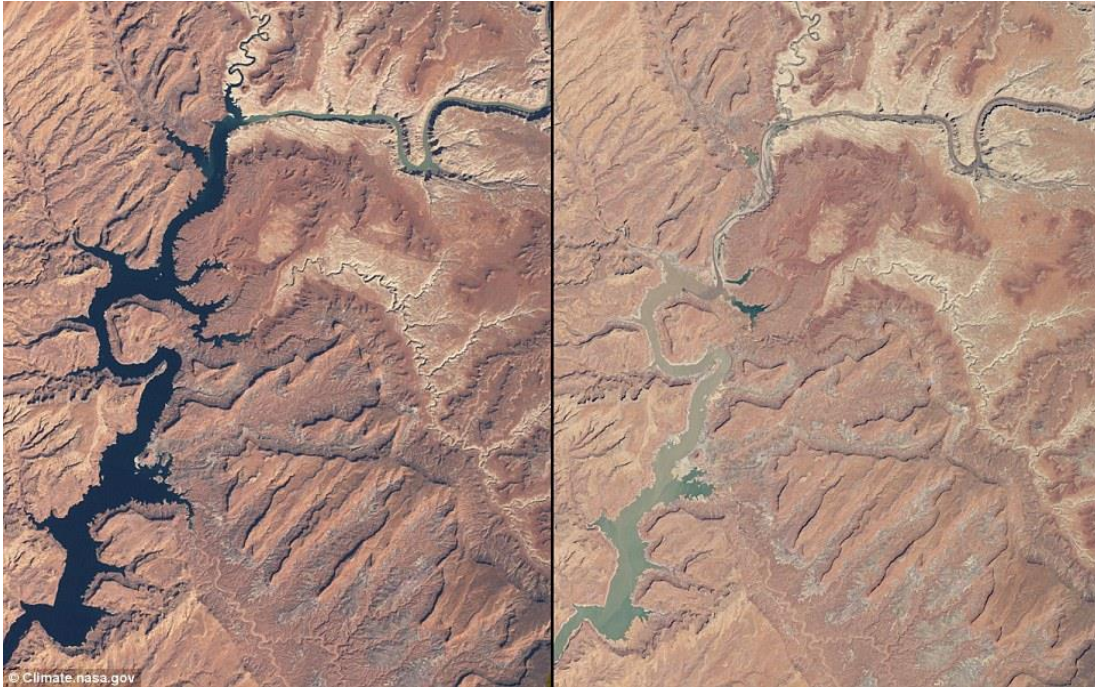


Illustration V-VI: Lake Powell, Utah-Arizona border. 1999 (l). 2014 (r).¹⁹⁸

And yet, the native peoples recognized that the people had also been influenced by the landscape. Chona describes the movement of her people in response to environment in simple, but practical terms. “When the summer was over and the pond dried up Where the Water Whirls Around, we took our babies and went moving over the hills, following the water” (Chona and Underhill 68). This was not an imposition, but rather an act of living with the land rather than merely upon it. The concept of Chona’s people did not make sense to the European notion of plenty (Poulsen 36). As Berlant notes, “landscapes are cultural products and they reflect the ethos and

¹⁹⁸ Illustrates the lack of human control over the lands over extended periods. Lake Powell, is at the center of the Colorado Plateau. Created in 1963 when the National Park Service used the Glen Canyon Dam to flood Glen Canyon. It took 17 years for the lake to fill, and levels fluctuations as much as 20-50 feet during the year. It is the second largest man made reservoir in the US. Lake Powell and the subsequently created Glen Canyon National Recreation area include more than 1.2 million acres of public land in Arizona and Utah. <http://climate.nasa.gov>

sensibility of their origins” (*Aesthetics*, 141). Powell’s aesthetic eye did not find plenty, but instead a wasted terrain; one that might be molded to the appropriate level of beauty and purpose. A greater state of perfection could be reached through utilitarian practice, proper alterations of the land, and benevolent stewardship. Men, or at least the right men, can conquer the natural obstacles set before them and given the proper ingenuity, less than favorable conditions can be made to satisfy the needs of particular people. And Powell was right, at least for a time. The so called improvement was incredibly rapid. Approximately 240 million acres of the western lands were converted to farms and ranches between 1830 and 1900.”¹⁹⁹ But as quickly as the lands were converted so too was “the fading out of raw frontier,” which also “took place fairly rapidly” (Athearn 21). The land has its limits and resists human control. “Frontier abundance inevitably declined,” and with it the increase in competition and therefore unprecedented human and environmental injustices (Cronon, Miles, & Gatlin 20). Today, less than 1% of the converted land remains.²⁰⁰ But the management practices introduced by Powell have continued, and the nineteenth century aesthetic views proposed by Turner and Powell lives on as “wilderness appreciation and utilitarian development [... remain] inseparable from the social construction of landscape” and the economic and socio-political consequences associated with these views.

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/northerntallgrass/> accessed 6-3-2014, “American Prairie History.” American Prairie Partners. American Prairie Partners, L.L.C., 2011. accessed 6-3-2014.

²⁰⁰ <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/northerntallgrass/> accessed 6-3-2014, “American Prairie History.” American Prairie Partners. American Prairie Partners, L.L.C., 2011. accessed 6-3-2014.

Chapter VI : ‘The Past is Never Dead. It isn’t Even Past’: Race,
Memory, and the Unsettled Borders of the American west²⁰¹

“No matter how much time passes, no matter what takes place in the interim, there are some things we can never assign to oblivion, memories we can never rub away.”
~Haruki Murakami



Illustration VI-I: Wounded Knee Burial.²⁰²

Turnerian mythology, which continues to inform much of our understanding of the American west and its inhabitants, “emphasizes the frontier as a place of

²⁰¹ William Faulkner. *Requiem for a Nun*, Random House, 1951. Faulkner’s narrative, which picks up the story of an earlier novel, *Sanctuary* (1931), is a genre-bending, genre-queering text that is at once part gothic novel, part play, part confessional, part nineteenth-century seduction novel. See, Keith Lawrence. “Moral Sentiment and Redemption in Faulkner’s ‘Borrowed Gothic,’ *Requiem for a Nun*.” *Literature and Belief* 24.1-2 (2004): 63-79; and Kelly Lynch Reames. “‘All that Matters is that I Wrote the Letters’: Discourse, Discipline, and Difference in *Requiem for a Nun*.” *Faulkner Journal* 14.1 (1998): 31-52.

²⁰² Burial of the dead at the battle of Wounded Knee, S.D. (ca. 1890) U.S. Soldiers putting Indians in common grave; some corpses are frozen. Library of Congress LC-USZ62-44458 (b&w film copy negative). <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007681010/>. [cropped from original]

opportunity” (Slatta 10). The landscapes of the West and Southwest continue to be a source of American strength and contribute to a sense of American exceptionalism begun more than a century ago when Turner first delivered his frontier thesis, which envisioned the development of a unique American identity based on the experiences of colonial settlers during westward expansion. These frontier sites were, from Turner’s Eurocentric view, understood to be gendered, racialized and ripe for white procurement and consumption.

American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward ... a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line ... This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is ... the Great West. Even the slavery struggle, which is made so exclusive an object of attention by writers like Professor von Holst, occupies its important place in American history because of its relations to westward expansion (Turner 3-5).²⁰³

The Anglo-American west, so long identified as a fabled frontier region, where the country grew up and ‘found’ itself has “been subject to conflicting definitions and

²⁰³ See Albert Bushnell Hart. “Hermann Von Holst.” *Political Science Quarterly* 5.4 (1980) 677-87. Von Holst was a German-American professor of history and chair of the department at the University of Chicago who began publishing a constitutional history of the United States twenty years before Turner’s thesis was delivered in Chicago. Hart believes Von Holst is important to American history scholars because he championed the “scientific study of history,” but he repeats Turner’s complaint in understanding Volume VI of the history to “lack” breadth because it is so completely devoted to understanding the history of “the advance of the slavery contest” (678, 682). Von Holst believed he needed to defend this volume in particular for “conclusions [...] often contrary to the ordinarily received views” (682). See also the University of Chicago library archive index for more information, where his scholarship is said to have “demonstrated the incommensurability of liberal ideals and the institution of slavery. American scholars and citizens alike were dismayed by the suggestions of immorality and self-interestedness” that von Holst argued was at the core of the institution of slavery in America <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.VONHOLST>.

images,” while at once retaining something of a universal quality based on the “myth of the Old West” in the canons of Anglo-American folklore and history (Slatta 10 and Athearn 20). Despite its being short-lived, the Old West is “the most precocious, unruly, noisy, flamboyant, and well known,” temporal and geographic location in America (Athearn 21). Indeed, the “West of the popular imagination, unlike the West of scholars, is an almost timeless sort of place” that exceeds meaningful consideration (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin 4). Even today, the American west of myth seems to experience a “perennial rebirth,” to engender an endless “fluidity.” That is because Turnerian reveries, which continue to inform much of our understanding of the American west and its inhabitants, return to the false egalitarian hope that this fantasy provides as it obscures the racial, gendered, and economic realities that very often restrict rather than grant access, as Chapter V highlights. Turner is often credited with rapturously igniting a particularly romanticized American imaginary of acquisition and loss that “celebrated a male saga of conquest, expansion, and extraction of the region’s resources” (Leckie and Parezo 2). But the American west has long been a contested site of “dynamic social processes” that have been informed by “entanglements and dependencies on other knowledges” too often minimized or overlooked altogether (Rose “As if” 57 and Said 32).

To borrow from feminist scholar Donna Haraway, the human socio-cultural “entangled assemblages of relatings knotted at many scales and times with other assemblages” have often been left out of the grand narrative of success and mastery

over people and place so often attributed to Anglo superiority (88).²⁰⁴ Indeed even in the most generous view of the optimism that guided Turner's thinking, opportunities are never fully afforded to all of the individuals who seek access to the land, natural and other resources, and economic, political, and social opportunities they promise. And it certainly ignores the level of violence enacted against a variety of others that underwrote the kind of mastery valued by Turner and his disciples. Turner seemed to ignore that the US government had been "willing to bloody itself in its drive to acquire greater expanses of land during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Dolan 69-70). "Territorial aggression" in multiple directions, and across cultural and racial divides, was spurred by settler colonial desires and demands that foregrounded competition rather than cooperation (Martínez 9). The conflicts that were set in motion even before Euro-American settlers crossed the 100th meridian erupted into even greater territorial violence as settlers entered the plains and Native Americans found they could recede no further. The western territorial disputes were complicated and exacerbated along the southwestern boundary of the US, where Natives, Africans, Anglos, and Mexicans forged temporary and shifting alliances at the Texas-Mexico border.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ This quote comes from Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*, a text devoted to understanding human and non-human relationships, especially in regard to what she terms "companion" species (i.e. humans and dogs). I do not mean to imply that any human residents of the American west, original or otherwise, were or are equivalent to animals; however, Haraway's quote aptly describes the lives of those in contact on the American west during expansion and to consider these entanglements is, as she writes "a needed, mortal, focusing practice in a soul-numbing, situated history" from which some Americans continue to hide from or be subjected to.

²⁰⁵ An example of these shifting alliances is found in Mary Austin Holley's letters. She described a cultural and territorial dispute often not considered in narratives of the American west. In 1831, she writes that the Comanche are "a noble race of Indians" who are "fierce in

The psychic wounding of the nineteenth century colonial settler initiatives are undeniably present in the American west even today, bleeding through histories, and stories, and imaginations. Turner clearly deemphasized the American western landscape as a “zone of cultural conflict” during the period of greatest Anglo-American expansion into the region, and he was not alone in idealizing the west’s potential while at the same time dismissing how it had been taken up by prior inhabitants (Rose “As if” 57). Euro-American settlers and their descendants, those like Cliven Bundy and his sons, often ignored the problematic relationships upon which this place emerged discursively and materially in the American imaginary. The literary crisis described by critic Folsom parallels the crisis of American history itself, which is fraught with fraudulent “origin stories” that have been “ritualized” around certain exceptional figures while at the same time leaving so many “outside the heroic horizon” (Klein 13, 11).

war,” but also “civil in peace, and remarkable for their sense of justice.” In addition to their general goodness, she writes that they “call the people of the United States their friends, and give them protection.” Clearly, Comanche Indians and Anglo Americans were still on friendly terms, but the same could not be said of the Comanche and their Mexican neighbors. Of this relationship she writes, that the Comanche “hate the Mexicans, and murder them without mercy. In further describing the “civilized” qualities of the Comanche people, she describes their system of justice. At regular meetings, they take up matters of captives. She writes that their system of “discipline is rigid.” But prisoners must be brought before the council before their fate can be determined. “If a hunting party takes the life of a North American after making him prisoner, without bringing him before the council for trial, the offenders are punished with death.” The Comanche display a desire to treat North American prisoners with fairness, but the same is not true of the treatment of their Mexican prisoners, according to Holley. The “Mexicans, who are considered as enemies and treated as such,” are not provided with the same sense of justice. Their poor treatment or death is considered unimportant during the Council meetings. Holley argues that the disrespect is reciprocal. “This hatred is mutual, and fully reciprocated on the part of the Mexicans. Hence the origin of the epithet expressing odium, so general in all parts of Mexico. To denote the greatest degree of degradation, they call a person a *Comanche*” (145-7).

Despite Turner's optimism, however, there were those who quickly recognized that "every [Euro-American] footstep treads upon the grave" of those prior inhabitants as Ann Sophia Stephens famously wrote in the opening of her 1862 dime novel *Esther; a Story of the Oregon Trail*. Despite the highly sentimental language, Stephens encapsulates an alternative reading of the American west and the cost of competition that for so many was loss and death rather than opportunity. The sheer totality of these losses and exclusions was becoming evident to many by the mid-nineteenth century, but because the right to have rights was invested in so few, the claims of Native, African, Asian and Mexican Americans were treated as illegitimate and insignificant. For instance, "Mexicans" in the mid-nineteenth century became "aliens in their own land" as ownership and control of Texas territories shifted between nations with little regard to its inhabitants, human and non-human (Lape 2). Just as Native peoples in the American west were displaced, so too were the Mexicans in the Southwest as the US took over much of the Texas territories. Américo Paredes articulates this historical displacement early in *George Washington Gomez: A Mexicotexican Novel* as one of the characters shouts "Their country! There you are. Their filthy lies are all over you already. I was born here. My father was born here and so was my grandfather and his father before him. And then they come, they come and take it, steal it and call it theirs" (20). Paredes narrative of life along the Texas/Mexico border, like many of his contemporaries, provides a "record of the aesthetic possibilities available at a particular historical moment for negotiating that moment's ideological conflicts" (179). And while there is not space in this project to explore their losses, it is nonetheless important to

recognize that they too remain displaced subjects caught between worlds. And just as Native Americans the “ethnic Mexican residents of the American west have been involved in a protracted struggle to prove their importance, to prove themselves significant in American society” (Gutiérrez 67-8). Far less frequently considered are the many Asian immigrants who lived and worked in the west, but they too have long-negotiated their lives in the American west. “They shaped the western landscape through cultivation and toil. They were not simply excluded. They were not just passive victims to be conquered and subjugated” (Nomura 149).

But the right to have rights is not merely a problem of the past. In the United States, and the American west in particular, minority concerns often continue to be ignored or sublimated to the concerns of Anglo Americans. The right to have rights remains a potent touchstone for minorities, for although many have gained official legal status, they remain bereft due to their historical positioning. This has created something of a dizzying conundrum for minority writers: if an historically “incoherent or corrupt” colonial system of exclusion and silence dictates present conditions, how can truth or equality ever be achieved? Can the tenants of the past be recognized and understood? Can there be change? (Weidman 91). An equally important question emerges for non-minorities: how can Euro-American descendants confront historical gaps “between official national histories” and the powerful unofficial accounts that illustrate a troubled cultural history and present, so that it does not dictate an untenable future (Weidman 91). For as philosophy scholar James Daniel Collins argues, historical “presence is an active grounding in one’s own present, but in one’s presence precisely as qualified by

the interpretive work of relational analysis of and critique of a past” (206). Cultural critique cannot merely arise in the present from the present moment, but must emerge from a deep commitment to understanding the present in terms of its past, requiring a teasing out, a frustratingly recursive act of cultural self-dis(re)covery. As Native American scholar Sarah Martin argues, a “culture so careless as to fail to harvest fully the images of its past,” including those images that are painful and contradictory, “is irretrievably diminished” (91). Martin is specifically concerned with the historical novel, briefly drawing on Walter Benjamin’s concerns with history and Michel Foucault’s notions of memory to consider James Welch’s *Fools Crow*. Extending her discussion more fully not only to Welch, but also to several other important minority authors whose texts “create a tension between fiction and history” in the American west, including Ishmael Reed, Percival Everett, Oscar Micheaux, and Winona LaDuke (Cook 442).

These writers invite a form of cultural “dreaming” intended not merely to rewrite history but to undo historical errors, the “legal fictions” and social fabrications that have defined American western history. Another significant motivation is to illustrate that “diversity is necessary” to a healthy cultural and social dialogue, and to highlight both the proper and improper ways of “interacting with others” (Echo-Hawk, Weidman 92, and Donahue 72). These literary artists offer an “invitation to speculate, imagine, feel, [and build] something better” than what our incomplete Euro-centric American literary history has yet offered (Haraway 92). As William Faulkner famously

stated “the past is always present,” but that does not mean the present must be entirely defined by the past.

Confronting both the old myth of a frontier void filled once and for all by an unstoppable European ingenuity and determination, and perhaps its more pernicious offspring, that the brutality and violence associated with the frontier is merely a problem of the past, emerge as the central undertakings of these novels. These writers resist “attempts at settled assumptions about [...] identity because of inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt [...] an individual, a community, or a nation,” according to theologian Mark Jordan.²⁰⁶ These literary works promise to unsettle the haunted American west through what are perhaps the most inventive retellings of the drama of frontier expansion past and present. The novels confront long-held American western myths in both jarring and humorous notes, which may finally begin to undo the fabrications that led to the singular legends of the west through the establishment of firm psychic if not material boundaries, and create an opening where difference may finally be remembered, welcomed and ultimately embraced; where the voices of the many can be heard. For as Weber argues it is only “by understanding the existence of contradictory and competing values and practices, and the changes wrought by time and circumstance, can one move beyond caricatures to

²⁰⁶ Jordan applies Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial theoretical concerns to religious practices and the official position of the Catholic Church. Jordan seeks to reconcile the inherent contradiction in the homoerotic practices of church ritual with its discriminatory homophobic policies that condemn. This choice is not entirely inconsistent with my reading of the other in the American west, especially since the heyday of the Wild West operated on a homoerotic social code—the desire to exclude women on the frontier is well documented and many scholars have argued that white men initially fled west in order to escape from the domesticating practices that conformed to Eastern ideals and began to organize the new Republic.

full portraits of a society” (Weber 9). The American west remains defined by those caricatures, but many minority writers engage in an effort to create that full portrait.



Illustration VI-II: Oscar Micheaux.²⁰⁷

African American writer, Oscar Micheaux, is an important transitional figure of minority literature and film of the American west. Micheaux, who was a prolific writer and film director at the turn of the century often embraces the Turnerian ideals of progress. Micheaux, in contradistinction to many other African Americans, often imagined the American west as a site of potential “racial uplift,” according to scholar Dan Moos (53). In 1905, hoping to find “personal opportunities,” Micheaux moved to South Dakota, a western territory where land remained available and cheap even into

²⁰⁷ Portrait from the first edition of *The Conquest* (1913). Cropped and border added.

the early twentieth century, to make a life homesteading, growing and selling crops (Moos 56). In 1913, he wrote and published *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Homesteader*. Like many of the amateur writers of the early frontier, *The Conquest* blends autobiography with fictional narrative. But, like the autobiographical writing of women on the frontier “that purports to be true,” Micheaux’s work has “been simultaneously devalued and privileged” in recent accounts as scholars attempt to recover and make meaning of minority texts that may lack the prosaic style that marks the most valued artistic depictions of the past (Karell 23).

Micheaux’s desire to write himself into the traditional Anglo American narrative of triumph, to describe “a true story of a negro who was discontented and the circumstances that were the outcome of that discontent” was marked by difficulty from the very beginning (“Introductory”). He could not find a publisher for *The Conquest* and so published and distributed the book himself.²⁰⁸ Initially written anonymously, it sold an impressive 1,000 copies due in large measure to Micheaux’s relentless effort to cultivate patronage for the book. He went on to rework *The Conquest* into *The Homesteader: A Novel* in 1917, which he then adapted for film. *The Homesteader*, which is the first full-length feature film to be produced by an African American, launched Micheaux’s impressive career in film that spanned three decades.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ See Patrick McGilligan. *Oscar Micheaux, the Great and Only: The Life of America's First Black Filmmaker*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); and Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence. *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

²⁰⁹²⁰⁹ Micheaux’s film career was hard fought since he failed to gain the financial backing of Hollywood, but he was persistent as well as prolific—he made forty five films. He had a large and dedicated African American following in the 1920s and 30s, but never gained the kind of

His early novels demonstrate that for Micheaux resisting the tenants of white society was less important than demonstrating that African Americans could be as successful on the frontier as any white settlers. Instead of highlighting his efforts to set himself apart from Anglo society, he attempted to write himself into the mythic history of the place in the heroic mode successfully adopted and deployed by his Anglo counterparts on the American western frontier. Micheaux focuses on the incredible challenges, and the possibilities for mastery in the American west for those with enough “enthusiasm” and courage to toil in its barren lands, whether black or white (72). His protagonist, Oscar Devereaux, describes earning money in the east, and returning to his land in South Dakota with “the grim reality of the situation facing” him, but he remains undeterred by the impending hardships (72). Instead of turning back in fear, he “began to steel [his] nerves for a lot of new experience which soon came thick and fast” (72). Micheaux’s protagonist exemplifies the rugged individualism and self-reliance offered up in Wister’s *Virginian*.

But Micheaux’s novel does not merely appropriate Turnerian assumptions about the lure of the American west and its potential as the site of a uniquely American identity, it also disrupts any claim that these are uniquely or naturally available to

recognition or following that his work merited. Recent recovery work, however, shows how important Micheaux is not only to American film history, but internationally as many of his films were exported. *Within Our Gates* was found with Spanish “intertitles”; *The Symbol of the Unconquered* was “found” in Brussels; *Within Our Gates*, *The Symbol of the Unconquered*, and *The Brute* were all exported to Sweden See Tommy Gustafson, “The Visual Re-Creation of Black People in a ‘White’ Country: Oscar Micheaux and Swedish Film Culture in the 1920s. *Cinema Journal* 47.4 (Summer 2008), 30-49; David C. Wall, “With a Crooked Stick: The Films of Oscar Micheaux.” *Black Camera* 1.1 (2009): 189-91; and McGilligan and Bowser and Spence.

Anglos. *The Conquest* follows Devereaux, an Illinois native and the youngest of thirteen children, as he attempts to make something of himself through hard work and determination. Devereaux's conscientious commitment to industrious activity, and to saving rather than spending his hard fought earnings, leads him to prosperity on the western plains of South Dakota, where he amasses a fairly large estate—at least temporarily—near the Little Crow Indian Reservation. The novel engages in the Turnerian philosophy that the frontier had been wild and dangerous and that it had been tamed through the ongoing efforts of the dedicated and persistent pioneer settlers who broke sod upon the hard earth. *The Conquest* takes up the “African American hero's reclamation of wilderness,” a trope adopted in and popularized in a number of traditional American western novels (Allmendinger 20).²¹⁰ Micheaux appropriated the tropes that would appeal to an audience already primed in the vernacular of the American west.

This did not mean that he did not face and describe the tremendous obstacles that he was forced to “hurdle.” Like the plains literature of Cather and Scarborough,

²¹⁰ See Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, which was first published in 1902. Wister has sometimes been identified as the ‘founding father’ of the American western literary genre. See also Loren D. Estleman, *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of the American Frontier*. (Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books, 1987). The tropes that populated those novels were later taken up in a variety of highly successful television westerns and sometimes record-breaking Western films. See *Bonanza* (1959-73), *Gunsmoke* (1955-75), *Rawhide* (1959-65), *Riflemen* (1958-63). The abundance of Western films produced during the 1970s and 1980s are too numerous to list here and are now considered by myriad subgenres, including epic, revisionist, biographical, outlaw, comedy, traditional, Blaxploitation, science fiction, acid, spaghetti, contemporary, space etc. Like their literary counterparts, these films have garnered little theoretical attention. See Scott Simon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003); R. Philip Loy, *Westerns in a Changing America, 1955-2000* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc. Publishers, 2004) and *Westerns and American Culture 1930-1955* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc. Publishers, 2001).

Micheaux's book describes the challenges presented by the unpredictable and often inhospitable weather. He describes the cold, gusting winds that made him "feel lonely and far from home" in the winter months and its stifling heat and "mournful tune" in the summer that was often his only companion (262, 287). And while the "quality of the soil" was unquestionably promising for farming, it was "severely offset by the inability to get water" (138). For Micheaux, the American west remained a frontier territory even into the twentieth century. Yet, Micheaux completely rejected any supposition that the American west had become an exclusively white man's land available for the taking, inherent in Turner's settled historical western narrative. For Micheaux, Turner's optimism extended equally to the determined African American willing to toil upon the land. And his text is interspersed with complaints about "negro's" general "lack of ambition" (17). Micheaux's protagonist roundly rejects what he believes is the excuse of "prejudice and hatred of the white race, whose chief object was to prevent the progress and betterment of the negro" as an obstacle to success (17). Yet, he admits that when he fell upon hard times with his horses, most of his white neighbors expected that he would head back to a place of greater "ease and comfort" rather than dig in and work harder (98). And they offer him little of the comfort and support that would likely have been proffered to their struggling white neighbors. Devereaux, however, takes great pride in the fact that he does not fulfill the "not entirely wrong" beliefs of whites. Micheaux's text includes an entire chapter on "Where the Negro Fails," in which he describes the two "classes" of "American negroes" (142). While Devereaux belongs to one class, the other fails to "realize what it takes to succeed" and further refuses "to

accept the success of the white race as an example” of what persistence and hard work can accomplish (143 and 145). The problematic language, which often verges on race-blaming, led many critics to roundly reject Micheaux’s narrative. Yet, the novel participates in an important dialogue about the American west, which serves as a geographic “testing ground for determining whether African Americans have a stake in the American dream” that had played out so publicly for white pioneer settlers (Allmendinger 15). For Micheaux, the American west emerges as an important site where the African American could find “personal freedom [...] respect [...], and economic success” (Allmendinger 15). Micheaux hoped to prove that, like white colonial settlers before him, the black colonial settler would meet the challenges of the frontier and conquer the land.

But, like Native American writers before him, such as Apess and Callahan, Micheaux was highly criticized for his apparent acceptance of Euro-American ideals and assimilationist rhetoric. His book was dedicated to African American educator Booker T. Washington, whose philosophy clearly influenced Micheaux’s work and his ideas about the possibility for economic opportunities for African Americans following the Civil War. But Micheaux’s “writings have been simplistically treated” and harshly judged for too completely embracing Anglo sociopolitical ideals, according to literary historian Blake Allmendinger, who argues that scholars have continued to disregard Micheaux’s important cultural work (15). For instance, Robert Bone, in his *The Negro Novel in America*, complained that some African American writers, especially Micheaux had completely embraced Turner’s optimistic vision, noting that his novels

argued that there “is no barrier to success which diligence and perseverance cannot hurdle” (49).²¹¹ Other critics joined Bone, arguing that the novels completely ignore and reduce the impact of racism on westering and instead “indulge in crude success-fantasies” that placed the blame for failure squarely on the shoulders of lazy negroes (Young 2). Certainly some of the criticism is warranted. Micheaux describes his life on the frontier in mostly idealistic terms, and envisions an African American homesteader of no less grit than that of Wister’s *Virginian*. Although Micheaux minimizes the impact of his race and obvious racist policies on his life on the frontier, he does describe the failure of a brief interracial marriage and tensions with white homesteaders that are obviously motivated by racial difference that he cannot overcome despite his hard work. However, rather than highlighting racial conflict, Micheaux “examines the physical hardships and psychological disorientation experienced by characters who relate to the prairie as outsiders or foreigners” (Allemendinger 16). Indeed Micheaux’s approach is much like that of Scarborough’s. Micheaux’s protagonist suffers two failed marriages and an unforgiving drought, which ultimately are the catalyst for Devereaux’s retreat from the frontier, demonstrating that his success was short lived and could not be sustained because he did not garner the same level of support from his Anglo neighbors that those in Cather’s *O Pioneers!* showed for one another during the most difficult times.

²¹¹ Ironically, although Bone offered the statement as an incredibly harsh critique of Micheaux’s work, the quote is often taken out of context and mistakenly attributed to Micheaux himself and is used to encourage African Americans not to give in to the obstacles they may face.

Critic Hugh Gloster has taken a more moderate approach to Micheaux's work, stating that while the author recognizes injustices, he simply asserts that these should not prevent him, or other determined African Americans, from attaining success (84-85). "Micheaux's claim to Turnerian ideals and privilege illustrates the power and desirability of the myth's promise" even to a black man in the American west and not necessarily Micheaux's inability to recognize the racist policies that hinder opportunities (Moos 56). And that Micheaux was able to wrangle a place for himself among "the [printed] literature" that "has been from the first the most important vehicle of myth in America" is a testament to his tenacity and ingenuity that should be embraced rather than rejected (Slotkin 19). And despite *The Conquest's* obvious cultural problems, it "may be considered double tellings as well as retellings, cathartic artistic experiments in which the subject's personal failures come to stand for the traumatic historical experiences of African Americans—in particular, the obstacles faced by racial minorities on the western frontier" (Allmendinger 31). After all, despite his great optimism, Micheaux's success was short lived.

While Micheaux's narratives "complicate the relationship between racial privilege and western identity," residing somewhere between the "oppressive" old western history and the "liberatory" new western history, the postcolonial impulse of minority authors who followed Micheaux adopt a far less optimistic account of the racialized American west. Their radical retellings no longer seem "plagued by a double consciousness" that troubled early critics of Micheaux's work even as they necessarily continue to "speak" from two cultures (Moos 56 and Allmendinger 15). The shift is part

of an ongoing reconciliation of the split personality created in a post-colonial world in which the dominated culture becomes necessarily subservient to the dominant culture as a mechanism of survival, and thereby is held hostage by the dominant language. The hostages seek desperately to find their own voice—one that recognizes its origins and refuses renunciation, but one that also understands that it cannot escape the weight of influence of the conqueror. Often the outcome, which Bhabha describes as “hybridity,” was viewed and described by formalist and structural theorists as in terms of gross errors, negligence and improper manipulations of the defined language rules because it did not conform to the English literary theoretical devices. The critical constraints were applied in an effort to keep marginal voices on the margin, but those from the margin eventually exceed these critical barriers. Among these writers, Welch, Reed, LaDuke, and Everett challenge the frontier thesis and its claims to an authentic American experience, in sometimes recognizable, but disturbing ways that rely on playful language and language play. These tactics work to deconstruct the western heroic vision and create a new western literary aesthetic that highlights diversity and racial inclusion and promotes a new “cultural worldview” (Donahue.70). Unlike Micheaux, these writers demonstrate little desire to unify, but rather to rewrite the western of the past and the present.



Illustration VI-III: African American homesteaders.²¹²

These authors revise the idealized image of the traditional Western figure of heroism—the white man who exemplifies the western expansion ideals of land acquisition and rugged individualism—by exposing the lingering failures of conquest and psychic woundings that arise from the violence intrinsic to the untethered and unethical colonialist mission in the American west. The silenced voices that are often relegated to oblivion in the western accounts by white authors emerge as powerful frontier voices. Welch’s *Fools Crow* (1986) and Everett’s *God’s Country* (1994), are decidedly historical novels set in the American west during the closing decades of the nineteenth century—the period populated with tropic figures that became the substance of the traditional American western novel.²¹³ Reed’s *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*

²¹² In Nicodemus, Kansas. Date unknown. After Reconstruction, up to 27,000 ex-slaves had migrated to northern Kansas by 1879 in an effort to capitalize on the Homestead Act of 1862. Library of Congress. HABS KANS,33-NICO,1—6. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ks0077.photos.069503p/>.

²¹³ See Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, which was first published in 1902. Wister has sometimes been identified as the ‘founding father’ of the American western literary genre. See also Loren D. Estleman, *The Wister Trace: Classic Novels of the American Frontier*. (Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books, 1987). The tropes that populated those novels were

(1969) and LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman* (1997) offer less traditional narratives that begin in the past, but jump temporal zones, explicitly in the first case and implicitly in the second, thereby unambiguously accenting the link between the past and the present and highlighting the temporal fragility of the American west of the past and its claim to a frontier past. Everett's *Grand Canyon, Inc.* (2001) and *Wounded* (2005) are set in the contemporary American west, emphasizing the ongoing violence. Together, these novels press against western expectations. They illustrate a postcolonial desire to 'meddle' with western tropes, and queer the temporal and geographic realm established by white masculine normativity. They do so in order to recuperate a polyvocal past, and also to demonstrate that "frontiers were not simply sites of victimhood or negation" but sites of interaction where "the discovery was mutual" if not equitably refracted through the historical and literary lens (Lape 9 and Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin 10-11).

later taken up in a variety of highly successful television westerns and sometimes record-breaking Western films. See *Bonanza* (1959-73), *Gunsmoke* (1955-75), *Rawhide* (1959-65), *Riflemen* (1958-63). The abundance of Western films produced during the 1970s and 1980s are too numerous to list here and are now considered by myriad subgenres, including epic, revisionist, biographical, outlaw, comedy, traditional, Blaxploitation, science fiction, acid, spaghetti, contemporary, space etc. Like their literary counterparts, these films have garnered little theoretical attention. See Scott Simon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003); R. Philip Loy, *Westerns in a Changing America, 1955-2000* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc. Publishers, 2004) and *Westerns and American Culture 1930-1955* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc. Publishers, 2001).



Illustration VI-IV: The Silenced Warwhoop.²¹⁴

Fools Crow and *God's Country* are decidedly different kinds of literary work.

Fools Crow is a serious attempt to resurrect a past and demonstrate cultural survivance in the face of extraordinary obstacles, while *God's Country* is a convincing satire set in the traditionally violent Wild West of the 1870s. *God's Country* follows the misadventures and misdeeds of Curt Marder, the man who would traditionally emerge as the Western heroic figure of rugged self-determination as he attempts to reclaim what has been taken from him by a band of “heathens” (6). *Fools Crow* examines a Plains Indian “culture in transition,” the Pikuni Blackfeet tribe, as the surviving members attempt to adjust to a changing world that includes both outside and internal pressures—

²¹⁴ By Charles Schreyvogel (ca. 1908). Photograph of original painting depicting Indians fighting the U.S. Cavalry. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-ds-05465. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>.

some that were positive, others that were terribly destructive (Cook 442). For instance, Weber argues that that the Plains Indians lives were never fully settled even before they encountered the demands of European colonial settlers. He writes that through contact with the Spaniards, “Apaches, Comanches, and other Plains peoples” became “more mobile and militarily powerful societies” (Weber 305). By the time of European contact on the plains, “change [already] had been a constant feature of native life, [...]but with their coming the pace of change accelerated” (Weber 304). The texts rescript the narrative of European heroism in the historic west and provide new perspectives that resist previous understandings of contact and resistance in the American west.

Welch describes conflict within the Lone Eaters branch of the tribe that had “become divided,” as well as the lingering disasters brought on by *Napikwan* diseases and weapons that forced the Pikuni “to become a different people” (189 and 371).²¹⁵ In doing so, Welch resists purely romanticized visions and nostalgic reveries about past Native culture, and instead creates a “culturally focalized” world within the novel that better represents the lived experiences of members of the Blackfeet Indians at the close of the nineteenth century (Donahue 57). Native American and literary critic Louis Owens, in his seminal work, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, describes *Fools Crow* as the most “profound act of recovery in American Literature” because of its accurate and careful attention to detail (166).

The novel moves the perspective from white cultural values of the traditional American western narrative to the “Blackfeet perspective” thus providing a more

²¹⁵ Pikuni word for white people.

historically accurate account of native life than those proffered by white writers (Donahue 56). For while, in literature, “the American experience came to be typified [...] by contact and confrontation [...] at both cultural and geographical borders,” the horizon of expectation seemed always to be reflected from a homogenous cultural purview of Anglo culture (Smith 8). In the traditional western, written from this Anglo standpoint, the ‘Indian’ “was usually the generic tribesman of the Plains—the new quintessential image of the Native American” whose identity was non-specific and relatively insignificant to the larger narrative of Anglo triumph (Berkhofer 96-97). In reducing the Native American to a singular trope that satisfied the white masculinist desire for unity, narratives have engaged in the “secret agreement between past generations and the present one” to perpetually reenact a form of cultural violence, as Walter Benjamin notes in his *Second Thesis* of the “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Welch undermines this agreement, thereby ensuring that the “present cannot elude the injunctions that the past addresses to it,” as Benjamin argued in his treatise (Simmay 152). Welch instead recasts the singular vision to highlight the polyvocal subjectivities that emerge from contact; to give dimension and particularity to the Blackfeet and to its individual members, to “reckon” with the past, which as Benjamin argued was the only path to “happiness” (Agamben 151).

The novel opens with White Man’s Dog, a Pikuni Blackfeet teenager who is “without luck,” but who nevertheless strives for wealth and respect among his people (7). He is neither the noble savage portrayed in Cooper’s Leatherstocking stories, nor the base heathen often described in captivity narratives, but is instead a mundane

member of his tribe memorable as a youth only because he is a friend of the more noteworthy Fast Horse; that is, he is not extraordinary in any particularly meaningful way, and is certainly not the wise chief or the fierce warrior often depicted in Anglo focalized texts (189). When White Man's Dog learns that Fast Horse will join Yellow Kidney in a raid against the Crow in an effort to obtain horses, he seeks to join so that he might capture more respectable horses and improve his standing in his own community. But despite his desire to participate in the raid, he expresses fear and seeks out the Pikuni medicine man, Mik-api, to perform a ceremony to make him brave and prepare him for the raid. And he does well, even better than his good friend Fast Horse, but his success is due in large degree to an accident and luck rather than bravery. Nevertheless, the raid changes his fate and that of his friend. The description demonstrates the fluidity rather than stability of Pikuni life prior to contact. And because the dispute is between tribes, Welch reverses Anglo preconceptions that all Native people belonged to a single people, or at least that all Native people experienced affiliation.

Welch's novel dwells on an important Native cultural feature that was often negated in the traditional western narrative: the tension between individual and community desires and between traditional folkways and progress among Native peoples. Native cultural values were never stable or unmoved, as the romanticized version of vanishing Indians would have Americans believe. Instead, Welch demonstrates that Native cultures were always in negotiation and contingent just as all other cultures were and continue to be. The press and pull among members of the

Blackfeet tribe, and between the differing tribes, of Welch's novel dramatizes a new vision of Blackfeet society that attends to its fullness, rather than the mimetic visions of Anglo invention. And while these shifts were certainly altered as "more and more of the *Napikwans* moved into Pikuni lands," the stagnant version of Native history that constructs tribal culture as permanent prior to Anglo contact is one that flattens Native history and culture rather than presenting it as rich and filled with multiplicity and possibility (Welch 93).

White Man's Dog, who becomes Fools Crow following his participation in the raid on the Crow Indians and his efforts to save Yellow Kidney, gains standing in the Blackfeet community as he continually negotiates his individual desires with the needs of the community. Fools Crow understands that, as with most Native American cultures, his story—any individual's story—is only one of many. Welch makes this clear as the narrative shifts from the individual—not always Fools Crow—to the community so that it is often difficult to differentiate the one from the many, the individual stance from the cultural positioning. Welch places great emphasis on the significance of the harmonious and fluid shift between the individual and the community as necessary to continuity, but not necessarily to stasis or permanence since the Blackfeet demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to the shifting circumstances. They moved camp, traded with other tribes, chose hunting sites, and organized raids as needed to ensure their success. This fluidity between self and communal positions is described during the council meeting. The Blackfeet argue about joining in discussions with all the bands to decide if they should leave their homeland to avoid the smallpox

and the US military. Fools Crow describes all the “voices, some loud, some strangely muted, some angry, some reasonable” as they debated the consequences of such a move (312). Welch’s detail to differentiation is striking. He does not depict a singular voice, but rather the engaged and sometimes bitter discussions among people who are not always in agreement on the best course of action. And after retiring to his own bed, Fools Crow “closed his eyes and listened to the voices in the lodge once again, but this time they all merged into one” (Welch, 314). Tribal members are at once revered for their individual positions and their communal ones.

Fools Crow suggests that retaining the voices of the many ensures the integrity, not merely the conformity, of the individual. However, losing community results in a loss of self-identity. Feather Woman, who no longer lives “much in [Fools Crow’s] world” suffers a form of amnesia—both of community and self. She states that she does “not fully understand the ways of the Pikunis anymore” and it makes her feel “ashamed” (333). She does “not see many of [the Blackfeet]” and it makes her “forget [herself]” (333). Fast Horse’s trajectory moves in the opposite direction of Fools Crow precisely because his own desires are never tempered by the community needs. His boastful cry during the Crow raid was thought to have angered and humiliated the Crow leader, prompting the chief to take revenge against Yellow Kidney, whose fingers were removed. Fast Horse is held responsible for Yellow Kidney’s fate and for the sorrow brought upon the Lone Eaters. And, rather than embracing cultural tradition “it lost meaning for him” (70). He had “become an outsider within his own band” and had come to admire Owl Child, who “defied the *Napikwans* and killed them [...] laughed at

their seizers and chiefs when they threatened revenge [...] laughed at his own people for their weak hearts” (71). Fast Horse seeks to stand apart, to place his individuality above his tribe, an error that comes with harsh consequences, not only for himself, but for the larger community as they too suffer the loss of a vital member. The problem does not belong to Fast Horse alone. Running Fisher, too is “prideful” (344). He recognizes that his boasts were for minor acts and that when he “danced, [he] danced in [his] own way” (344). While individuality in itself is not worthy of condemnation, Running Fisher comes to recognize that unlike Fools Crow, who “learns the ways of the many-faces,” Running Fisher is a “nothing-one” (344). Fisher represents what Momaday recognizes as a continuing problem of historical loss: “the problem of young Indian people [...] drifting inexorably from the ancient center of their traditional world” (Momaday *Buffalo Trust* 14).

Unlike *Fools Crow*, *God’s Country* remains with the Anglo settler, yet places him decidedly outside the standard heroic narrative, fixating on just how tenuous his historical positioning has always been. Everett, an African American scholar, demonstrates that the very traits that make the traditional figure of the western epic uniquely available for American citizenship also make them undeniably incompatible with all other human and non-human inhabitants of the American west. Everett highlights the untenable “self-defeating [...] code of the frontier” strategy, for it succeeds only in destroying that which it desires (*Country* 27). Everett’s Marder is a completely unsympathetic character. His many misfortunes are a direct result of his having only a “half a mind” that is “able to overlook completely” the fact that he

gambled away his fifty-two acres only after promising half of it to another man as a payment in what was surely a fraudulent deal that he never meant to fulfill (3, 131). Everett alludes to the many broken promises and treaties that underwrote Euro-American movement into the American west. Marder wants what has been taken from him, not because of any particularly important relationship, or historical connection to the land, but merely because it is his possession and he has a right to it—and it is what defines his eligibility for American citizenship.

Marder fails to respond to an attack on his land and possessions with strength and virility, despite recognizing that it is his duty to do so. Instead, he is witness and victim. He watches from afar as men steal his belongs, but rather than act, he cowers in terror and disbelief as his wife cries out in terror and his dog is shot through with an arrow. Although he claims to have grabbed his gun and stood his ground, as any good western hero would have, he instead watched silently as his wife was carried off on the back of another man's horse (3). The heathens, he is sure are Injuns, or perhaps white men dressed as Indians. His only hope of repossessing his land, his wife, and his other belongings is a renowned tracker named Bubba, a black man who can 'read' the land and communicate with indigenous peoples in their language; two skills that Marder has never bothered to learn, nor has he ever needed to, since his whiteness granted him the privilege of taking rather than negotiating. But because it is 1871, Marder is forced to negotiate with Bubba, at first trying to hire him for six acres of land, but finally agreeing to "split it down the middle" as Bubba demands. Afterward, Marder describes feeling "violated" by having had a "nigger stare right into [his] eyes," something he had

never experienced and had never expected to experience (26). Bubba is no longer a slave, and confronts Marder with a familiarity that is disturbing to the white westerner. Bubba must be reckoned with on his own terms, as a free man, an equal. Marder is shaken by the unspoken understanding and there is something dangerous about racial interactions that are no longer culturally scripted.

The proposed land exchange piques the interests of a group of Native Americans who are enlisted to help track the bandits. Big Elk and Running Deer question Bubba's apparently unlikely partnership with Marder; one that Big Elk describes as helping "the white man find the white men" (58). Bubba defends the relationship by describing the land he is to receive as payment, but this leads them all to recall the land's marginalized history and that of their own. Their place on the land—not their ownership of it for as Black Elk articulates, no one "can own the land"—was an immaterial consequence during the European expansion westward (60). "Funny, ain't it. It used to be your land," Bubba suddenly recalls as if this truth has already been erased from the historical memory. "Maybe I should give it back to you when I get it." But Happy Bear reminds Bubba of his place on the American frontier, warning him that he "is darker than [they] are" and therefore unlikely to be treated as a citizen with ownership rights any more than they are. Happy Bear assures Bubba that he will never have to worry about making the difficult decision about keeping or returning the land, because even in the unlikely event that Marder were to follow through on the agreement, the government will never let him keep it (60). As he does in his novel *Watershed*, and as Reed does in *Yellow Back Radio*, Everett illustrates the natural affiliations among minorities in the American

west that might ultimately overthrow racist pasts. Everett recognizes that the “legacy of slavery and the legacy of conquest endure, shaping events in our own time” and that they did not emerge of distinct practices and policies, but rather are part of the same colonial performances of exclusion and dominance (Limerick 18).

The irony, of course, is that Marder never intends to give Bubba a single acre, doesn't even own the land himself as he gambled and drank it all away. Among the white pioneer settlers, the land as entity and agent, has been as thoroughly erased as the non-Anglo humans. The land stands as a commodity, but not as a place of relations among men. Marder, and the other Anglo settlers populating *God's Country* do not live “in harmony” with the sacred as the Blackfeet had (Welch 360). And it seems even the land recognizes the fraud, this taking and giving, and claiming without regard to human and non-human others. Marder, as he drifts off to sleep out on the frontier, is deeply terrified, not of the men who he is certain would like to kill him—and indeed they experience a murderous rage against him even if they do not act on it—but of the land itself, which has taken on a menacing character that he does not recognize as part of his own fraudulent destiny. “It was big country and I'd wanted to see it, but it scared me something awful, like it was making threats at me all the time” Marder opines (60). But perhaps the land is not so much as threatening Marder as it is attempting to defend itself against him and other men like him. For Marder, “like all settlers, looked to taming it and making it work for [them], so [they] could get rich” (60). In Everett's western past, the white men who possessed the land had no relationship with it, no history with it, no

right to it, did not listen to the rhythms of the land as did the Shoshone, Cather's Alexandra, or Micheaux's Devereaux attempted to do.

Everett's critical focus in *God's Country* remains appropriately on the historical myth of white male superiority and the text undermines it through the sometimes-jarring juxtaposition of humorous turn with somber insight. The subtext of the novel demonstrates that the white men of this western past did not so much as meet their destiny as they confiscated the destiny of others, owning things, but not earning them or living in relationship with them. And everyone knows who has been violated. What is less clear throughout the narrative is why Bubba, an intelligent, capable man who clearly understands that he is being used, does not refuse to help Marder, or leave him to die in the barren wilderness. But in an unambiguous turn, when Bubba finally does "leave" Marder, abandoning his obligation to his business partner, it is too late. Marder, declaring that he didn't know "what came over" him, except a "kind of blind historical urge" engages in the violence that provides the "central action" of many traditional western novels and serves as "the initiation of the hero into the world of men" (Everett 218 and Cawelti 66). Everett's novel at once invokes the traditional Euro-American images of slavery and the conquest of Native American lands that represented success and transforms them into images of failure rooted in racist hatred that cannot be understood even by those who experience it to demonstrate that these are not independent socio-political endeavors. "Like slavery, conquest tested the ideals of the United States. Conquest deeply affected both the conqueror and the conquered, just as slavery shaped slaveholder and slave" (Limerick 18). But Marder does not emerge as a

hero in this retelling, he becomes a petulant assassin influenced by the “historical” past of slavery and his inability to reconcile himself to a human encounter in which he is not granted superiority on a land that he has taken. Marder states that the “black man in front of [him] weren’t no kind of real human being, just a thing,” thereby reproducing the language of slaveholders and the faulty pseudo-science that coded non-whites as non-humans and justified their inhuman treatment (218).

Bubba meets Marder’s violence with a strange acquiescence that mirrors the resolve portrayed in *Fools Crow*. Bubba does not respond to the violence in kind, but merely attempts to leave as Marder fires shot after shot into the wounded man. Bubba is transformed into the hero, the man of the traditional western who is “sacrificed for a society which no longer has a place for” him (Cawelti 70). Yet Bubba does not die, warning Marder that “you cain’t kill me,” and, indeed, it is Marder who believes he “is a dead man” as he unleashes his violent rage (219). Bubba is both a martyred hero and a historical ghost who refuses to submit to the historical narrative provided for him. *Fools Crow* concludes on a similarly hopeful note of continuance even as it seems to embrace a changing future. Certainly it is true that the Anglo desire for land meant that there could never be a peaceful outcome between the Blackfeet and Euro-Americans; that even “if all the chiefs” had met with the US military representatives as demanded, “it would not have changed the simple fact that the Blackfeet were to be eliminated by any means possible, or at least forced into a position they would never peacefully accept” thereby suggesting the inevitability of a violent conclusion (Welch 277). And while *Fools Crow* has a vision of the “*Napikwan* children playing and laughing in a world that

they possessed [...] and Pikuni children, quiet and huddled together, alone and foreign in their own country,” he does not give into despair or into a future already written for him and his people by Euro-Americans (386). Indeed while the outside pressures on the Pikuni “made their world seem hopeless,” Welch makes it clear that it is not hopeless and that the Blackfeet transformed rather than disappeared (309). So while there is change, there is also a future. Fools Crow finds “a peculiar kind of happiness—a happiness that sleeps with sadness” (390). And while the Pikuni world at the end of the novel is not as it had been before internal conflicts, before the smallpox, before the wars with the white men, Fools Crow recognizes that it “was as it should be” and there is something utterly empowering in that statement (391). Both *Fools Crow* and *God’s Country* reject the literary and historical erasure of minorities on the American frontier, cast-off calls for racial vanishing and instead embrace endurance by writing from and within minority positions, giving voice to the historically silenced, and vocalizing their longevity.

Disrupting Time

“I do not believe that time is linear. Instead, I have come to believe that time is in cycles, and that the future is a part of our past and the past is a part of our future.”
~Ishkwegaabawiikwe, 2018

Reed’s *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* is much like Everett’s *God’s Country* in that it engages in humor and absurdity to examine white western myths and the multicultural and racial entanglements inherent in the narrative of the American west. LaDuke’s *Last Standing Woman* recuperates the narratives of a particular Native world

much as Welch's *Fools Crow* does, yet it obliterates the temporal expectations of traditional narratives. Scholars and writers alike have often paid "careful attention to the sequential nature of frontier life" offering up tidy interpretations of the Anglo movement westward as temporally, geographically, and culturally linear (Jeffrey xv). The linear story is certainly a tidy one that provides a peculiar comfort and simplifies the work of scholars and critics. But linear narratives, even those that work to disrupt prior conceptions of white western history, often inadvertently engage with narratives of progress even as they reject the notion of the certainty that this entails a necessary movement from one lesser form of humanity into a better one (i.e. primitive to civilized, savage to cultured, old to new). *Yellow Back Radio* and *Last Standing Woman* dislodge the customary linear narrative of progression proffered by customary literary renderings of western life. In the space of the "temporal free play" the narratives open a "gap between coloniser and colonised" [sic] that disrupts the terms of this opposition, and as such becomes the site for power, agency, and identity in the 'post-colonial' world" (Nichols 5). The narratives obliterate linearity and instead offer episodic versions of history whose connections are often tenuous and difficult to tether together even as they move through time. LaDuke's storyteller reminds the reader that "this is not where this story begins" even as the material object, the text, begins to tell its story (18).

Last Standing Woman is a polyvocal, culturally focalized text much like *Fools Crow*, that shows that for her people just as for the Blackfeet, "the story" is "all of our story" (18). The narrative remains rooted in the traditions of the Anishinaabe tribe on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota and provides the perspective primarily of the

tribe's female members. And like *Fools Crow*, the novel does not shy away from representations of internal tribal conflict that arose concomitantly with the external pressures brought on by Euro-American emigration and violence. LaDuke creates a complex and complicated history of seven generations of Anishinaabe beginning with the Sioux uprising in 1862—the story told so often among white captives like Lavina Day Eastlick—and tracing their stories through 2001 as Lucy St. Clair's six sons having “all seeded fruit” ensuring the future of the Last Standing Woman and the tribe (288). LaDuke creates an encapsulated, but rarely represented world, so far removed from the present imagination that she includes maps to situate the reader, a list of fifty-one characters with brief biographical information, and a glossary of Anishinaabe terms used throughout the novel. These framing apparatus are more than mere artifice; they are a poignant technique conscientiously designed to engage readers in cultural immersion in a world LaDuke understands they cannot be expected to know given the limited historical presence thus carved out for them. The glossary, for instance, plays an important role in the text. The words listed are included in LaDuke's text, but their English translations are not always provided. The reader is responsible for either establishing meaning through context, or for doing the work of excavating meaning. Language plays an important role in reorienting the reader. Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien, in *Weird English*, joins a growing number of cultural and multicultural theorists who argue that the dominant language, particularly the English language has violently coerced non-native speakers into adopting a way of communicating and speaking that does not match their cultural identity. She writes that the English language is a living,

breathing thing that does not abide a singular structural composition. She argues that the voices from the margin—those too often ignored by past literary theorists—impose their own sense of cultural identity, borne of isolation and oppression, on the language, changing and distorting it so often and dramatically that no single textual rubric can explain the meaning of the “text.”

The power of the normative value of rules of language allow those who have been consecrated with the authority to break rules without fear of punitive damages, while punishing those who are not consecrated for their ignorance. Pierre Bourdieu describes the rites of institution, which give the power and authority to the institution to dictate and sanctify the hierarchy. He says these rites “signify” identity not only to the individual, but to all others, so that the individual feels “obliged to comply” with the requirements of his/her title—whether small and insignificant and foul (e.g. racial or sexist slurs) or magisterial--and others feel obliged to treat him/her in a manner commiserate with the “name” (e.g., a beggar will beg, and a president will lead; people will give to the beggar, but obey the president) which is to say that individuals “[b]ecome what [they] are” (121-22). Bourdieu critiques rites, which assign “properties of a *social* nature in a way that makes them seem like properties of *natural* nature” in order to begin a dialogue about the way rites imbue [. . .] a power “so great that it is capable of resisting all practical refutations” (118, 124).

LaDuke, in refusing to use English terms to make the Native language intelligible to her readers both refuses the language of the colonizer and embraces the language of her Native ancestors. In doing, so she privileges the language of the

oppressed and devalues the language of the oppressor as the guiding rubric of language communication. Gloria Anzaldúa describes the true horror of the dominating linguistic authority of the colonizer, using the terms “Cultural Tyranny” and “Linguistic Terrorism.” She describes how “[c]ulture forms beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates” (1018). But more importantly, Anzaldúa writes that culture is not created by accident by a hapless group of people without an agenda, but is instead “[c]ulture is made by those in power” (1018). Anzaldúa, like Ch’ien, argues that one cannot separate the person from the language, which is why banishing a non-native language can so swiftly crush the non-native speaker. “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (1027). LaDuke’s pride both recuperates the language of her people and disorients English readers who must work to grasp meanings from another tongue.

The power of this disruption can be materially potent for readers. Young scholar Rebecca Driscoll demonstrates the effectiveness of LaDuke’s techniques. Driscoll writes that despite early engagement with Native American texts, only LaDuke’s “gave [her] the illusion of being within Anishinaabe culture to an extent that allowed [her] to look back at dominant culture [...and] to view [her] own culture as foreign and incomprehensible” (2). The significance of this orchestration is further evidenced in LaDuke’s choice to include only Anishinaabe characters in her list—even those whose roles are fairly insignificant to the story. LaDuke’s inclusion of even minor Native characters is further emphasized as she refuses to include any Anglo characters in her

list, even those whose roles are pivotal within the narrative. LaDuke places them in the margin. The exclusion of white character descriptions serves to support LaDuke's literary desire to embed the text entirely in the Anishinaabe world, but it also explicitly replicates the historical and literary act of silencing that has for too long been assigned to those of the non-Anglo community. As post-feminist scholar Catherine Keller writes, "those who wear the mark of chaos, the skins of darkness, the genders of unspeakable openings—those Others of Order keep finding voice," refusing to quietly accept the places that have been assigned to them. "But they continue to be muted by the bellowing of the dominant discourse." LaDuke refuses these dominant narratives. Despite this radical philosophical positioning, *Last Standing Woman* has garnered far less attention than the written works of other Native American writers including Welch and Louise Erdrich.

One of the few scholars to offer an extended examination of *Last Standing Woman*, Steven Salaita recognizes LaDuke's artistic mastery in bending time, after all the text compresses an impressive history from 1862-2001, noting that the "historicity of the novel is a structural strategy, not a comprehensive structure" that purports to guide the narrative (23). Salaita identifies this move in an attempt to protect *Last Standing Woman* from what he considers the "dubious" label of historical novel, which presupposes the outcome and attempts to draw together the appropriate incidents that move the plot to a particular conclusion (23). The start of particularly important episodes in the novel are punctuated by year markers, which for the most part follow a chronological pattern. Yet, for LaDuke, no such predetermined, or traditionally fixed

trajectory exists, even in the consideration of events that have already occurred. Instead, she recognizes that the “unfolding of each historical moment will reverberate indefinitely in a cycle with consequences not only in the present, but also to the past and for the future” (Salaita 23). The Storyteller highlights this as she writes of a child in utero “who had the gift of the story and the word” even “before she emerged from her mother” (295). Her mother had at first “resisted” the stories of her own memory, but “as the child grew” in her womb, “the stories came forth with more force” and she could no longer deny them (295). The stories penetrate her psychically, but they have bodily consequences as well. As the stories returned, “they formed a web that surrounded them both and linked them from past to future. While before there seemed to be no time, now there seemed to be nothing but time, as each story joined their lives to the whole” (295). Despite the revolutionary possibilities in LaDuke’s engagement with “retrocausality,” Salaita is most concerned with how LaDuke illustrates the grave consequences of the “encroachment of white settlers onto Anishinaabe land” (22). Salaita argues that LaDuke’s novel illustrates that that Anglo intrusion on the land enacted the greatest impetus for the “transformation” of Anishinaabe lifeways (22). Mary Crow Dog in *Lakota Woman* makes the claim in explicit terms, arguing that the “fight for our land is at the core of our existence, as it has been for the last two hundred years” (11). The concern for the loss of Anishinaabe lands as white settlers claimed more and more of it clearly has devastating consequences for the Storyteller’s people and other Native people in *Last Standing Woman* as well, but as Tom Matchie argues, “recovering this land is a metaphor for reinventing the whole country, the planet if you will” rather than

a purely nostalgic desire to return to fixed place in order to reenact a set of past rituals that might restore the Ojibwe to an idealized state of static harmony (Matchie 3).

Remaking is not a return, but a recognition of passing time and alterity. Yet the time cannot be measured in traditional Euro-American terms.

Land is significant to the loss of Native identity, but *Last Standing Woman* demonstrates all the ways in which other appropriations of Native culture have been no less harmful to Native American lifeways. The narrator laments that an Anishinaabe actor, Jim Nordstrom, “would never become more than an Indian extra” in Hollywood movies (109). The problem is not Nordstrom’s lack of acting talent, but rather a lack of critical understanding of the part of the dominant culture to which movies speak. Nordstrom is relegated to the background because “Tony Curtis, Rex Barker, and Tom Ward all played Indians better than any Indians did” (109). Such a claim is ridiculous, and speaks to the assertion of false authenticity that many Native Americans have described when Euro-Americans attempt to speak of Native experience in place of experienced Natives.

The statement is not meant to be taken seriously, except in the sense of false performances by and for white audiences. It demonstrates LaDuke’s willingness to engage playfully as well as seriously with the ongoing implications of cultural whitewashing. The appropriation of the Indian image in American history and film cemented him in an eternally fixed historical position far removed from his past, present, or future. As Miller and Savage Jr. argue, “the stereotypic European American

image” of the Native Indian “had little to do with actual” Native Indians.”²¹⁶ The Storyteller recognizes that the white portrayal of Indians “reaffirmed the eternal status of the Indians in America’s psyche,” even if it had little to do with how Native Americans lived or behaved (109). LaDuke attempts to correct this appropriation by reinserting his status as an historically relevant member of an important clan with a historically relevant memory. In the “Cast of Characters” list, Jim Nordstrom is also identified by his native name, Jim Good Fox. And while he is a Hollywood movie extra, he is also the “son of Philomene St. Clair, father of Alanis Nordstrom. Bear Clan” (13). Each of the individuals listed in the “Cast of Characters” is an effort to restore specificity to individual tribal members, and to establish their lineage among their tribal community; to wrest them from their eternal symbolism. They are intentionally defined by their relations to the other members of their family. Indeed, LaDuke’s episodes include tales of lumberjacks who removed trees, and stories of “the missionaries who destroyed Chippewa spirituality, the anthropologists who robbed Indian graves, the sanitarium at Walker where many Natives lost their sense of being, and the boarding school that took away Native family education” (Matchie 4). In other words, there is no single place to which the Ojibwe people can return, no time in which their culture can be restored.

This does not result in a sense of defeat or certainty about the future, however.

Instead it gives birth to a fight to reclaim land, which serves as the site of an eternal

²¹⁶ David Harry Miller and William W. Savage, Jr. “Ethnic Stereotypes and the Frontier: A Comparative Study of Roman and American Experience.” *The Frontier: Comparative Studies*. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 109. The original reads: “The stereotypic Roman image of the German had little to do with any actual Germans.”

spiritual homeland as much as a material dwelling place. Native landscapes were “infused with significance” because of their connection to the “sacred places” of Indian (Schaafsma and Tsosie 22). The search for a land is a search for the sacred nowhere and everywhere sites as well as the material sites. And this becomes a source of pride and power, for while the refutation of time serves as the greatest source of transformation into authenticity, as post-colonial philosopher Bhabha’s asserts “time, rather than space, becomes privileged in questions concerning identity, politics, and agency” (Nichols 6).

LaDuke, Welch, and other Native writers show that part of the triumph of their histories is that “Indian people made their own choices about what to preserve and what to abandon from traditional ways” (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin 11). Native people also articulate the way in which culture is passed from one generation to the next so that there remains a sense of continuity in their shifting worlds, a sense of passing on of cultural memory rather than individual history, that both compresses time by connecting people across the ages, and expands it by eternally resurrecting the ancient past in the present. As N. Scott Momaday writes, “Some of my mother’s memories have become my own. This is the real burden of the blood; this is immortality” (22). While Native Americans were never silent as Peter Iverson points out in his book *“We Are Still Here” American Indians in the Twentieth Century*, their narratives were underrepresented in American literature and history. Iverson, an historian and Native American studies professor at Arizona State University, writes passionately about Native American tenacity. Iverson does not ignore racism, but emphasizes “the persistence of Indianness” during a period of great change in their lifeways (28). A

pervasive ongoing myth about American Indians is that as a group they have ‘vanished,’ or have become so deeply enculturated into the Euro-American present that they are no longer relevant to discussions of our time, but as Mihesuah notes, there are more than 2.1 million members of 500 tribes living in the US. According to the National Congress of American Indians, there are 562 “federally recognized Indian Nations” and that as many as 4.1 million persons living in the US identify as Native American or Alaska Native. Such figures indicate that the while the supposed vanishing fits with the Euro-American notion that “Indians were on their way to extinction” long before the 1900s, it does not correctly represent the state of Native American presence (Mihsuah 74). Native American authors draw attention to their historical relentlessness to dispute cultural exaggerations of their vanishing. Iverson whose book argues that Native Americans did not vanish into the mist, but instead found a way—despite all the obstacles placed in their path—to persevere, to adapt, to fight back, to reclaim their history, and to flourish in the smaller bits of lands that they retained. Indeed the title of LaDuke’s novel is ironic. *The Last Standing Woman*, is of course, not the last Anishinaabe woman standing. She is one among many, in a line that extends backward and forward, outward, and returns to the Anishanaabe people.

Whereas *Last Standing Woman* disrupts time even as the episodic stories engage in traditional narrative, *Yellow Back Radio* distorts narrative as well as time in an effort “to reclaim history” for African Americans in the NorthAmerican west where they were neither absent nor insignificant (Mielke 16). *Yellow Back Radio* often takes the form of poetry rather than prose as it eschews standard punctuation and line breaks designed to

mimic the orality of radio westerns, according to Reed (qtd. in Faber). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that these omissions of standard English are meant to draw attention to the fact that these marks are “literary conventions rather than sources of information, particularly about the black experience” (240). The argument fits neatly with those offered by Anzaldúa and Ch’ien. The refusal to embrace the ‘master’ narrative—and the double entendre is intended—is not merely playful, but is intended to reproduce a kind of linguistic violence against those whose linguistic dominance performed violence against African Americans. The disorienting form of the text is matched by the subject, which dislodges the traditional western from its tropic forefathers. Reed attempts to step into the “imaginative void,” just as Micheaux had previously, according to scholar David Nicholls (32). Unlike Micheaux, however, Reed does not struggle to find a way to adequately express the contributions he and other African Americans made to westward expansion, and instead “fills the void with postmodern fabulation” (Nicholls 32). The fabulation is “appropriate to the human territorial space of American, and particularly black American experience” in the American west which is already a site of incredible fantasy (Cowley 1238).

The narrative focuses primarily on three significant characters: the Loop Garoo Kid, an African American cowboy who practices Neohoodoo and gains “fame [...] throughout the frontier” for his work with a traveling carnival (10); Chief Showcase, the last remaining “injun” in the region (24); and Drag Gibson, whose “fat and ugly frame” is the embodied representation of his “quest for power,” is a serial killer, who has murdered seven of his wives and all of Chief Showcase’s tribe (22, 25). The novel does

not conform to any prior novelistic conventions, or certainly not those most lauded by critics and scholars, but instead is interested in “developing new knowledge in an established field” for there is no “genre we recognize as the black western” (Opie 57 and Nicholls 46). Reed works to upend the cultural “lies” that were “bent upon making [blacks] behave” and stir African and Euro-Americans from the “historical amnesia” that continues to shroud their participation in the historic movement west (Reed 18 and Nicholls 34). Nicholls correctly argues that greater scholarly attention has been given to African Americans who migrated from the South to the North and even occasionally from the West to the East, while ignoring almost entirely the movement west. Nicholls, drawing on the “formulization of the migration narrative” traditionally taken up in African American novels of northward movement that become “formal mediations of social movement,” considers texts of African American movement west (36). He argues that these “mediations take on not only a different landscape and itinerary but also intriguing formal properties” (36). Nicholls analyzes six African American memoirs, including African American cowboy Nat Love’s 1907 memoir. Like Micheaux, Love “makes little mention of his blackness, and the racial identities of his comrades are never explored in great deal” (Nicholls 38). In Love’s memoir and many of the others Nicholls examines, he finds patterns of “uplift,” but also explicit desires of early African Americans to articulate that “nationality, not race is what is at stake for the black man on the American frontier” (Nicholls 41). Because nationality is the predominant paradigm in the American west, African American narratives of westward experience have had a difficult time finding their fit.

Returning to Reed, Nicholls argues that *Yellow Back Radio* stretches “the limits of logic and temporality expected of realism” (Nichols 47). Reed achieves this through masterfully witty character-bending and time-bending. The text is a wandering pastiche that covers three centuries even as it is entirely grounded in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. “The novel ranges from the eighteenth century to the present combining historical events and [traditional] cowboy myths with modern technology and cultural debris” (McVeigh 150). *Yellow Back Radio* is riddled with these anachronisms so that it is as if the reader joins the characters in “witnessing something entirely different” from anything they may have witnessed before (Reed 12). For instance, in this dry and dusty west of the past, “computers do the work, feed the fowl” even as these mechanized devices will not be available for a half century or more (19). There are “Buicks” and instead of the bones of long-dead animals bleaching in the hot sun, there are “skeletons of washing machines” in Reed’s imagined old west (71). Further examples abound, as with the arrival of Chief Showcase, who listens to “Soul Music” in a “helicopter” (44). Reed, like LaDuke, disrupts the linear concept of time, collapses the past and the present, and even the future. Reed extends time to imagine not only machines that feed the animals, but animals that become machines thereby eliminating the technology that mediates between man and animal. In Reed’s world, there are “programmed cows [that deliver] cartons of milkshakes in 26 flavors” (19). In this imagined future-past, cows are so thoroughly commercialized and efficient that there is no longer a need for the ice cream shop or the grocery store. And a “new kind of plant” that is “plastic” and “growing in the hills like wildfire” (43). There is a trace of

an environmental critique in these moments. Landfills piled up with plastic trash peppers the modern landscape.

Reed further disrupts time as the real, the imagined, and the possible collide. The text provides a brief account of Esteban de Dorantes, a Portuguese slave who in 1528 made his way across the sea with Cabeza de Vaca and others. He was one of the early “explorers” of the American southwest and was the first “Negro” to land in what would become the United States (Barr 2).²¹⁷ In Reed’s account, the factual is infused with folklore:

In the early half of the sixteenth century about 1528 an expedition which included the black slave Estevanico landed at Tampa Bay. He and his companions were lost trapped and enslaved by Indians. Other expeditions also vanished mysteriously. Legend has it that the city can only be found by those of innocent motives, the young without yellow fever in their eyes (Reed 28).

Famed explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, “who died and went to Hell together” are also briefly mentioned (105). John D. Rockefeller, Kit Carson, Barnum Bailey, and John Quincy Adams also make appearances in *Yellow Back Radio*. And Drag attempts to hire John Wesley Hardin to kill Loop Garoo (136). Hardin, of course, was a notorious gunslinger in the old west who was credited with killing 27 men, although he claimed many more in his autobiography—written from jail. The mashup of real and imagined explicitly evokes questions about the fabrications of history in the American west in much the same way that Everett does in both *God’s*

²¹⁷ See Alwyn Barr. “Explorers and Settlers.” *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*. Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1996. 1-12; and Goodwin, Robert. *Crossing the Continent, 1527-1540*, New York: Harper Collins, 2008, for an expanded account of de Dorantes.

Country and Watershed, particularly as it circulates around the non-stories of Africans and Natives and asserts a reckoning with the real: “Indians and black people have been roaming the plains of America together for hundreds of years” even if the history of the American west appears to speak a different truth (Reed 48). The tangled web of stories, true and false, real and imagined, that are impossibly, yet exquisitely drawn together, offer an explicit call to “abandon America institutions” and embrace the “One Big Dead” that has been the imagined narrative of the American west and its inhabitants (202). It represents the liberatory possibility for the colonial subject, since it is the construction of “continuous time” that legitimizes some at the expense of others (B. Nicholls 8). Such heteronormative conceptions of time permit “the idea of progress, and differentiates the past from the present, so that categories such as the modern and the primitive arrive” seamlessly at once (B. Nicholls 8). Reed’s postmodern stance refuses the Euro-American hierarchy of historical knowledge previously scripted for African and Native Americans.

Even Now

Wounded (2005) and *Grand Canyon Inc.* (2001) all jump forward about 100 years, moving from the historical, or the mostly historical, to the contemporary as they explore the ongoing legacy of cultural conflict. *Grand Canyon Inc.*, like Everett’s *God’s Country* and *Reeds Yellow Back Radio*, is another satire, and follows Winchell Nathaniel “Rhino” Tanner on his quest to purchase and ultimately develop the Grand Canyon into a ‘must-see’ theme park. Everett brings a similar sense of humor to Tanner, who is in many ways a modernized version of Marder, retaining the “instinct” to avoid

“self-reflection [...] at all costs” (Grand 47). However, Tanner is made more terrifying because he is more creative, more mobile, more indiscriminate, “willing to shoot anything that lived,” and far more destructive as he doesn’t merely want to inhabit the landscape, but to remake it entirely (4). The call to an ecological citizenship is made more explicit and the consequences on the relations among human and non-human animals are drawn more clearly. When Tanner successfully uses a prized BB gun for the first time, the narrator, Simpson “BB” Trane, describes it as a “murder” and the victim is a “little assassinated bird” (11). Tanner’s desire to conquer, control, and profit from the Grand Canyon, is matched only by his desire to kill in abundance. Tanner staves off his depression at having been such a poor shot that he “couldn’t kill anything” as a child by slaughtering every kind of animal he can while traveling around the world as an adult (47). Tanner is a modern gunslinger, and with no trophies left to collect in America, he makes his fortune as a large game tracker in Africa. “Bang. Bang” (67). The connection between the present moment of the text and the historical colonial moment on the African continent is unmistakable. The conquering spirit of the Anglo in the American west did not begin there.

Tanner, like Everett’s Marder and Reed’s Gibson, objectifies the land, seeing it only in terms of its utilitarian and economic uses. The western landscape stands as a penetrable space that is meant to be tamed, subdued, or worse destroyed for the profit of white masculine desire. These men, driven by their colonial, capitalist desires are incapable of recognizing the complex ecological history of the land, or even ever imagine that such a thing as complex as an historical relationship exists; none

contemplates his life as a member of a larger human or ecological community. Instead individual determinism and economic supremacy drive their pursuits. They are incapable of committing any heroic act because each of their interests are singularly selfish. Tanner, like Marder and Gibson, is driven to possess, without any sense of stewardship or reciprocity. As a ten-year-old boy viewing the Grand Canyon with his father, his first response was not that of awe and wonder, nor to marvel at the beauty of the natural landscape, nor a wish to sit in contemplation with it. Instead “his first question” is whether or not they could purchase the land (4). When he is told that it is “not for sale,” the youth responds with the very modern American mantra that all things are “for sale” (4-5). Seeking to possess without regard to the consequences, to histories or relations, is among the greatest moral failings of the traditional American western man.

While Tanner and Marder want to take the land, to conquer and possess it as one might any inanimate object whose material significance holds no particular intrinsic meaning, Everett’s John Hunt imagines the western landscape as a place of recuperation, refuge and beauty that is already anchored discursively by its volatile past, complex present, and uncertain future. Hunt is a well-educated man who lives on his relatively spacious Wyoming ranch with an aging uncle. Hunt is there because “he loves the place,” and it is a place where a particularly careful and skillful horse trainer is appreciated—no matter how out of place he may at first appear (36). When a skeptical young visitor asks why Hunt chose to live so far from the modern conveniences of one of the abundant urban centers rising up from the American landscape, Hunt is perplexed

by the question, and offers one of his own: “Did you notice the landscape when you drove in?” For Hunt, an art history major who graduated from Berkley, choosing the natural landscape over a cityscape is an easy one. “This is a beautiful place” (51).

Tanner’s distempered bloodlust is replaced by Hunt’s deep understanding of the geological, human, and non-human histories in the American west. Hunt gave up cattle ranching because he didn’t “like the businesses [he] had to sell cows to” (36). He is disturbed by the practices of meat production in the United States and refuses to become a part of the machinery that sends hundreds of thousands of cattle to slaughter each year to satisfy the insatiable appetites of Americans who remain ignorant to the plight of the animals. Hunt responds to the horses he trains, rather than directing them. And there are moments when Hunt recognizes that his thoughts burden the horse, so that the two are connected, not merely by the contact of their flesh, but by the correspondences and comingling of their consciences—they are partners who share a single rhythm.

Hunt seems to share a deep respect with the people of the town as well, and they seem to reciprocate. This is the languid, peaceful American west of our nostalgic dreams. But very quickly this quiet western landscape is marred by violence. Respect and reciprocity provide thin veils to cover hatred and bigotry. When a college boy, one the local waitress “heard was gay,” was found “strung up like an elk with his throat slit” the seething hatred and intolerance is exposed (14, 12). Hunt initially takes a healthy disinterest, much as Robert Hawk did in *Watershed*, and attempts to make sense of the ‘senseless’ slaying. He even maintains this stance when his newly hired handyman is arrested for the crime and later hangs himself in jail. But Hunt’s personal entanglement

begins, without his even recognizing it, when violence erupts again. Riding one of his horses, he spots a black stain on the red earth and he “knew what had happened” (45). Hunt peers into an empty den and follows the tracks leading away as he became “confused, near tears, angry” (45). The senseless slaughter of a wolf family penetrates his disinterested mind. Again, Everett depicts the sheer horror and pain of Hunt’s dawning realization in a way that echoes Hawk’s. Everett’s texts insists that the pain cannot be avoided, that the personal distance is a construct that serves to embolden those who are in power, or those are decidedly a part of the power structures. The crime against the gay student and the crime against a wolf mother and her two pups are yoked together in the text as a violence-in-kind—one is no more senseless than the other—or at least those who perpetuate the kind of crimes are not very different from one another. Hunt locates the charred remains of the mother and attempts to save the badly wounded pups. Only one of the animals survives, although Hunt and his uncle are forced to cut off one of her legs to keep her from dying. She is forever wounded.

The violence escalates, and Hunt’s personal engagement deepens, when David, the son of an old college friend, and his lover travel to Wyoming for a protest rally in honor of the gay college boy. Cattle are found slaughtered in the fields and the words “Red Nigger” appear on an Indian farmer’s landscape. As Hunt tells David and Robert, “Nobody’s got the hate market cornered in this country” (67). Set against the violence is a complex love affair. Hunt, who is recovering from the guilt over his wife’s death, is falling in love with Morgan, a female rancher who lives nearby. But their budding romance is intersected by Hunt’s memories of his dead wife and by David’s sudden

longing for Hunt as both a sexual partner and as a paternal stand in for his father, who simply cannot accept David's homosexuality. Hunt is neither comfortable nor threatened by David's sexuality. Again he maintains a dispassionate distance. This is one of Everett's strongest cultural critiques: the urge to remain dispassionate, to maintain distance in the face of injustice is a hopeless strategy that inevitably leads to disastrous consequences. In a particularly touching scene, Hunt must save David from freezing by taking him to a cave, stripping him down and using his own body heat to warm him. The delirious young man reaches up to Hunt and kisses him on the lips. Hunt does not turn away, but he is later filled with guilt that threatens to undermine both his relationship with David and his relationship with Morgan. Although it never emerges as a crisis of masculinity in the text—it is simply an opening up of the possibilities—it creates a tension that the three of them are forced to negotiate. Cultural and social problems must be confronted, discussed, kicked around, and turned over. While Everett attempts to bring these new identities into the conversation, the text is not always successful. In one passage, Morgan admits she named her horse Square because "He just never fit in with the other horses. He's too sweet. He lets them run all over him" (34). The homosexual undertones, which could equally describe the dead handyman, who Hunt learns was gay, are troubling. The conflation of homosexuality with sweetness or weakness, which is an obviously problematic reduction and simplification, however, is meant to provide further disruption of the western traditions, even if the ending seems less hopeful. For instance, it is possible to see Everett as

joining with Reed, who includes cross-dressing scenes, in explicitly moving to queer the American west, or to go further and suggest that the American west was always queer.

As feminist scholar Annie McClintock argues, “people’s experiences of desire and rage, memory and power, community and revolt are inflected and mediated by the institutions through which they find their meaning—and which they, in turn, transform” (15). Minority writers who take up the American west provide complicated renderings in which the “others” who have traditionally been banished to the margins flood the texts. And because the complicity encompasses such a wide range of institutions, reversals are not provided in simplistic terms and there is no suggestions that undoing the past traditions can be done seamlessly. Instead they are tangled and complicated and painful. These writers demonstrate the web of cultural collisions that undermine any claim to a past or present heterogeneous west, but in doing so are forced to take up myriad themes, including “religious feminist, activist, environmental, tribal, historical, colonial, decolonial, postcolonial, biographical, autobiographical” (Salaita 22). These are not comforting portrayals, and readers are often left in an uneasy psychic place wondering what to make of these texts, what to do with them. But these works demand attention and recognition precisely because they are “immensely engaging [even as they are] deeply provocative” (Krauth 313). They are not meant to be read thoughtlessly, or as pure entertainment. Instead, they “open this world [...] in a way that hasn’t been available before” but perhaps should have been all along, as Stewart argues of Everett’s work (323). These narratives of the American west and all its inhabitants revisit a long-violent American territory, exposing myriad forms of hatred that circulate around race,

gender, sexual identity, environment, and competition for resources. They also show that all these others are “participants in cultural exchange that informs American identity” rather than residing somewhere outside of it, and that their participation has never been absent (L. Smith 2).

Conclusion



Illustration VI-V: Peaceful Negotiations.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ By Bunky Echo-Hawk. Original artwork appearing in Walter R. Echo-Hawk’s *In the Courts of the Conqueror*. Cropped from original; border added. Used with permission.

*Truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares
an original affinity with freedom.*

~Michel Foucault

Modern minority narratives of resistance expose the limits of the frontier myth in serious, satiric, sometimes painful relief, chipping away at what they identify as the false claims of expansion and prosperity that have for too long been accepted as historically accurate, unavoidable, and available only to the few. Minority writers trace the implications of fabricated cultural absences that have been sanctioned by a suspect historical record, and echoed in traditional narrative accounts of the American west. They confront the often porous boundary between fact and fiction, and categories of race, gender, and status in their narratives. Together these writers disrupt the seemingly natural binaries that emerged as “self-evident categories of identification” (Jagose 2). They negotiate a difficult terrain where the politics of gender, sexuality, race and truth are intimately intertwined with imagined frontier boundaries. They locate some of their most scathing critique of traditional American values, which these texts argue displace, erase and exploit, at the very site of their creation: the western locales of the fantastic dramas of the American imaginary rooted in historically implicated places. For “cowboys, Indians, and mountain men, and the lore surrounding them” are considered uniquely western “because we identify the West as a place in which, historically or otherwise, these figures move.” In the American mythos, the west is “the place that has made possible the existence of a cowboy, an Indian, a mountain man” and a place that fails to represent so many others (Poulsen 18). And it is only in this place that these men could have emerged.

Such a sense of the comingling of place, culture, and racialized identities in the development of a uniquely-American character traces back to the earliest novels of contact that often provided a romantic picture. “Cooper offers scenes of Indian and white characters discussing their cultural origins in the American landscape and relating them to the broader discussion of the development of a nation” (Smith 12). The literature of the North American frontier in the nineteenth and twentieth century provided powerful representations of conflict and of conquest. But minority writers, “Native American, Asian American, African American” and Anglo writers alike “lived in the culturally fluid contexts of the contact zones at the frontier” (Lape 3). The provisional characteristics of contact undermine any claim to a homogenous, rugged individualism that is the trademark of the traditional images of the frontier and the American west that followed. Indeed the texts often highlight the intra-dependence among traditionally segregated categories that remain permeable and leaky despite strong political efforts to establish, or more precisely to manufacture limits. New western narrative territories concern themselves not only with undoing and remaking the myths of the past, but also with the unearthing and turning over the dilemmas of the present, which are always weighted by the residue of history. Their works intentionally collapse the boundaries of time to demonstrate that the past is ever present and the problems of history, specifically a history that is “hostile to diversity” persist (Donahue 76). History is an ongoing permutable reality that is never sufficiently told once and for all. However, as scholar Linda Vance asserts “[s]torytelling is by definition an act of community” (176). In retelling and reformulating the American western, minority

authors often work to move readers from “individual to cultural consciousness” (Donohue 58). In doing so, new communities emerge, and perhaps more intriguing is the prospect for new histories to emerge. If “the function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence” as Barthes contends, then these minority writers are determined to stem the flow (Barthes 143). Scholars need to pay more attention to what these sometimes radical narratives can tell us about the multiplicity of ways that “we are all intimately and irrevocably connected” through time and place (Vance 174). In *Postethnic America*, David A. Hollinger defends the “elements of multiculturalism” that “balance an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, and promotes solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds” (3). Without the broadened perspective, discussions merely continue to legitimize other forms of erasure and do “not provide a comprehensive picture of the history of interracial and cross-cultural interaction” and affiliation that permeated the literature and culture (Smith 1). While Smith focuses primarily on contemporary authors, she recognizes that “it is important to note that the intersection of black, white, and red in American fiction precedes” them even if these texts have often been forgotten or disregarded in favor of those that embrace the myths (1). Much of the canonized literature rejects these interactions and instead engages in the “over-accenting of Anglo-Americans” so that the story of the American west “suffers” dramatically (Limerick 41). The “cast of characters” in the traditional literature of this place have been “contracted to fit the tight, polarized categories of the

frontier” (Limerick 41). But while the American west’s present is certainly connected to the past, it does not mean it is fated to eternal repetitions. John Hawgood, applying a modern multiculturalist lens to Turner’s optimism argues that “new frontiers can open up for the first Americans as well as for the newest ones” (411).

Chapter VII

Conclusion: The Future of the Western Past

Ghosts haunt American literature because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject.

~Renée L. Bergland



Illustration VII-I: John Sontag as he lay dying.²¹⁹

“Does the western past have a future?” So muse William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin in their introduction to the collection *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*. The question hits upon what Paxson argues is the “greatest of American problems” even today: the question of “the West” (1). Paxson does not offer this as hyperbole, even as it seems there are other American problems that ought to

²¹⁹ Sontag was shot September 1904. Lying in a makeshift ‘grave’ of straw and manure, even as he continued to breathe, he was surrounded by gunmen who waited for his death. He was alive at the time of the photograph. 111-SC-03363 <http://www.archives.gov>.

present greater dilemmas: race, gender, sexuality, class, poverty, environment, and immigration are but a few of the pressing issues that seem more problematic and more rooted in the present. And they seem decidedly more urgent. But for Paxson and many other scholars, it is in the unresolved place—materially and imaginatively—of the American west and its appeal to a frontier past that many of these other cultural contestations emerge most potently. Alternatively, it is from the problems of race, gender, and violent conflict that were rooted in the frontier ideologies most prevalent in the American west that these current problems can be traced. In either case the western past continues to influence the present and the present continues to be influenced by our western past. The frontier period seems to have slipped into a past, yet it is recalled again, both imaginatively and materially, today in surprising and contradictory ways. The American west and the question of its past and future opens a complex web of elusive questions since even understanding the western past is complicated and remains only a partially understood, if often (miss)told story rife with contrivances, contradictions, and binary positionings that perpetually lead to division rather than reconciliation. As David Wrobel argues, discussions of the American western past remain “divided over issues of frontier or region, process or place, triumph or tragedy, settlement or conquest, development or despoliation” (401). These binary discourses often circulate around the “Old” versus the “New” western historians: the former emphasizes triumph, while the latter emphasizes tragedy. Yet these dichotomies are painfully simplistic and inadequate, and those who engage them often over accentuate one position at the expense of the other. But the ‘problem’ of the American west is that

it cannot fit neatly into these tidy categories of opposition. The American west is a site of triumph; and a site of unspeakable tragedy. It is both. And it is possible to recognize the history of the American west as a frontier—a boundary marked by cultural engagements with long reaching consequences—and a region—a geographic site marked by unique physical characteristics that shapes its inhabitants and dictates human activities. For as Weber argues, accepting the one does not require the exclusion of the other. And, this project has not attempted to enter into these scholarly disputes as a way of determining the truth or taking sides, but as a way of negotiating through them and in them and embracing them; embracing all the others.

But, just as locating the American west is fraught with difficulty and depends largely on who does the locating and for what purpose, so too are considerations of both the past and the future artifacts borne of the geographic and psychic region so significant to considerations of American character and the development of a particular western political ideology. “Does the western past have a future?” is proposed as a rhetorical question, and these noted scholars offer it not to engage in the dichotomies of the debates that continue to frame scholarly research on the American west, but in order to open a range of questions about the scholarly approach to the frontier of the past and the place of the future. American history and literary studies on the western as a genre rooted in the place of the American west before, during, and after its most infamous frontier period, must ensure negotiations that will safeguard against a future that merely replicates its troubled past. But the question presupposes the falling away of the western past that informs so much of our contemporary notions. The question, although it has

the potential for moving scholarly considerations in new directions, simultaneously invokes a sense of romantic loss and a desire to recapture a moment that is desirable and yet slipping away. That is, it treats the western past in much the same way that the western past treats the Native American—as an already vanishing subject, transforming the western past into the irretrievably lost subject that has become the victim of a relentlessly revisionist discursive move coupled with unabated technological progress. Furthermore, it facilitates a state of exceptionalism and privileging of the American west—both as a frontier and as a region—as embodying a special history worth preserving over other regions and other US histories. For this, and a variety of other reasons, many might suppose that the question is a simple one: that the western past has no place in the future; might declare the matter closed as Turner did more than 120 years ago.

To the contrary however, it appears that the western and the violent frontier rhetoric posited around boundaries, borders, and disputed claims so closely associated with its significance, is gaining momentum rather than losing traction. If it is a place, it is a place that remains highly contested. If it is a process, it is one that continues. Recent fracking technologies teach us that the American west is yet fully conquered: there is yet more to be subdued, taken, and extracted. This claim resonates with a similar argument made by scholar Kerwin Klein two decades ago when he noted that contemporary worldwide political practices and popular media had “kindled popular interest in the sort of stories that western historians have long told” (“Reclaiming” 179). The American west and its frontier/regionalist rhetoric rises again and again—a

haunting cultural manifestation that casts a long shadow over the present, and acts upon it in incredibly powerful ways. Many scholars demonstrate that contemporary global (mis)conceptions about the United States, its leaders and its people are freighted with geographically and temporally marked assumptions born of the myth of the frontier in the American west and of those who have variously occupied, owned, tamed, led, destroyed or cultivated the place. Indeed, many scholars recognize that the “West’s revered place in American popular consciousness is as strong now as [it] ever” was, and in many ways is experiencing its own kind of revival once again (Deverell 46). This renewal presents both a moment of opportunity and of danger. Many of the ‘new’ westerns simply reenact the “stabilizing foundations as myth” that underscored the traditional narratives of the American west that underwrote indiscriminate violence and stories of perpetual conquest as they excluded other voices (Sinowitz).

In their consideration of the western past, Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin, reflect that the “modern regional West has become a repository for a national frontier past. In this sense, the history of the frontier has never ended but continues to this day as a key element in the mythology and ideology of American nationalism” (25). In acknowledging the encoding of place as a repository for nationalism, these scholars accept that at least some landscapes, or certain landscapes more than others, “speak a cultural dialect” to which a culture responds (Poulsen 10). The cultural dialect of American nationalism associated with the American west, however, is one that remains highly problematic and invested in colonial-settler ideologies that circulate around competitive impulses and fuels ongoing battles in place. The battles are taken up both

imaginatively in American art and materially in ongoing battles on the ground.

Evidence of the eternal west can be found in the literature and film of this place, which has been declared dead many times over only to be reborn again and again. In an article for the online magazine *Acculturated* published in June 2014, Mark Tapson, in a move that is similar to Cronon and his colleagues, asks “Has the sun finally set for good on the Hollywood western?” The question invokes the trope of erasure for a supposedly unique, but already lost American genre, and inevitably gives rise to a call for its retrieval from the abyss. Tapson relies on the box office failures of two recent western films to provoke his deep concern for the loss of the western in the American consciousness: *The Lone Ranger* (2013) and *A Million Ways to Die in the West* (2014). He takes these big-budget flops as evidence that the western no longer appeals to American or overseas audiences, and has frightened movie makers away from the genre. Such a conclusion completely glosses over the fact that the failure of both films might have nothing to do with the genre, but instead may simply reflect the fact that both movies were simply poor artistic efforts. Or, that in the case of *The Lone Ranger*, a remake of a highly popular and well-known western television series, failed to honor the western. Johnny Depp, who played Tonto, provided a strangely comedic version of what was a dramatic character and series. The original series, which aired between 1949-1957, ‘reads’ as campy and perhaps poorly acted by contemporary standards, but was a dramatic rather than comedic offering and was meant to provide a moral compass to viewers. The remake does not reflect the attitudes of those who created, acted in, or watched the series. Likewise, *A Million Ways to Die in the West*, is a spoof of the tropes

of traditional western films. The failure of both films may be due to the lack of reverence the films paid to the mythic west, and may actually indicate that audiences are not yet ready to make fun of an embedded institution that remains relevant. In both cases, the box office failure may have resulted from the silly portrayals that did not treat the western genre with the respect that audiences continue to demand, and failed to accurately reproduce the traditional westerns that they seem to reference. Tapson ignores the problems, and instead writes longingly of the “tragic film” *Lonely Are the Brave* in which Kirk Douglas “plays a fiercely independent cowboy who loses a heroic battle against the inexorable advance of modernity” (Tapson). His nostalgia for the film is clear, as is his desire to revive the western films of the past from the crushing weight of a new Hollywood aesthetic. He argues that it “would be a tragedy as well if the classic Hollywood western and its archetypal American hero met the same fate,” that is that they could not stand the test of time and technology (Tapson). But as Darren Franich writes for *Entertainment Weekly* in June 2015, “the last 10 years might be the best decade for Westerns,” since their height of popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the films set in the American west during the frontier and colonial-settler periods reproduce the “archetypal” figures of the cowboy, sheriff, or outlaw, while others work to transform it, thereby recalling the tragedy and nostalgic longing that Tapson invokes.

In addition to *The Lone Ranger* and *A Million Ways to Die in the West*, more than two hundred western films were released since 2000. Among them *3:10 to Yuma*, *The Proposition*, *No Country for Old Men*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *Shanghai Noon*, *The*

Missing, Brokeback Mountain, Serenity, The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, A Shot in the West, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, There Will be Blood, Comanche Moon, Jonah Hex, The Warrior's Way, Cowboys and Aliens, Meek's Cutoff, Rango, The Salvation, Dead Man's Burden, Django Unchained, Sweetgrass, The Homesman, and the highly anticipated remake of *True Grit*.²²⁰ Certainly, these are not all in the classic western tradition that Tapson laments—this short sampling includes westerns that fall into the subcategories of traditional, horror, documentary, science fiction, supernatural, outlaw, revisionist, comedy, animated, Spaghetti, contemporary, romance, action adventure, and Euro Western genres—and many did not achieve the level of box office success that Tapson would champion as evidence for their success. But the list demonstrates the inventive ways that artists have approached the American western, and the multiplicity of ways they have transformed it and brought it forward into other genres, thus capitalizing on its popularity and ensuring its continuation. And, among the movies listed above are several critically acclaimed films that were also financially successful.

The western has experienced a revival in other media as well. HBO's very popular and successful series *Deadwood* ran for three seasons from 2004 to 2006. The History Channel recently ran the three-part miniseries *The Hatfields & McCoys*, set in Kentucky of the First Great West. It was the channel's first scripted program to air in the US and was lauded for transcending "the confines of its age by revealing the feud's posturing, resentments and callous violence that mirror the dynamics of modern urban

²²⁰ See <http://www.cinemas.com/westerns.html> for a list of 500 western films.

gangs,” according to a review in the *Los Angeles Times*. The article at once situates modern gangs as America’s new frontier and links it to a western past and tradition. And currently several scripted television series draw on the American western and frontier violence, including *Justified*, *Hell on Wheels*, and *Longmire*. In 2016, WGN began airing *Outsiders*, which they promote as a story of “the struggle for power and control set in the rugged and mysterious Appalachia.” The program tells the story of “a family who’ve been in rural Kentucky longer than anyone can remember. Living off the grid and above the law on their mountain top homestead, they’ll protect their world and their way of life using any means necessary.” The narrative at once invokes the very language of colonial-settlers and western frontier ideals that the Bundy’s invoke in their ongoing land disputes. And, there is *Pioneer Woman*, a cooking and lifestyle show about a modern ranch wife who draws on western pioneer-settler traditions as she makes hearty meals in a beautifully modern and fully-kitted kitchen while her husband tends to the livestock. And although critics have been “declaring the cowboy dead or disappeared for more than a century,” he lives on. As Wallace Stegner argues, the “mythic figure” of the cowboy persists (79). Attempts to bury him have been subverted by his eternal return. Although this figure has at times seemed to slip into the periphery, he has not faded from our cultural memory, according to Stegner, because “we can’t or won’t do without” him (80). Indeed, he has found his way into our modern world. There is even a glossy monthly magazine dedicated to the *American Cowboy*. And in 2013 Matt Staggs hailed the “triumphant return” of the western comic after an extended lull following its falling off in the 1950s. In addition to Louis L ’Amour’s *Law of the Desert*

Born, many current comic monthlies take up the American west, including *The Sixth Gun*, *Manifest Destiny* and *East of West*, and myriad comics based on the films listed above have also been produced in the last decade.

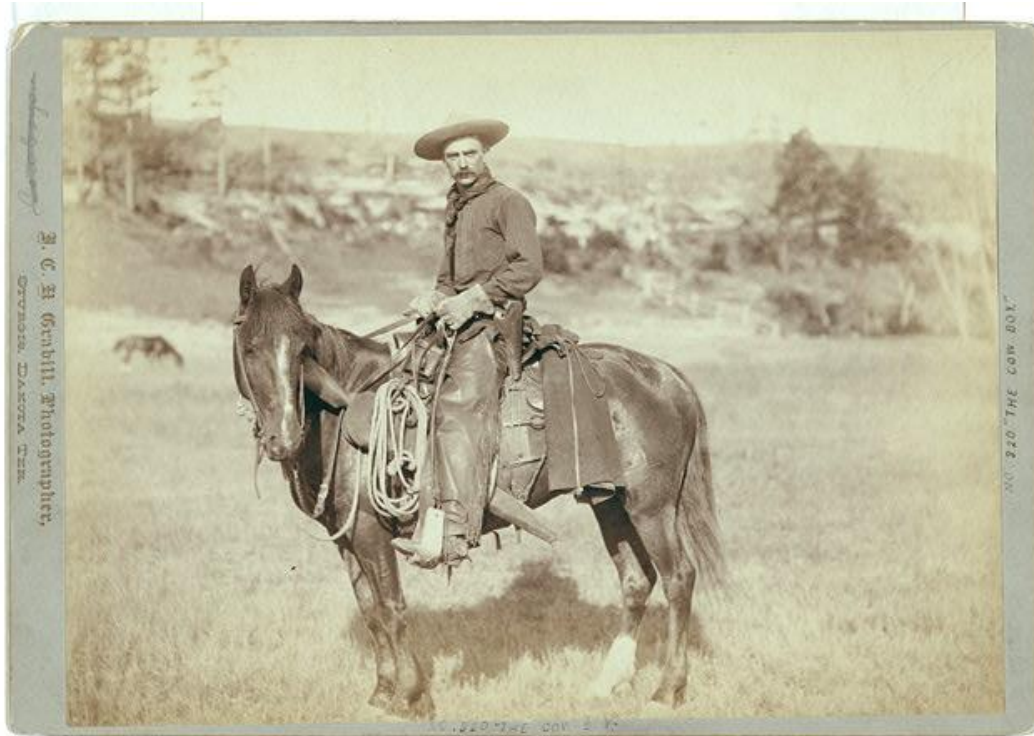


Illustration VII-II: *The Cowboy*.²²¹

However, many of the westerns produced today are not merely reproductions of those written in the past. As Chapter VI demonstrates, many contemporary approaches to the western do not attempt to reenact and reproduce the most popular original westerns, but instead look “directly into history, seeking out the source of [the] contemporary world through the past” (Sinowitz). These approaches to the artistic representations of the western aesthetics and histories “reconsider how we should come

²²¹ By John C. Grabill. (ca. 1888). In Sturgis, Dakota Territory. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-ppmsc-02638. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99613920/>.

to understand historical processes and the recording of history itself” as they offer the potential of dislodging the old codes that seem so determinedly cemented in cultural scripture (Sinowitz). But the renewed interest in the western demonstrates that despite all the work that has already been done, “frontier social changes and interactions need more probing” to ensure that the western past does not retain “a sort of monolithic glory” that it has enjoyed thus far (Slatta 134 and Deverell 46). And in so doing, ensuring that the future of the western past does not merely replicate and reify the forms of othering and American exceptionalism that are deeply rooted in the past and have been so dangerous and difficult to overcome.

The Battle in/for the American west Continues

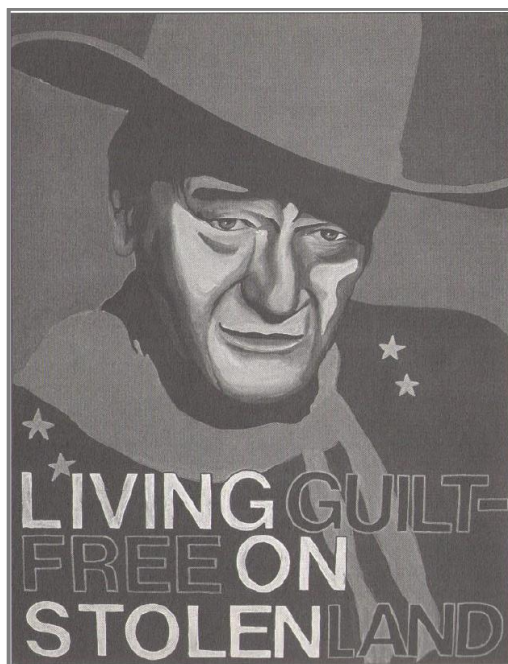


Illustration VII-III: Your Hero.²²²

²²² By Bunky Echo-Hawk. Original artwork appearing in Walter R. Echo-Hawk’s *In the Courts of the Conqueror*. Cropped from original; border added. Used with permission.

“The Land that defeats some ennobles others.”
~Diane Duvan Quantic

Some have argued that the “winning of the last frontier,” those important arid regions that concerned and fascinated Powell and so many others, “completed the conquest of the continent” (Paxson 1). Other scholars, agreeing with the premise, argue that the effort was completed after pioneers “civilized the region until it was as stable and well-ordered as any other section of the nation” (Stout, Jr. and Faulk 253). Even those who object to the glorification of this singular belief about the American west as a subdued region tend to write in these terms. “The conquest of Western America shapes the present as dramatically—and sometimes perilously—as the old mines shape the mountainsides” (Limerick 18). Furthermore, the language of conquest and winning designate both implicitly and explicitly that the time of danger and of fighting has ceased. This is a modern day fantasy—a new myth of the west. The American west remains a place of intense conflict that crosses geographic and temporal boundaries.

Eternally Daniel Boone

The triumphant call to a ‘winning’ of the west appeals to an outdated but not forgotten notion of conquest and submission. The language itself, which is fueled by opposition, perpetuates an aggrandized interpretation of the Euro-American movement across the frontier and the naturalized Anglo-American inheritance of it. Such marks one of the most important historical shifts in the American identity with the place of the American west. “Perhaps the most telltale sign of the transition [from frontier experience to modern experiences in the American west] was a feeling among the

inhabitants of a place that they were no longer inventing a world but inheriting one” to which they were the rightful heirs (Cronon, Miles, Gitlin 23).

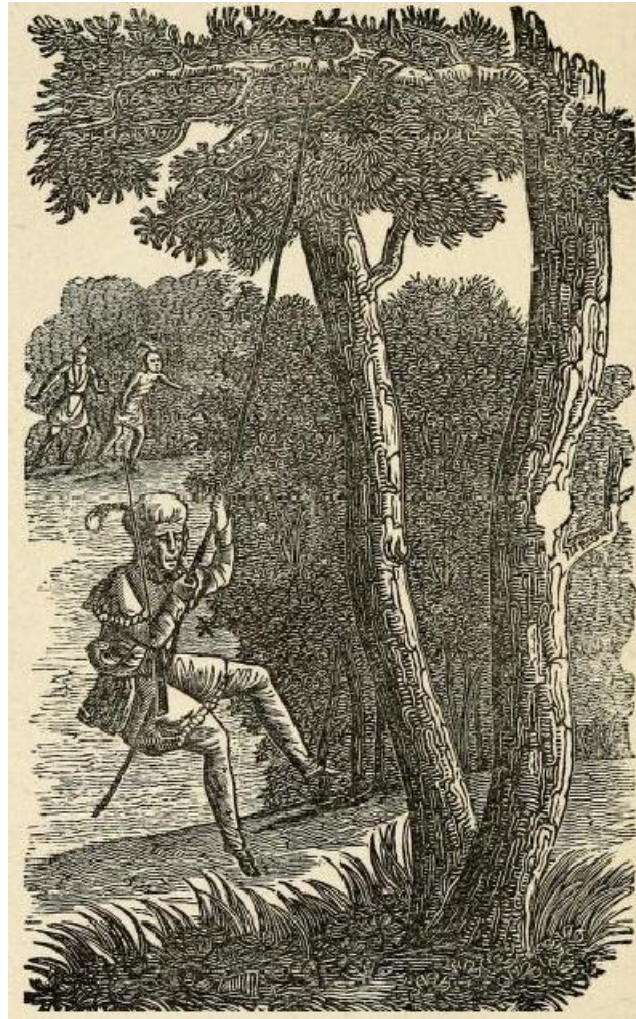


Illustration VII-IV: Wood carving accompanying Timothy Flint’s 1868 updated biography, *The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone: The First Settler of Kentucky Interspersed with Incidents in the Early Annals of the Country*.²²³

²²³ The book was originally titled *The First White Man of the West; or, the Life of Daniel Boone*, published in 1833. The editor of that edition, H.E. Barker, included the following note: “Abraham Lincoln not only read a copy of this stirring narrative by Timothy Flint, but owned a copy of the book, and wrote his name on its fly-leaf. Lincoln’s copy so autographed is now owned by the Chicago Historical Library. None of Lincoln’s biographers seem to have mentioned his use of his work.”

Winning in the American west deploys the masculine heroic vision of the rugged frontiersman and the independent cowboy shrugging off the “mantle” of domestication (Holt and Thompson 425-6). And these cultural prefigurations glorify the “most celebrated men of American culture”: the men of action (Holt and Thompson 428, 429). Such claims recall for some Americans epic battles, both internal and external, victory and heroism—and often the desire to repeat these. For instance in March 2015, Curtis Penix, a Michigan steel worker, completed a 16-day, 240-mile journey through the Appalachian Mountain range. He set off to retrace iconic frontiersman Daniel Boone’s footsteps, which are often credited with opening an “important early artery for settlers heading westward.”²²⁴ Penix said his journey was “inspired” by Joshua, his fifth great grandfather who had made the journey with Boone in 1775. Reporter Bruce Schriener notes as an aside that Joshua became a successful pioneer in his own right. He “acquired” 1,400 acres of Kentucky land. He later parceled it off and bought a plantation in Virginia with the profits he made off his western lands, thus highlighting the movement between the two regions that was never simply uni-directional. As Curtis embarked on his modern day frontier expedition, the family’s unseemly past as slave owners is predictably absent. Curtis instead embraces the American history associated with action, success, ingenuity and conquest. The “American dream started on this road,” he declared on the day he set off. Schriener’s *Associated Press* article was picked up by local, national, and international news

²²⁴ Bruce Schreiner. “Man Retraces Daniel Boone’s nearly 240-mile Trek to Kentucky.” abcnews.com

organizations. Few of these bothered to change the original. And at the time of this writing, only one report mentioned that Boone's path had already been marked by those who had made the journey before him. *Lexington Herald* columnist Tom Eblin notes that "many of the well-worn buffalo and Native American paths Boone incorporated into his trail are now country roads, railroad tracks and even major highways," and that still other paths have "all but disappeared."

While Curtis' goal had been to do "just like Grandpa Joshua [...] sleeping under the stars, fording the rivers, carrying" all his food, he was forced to skip dangerous water crossings, slept in garages and carports, and even a hotel one night, and was fed by those along the way—luxuries not available to those who originally crossed.²²⁵ He used a GPS transmitter to mark his position on his website lostinthewander.com. Despite the use of modern technologies that made the trip possible, and available to readers "in the moment," and the differences in topography and landscape—sixty percent of the route is now paved roads—Penix and his followers have replicated the notions of a virgin land explored and penetrated anew. Penix and John Fox, who is part of an organization committed to preserving "the historic route as a hiking trail, walking paths and a memorial to the pioneers," believe that they "may be the first people in two centuries to walk all of Boone Trace."²²⁶ The land, the trail, and even the history is conquered once more in an effort to preserve a particular history about a particular set

²²⁵ See <http://www.pressherald.com/2015/03/27/hiker-retraces-daniel-boones-footsteps/>

²²⁶ Tom Eblin. "Backpackers Walking in the Footsteps of Daniel Boone." *Lexington Herald-Leader*. March 21, 2015. See also various versions of the AP story picked up at different moments of Curtis Penix' journey.

of individuals. But the battle in the American west is about more than story telling.

There are real, material consequences that arise from these whitewashed histories.

gopherus agassizii v bos taurus or mano a mano?



Illustration VII-V: The desert tortoise.

While the so-called opening, settling and civilizing of the land further west has given way to many myths and fictions, the battles on it and over it are not mere tales of fantasy. And, the story of the domination of the land and people is not one that has passed. The land and the people on it continue to wage battle. The American west was and remains an unsettled territory: legal wrangling and violent skirmishes continue to punctuate life along this interior borderland. Many of these concerns bubbled back to the surface very recently when individual, state, and federal rights collided over the needs of a dwindling group of *gopherus agassizii* whose homelands are ostensibly coming under threat of too many grazing *bos taurus*. The conflict, which has been percolating for decades along the Arizona-Nevada-Utah border, simmered over and

played out very much like a wild west showdown as an aging cattle rancher decided to take on the Federal Bureau of Land Management and faced down a group of armed federal agents with a posse of his own gun-toting, flag carrying ‘soldiers.’



Illustration VII-VI: On the brink of disaster in the desert.²²⁷

The well-publicized, well-armed standoff erupted dramatically in April 2014 nearly a year after a Nevada district court ruled that Cliven Bundy and his 900 cattle, according to government estimates, were trespassing on protected lands. The court banned Bundy and his cattle from grazing on the BLM lands, and gave federal authorities the right to “impound” cattle caught illegally grazing.²²⁸ Bundy made national headlines, and became something of a folk hero to many along the dry and dusty ranching lands when he refused to submit to the federal rules. Bundy’s story

²²⁷ Jim Urquhart—Reuters. <http://time.com/63528/the-armed-rebellion-on-a-nevada-cattle-ranch-could-be-just-the-start/>

²²⁸ <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/nevada-rancher-threatens-range-war-feds/story?id=23225314>; See also gov doc Case 2:12-cv-00804-LDG-GWF Document 35 Filed 07/09/13

demonstrates the complex and conflicting demands on western territories, which even today suffer from a tangled history that reflects a troubled past and an uncertain future. Bundy's story also demonstrates the conflict between animal and human, state and federal rights. Bundy is a Nevada rancher who refused to remove his cattle from protected lands set aside by the federal government to ensure the continuation of the *gopherus agassizii*.²²⁹ Prior to the Bundy stand-off, and perhaps even now, few people outside of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management and a handful of conservationists, knew anything about the desert tortoise, or its perilous plight. The *gopherus agassizii* is a dome-shelled, "stubby-legged" animal with a small reddish-tan head and greenish-yellow eyes. The species lives in the Mojave, Colorado, Sonoran, and Sinaloan deserts in the southwestern US.²³⁰

Both Bundy and the current *gopherus agassizii* population have laid a 'homestead' claim to land in the Mojave Desert region that draws on their lineage. And they both have an interest in continuing to live on the land; yet they are in competition and it seems that at least one might have to go. The desert tortoise has a long history, having occupied the Mojave for millions of years, and are very much a part of the visual, tactical and auditory (they hiss, grunt, pop, whoop, huh, ech and bip) experience in the desert up until the mid-1900s. Since then, however, their populations have been dwindling, and in some parts of the desert they have disappeared altogether, according to US Fish and Wildlife Service. The agency first brought the declining desert tortoise

²²⁹ For a more thorough timeline of the Bundy stand-off, see Washington Post.

²³⁰ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-08-26/pdf/2011-21879.pdf>, 2

populations to the Department of the Interior, in a 1982 report indicating that “human activity [is the] most significant cause of tortoise mortality.” Again, the cause of species mortality is linked to human technologies and human consumer practices. In that report, researchers argue that the “vast majority of threats to the desert tortoise or its habitat are associated with human land uses.”²³¹ Among those identified as most menacing to the desert tortoise were “habitat loss” brought on by “off-highway vehicle use” and “poor grazing management and mining,” as well as “military activities” were listed as “primary reasons for the decline in the tortoise.”²³²

The Department of the Interior did not act on a 1984 petition to protect the desert tortoise because it was “precluded” by other “higher priority” listings (2). The agency, following the Endangered Species Act of 1973, acted on a second petition brought in 1989. The tortoise was classified as “endangered,” that is under threat of extinction in all or a significant part of the animal’s range, and came under emergency protection in August 1989. In a report released in April 1990, as the emergency order was about to expire, the tortoise received a downgraded designation as “threatened,” a designation that indicates that an animal is likely to become endangered.²³³ A recovery plan in 1994 identified the critical habitat as protected, arguing that “full recovery of [plants] from past overgrazing practices” will take “decades” (4). The plan was updated in 2008 to further study the tortoise and its habitat and to provide more aggressive

²³¹ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-08-26/pdf/2011-21879.pdf>, 2

²³² <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-08-26/pdf/2011-21879.pdf>, 2

²³³ Federal Register 55.63, http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr1673.pdf

strategies to protect the population.²³⁴ The plan was revised again in 2011 after a warning that the Mojave population had “declined precipitously.” The agency invoked an “emergency” order of protection.

Among the issues raised in the many reports that have been issued on the welfare of the desert tortoise is that the land that the Mojave population of the desert tortoises roam is owned by a wide variety of agencies and individuals [...] Indian tribes [...] and private parties” making it very difficult to implement an effective strategy for their continued survival (2). As a corrective, the Bureau of Land Management in 1993 began purchasing grazing rights back from ranchers in the area in an effort to consolidate the tortoises territory. The matter was further complicated because officials admitted that “quantitative estimates of the magnitude of these threats,” or of their relative importance have not yet been developed.” Among the conclusions it reached, it noted that it would be “challenging to recover the desert tortoise by singling out a particular threat or subset of threats to the exclusion of others” and called on renewed effort and commitment to recognizing how the desert tortoise had come under “threat” from multiple misuses or overuses of its habitats and included a six-point plan of management.

²³⁴ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2008-08-04/pdf/E8-17520.pdf#page=1>; and see <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=C04L>



Illustration VII-VII: The West Has Now Been Won.²³⁵

But the real danger is a threat from the outside, according to the rancher at the heart of the standoff. Bundy claims his family first “homesteaded his ranch in 1877” and that they have been grazing their cattle there ever since. In an ironic twist, Bundy has come to see himself much like the Plata Indians of Everett’s fictional watershed. He cites his family’s origins on the land. Bundy does not believe he has ever ceded his right to the Gold Butte area in question, and therefore does not believe he is under the authority of the US government with regard to land use. He believes the federal government is responsible for improperly managing resources in the area. Furthermore, Bundy doesn’t believe that the federal government has the right to interfere with his

²³⁵ Protesters place a sign on a bridge near the Bureau of Land Management’s base camp where seized cattle, that belonged to rancher Cliven Bundy, are being held near Bunkerville, Nevada. April 12, 2014. U.S.

cattle. He accuses the federal government of “a ‘land grab,’” and has vowed not stand for the unwelcomed federal intrusion into private enterprise.²³⁶ And thus far, he has ignored the fines that he began amassing in 1993, when he continued to allow his cattle to graze on the protected lands, and has defied court orders to cease grazing.

In a measure that the Center for Biological Diversity called long overdue, the BLM began a four-week cattle roundup on April 5th. “Despite having no legal right to do so, cattle from Bundy’s ranch have continued to graze throughout the Gold Butte area, competing with tortoises for food, hindering the ability of plants to recover from extensive wildfires, trampling rare plants, damaging ancient American Indian cultural sites and threatening the safety of recreationists,” Rob Mrowka, a spokesman for the group, said in a statement.²³⁷ BLM officials said they had exhausted administrative and judicial measures and called the roundup a measure of “last resort.” The roundup up sparked a confrontation that escalated quickly, with the Bundy family accusing federal agents of hiring “contract cowboys” and recalling the language of the frontier, they labeled the men “cattle thieves.” In an effort to reclaim their rights, the Bundy family declared a “Range War.”²³⁸ Two days after the federal authorities arrived and began removing cattle, the Bundy family and their supporters had established “Camp Liberty” with protest signs and maps that asked “Who Owns the West?” And they boldly

²³⁶ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/04/15/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-long-fight-between-cliven-bundy-and-the-federal-government/>

²³⁷ Foxnews.com

²³⁸ <http://bundy ranch.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2014-04-09T12:21:00-07:00&max-results=7&start=119&by-date=false>

claimed victory when the Bundy family advanced on armed agents who didn't have the "courage" to shoot.

While he claims an historical heritage, cloaking himself in a particular version of the western past, he draws on modern digital technologies to spread his message. And he is gaining followers. The Bundy Ranch Facebook page has nearly 130,000 likes. The banner shows grazing cattle and the profile picture is the American flag. The family also runs the Bundy Ranch BlogSpot that at once invokes a sense of patriotism and national pride, while it evokes the claims to exceptionalism that infused the American west with a sense of unparalleled autonomy; as a place of escape and individual opportunity unbridled by government interference. The site brings together government documents, video clips of Cliven Bundy delivering updates in sermon style lectures, messages of support to American troops, songs of freedom, calls for protection against violent militia men, quotations from the Declaration of Independence, and patriotic slogans. The site also regularly adds news clippings—especially those of interviews with Cliven—and photographs of family members. The site is folksy, and to their credit, they post stories that do not always show the Bundy family in the most favorable light, but they also often fail to acknowledge the sources of the stories posted to the site, appropriating them as their own production.

Calling himself the "last man standing," Bundy accuses the BLM of running off all the other ranchers in the area and he vows not to be run off as well. Bundy, maintains that he has not refused to pay grazing fees: he has refused to pay them to the federal government because he does not believe they have jurisdiction. He claims he

will gladly pay fees to the county. He argues that only Nevada authorities have the right to charge him or to confiscate his property for failure to pay. And, many Nevada officials agree. Although the cattleman's association took a hands-off approach, Nevada state officials warned the BLM that the approach they were taking could lead to disaster, recalling earlier catastrophes involving what they called overzealous federal agents and American citizens.²³⁹ Siding with Bundy, Nevada state legislators argued that the BLM has refused to step in and remove feral horses that are doing significant damage to other lands. They have introduced a bill, the Nevadan's Resource Rights Bill (NRR) AB408, that Bundy claims is "the most publicly supported bill" under review out of the thousands proposed. "This bill will make it possible for the people to clearly claim their rights to the resources in Nevada."²⁴⁰ The Bundy's include a link to a petition supporting the measure on their website.

²³⁹ Ruby Ridge and Waco

²⁴⁰ <http://bundy ranch.blogspot.com/>



Illustration VII-VIII: Has the Fight Just Begun.²⁴¹

Cliven Bundy, his family, and his supporters embrace the hegemonic narrative mapped on the lands by Turner and others and that “their fathers and brothers and their fathers and brothers before them earned rights to the land that transcended both logic and law” (Lamm, McCarthy 234). And, for now Bundy’s claims draw on “vague, undefined, powerful moral rights that passed from generation to generation to families,” but for now his supersedes all others (Lamm, McCarthy 234). Fear that the escalating tensions at the Bundy Ranch standoff could accelerate into a full blown shootout as it had at Ruby Ridge, or worse mass death as was the case in Waco, the federal agents were pulled out of the area after only a few days. The cattle roundup ceased. Several of the cattle died of distress during their removal—hardly noticed casualties in a new frontier war. The others—a meager 300 of the 900 trespassing bovines—were returned

²⁴¹ www.cnn.com.

to the Bundy family, presumably to be released back onto the protected lands. The trespassing cattle continue to graze on the land. Bundy still has not paid the federally-mandated grazing fees. And the only real loser is the stubby footed tortoise which remains voiceless, invisible and endangered with a critical habitat on the verge of collapse.

After having successfully defended their territorial rights, the Bundy's joined another battle. On January 2, 2016, an armed group of protestors broke away from a peaceful march and took over an empty federal facility on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon.²⁴² The protestors included two Bundy brothers who encouraged protestors to "take a hard stand" against what they describe as federal infringements on their rights. Their father is already in a dispute with the Bureau of Land Management over his grazing rights, and while federal officials continue to state their intention of following through on collecting and removing Bundy's cattle from federal land, he and his supporters were successful in forcing heavily armed federal officers to "stand down" during their armed protest (see Chapter IV). The standoff in Oregon echoes the earlier dispute, although the Bundy family has no immediate stake in the battle. Dwight Hammond, 73, and his son Steven Hammond, 46, are also ranchers and have been in an ongoing dispute with the federal government over land use and management. The men were accused of setting fires on federal land in 2001 and 2006. The men dispute the charges, claiming that they used the fires as a protective measure

²⁴² See the following for articles: www.washingtonpost.com, www.nydailynews.com, www.latimes.com, www.theatlantic.com, www.rollingstone.com

on their own land, and that the fires accidentally spread into federal land, causing heavy damage. According to the men, in one case, they set fire to their own land to protect feed crops from a natural fire already raging nearby. Prosecutors countered that the fires were purposely started on federal property in order to destroy evidence of illegal poaching and both men were sentenced to jail. They surrendered peacefully to authorities to serve their sentences, but it did not end the standoff supposedly ignited over their legal woes. Instead, two weeks after it started, the ‘militiamen,’ as they call themselves, were asking for supplies from their supporters. A reporter with the *Los Angeles Times* argues that the militants “seized on fears of federal interference in Western affairs and said just enough, in just the right places [...] to garner national attention.” And it worked.



Illustration VII-IX: Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon.²⁴³

²⁴³ Armed men stand guard outside near a protest poster. Photo by Jim Urquhart, *Reuters*.

Much of that attention, however, has been unwelcomed. The *Atlantic Monthly*, quotes blogger Scott Alexander, who argues that a difference in political ideology undergirds the contentious battles, and these cannot be easily resolved. According to Alexander, the occupiers, who belong to the Blue Tribe—a group of right wing conservatives—will never be able to peacefully coexist with members of the Red Tribe—a group of liberal extremists. Alexander writes that “if you’re part of the Blue Tribe, then your outgroup isn’t al-Qaeda, or Muslims, or blacks, or gays, or trans people, or Jews, or atheists—it’s the Red Tribe.” Of course this lines up quite nicely with our political system, which is broken down into red states and blues states, along similar political ideologies, although perhaps less entrenched. But. The. Red. Tribe. The language, and the weight of these words in the American lexicon is impossible to ignore: Red Tribe. But they are banged out easily enough on Alexander’s keyboard apparently without any sense of the implications or the irony. As Bakhtin reminds us “there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms—words and forms that belong to ‘no one’; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents [... and] contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individuals) are inevitable in the world” (273). While Alexander deployed the language with little thought, and perhaps without intending to recall the historical traumas playing out on the contested ground at the center of the most recent arguments, past meanings were not lost on some members of the community. A group of Paiute Indians—a Red Tribe—capitalizing on the national attention brought on by the feuding, gun-toting men on both sides, unequivocally laid claim to the land.

Burns Paiute tribal chairwoman Charlotte Rodrique, fed up with the occupiers complaints over their loss of access to the land and their claims to oppression, seized the opportunity to lay claim to the land at a highly publicized press conference attended by over 400 members of the Paiute community. She accused the militiamen of encroaching on sacred Native lands. “This land belonged to the Paiute people as wintering grounds long before the first settlers, ranchers and trappers ever arrived here,” Rodrique said. “We haven’t given up our rights to the land. We have protected sites there. We still use the land” (theguardian.com). She urged the men to go home and to leave the community in southeastern Oregon in peace. Yet, in a remarkable turn, Ammon Bundy, at a press conference of his own aligned his cause with the Paiute people—he claims they share in a state of lived oppression. “I would like to see them be free of the federal government as well. They’re regulated by federal government very tightly and I think they have a right to be free like everybody else.” He said he and his men would leave when the federal government agreed to relinquish swaths of the land now under the Bureau of Land Management’s control. Rodrique, for her part, seemed to embrace Bundy’s position, but he is not likely to find that support as entirely faithful to his cause. She states that so long as those lands went first to members of the Paiute Tribe, she can get behind Bundy. But Rodrique is not a foolish woman. “For them to say they want to give the land back to their rightful owners—well, I just had to laugh at that,” she says. “When they talk about returning land” they do not mean returning it to the Paiute people, who “have never given” up the land that was once theirs. The skirmish in Oregon demonstrates that the battles in and for the west are hardly settled. Indeed, one

of the militants was shot and killed by state troopers as he left the compound to visit a sheriff in a neighboring county and other members were taken into custody, including the Bundy boys who now face federal charges. Four militants remain more than a month since the militants seized the building, and in an effort to make a martyr of their dead leader have renamed the compound to “Camp Finicum.” Finicum’s funeral in Kanab, Utah, included mounted cowboys carrying US flags, prompted renewed support for the group. Demonstrations in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington included protestors with signs that read “Rural Lives Matter” and “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” thus making the absurd move to link Finicum’s death to the spate of police violence against African Americans in urban settings. And furious debates among community members near the standoff continue to determine who is responsible and how the matter can finally be resolved without further violence. The continuing battle demonstrates that control over borders is often “more dream than reality” (Truett and Young 2). The western past is embedded in our present, and without serious interventions, it will be a part of our future, both in the US and abroad, as the violent individualism of the American west has exceeded regional and nation boundaries.

For the Bundy family, the matter of their rights is unseverable and begins with what they believe is a modest and reasonable claim. “It is simple; the land belongs to the people.” The Bundy’s appeal fails to recognize the anthro- and Euro-centric position of their claim and dismisses all other potential stakeholders. It is a rigid stance grounded in the historical claims of a Euro-American ancestral history, often without acknowledging prior competing claims made possible by the very government that

Bundy now claims invalid. The claim is an error of colonialism and imperialism that transcends the historical record: a revision of history that neglects representations of others. As Bhabha argues it is an oppressive move in which “something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic” (34-35). Vizenor’s *Manifest Manners* resonates with similar claims as he argues that dominant literature has created a false, but current construction of Manifest Destiny. But the conflict was not unforeseen. Powell predicted ongoing conflicts in the American west given the drawing of states, which distributed natural resources unevenly. And, more recently, Richard Lamm and Michael McCarthy predicted the condition of the lands, ownership contests, and government intervention in the American west would lead to growing tensions; that violence would erupt. In their book, *The Angry West: A Vulnerable Land and its Future*, they argue that “A storm is building on these lands [...]” (233). Rather than reading the American west as a closed territory, or embracing a tamed frontier, they see the ongoing manifestations of violence that have yet to be fully quieted. “They are wrong, these westerners, unable to understand that they cannot lose what they never possessed, unable to understand their own history – that it was their own fathers who leveled the timberlands, who grazed the grass to stubble, who plowed the earth to dust, who breathe life in the Muirs and the Roosevelts and the Pinchots who came to haunt their existence. Perhaps now it makes little difference. Perhaps it never did” (233-34). But as Plumwood argues, we have entered an “age of ecological crises,” and she warns that “as

we press the oceans, the atmosphere, the ecosystems, the species, to their limits of survival to meet our demands,” we have reached a critical period that requires that humans “acknowledge limits” (145). Although it has often been inscribed with a spectral ability to provide in abundance, the land of the American west has always had its limits. In “the end as in the beginning, a dry land—so that all problems returned to the master problem of how to get enough water on land for which there could never be water enough” (DeVoto 37).

The land in the American west continues to be dominated by the geographical markers that plot the lives of all its inhabitants. That it is mapped by the arbitrary political boundaries drawn up as the United States expanded westward “partly by sheer haste, partly by ignorance of actual resources, and partly by political theories which sought to override the facts on the ground” has done little in the way of opening the American west to a renegotiation of the territory (Mumford 237). Examples abound of the indiscriminate, often accidental progress in the American west. Even before the Homestead Act of 1862, settlers rushed to the state of Iowa as early as the 1830s to stake their claims on the “open” lands. They did this “despite the fact that the federal government had not surveyed the public lands and that therefore no legal titles could be had” (Stout Jr. and Faulk, 171). They were, in essence, squatters on the land, although to be fair they did work it. In order to “protect their investments of time, labor, and money” in the absence of official surveys, the Iowa pioneers “devised their own system of land rules and titles and enforced their decisions” (Stout Jr. and Faulk, 171). Following a well-established practice, the surveyors “agreed to a preemptive law that

allowed those already tending to the land first purchase” rights (Stout Jr. and Faulk, 171).

The historical record demonstrates that the movement west was not linear, successive or sequential as many theorists argue, but included movement back and forth along an east-west trajectory and even a north-south pattern.²⁴⁴ While such readings provide a tidy organizational pattern for interpreting the American west it also inadvertently reifies claims that the movement was inevitable; a natural part of the progress associated with Manifest Destiny. Such arguments ignore the weight of the American west as place of symbolic significance, and its circularity as Jay Gitlin argues. Just as the stereotypes of Indians identified in chapter two are shown to have “prevailed because it had a political application,” that of taming the wild nature that they represented and revoking their claims on the land, “the frontier has become a dominant interpretive theme and political symbol” of American superiority (Miller and Savage Jr. 125 and Slatta 3). Dominance has allowed those living there to develop “recognizable and separate society” and identity within the larger American cultural frame. Resistance to the swift progress was immediate and ongoing (Athearn 20). In 1864 George Marsh, considered an early environmentalist, had a less optimistic view of the frontier lands than those Turner would later come to celebrate. He prefigured Plumwood’s claims, warning that the vast Euro-American invasion into the American west needed to be quelled. He called for “some abatement in the restless love of change which characterizes [Americans], and makes us almost a nomade [sic] rather than a

²⁴⁴ See Jeffrey.

sedentary people” (Marsh 279-80) Marsh understood that “landscape is as variable as the habits of the population” and that these must be taken into consideration in the movement west (279). Already concerned with the “felled forest” and he pushed for a recognition of the human dependence “upon soil, water, plants, and animals” and thoughtful use of resources that would “help us become, more emphatically, a well-ordered and stable commonwealth, and, not less conspicuously, a people of progress” (Lowenthal, Introduction, Marsh 280). Marsh was not alone in his tempered claims, yet the singular narrative continues to inform and define the western interpretation of human and non-human relations in the American west that as the Bundy Ranch standoff demonstrate seem to repel efforts at renegotiations in the place despite any potential long-term consequences. As the Native American traditions about the landscape demonstrate, they do not “comprise a single story but a kind of ‘boundless, sprawling narrative’ that embraces many interpretations of even the same story and views these differences not as abhorrent, but as creative (Schaafsman and Tsosie, “Xeroxed in Stone”)¹⁵. We need to embrace an “energetic, place-based conversation” grounded in an ecological approach, which attends to the “systems and interactions” of the people, the place, and the literary works.

The American west of our past has been resurrected not only in national debates like the ones that played out in Nevada and Oregon, but it has also infiltrated transnational and global discourses that perpetuate rather than mediate violence. The myths of the American west, which have been taken to be grounded in place, are not contained within the geographically marked region of the US; that is, the frontier of the

American western is no longer located west of the 100th meridian—and perhaps this too has always been an illusion of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism. As feminist geographer Linda McDowell argues, the imaginary is often “paralleled by and connected to a reshaping of the ‘real’ world as flows of capital and labour disrupt associations between nations, states and borders” (“Spacializing” 2). One of the most troubling aspects of the American west of the past is its portability across geographic and temporal boundaries. The western has demonstrated incredible flexibility and longevity. The American and global appetite for grand western narratives has not waned, but has instead migrated across geographic and national boundaries as postwestern scholars argue.

Susan Kollin, in the introduction to *Postwestern Cultures: Literature, Theory, and Space*, recalls the language of the western and its imagery that propelled the US into a war with Iraq under President George W. Bush. The myths have been deployed in unmistakable and troubling ways to reach across borders. But it is not merely US interactions with foreign countries that has informed national policies built on the desires defined by our western past, the ideals of US western pasts have been taken up in the very regions in which we deployed them against. Frontier justice, once thought to be an exclusively or especially American form of resolving past conflict, has migrated across porous cultural boundaries. On February 2, 2015, members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria released a video that purported to show the brutal slaying of Jordanian national 1st Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh, who had been drugged, placed in a cage, and burned alive sometime in January after having been captured a month earlier. Many

American news outlets reported the gruesome details of al-Kaseasbeh’s death, but not on the other contents of the 22-minute professionally produced video, which includes footage of Jordanian King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein meeting with and shaking hands with US President Barack Obama. A day after the video’s release King Abdullah II had a private meeting with members of the House Armed Services Committee, President Obama and other members of the US government to discuss the ongoing “scourge” of ISIS extremists. Following those meetings, it was widely reported—by reputable and less reputable news sources alike—that King Abdullah II invoked the spirit of Clint Eastwood’s character in the 1992 wild western drama *Unforgiven*.



Illustration VII-X: Jordanian King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein.

California Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter told reporters that Abdullah II quoted William Munny, an aging gunslinger who had hung up his holster only to be pressed back into service. Abdullah II himself is a retired military pilot. “He’s ready to

get it on,” Hunter was reported as saying of Abdullah II after watching the horrifying video. Although Hunter refused to state exactly what part of the film Abdullah II quoted, many news outlets speculated that he reiterated Munny’s warning, while other outlets provided a direct quotation from the film that they attributed to the King. In the film, Munny, under attack, shouts that “Any son of a bitch takes a shot at me, I’m not only going to kill him, I’m going to kill his wife and all his friends and burn his damn house down.” Munny’s promise to those firing at him do not speak to claims of justice, but instead recall the kind of frontier violence that marked many traditional westerns. The lines promise revenge and an assurance to hurt the other guy more. The comparisons between Munny and the King, however, are complicated by the fact that the film takes place as the frontier violence of the old west is fading and the Munny too is a broken man. Many of the characters, including Munny’s partner and Munny himself, are uneasy about their violent mission. Munny, who was nearly destitute at the time that he takes the job, is a hired gun, whose only stake in the outcome is a paycheck that might improve his lot and allow him to provide a future for his motherless children.

Whether Abdullah II provided a direct quote or merely alluded to the concepts in the film more generally, his ready reference to the violent rhetoric of the wild western indicates that the American west remains a highly portable ideology that is readily taken up to fit a variety of national and transnational goals. “In the Western, violence is characteristically the hero’s means of resolving the conflict generated by his adversary” (Cawelti 65). Abdullah II, in appropriating the western rhetoric, deploys western violence as a viable transnational response, and also casts himself in the role of the

traditional western hero. And he proves that the “attraction of lawlessness did not die with the frontier” and is not exceptional to white masculine modes (Stegner 74). Jordan, in keeping with the King’s promise to hit back at those responsible, moved quickly in rounding up and publicly hanging several ISIS-affiliated prisoners in a matter of days. The quick deployment of the rhetoric in discussions of Middle Eastern conflicts demonstrates the migratory and porous nature of the tropes of the American west, whether actual or imagined, even to those who seem outside its historical, geographical, and political sphere.

As Kollin and other postwestern scholars argue, disrupting and displacing the metanarratives of the American west is particularly important because so much has relied on reaffirming their voracity. The “old codes find new life” in new and unexpected territories, thereby encoding their own resistance to new stories (Klein, *Frontiers* 3). Klein, an early postwestern scholar, had hoped to “emancipate the west” from its regionalist entrapments in his article on the postwestern by reorienting scholarship “toward both the history of the nation and the transnational processes of European conquests of indigenous people” (Klein “Reclaiming” 215 and Young 116). Klein worried that in retaining the regionalist projections, literary and history scholars often reified the narratives of exceptionalism rather than upending them. Some postwestern literary critics, however, argue that “a key aspect of a critical regionalist practice” emerges through the “decentering of the link between western regionalism and US nationalism” and not by abandoning the regionalist critical lens (Campbell). For her part, Stephanie LeMenager, in *Manifest and Other Destinies : Territorial Fictions of the*

Nineteenth-Century, locates the origins of the postwestern literary impulse not regionalist reworkings, or in the most recent permutations of the western novels that seem to revise western narratives by locating them along American borderlands, nor in disputes arising in current middle East confrontations, but in the nineteenth century literature of the sea.

She grounds the imperialist urges of Manifest Destiny not in the sweeping grassy plains and open ranges of the American western landscape, but instead in the sea, or rather in the tension between these two imperial territories. Citing literary sources like James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville along with other historical sources, she convincingly argues that “maritime empire” rather than “frontier settlement” were the dominant themes that underwrote expansionist and nationalist ideals well into the nineteenth century (115). She argues that it is in the “tension between [the] coveted domains” of the sea and the western United States that the first notions of a “postwestern, postfrontier theory of US empire and nationhood” emerge (113). For LeMenager “there is no frontier line in which the transformation of savagery into civilization can be seen, or where wilderness turns into the settler-nation; savagery and civilization, wilderness and nation, figure as one in the same” (134). The inability to “locate” the division serves as an important theoretical move as it refuses the exceptional rhetoric that informed the nationalist agenda of Manifest Destiny in the American west, and demonstrates how these ideals may be expanded beyond purely US nationalist enterprise. As she notes, the frontier, especially invoked by Turner and his disciples, severed the “USA from global imperial history, marking it as an exceptional

national experiment” (“Imagining” 515). In her account, from sea to shining sea, is not a destiny that marks the North American continent, but instead includes the movement between nations and their interactions that were embedded in the earliest stages of US development. Abdullah’s rhetorical move insists on the recognition of the transnational nature of the imperialist moves and its consequences across national borders.

The diverse engagements with postwestern negotiations is not surprising, but rather is consistent with scholarly and artistic desires to move beyond the western even as they attempt to understand the western’s place in the modern world. Yet, as William Lombardi argues, “by accentuating dynamic transregional flow, postwestern criticism has downplayed strategic and unintended local spatial and cultural resistance” (emphasis original 143). Since strategic resistance against the metanarratives has been one of the key considerations of this project, I want to couple postwestern negotiations with other theoretical practices that might ensure, perhaps even encourage, the forms of cultural resistance that remain furtive for encounters in and discussion of the American west. Because the western has been so grounded in place, the geographic region of the American west, the nexus of psychogeography and ecopsychology offer a potential starting point for considering new approaches to destabilizing the old western mythologies and safeguarding against the reproduction in the United States and abroad.

But the notion of rebirth is inexorably coupled to the notion of death. The western is tied to a sense of loss, of place, of ideas, of time, but the loss has never been properly mourned. As Cassie Steele argues, “the necessity for mourning arises throughout the course of a lifetime and is, furthermore, an integral component of the

very formation of a subject, both at the individual and the cultural level” (4). Drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, she argues that “the relation of individuals within and between cultures, and the relation of a culture to other cultures are bound up with mourning” (4). In order to fully and properly mourn “depends upon a prior acknowledgement that what has been lost was never a part of the self” and requires “the capacity to acknowledge the otherness of objects” (Radstone 163). The work of new writers of the American west are perhaps engaging in the tentative first steps of cultural mourning, steps that will ultimately allow for cultural acceptance and forgiveness.

It is important to recognize that the American west has not merely been a place of mundane performances of cultural values, but also a material ground from which the privileged have imposed on and taken from the less privileged, among these both human and non-human beings. Savage argues that modern writers of the American west, including Cormack McCarthy self-consciously “reassert a sense of emplacedness” through naming and mapping, in order to reground the postmodern western in place even as it displaces other western themes (999). The narratives give way to the considerations of ‘Deep Ecologists’ who argue for the “vital connectedness of all living things” (Roszak 13). Steven Rosedale argues that novels that demonstrate a “a healthy skepticism regarding the legacy of pioneering,” also provide an analysis of the “interrelatedness of environmental and human exploitation” that the settler colonial mission enacted in the American west (137). He writes about Rosedale examines Cantwell’s *Land of Plenty* in which “a return to the pastoral and frontier conditions is

barred because the aftermath of pioneering itself has depleted the natural landscape” (142). And Smedley’s *Daughter of Earth* “thoroughly” examines the “consequences of ‘westerling’ for the working class and its relationship to the environment.” (143). Such considerations of place refuse the “usual” sense of the place that “suggest that it lies outside the personal, a container within which people pursue their private purposes” in a way that is no longer connect to the place (Berleant, *Aesthetics* 3).

EXTRACTS

“One must care about a world one will never see.”
~Bertrand Russell

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways.
The point, however, is to change it.”
~Karl Marx

“Oh I wish I had the power, the power to change the world
But I’m just one man trying to do it on my own
Can someone help me (change the world)?
Can somebody help me (change the world)?”
~Sean Kingston

“If it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”
~Aleksander Solzhenitsyn

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.”
~Paulo Freire

“There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”
~Woodrow Wilson

“Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts, perhaps the fear of a loss of power.”
~John Steinbeck

“Where there is power, there is resistance.
Where there is resistance, there is critique. Where there is critique, there is the possibility of self-transformation. Where there is self-transformation, there is the possibility of social and political change. Where there is social and political change, there is power.
Where there is power, there is resistance.”
~Michel Foucault
~Wayne Gibardi
~Michel Foucault

“I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light.”
~Margaret Atwood

“Resistance is fertile.”
~Ruth Ozeki



VII-I: Custer Battlefield before National Monument designation.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ MSS 1608; William Henry Jackson papers; L. Tom Perry Special Collections; Photograph Archives; 1130 Harold B. Lee Library; Brigham Young University; Provo, Utah 84602; <http://sc.lib.byu.edu/>.

“Wowaśake Kin Slalyapo Wowahwala He E.”
~*Hehaka Sapa*²⁴⁶

“Forget the past. Be not the slave of your own past [...] But dare rather to quit the platform, plunge into the sublime seas, dive deep, & swim far, so shall you come back with self-respect, with new power, with an advanced experience that shall explain & overlook the old.”
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The changes we dread most may contain our salvation.”
~Barbara Kingsolver

“I wish when we touch
we could transcend history in
double helixes of dark and light
~Qwo-Li Driskill, Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer

“A very great vision is needed and the man who has it must follow it as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky.”
~Crazy Horse, Sioux

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”
~Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Ye live not for yourselves; ye cannot live for yourselves; a thousand fibers connect you with our fellow-men; and along those fibres, as along sympathetic threads, run your

²⁴⁶ The English translation is: “Know the Power that is peace.” The inscription of Black Elk’s words appears outside on the museum wall at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Crow Agency, Montana near the Crow Indian Reservation (according to the 2000 US Census, the Crow Indian Reservation is ranked sixth among the poorest reservations in the US). The site was formerly known as the Custer Battlefield National Monument, but in 1988 descendants of the Crow and Cheyenne warriors who fought to preserve their own way of life protested against the Euro-centric interpretations and the lack of recognition of Native American presence at the site. Pres. George H. W. Bush approved Congressional funding for a monument to commemorate Native Americans victory, as well as the culturally neutral name change. The site was renamed in 1991 and a competition was held to design the Indian Monument. In 2003 Congress authorized funding for the project and in 2014, the site, with the completed Indian Memorial was rededicated. The monument marks one of the last and most significant battles between Native Americans and US Soldiers. On June 25 and 26, 1876, Lt. Col. George A. Custer led 263 members of the U.S. Army’s 7th Cavalry against thousands of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Sioux warriors. Custer and his men were surrounded and killed. The spot was immediately marked as Last Stand Hill.

actions as causes, and return to you as effects.”
~Henry Melville²⁴⁷

“I walk out of genocide to touch you.”
~Qwo-Li Driskill, Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer

“hatred bounces.”
~e.e. cummings

ETYMOLOGY

Manifest Destiny, *noun*:

mænəˌfest dɛstɪni

The belief or doctrine, held chiefly in the middle and latter part of the 19th century, that it was the destiny of the U.S. to expand its territory over the whole of North America and to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic influences.

Frontier, *noun*:

frənˈtɪ(ə)r

A border between two countries.

A region that forms the margin of settled or developed territory.

The edge of new knowledge.

Western, *noun*:

wɛstərn

A desert, a wilderness.

orig. U.S. A novel, film, etc., depicting life as imagined to be typical of the western United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, usu. featuring cowboys in heroic roles, gunfights, etc.

²⁴⁷ Consistently attributed incorrectly to the more famous author Herman Melville.

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Biographical Information

Tracey Daniels Lerberg completed her PhD with a Women's and Gender Studies Certificate while serving as the Director of the Writing Center at the University of Texas at Arlington. Dr. Clough's research and teaching interests include Nineteenth Century American women's and multiethnic literature, cultural studies, and animal, critical race, environmental, and gender theory.