

## ABSTRACT

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THE RHETORIC OF IDENTITY IN FOUR  
CALIFORNIA SOCIAL PROTEST NOVELS.

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This dissertation examines the rhetorical strategies of four California social protest novels of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). I argue that among these four texts, those that succeeded rhetorically—Ruiz de Burton's and Steinbeck's—did so by making it possible for their mostly white, middle-class audiences to identify with their characters along class, race, and other demographic lines. The rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke help explain the complex ways these novels invite audience identification with some characters while creating distance with others. I also examine the roles of sentiment and naturalism in each text's rhetorical success or failure. Although these novels were all written or read as social protest fiction, there

exists no full-length analysis of the rhetorical strategies these writers employ. In their arguments over California land ownership and the land's potential wealth, the novels reveal much about how American identity was constructed during this period.

Chapter One argues that in *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton encourages identification by blurring racial lines and emphasizing her characters' social class, presenting the Alamar family as entrepreneurial Americans who can pass for white and who blend easily with upper-crust New York society. Chapter Two focuses on the ways Jackson creates Native American characters in *Ramona* who possess some traits of "American" identity such as whiteness, domesticity, and work skills. Jackson's characters, however, remain too exotic for the reader to identify with them, and thus her novel has been read as romance rather than protest. Chapter Three argues that *The Octopus* is too deterministic to succeed as social protest against the railroad monopoly, but that Norris is arguing instead for a global expansion of U.S. capitalism. Chapter Four demonstrates how *The Grapes of Wrath* aligns the migrants with America's white middle class. Steinbeck enables identification by emphasizing the Okies' Anglo heritage and their willingness to work; like Ruiz de Burton, he also employs an effective balance between sentiment and naturalism.

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FOUR CALIFORNIA SOCIAL PROTEST NOVELS

By

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# Dedication

To Darren and Sara Sue

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## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction: Real Estate, Railroads, and Rhetoric.....	1
Audience.....	6
Rhetorical “Success”.....	9
The Rhetoric of Identification.....	10
<i>Familial Substance</i> .....	13
<i>Directional Substance</i> .....	15
<i>Generic Substance</i> .....	17
Summary of Chapters.....	26
Chapter 1: Continental Characters in Ruiz de Burton’s <i>The Squatter and the Don</i> ..	30
Introduction: Fictional Romances and Non-fictional Struggles.....	31
Racial Divisions: Harte’s and Atherton’s California.....	40
An American Don: Class Hierarchy and Identification.....	47
Making Connections: Identification Through Region.....	62
The Rhetoric of Genre: Historical Romance, Sentimentalism, and Naturalism....	70
<i>The Limits of Historical Romance</i> .....	71
<i>Sentimentalism in The Squatter and the Don</i> .....	80
<i>Naturalism in The Squatter and the Don</i> .....	84
Conclusion: The Reviews and Her Rhetorical Success.....	88
Chapter 2: Assimilation and Identification in Helen Hunt Jackson’s <i>Ramona</i> .....	94
U.S. Indian Policy and Jackson’s Indian Policy.....	101
The “Sugared Pill”—Too Sweet?.....	109
<i>Ramona</i> ’s Effects and Sentimental Identification.....	123
Chapter 3: Frank Norris’s <i>The Octopus</i> : Epic Capitalism.....	130
<i>The Octopus</i> as Social Protest Novel.....	134
Norris’s Literary Criticism.....	140
From West to East: Naturalism and the “Course of Empire”.....	142
“The Song of the West”: <i>The Octopus</i> as Norris’s Western Epic.....	156
Epic Capitalism.....	164
Chapter 4: <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> : Steinbeck’s Sentimental Harvest.....	168
Background: Sowing the Seeds.....	172
Identification Through Race, Class, and Religion.....	177
“And That Feeling Must Go into It”: Sentimental Domesticity in <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> .....	186
“This Book Wasn’t Written for Delicate Ladies”: <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> and Naturalism.....	195
The “Giving of the Breast”.....	202
The Effects of the Novel and Its Aftermath.....	207
Epilogue.....	213
The Rest of the Story.....	213
Endnotes.....	197

Works Cited ..... 222

## Introduction

### Real Estate, Railroads, and Rhetoric

How does one in the novel (the novel which is a work of art and not a disguised piece of sociology) persuade the American reader to identify that which is basic in man beyond all differences of class, race, wealth, or formal education?

Ralph Ellison

California is America, only more so.

Wallace Stegner

California has always been a place of extremes. With its sublime landscapes — from flat, scorching deserts to towering, snow-capped granite peaks—its rapid settlement and development, its diverse peoples, and its boom-or-bust economy, it has occupied a unique space in the American imagination since Richard Dana captivated a nation with his *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840). It is the golden state, a bit unreal, but beckoning with promises of good weather, graceful living, and, above all, abundant wealth. All too often, though, California has not delivered on its promises to the many hoping to reap its bounty. Instead, the state’s history has been largely marked by exclusion, by people displaced from their homes or barred from owning land in the first place. Since Dana first pronounced, “in the hands of an enterprising people what a country this might be!” (qtd. in Starr, *Americans* 41), California has been a contested place, where the success of one group—native California Indians, Spanish *californio* landowners, Anglo squatters, railroad corporations, large-scale ranchers, and migrant workers—has seemed to depend on the impoverishment of another, despite the apparent vastness and fertility of the land. In fact, as David Wyatt notes, quoting Freeman Champney in 1947, “In its extremes of wealth and destitution, in the absence or impotence of any middle group representing the public interest, and in the domination of the organs of civil life by irresponsible private greed, [California] has been one of the few areas of American life that has closely approximated the Marxian predictions about capitalist society” (*Fall* 151).

However, despite the extremity of California’s distribution of wealth in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the conflicts it engendered were not unique to the state. As Wallace Stegner presumably claimed, “California is America, only more so.” California’s conflicts from this period were representative, if intensified, of national

questions of land use, wealth, and by extension, national identity. Thus, their study is valuable not only for what they reveal about the region, but about the entire nation as well. For if, as Frederick Jackson Turner famously articulated in his 1893 Frontier Thesis, Americans believed that their use of the land and frontier was the defining factor of their national identity, then questions about land rights are inextricably tied to questions about identity. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were a crucial period in California's development that saw the "closing" of the frontier, the development of the state's economy from rough-and-tumble mining to mature agriculture, and the flowering of a California literature. During this period the stakes seemed higher than ever, making the state the nation's most extreme test site for its national experiment of freedom and justice—and wealth—for all. As Joan Didion put it some one hundred years later, "The mind is troubled by some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent" (*Slouching* 172). Making "things" work out in California, the final continental frontier, was essential to the way the nation thought about itself during this period.

As a place that illustrates these conflicts over its potential wealth, California's literature is a fruitful site for an examination of the issues of national identity that the state's land use raised in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The rhetoric of the public debates over land and national identity is nowhere more dramatic than in the body of California social protest fiction that developed in the 1880s and culminated in 1939, and yet no critical attention to this body of literature as such exists. Four of these social protest novels are the subject of this dissertation: Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), Frank Norris's

*The Octopus* (1902), and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). These texts debate who had the right to the land, going beyond simple legal rights (though they debate these too) to argue about who should be considered "American," and therefore entitled to citizenship in that era. Though the texts represented here are not the only novels that address social problems in California, they are all interrelated, all dealing with land rights and yet depicting the same groups in strikingly different ways, each arguing on behalf of a different group.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Mexican-American landowners whose rights Ruiz de Burton so vigorously defends in *Squatter and the Don* are themselves the oppressors of the native Americans in *Ramona*; the white farmers who are callously indifferent to the squalid lives of the migrant workers in *The Grapes of Wrath* are the besieged "little man" in the face of the monstrous railroad of *The Octopus*. These interconnections cast into relief the rhetorical strategies (and potentially, the positions) of the writers in their attempts to cast their characters as upstanding Americans.

The very notion of a California social protest literature as early as the nineteenth century runs counter to traditionally perceived notions of *fin de siècle* California and western American literature as principally concerned with sustaining the frontier myth of the west. The California myth and its literature can get in the way of social protest, both then and now, blinding the nation to other representations of the state and its problems. But long before William Kittredge welcomed (in his 1987 book *Owning it All*) modern western fiction writers who were throwing the western mythos in favor of "antimythological" works (qtd. in Lewis 12), the four writers studied here counter the myth of a golden, paradisaical California with which the nation was familiar from popular local color writing. Instead, these writers expose a California grappling with issues common and critical to the rest of the nation: railroad trusts, the "Indian Question," the

rise of industrialized agriculture, and Depression-era poverty. In so doing, these writers write against California and western exceptionalism, which Nathaniel Lewis argues has kept western American literature isolated from the rest of the nation and its literary history. On the contrary, these writers suggested that the nation could not afford to maintain its view of California as remote and exotic; just as allowing these problems to continue would harm the nation, facing and solving them would benefit the entire United States.

Simultaneously, however, these writers also rely on California's romantic-seeming history to attract and appeal to their readers. Fiction about the California myth seemed to ensure a market of easterners eager for tales about the Wild West—witness the commercial success of local color writers such as Bret Harte and Gertrude Atherton—and these writers were hungry for a national audience. Capitalizing on the intense national desire to grasp the always receding past, the writers present their problems as the myth endangered, which gives their arguments exigency. They walk a line between meeting their readers' expectations of California as a region still burgeoning with possibility, and opening their readers' eyes to the egregious injustices occurring in the state. None of them suggests the possibility of a return to a pre-lapsarian state; rather, they all look forward to a future of more perfect social justice.

This dissertation uses rhetorical theory—an often-overlooked tool in literary analysis—to lay bare the ways these novels construct American identities to make their arguments persuasive to their audiences. Because three of the four novels were written as overt arguments, it seems only reasonable to analyze them as such. By recognizing that these writers were consciously addressing an audience and calculating what it would take to persuade them, we can unmask the cultural assumptions and values of those audiences.

The audiences they address—intended, invoked, and actual—tell us much about late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Americans’ ideas about national identity and reform and why the writers made what seem to modern critics sometimes vexing choices.

I argue that the novels succeed or fail at influencing public opinion to varying degrees based on the success they have in creating ties of identification between their characters and their audiences. They create identification along lines of class, race, region, and religion, seeking to strike a balance between creating characters their audience will find sympathetic—despite the fact that the audience would normally see the characters as Other—but also exotic enough to motivate them to keep reading. The novelists also experiment with genre, as it too affects the reader’s ability to identify with the characters. The novel that most strongly influenced public opinion of these four, *The Grapes of Wrath*, did so because of its success in portraying Okies as Americans of old stock. Using a combination of sentimentalism and naturalism, Steinbeck shows his audience that the Okies were good workers, desiring success in the national capitalist economy. On the whole, the novelists try to show that anyone willing and able to work is assimilable into the American economy and nation, defining their characters as Americans rather than more exotic-seeming Californians. In so doing, they also make implicit claims about western literature, suggesting that California and Californians are not as remote as was popularly thought at the time.

### **Audience**

Any discussion of a text’s rhetoric must consider the potential audiences of the text. These novels show that these California writers saw their state as an integral part of a national project of economic expansion, not divorced geographically and culturally

from the rest of the nation, as opposed to local color fiction that depicted the state as exotic and distanced from national affairs. On the contrary, these writers believed that what affected California affected the nation, and thus they wrote to a national, not regional, audience. The novels are heavily invested in portraying their characters as ideal Americans who define themselves first and foremost by how they can contribute to the nation—through their labor. As would be expected, the characters for the most part are also portrayed as “white,” but it is often their very willingness and ability to work that allow them to be identified as white.

The audience the novels address is, generally speaking, a national, middle-class, mostly white, American audience—a group of people who would have more political and economic power than the subjects of the novels themselves, who were not the intended audiences (with the exception of Ruiz de Burton’s audience). In general, this group was probably largely Protestant, and was generally accepting of American economic and governmental ideologies. It was probably neither extremely conservative nor liberal religiously and politically. Nicholas Visser discusses the difficulty of gaining a middle-class audience for radical novels, since the audience is probably not the oppressed class itself. He quotes Engels, who argues that the goal of the novelist should be to shatter “the optimism of the bourgeois world,” and thus to cast “doubt about the eternal validity of the existing order” (203). The trick, though, is in attracting a middle-class audience enough so that they will pick up and continue reading the novel; a complacent audience likely does not want their optimism shattered. Thus, rather than disparaging the American capitalistic project itself, these writers seek a more evenhanded application of American law, asking only that existing laws be applied to make the system more inclusive. The novelists hoped to expose the injustices being inflicted upon their various groups, to

make their audiences aware of the problem. They stop short of advocating the dismantling of the capitalist system, which may be seen as conservative. However, in arguing about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jane Tompkins asserts, "Stowe's very conservatism...is precisely what gives her novel its revolutionary potential. By pushing those beliefs to an extreme and by insisting that they be applied universally, not just to one segregated corner of civil life, but to the conduct of all human affairs, Stowe means to effect a radical transformation of her society" (145). Particularly Ruiz de Burton and Jackson believed that if only the nation were made aware of certain injustices in California, it would act swiftly to right them, and in this belief they were optimistic about the nature of the American public and governmental system. But none of these novels has particularly revolutionary politics—not even *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was excoriated at the time for what readers saw as its pink-leaning ideology.

Of course, Ruiz de Burton and Helen Hunt Jackson's 1880s early Progressive-era audience differed from Steinbeck's 1930s Depression-era audience, both in their political-historical contexts and in their literary expectations. Likewise, the audience the authors intended or invoked at times differed from their actual audience. For instance, although Ruiz de Burton invokes a national audience, her actual audience was far narrower, probably not extending beyond California's boundaries. Conversely, though Steinbeck wrote to his agent that his book was not intended for "delicate ladies" (*Life in Letters* 175), and he predicted it would not be a "popular book" (*Life in Letters* 173), *Grapes of Wrath* continues to reach a worldwide audience today. For these reasons, I discuss each novel's audience more fully in each chapter.

Kenneth Burke's theories about rhetorical identification are central to this study, as are Lauren Berlant's on sentimental identification. In addition, the work of California

cultural historians such as Kevin Starr and David Wyatt, with their treatments of California's history and literature that are concerned with the imaginative place of California in the nation, are important to this project. I add to their tradition by broadening the scope of their work in terms of the writers, such as Ruiz de Burton and Jackson, included in California's story. Western literary criticism, which is turning a corner in terms of employing poststructuralist and cultural studies, such as Anne Goldman's *Continental Divides* and Nathaniel Lewis's *Unsettling the Literary West*, also informs my work. As Goldman and Lewis suggest, reading western writing outside the boundaries of region and authenticity, respectively, can give a new relevance to western literary texts and studies, linking western writing to broader literary traditions. Just as the writers I study here saw California's problems as national problems, I hope to show that California's fiction is interrelated with national literature. Because, as discussed below, genre is important to the success of the novels, I also draw on the theories of Jane Tompkins, Lauren Berlant, and June Howard extensively in my discussions of each novel.

### **Rhetorical "Success"**

It is difficult to attribute specific acts of legislation or reform programs directly to the novels; it is more likely that they contributed to national debate in more diffuse ways, which may have indirectly led to legislation or other reform measures. Therefore, I discuss each novel's success mostly in terms of the level to which it raised the nation's attention to a problem, rather than as some concrete political action taken as a result of the novel. If the novel raised the level of consciousness in the nation, sparking debate and conversation about the issue, I deem it successful. I judge this in each chapter by looking at the number of copies each book sold, the number and type of reviews the book

garnered, the letters and other writing of the authors that addressed the novels' reception, as well as any political or other action taken as a result of the book.

### **The Rhetoric of Identification**

According to the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke, the more an audience can see itself in the speaker—and in the case of these novels, the characters—the more likely it will be persuaded. The characters with whom the reader is asked to identify in these novels are astonishingly varied, with each text arguing for the rights of a different group, often at the expense or disregard of another group that is portrayed sympathetically in one of the other novels. It is fascinating, then, to see how the novelists take such disparate groups and make them over in the image of their audiences. The novels can be read as performances of Burke's theory of division and identification in their attempt to create unity among widely disparate groups. They question commonly held assumptions about hierarchies of race, class, and region, at times creating unexpected alliances (for example, Ruiz de Burton aligns her *californios* more closely to Anglo, eastern high society, while whites in *Ramona* are rarely portrayed favorably). The novels achieve various degrees of success; in some cases—particularly those of Ruiz de Burton and Steinbeck—they achieve a state of rhetorical “transcendence,” another Burkean term that denotes the transcendence of the characters' former identities to create a new identity that is neither one nor the other but a wholly different thing.

In their arguments over land ownership, these novels are negotiating not only for the land itself, but also for their characters' inclusion in the national identity; at issue is not only who gets the land, but who gets to be called “American.” The issues of land rights and national identity were impossible to separate, as demonstrated by state and federal laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Geary Act of 1892,

which explicitly excluded certain groups from owning land and becoming citizens. To allow these “dangerous classes” (to borrow a term from Richard Slotkin’s *Fatal Environment*) to own land would make them American, and thus, for some people these marginalized people had to be prevented from doing either. Each writer’s task, then, is to present his or her characters as possessing “American” identities and therefore the right to property. The audience must identify with the characters as being worthy of owning and working the land and gaining access to the wealth of the nation.

Burke’s theories of rhetorical identity inform the types of identifications the novels create. Burke argues that the condition of the human body, as it is physically separate from other human bodies, is divided from other bodies. For Burke, this division is always present, one of the defining conditions of humanity. Because people are divided from one another, they have separate, often conflicting interests of property, which Burke says are often in “the most materialistic sense of the term, economic property,” but which can also be moral properties (23-24). The novels studied in this dissertation all deal with conflicting interests in real property, but the disputes over land ownership cannot be separated from questions of moral properties. The land laws that favored certain groups over others were often based on which group had a stronger claim to the land due to moral, ideological properties. For example, many Americans believed that the “laziness” and “indolence” of the Spanish landowners made them somehow undeserving of the land they owned, and this attitude helped justify the American practice of squatting on Spanish landowners’ property and converting grazing land into wheat fields. Thus, the conflicts of interest are both ideological and economic.

From this state of dissociation and conflicting interests, according to Burke, arises the need for rhetoric; he points out that “[i]f men were not apart from one another, there

would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence" (22). But because we are divided, we must persuade others to act in our interests through rhetoric. Burke theorizes that one way to do this is to cause the audience to believe that its interests and the rhetor's are the same; in other words, the rhetor seeks to create identification with the opposing party, so that the opposing party sees herself in the rhetor. Burke explains:

A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so.

Here are ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is "substantially one" with a person other than himself. (20-21)

We are "consubstantial"—of the same body, metaphorically—with others when we share or appear to share common properties or interests. When bodies are consubstantial the differences between them are erased, whether in actuality or in perception. The more the rhetor can make the audience believe their bodies and interests are similar to or the same as the rhetor's, the more likely they will be persuaded. To persuade someone, according to Burke, one must "talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (*Rhetoric* 55). Hence, these four writers all seek to identify their characters' ways and attitudes with their audiences', giving "signs" of consubstantiality.

In each chapter I discuss at least three ways in which the writers “give the ‘signs’” of consubstantiality by creating identity through familial substance (race, class, and religion), directional substance (region), and generic substance (genre).

### *Familial Substance*

Identification along racial or ethnic lines depends on what Burke calls “familial substance”:

In its purity, this concept stresses common ancestry in the strictly biological sense, as literal descent from maternal or paternal sources. But the concept of family is usually “spiritualized,” so that it includes merely social groups, comprising persons of the same nationality or beliefs. Most often, in such cases, there is the notion of some founder shared in common, or some covenant or constitution or historical act from which the consubstantiality of the group is derived. (*Symbols* 243)

Clearly, because issues of race deal with questions of ancestry, they fall under the category of familial substance. But Burke’s extension of the definition to “social groups” bound by a common history, “covenant or constitution” allows us to discuss common nationalities and ideologies (such as capitalism) as well. Indeed, Ruiz de Burton points to the United States constitution and other binding legal promises to establish her characters’ rights, drawing on this commonly-held covenant to show her characters’ consubstantiality with their audience. And if the writers can convince their audiences that they and their characters share less explicit traits of “Americanness” than legal citizenship, the audience will be more likely to identify with them, rather than seeing them as foreign Others.

Burke's emphasis on division becomes particularly important in novels that deal with race relations. As Wyatt argues in *Five Fires*, race is central to the development of California. The state's ethnic diversity from the very beginning of its United States history has been unparalleled by any other state. When bodily "evidence" of difference and apparent moral and intellectual inferiority are seemingly visible to an audience, there is a significant barrier to identification and hence to persuasion. Ruiz de Burton and Helen Hunt Jackson especially deal with this barrier, but issues of race and Otherness come up in all of the novels. The writers therefore all present their characters as "white" to their audience: Ruiz de Burton emphasizes her characters' European roots rather than their Mexican roots; Ramona's father is Scottish; Norris's reminds the reader repeatedly of his ranchers' Anglo ancestry; and Steinbeck stresses the migrants' Anglo heritage. In doing so, however, other divisions are opened: for example, in closing the division between the *californios* and wealthy, white settlers, Ruiz de Burton also opens a division between the *californios* and native Indians.

Because notions of American identity are so enmeshed with the ideals of capitalism, invariably class also comes into play as a sign of common familial substance. Issues of class are inextricably tied to issues of race and American belonging in these novels, in some cases superseding the racial differences. For Burke, "belonging" is rhetorical in the sense that "a specialized activity"—in this case, working—"makes one a participant in some social or economic class" (*Rhetoric* 28-9). All of the novels portray their characters as skilled workers; in fact, next to race, their status as workers is the most important source of identification in the novels. In most cases, the characters' portrayals as efficient, strong workers went against cultural stereotypes: in much California writing—fiction and non-fiction—Mexican-Americans were typically portrayed as lazy

and indolent; the Indians were usually portrayed as uneducable and possessing only the lowest skills; the Okies were seen as seeking government benefits, not work. For American middle-class audiences, who saw California as a place with an abundance of work, a fallow field was “a sin,” as Steinbeck puts it in *Grapes* (301). It would follow that those who were willing to work hard in California should be rewarded with the profits of the land. The novelists therefore emphasize their characters’ skills and willingness to work: Ruiz de Burton’s Don Alamar is a visionary, entrepreneurial businessman, as are the ranchers in *The Octopus*. In *Ramona* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Alessandro and the Joads, respectively, are skilled farmers and manual workers. The injustice is that, despite their hard work, they are denied the land and its wealth.

With the exception of *The Octopus*, the novels also take up the issue of religion as well, inviting the reader to identify (or not) with the characters along religious lines. In *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton downplays the Alamar family’s Catholicism and creates bridges between the Protestant and Catholic families through marriage. However, the text remains largely secular. In *Ramona*, the title character’s devout Catholic practice has a divisive effect: it keeps the reader at a safe distance from Ramona, and is one reason the audience is, I argue, unable to fully identify with Ramona and her plight. Religion is pervasive in *The Grapes of Wrath* as well, with the Joads shunning more rural-class Pentecostalism in favor of a more intellectual, Emersonian transcendentalism that may have appealed more strongly to a well-educated audience.

#### *Directional Substance*

Other signs of consubstantiality in these novels come into play as well. Even today, region continues to play a large part in our constructions of individual identity. Where we come from is part of who we are, despite the homogenizing effects of national

food chains, nationally-owned broadcasting conglomerates, and the ease with which we can travel across the entire continent in a matter of hours. But our persistent concern with geographic origin would fall under Burke's category of "directional substance":

Doubtless biologically derived from the experience of free motion, since man is an organism that lives by locomotion. Frequently, with metaphors of "the way," the directional stresses the sense of motivation from within. Often strongly futuristic, purposive, its slogan might be: Not "Who are you?" or "Where are you from?" but "Where are you going?" (*On Symbols* 244-5)

Certainly the United States' unrelenting impulse toward expansion, whether by Manifest Destiny or by the nation's expanding economy onto the global scene, applies to this direction and futurist mode of identification. For the most part, these authors are forward-thinking, excited about the possibilities of a more inclusive, productive nation. But while Burke stresses the futuristic aspects of directional substance, in these novels the question "Where are you from?" is also vital. Because of California's unique position in the national imagination as somehow different from the culturally hegemonic east, especially the earlier writers sought to find ways to portray the far-western state as not dissimilar from the east. Region thus becomes another means of establishing identification; a shared locale implies a shared past, a commonality. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck refers many times to the Okies' old-stock American heritage, and Ruiz de Burton emphasizes her characters' comfort within both a developing regional California culture and a more established eastern society.

It is important to note that the identification the novelists seek to establish is for rhetorical effect and is sometimes temporary: in some cases, their rhetorical strategies do

not coincide with their personal beliefs about race and class. In other words, the novelists seek temporary alliances to suit their rhetorical purposes rather than claiming that the groups are consubstantial in every way and for all time. Burke's term "interests" allows for this distinction. To argue for common "interests" is less ambitious than to make truth claims. "Interests" is a word of finance, of banks and loans—fitting for arguments about land ownership and agriculture. And, like capital, interests can shift and change. Thus, the writers can flit back and forth between groups, uniting some and dividing others as suits their purposes. Indeed, despite widely accepted nineteenth-century pseudoscientific arguments about race and bloodlines, the writers here are not dealing with questions of truth but of public opinion and policy.

### *Generic Substance*

In addition to creating identification along these demographic lines, the success of these social protest novels also depends upon genre. Carolyn Miller argues that genre is "a complex of formal and substantive features that creates a particular effect in a given situation. Genre, in this way, becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action" (153). Readers come to any text with a certain set of expectations of its genre and what kind of argument is possible within the confines of that genre. The writers of these four novels deal with the constraints of genre in interesting and unexpected ways, at times transcending expected generic conventions to better suit the novelists' rhetorical ends, and at times becoming limited by their genres. According to Miller, genre "is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends." On the contrary, genre helps define "what ends we may have: we learn we may eulogize, apologize, . . . We

learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together” (165). This idea can be successfully applied to genres in fiction as well as more traditional rhetorical forms.

This dissertation addresses the problem of social protest fiction, a genre that, when not being attacked on aesthetic grounds, is often simply overlooked by critics. But the form raises interesting questions about identification and genre, especially in the four novels in this study. Two genres often associated with social protest fiction are sentimentalism and naturalism, and, indeed, the four novels all negotiate between sentimentalism or romance—what June Howard refers to as “social melodrama” in her groundbreaking book *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*—and naturalism. As Howard points out, although sentimentalism and naturalism seem almost antithetical, traces of the former can almost always be found in the latter, and vice versa, and this is certainly true in these four texts. As with the importance of a balance between the exotic and the familiar in their characters, the novels also must walk a fine line between a sentimental worldview, with its possibilities of change through romantic closure, and the more deterministic worldview of naturalism. The most successful of the novels, *Grapes of Wrath* and *Squatter and the Don*, manage to negotiate a balance between these two seemingly contradictory genres. Neither completely sentimental nor naturalistic, they incorporate the most effective elements of both.

Sentimentalism has long been associated with American social protest, the most striking example, of course, being Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Jane Tompkins has convincingly demonstrated how this genre constituted real power in the nineteenth century. A novel remarkable for its use of sentimentality, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

demonstrates American audiences' susceptibility to arguments based on feeling. It had an enormous political impact on the nation and set the standard for social protest fiction for years to come (despite the fact that most literary studies on sentimentalism are limited to the nineteenth century, as if literary sentimentalism ended in 1901). Helen Hunt Jackson explicitly aspired to affect the nation similarly with *Ramona*, and *Squatter* and *Grapes of Wrath* also draw on the sentimental genre. Even *The Octopus*, with its almost explicit disavowal of the sentimental, deals in some way with sentimentalism, even if only to refute it. Rhetorically, sentimentalism invites the reader to identify emotionally with the characters, and it is arguably the genre that lends itself best to the types of identification discussed above; in other words, sentimentalism invites the reader to identify with the characters along race, class, and other demographic lines. Creating a sense of consubstantiality between the reader and the character is what allows the reader to identify emotionally with the character, inviting compassion and sympathy. Lauren Berlant, who ultimately finds sentimentalism unhelpful politically, argues that it "promotes individual acts of identification based on collective group memberships [and] has been conventionally deployed to bind persons to the nation not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen's core" (636). Often using the trope of conversion, it models to the reader the proper emotional response to the social problem at hand. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this is seen in Aunt Ophelia's and Topsy's conversion by little Eva's death and by George Shelby's conversion by Uncle Tom's death. In *Squatter and the Don*, William Darrell is the most significant convert. In *Ramona*, Aunt Ri's conversion is explicitly meant to act as a model for the reader; in *Grapes of Wrath*, Tom and Ma Joad are converted to Casy's worldview.

Another important rhetorical feature of sentimentality is that its philosophy allows for the possibility of change. Because, as Howard puts it, in the sentimental novel the “fundamental oppositions” or conflicts are ostensibly moral and private rather than political and public (172), it is up to the individual to make changes and enact reform. Whether through a character’s personal conversion or closure of romantic plotlines (usually by marriage), sentimental novels offer hope that reform is possible. The danger, however, is in their offering too much closure. If a novel ends on too “happy” a note, it may not leave the readers with a sense of an urgent need for change. This is partly the reason for *Ramona*’s failure as a social protest novel.

Sentimentalism has also been criticized as a “failure of feeling,” to use Wallace Stevens’s term (qtd. in Wyatt, *Selected Stories* xii). In the language of literary theory, Lauren Berlant charges that it “uses personal stories to tell of structural effects, but in so doing it risks thwarting its very attempt to perform rhetorically a scene of pain that must be soothed politically” (641). She and others argue that it allows the reader to cry self-satisfied tears without demanding any further action. Nicholas Visser similarly argues that *The Grapes of Wrath* moves us from the political and ethical to the intensely personal and intimate. “In short,” he says, “the final moments end up telling the oppressed and exploited the old story: social justice can emerge only when there is a universal change of heart, only when people decide to be kinder to each other—a message which has always consoled those who gain advantage from the *status quo* more than it has to those who bear the costs of social inequity” (211). In this view, sentimentality perpetuates and even fosters oppression. It is true that sentimentality asks for a personal, perhaps private, response (if we assume that emotions are necessarily

“private”), but I argue that appeal to emotion does not preclude a political response. If a reader does not experience a personal change of heart about the characters she is initially prejudiced against, it seems unlikely that she will be persuaded to act politically in their interest. Furthermore, while it is possible for sentimentalism to fail to effect change, it cannot be denied that, when done well, sentimental fiction has the power to change public opinion, as evidenced by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Sentimentalism, with its appeal to pathos, is a powerful way to present the political as the personal, to empower individuals with the idea that they can affect the world positively.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from sentimentalism is naturalism, which has also long been associated with social protest fiction, if also problematically. Naturalism works well for social reform because it attempts to provide a “scientific” rendering of a social problem. With its roots in journalism, naturalism offers a convincing representation of reality; in Dreiser’s words, naturalists seek to convey “a true picture of life, honestly and reverentially set down” (qtd. in Howard 142). Not bowing to constraints of delicacy or euphemism, naturalistic novels can paint a graphic picture, rendering a problem urgent and dire. With their dogged tracing of causality, naturalistic novels also enlist the rhetoric of science to form the best response to social problems; if the problem can be scientifically explained, the logic goes, then it can be scientifically solved as well. Lewis argues that western literature has long been constrained by its insistence on representing the “real,” and notes that the development of realism in the east, “the sometimes gentle but intractable turn away from sentimental, romantic fiction toward social and even scientific accuracy” in the writing of Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman was already “de rigeur” in the west (112).

Critics Krista Comer and Nathaniel Lewis have questioned the place of the “real” in western American literature, with Lewis in particular arguing that reading western literature for its “authenticity”—how well it captures the spirit and reality of the west—has limited western literary criticism. While Lewis decries the narrow conception of a western literary tradition based on the “real,” in these novels claims of authenticity were particularly essential if they were to persuade their readers to act. For the four writers studied here, it was essential to depict their stories and characters as being real; their rhetorical success depended on it. For if their audiences were not convinced of the truth of the dire circumstances each faced, they would not be committed to action. Indeed, there is evidence that all four of these writers strove to create believable stories, through research, personal experience, and eyewitness reporting. As Steinbeck wrote, “There’s one other difficulty, too. I’m trying to write history while it is happening and I don’t want to be wrong” (qtd. in Visser 210). The books’ reception histories show, too, that in large part reviewers judged the books based on their “accuracy.” Steinbeck perhaps was the most successful at establishing his novel as “truth,” with public figures referring to the Joads as real people, and Oklahoma officials making a vigorous rebuttal to Steinbeck’s supposed slight on their state. So enthusiastically was Jackson’s *Ramona* also accepted as truth that it drew thousands of tourists in search of the “real” Ramona and her homes. Thus, the verisimilitude that naturalism provides is important to these novels.

However, with its deterministic philosophy and oftentimes bleak endings, naturalistic fiction can also leave the reader with scant hope for the possibility of change. Naturalism’s deterministic philosophy tends to deprive its characters of agency, suggesting instead that they are subject to the chance, unstoppable forces of “natural” systems, economic, biological, or geological. Furthermore, there are problems with the

distance between the narrator and the subject in naturalistic texts, as Howard argues. According to her, there are two voices at work in these novels: the voices of the characters and the voices of the narrators. The narrator usually speaks from a position of privilege and understanding, while the characters understand little about the politico-economic situation in which they find themselves. The subject of the naturalistic novel, often the “brute,” possesses no self-consciousness and is ignorant of the forces that control his destiny. Set against and above this Other is the narrator, who scientifically explains these forces to the reader. Rhetorically, this distance invites the reader to identify with the knowledgeable narrator rather than the subject, and thus works against the impulse to identify with the characters. There is less sense of consubstantiality, which makes the audience more distant from the characters and superior to them, and less likely to engage emotionally with them.

This problem of the voice of the narrator is not limited to naturalism, however. Anytime there is a gap between the narrator’s and the characters’ knowledge—even in a romantic novel such as *Ramona*—there will be less impulse to identify with the character. In *Ramona*, the Indian characters understand only minimally the political scene and laws that enable the white men to chase them out of their land time after time. And it is *Ramona* that invites the least identification between its characters and audience. In *Squatter and the Don*, on the other hand, the gap in knowledge between the Don, his family, and the narrator is minimal—perhaps because this is the only novel of the four whose author is a member of the class she represents in her book. Indeed, part of the appeal of the Don and his family is that they *do* understand the system they are up against. In *The Octopus*, even the ranchers, with their tickertape readouts of the Chicago markets, do not understand the extent of the system the railroads have in place. They are

naïve compared to the likes of Shelgrim and Derrick's son, and only Presley at the end of the novel gains complete understanding. In *Grapes of Wrath*, the Joads have their own common-sense, folksy wisdom, almost in competition with, or parallel to, knowledge of the politico-economic system they find themselves in. Though they do gain knowledge of this system by the end of the book, they have an intuitive knowledge, an equally "American" system of values, that makes them sympathetic characters. And the narrator respects them for this. It seems that in the cases of these four novels, the wider the gap in knowledge between the narrator and characters, the less effective the rhetoric.

There are clearly problems with using either straight sentimentalism or naturalism in a social reform novel. I argue that, of these four California novels, the successful ones create a hybrid of sentimentalism and naturalism to avoid the pitfalls of and to capitalize on the usefulness of both genres. They work to create sentimental, emotional identification between their characters and their audiences while also using a well-informed, politically minded narrator who treats the problem more sociologically, explaining root causes and appealing to the reader's intellect. This hybrid is highly rhetorical, and it is important to realize that these two genres, usually seen as totally opposite from each other, can be made compatible. The best, most explicit example of this blend can be seen in *Grapes of Wrath*, in which Steinbeck invites his readers to identify emotionally with his characters in the particular chapters and adopts a more naturalistic voice in the general chapters, explaining the meteorological and economic causes of the Dust Bowl and mass migration west. In his particular chapters, Steinbeck never "brutalizes" his characters: while naïve at the beginning of the novel, they are treated with the utmost respect and compassion by their narrator.

The balance, or lack thereof, of these genres is most clearly seen in the endings of the novels. The conclusion is a crucial part of the novel's argument and illustrates the dominant genre of the novel, with all of its theoretical implications. Unsurprisingly, the endings of these four novels have also been the most problematic for the critics, both contemporary and modern. The ending has to walk a fine line between illustrating that the problem is dire but also solvable. Veer too closely to a "happy," sentimental ending, such as in the case of *Ramona*, and the reader will not be motivated to seek change. With an ending that removes the reader too far from the grimness of the problem, the need for reform becomes secondary to the closure of the romantic plotline. Though the ending of *Ramona* is not altogether "happy," as some critics complain, the immediate problems have been resolved, even if unsatisfactorily. Ramona, the deserving princess, marries the wealthy Felipe and wants for nothing materially, even if her true love, Alessandro, is forever gone. But veer too closely to hopelessness—or determinism—as is the case in *The Octopus*, and the response is the same: there is no reason to try to enact change. At the end of *The Octopus*, Presley learns that all forces—natural and economic—work together for good. Thus, there is no need for him to rail against the railroad, as he struggles to do through the entire novel, and the reader is not inspired to reform. *The Grapes of Wrath*, on the other hand, manages to keep its readers emotionally connected to the Joads while also keeping the problem at the forefront. The final scene is emotionally moving, and its lack of resolution and its graphic representation of the Joads' problems leave no doubt in the reader's mind that action still needs to be taken. Its ending is ambivalent, offering neither happy closure nor complete despair. Ruiz de Burton also strikes an appropriate balance, but, as I argue, though her rhetoric is sound, she did not have access to the national audience that Steinbeck did.

## Summary of Chapters

I bookend my analysis with the two texts I believe are the most effective rhetorically, *The Squatter and the Don* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Both Ruiz de Burton and Steinbeck are successful, I argue, in creating ties of identification with readers based on character and genre. Ruiz de Burton establishes identification by blurring racial lines, presenting the Alamares as white Americans who blend easily with upper-crust New York society. Don Mariano is an intelligent, rational entrepreneur. His forward-thinking plans for his land and his gentlemanly manners represent his belonging with a middle- to upper-class audience and distance him from the ruffianly Anglo squatters who do not listen to his practical ideas. Ruiz de Burton subverts the conventions of historical romance, balancing sentimentalism and naturalism instead to argue that the Alamares and their *californio* culture should not be destined to die out.

*The Grapes of Wrath* aligns the migrants with white, middle class America. Though the Joads cannot afford a middle-class lifestyle, they have middle class yearnings and sensibilities: skilled workers, they long to cultivate the land and settle on their own little bit of property. Steinbeck, too, closes divisions by emphasizing the Okies' Anglo heritage, urging his audience that the migrants are Americans, deserving of far better treatment than they are receiving. Steinbeck employs many of the tactics of sentimentalism in his story of the Joads, never letting them fall into the category of "brute," while using his general chapters to provide a more naturalistic explanation of the catastrophic events that have left the Joads homeless.

*The Grapes of Wrath* is, unfortunately, the only novel of these four that captured the nation's attention on a level of persuasive success anything like that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel's publication benefited from the perfect confluence of circumstances:

like Stowe's, Steinbeck's audience was already involved in a debate over the problem; a host of other texts published the same year gave his novel further socio-political context; and he already enjoyed recognition as a writer of national importance, which virtually guaranteed him a national audience. In contrast, Ruiz de Burton, a Mexican-American woman writing under virtual anonymity, enjoyed none of these advantages. Though her rhetoric is sound, she did not have access to the audience that Steinbeck did and therefore did not succeed at sparking the intense debate that *Grapes of Wrath* did.

The two middle chapters analyze *Ramona* and *The Octopus*, which I consider less successful as social protest novels, largely because they are too firmly attached to a single genre for the audience to fully identify with their characters. In *Ramona*, Jackson creates characters who, while possessing some traits of Americanness such as whiteness, devotion to family, and work skills, remain too exotic for contemporary readers to feel consubstantial with them. Ramona is too piously Catholic and flawless; Alessandro is skilled but remains a primitive, noble savage, unwilling to adapt to American ways. This depiction, I argue, is reflective of Jackson's personal views about assimilationist Indian reform policy: for her, it did not matter whether the characters adapted to American culture for them to be deserving of protection by American law. In the end, however, the novel veers too closely to local color romance, with its perpetuation of racial stereotypes, for the reader to finally be moved to action by it. This assessment is confirmed by its continuing cultural status not as a social protest novel (as is the case with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) but as a romance novel.

*The Octopus* is unique in this collection of texts in that Norris, unlike the other authors, did not intend his work to be a reform novel—he was more interested in the drama of the story itself than in reform. Nevertheless, the book was read as social protest

and has perplexed critics since its initial publication for the way it seems to invite and then repudiate this type of reading. Norris succeeds marvelously at creating characters we want to stand beside and for whom we feel intense sadness when they are defeated by the monstrous railroad. But Norris's firm commitment to naturalism and the deterministic forces that go with it do not give the reader the means to effect change; rather, the lesson Presley learns at the end is that all forces work together for good. There is no way to effect change, but neither is there reason to, the novel seems to argue.

In addition to providing an in-depth analysis of the rhetoric of these novels, this study also broadens our understanding of the canon and American literary history. It includes two lesser-known women writers alongside two more traditionally canonical, male writers. Ruiz de Burton in particular complicates our understanding of Mexican-American women and of the *californio* landowners who lost millions of acres of land when the U.S. annexed California. As the only writer of these four to belong to the group she portrays, there is virtually no distance between her narrative voice and her characters. Her vigorous defense of the *californios* defies stereotypical depictions of the Mexican-Americans as indolent romantics too lazy to defend their rights. This is a stereotype that surfaces not only in Gertrude Atherton's and other local colorists' works, but also in Norris's and Steinbeck's novels. Much work remains to be done on Ruiz de Burton, who is not included in important histories of California literature and culture such as Kevin Starr's, and it is for this reason that my chapter on her is disproportionately long. Like Ruiz de Burton's case, as some of the only fiction to depict Southern California's native Americans, Jackson's *Ramona* also works against cultural prejudice by arguing that the Indians were hard workers, capable of learning and assimilation. With her untraditional

marriage, her commitment to writing as a profession, and her conspicuous governmental role with the Indians, Jackson herself defied cultural stereotypes. These two women change the story of both California fiction and history.

Sadly, though it would be nice to report that these four novels present a vision of California that includes all the groups mentioned above, this is not the case. None of the writers seemed able to envision a California where the land's rich bounty was shared by all; instead, the texts more often advocate the inclusion of their particular group at the expense of others. This could be interpreted as a rhetorical tactic, for defining oneself against an Other helps strengthen identification within a group. But at the risk of sounding deterministic, the same historical pattern seems to continue to be played out in California politics today. Perhaps by studying the successes and failures of these writers we can learn to imagine a nation that is more inclusive of all its peoples. At any rate, what these novels do show is a group of politically engaged Californians stimulating debate, aware that the decisions made and policies enacted in their state would, as they continue to do, affect the policies of the entire nation.

## Chapter 1

### Continental Characters in Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*

## **Introduction: Fictional Romances and Non-fictional Struggles**

Since Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's publication of a new edition of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* in 1992, a steadily growing body of work on Ruiz de Burton and her novels has emerged. The critical corpus on her is still not large enough, though, to match her significance in California history and in the California and Chicana literary tradition. *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) is a remarkable novel not only for its "firsts"—it was the first narrative about the native Californians published in English by a Mexican American woman and from the perspective of the conquered Mexican culture—but also for the ways it complicates nineteenth-century stereotypes of Latin Americans and particularly Latin American women. But the novel is also remarkable for its strong rhetorical bent. The narrator of this "novel with a purpose," as more than one reviewer called it (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 565, 568), is constantly aware of her audience and seeks both to educate them about the plight of the *californios* and to persuade them to take action against the injustices they suffered at the hands of the U.S. government, which promised them the full protection of the law due any citizen of the United States. In this chapter I argue that Ruiz de Burton accomplishes these objectives by closing racial divisions between her audience and her characters. This tactic in stark opposition to popular nineteenth-century Anglo local color writers, such as Gertrude Atherton and Bret Harte, who capitalize on the Mexicans' exotic difference from their eastern readers. In contrast to these writers, Ruiz de Burton establishes identification chiefly along class lines. This tactic, along with

her skillful use of genre that borrows from naturalism and sentimentalism, among others, makes her a unique voice in nineteenth-century American literature.

In a *San Francisco Chronicle* article from 1872, the writer notes the singularity of Ruiz de Burton's life: "This is the first instance we have to note of a native Californian authoress, and as such, together with the peculiar history of the lady, she is worthy of more than a passing notice" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 571-2). Indeed, the "authoress" led what many of her Anglo contemporaries would have seen as a glamorous life filled with travel and exciting social engagements, a life that seemed to confirm their picturesque ideas of California history. Born in Baja California in 1832, she was the granddaughter of Don José Manuel Ruiz, who was commander of the Mexican northern frontier of Baja California and later became governor of Baja California. She was related through her grandmother to several prominent Alta California families, the Carrillos, the Vallejos, the Guerra y Noriegas, the Alvarados, the Pachecos, the Castros, the Picos, and the Estradas (Sánchez and Pita, *Squatter* 10). She met her future husband, then a lieutenant-colonel in the U.S. Army, while he was in Baja California to secure La Paz for the United States.

In a 1932 story for the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine* enticingly titled "Enemy Lovers," Winifred Davis casts the U.S. conquest of California as the literal and metaphorical backdrop of their marriage. They were, according to Davis, "natural enemies," he being "typically American" and she "equally typically Spanish." Reportedly, when a young María taunted Burton, asking, "And how do you expect to subdue us with that handful of pretty soldiers, Col. Burton?" he replied, "I don't know at all...I can try of course. And if you won't let me, why, of course I can't blame you.

Perhaps it is your pleasure to resist me?" (Davis). The portrayal of U.S. invasion as an act of seduction of the feminine California was a common trope for Anglo California writers of the late nineteenth century and worked to help Americans justify U.S. aggression. And as with many nineteenth-century California historians, Davis recounts the U.S.'s annexation of Alta California as welcomed by the Mexicans. According to her, the commanding officer in La Paz, Admiral Shubrick, "promised protection to the lives and property of all and immediately balls and receptions and general good times followed. Lower Californians expected immediate citizenship in the United States of America and expressed themselves glad at the prospect!"<sup>2</sup> According to Davis, the commandant-subaltern relationship between the U.S. and La Paz was mirrored in María and Henry's relationship as well: the young Ruiz "fell naturally and unconsciously into the role of pupil, eager to learn of a newly found teacher." Davis also claims that Ruiz de Burton's "mind was richly endowed," though its "cultivation" did not begin until her engagement to Burton.

Ruiz de Burton became a U.S. citizen in 1848 and moved in the high social circles befitting a military wife. Davis never discusses her writing or business acumen. By all reports Ruiz de Burton was quite beautiful: her good friend Mariano Vallejo wrote to his wife, "Pleasant and very amiable as she is, I did not kiss her (but I had a great temptation to do so) as I found her very beautiful" (Rosenus 216). In another newspaper account she is described as having "black and lustrous eyes" and beauty "of the pure Castilian type, graceful, non-chalant and easy. Judging from her present appearance, her form and features, and the bright glance of her eyes, so well preserved, what she must have been at sweet sixteen—is a thought too bewildering for a youthful and susceptible bachelor to

contemplate” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 570). The “bachelor correspondent” of this article continues, “she has lived in our largest Eastern cities, and added much to the social attractions of our National Capital, gaining for herself a large experience among noted men and women.” After the death of her gallant husband, he assumes that “her life would be a lonely one were it not for the companionship of her son and daughter and the associations that naturally gather about a person whose social position has been high and whose talents afford a fascinating entertainment in society” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 571).

But this romantic portrayal of a life of “enemy lovers” and high society distorts the truth of her life, which she lived on the brink of poverty for most of her years following Burton’s death. Requesting a military pension of only thirty dollars a month and heavily mortgaging her property to supply herself with capital, she often had to borrow cash from friends to support an upper-class facade that included an expensive lifestyle of travel and the best hotels (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 550). Critics today have commented on her various positions in life as conflicted: she led a life of both privilege and exclusion, as Mexican and U.S. citizen, in a unique position to critique U.S. expansionist policy of the late-nineteenth century.

If the admonition to “write what you know” is good advice, Ruiz de Burton seems to have followed it. *The Squatter and the Don*, while by no means autobiographical, mirrors Ruiz de Burton’s life in more ways than one. Mixed marriages like hers abound in the novel. The opening chapter introduces the reader to Mary and William Darrell. Mary (María) is Catholic and has Latin roots (her maiden name is Moreneau); William is Protestant. The main romantic plotline of the novel is also cross-cultural, relating the

courtship of Clarence Darrell (the son of William and Mary) and Mercedes Alamar, daughter of Mariano Alamar, the *californio* landowner. Don Mariano, a wealthy landowner in San Diego, is based closely on Mariano Vallejo, a friend of Ruiz de Burton's and an important figure in California's nineteenth-century history. Vallejo's biographer, Alan Rosenus, comments that Ruiz de Burton's portrayal of Don Mariano is strikingly accurate in its rendering of Vallejo's "intellectual clarity and humane pragmatism" (224). The Alamares' aristocratic leanings also mirror Ruiz de Burton's own: Davis describes Ruiz de Burton as possessing "native hauteur" and "[t]rue aristocracy."

The first half of the novel deals with the antagonistic relationship between the Don and the Anglo squatters who have settled on his land, with the Don attempting to use logical, reasonable means to persuade the settlers to stop killing his cattle and to enclose their land (which is actually the Don's, and which they are squatting on). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) guaranteed that the Mexican landowners, newly granted U.S. citizenship, would retain the titles to their land. But the Land Act of 1851 placed the burden on the landowners to prove the validity of their titles. Although most titles were eventually approved, the landowners often had to mortgage their ranchos, and many eventually were forced to sell their land to pay for litigation costs. Meanwhile, Anglo squatters were allowed by law to settle on and farm the ranchos, while the landowner was forced to pay taxes on the property the squatters were profiting from. The settlers in *Squatter*, led by William Darrell, take advantage of these unfair land title laws to draw the Don into lengthy litigation battles, eventually driving him to sell off his cattle. On their drive to the Colorado River to sell the herd a freak snowstorm leaves the cattle dead,

Victoriano crippled, and the Don with pneumonia. Ruiz de Burton had similar land woes, the title of her Jamul Ranch being tied up in litigation for years, and the court battle draining her of needed capital and the use of her land. Like Don Mariano, she was continually cooking up business schemes in hopes that her next plan would allow her to continue the lifestyle she was accustomed to.

The second half of the novel deals with the defeat of a proposal to construct a terminus of the Texas Pacific Railroad in San Diego. When the Don and his friends invest heavily in this possibility and it never materializes due to government corruption, their fortunes are ruined. Like the Don, Henry Burton invested in stock in the hoped-for San Diego railroad that eventually proved worthless. Buttressed with quotes from Carlyle, Herbert Spencer, and Emerson, the novel rails against the immoral, monopolistic capitalism practiced by the *nouveau riche* railroad moguls. Powerless in the face of so much wealth, the Don dies depressed and practically penniless, leaving his family on land that is worthless in the short term. His wife and family are “rescued” by Clarence Darrell, who has become rich in mining and on Wall Street and who buys their land. The families, now united by Clarence and Mercedes’ marriage, move to San Francisco, where the Alamar sons will start a bank. This white rescuer did not materialize for Ruiz de Burton herself, however, and she died in Chicago in 1895 while fighting for title to a land grant in Mexico that would have made her a multi-millionaire. When she writes in the novel that “no one will willingly tolerate a *poor native Californian*” (324), she was all too familiar with her character’s marginalized position. It is not difficult to imagine why it was so important to her to keep up the appearances of wealth, as it gave her access to power that her ethnicity otherwise barred her from.

While critics refer in passing to *Squatter and the Don* as a rhetorical novel, none has put forth a comprehensive analysis of Ruiz de Burton's rhetorical strategies.<sup>3</sup> The novel's call for political reform is announced time after time by her characters and the narrative voice. The novel is all about persuasion; it is filled with rhetorical acts. It opens with a debate between Mary and William Darrell about settling on Mexican-owned land and ends with a scathing peroration addressed directly to the audience. Throughout the novel, the characters participate in debate with each other, and layered over this is the voice of the narrator, which ranges from didactic to sharply ironic. The purpose of the novel is clear: as Don Mariano says, "I fear the conquered have always but a weak voice, which nobody hears...We have no one to speak for us" (66). Ruiz de Burton's task, then, is to speak for them.

A significant component of any rhetorical situation is, of course, the audience. The readers Ruiz de Burton imagined she was writing to, the audience she invokes in the text, and her actual readers significantly affect her rhetorical choices as well as the way readers interpret her novel. Given the mass readership of mid-nineteenth century sentimental novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, and Jackson's 1884 *Ramona*, on the one hand it seems reasonable to assume Ruiz de Burton could hope for a similar audience of middle class women for her historical romance. Richard Brodhead comments on the influence of mid-century novels on the later nineteenth century, noting that this then relatively-newfound literary market "helped establish both the circle of readers and the reading tastes and habits by which the great bulk of literary production was consumed in later nineteenth-century America" (469).

The popularity of these novels—especially *Ramona*, which dealt with somewhat similar California issues and was published just a year before *Squatter*—cannot have gone unnoticed by Ruiz de Burton, and there are elements of *Squatter* that play to the values and assumptions of a female audience, such as the character of Mary Darrell and the overall centrality of women as the moral foundation of the novel. The multiple romances between the Alamares, Michelins, and Darrells would also appeal to middle-class women. Thus, Ruiz de Burton's use of some of the conventions of the American sentimental, "feminine" novel gave her access to a wide readership, unusual in that she would be the first Mexican-American woman to exploit this genre for political/rhetorical purposes.

But on the other hand, other elements within the novel seem to invoke a different or additional audience. In the first place, Ruiz de Burton complicates the genre of the sentimental, historical romance by invoking it and then "spoiling" it. Mercedes is the stereotypical, blushing, blue-eyed romantic heroine, prone to fainting and weeping. But on learning that Clarence is neither an indigent squatter nor a land shark, Mercedes' sister Elvira jokes, "Really, I think our romance is spoiled. It would have been so fine—like a dime novel—to have carried you off bodily by order of cruel parents, on arriving at New York to marry you, at the point of a loaded revolver, to a bald-headed millionaire." She and her husband George jokingly lament that "our romance is stripped of its thrilling features" (132). While Ruiz de Burton does provide an entertaining romantic storyline, it is not her project to provide for her readers a sentimental hanky-wringer; rather, in anticipation of Upton Sinclair and Frank Norris, her central aim is to expose the corrupt workings of the monopolies and federal government. Furthermore, her references to high

culture and literature suggest that she is writing to a well-educated, wealthier audience who would hopefully have some influence on political processes, the better to enact the changes she believes are necessary. Her references range from Dickens to Carlyle to Herbert Spencer, demonstrating her own literary cultivation, but also demanding that the reader recognize such figures of the cultural elite. Her inclusion of long, legislative articles and discussions of the intricacies of the laws also suggest she intended an audience of well-educated, politically-savvy Americans. Invoking such an audience reflects Ruiz de Burton's pragmatism; an upper-class, politically powerful, mostly white audience would hopefully have the means to effect change. In some ways her intended audience seems more in line with a Howellsian audience that Brodhead describes as "cosmopolitan in range, looking to the European cultural world—more than to socially remote areas of American life—as an extension of its sphere." (471). Her many references to European culture (particularly French) reflect this audience's concerns and her own constructed self-image as genteel aristocrat. None of her letters, though, seems to indicate that she was interested in developing a new aesthetic in the way that Howells championed realism—indeed, her main purpose in writing is to persuade her audience and to earn badly-needed money for herself and her family, with aesthetic concerns subordinated to her rhetorical purposes.

The scope of Ruiz de Burton's audience is also significant—whether she intended or imagined a regional California audience or a nationwide audience. A previous novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), published anonymously in Philadelphia, was set almost entirely in the east, indication of the scope of audience she intended. In *Squatter*, given the various arguments she makes or implies about the connections between

California and the rest of the nation (which will be discussed in a later section of the chapter), and given her own travels and political and social connections across the nation (she offered to present Mariano Vallejo to President Lincoln and petitioned President Grant for a government position for her son), it seems reasonable to assume that she would have sought a national audience for her grievances, perhaps planning to use her social connections in the east to develop an audience there. However, while mass production and marketing made a nationwide audience possible at this time, there is little indication that the book was actually widely read outside of California. Ruiz de Burton paid to have *Squatter* published by the San Francisco publishing house Carson & Co, which would not have the national marketing resources of a larger, east coast publishing house. So, while we may surmise that although the novel's intended audience was national in scope, her actual audience most likely did not extend very far outside of California.

### **Racial Divisions: Harte's and Atherton's California**

As mentioned above, one of Ruiz de Burton's chief strategies is to minimize the otherness of her Mexican American characters, unlike other writers of her time such as Gertrude Atherton and Bret Harte, who sought instead to emphasize the differences between the Mexicans and Americans. Ruiz de Burton sets up a series of identifications between herself and her audience based mainly on class, but also on race, gender, and region/nationality, in an attempt to illustrate to her white, upper class readers that the landowning Mexican American population is not as dissimilar to themselves as they might believe. If she can show that her *californio* characters share common properties with her audience in terms of race, class, and American identity, the audience will be

more likely to identify itself with the characters, share the indignation Ruiz de Burton expresses, and hopefully be compelled to act.

The racial prejudice Ruiz de Burton sought to dismantle was perpetuated in part by local color writing about California. Readers accustomed to portraits of *californio* culture by late nineteenth-century authors like Gertrude Atherton and Bret Harte (and, to some extent, Helen Hunt Jackson, who is discussed in the next chapter) would have been unprepared for the cosmopolitanism of Ruiz de Burton's characters, with their European affinities and their ease in moving between their California culture and eastern, high society culture. Ruiz de Burton's characters contrast sharply with the likes of Atherton's Doña Eustaquia in "The Ears of Twenty Americans," an old Mexican woman who provincially refuses to leave Monterey even if it would give her means to indulge her passion for books and culture. In contrast to Ruiz de Burton's project to establish identification between the two cultural groups, both Harte's and Atherton's depictions of California and its people establish and romanticize difference between the two cultures rather than erase it. Their portrayals of the *californios* are sympathetic but also condescending and demeaning. This impulse to exoticize is, of course, unsurprising and not uncommon in texts dealing with foreign cultures and lands. In the eyes of Harte and Atherton, in comparison to the US's modern eastern society, the *californios* were strange yet picturesque, living in a place that was destined for change and progress. As a throwback to earlier, outmoded times, in this view California seemed to be simply waiting to be conquered, so that its promise of wealth could be realized by those worthy of it.

In *The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches* (1870), Harte's story "Notes by Flood and Field" looks at the subject of land grants and squatters' rights. Harte—or at least his narrator—appears to be sympathetic to the plight of the Mexican landowners, and by the end of the story the *Espiritu Rancho Santo* is the only structure in the area still standing despite devastating floods, the Mexicans being perhaps not "the darned fools people thinks 'em," as one settler admits (132). But if there is sympathy from the narrator and grudging respect for them in the end from the settlers, the differences Harte establishes between the east and west and between Latino and Anglo are more significant than the similarities. This is apparent even from the opening descriptions of the terrain and climate:

It was autumn, but not the season suggested to the Atlantic reader under that title. The sharply defined boundaries of the wet and dry seasons were prefigured in the clear outlines of the distant hills. In the dry atmosphere the decay of vegetation was too rapid for the slow hectic which overtakes an Eastern landscape, or else Nature was too practical for such thin disguises. (115)

Here, defining the reader as eastern makes explicit the sharp divide between west and east, with the western landscape figured as foreign and strange.

In Harte's story, when we meet the *californio* Don whose land is being appropriated by the white settlers, his adobe house is described as filled with "cathedral gloom" and the "incense" of *cigarrito* smoke. Señor Altascar wears a "stiff, uncomely sombrero" and a "serapa." He speaks in incantations—curses, really—of defeat. His dark home, his strange clothing, and his mysterious speech are vastly different from Ruiz de Burton's characters' witty banter in *The Squatter and the Don*, and they also stand in

sharp contrast to Harte's Anglo hero, the "picturesque figure" of George Tryan, who is in love with Señor Altascar's daughter and feels sympathy for the Don whose land his family is taking possession of (he is the counterpart to Clarence Darrell in *Squatter*). A marriage between the two cultures in this story is not to be, however, as one of the final tableaux of the story is of George lying dead on a bed covered with lace, "in all that splendid luxury" which "these strange people lavish upon this single item of their household" (135). Far from establishing identification between the two cultures, Harte distances Mexicans as exotic and foreign. Altascar's daughter is not even given a face, it being either downcast or obscured in shadow, in contrast to Mercedes Alamar's blushing cheeks and angelic blue eyes. Senor Altascar is described as "tragic" and fatalistic, responding with irony when the narrator suggests he appeal the ruling depriving him of his land: "*Que bueno?*—Your courts are always just" (125). For Harte, the dark, decaying "tomb-like repose" of the casa is destined to die out quickly and become a romantic interlude in California's past. Inside, the narrator feels that "we might have been shut out from the world as well as the whistling storm, behind these ancient walls with their time-worn interior" (135). As implied by this story, there is no place for "these strange people" in the newly-annexed, U.S. California.

Aside from this story, however, there is actually little in Harte's fiction that treats the *californio*. But a few years later, Gertrude Atherton, who was born in San Francisco, picks up on this potential goldmine of a subject, excited at its prospects. "Forked lightning was cracking in my skull," she wrote in a letter upon the discovery of her new subject. "It illumined a dazzling vista. Bret Harte had barely touched upon that period and its nuggets were mine" (qtd. in Leider 108). Emily Wortis Leider, Atherton's

biographer, notes that for Atherton, “writing was a form of venture capitalism, a kind of mining by which locales and characters could be scouted, developed, and merchandized like veins of ore” (4). Atherton’s short stories of pre-annexation California life, *Before the Gringo Came: Being Eleven Stories of Old California*, were published together in 1894 and separately around 1890 in periodicals such as *Lippincott’s*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and *Current Literature*, and in England in *Blackwood’s* and the *London Graphic*, where they met with a particularly receptive audience.<sup>4</sup> Like Harte’s, Atherton’s stories also figure Alta California as alien. California’s topography for Atherton, too, is isolating and wild. In “The Pearls of Loreto,” the “isolated country” gives “a sense of being imprisoned in an enchanted vale where no message of the outer world could come” (25), language strikingly similar to Harte’s. In “The Ears of Twenty Americans,” Doña Eustaquia reiterates the separateness of California from the rest of the continent: “I well can understand that you know nothing of us, for it is like we live on another planet. We not even have the newspapers like you” (74). Atherton reinforces all the typical stereotypes of the *californios*: they are “haughty, passionate, restless, pleasure-loving” (13), yet they are also “languid” and “shallow” (14) and have “little ambition” (15). The women are passionate and beautiful, like mountain roses compared to the hothouse roses of the East. The conquest of the women is metaphorical for the conquest of the territory, with California repeatedly sexualized as female, waiting to be ravished: “The golden skeleton within the sleeping body of California had not yet been laid bare” (2). Courtship between the Americans and Mexicans is discussed in military terms: “I feel as if the war between the United States and California began tonight” (57), Benicia says at the ball, and, sure enough, “[t]en minutes later California and the United States were flirting

outrageously” (58). Russell’s conquest of Benicia will be “as signal as the capture of Monterey,” and will show the Mexicans that “American blood is quite as swift as Californian” (75-6).

For Atherton, as with Harte, this era of imagined California history is already past and picturesque. In “The Ears of Twenty Americans,” one U.S. soldier comments on Monterey, “Nor could anything be more picturesque than this scattered little town...its quaint church surrounded by the ruins of the old presidio, its beautiful, strangely-dressed women and men who make this corner of the earth resemble the pages of some romantic old picture book” (69). Once the Americans have taken over the town, however, it becomes transformed: “An American alcalde with a power vested in no judge of the United States ruled over her; to add insult to injury he had started a newspaper. The town was full of Americans; the United States was constructing a fort on the hill; above all, worse than all, the Californians were learning the value of money. Their sun was sloping to the west.” For Atherton, the Californians’ entrance into a market economy necessarily spells their cultural doom. Despite the fact that Doña Eustaquia wishes for a newspaper that can offer a California perspective, the narrative voice here sees such an advance as a sign of decline of the culture.

Mirroring the decline of old Monterey is the decline and death of Benicia, who has married a U.S. captain against her mother’s wishes. Despite the attempted marital union between Benicia/Mexico and Russell/U.S., Benicia dies from the superstitious, irrational curse of her mother, who resists the American takeover. Although Doña Eustaquia is the most learned, ambitious woman in Monterey (her friend Brotherton notes that she might even be better suited to the East coast, where she could satisfy her intellect

better than in California), the Doña's refusal to accept a U.S.-Mexican union is what dooms her daughter and the *californios*. Benicia dies in the sumptuously adorned Mexican bed, a repeated symbol in both Atherton and Harte of Mexican difference. The *californios*' own seeming culpability plays perfectly into an expansionist American agenda, strengthening American ideology and nationalism. In defining *californios* as Other, the Anglos' sense of American identity is reinforced.

Atherton's stories of "old" California, like Harte's, free her to endow California's past with poetic romanticism and allow her to portray Spanish California as unable and undeserving to survive in the face of a progressive, modern, American culture. While Doña Eustaquia longs for books and newspapers in which an accurate history of California can be written, one that includes Mexican politicians, leaders, and soldiers, and while Atherton does make attempts at historical veracity by including actual *californio* leaders (such as Governor Pio Pico, Mariano Vallejo, and General Castro) as minor characters in her stories, her simultaneous local-color commodification of the region and the period for Eastern consumers makes it impossible for her to present an accurate, unromanticized version of California's past.

Atherton's short stories were considered to be historically accurate as late as 1976, with one critic praising her for the social history presented in *The Splendid Idle Forties*, which, according to this critic, "described the customs and attitudes that caused the demise of the Mexicans in the 1850's and 1860's" (McClure, *Gertrude Atherton* 17). As evidenced by this remark, even in the late-twentieth century, the Mexicans were seen as responsible for their own downfall, rather than the land-hungry, gold-crazed Americans. For all Atherton's "accuracy," however, the distance between historical truth

and her fiction was often great. For example, eager to capitalize on her subject of Alta California with an audience hungry for local color, Atherton staged what she hoped would be a picturesque *merienda* with some Mexican-American friends of her hostess. Instead, the old matrons showed up not wearing filmy lace mantillas but “black worsted fascinators,” looking to Atherton “like nothing on earth but so many black turkey buzzards squatting on the rocks, gorged with prey” (qtd. in Leider 110). Of course, this image never makes it into her stories. The need for a writer such as Ruiz de Burton is clear, then, as she supplies her readers with another version of the truth, told from the standpoint of the *californios* themselves.

The remainder of this chapter analyzes the various ways that Ruiz de Burton works against the romanticizing impulse of writers like Atherton and Harte. Rather than capitalizing on the differences between the two peoples, she seeks to close divisions, establishing identification between her characters and her readers. I argue that she turns to issues of class and race, region, and genre to highlight the similarities between her characters and her audience.

### **An American Don: Class Hierarchy and Identification**

Chapter V of *Squatter*, “The Don in His Broad Acres,” is a key chapter for Ruiz de Burton in terms of countering common stereotypes about the California landowners and establishing Don Mariano as a character with whom her audience can identify. She presents the Don as a savvy, reasonable businessman making an early overture to the Anglo squatters in a generous attempt to benefit both their interests. His acceptance of capitalistic assumptions and values helps define him as American rather than Other to

Ruiz de Burton's audience, and his portrayal as a moderate, educated gentleman makes him a sympathetic character. But because her audience is mostly Anglo, getting them to cross racial lines to identify with the Don is no easy task, especially given the prejudices her audience was likely to hold against the *californios*. To overcome this prejudice, Ruiz de Burton uses a two-pronged strategy: she blurs racial lines, minimizing the Alamares' Mexican roots, and creates identification through class rather than race.

Rather than emphasizing their Mexican heritage, Ruiz de Burton constantly reminds the audience of the Alamar family's European roots. The Alamares most often refer to themselves as "Spanish" rather than "Mexican" (Sánchez and Pita point out that Don Mariano is the only one to identify himself as Mexican [*Squatter* 38], but even he usually refers to himself as Spanish). Mercedes has a French governess and reads French history, and they dance the quadrille rather than the *jarabe tapatio* at their evening gatherings. Their color is also light: the reader is constantly reminded of Mercedes Alamar's blonde hair, light skin, and blue eyes. Clarence comments that Don Mariano and his son look "like Englishmen," and Romeo thinks Victoriano is "so light he looks more like a German" (85). In short, the Alamares can pass for white Europeans, making it easier for Ruiz de Burton's white audience to identify with them. At a time when the upper classes of the United States looked to Europe for their cultural models (as the novels of Henry James, and Edith Wharton demonstrate), allying the Alamares with Europe rather than Mexico reduces their Otherness to an American audience. In *The Squatter and the Don*, there is no dusky, silent Latina hiding behind her *rebozo*, as there is in Harte and Atherton. On the contrary, Mercedes Alamar is an easily recognizable

American young lady, perfectly fitting the role of the blushing, innocent, well-mannered romantic heroine.

Though her characters can easily pass for white, Ruiz de Burton's personal letters demonstrate that she too privately participated in what Sánchez and Pita call "racializing discourse" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 546). She writes to Mariano Vallejo, "[C]reo que nuestra *sangre* es mejor y que ellos (los Yankies) nos ganan en huesos, en espíritu mercantil, empresarios, locos sin mas Dios que el dinero. Nosotros, el gusto, los placeres, el romanticismo, etc. [I believe that our blood is better and that they (the Yankees) are better in the bones, in the business spirit, businesses, crazy with no other God than money. As for us, taste, pleasure, romance, etc.]" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 159).<sup>5</sup> She also writes to Vallejo's son Platón that "it is my most ardent wish that all Californians may cherish forever in their bruised hearts that loyal attachment to their own race" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 157). Though this language sounds similar to Atherton's stereotyping discourse, it never appears in *Squatter*.

Her private views toward Americans were also much sharper than what she presents in the novel. In a letter to Mariano Vallejo, Ruiz de Burton expresses her view of the relationship between the *californios* and the Americans:

Los Americanos son y serán siempre los enemigos morales de mi raza, de me Méjico. No digo esto con odio; ellos no hacen mas que seguir la ley de su ser. Las naciones, los individuos, los animales, todos hacen lo mismo. Sin odio, los tiburnes se comen las sardinas; sin rancor los lobos se comen los borregos...Pero ni los tiburnes, no los lobos...deben ser amados de sus víctimas [The Americans are and will always be the mortal enemies of my people, of my Mexico. I don't say this with hatred; they do

not do more than follow the law of their nature. Nations, individuals, animals, all do the same. Without hatred, the sharks eat the sardines; without rancor the wolves eat the lambs....But neither the sharks, nor the wolves...can expect to be loved by their victims]. (qtd. and translated in Goldman 59).

This type of strong criticism against the United States, as Anne Goldman notes, is not to be found in the novel, but is reserved for private dialogue (58), which makes Ruiz de Burton's rhetorical control over her private sentiments all the more remarkable. These excerpts from her letters highlight the rhetorical stance she takes in the novel; her ability to be evenhanded and to adopt a public stance of forgiveness in the novel—while at the same time remaining sharply critical of American policy—is a remarkable rhetorical feat. The pseudonym under which she published the novel, “C. Loyal,” stood for the Spanish “Ciudadano Leal,” or “Loyal Citizen,” a “common letter-closing practice used in official government correspondence in Mexico during the nineteenth century,” according Sánchez and Pita (*Squatter* 13). While they read the pseudonym as a “ironic twist, considering that the work is severely critical of the political structures of U.S. society” (*Squatter* 13), it can also be read as another rhetorical tactic that would assure her Anglo readers of her loyalty to the United States, even though she is critical of the way its laws have been corrupted.

Her anger with the Americans mixed with her magnanimous spirit is apparent in the novel's characters, who repeatedly assert that the blame for their treatment does not lie with the squatters or even with Congress. Mary Darrell, who supports the *californios*, also denies the culpability of her husband: “Don't speak of your wickedness, for real wickedness is perversity. You have acted wrongly at times, when you have misapplied

your rights and the rights of others, but you have not intentionally done wrong” (56). The Don himself believes that “Congress itself did not anticipate the effect of its laws upon us and how we would be despoiled” (66). He shows sympathy for the squatters multiple times, acknowledging that “there have been cases where honest men have, in good faith, taken lands as squatters, and after all, had to give them up. No, I don’t blame the squatters; they are at times like ourselves, victims of a wrong legislation, which unintentionally cuts both ways... We are all sufferers, all victims of a defective legislation and subverted moral principles” (74). The Don is open-minded enough to not condemn the entire white race: “The majority of my best friends are Americans. Instead of hate, I feel great attraction toward the American people. Their sentiments, their ways of thinking suit me, with but few exceptions. I am fond of Americans. I know that, as a matter of fact, only the very mean or narrow-minded have harsh feelings against my race” (165). The Don’s moderate views of the squatters and his ability to see that they are not the underlying cause of his problems make him and his ideas more palatable to a white audience than would an extreme argument.

Although the Don speaks of having American friends, however, they seem to include only wealthy, upper-class Americans. Most of the Americans in the novel who are “mean and narrow-minded” are all of the lower, working class (and are, incidentally, described as “dark” and “gypsy-looking” (72)). This is explained by Ruiz de Burton’s desire to portray the Alamares as aristocratic. While minimizing the racial differences between the Alamares and her audience is one way Ruiz de Burton shortens the distance between her audience and her characters, she shortens the distance even further with economic class and Don Mariano’s adherence to capitalistic values. The Don, like her

intended audience, is clearly well-educated, a man of good breeding, and a gentleman—all elements that will strengthen his ethos with Ruiz de Burton's readers, if not with the Don's immediate audience of the squatters. His skillful rhetoric in his proposals to the squatters demonstrates that he is a man of intelligence and courtesy. He repeatedly shows his rhetorical acumen with a smart use of the classical appeals to logic, character, and, to a lesser degree, emotion. He starts his argument for cooperation in Chapter V by laying out a set of assumptions both sides share: "The reason why you have taken up land here is because you want homes. You want to make money. Isn't that the reason? Money! Money!" (86). The squatters agree, laughingly, and the Don continues, "Well, I can show you how you may keep your home and make more money than you can by your present methods, while at the same time I also save my cattle. That little point, you know, I must keep in view." As good capitalists, the squatters grant that the Don also needs to benefit from the deal. He further bolsters his credibility with them by showing that he understands their positions regarding the expense of putting up fences, and he is prepared for their objections with logical answers. He flatters their intelligence and shows his honesty by reminding them that "You are too good business men to suppose that I should not reserve some slight advantage for myself, when I am willing you should have many more yourselves" (87). He has calculated the expenses necessary to get the settlers started in cattle and fruit, and suggests a solution for irrigation until the trees take root.<sup>6</sup> He catches Mathews, the most obnoxious of the squatters, in a *post hoc* logical fallacy when he claims that the Don's cattle were to blame for his ruined crops; the Don points out that the bad crops were all over the state while his cattle were not. Above all, he is gentlemanly and respectful of the settlers, careful not to offend them or even

directly accuse them of killing his cattle, and never losing his temper in the face of their rudeness. His behavior is in sharp contrast to that of the squatters, who can barely conceal their contempt for the Don and his proposal. The Don's logical arguments counter racial stereotypes of Mexicans as capable only of emotional decisions, and as female author of these arguments, Ruiz de Burton counters gender stereotypes as well.

Most importantly, aside from demonstrating sharp rhetorical skills, the Don also demonstrates qualities that would define him as "American" (particularly as it was constructed at the time) to Ruiz de Burton's readers. He is industrious, entrepreneurial and forward-thinking—in short, an excellent capitalist. This is in direct refutation of the stereotype of the *californios* as throwbacks to a bygone, pre-capitalist era and establishes them instead as modern U.S. citizens, capable of succeeding in a capitalist society and entitled to the protection of the law. One squatter declares of the Don that "you can't teach 'an old dog new tricks.' Those old Spaniards never will be business men" (83). But contrary to this cliché, the Don is well-versed in American capitalism: "Their sentiments, their ways of thinking suit me, with but few exceptions," he says (165). In a direct refutation of the common charge that the Mexican landowners allowed rich, fertile land to lay useless and therefore did not deserve, in practical American eyes, to keep it, the Don concedes that letting the rainfall go to waste in the past was "an old time folly with us," but he argues that at the time they raised only enough fruit for their own use, as there was "no market for any more." Once there was a market for other goods, he points out, "We raised cattle and sold hides and tallow every year, and made money. When gold was discovered, we drove our stock north, got a good price for it, and made money" (89). He portrays the landowners as being adaptable to change and as active participants

in the nation's economy. Now, ironically because of the American no-fence law, there is no money to be made on cattle, and so the Don is prepared again to shift tactics. He encourages the squatters to cooperate with him to enclose small fruit orchards, while continuing to allow cattle to graze in the remaining open areas.<sup>7</sup> The Don asks them rhetorically, "And is it not a pity to impoverish our county by making the bulk of its land useless?" Here, in a reversal of blame, it is the American legislators who are guilty of enacting laws that make the land useless rather than the *californio* ranchers.

By the definition of "American" as profit-seeking capitalist, Alamar is a better American than the squatters, who, being white, feel they have more claim to the title "American" and to the title of the Don's land than he does. But at the end of the chapter, the squatters refuse the Don's sensible business opportunity and thus the chance to profit more so than they would by following their own plan. Their plan, however, as evidenced by William Darrell's previous encounter in northern California and by the outcomes of the other squatters in the group (Mathews becomes deranged and is committed to a mental institution), did not often lead to riches. The squatters, due to their racism and shortsightedness, instead decide to take advantage of the unjust laws, even if they do not stand to gain much financially. Ruiz de Burton's rhetorical strategy here is significant: with the Don's adherence to capitalistic values she is redefining the term "American," broadening it to include the Latinos living in California, showing that the *californios* could be better Americans than the Anglo squatters.

This fifth chapter also illustrates Ruiz de Burton's complex, somewhat troublesome attitudes about class.<sup>8</sup> The hero of the chapter is clearly the Don, and the squatters come off so badly that there is no danger of the reader sympathizing with them

and their position. To not see the good sense of the Don's position would be to identify with the squatters, which no audience, especially a refined, literate one, would want. Ruiz de Burton's rhetoric here is complex: on the one hand, the Don appears to sympathize with the squatters, which allows the audience to sympathize with the Don and admire him for his magnanimity. The audience's identification with him is strengthened even further when the squatters are revealed as coarse lower-class ruffians. But on the other hand, it is troublesome that in essence Ruiz de Burton denies the squatters and others closer to their economic class—namely, the *vaqueros* and Indians who perform manual labor for the Don and his family—any kind of voice. These manual laborers are conspicuously absent from the novel, appearing only very briefly, and hardly speaking. They, rather than the aristocratic Alamar family, function as the Other for the audience. In this chapter, the Don attempts to capitalize on these working-class Others to create identification between himself and the Anglo squatters. When one squatter insists that he “ain't no *vaquero* to go *busquering* around,” the Don agrees that such work is not required for men of their standing, answering, “I don't go *busquering* around *lassoing* unless I wish to do so... You can hire an Indian boy to do that part” (89). With his dismissal of the *vaqueros*, a fairly rigid class hierarchy is set up, with the Alamares, the Mechlins, and Clarence at the top, the squatters in the middle, and the Indians at the very bottom. When, by the end of the novel, Gabriel Alamar has fallen to the level of a hod-carrier, Ruiz de Burton is obviously sympathetic to him, but his degradation seems all the more tragic because, rightfully belonging to the elite class, he obviously does not belong in such squalor. From our twenty first-century eyes, it is unfortunate that she seems to treat with disregard those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder. But viewing the

problem through the lens of rhetoric provides some explanation for her choices, even if it does not justify her seeming prejudices. She had to align her characters with the audience most capable of effecting change.

The ability to speak standard English was—and still is for many—a significant marker of American identity. As Theodore Roosevelt asserted in a 1919 letter, “We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language.” Fighting her own battles in court, where the weapon is rhetoric, Ruiz de Burton was keenly aware of how important a command of the language is. In giving the conquered a voice by writing the novel, however, she unfortunately reserves a command of the language for the members of the upper classes only, with the Don’s class trumping the squatters’ privilege of race. At the beginning of chapter five, the Don apologizes in advance for his English, but rather than being in a subordinate, disadvantaged position linguistically, he is actually quite fluent; it is the American Romeo who is flattered by the Don’s compliment on his Spanish rather than the Don who needs help with interpretation. And the other squatters are forced to acknowledge that the Don’s English is very good. Indeed, the Don’s English is superior to the squatters’ in terms of standard English; he is a better speaker than the native speakers are themselves. The Don speaks formally, in complete, well-developed paragraphs, while the squatters utter sublingual sounds like “Pshaw,” mutter under their breaths, use colloquialisms like “ain’t,” and cannot mount any well-developed opposition to the Don longer than a sentence or two. Here again, if the ability to speak standard English is part of what identifies one as American for Ruiz de Burton’s audience, the Don is more “American” than the squatters. It is also significant that some of the characters speak in dialect—for example, the *vaqueros* speak a mixture of Spanish

and English—but the Alamares all speak English without a written Spanish accent. Here again, Ruiz de Burton redraws the boundaries of American identity to include those on the margins, but only if those on the margins are of the appropriate class. Linguistically, with their appropriation of Spanish slang, the squatters are linked more closely to the Indian *vaqueros* on the Don's ranch than to the Don.

Ruiz de Burton's own command of the language is put on display in this chapter as well. Obviously, as author of the chapter, she demonstrates through Don Mariano her ability to construct logical, persuasive arguments. The chapter also demonstrates the multiple strategies and intertextuality Ruiz de Burton employs in her crusade against the unfair land laws. The narrator whose voice opens the chapter is a member of the cultural elite who can quote Charles Dickens: "The one great principle of English law...is to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings" (84). The quotation works as a rhetorical tactic of establishing authority through a strong arbiter of cultural power such as Dickens; it is also a demonstration of Ruiz de Burton's impressive education. She then quotes the Land Act of 1851, before cleverly inverting it to indicate what it truly means. Rather than an act to "settle" the land claims, as the law indicates, she argues it is actually an act to "*unsettle* land titles, and to upset the rights of the Spanish population of the State of California" (85, emphasis original). The narrative voice does not hesitate to turn established authority upside down, recasting actual codified law into more transparent language.

Ruiz de Burton also needs to show that the government policy of squatters' rights is not benefiting the right people, and that through the Don's plan, California can better

benefit the nation as a whole than by keeping the land unenclosed to grow the grain traditionally raised in other parts of the country. Here she is arguing for a different plan for California, though still a plan based on the profit motive. In fact, the profit motive is a key assumption in the Don's arguments. His plan does not try to displace the capitalistic system, but rather works within it to maximize the benefits for all. In this way, Ruiz de Burton's solution is not as radical as it could be, as she seems to accept the principles of capitalism while calling for reform. But neither is her solution nostalgically useless. Far from a sentimental, nostalgic plea to retain the status quo or revert to some imagined past, the Don's ideas are sharp, clearheaded, and forward-thinking. He sees that the land is better suited to smaller orchards and cattle grazing than to large, thirsty grain crops, and he envisions a Southern California that contributes to the nation's economy by providing superior vineyards, olives, figs, citrus, apricots, and other fruits. His arguments are logical (he appeals to his audience as "sensible, judicious men" (88)) and generous to the squatters, allowing them to keep the land they have already settled on and fronting them the necessary cash to plant and enclose their orchards and start them with half of his cattle. His plan, he argues, "will be as beneficial to you as to me, and also to the entire county, for as soon as it is shown that we can make a success of the industries I propose, others will follow our example" (90). With new canning and shipping technologies, the San Diegans would have the ability to deliver their product to the entire nation. Through the Don, Ruiz de Burton envisions a type of capitalism that benefits not just a select few, as the current squatter laws and railroad monopolies allow, but an entire county, and by extension, an entire nation. Significantly, she proved to be

prophetic, for after the bonanza wheat crops of the 1870s, the state agriculture began to focus more and more on specialty crops such as the ones the Don outlines in his plan.

The squatters ultimately refuse the Don's offer to help them convert their land into orchards and grazing pastures because they already benefit from the "no fence law," which they say is "better than all the best fences."<sup>9</sup> The Don asks, "But what if you make more money by following other laws that are more just, more rational?" Miller replies that "The 'no fence law' is rational enough for me." But, according to the Don, the no fence law discourages the most profitable use of the land. If the desire to make as much money as possible is one characteristic of being American, the squatters are decidedly acting in un-American ways. Clarence points out in the end that "this is a grazing county, [and] no legislation can change it. So it would be wiser to make laws to suit the county, and not expect that the county will change its character to suit absurd laws" (91). In the end, however, despite the Don's masterful, sensible presentation, and against Clarence's advice, the squatters elect not to cooperate. Only Clarence, who is a member of the Don's genteel class, is able to see the logic of his proposal, and it is clear that the real target audience of the argument is not the squatters but Ruiz de Burton's middle-class readers, who, fancying themselves to be more like Clarence than the squatters, are more likely to be persuaded than the squatters.

The superiority of the Don to the Anglos—except Clarence—is not subtle here. Yet despite his light skin, his mastery of the English language, and his far-sighted business plans, the Don is overcome by his opposition. The law is on the side of the squatters. It is the Don's race that keeps him from enjoying the full protection and benefits of the law, and even though he may be more "deserving" than the squatters to

retain control over his land, this proves to be impossible in the face of discriminatory laws and corrupt courts. When we first meet the Don in the second chapter of the novel, he is silently pacing the length of the piazza in front of his house. By the end of the novel he remains silenced by the U.S. government despite his eloquent rhetoric. By the end of the novel he is dead.

Clarence Darrell is the only member of the group of squatters who sees the sense of the Don's plan, and he urges his father and the others to agree to it. Of course, Clarence is not really a squatter; he has secretly paid for his family's land at his mother's request because they believe it is wrong to acquire land without paying for it. No one else knows about the transaction except the Don, but the Alamares and others cannot help but be enamored with Clarence, who possesses a "natural" gentility. Don Mariano and Clarence embody the novel's definition of "American" and how American capitalism should work. Clarence is a shrewd businessman, making millions off his investments, yet he is also compassionate, buying Don Mariano's cattle in an effort to help him recoup as much money from his decimated herd as possible. As Clarence points out, though, while this was a favor to the Don, he also benefited from the transaction. When the cattle are destroyed in a freak snowstorm, before Clarence has paid for them, he still offers to pay, arguing that he owned them from the time they agreed on the deal, and that the Don should not be liable for their transport. Clarence also shares the Don's (and, by extension, Ruiz de Burton's) opinions about their "privilege and duty" as American citizens to criticize their government (97). It is significant that Clarence is the only male left still standing, literally, at the end of the novel, among both the Alamares and the squatters. He is of the right class, the perfect capitalist, and being white, he does not face

the same discrimination as the Don. With his compassionate capitalism, he embodies the way the system is supposed to work.

Lest the audience think the problems of the *californios* do not affect them, Ruiz de Burton further strengthens the identification of the audience with the Don and his plight by demonstrating that it is not only Mexican-Americans who are being hurt by the squatters and corrupt government, but Anglo families as well—specifically, upper-class Anglo families. In a shrewd move, she gradually diverts blame from the Anglo squatters to train her focus on an even greater problem: the railroad monopolists. Grouping the Anglo friends of the Don with the Alamares, all Californians—white and Latino—share a common enemy. The squatters manage to illegally claim the Mechlins’ house and land, which remains tied up in litigation before it can be returned to its rightful owners, and Mr. Mechlin, despondent and ill, dies of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. But Ruiz de Burton connects the squatters’ illegal act to the failure of the Texas and Pacific railroad to be built. This failure, she argues, strangled the economy of the city and fostered corruption in its government, thus providing the squatters with legal loopholes enabling them to take over the Mechlins’ house. The railroad monopolists are portrayed as the cause of all the Alamares’ and their friends’ misfortunes, a rhetorical move that Burke says “reinforces unification” between the rhetor and audience (*On Symbols* 73). The Anglos and *californios* can thus identify with each other in the face of their common enemy or problem. Burke points out that this type of scapegoating can be effective when an explanation is needed for a seeming disparity between “good” capitalism and “bad” capitalism, “with those of a different lodge being vessels of the ‘bad’ capitalism”

(*Philosophy* 195-6). For her, the Don and Clarence represent “good” capitalism. The railroad tycoons, who do not consider the rights of others to achieve wealth and happiness, represent “bad” capitalism. The rhetorical effect of the scapegoating, though, is also to show that the railroads hurt *all* Californians, not just the Mexican-Americans. All Californians—characters and readers alike—have a stake in the outcome of this struggle.

### **Making Connections: Identification Through Region**

In addition to race and class, Ruiz de Burton also attempts to create identification with her eastern readers (whom she hoped to attract, if unsuccessfully) through region. As the westernmost continental territory of the United States, California figured in the national imagination as “out there,” foreign and barbaric, a region that as a matter of course paled in comparison to New York and the east coast as a center of economic and cultural power.<sup>10</sup> This attitude is reflected in the comments of Atherton’s soldiers, who are pleasantly surprised that California is not nearly as barbaric as they had envisioned: “What an improvement on Byron and Tom Moore! It is all so unhackneyed and unexpected. In spite of Dana and Robinson I expected mud huts and whooping savages. This is Arcadia, and the women are the most elegant in America” (77). Despite Russell’s discovery that Californians are “elegant” rather than “savage,” he persists in exoticizing the region and its people, relegating them to the never-never world of the pastoral utopia. For the American soldiers, California is a place to escape the realities and responsibilities of government and nation, a place where they can “lie around in hammocks whilst these Western houris bring us aguardiente and soda” (77). The eastern language explicitly connects the west with the exotic Orient. Even as the soldiers dance with real, live

women in the *sala*, the place is to them unreal, foreign, and already a quaint reminder of the past. As utopia, it was imagined as a place for escape from the responsibilities and problems of the nation, particularly with the rapid “closing” of the frontier with its wide-open spaces quickly becoming populated.

Part of Ruiz de Burton’s project, in contrast, is to work against this strain, to rectify the imaginary backwardness of California, showing that it is neither a barbaric land populated by savages, nor a trouble-free paradise to use as an escape valve for crowded eastern cities. As Goldman puts it, “By insisting upon the federal relationship to California, Ruiz de Burton refuses to participate in language that represents the state as a dilapidated paradise whose pre-industrial charms distinguish it from the busy activity of the twentieth-century East (itself a synecdoche for ‘nation’)” (54). For Ruiz de Burton, California was a significant part of the nation, a region that had a stake in national issues and that had the potential to help ameliorate the problems surrounding reconstruction that the nation faced after the Civil War, if only the East coast centers of power would recognize how commerce with the state would benefit the nation. Because the state is no longer involved in literal military battle for territory,<sup>11</sup> the novel’s arguments are both cultural and economic; Ruiz de Burton uses money as the primary shared value between the Californians and the rest of the nation. If Ruiz de Burton can show that California is not culturally and economically dissimilar to the East coast, this opens a new avenue of identification between her characters and her readers. Furthermore, it would also likely stroke her California readers’ egos in constructing a special status for their state—one that significantly included *californios* as a vital part of the state and nation.

Ruiz de Burton was not unaware of the perception of barbarism that easterners held about her state. Realizing her readers might question why the Mechlins—friends of the Alamares and a family of high social standing in New York—came to be in such a supposedly backwoods place, she explains that, as was common practice at the time, a dying James Mechlin came to California seeking its “salubrious air.” He made a rapid recovery—one that was not to be had in Florida or even in Europe. Mechlin built a large house for his wife and daughters as “compensation” for “exiling themselves from New York, for it was exile to Caroline and Lizzie to give up their fine house in New York City to come and live on a California rancho” (67). Ruiz de Burton’s repetition of the word “exile” demonstrates her awareness of the common perception of the west.

She does much to defend her state against the idea that California serves the nation as nothing more than a natural health resort, however. The Mechlin girls quickly learn to enjoy the society of the Alamares in the way of dances and other social gatherings, and the families are soon connected through marriage as well, uniting west and east. The testimony of the transplanted eastern characters such as the Mechlins also gives Ruiz de Burton credibility, for it is they who suggest that California might actually be superior to regions that are typically thought of as cultured; they become stand-ins for what eastern readers she attracted. For example, George Mechlin “had found New York so very dull and stupid on his return from California that when Christmas was approaching he told his uncle and aunt—with whom he had lived—that he wanted to go and spend his Christmas and New Year’s Day with his family in California” (67). This is a striking reversal of conventional wisdom about New York’s cultural superiority. Clarence, who also obviously has cultivated tastes, echoes sentiments that California is actually superior to Europe: “Don’t you know I like some of our California wines quite as

well as the imported, if not better? I suppose I ought to be ashamed to admit it, thus showing that my taste is not cultivated. But that is the simple truth. There is that flavor of the real genuine grape, which our California wines have that is different from the imported” (159). And Don Mariano speaks of the bounty Southern California has to offer the rest of the nation: “I had some very fine California canned fruit sent to me from San Francisco. Why could we not can fruits as well, or better? Our olives are splendid—the same our figs, oranges, apricots, and truly all semitropical fruits are of a superior quality. When this fact becomes generally known, I feel very sure that San Diego County will be selected for fruit and grape-growing” (88).

Ruiz de Burton’s aim to equate California culture with New York’s is most evident in the rather lengthy portion of the book that relates Mercedes and Elvira’s stay in Newport and New York, which otherwise does not contribute much to the plot. The girls’ trip east reverses the typical trend of easterners moving west to that of westerners moving east, showing that expansion was not just one-way but fluid. The chapters also reaffirm Ruiz de Burton’s identification with the upper class, as they show that the genteel Californians can hold their own in New York society. In fact, the Californian beauties dazzle New York society, and Mercedes breaks the hearts of several heirs to millions by remaining loyal to Clarence. Lawrence Mechlin, George’s uncle, approves of his nephew’s marriage to Elvira, saying, “I know I shall be proud to present my beautiful niece to New York society. Her manners are exquisite. She is lovely. She will be greatly admired, and justly so” (176). Mrs. Mechlin calls Mercedes a “well-bred young lady” who has an “inbred self-respect, a lady’s sense of decorum” (186).

Despite the girls’ relatively recent U.S. citizenship and their geographical distance from the east, on their visit to Washington, D.C., the Alamar sisters prove themselves to

be patriotic as well: Mercedes wants to walk the grounds of Mount Vernon “reverently,” and they delight in Washington’s “proud and symmetric proportions, with its radiating avenues lost in diminishing distances.” Here, in a reversal of the typical direction of the gaze, the east becomes a spectacle for the gaze of the westerners, a “picturesque *ensemble*” that Mercedes wants to carry “photographed in her memory” (198).

On the other hand, Ruiz de Burton seems to relish the thought of the sisters being the object of an eastern gaze both when they are in New York and a “California” gaze when they are in San Francisco. While the travelers are in San Francisco, they create the same stir as they do in New York:

It was very evident that the ‘party from San Diego’ made an impression and quite a stir among the guests of the hotel who were at dinner...Everybody turned to look, to see what everybody else was looking at, and all acknowledged that they had never seen handsomer or more graceful people than those two couples. Exclamations of surprise were uttered in suppressed tones, and unqualified praises were whispered everywhere. (143)

While the reactions of the San Franciscans are flattering to the young couples, the concept of the gaze implies difference between subject and object; there must be an Other to receive the gaze. This implication is not conducive to Ruiz de Burton’s rhetorical strategy of erasing difference, but in fact seems to heighten the difference between the southern Californians and New Yorkers. Mercedes’ beauty seems to set her apart from others rather than to reinforce her similarity to them. In her desire to show California as equal in stature to the rest of the nation, Ruiz de Burton perhaps overcompensates in drawing Mercedes as superior to her eastern and San Franciscan counterparts. This is

risky: if her audience is unable to identify with her characters because it feels inferior to them, or if Mercedes does not seem believable, Ruiz de Burton runs the risk of alienating her audience. However, she is drawing on the same values that her audience would value in a romantic heroine—beauty, manners, and breeding—to show that not only do the Alamar girls possess these traits, but they possess them in super-abundance. This is conventional in such a novel, and Ruiz de Burton is skillful at striking a delicate balance between portraying her heroine as a typical American girl and as a superlative heroine, motivating her readers to both identify with and admire her. It is important to note that Mercedes is not described in exotic terms like those used by Atherton to describe Mexicans, but in terms a cultured, eastern American audience could identify with and would value. Like the Don's business acumen that is superior to that of the squatters—superiority that shows his Americanness—Mercedes' superior, innocent beauty, coupled with her patriotism despite her father's difficulties, shows that she too is essentially American.

Ruiz de Burton was also acutely aware of the necessity of connecting the economies of the north and south as well as east and west. In so doing, her novel participates in a unifying project, in contrast to the regionalism that popular local-color fiction fostered. With the Civil War a mere twenty years in the past, the nation was still struggling to unite its different regions—indeed, even questioning whether they could be reunited. She believed that connecting Southern California with the rest of the South by railroad was essential to the recovery of the South and, by extension, the entire nation. As David Luis-Brown points out, “the railroad epitomizes *Squatter's* political project of postbellum sectional reconciliation,” as it will “establish commerce” between Southern

California and the other southern states (818). When Don Mariano tries to convince Stanford to build a western railroad terminus in San Diego, he encourages Stanford to consider the trade benefits of controlling a railroad, “uniting Southern California with Arizona, with the Southern States and Northern Mexico, and developing those vast countries now lying useless, scarcely inhabited” (292). In an example of regional prejudice, the governor responds that he is too busy to attend to “those *wild* countries” (292). The northern transcontinental route was completed in 1869, but unfortunately, as Clarence observes, “The Congressmen from the north do not seem to feel all the interest they should in reviving the south. They are angry yet. The fact they coerced back into the Union the southern people has not appeased them yet, it seems” (166). The south was ultimately excluded from consideration in Congress because of what Ruiz de Burton saw as the shortsightedness of the government and railroad men.

Her choice to align Southern California with the south, as it had just lost the war and did not command great political power, is interesting, if not surprising. But it can be better understood if we consider that the south had been marginalized by its defeat in a similar way to the *californios*’ defeat. Carey McWilliams explains, “Concentrated in the south, the Mexican-Spanish element looked with some favor upon the Confederate cause and tended to side with the Democratic Party, upon the assumption that secession of the southern states might enable Southern California also to secede....After the American conquest, the southern counties were isolated for twenty-five years from the north, a branch line of the Southern Pacific not being completed to the south until 1876” (16). Goldman argues that connections between west and south are also evident in Ruiz de Burton’s first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, which, Goldman says, questions “the

North-South axis that conventional narratives use to plot the Civil War and the East-West dichotomy that pushes Mexicanos and Native Americans to the geographical margins of a country depicted with its center skewed at the eastern limits of its territory” (66). Linking California with the south disrupts conventional thinking that divides the nation into strict regional axes. To Ruiz de Burton’s thinking, it was important for the nation to facilitate economic recovery of the south, and, by extension, Southern California as well.

Ruiz de Burton may have felt personal affinities with the plight of the defeated south as well. On the one hand, she had close ties to Abraham Lincoln through her husband: Lincoln had requested on her behalf that her husband be promoted to Colonel (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 189), and she writes to Vallejo that were he to come to Washington, he would be well-received by the Lincolns; she explains that she and Mrs. Lincoln are good friends (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 239). But on the other hand, she also made an ally of Jefferson Davis and his wife during Davis’s imprisonment at Fortress Monroe. Mrs. Davis wrote that Ruiz de Burton “is a sympathetic, warm-hearted, talented, Mexican woman who is very angry with the Yankees about Mexican affairs, and we get together quietly and abuse them” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 196). It is not surprising that as a member of another defeated people, Ruiz de Burton would identify with the feelings of dispossession of the South, having just lost the war of “northern aggression.” Perhaps she also identified with the antebellum feudal culture of the south, which her characters and she were accustomed to.

Ruiz de Burton’s desire to connect north and south is apparent even within California itself; she makes a clear effort to show that the San Diegans can identify with the San Franciscans. In addition to the stir the San Diegans create in the hotel dining

room, the party attends the opera, which simultaneously shows the Alamares as Southern California residents appreciative of the culture of northern California and shows San Francisco itself to be a participant in the high culture typically thought of as eastern. Clarence declares that San Diego Bay “is as good as” San Francisco Bay (151). Here too, Ruiz de Burton decentralizes both Northern California and the east coast as exclusive regions, showing that both social and geographic boundaries are fluid. Mercedes and Elvira, coming from the west, are comfortable in all three locales; George and Clarence, coming from the east, are equally comfortable in the different regions. The addition of a railroad in San Diego would further tie the nation together.

Thus, in a post-bellum nation that felt itself divided regionally, Ruiz de Burton seeks to close these divisions and create identification between their citizens (at least, the social elite). She shows the integral part California plays in the nation’s economy and development, that it is not an isolated, foreign region that eastern congressmen can afford to ignore. She also shows that the Southern Californians are on a par with New Yorkers socially and culturally, and are not the foreign Other as they are portrayed by writers such as Atherton. Ruiz de Burton does not go so far as to dismantle the hierarchy of regional power itself; in the chapters that deal with the Alamar sisters’ trip to New York, she is more interested in proving that the *californios* are worthy of *entré* into New York society’s highest ranks than in pointing out the false values that such a society represents and the problems inherent in such a regional and cultural hierarchy in the first place.

### **The Rhetoric of Genre: Historical Romance, Sentimentalism, and Naturalism**

As discussed above, Ruiz de Burton creates characters that strike a delicate balance between the exotic and the ordinary. Beautiful, educated members of high

society, the Alamar girls are also “like” other American girls. Her use of genre also strikes a delicate balance, inviting her readers to identify emotionally with the characters without becoming too sentimental, while also emphasizing the gravity of the problem. Like *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Squatter and the Don* is a composite of several different genres, including verbatim legislation, the jeremiad, and, most significantly, sentimental romance and naturalism. Such combinations, which illustrate perfectly Mikhail Bahktin’s theory of *heteroglossia*, seem to be essential to a successful polemical novel. As a novel protesting the monologic voice of the law and government, heteroglossia allows for a dialogic interplay of different voices that have not previously been heard.

#### *The Limits of Historical Romance*

Before I discuss how I believe the novel should be classified, I discuss here what it is not. Critics usually classify *Squatter* as a historical romance or historical novel.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to these critics, however, I contend that if the novel has romantic elements, it is essentially not historical romance. The first problem with classifying the novel as historical romance is that Ruiz de Burton casts the problems it presents not as “historical” but as current. Rather than a story about “long ago,” the title page describes it as “a novel descriptive of contemporary occurrences in California.” Ruiz de Burton’s own life, in addition, attests to its currency: while she was writing the novel she, like the Alamares, was entangled in legal battles over the title of her Jamul, California, ranch. Mariano Vallejo and many other old *californio* families were also struggling to retain their estates and wealth. Many died considerably poorer than they once were. This issue was not a *fait accompli*. To call it an historical romance tacitly acknowledges that the question was

already moot at the time of the novel's publication and denies the novel its rhetorical purpose, casting it as elegy or nostalgia rather than as social reform fiction.

In American literature the historical romance was particularly useful for writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Catherine Segwick for its capacity to symbolically work out—and often to justify—the problems associated with the birth and development of a young nation begun by revolution and continuing to expand its borders by aggression and conquest. Cooper's highly sympathetic Natty Bumppo and Segwick's heroic Magawisca notwithstanding, both novels demonstrate the inevitability of the domination of the Anglos, if not (especially in the case of *Hope Leslie*) its desirability. Cooper raises important questions about the responsible use of the land and about society's corruption of natural law, and Segwick offers an astonishing retelling of the Puritans' conquest of the Pequods from the perspective of the Indians. But in the end, both seem to capitulate to the forces of the U.S.: Natty is too attached to his primitive ways to survive in civilized Templeton and becomes an unwitting participant in the expansion of the nation, clearing the way for more settlers to follow. In *Hope Leslie*, the marriage between Faith and Oneco seems to represent the potential for a more peaceful union of the two races rather than the extermination of one, but as Mary Kelly points out in her introduction to the novel, by the time she marries Oneco, Faith has become more Indian than European (xxxiv), and Magawisca tells Everell that “the Indian and the white man no more can mingle, and become one, than day and night” (330). While Segwick's Magawisca and Cooper's Mohegan are both heroic, sympathetic characters, both novels illustrate the decline of a pre-capitalist society and the advancing, seemingly inexorable American forces of expansion. These novels cast their eye back to the past rather than to the future.

Like *The Pioneers* and *Hope Leslie*, Ruiz de Burton's novel also attempts to work out in novel form the imperial designs of the United States on California and its legislation that robs the *californio* rancheros of their land. But unlike these typical American historical romances, her novel does not justify U.S. imperialism. Rather, Ruiz de Burton seeks to demystify and historicize the effects of American aggression in California, to show that contrary to American assumptions, the conquest of California was neither inevitable nor an "organic" development of the nation; and that the result of the laws was the serious, possibly irreparable injury of its new citizenry.

Like *Hope Leslie* and *The Pioneers*, *The Squatter and the Don* also deals with a culture that is in danger of dying out in the face of the forces of "progress," in this case at the hands of the settlers and railroad magnates. The Alamares are in a struggle for their land and lives against the settlers, who enjoy the benefits of a discriminatory law to support their spurious claims to the land, at least for a time. The Don's family, too, is portrayed as aristocratic and does not at first glance seem to fit into a culture of democracy and capitalism. The Doña is repeatedly figured as a "queenly lady" (171), Gabriel is a "gentleman" who has "inherited the natural nobility of his father" (325), the Alamar girls are described as "ladies" (117), and Mercedes is a "princess." Even their dog is named "Milord." The feudal ranchos helped populate the land, and, during Indian rebellions, Don Mariano explains to Clarence that "the landowners with their servants would turn out as in feudal times in Europe" to defend the missions (163).

But while this remnant of feudal aristocracy seems to be flourishing at the beginning of the novel, the Alamares have moved away from it by the end of the book. It is true that they seem to enjoy their privileged status as feudal landowners, as I argued in

the preceding section on class, but they are also adaptable to their new government and economic system. Ruiz de Burton's argument is that the Alamar family and their *californio* culture should *not* be destined to die out, as opposed to its stereotypical portrayal in Atherton's stories and other historical romances. Unlike Natty Bumppo, the Alamares are willing to adapt, and do succeed to some extent, although the novel is ambivalent as to the degree of their success. They suffer setbacks that cannot be ignored, such as Don Mariano's death and the compromised health of Gabriel and Victoriano (his lameness delays his marriage to Alice Darrell and hurts the family's economic prospects, as he is unable to work their land). But, on the other hand, backed by Clarence's capital, Gabriel and Victoriano are assured of going into business in San Francisco, with the promise of Victoriano marrying Alice. Although Don Mariano dies, his wife and children survive, leaving behind their feudal rancho, which is "too full of sad memories" (332) and embracing an urban, market society. In this way, Ruiz de Burton departs from historical romance to argue that the *californios* are well suited to capitalism and not caught hopelessly in the past, doomed to vanish, as Magawisca predicts of the Indians.

The reason for the Alamares' only partial success is not that they lack some inherent trait that qualifies them for success in a capitalist United States, but that the chips are stacked against them as Mexicans (though in the quotation below, she refrains from using this term). Rather than bowing to the inevitable forces of progress, as is conventional in the historical romance, Ruiz de Burton demystifies these forces in showing that the *californio* culture is capable of survival in a capitalist system, and that American prejudice and government corruption is at the root of their problems rather than any essential traits of their race. For example, Gabriel is clearly willing to work when he

is called upon to support his wife and family, but Lizzie realizes that “the fact that Gabriel was a *native Spaniard*...mitigated against them. If he had been rich, his nationality could have been forgiven, but no one will willingly tolerate a *poor native Californian*” (325, emphasis original). Hence Ruiz de Burton’s call for reform, which would enable the U.S. to live up to its lofty ideals and create a nation where all—especially such a worthy family as the Alamares—can succeed. She is not lamenting an already bygone people; she is calling for reform of a still-current problem.

Ruiz de Burton’s contradictory views on class again become apparent in the last two chapters of the novel and admittedly complicate a reading completely in sympathy with twenty-first century progressive values. While Gabriel and Victoriano are willing to work, the Alamares are not really suited for manual labor, with Gabriel falling and injuring himself and Victoriano relapsing into lameness from his efforts to work the fields. Their true position, Ruiz de Burton clearly argues, is as members of society’s elite. When Clarence restores their rightful positions in society, even though they do not rejoin San Francisco’s high society, which has become vulgar with the *nouveau riche*, they are secure in their elite position, with “no fears for the future” (332). Ruiz de Burton decries the decline in social class of her fellow *californios*: “Yes, Gabriel carrying his hod full of bricks up a steep ladder was a symbolic representation of his race. The natives of Spanish origin, having lost all their property, must henceforth be hod carriers” (325). But by the end of the novel, the Alamares have been restored to their rightful place in society, with the promise of Gabriel and Victoriano starting a bank and becoming gentlemanly professionals. Although they will not be wealthy landowners like their father, they will be able to maintain their comfortable position in San Francisco. So

although the Don and his way of life do indeed die out, Ruiz de Burton is able to imagine a future generation of *californios* as rightful members of the upper middle class.

That the Alamares' financial future and position in society are secure at the end of the novel is thanks mainly to Clarence. In an effort to keep the readers from seeing Clarence as a white rescuer—which would imply that the Alamares could not survive on their own without help from an Anglo—he insists his payment to them is “not a bit generous” because he can double his price for the land later (332). Here, Ruiz de Burton models the way capitalism is supposed to work and can work between the two races. With an infusion of Yankee capital, the Alamar family is ultimately able to continue. What is to become of other *californio* families who are without a friend like Clarence—families who worked alongside Gabriel as manual laborers—is less clear. But the fact that Ruiz de Burton can imagine a way out of the problem steers it clear of historical romance.

The historical romance also often uses marriage as a way to theorize the possibility of a union between the two conflicting cultural groups. The use of marriage as a suasive device in literature is common. While both Cooper and Segwick are ambivalent in their stances regarding American law and land appropriation, the marriages at the end of both *The Pioneers* and *Hope Leslie* support the “progress” of the nation as it expanded its borders, destroying native cultures and seizing land as it saw fit. *The Pioneers* imagines the marriage of Elizabeth Temple and Edward Effingham, who, being white but “adopted” by John Mohegan’s tribe somewhat tenuously represents the Indians in a happy union of American and Indian. Kenneth Burke defines the term “courtship” as “the use of suasive devices for the transcending of social estrangement” (208); in other words, courtship is a rhetorical way to close the difference between the self and the

Other. Ruiz de Burton makes great use of courtship in her novel (which Goldman mistakenly argues is almost secondary to the political story). Mercedes and Clarence's eventual marriage stands for much more than a union of two individuals; it is a union of Anglo and Mexicano. And their marriage is not the only one that takes place. Cross-cultural marriages abound in *Squatter*: the Latin Mary Moreneau and William Darrell, Gabriel Alamar and Lizzie Mechlin, George Mechlin and Elvira Alamar, aside from Clarence and Mercedes.

Marriages between Anglos and *californios* were not without historical precedent: Ruiz de Burton's own marriage is an example of this type of union, and Cora Baggerly Older lists several such marriages in her rather sensational *Love Stories of Old California* (119). Kevin Starr also discusses marriages between American and Californian, such as Alfred Robinson and Ana de la Guerra, and Abel Stearns and Arcadia Bandini (26). The recitation of these marriages in so many places underscores their symbolic power of uniting two disparate peoples. As told in Atherton's stories, the Anglo's taking of a Mexican wife completes the Arcadian picture that California promised and figures U.S. aggression against California as seduction—suggesting that the Mexicans actually welcomed the advances of the U.S.—rather than as the war it actually was. Her stories are representative of the way marriage in historical romance is often used to illustrate the dying out or conquering or subsuming of one group into the other.

But as would be expected, Ruiz de Burton's cross-cultural marriages differ from the way they were romanticized by Atherton and further complicate a reading of the novel as historical romance. In Atherton, the Mexican wife works as a symbol of conquest and of a connection to the good life of the *californios*, with the Americans

clearly adopting the position of the owner of the gaze and the *californiana* the inferior object. Similarly, Helen Hunt Jackson's Señora Moreno disdains the cross-cultural marriages, saying, "I like not these crosses. It is the worst, and not the best of each, that remains" (30). In contrast, Ruiz de Burton sees another kind of potential for mixed marriages. She writes to Mariano Vallejo,

Así es que estando esos dos elementos contrarios en la masa de la sangre en ambas razas, la *mezcla* de ellas no puede menos de producir una tercera, más bella, más enérgica, más fuerte, más dulce en carácter, más templada y creo que más fuerte [In this way, there being those two contrary elements in the mass of the blood in both races, the mixture of them can do no less than produce a third, more beautiful, more energetic, stronger, sweeter in character, more temperate and I believe stronger].

(Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 159)

She sees the possibility of the mixture of races benefiting both, producing a better race. Her belief was in keeping with a common attitude; according to Starr, the fairly common idea was that the children of this mixture "were the eugenic beginnings of a new people, a Latin-Yankee California stock partaking of the best of both strains" (26).<sup>13</sup>

There is another significant difference between the mixed marriages in Ruiz de Burton and in Atherton. While Ruiz de Burton's own marriage, the historical marriages discussed by Starr and Older, and the marriages in Atherton were always between an Anglo man and Mexican woman, in *Squatter* there are marriages between Anglo women and Latino men as well, as in the case of Lizzie Mechlin and Gabriel Alamar, and the courtship of Alice Darrell and Victoriano Alamar. Ruiz de Burton's fictional marriages

point to a more radical vision than Atherton's and turn upside-down the notion of an Anglo conqueror race ravishing a passive, feminine land, as Atherton portrays. For Ruiz de Burton, these marriages suggest hope for a true cultural hybridization.

Furthermore, while in Atherton's stories the cross-cultural marriages are unsuccessful, in Ruiz de Burton's novel, they are successful if not always easy. In Atherton's "The Ears of Twenty Americans," while the American Russell is devoted to his Mexican wife, Benicia dies at the end (significantly, as a result of her own mother's curse, which lays the blame on the Mexicans and their backward ways rather than the aggressor Americans). In "The Washtub Mail," the Mexican wife goes mad. In Harte's "Notes by Flood and Field," the marriage never even takes place. None of these stories is able to imagine a successful union between the two cultures in the way that Ruiz de Burton does. So, her use of marriage as a way to theorize the joining of the two interests—*californio* and Anglo—is unique; it does not conform to typical historical romance marriages.

Thus, while *Squatter* has some structural similarities to an American historical romance—depiction of a culture in danger of dying out in the face of American expansion and cross-cultural marriages—it is much too hopeful and adamant in theorizing ways for the antagonized culture to survive to be called historical romance. Unfortunately, for all Ruiz de Burton's efforts to portray her problems as timely, her critics then as now did not seem to recognize the urgency of her arguments. One reviewer questions her exigence, claiming that "it is somewhat late in the day to discuss [the legislation's] justice or expediency" and that the "argument may thus be out of place" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 565). Apparently, for this reviewer, if an unjust law has been in effect for a number of years, there is no point in trying to rectify it. But an unjust law is

always exigent; its being in place for many years does not mean its debate is untimely. This reviewer has clearly bought into the romanticization of California's past, while Ruiz de Burton's and others' lives show that railroad and property rights continued to be issues well into the 1880s. However, the reviewer also seems conflicted; he or she also recommends the book on the basis that "it touches affairs in which all residents on this Coast have a present living interest." It is remarkable that the reviewer can see the problems the book presents as being both of the past and also of the present day, so powerful was the ideology that the land issues had long been settled. Another reviewer speaks of the novel's characters as being representative of the "old conflict of the two races to which *The Squatter and the Don* belonged" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 566). For him or her, the conflict is "old" rather than current, and the racialized language he or she uses makes it clear that he sees them as belonging to two distinct races, not as simply Americans. Both reviews illustrate the insistence on the part of Ruiz de Burton's readers on seeing the *californios* as historical romance rather than illustrative of what was at the time a current, pressing problem. Unfortunately, continuing to read the novel in this way discounts its polemical message.

#### *Sentimentalism in The Squatter and the Don*

Rather than waxing nostalgic in a historical romance, Ruiz de Burton makes compelling logical arguments in favor of *californios*' property rights and a San Diego railroad terminus. But she also appeals to her readers' emotions, employing elements of sentimentalism to do so. Using elements of this genre, well known for its effectiveness as a rhetorical device, further highlights the novel's rhetorical purpose and denies the nostalgia readers seem intent on seeing in it.

The novel exhibits some of the surface trappings of sentimentalism. Its heroine, Mercedes, becomes delirious on losing Clarence and takes to her bed; Clarence, too, is struck with fever; and there is a tearful scene at Don Mariano's deathbed. Ruiz de Burton's romantic plot line also works to situate her novel as sentimental. The romantic plotline would appeal to female readers, and she also puts women at the moral center of the novel. As in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the women in *Squatter* are the ones who effect justice and see moral truths. Women's words both open and close the novel: Mary Darrell, *née* Moreneau (her Latin roots and first name tie her to Ruiz de Burton herself), opens the novel with wise words for her husband William, advising him not to settle on Mexican-owned land; and the novel closes with Doña Josefa ruminating on the injustice she has been shown, her mind rebelling "in a mild and dignified way":

To her, rectitude and equity had a clear meaning impossible to pervert. No subtle sophistry could blur in her mind the clear line dividing right from wrong. She knew that among men the word BUSINESS means inhumanity to one another; it means justification of rapacity; it means the freedom of man to crowd and crush his fellowman; it means the sanctification of the Shylockian principle of exacting the pound of flesh.

(335)

Here Doña Josefa will make her voice heard, unlike Don Mariano, who complains earlier in the novel that the conquered people have no voice.

Furthermore, like the women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which places women at the novel's moral center, the women go behind their men's backs to effect justice. Ann Douglas notes that nineteenth-century women "were to use the moral suasion of example and mild precept to turn their men to more human (or feminine) ways" but that "women

were never directly to oppose men, no matter how stupid or brutal they might be” (*Uncle Tom’s* 17). But if their men refused to cooperate, as Douglas points out, the women in sentimental fiction will act without their consent. Ruiz de Burton follows this generic convention. While Mary Darrell may be sweet and gentle, she also goes against William’s wishes by directing Clarence to buy their land behind William’s back. The narrator also chafes against the limitations imposed on women: “Man might take, and absolutely appropriate, monopolize and exclude her from money-making, from politics and from many other pursuits, made difficult to her by man’s tyranny, man’s hindrances, man’s objections” (169). The narrator’s ire against her circumscribed position is apparent as well when she makes a direct jibe at women’s lack of inclusion in business matters, noting, tongue-in-cheek, that “the squatters did not make any pretense to regard female opinion with any more respect than other men” (84).

*Squatter* is replete with the trappings of sentimental romance, with Mercedes the picture of the romantic heroine, blushing, tearful, beautiful, and innocent, and Clarence courteous, handsome, and gallant. However, as Goldman observes, Ruiz de Burton undercuts these tropes with irony, poking fun at the feminine sentiment. The most metatextual example, she argues, is when George Mechlin teases Mercedes about her suitor: “It isn’t half so romantic to love a plain gentleman as to love a brigand, or, at least, a squatter...Aren’t you regretting that, after all, you cannot sacrifice to love your patrician pride by marrying a land-shark, thus proving you are a heroine?” He continues, “Really, I think our romance is spoiled. It would have been so fine—like a dime novel—to have carried you off bodily by order of infuriated, cruel parents, on arriving at New York to marry you, at the point of a loaded revolver, to a bald-headed millionaire!” (131-

132). Goldman argues that Ruiz de Burton's self-conscious references to typical romances highlight the contrast between her depiction of the *californios* and the romanticizing of them by other authors such as Atherton and Josephine McCrackin.<sup>14</sup> This is in keeping with Ruiz de Burton's strategy of erasing difference. She subverts the typical trappings of sentimental romance to serve her own particular argument. The lovers are not defying any cultural norms by marrying; on the contrary, they are of the same monied, educated, cultured class. Disrupting the conventions of the dime novel romance, Ruiz de Burton again tries to convince her audience to see her Latino characters not as different but as members of their own class with their same interests. This type of identification carries over to gender too. Upon finding out about Clarence's return, Mercedes "kissed the letter, and cried over it, of course, as women must" (328). Mercedes is portrayed as similar to the women of her audience. This is also apparent when George observes that Mercedes needs "to have a cry all to herself, as most girls would, when their sweethearts have just left them" (155). Aside from her beauty, there is nothing unusual or exotic about Mercedes; she is like "most" American girls Ruiz de Burton's readers know.

Goldman also argues that Ruiz de Burton's conclusion, in which she addresses her audience directly, "makes us question the efficacy of the 309-page fiction that precedes it" and reflects the limits of the historical romance that "enforces plaint rather than platform" (63), despite the dialogism that pervades the novel. However, if we read the novel as sentimental fiction rather than historical romance, it is not necessary to read her direct address as an admission of the novel's ineffectiveness. The dropping of the fictional mask is not without impressive literary precedent: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ends

similarly, with Stowe taking up the pulpit to exhort her readers to action, both religious and political. Ruiz de Burton's peroration would therefore be easily recognizable to her audience as a trait of sentimental fiction, and it situates her firmly within this strong American tradition. While Stowe's prophecy is explicitly religious, drawing on a rich American rhetorical tradition, Ruiz de Burton's is less so—she makes comparisons to the tyranny of Napoleon and does not warn against the wrath of God. Her novel is for the most part devoid of religious references; except for the implied difficulties of a Catholic-Protestant marriage, her prophecies are more political-historical than religious. However, she does quote the Unitarian, transcendentalist minister William Ellery Channing at the beginning and end of the conclusion. And in the last line of the novel she uses overt religious language to make explicit connections between California and slavery. She argues that if the California legislators do not act according to the will of the people, the Californians “must wait and pray for a Redeemer who will emancipate the white slaves of California” (344). Framing the problem in religious terms supplies her with one final argument and does not, as Goldman implies, merely repeat what we have already been told.

#### *Naturalism in The Squatter and the Don*

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### **Conclusion: The Reviews and Her Rhetorical Success**

*The Squatter and the Don* did not spark a national furor on the level of that provoked by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It would not be until 1939 that a work of fiction was to affect the nation so profoundly again. The plain fact is that *The Squatter and the Don* never acquired the vast readership that Steinbeck's book did. As Burke notes, “Where public issues are concerned, such resources are not confined to the intrinsic powers of the speaker and the speech, but depend also for their effectiveness upon the purely technical

means of communication, which can either aid the utterance or hamper it. For a ‘good’ rhetoric neglected by the press obviously cannot be so ‘communicative’ as a poor rhetoric backed by national headlines” (*Rhetoric* 25-6). *The Squatter and the Don* is “good” rhetoric. But as a virtually unknown Mexican woman, Ruiz de Burton simply did not have the access to a nation-wide audience that Steinbeck did. The use of the pseudonym “C. Loyal” also may have not allowed her to take full advantage of her political and social connections in gaining an audience. The book deserved much more attention than it received.

But, if judged by criteria other than the size of its readership and its effect on national public opinion, we can grant the novel some degree of rhetorical success. Borrowing Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s definition of rhetoric as “the study of the discursive techniques allowing us *to induce or to increase the mind’s adherence to the theses present for its assent*” (4), Ruiz de Burton was indeed successful on both levels, both inducing and increasing her actual audience’s adherence to her arguments. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s phrase “to induce” broadens the purpose of rhetoric to include informing the audience as one of its goals. Ruiz de Burton clearly has this goal in mind, as she makes clear throughout the novel that one of her chief purposes is to educate her readers about the injustice faced by the Californians. The Don realizes that “few Americans know or believe to what extent we have been wronged by Congress” (65). Clarence frequently stands in for an uninformed audience as Don Mariano explains to him the biased laws he faces. The Don comments on the typical reaction when the facts are explained: “George could not believe me when I told him that (the land-owners) have to pay the taxes on the land cultivated by the pre-emptors. When he at last understood

that such unfair laws did exist, he was amazed” (74). The narrator also notes that the facts “would have seemed too monstrous to have been believed all at once, incredible if revealed without preparing the mind for its reception. Yes, the mind had to be prepared—slowly educated first” (159). This is, of course, exactly what Ruiz de Burton is doing for her audience, as the Don speaks for her own sentiments in his belief that Americans would “not tolerate” but would “denounce” the corruption in Congress (164).

Ruiz de Burton succeeded in educating her readers. In the first place, for a Mexican woman, having the novel read at all was a victory. Though she had to publish it herself to get her voice heard, any form of publication was better than none. As Sánchez points out, Mariano Vallejo’s memoir still sits, unpublished, in the Bancroft Collection at the University of California, Berkeley (Sánchez, “Nineteenth-Century” 279). This was not to be the case with Ruiz de Burton’s work, as reviews from contemporary California newspapers show that it was read and received favorably. In a *Daily Alta California* article about her first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, the author predicts that the book “will be read with pleasure on this Coast at least, even though the sentiments contained therein may be considered contrary to received opinions” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 572), and an article from *The San Francisco Chronicle* notes that the demand for *Squatter* was so great in San Diego that a “miniature tempest” was raised when the public librarian removed the book from the shelves in an attempt to shield the public personages it caricatured (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 568). Thus, even if Ruiz de Burton did not singlehandedly overturn the Land Commission laws or bring down the railroad monopolies with her novel, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that “[w]hat is characteristic about the adherence of minds is its variable intensity” (4). That is, even if

she only succeeded in gaining a sympathetic recognition of her position, her rhetoric may be judged successful on some level.

While some of her reviewers failed to see the immediacy of the problem, and one reviewer comments that her conclusion is “more than the occasion calls for,” another review from *The Daily Examiner* finds the opposite to be true, deeming that it “touches affairs in which all residents on this Coast have a present living interest” (565-6). This reviewer also comments that the novel is “useful” because it “seems to show that after all might is not right, and if lawmakers and those who gain the advantage of the former’s labors would put themselves in the other fellow’s place for a time, they might not be so well satisfied of the justice or propriety of their proceedings” (565). A review from *The San Francisco Chronicle* calls the novel “a strong presentation of the influence of two evils which have done much to retard the growth of the State and to harass honest settlers” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 569). Another warns that the novel exhibits “a feeling of injury and bitter resentment which bodes ill for those who continue to add fuel to that flame. Of this the railroad people had better follow Captain Cuttle’s advice and make ‘a note’ as soon as convenient” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 566). The reviewers admire the “earnest sincerity” and “fervid eloquence” (565-6) of her “eloquent and impassioned plea” (568).

The reviews also uniformly praise the novel for its stylistic control, for its “well drawn” characters, its “sprightly, natural” dialogue, and its “entertaining style” and “dramatic power” (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 565, 566, 569). The review from the *Examiner* notes that “people with grievances are not usually popular, as frequently they are wearisome. But this failing cannot be laid to the charge of the author of ‘*Squatter* and

the Don'....the author has managed to combine instances of all these sins of omission and commission in a very pleasant and readable tale" (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 565).

The attention the novel received from the reviewers and the California public indicates that she had some rhetorical success in arousing awareness. Burke writes, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (*Rhetoric*, 55). As the reviews show, Ruiz de Burton certainly co-opted her audience's speech and their values of wealth and capitalism and fulfilled their expectations of a genre and literary style. She succeeded in getting her audience to identify with her characters.

Significantly, thanks to the recovery work of critics such as Sánchez and Pita, a new, perhaps unintended audience now exists for Ruiz de Burton's work: a modern, twenty-first century audience. In an age when the literature of the west is still regarded as marginal to the American canon, her novel is finally beginning to receive the critical attention it deserves. A complex novel that is both celebrated for the way it works against cultural stereotypes yet criticized for its assimilationist implications, it has become canonical in Latino studies, appearing in the commonly-used anthology *The Latino Reader* (Augenbraum and Fernández Olmos) and receiving critical attention from Latino studies critics such as Sánchez and Pita, Jesse Aleman, and David Luis-Brown. While less known in American literary studies, it is quickly gaining importance in this field as well. It is a complex novel that reflects the complicated life Ruiz de Burton led: on one hand she seems to prop up a romantic construction of her life when it seemed to suit her or give her some advantage; on the other hand, she rails against the limitations it put on her as well. We see these conflicting instincts in the way she deftly works against

historical romanticism; we also see it in her views about race and how they are figured in the novel; we also see it in her conflicting views of class, with sympathy for Gabriel yet disregard for Native American workers. Yet despite these conflicts, the novel continues to educate and persuade, providing insights into complex race relations that exist in California to this day, and helping to undermine the myth of the independent west by pointing up the reliance of the railroads on government subsidy and favor. The recovery of this important contributor to California history and literature gives us an important perspective from which to view American history and ideologies. Over one hundred years from its original publication, with its witty dialogue and self-conscious narrator, the novel holds up well even today and remains a compelling exposé of the discriminatory treatment of the *californios*.

## Chapter 2

### Assimilation and Identification in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*

If the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo left wealthy *californio* landowners with less-than-solid titles to their vast land grants, it left the California Mission Indians with even less protection under U.S. law. Because Mexicans had granted them much of their land by oral contract before the U.S. “annexation,” the Indians could under U.S. law claim only the “right of occupancy,” as Helen Hunt Jackson defines it in the opening chapter of her non-fictional exposé of the nation’s abuse of native Americans, *Century of Dishonor* (1881). With no legal claim to the land and little money to fight battles in court, the Indians were left with little hope of maintaining their tribal ways of life as American settlers made their way into the golden state. To Hiram Price, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Jackson wrote that “at present, it is no exaggeration to say, that to the average new settler [in California], the presence of an Indian family, or an Indian community on lands he desires to own, is no more obstacle, than the presence of so many foxes or coyotes” (Jackson, *Indian Reform* 263).

Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885) was already a well-established writer on the eastern literary scene when she began advocating for Indian reform. A friend of and esteemed by Emily Dickinson and the editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she was a popular and prolific writer during her lifetime, a regular contributor of articles, poetry, and fiction to such eastern literary magazines as *Scribner’s Monthly Magazine*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Century*. Ralph Waldo Emerson called her “the greatest American woman poet” and reportedly kept one of her poems in his notebook (Mathes, *Indian Reform* 5). After her first husband’s death in the 1860s, she depended on her writing for her living, writing under the pseudonyms “H.H.” and “Saxe Holme,” and she was known

to be a shrewd businesswoman who demanded full market value for her pieces (Erkkila 87). Although she was disinclined to embrace other “women’s causes” such as temperance and women’s suffrage, the evening in 1879 when Jackson attended a lecture in Boston given by Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca tribe, changed her life dramatically. Upon hearing about his people’s dispossession of their tribal lands, she became, as she confided to Higginson, “what I have said a thousand times was the most odious thing in life,—‘a woman with a hobby’” (Jackson, *Letters* 84). She devoted the rest of her life, which ended in 1885, soon after *Ramona* was published, to her “hobby,” lobbying and writing ceaselessly for the American Indian, and she is now best remembered for the two major works she published in hopes of advancing their cause, *Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*.

*Century of Dishonor* was produced entirely in the east and did not focus on California Indians. Researched in the Astor Library in New York, the work details the numerous treaties the U.S. had broken with the Indians and argues that such policies of bad faith be stopped immediately. Jackson hoped that *Century of Dishonor* would “go into every American home,” lighting the fire in the hearts of the American people to demand change in congress. “There is but one hope of righting this wrong,” she wrote. “It lies in appeal to the heart and the conscience of the American people. What the people demand, Congress will do. It has been—to our shame be it spoken—at the demand of part of the people that all these wrongs have been committed, these treaties broken, these robberies done, by the Government” (30). She structured *Century of Dishonor* in a way that she hoped would capture the imagination of the public: it was written not as a complete history of American dealings with natives, but as a series of

narratives, each tracing the broken treaties and promises of the U.S. to a particular tribe. Always aware of her audience, she believed this strategy would be “much more intelligible & interesting & effective to rouse peoples attention. It is like getting interested in the personal history, for instance, of the Ward family—or the Jackson!” (120). Even so, unfortunately, the book did not sell well, despite her having printed at her expense a copy for every member of congress. It did, however, garner some good reviews, and Jackson conceded “somehow it stirred things—for you see books, pamphlets, & mag. articles are steadily pouring out on the subject” (240).

Following the publication of *Century of Dishonor*, Jackson undertook a trip to California in the winter of 1881-1882 on commission for *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, for which she would write a series of travel articles (Padgett 838).<sup>15</sup> These travel sketches depict the missions as relics of a romantic past and the Indians not as victims of the civilizing interests of the Catholic church, as some claimed as early as the nineteenth century, but of the hastily enacted secularization program wrought by the Spanish government: “That there was so little active hostility on the part of the savage tribes...is the strongest possible proof that the methods of the friars in dealing with them must have been both wise and humane (*Glimpses* 35). The mission buildings themselves have fallen into a state of beautiful disrepair: “The peace, silence, and beauty of the spot are brooded over and dominated by the grand gray ruin, lifting the whole scene into an ineffable harmony. Wandering in room after room, court after court, through corridors with red-tiled roofs and hundreds of broad Roman arches, over fallen pillars, and through carved doorways, whose untrodden thresholds have sunk out of sight in summer grasses, one asks himself if he be indeed in America,” she writes of San Juan Capistrano

(*Glimpses* 91). Like those in Harte's and Atherton's works, the missions depicted here are decidedly not American. Nonetheless, Jackson's interest in California's mission past dovetailed neatly with her burgeoning interest in the Indian, and henceforth her reform work would focus solely on the California Mission Indians. By this point she was seen publicly as an expert on Indian matters, and so she was appointed in 1882 by the U.S. government as a Special Agent, along with Abbot Kinney, another reformer, to research and write a report for the Commission of Indian Affairs. Together, they toured southern California to witness firsthand the state of the mission tribes, and they provided their *Report on the Condition and Needs of the Mission Indians of California* to the government in 1883.

Discouraged by the poor reception of *Century of Dishonor*, Jackson determined to try again, this time in the mode of fiction. She saw fiction, for which she was already well regarded, as the best way to reach her largest audience ever. Surrounded by Indian baskets she had collected along her journeys and drawing on many of the events she heard about and saw while touring southern California as material, Jackson quickly wrote *Ramona* at the Berkeley Hotel in New York. The culmination of her career as Indian advocate came with the publication of *Ramona* (1884), which, along with *Century of Dishonor*, she called "the only things I have done of which I am glad now" shortly before her death (Jackson, *Letters* 351).

*Ramona* immediately sold well and has gone through over three hundred printings since its initial publication. It inspired countless plays, songs, a movie, and recently a Spanish-language telenovela. It is still reenacted each year in Hemet, California, in an outdoor "Ramona Pageant." But *Ramona* has had mixed reviews as to its effectiveness

as a protest novel. For all its commercial and popular success, *Ramona* did not instigate the kind of sweeping reform Jackson hoped it would, though the novel did inspire some political action, which I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter. The novel garnered favorable reviews (notably from Jose Martí, who called it “our novel” in his introduction to his translation of it (204), but *Ramona* was enjoyed more for its literary qualities than its political message. For instance, a reviewer for the *Critic* called it “one of the most tender and touching [love stories] we have read for a considerable period” (qtd. in Mathes, *Indian Reform* 218). Others described it as “a prose Evangeline, . . . a sweet and mournful poetic story” (qtd. in Mathes, *Indian Reform* 218). The critic for the *Overland Monthly* noted that it possessed “no burning appeal, no crushing arraignment, no such book as ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’” Less a reform novel, it was “an idyll—sorrowful, yet never harsh” (qtd. in Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson* 83). Disappointed, Jackson wrote, “I fear the story has been too interesting, as a story. . . I am positively sick of hearing that ‘the flight of Ramona and Alessandro is an idyl’— & no word for the Temecula ejection” (Jackson, *Letters* 341). Indeed, as a love story and not a political indictment is how the novel has been remembered in California’s popular imagination.

The novel has also been generally dismissed by more modern critics and historians as well, as nothing more than a sentimental romance novel that capitalizes on a mythic California past. Kevin Starr attributes to the novel California’s perpetuation of the romantic mission myth of the state’s history, “a glorification of a Southern California suffused with the golden memory of pastoral days, rather than an indictment of present injustices” (397). Carey McWilliams derided the research that went into the novel, charging that it was “second-hand, and consisted, for the greater part, of odds and ends of

gossip, folk tales, and Mission-inspired allegories of one kind or another.” Like Starr, he charges that the novel “firmly established the Mission legend in Southern California” (73). In his cultural history of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis calls it “a romance that generations of tourists and white Angelenos have confused with real history” (330). The novel has enjoyed renewed critical evaluation in light of recent native American and Chicana literary criticism, but for the most part this criticism echoes the cultural historians’ arguments. Anne Goldman classifies the novel as an elegy for a dying era of California history, which, she argues, is unsuitable for a call to reform (48, 53). John Gonzalez groups it with other Indian reform novels that espoused what Amy Kaplan terms “manifest domesticity,” in its participation in an imperialist program that allowed women to “vanish” the Indian through civilizing domesticity. Jackson is often closely and disparagingly linked to the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA), a major reformist group that sought to educate and “civilize” the Indians so that they would be suited for citizenship.<sup>16</sup>

It cannot be denied that Jackson herself subscribed to commonly held hierarchies of “civil” versus “savage.” And she seems personally in the thrall of California’s mythic past, with her rich descriptions of the missions in romantic decay. However, if we see her use of the clearly popular trope of the genteel and decadent Mexican culture as a rhetorical strategy calculated to spark readers’ interest, we must reconsider its purposes and effects. At times she also appears to adopt an assimilationist argument common to Indian reformers—also, apparently, to assuage her audience—in an attempt to create identification between her audience and characters. But because her own reform ideas differed from those of her fellow reformers and a mainstream American audience, she ultimately cannot sustain this identification. As a result, Ramona and Alessandro remain

romantic Others, which stifled any urge the original audience may have felt to instigate reform. Jackson's refusal to enable her audience to identify with her characters, I argue, belies her refusal to accept the assumption that the Indian must adapt to the U.S. culture, a radical theory (for the time) about race that invested her Indian characters with more agency and subjectivity than they were typically portrayed as having. *Ramona* is a complex text that is both a radical critique of the now-outmoded racial and social theories of her time and a bland reinforcement of them, and the failure of her novel to spark reform is the result of the tension between her need to appeal to her readers even though she did not espouse their reform ideas.

In this chapter, I discuss the racial, social, and reform theories popular in the late-nineteenth century U.S. before I investigate how Jackson contends with them in *Ramona*. I then discuss the effects of the novel and conclude with an examination of Lauren Berlant's theories about sentimental fiction and identification.

### **U.S. Indian Policy and Jackson's Indian Policy**

Initiated by the Standing Bear lecture, Jackson entered into an already-vociferous national debate on the "Indian Question." Earlier policies of removal were no longer effective at preventing violence between white settlers and natives, since land available for settlement seemed to be becoming scarce. Large reservations had helped alleviate friction between white settlements and Indian groups, but white settlers inevitably wanted the lands of the reservations. Smaller reservations and individually granted homesteads, advocated by Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz (appointed in 1877), were hoped to encourage Indians to give up their tribal life and conform to American ideals of private property and Protestant ideals of individual salvation and responsibility. Because in the

view of the Indian Rights Association Executive Committee “the Indian as a savage member of a tribal organization cannot survive, ought not to survive the aggressions of civilization” (qtd. in Mathes 9), assimilation was proffered as a humanitarian alternative to genocide. Secretary Schurz wrote that the Indians were faced with the stark choice between “extermination or civilization” (qtd. in Limerick 197). Well-intentioned reformers, who were largely Protestant evangelicals, then turned to programs to lead the Indians out of savagery, with the ultimate goal of preparing them for citizenship.

The debate over assimilation was predicated on several racial assumptions. From the time of Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the Indians had been considered savage but teachable; their savagery was due more to their environment than to their inherent nature. The Indians, in this view, were simply at a more basic stage of development, whose trajectory culminated in European/American civilization. The task of the Americans, then, was to speed up this civilizing process so that the Indians could be fully participatory citizens deserving of American legal protection. And, as Gonzalez argues, their citizenship would also signify “the measure of the nation’s own civilized status” instead of their current position as a “remainder and therefore reminder of the ultimate failure of national completion” (439).

Private property figured significantly in this plan as the antidote to tribalism, which was considered the main barrier to the Indians’ civilization. Lyman Abbot opined that the Indian had to be “touched by the wings of the divine angel of discontent....Discontent with the tepee and the starving rations of the Indian camp in winter [was] needed to get the Indian out of the blanket and into trousers—and trousers with a pocket in them, and with a pocket that ache[d] to be filled with dollars!” (qtd. in Limerick 198). To this end, in 1875 Congress passed the Indian Homestead Act, which

was designed to encourage private ownership of land at the expense of tribal holdings. Later, the passage of the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 (two years after the publication of *Ramona*, leading some critics to attribute its passage partially to the novel) struck a singular blow to tribal life. It broke reservations into small allotments given to individual Indians. “Left over” land from the reservations, which, unsurprisingly, turned out to be plentiful, was sold to white settlers. Patricia Nelson Limerick notes that over the course of the next forty-seven years the Indians would lose two thirds of their land as a result of the Dawes Act (199).

Other measures for encouraging assimilation included education and Christianization. Like the Franciscan missionaries before them, Protestant American reformers believed that Christianizing the Indians was in the Indians’ best interest. Missionary schools, taught mainly by women, were established to educate the Indians in civilized, American ways. A poignant picture of these schools and their effects on tribal life is portrayed in Gertrude Bonnin’s writings, in which she tells of being forced to give up her blanket and moccasins for Western-style clothes, to cut her hair, and to submit to rules she did not understand. She returned to the reservation after her first three years of schooling “neither a wild Indian nor a tame one” (867). Gonzalez insightfully connects these programs with Amy Kaplan’s term “manifest domesticity”: “If discourses of manifest destiny such as antebellum domesticity depicted Indians as literally disappearing ‘before the white man,’ then, within the discourses of post-Reconstruction domesticity, ‘savages’ were to disappear figuratively as the objects of white women’s civilizing instruction” (439). A prime example of a novel that is often interpreted as exemplifying this national program is S. Alice Callahan’s *Wynema*, which portrays the successful

education of an Indian girl and her marriage to a properly Protestant white man. It should be noted that Melissa Ryan argues forcefully against this reading, arguing that Callahan's narrative was a calculated rhetorical strategy designed to link the Indians' status as marginalized citizens with white women's similar status. Indeed, the Indian reform movement had come to be associated with "women's work," as the abolitionist movement had before it. But, while white missionary women would have been part of Jackson's intended audience—the novel was serialized first in *The Christian Union*—she also hoped for the novel to reach a mainstream, broad audience of Americans.

Like her fellow reformers, Jackson, too, believed that the Indians were capable of assimilation—if not desirous of it, as I show later—and she strove to show both in her letters and in her novel that they shared feelings and values with her American, Christian audience despite the Indians' present "barbarity." In response to a criticism from her husband, William Sharpless Jackson, that the Indian was lazy, she argues,

That is true of only a part of the Indians—& not of any single tribe that has had any thing like a chance!—How much would you work, if Government could pull you up at any minute & carry you to Indian Territory!—if men could steal all you owned & you couldn't sue them?—

Spite of this, there are dozens of tribes who are working—some who are even manufacturing—the Choctaws took a prize for cotton last year! (62)

Here she shows that they are not only industrious, but also capable of fitting into a capitalistic society, of "manufacturing." To Henry Teller, who was a Senator and Chester A. Arthur's Secretary of the Interior from 1882 to 1885, she argues similarly, "Such men as these want a title given to them individually. They don't want a land title in common

with their tribe, any more than you would want a title in common with the Central City people, or Mr. Jackson would with those of Colorado Springs” (231). She believed strongly that the Indians were just as deserving of the land as the whites. She writes that before Albert Kenney saw “two or three” Indian villages, “he was unaware of how industrious and deserving many of them were; and how cruel the injustice had been of driving them off lands which they had cultivated for a hundred years” (236). For Jackson, the Indians had already demonstrated their worthiness of the land, regardless of their “savage” state.

But Jackson was also somewhat at odds with both official government policy and her fellow reformers. Mathes contends that she “was less interested in assimilation of the American Indians and more interested in the protection of their land rights and adherence to treaty provisions” (5). Jackson was not strongly religious (she preferred Sunday drives with Will over going to church), and therefore was not driven by the evangelical, Christianizing agenda of her fellow Protestant reformers. And while she wrote in *Century of Dishonor* that once America stopped breaking its treaties with the Indians, “time, statesmanship, philanthropy, and Christianity can slowly and surely do the rest” (*Century* 342), her actions were clearly focused on immediately securing Indian land rights regardless of their status as citizens. In fact, she considered the citizenship effort ill-conceived. She wrote in *Century of Dishonor*,

The notion which seems to be growing more prevalent, that simply to make all Indians at once citizens of the United States would be a sovereign and instantaneous panacea for all their ills and all the Government’s perplexities, is a very inconsiderate one. To administer complete citizenship of a sudden, all round, to all Indians, barbarous and

civilized alike, would be as grotesque a blunder as to dose them all round with any one medicine, irrespective of the symptoms and needs of their diseases (340).

She emphasizes that the U.S. must protect the Indians “in every right and particular in which our laws protect other ‘persons’ who are not citizens” until they are made citizens (*Century* 341). She counts citizenship as one means to ensure the protection of their rights (and, as the quotation shows, she subscribed to the commonly-held hierarchy of “barbarous” versus “civilized”), but she also argues forcefully that the Indians deserved immediate protection whether they were citizens or not. In her dealings with the Ponca Indians, Jackson scorned Schurz’s notion that money raised to fight legal battles for the Poncas would be better spent on Indian schools.<sup>17</sup> Instead, she wanted to determine “[w]hat the Indians’ own feelings are about going on reservations.... I am entirely sure that to propose to those self supporting farmers, to submit themselves to the usual reservation laws and restrictions would be futile.” (241). By framing citizenship and assimilation as a means to an end rather than the end itself, Jackson set herself apart from and against both the government and other reformers. Her desires to appeal to them and to remain true to her own agenda are reflected in *Ramona* and are, I argue, partially responsible for its political failure.

Critics have faulted *Ramona* for not theorizing a solution to the problem. By the end of the novel Alessandro, a Native American, is dead, and Ramona and Felipe have fled the country for Mexico. It is usually rhetorically risky to decry a problem without suggesting a solution. *Ramona*’s lack of solution is reflected in Jackson’s other writing, which expresses uncertainty as to how the problem could be solved, if it could be solved at all. In her report on the Mission Indians, she wrote, “It would have been very difficult,

even at the outset, to devise practicable methods of dealing justly with these people, and preserving to them their rights. But with every year of our neglect the difficulties have increased and the wrongs have been multiplied, until now it is, humanly speaking, impossible to render to them full measure of justice. All that is left in our power is to make them some atonement” (qtd. in Dorris x-xi). Jackson maintained in *Century of Dishonor*, however, that a detailed solution was unnecessary for the United States to cease its mistreatment of the Indians:

However great perplexity and difficulty there may be in the details of any and every plan possible for doing at this late date anything like justice to the Indian, however hard it may be for good statesmen and good men to agree upon the things that ought to be done, there certainly is, or ought to be, no perplexity whatever, no difficulty whatever, in agreeing upon certain things that ought not to be done, and which must cease to be done before the first steps can be taken toward righting the wrongs, curing the ills, and wiping out the disgrace to us of the present condition of our Indians.

Cheating, robbing, breaking promises—these three are clearly things which must cease to be done. One more thing, also, and that is the refusal of the protection of the law to the Indian’s right of property, “of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (342)

To William (who apparently shared the same concern as some of her critics), she wrote, “Because I am not able—as I most certainly am not, to ‘outline’ or even *conceive* of a proper & detailed system for the management of 250,000 Indians—is that any reason why I should not be qualified to protest against broken treaties—cruel massacres—&

unjust laws.—A woman does not need to be a statesman, to know that it is base to break promises—to oppress the helpless—!” (62). This is the point of her novel: that the mistreatment be stopped at once. Jackson did not see herself as a policymaker. As a popular writer with access to the public ear, Jackson believed her most important task was to raise awareness about the Indian plight. To a friend she writes, “Don’t, if you can help it, let any of them think I can ‘help’ them. It breaks my heart. Do try to make them understand that all I can do, is to *tell* about them” (253). She trusted the American public to do the right thing once they were educated about the Indians, urging Americans to at least cease mistreating the Indians until other policy could be worked out.

In this regard, Jackson is like Ruiz de Burton, who also believed that if the American public were only made aware of the mistreatment of the *californios* at the hands of the U.S. government, it would be stirred to action. This belief is common to sentimental writers: Stowe, too, writes that if Christians knew the truth about slavery, “such a question could never be open for discussion” (622). Lauren Berlant argues that belief in the power of sentimentality requires “political optimism” in the transformative power of feeling (640). If the dominant group can be shown that the oppressed group shares with them feelings of pain, love, and suffering, the sentimentalists hoped, it would cross lines of class, race, and gender to identify with the oppressed. Jackson writes in *Century* that if any one of the thousands of government-sponsored Indian reports were “read by the right-thinking, right-feeling men and women of this land, [it] would be of itself a ‘campaign document’ that would initiate a revolution which would not subside until the Indians’ wrongs were, so far as is now left possible, righted” (338). About Standing Bear’s plight and speech, she has the same hopes: “If he could go, or if the book

which tells his story could go into every American home, there would be a swift and mighty revulsion of American sentiment upon the ‘Indian Question’” (Letter 42).

### **The “Sugared Pill”—Too Sweet?**

In William Jackson’s view, *Century of Dishonor* did not sell well because the style did not “clutch the average reader” and would be effective only for people already interested in the “Indian Question” (Mathes *Letters* 17). Jackson was determined not to make the same mistake again with *Ramona*, writing that with *Ramona* she had “sugared [the] pill” (qtd. in Dorris xviii). Her letters demonstrate an intense desire to “draw a picture so winning and alluring in the beginning of the story, that the reader would become thoroughly interested in the characters before he dreamed of what was before him:—and would have swallowed a big dose of information on the Indian Question, without knowing it” (337). So worried was she that people would be uninterested in her true subject that she grudgingly gave up her first choice for a title, *In the Name of the Law*, because she feared it would “be a mistake;—[would] ‘show my hand,’ so to speak” (318). As it turns out, she hid her hand perhaps too well: the romance between Ramona and Alessandro proved to overshadow their “American” qualities that Jackson hoped would ensure her audience’s identification with them. In this section I argue that while in some ways Jackson gave Ramona and Alessandro identifiable characteristics to a white, American audience, she miscalculated in significant other ways, and as a result her characters remained exotic Others who do not share their American advocates’ views about assimilation. A white, Protestant audience could sympathize with them, yes, but in the end, they did not identify with them and were not moved to act on their behalf.

To ensure reader interest, Jackson consciously played up the popular romantic trope of the graceful, decaying Mexican life of Southern California, which she had drawn

on in her previous travel sketches. “There is so much Mexican life in it,” she wrote to William Hayes Ward about *Ramona*, “that I hope to get people so interested in it, before they suspect anything Indian, that they will keep on” (307). Jackson was well aware of her audience’s taste for local color travel literature and romance, and so she uses a romantic plotline to garner sympathy for her characters from her audience. Half Scottish, half Indian, Ramona has grown up on Señora Moreno’s, her adoptive aunt’s, graceful Southern California hacienda. Despite Ramona’s “sunny” disposition that endears her to everyone else on the estate, the Señora hates Ramona because of her Indian blood. When Alessandro, the leader of a band of Indian sheep shearers, remains at the hacienda after the shearing so that he can coax the Señora’s only son, Felipe, back to health, Alessandro and Ramona fall in love. Because the Señora opposes their marriage, the star-crossed lovers flee and are secretly married in the church, and Ramona changes her name to “Majella,” Indian for wood-dove. That the entire first two thirds of the novel are set on the hacienda and devoted to the romance between Ramona and Alessandro helps explain in itself why the book has been remembered chiefly for its romantic story.

The last third of the novel abandons the hacienda altogether and traces Ramona and Alessandro’s increasingly desperate flight from white encroachment and persecution. In fact, a close reading reveals that Jackson even tries to undo the Mission romance she seems to relish at the beginning of her tale. When Ramona waxes nostalgic for it, Alessandro sharply corrects her. “I wish it were the olden time now, Alessandro,” Ramona tells him, “when the men like Father Salvierderra had all the country. Then there would be work for all, at the Missions. The Señora says the Missions were like palaces, and that there were thousands of Indians in every one of them; thousands and thousands, all working so happy and peaceful” (229). In an often-overlooked passage,

Alessandro responds with an alternative perspective of the Missions that cuts against this widely-accepted romantic history. “It was too much power,” he tells her. “The Indians did not all want to come to the Missions; some of them preferred to stay in the woods, and live as they always had lived; and I think they had a right to do that if they preferred, Majella.” He proceeds to tell her about atrocities committed by the priests, such as clipping the ears of Indian neophytes (231), and points out a corrupt priest to Ramona (229). Alessandro does not yearn for the “happy and peaceful” Mission system imagined by Señora Moreno and Ramona; for him it was unjust, depriving the Indians of their natural right to the land. Unfortunately, this perspective is all but lost in the rest of the story, given that the friars seem to be the only people willing to help Ramona and Alessandro.

Jackson is unflinching in her portrayal of Anglo-American appropriation of Mission Indian lands; it is this part of the novel where her critique begins in earnest. Anglo settlers, with the exception of the Hyer family, are consistently portrayed negatively: they are drunk and abusive; they greedily snatch up all available land and water, twisting the law to afford them whatever they want; and they literally get away with murder time after time. The Indian Agent sent to advocate for and assist the natives is lazy and ineffective at best, and harmful at worst, thoughtlessly sending medicine to Ramona and Alessandro’s baby that ultimately kills her. Ramona and Alessandro are forced from their home time after time by white settlers and their thinly veiled threats of violence. Each new place they go, while initially a pastoral idyll, turns nightmarish as it is eventually invaded or appropriated by Anglo settlers. Their flight finally leads to Alessandro’s insanity, which causes him to take a white man’s horse, an inadvertent crime for which he is murdered. After his mother’s death and a long search, Felipe

finally locates the grieving Ramona and marries her. Unable to live alongside the continually expanding white settlements, the couple flees America for Mexico, where they are greeted by the Mexican people with open arms.

In many ways Ramona and Alessandro fit the reformists' ideals for citizenship and assimilation perfectly, and Jackson works to show that they are people with whom the audience can identify. Like Ruiz de Burton's heroine, Mercedes Alamar, Ramona has several characteristics that identify her with Jackson's white, Christian, mostly female audience, not least of which is Ramona's Scottish heritage. Her upbringing on the Señora's hacienda also links her more strongly to her European rather than her Indian roots. Like Mercedes, Ramona is beautiful, with striking blue eyes, which her first daughter inherits. And like many female characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Ramona is also an excellent housekeeper, able to turn the most humble of dwellings into a comfortable, attractive home. When she deserts her gracious life with Señora Moreno to live in poorer and poorer circumstances, Ramona becomes the Indian epitome of the "angel in the house," a devotee of the cult of true womanhood. Aunt Ri, a sympathetic Tennessean, is surprised to find that Ramona loves her baby as much as a white woman would, and she keeps a perfect house, better at cooking and decorating even than Aunt Ri, who is "affectionate" but "disorderly" (288). Ramona, unlike Ri, can fix up a room "out er nothin'" so that it looks "jest like a parlor," that symbol of white decorousness. Ri and her husband, Jos, also marvel at Ramona's Mexican cooking, for they "never thought nothin' o' beans, but these air good, 'n' no mistake!" (288). As an attractive, attentive housekeeper, Ramona embodies notions of middle-class, white women's domesticity even better than Aunt Ri.

Alessandro also has the potential to assimilate into the dominant Anglo culture. He, too, is attractive, he dotes on his wife, he is educated and bright, and he is Christian. He plays the violin, an unequivocal symbol of European culture. He is also, significantly, a good worker, as Señora Moreno discovers when she witnesses his deft management of her estate: “It was strange to see how quickly and naturally Alessandro fitted into his place in the household. How tangles straightened out, and rough places became smooth, as he quietly took matters in hand” (73). If white Americans were concerned about Indians not desiring work or being deserving of their own land, rhetorically Alessandro should rectify these wrong views: he could fit into a capitalist society if he wanted to. He is a skilled farmer, which Jackson’s contemporaries saw as an essential step away from more primitive hunter-gatherer cultures towards civilization. Jackson directs her readers’ feelings of identification with Alessandro through other white characters. In one scene, on finding Alessandro calmly defiant, the white settler who comes to take over Alessandro’s land and freshly planted wheat fields muses, “I don’t know as I blame him a mite for feeling that way...I expect I should feel just so myself” (265). Significantly, Alessandro also does not seem overly tied to tribal bonds, choosing instead, for Ramona’s sake, to farm his own land and move from tribe to tribe when necessary—and eventually he and Ramona separate themselves even from other Indians. Choosing the nuclear family unit over his tribal unit, he shows signs of individualism, an important characteristic for his American citizenship.

However, Alessandro does not *want* to assimilate, and this separatism unfortunately alienates him from Jackson’s audience. Alessandro does not try to conform to the capitalist system. When Ramona suggests they go to Los Angeles, where he could

play the violin at dances and she could sell her lacework, and where, she reminds him, “many of your people...work for whites,” Alessandro adamantly rejects the idea and calls her “foolish” (278). This is not without reason, as he explains bitterly that Indians receive at best half the wages of a white man and at worst a bullet in the head for their work. Alessandro despairs of any legal solution to their quandary, and here Jackson’s critique of liberal reform plans is implicit. Alessandro’s bitterness and hatred toward whites demonstrate clearly his understandable unwillingness to work within the U.S. legal and economic system. But it also makes him nearly impossible for Jackson’s audience to identify with him. Despite his ability to succeed in a capitalistic system, he purposely sets himself apart from it. And his final descent into insanity only serves to confirm his identity as Other. Though the audience may sympathize with him, he does not seem similar to them, and thus he remains unidentifiable to them.

Ramona also demonstrates unwillingness to assimilate to Anglo culture. Like Alessandro, Ramona also declares at one point that she never wants to see another white face, and her flight from the U.S. at the end of the novel seems to rule out the possibility of a society in which Anglos and Indians are peacefully integrated. Ramona’s denouncement of white society is in stark contrast to the characters in *Squatter and the Don*, who go to great lengths to show that the Mexican Americans can and want to fit seamlessly into the American capitalistic society. Given Jackson’s audience and her goals, if Ramona and Alessandro’s denunciation of white culture is understandable, it also seems counter-productive, leaving the readers without a solution and preventing them from identifying with the characters.

The second part of the book also includes a sentimental device in the character of Maria Hyer. A stand-in for the reader in the same way as Miss Ophelia in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Aunt Ri" has overtly racist views until she meets Ramona and Alessandro. Like Jackson before her own education on the plight of the Indian, Ri's knowledge of Indians "had been drawn from newspapers, and from a book or two of massacres, and from an occasional sight of vagabond bands or families they had encountered in their journey across the plains" (286). Folksy migrants from Tennessee, when Ri's family rescues Alessandro and Ramona from a freak snowstorm and brings them to shelter, they are initially disappointed to discover that the family is Indian. But upon seeing Ramona's and her baby's blue eyes, and seeing how much Ramona cares for her daughter, Ri begins a conversion process that has her using rather painfully-written dialect to tirelessly advocate for the Indians. By the end of the novel, she has become the most outspoken character for Indian rights—more so even than Ramona and Alessandro themselves, whose response to injustice is to remove themselves from it. Aunt Ri is the feminine moral center of the novel, modeling the conversion Jackson hopes will take place in the reader.

But Ramona shuns even Aunt Ri, the only sympathetic white character in the book. Jackson's use of Aunt Ri here differs from Stowe's use of her own white convert. While Ophelia eventually accepts Topsy and adopts her in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Ri doesn't end up peacefully co-habiting with Ramona in the same way.<sup>1</sup> Wagner astutely notes that class issues are at work as well in Jackson's portrayal of the Hyers. As the only sympathetic white characters in the book, the Hyer family "bears the entire weight of the novel's moral life" (14). One consequence of this, he argues, is that Aunt Ri takes over

the Indian voice, effectively silencing Ramona and Alessandro's political response to the problem (14). But he also notes that Ri's dialect is so "outrageous" that it sets "clear limits to her readers' potential identification with the Hyers." Any conversion experienced by the reader through Aunt Ri is tempered by her illegible dialect, which distances her from the reader. Unlike a well educated naturalistic narrator, or even Miss Ophelia, Aunt Ri remains a cipher to Jackson's audience, a folksy dispenser of wisdom, but not one with whom the audience can identify, or even understand.

Ramona's choices in marriage also make her less identifiable to her audience. While Mercedes Alamar's blue eyes make her eligible for American high society and for marriage to the wealthy Clarence Darrow, symbolizing a union between Anglo and Hispanic America, Ramona marries a full-blooded Indian who leads her further and further from white society. Her "whiteness" is further diminished by the fact that she consciously chooses to deny it and identify herself with the Indians. Her renaming of herself "Majella," Indian for wood dove, shows her allegiance to her Indian blood. In fact, Ramona blends seamlessly into every culture she encounters but white culture. She demonstrates a seemingly inherent connection to the Indians because of her Indian blood, but Jackson also shows that blood ties are not required for assimilation, because at the end of the book Ramona also blends into Mexican culture, to which she has no blood ties at all. Ramona also vociferously—and understandably—refutes an offer of marriage from one of the white settlers. If blood is not the determinant, then, the reader can only conclude that her refusal to blend with white culture is willful. This is also demonstrated by her renunciation of her blue eyes: when her first daughter is born she laments that she does not look like Alessandro; when her second daughter is born she rejoices that she has

Alessandro's dark eyes (and it is not insignificant that the first, "whiter" baby dies). Despite her best intentions, Jackson seems to be unwittingly demonstrating that both Ramona and Alessandro are unassimilable by choice.

To further compound the problems of creating identification, Ramona and Alessandro are not even representative of typical Indians. They are portrayed as exceptional, having the best potential to join white society. Conversely, this implies that other Indians are even more "other" than Ramona and Alessandro, who can read, write, and lead. Although Jackson intended Alessandro to be a positive example of the potential of the Indians for success in America, he remains the "noble savage," making it difficult for the audience to identify with him strongly enough to demand change in Congress. If even Indians like Ramona and Alessandro, who come closer to "white" than ordinary Indians, do not desire assimilation, it seems unlikely that others will be capable of assimilation.

Another barrier to the audience's identification with the characters is religion. Jackson purposely courts the Christian majority audience, which she knew was a major constituent of the reform movement. She chose to publish the novel first serially in *The Christian Union* "1<sup>st</sup> because the Mags. could not begin it for year & a half—2d to hit the religious element—...I believe 100,000 readers of this sort will do more for the cause, than four times that number of idle magazine readers" (319). But by emphasizing Ramona's Catholicism, Jackson creates another barrier between her character and her audience, one that emphasizes Ramona's difference from them rather than her sameness.

Jackson knew that, like the abolitionist movement before it, late nineteenth-century Indian reformers were influenced heavily by the dominant evangelical Protestant

movement of the time. As a part of President Grant's attempt at reform, most Indian agency positions were given to Christian denominations, mostly Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quaker. Only seven of the seventy Indian agencies appointed by President Grant were given to the Catholic Church (Mathes, *Indian Reform* 2). Religious leaders also served as members of the Board of Indian Commissioners, and, as discussed above, prominent philanthropic groups such as the Indian Rights Association and the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA) believed strongly in educational and missionary work. The use of religion was common in reform novels: Stowe also deftly capitalized on her audience's Christian sympathies. As Jane Tompkins has insightfully demonstrated, *Uncle Tom's Christianity* and transcendent death enacted a philosophy "as much political as religious, in which the pure and powerless die to save the powerful and corrupt, and thereby show themselves more powerful than those they save" (128). But Jackson's use of religion contrasts sharply with Stowe's, in that rather than playing to her audience's Protestant beliefs, she emphasizes her characters' Catholicism, which would have served to make them more exotic.

Like *Uncle Tom* and Little Eva, Ramona is deeply pious. She is portrayed as an angel when Father Salvierderra sees her: "the sunbeams played around her hair like a halo; the whole place was aglow with red light, and her face kindled into transcendent beauty" (47). But in contrast to Little Eva and Tom, Ramona constantly exhibits ultra-Catholic characteristics that would be questionable to a Protestant evangelical audience. From their morning hymns to Ramona's prominently displayed Madonna, both Ramona and Alessandro are extremely devout. And, aside from Aunt Ri, only the priests of the Catholic Church—not, for instance, Protestant missionaries—see the injustice of the

Indians' treatment and are willing to help them. In the end, Alessandro's death does not serve any redemptive purpose; he does not die to save "the powerful and corrupt," and thus his death does not serve any transformative purpose. Although Jackson may have felt compelled to portray the couple's religiosity for realistic purposes, the main result of emphasizing Ramona's and Alessandro's Catholicism is that Jackson risks alienating a largely Protestant audience who might see it not as a bridge-building similarity but as an example of further distance between the Indians and themselves. Perhaps Jackson's own lack of interest in religion and missionary work is revealed in her novel.

Jackson does attempt to deal with this potential problem. Toward the end of the novel, Aunt Ri—originally anti-Catholic—becomes more broad-minded, admitting, "I allow I didn't never expect ter think's so well uv prayin' ti picters, 'n' strings er beads, 'n' such; but ef t's thet keeps her up ther way she's kept up, I allow thar's more in it 'n it's hed credit fur. I ain't gwine ter say enny more agin it, nor agin Injuns." When Ramona is near death, Felipe and the Indians drop to their knees praying, Ri initially holds herself apart, but then decides to "jine in prayer, tew" (341). But Aunt Ri is not converted to Catholicism; instead, she consciously remains apart from it, not praying "ter no picter." While her tolerance of it is admirable, it is not enough to bridge the differences between the two religions.

In contrast to *Ramona, Squatter and the Don* bridges Catholicism and Protestantism by showing examples of successful marriages between the two. But Ruiz de Burton's book is essentially secular: unlike the Señora Moreno, who rebelliously erects a large cross on her property to advertise her Catholicism to Anglo settlers, the Alamares barely acknowledge theirs. Doña Alamar objects to Mercedes' marriage to Clarence not because he is Protestant but because she thinks he is a squatter. Neither of

Ramona's marriages bridge this gap like *Squatter* does—both Alessandro and Felipe are Catholic, and Ramona shows no sign of converting to Protestantism. And so Jackson misses another opportunity to close the divisions between Ramona and her readers. Neither successfully secular like *Squatter*, in which the Other is made identifiable, nor successfully evangelical like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, religion in Ramona remains divisive.

As a result of their unwillingness to join white society and as a strong symbol of their difference, Ramona and Alessandro literally remove themselves from white territory time and time again. These removals serve purposes opposite from colonial captivity narratives such as Mary Rowlandson's. As Rowlandson was taken further and further from white society, she feared losing her civilizing instincts. But while Rowlandson mourned each remove, Alessandro and Ramona find renewed peace and spirit the further they get from society. Their final removal, to a valley high on San Jacinto Mountain with "lovely sheltered nooks" and a "crystal spring" that never runs dry, is where they give birth to their second child. They are perfectly suited to the pastoral life the valley affords them, seemingly secluded from all harm. But of course, even this hideaway proves unsafe from unprincipled Americans and becomes the site of Alessandro's death. There does not seem to be any place for the Indians to go, no matter how far they isolate themselves from white society.

Gonzalez argues that differences such as these show that Ramona and Alessandro are racially unassimilable. However, it is important that Jackson casts them not as incapable of assimilation, as their skills and education make clear. Rather, Jackson hints at a more complex understanding of race, suggesting that it is a construct rather than biologically determined, as was widely believed in her era—and thus she endows her characters with more agency than they are typically given credit for. Margaret Jacobs

faults Jackson for vacillating between racial determinism and fluidity, but Jackson presents a view of a racial fluidity that is not seen often in literature of this period. Ramona herself, the *mestizaje*, in effect chooses her race for herself, and changes her identity more than once in the narrative. Her Scottish blood allows her to claim whiteness (she is not as dark as Alessandro), but she chooses to identify herself as Indian once she leaves with Alessandro, naming herself Majella. She speaks of the power of naming: “The nuns taught us some names [of California plant life]; but they were hard, and I forgot them. We might name them for ourselves, if we lived here. They would be our relations” (209). Here, Ramona denies the power of the Church to name the plants and assumes that power herself. By choosing her own name, she empowers herself to choose her own relations and calls attention to the construct of race. By the end of the novel her racial identity has shifted again; this time her public identity is Mexican. Aunt Ri, too, alludes to the possibility of “changing” her race: “Pears like I’m gittin’ heaps er new ideas inter my head, these days. I’ll turn Injun, mebbe, afore I git through!” (349). While Ramona’s choices (if they can be called such) lead her away from white society, they also demonstrate her own agency in determining the type of life best suited to her, a fact often overlooked by critics.

It must be acknowledged that Jackson’s own narrative descriptors for Ramona and Alessandro strongly undercut the radical ideas about racial fluidity toward which she gestures. Despite Alessandro’s accomplishments, Jackson asserts repeatedly that he is “not a civilized man,” but rather one who obeys only “simple, primitive, uneducated instincts and impulses” (54) and is therefore limited in his range of choices. In arguing that Jackson was open to the idea of race as a construct, I do not claim that Jackson

disdained hierarchical racial beliefs typical of her time. I simply wish to suggest that Ramona's adoptions of other cultures seems to suggest that Jackson saw race as negotiable and not fully determined by blood.

Ramona's final exile to Mexico does not seem to offer the possibility of any practicable solution in America for the Indians. Critics have faulted Jackson for the ending of the novel, calling it too "happy" to work as a protest novel, or as demonstrating the Indians' incapability of becoming civilized. But rather than portraying them as *incapable* of assimilating, the novel portrays them as *unwilling* to assimilate, focusing more on unscrupulous settlers. In doing so, Jackson invests Ramona, Alessandro, and Felipe with more agency than other, more strongly assimilationist novels such as Callahan's *Wynema*, which ends in domestic bliss. If assimilation does not seem possible in the novel, perhaps this is a good thing, for Ramona is in the end able to "choose" her identity as a Mexican *señora* rather than being forced into a white culture that maligns and mistreats her. Ramona, Alessandro, and Felipe seem intent on retaining their otherness, choosing to remove themselves from situations in which their ethnic heritage faced obliteration instead of remaining. While Jackson does not seem capable of imagining how *californios*, Indians, and Anglos were to live together, she at least seems to demonstrate a willingness to respect the Indians' will to keep their culture alive. In any event, it is clear that she believed the Indians' "uneducated instincts" did not preclude them from legal protection, a notion not commonly held.

Unfortunately, this departure from mainstream public opinion worked against Jackson rhetorically. Because her most Americans at the time saw assimilation as the only possible solution to the Indian problem, Jackson's ambivalence toward it limited the political results of the novel. Ramona and Alessandro may have garnered sympathy from

the audience, but they remained exotic enough for the audience to continue to see the Indians as a group as different from itself—objects to be pitied, yes, but not really similar to them. Whereas Ruiz de Burton presents her Mexican-American characters as “civilized” Europeans who look like and act like Americans and who possess “American” traits, and who, above all, indicate willingness to join the dominant white culture, Jackson depicts the Indians as doing everything in their power to remain apart from it. If Alessandro and Ramona remain ardently opposed to assimilation, this cuts off the most popular avenue of reform. To her audience, then, it must have seemed that there was truly no solution, and therefore, no amount of reform could help.

### ***Ramona’s Effects and Sentimental Identification***

The direct political effects of *Ramona* were more diffuse than *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to which President Lincoln half-jokingly attributed the start of the Civil War. Jackson’s own letters reflect both disappointment and satisfaction with the results of her work. Before her death in 1885, she wrote to Will, “I would have liked to do a few more of the things I had planned—but now I am more than willing.—It is of no consequence about the few words more I could say—If *Ramona* & the Cent. Of Dishonor have not helped—one more would have made little odds—But they *will* tell in the long run—The thought of this is my only consolation as I look back over the last ten years” (*Letters* 345). She seems to be trying to convince herself that she has made some difference. Indeed, the novel did result limited reform, causing a general uptick in the level of national debate over the problem. Jackson’s work also seems to have inspired the WNIA to redouble its efforts, and in 1891 the Act For the Relief of the Mission Indians in the State of California was passed, based on the recommendations of Jackson and Abbot

Kinney 1883 (DeLyser 168). Some critics also attribute the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887 partially to *Ramona*—a mixed blessing, to be sure (Gonzalez 455). Thus, while the novel did not provoke a national debate on the scale Jackson hoped for, it did achieve more modest accomplishments.

Historical differences between Stowe's period and Jackson's made Jackson's task more difficult than Stowe's. As Valerie Mathes points out, the Indian problem affected in the low-hundreds of thousands of people, while there were millions of slaves. Westerners were greedy; they wanted Indian land. The fight to free slaves, on the other hand, was not over territory. And the Indians had to overcome their reputation as violent killers, which the slaves did not (Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson* 81). To this list I would add that, in the densely populated east, the slave problem seemed "national" in scope rather than regional. In contrast, in the west the government was doing its best to keep the Indian problem invisible. With the Indians relegated to the geographic and political margins of the nation, it would have been easy for an eastern audience to ignore the Indian problem (a problem the *californios* were also faced with). Therefore, Jackson had to convince a nation that this issue was not just a western problem but rather an issue of importance to the entire nation.

But aside from historical reasons for the difficulty Jackson faced, the chief reason for the novel's failure as social protest was her failed attempt at sentimental identification. Jackson consciously invoked *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in her writing of *Ramona*. She wished for it to "do for the Indian a thousandth part that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for the negro," as she wrote to Thomas Bailey Aldrich in 1883 and 1884 (Mathes 77). She also described a similar writing process to that of Stowe's, confessing

(most likely to Thomas Wentworth Higginson) that “the whole plot flashed into my mind,—not a vague one—the whole story just as it stands to-day,—in less than five minutes, as if some one spoke it. I sprang up, went to my husband’s room, and told him; I was half frightened. From that time, till I came here, it haunted me, becoming more and more vivid....As soon as I began, it seemed impossible to write fast enough” (Mathes, *Indian Reform Letters* 313).

Lauren Berlant argues that “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is an archive people come to out of a political optimism that the revolution in mass subjectivity for which it stands might be borrowed for the transformation of other unjust social institutions” (640). Clearly, Jackson was trying to capitalize on the genre that Stowe had used so astutely years earlier, so certain was she that if “right-feeling” men and women knew of the Indians’ plight they would join in the reform cause. According to Berlant, reference to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “marks a desire for identification and translation across nations, lexicons, and systems of hierarchy;” it also “is a sign that an aesthetic work can be powerful enough to move the people who read it into identifying against their own interests” (640). For Berlant, identification of the socially privileged with the abject is the main rhetorical strategy of sentimental literature (though she ultimately finds it ineffectual). But the ambivalence *Ramona* exhibits regarding identification—seen specifically in Ramona’s, Alessandro’s, and Felipe’s refusal to assimilate, despite strong national support for an assimilationist government policy—complicates a reading of the novel as sentimental. If Jackson intended to draw on the persuasive power of identification, she failed. Although parts of the text work hard to get the reader to identify with Ramona and Alessandro, other parts seem to go out of their way to continue to cast them as willfully Other.

Ultimately, her impulses to romanticize her California setting and to sentimentalize her characters were at odds with each other, in that sentimentalizing requires identification that romance precludes.

Many critics read *Ramona* simply as a romantic elegy for an imaginative California past. But while the impulse toward nostalgia does exist in her writing, I think it is Jackson's final unwillingness to get behind an assimilationist policy advocated by most of her audience that accounts for her refusal to allow Ramona, Alessandro, and Felipe to vanish in the face of "manifest domesticity." Jackson is finally unwilling to adhere to the sentimental ideal of "'one people' that can absorb all difference and struggle into a sponge of true feeling" (Berlant 655). Unfortunately, rather than moving towards the "postsentimental," as Berlant argues Toni Morrison does in *Beloved*,<sup>18</sup> Jackson doesn't know what to do with the Others that refuse to assimilate, and so they simply leave the U.S. The nation—Jackson's audience—then, does not have to deal with the Indians at all because they don't desire inclusion in it in the first place and vanish of their own accord. The audience is free to simply sympathize with the sad romance of Ramona and Alessandro, without ever being moved to take action to ameliorate the problem.

As its reception history shows, like *The Squatter and the Don*, *Ramona* was read not as contemporary social protest fiction, but as romantic history. The California myth had a stronghold on nineteenth-century readers, and Jackson's novel was both stymied by it and contributed to it. Though in the end, Ramona and Alessandro do not vanish under manifest domesticity, they nonetheless vanish anyway, either through insanity and death or a final removal beyond the nation's borders. Unlike Mercedes and her spirited family

that has so many “American” traits, the Indians—and Mexicans too, for that matter—in this novel do not finally belong in America. In choosing to retain their different ethnic heritages, they ultimately must give up their places in California. Jackson should be given credit for giving them the agency to determine their own racial identity and for recognizing that assimilation was not a perfect solution. But her inability to imagine any other solution crippled her rhetorically.

The most significant effect of the novel was its immediate and lasting effect on California’s social memory. *Ramona* inspired an enormous boom in tourism, as sites sprung up all over southern California claiming to be the “real” rancho Moreno. Towns squabbled to be named after the novel, and several “real” Ramonas made money posing for pictures. Jackson herself decorated her New York hotel rooms from which she wrote *Ramona* with Indian baskets and trinkets,<sup>19</sup> inspiring a basket-collecting craze, and George Wharton James’s *Through Ramona’s Country* acted as a guidebook for *Ramona* tourists, pointing out locations where the “true” *Ramona* story took place. One of the chief attractions of tourism is the opportunity to see the Other, the exotic, which does not bring about identification. Wagner insightfully suggests that the tourism the novel sparked was a result of Jackson’s use of local color to link Southern California to the post-Civil War South. The local color genre, he argues, invited readers to see these as interchangeable regions, both throwbacks to a more pastoral era, and invited them to tour and otherwise “consume” the regions, either physically or literarily.

As a tourist destination, California would remain on the economic margins of the nation, and therefore its problems too would remain on the political margins. Unlike Ruiz de Borton’s portrayal of the state as a vital part of the expanding nation’s economy,

the tourist-destination status of California that *Ramona* perpetuated relegated it to the picturesque, quaint, and extraneous. Perhaps as a native easterner, Jackson was afforded this distance in a way Ruiz de Burton, Norris, and Steinbeck were not. And yet I think that Jackson would not have been displeased with the tourism boom, partly because of her own penchant for collecting baskets and other Indian wares. Martin Padgett argues that the tourism and commodification of the region were not necessarily incompatible with reform, giving an admittedly against-the-grain reading of James's *Through Ramona's Country* that stresses James's concern for the remaining Indians in Southern California. James, Padgett argues, demonstrates "a typical combination of sympathy and exploitation" in his meeting with Ramona Lubo (an Mission Indian woman said to be the "real" Ramona), but is also "forced to acknowledge her individual agency" (861). The same could be said about Jackson's own attitudes toward the Indians and California. Jackson died a year after *Ramona* was published, and therefore never got to see the ultimate results of her work. But given her desire to stir the debate, to publicize the cause of the Indians, she probably would have been pleased to see that her work inspired people to witness the state of the Mission Indians. In any event, it cannot be denied that tourism did change the land. As Dydia DeLyser argues, "Though some scholars have implied that Ramona tourists were simple-minded dupes who readily confused the fictional Ramona-inspired past with the real one, and who were easily lured to phony Ramona sites where they could be relieved of their moneys by an array of superficial Ramona souvenirs, the reality is far more complex, for through the landscape these fictional places in fact became real" (xii). The Ramona myth has entered the consciousness of California, for better or worse.

*Ramona* contributes an important voice to the California conflict over the land. It argues on behalf of a people that *Squatter and the Don* ignores at best and denigrates at worst. Though I don't want to argue that Jackson was a proto-multiculturalist, she at least recognized that the Indians may not have wanted to be absorbed into white culture. What alternative remained, she was unable to articulate. But for Jackson, it didn't matter whether the Indians were American; their land rights had to be preserved. Unfortunately, this was a leap her American reading public didn't seem to be ready to make, especially given their readiness to embrace the romantic mission history the novel that dominates the novel. Too much romance and not enough sentimental identification resulted in characters who were too distant from their audience. But while the novel ultimately did not foster the kind of reform Jackson hoped it would, she should be commended for portraying her characters as having identities other than as minorities seeking to be seen as whites.

## Chapter 3

### Frank Norris's *The Octopus*: Epic Capitalism

Facing west from California's shores,  
Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,  
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land  
of migrations, look afar,  
Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled;  
For starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere,  
From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero,  
From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands,  
Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd,  
Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,  
(But where is what I started for so long ago?  
And why is it yet unfound?)

—Walt Whitman, 1860

Like *The Squatter and the Don*, Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) has often been read as a powerful indictment of the Southern Pacific Railroad's monopoly that put a stranglehold on California farmers, both large and small, in the late nineteenth century. Contemporary reviews show that it spoke to a pressing political concern of the late nineteenth century. B.O. Flower, writing for *Arena* in 1902, exhorted his readers that in reading the book aloud to family and neighbors, "you will be helping to awaken the people from the death-dealing slumber that has been brought about by the multitudinous influences of corporate greed, controlling the machinery of government and the opinion-forming agencies of the Republic" (31). Flower sees the novel as not only a story about the California railroads but also "of the railroad corporations of the United States, and of the trusts in general" (Davison 30). I.F. Marcossan wrote in 1901 that *The Octopus* was "a terrific protest against the oppression of a community by a great railroad" (129). The review in *The Outlook* states, "Certainly the reader must feel inclined by the vivid, dramatic narrative to the belief that a railroad system having a monopoly because of no business competitor, a carrier upon which the public at large depends for service, should be forced to submit to public supervision, even in the matter of rates, to prevent positive oppression" (McElrath 134). Norris's novel tells the story of a group of Central California tenant ranchers who, stymied by the economic and political power of the railroad to set arbitrary freight rates and renege on land deals, form a league to buy representatives on the railroad commission and eventually pay with their lives in a bloody shoot-out. The novel immediately captivated readers and, after the previous success of *McTeague*, confirmed the young writer's status as a "serious" author. Indeed, the novel

compellingly details the suffering and violence inflicted on Norris's well-drawn characters by the corrupt railroad men. And although the historical Mussel Slough shooting that is fictionalized in the novel occurred in 1880, well before the time of the novel's publication, the issues of monopoly capitalism it raised continued to give the novel exigence in 1901.

But although the novel in some ways seems to be a strong condemnation of monopolism, reading *The Octopus* as a social protest novel has also been problematic for critics, especially those responding to it after its initial publication, because of its seeming philosophical inconsistencies. While much of the book focuses on the inequities of monopoly capitalism, the novel ends on a surprisingly upbeat note and seems to dismiss the issues it has raised as unimportant. Critics have either deplored the ending or attempted to reconcile it with the bulk of the book in various ways. In 1933 Granville Hicks found that the novel is "in the end too false" and that Norris "seems never to have understood" the "philosophic implications" of determinism as introduced to him by Zola. "As a theory," Hicks writes, the ending is "ridiculous, and it destroys the emotional effect of the book" (38-9). Walter Fuller Taylor writes in 1942 that the ending, "instead of serving its apparent purpose of closing the terrible story upon a level of serene reconciliation, has rather the disconcerting effect of a verdict given against the evidence"(67). George Wilbur Meyer (1943) attempts to reconcile the two philosophies by making a distinction between determinism and fatalism, arguing that while the events of the novel are shaped by inevitable forces, history is not doomed to repeat them, and that Presley's final pronouncement at the end of the novel is not reflective of Norris's views. Donald Pizer (1955) finds that the reader should only take seriously Presley's final

intellectual development as representative of Norris's own beliefs, and that "freedom on the personal level [and] determinism on the 'cosmic' ... are not incompatible in Norris's mind, and he would feel no need to resolve them" ("Another Look" 94). In a later article (1962), Pizer argues that the novel "makes sense within an evolutionary theistic context" ("Concept of Nature" 113), and that Norris is looking backwards toward transcendentalism and its thought about the relationship between humans and nature rather than forward. But for Charles Walcutt (1966), the problem of whether "people must or should stand for such criminal injustice" is "not solved" (99). Also in opposition to Pizer, James Folsom (1962) finds the ending to be spoken in Presley's voice and entirely ironic; for him, the argument is not over force, but rather "over what is fair profit" (399). More recently (1985), James Machor has argued that Norris attempts to write an epic, but Annixter's death leaves the epic incomplete and causes the novel to revert to romance, thus explaining the conflicting philosophies. Torsten Pettersson (1987) traces the discrepancy to the conflicting influences of Zola, Calvinism, and evolutionary theory that were reflective of the conflicting theories of the nineteenth century, when "Christian beliefs and values were crumbling under the impact of secular convictions deriving from the natural sciences" (91). Pettersson also suggests that Norris's synthesis of social critique with naturalism is in line with other naturalistic literature. Charles Duncan (1993) argues that the multiplicity of viewpoints in the novel is intentional; the novel demonstrates that "the artistic ordering of experience does not always result in simplification" (57). This summary is certainly not exhaustive but rather representative of some of the ways critics have attempted to explain the apparent disjuncture in the novel.

Norris's essays give us valuable insights into his literary and social theories, which inform the novel and help explain what modern critics have seen as an inconsistency between the bulk of the book and its conclusion. In this chapter I discuss the reasons the novel has been read as a social protest novel and how Norris complicates this type of reading, and I suggest an alternative argument Norris is making based partly on his essays—one, I argue, that involves American and western American literature, and the role of California in the nineteenth-century project of United States expansion.

### ***The Octopus as Social Protest Novel***

As the early reviews testify, *The Octopus* makes a dramatic comment on the injustices the San Joaquin farmers faced at the hands of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the late nineteenth century. The novel's essential historical veracity is one reason a social protest reading is so persuasive. Norris's journalistic training and his desire to "get hold of...the *details* of this kind of game, the lingo, and the technique" drove him to research his subject meticulously (Letter to Harry M. Wright, Davison 2). He spent months traveling California, interviewing people from all sides of the matter and working on a sacking-platform in Hollister to get a feel for ranch life. At one point in the novel, in a style similar to Ruiz de Burton's when she quotes verbatim from legislation, the farmers read aloud almost verbatim from a railroad circular, the *California Guide Book*, that encourages settlement of the land and virtually guarantees them a low purchase price once the railroad owned the land outright (Conlogue 43). And, as the novel's map of the railroad's holdings attests, the Southern Pacific Railroad (thinly disguised as the Pacific and Southwest Railroad in the novel) was in reality the largest landholder in the state, making it somewhat less than popular among Californians. The Mussel Slough shooting,

according to Kevin Starr, “impressed itself deeply on Californians; it distilled and dramatized the core conflict of the state, monopoly versus individual ownership” (xvi). The survivors of the historical incident were treated more like heroes than vigilante outlaws: after a brief and privileged prison term they were welcomed back into California society with celebration (Starr xvi). The novel’s very subject, then, resonated deeply with its audience; a plotline about such a politically charged incident would make it almost impossible for Norris’s immediate audience to ignore the political implications of the novel. Indeed, the injustices the farmers face resonate with modern audiences as well, and have resulted in the continued desire in modern critics to read the novel as social protest.

Norris’s well-developed characters usually elicit the same sympathy from their audience that their historical counterparts did (with the notable exception of the reviewer of *The Dial*, who sided with the railroad and saw the ranchers as standing “without the law” and illustrating “nearly every form of violence and anarchy” [Davison 20]. It is rather a stretch, though, to defend the railroad as working within the law, as this reviewer does.). Norris’s success in establishing identification between his audience—both contemporary and modern—and his characters is remarkable, given that in many ways most of the “victims” in this novel are highly privileged men. Buck Annixter and Magnus Derrick are both wealthy white settlers, holders of vast tracts of land. They are the agricultural industrialists who would later mercilessly oppress the migrant workers in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Unlike the migrant farmers of *The Grapes of Wrath*, they do not love the land, do not feel a connection to the earth, but rather squeeze it dry before moving on to another enterprise. But Norris nonetheless succeeds in making them sympathetic

characters with whom the audience can identify, which was perhaps made easier by the fact that Norris believed the reading public of America to be “the well-to-do” (1199), and therefore perhaps likely to identify more easily with wealthy characters.

Annixter is the most sympathetic of the ranchers. He is college educated, a “true Yankee” (595), a hard worker, obstinate and blustery about “female women,” but also transparently vulnerable, especially in his romance with Hilma Tree. His love for her transforms him into a person keenly aware of the human suffering around him and prods him into selflessly taking Mrs. Dyke and Sidney into his household after Dyke has been captured. In the end, his fight against the railroad is not solely for his own selfish gain; he wants to feel “that there are other interests than mine in the game” (841). Annixter persuades the reader that they share common interests, and that the ranchers do not represent simply a different branch of heartless capitalism. His transformation into a selfless, loving man makes his death, matter-of-factly reported—“Annixter, instantly killed, fell his length to the ground, and lay without movement, just as he had fallen, one arm across his face” (993)—all the more “hard to take,” as David Wyatt puts it, for its economy of phrase. Wyatt’s identification with Annixter and the others is clear: “There is, for me, no more moving scene in American fiction, and its power is due to the skill with which Norris has included me as a *bystander*. I have been preparing myself to stand in with those characters in one fight” (123). Jack London had a similar reaction to the shooting: “[I]t is Annixter, instantly killed, falling without movement, for whom we first weep. A living man there died” (154). The reactions to Annixter’s stunning death indicate the close identification Norris could create between Annixter and some of his readers.

Even “Governor” Magnus Derrick, who mercilessly kicks his tenants off his land so that he can reap even bigger profits, comes off as the underdog in the face of the virtually limitless power of the railroad. Magnus’s fondness for his sons, his natural leadership abilities, and his dignity all make him a sympathetic character. But his internal struggle over whether to join the League as its president is what really gives him depth, as the “statesman” in him clings to the “Old School” of “honesty, rectitude, [and] uncompromising integrity” and rises up, futilely, against the “politician” of the “new order,” who turns out to be his own son Lyman (667). Magnus is put in an impossible situation, where “Wrong seemed indissolubly knitted into the texture of Right” (808). But, having chosen his new path, he proves unfit for leadership under the new order, unable to match the railroad’s corruption, and unprepared for Lyman’s betrayal. While Magnus never becomes a true governor, Lyman is the true member of the new order, a deal-maker, a city man who understands the efficacy of politics behind closed doors. When Magnus is exposed as a briber, his regret over his involvement in the affair is palpable, and when his other son Harran is killed in the shootout, his descent into insanity and final humiliation by Behrman is filled with pathos. If Annixter’s transformation is from a boy to a man before his untimely death, Derrick’s is from a leader and man of honor to an old man, “broken, discarded, discredited, and abandoned” (1024). By the end of the novel he is utterly devastated, and the difficult decisions he has to make that lead to his eventual ruin make him a character with whom the audience can identify.

It is not only the wealthy who suffer, however. Norris shows that the less wealthy also suffer at the hands—or tentacles—of the railroad. By the end of the novel, the Trees have had to quit their pastoral dairy on Annixter’s land; Hilma is widowed and has

miscarried; Dyke, a small hops farmer who is financially ruined by the railroad's arbitrary rate hike and so becomes a vigilante, is sentenced to life in prison, and Sydney Dyke is left without a father; Mrs. Hooven dies of starvation and exposure in San Francisco, and her daughter is forced to either prostitute herself or starve. As the red tentacles on the map of California Norris describes show, the railroad was like "a gigantic parasite fattening upon the life-blood of an entire commonwealth" (806). The railroad affects not just the wealthy ranch owners, but people from the entire state. These minor characters thus help universalize the problem and demonstrate that it is not only the special interests of the wealthy ranchers that the railroad jeopardizes.

Wyatt admits to Norris's power to get the reader to "take sides...[T]he ranchers are individuated through the pattern of expectation in ways that make them the primary objects of our concern" (*Fall* 120). Norris's interview with real-life railroad magnate Collis Huntington may have led to Norris's inclusion of Presley's interview with Shelgrim, the president of the P. & S.W. in the novel, in which the poet is surprised to find a compassionate, thoughtful art critic. But throughout the novel, the railroad remains a monster, unidentifiable, capable of eliciting no sympathy from the reader. Unlike the ranchers, Behrman, the railroad's henchman, is a type (vivid though the rolls of fat on the back of his neck may be); the reader does not enter his consciousness until the very end of the novel, and in contrast to the ranchers' deaths, his gruesome death is usually met with some degree of satisfaction.

Given the highly sympathetic protagonists and the unsympathetic antagonists of the novel, it is understandable that it has been read as a protest against this disembodied force that causes the death and despair of so many good people. But, as it is difficult to

argue against a “force,” despite the novel’s power to incite moral outrage and despite its seeming call to reform, a social protest reading is ultimately problematic. The novel concludes with Presley at the helm of a ship on its way to India to deliver wheat to the starving people there. With its unabashed optimism about the victory of good over evil, the ending seems out of step with the human suffering the ranchers and their families endure:

Falseness dies; injustice and oppression in the end of everything fade and vanish away. Greed, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity are short-lived; the individual suffers, but the race goes on. Annixter dies, but in a far distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved. The larger view always and through all shams, all wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good. (1097-8)

On the one hand, the novel asks its readers to invest themselves emotionally in extremely sympathetic characters pitted against daunting odds, as discussed above. But on the other hand, the optimism of the conclusion and Norris’s commitment to the theories of naturalism, with their emphasis on deterministic forces, do not lend themselves to arguments for reform. Coming late in the novel, Presley’s interview with Shelgrim seems to introduce an entirely new viewpoint in which no one is really responsible for the deaths and suffering of the ranchers. Shelgrim appears to convince Presley that “*Railroads build themselves....You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men....I cannot control it. It is a force born out of certain conditions, and I—no man—can stop it or control it*” (1036-7). In a similar interview in Ruiz de Burton’s novel, the Don and his friends refuse to accept such a

pronouncement, but for Presley, “the words rang with the clear reverberation of truth” (1037). The novel’s concluding paragraph also supports Shelgrim’s view and seems even more optimistic than Shelgrim’s pronouncements. Despite the poetic justice of Shelgrim’s grim death in the hold of the *Swanhilda*, it is difficult to accept that the ranchers’ demises are worth the good that will come of them. It is not as if Annixter’s death were *necessary* for the wheat to reach its final destination. Thus the ending, to many, rings hollow with an optimism that seems false and undeserved.

### **Norris’s Literary Criticism**

Norris’s literary criticism is helpful in explaining the novel’s contradiction between its plea for justice for the ranchers that seems apparent throughout a good two-thirds of the book and its optimistic ending which seems to assert that the ranchers’ deaths are of no consequence. Norris’s essays reveal a great deal about his complex ideas about the purpose of the novel. Given his literary theories, it is not likely that he intended *The Octopus* to be a political protest against the railroad in the same way that *The Squatter and the Don*, *Ramona*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* were clearly intended to be political protests. In fact, one reviewer quotes a personal letter of Norris’s as saying, “I do not think I shall attempt any solution of the problem involved in ‘The Epic of the Wheat.’ The novelist, of necessity, deals rather with conditions than with theories, and I think I shall leave to the political economist the solutions of the problems of the ‘present discontent’” (McElrath 156). Norris does argue in his essay “The Novel with a Purpose” (1902) that the best novel “proves something,” however, this “something” is not necessarily an isolated political argument but rather “draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men

but of man” (1196). Emphasizing the necessity for artistic distance, he argues that “the moment the writer becomes really and vitally interested in his purpose his novel fails” (1198). If he follows his own advice, then, Norris must remain emotionally detached from the “iniquitous” freight system the ranchers were up against. For the novelist, the working out of the story, not its political effects, is of primary concern. This seems to deny a rhetorical dimension to the novel and helps to explain why Norris seems to abandon his characters at the end—he has other, larger concerns in mind than those of the individual ranchers.

But in the same essay, Norris also asserts that the novel

may be a great force, that works together with the pulpit and the universities for the good of the people, fearlessly proving that power is abused, that the strong grind the faces of the weak, that an evil tree is still growing in the midst of the garden, that undoing follows hard upon unrighteousness, that the course of Empire is not yet finished, and that the races of men have yet to work out their destiny in those great and terrible movements that crush and grind and rend asunder the pillars of the houses of the nations. (1200)

This rich passage is reflective of the underlying tension that surfaces in *The Octopus*. Here, Norris *does* argue that novels should protest social injustice—that they can serve as powerful ideological tools that can expose the “evil tree” in the midst of the garden (an interesting agricultural metaphor, given the work of taming the California “garden” and making it profitable). On one hand, the first two thirds of *The Octopus* seem to attempt to prove that “power is abused.” But by the novel’s end, “undoing” does not seem to follow hard upon “unrighteousness,” as it should, S. Behrman’s death notwithstanding. *The*

*Octopus* seems to switch tracks in the middle of the novel, as Norris does in the above quoted paragraph, switching his focus from political injustice to larger, unalterable forces such as the “course of Empire” and “destiny” and “movements.” Rather than focus his novel on individuals (which he did perhaps too well), he wants to get at the bigger picture, the “whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses.”

In attempting to get at the bigger picture, Norris’s ideas about reality are belied in the sentence that touches on his view of “destiny” which cannot be stopped: the “course of Empire” and “race impulses.” The ranchers, though expertly drawn, sympathetic characters, are only a small part of the overarching narrative for Norris. The ideology of racial empire is Norris’s real subject, not the individual plights of the ranchers. And, representing the final chapter of U.S. continental expansion, California is central to his argument about the course of empire.

### **From West to East: Naturalism and the “Course of Empire”**

Written soon after the publication of *The Octopus*, Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous Frontier Theory demonstrated Americans’ belief that the frontier and the sense of space and the “strenuous life” it provided the nation was no more. The very thing that made Americans distinctly American, Turner argued, was gone. Like many of this era, Norris, too, was nostalgic for the frontier and unwilling to see it end. As he writes in “The Frontier Gone at Last” (1902), “We liked the Frontier; it was romance, the place of poetry of the Great March, the firing line where there was action and fighting, and where men held each other’s lives in the crook of the forefinger” (1183). He notes that the American western frontier has already “become conscious of itself, acts the part for the Eastern visitor; and this self-consciousness is a sign, surer than all others, of the

decadence of a type, the passing of an epoch” (1185). In many ways *The Octopus* is a novel about the transition of the west from its gold rush days to a more stable and integral position in the national economy and geography. Magnus’s days as “old school” Governor are over; despite his modern farming techniques, he is ill-prepared to fight the railroad on its own terms. California is no longer the frontier, but rather in many ways becoming more like the east and its settled ways.

But Norris cannot relegate the frontier altogether to the past. The Anglo-Saxon race “still must march, still must conquer” (1185). In “The Frontier Gone at Last,” Norris traces the frontier of western expansionism through the Middle Ages, from England to the east coast of the United States, to the continent’s west coast. Now, however, according to Norris, the spirit of Anglo-Saxon conquest will turn its focus so far west, it ends up being east. Norris’s ideas were not new: as early as 1818, American expansionists foresaw the opening of the west as a gateway to trade with the East: Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton prophesied, “In a few years, the Rocky Mountains will be passed, and the ‘children of Adam’ will have completed the circumambulation of the globe, by marching to the west until they arrive at the Pacific ocean, in sight of the eastern shore of that Asia in which their parents were originally planted” (qtd. in Sundquist 136). At the turn of the century this continued “impulse” to conquer manifested itself in Roosevelt’s aggressive military foreign policy. During the Spanish-American War, in which the United States wrested control of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898, Roosevelt’s foreign policy of unabashed imperialism was intended to be benevolent; Roosevelt saw it as a means of snatching parts of the world “from the forces of darkness” (“Strenuous”). Benevolent imperialism would have

seemed to Roosevelt as in keeping with his progressive ideas of reform; U.S. expansion was merely reform on an international scale. “In the long run,” he argued, “there can be no justification for one race managing or controlling another unless the management and control are exercised in the interest and for the benefit of that other race. This is what our peoples have in the main done, and must continue in the future in even greater degree to do, in India, Egypt, and the Philippines alike” (History).

*The Octopus*, published shortly after the Spanish-American War, has a similar imperialistic agenda. For Norris, this benevolent imperialism took the form of trade. He conflates the two terms trade and war, calling them “only a different word for the same race-characteristic” (1185-6). Even if, argues Norris, the actual time for physical conquest of territory or nations was over, “the desire for conquest...was as big in the breast of the most fervid of the Crusaders as it is this very day in the most peacefully-disposed of American manufacturers” (1186). Roosevelt also linked “naval and commercial supremacy” (“Strenuous”), and Norris optimistically envisions an eventual, gentler version of trade, one that will unite the entire world in a common sense of internationalist patriotism, when Americans “realize that the true patriotism is the brotherhood of man and know that the whole world is our nation and simple humanity our countrymen” (1190). By circling the globe, in his view, the Anglo-Saxon will bring peace and prosperity to the entire world.

This imperialistic ideology finds expression in *The Octopus*. If we read the novel with Norris’s theories about the novel and empire in mind, the seeming split between the first and second parts of the novel becomes understandable, because Norris’s real argument in *The Octopus* is not to excoriate monopoly capitalism (as Roosevelt did) but

to argue for the continued expansion of the United States, if not by means of military conquest, then by trade. The overarching American narrative for Norris is the one that began with Columbus' landing in the West Indies and continued across the entire continent—the epic of Manifest Destiny. The wheat in the novel is a symbol of this corporate and racial expansion; the epic of conquest has turned into the epic of capitalism. For Norris, this frontier is not closed, and western Americans are only part of a continuing cycle—perhaps the final chapter in continental Manifest Destiny, but only a part of a new global expansion. The wheat, as it finally makes its way overseas, is the final step in the epic journey, as it completes the long westward journey around the globe.

In this reading Cedarquist, who is often overlooked by critics, becomes an essential character as the one who, even more than Shelgrim, gives voice to Norris's ideas about the course of empire. With his grandiose ideas to cut out the middleman and ship directly to Asia, Cedarquist is the real visionary. A shrewd businessman, Cedarquist is the late-nineteenth century's military man: his manner suggests that of "a retired naval officer" (815). He acts on Norris's desire for a "gentler" form of trade and competition, a version of trade which allows for humanitarian impulses but also manages to turn a profit.

Like the famous recommendation of "Plastics" in *The Graduate*, Cedarquist's business advice to the Derricks is succinct: "Markets." He elaborates, though:

The great word of this nineteenth century has been Production. The great word of the twentieth century will be—listen to me, you youngsters—Markets. As a market for our Production—or let me take a concrete example—as a market for our *Wheat*, Europe is played out....For years we have been sending our wheat from East to West, from California to

Europe. But the time will come when we must send it from West to East. We must march with the course of empire, not against it. I mean, we must look to China. (819)

Military conquest often seeks to expand production, to make more natural resources available to the nation. But given the amount of wheat the United States was already capable of producing, acquiring these resources was no longer the imperative in the early twentieth century. Instead of territorial conquest, more consumers were required for the vast production the United States was already able to sustain. Savvy businessmen like Cedarquist, therefore, looked to Asia as a promising new source of consumers. “Tell the men of the East to look out for the men of the West,” Cedarquist warns. “The irrepressible Yank is knocking at the doors of their temples and he will want to sell ‘em carpet-sweepers for their harems and electric light plants for their temple shrines” (1095). An army of salesmen rather than soldiers will conquer the East.

According to Cedarquist, the Trust and American indifference to public affairs are preventing the nation from fulfilling its imperial destiny of market expansion. So to the extent that the railroad monopoly is preventing this, the novel is anti-monopolism. But the ending of the novel, with Behrman’s gruesome death, makes it clear that not even monopoly can stop the wheat—and thus, America’s influence—from making its way around the globe: the wheat inexorably leaves the west coast port in the hold of Cedarquist’s ships. Cedarquist’s ideas about the importance of a global marketplace have proven to be quite visionary, as historically he has proven to be right: in 2001 the United States exported a net total of over three billion dollars of wheat worldwide (U.S. Census Bureau), and global capitalism seems unstoppable.

In his pursuit of “gentler trade,” Cedarquist fervently believes that trade and development, and not other sham humanitarian efforts, are the true ways to benefit people. He mocks the efforts of the ladies’ committee, of which his wife is a prominent member. Her favorite activities, according to her husband, include supporting the con-artist-of-the-month posing as any number of characters and discussing over “teacups and plates of salad” ways to help famine victims in India. The committee also sponsors a fair in San Francisco to encourage Eastern investors to come to the state. Cedarquist decries San Francisco’s civic mindedness and calls attention to the difference between seeming humanitarianism and true support for the city. To Cedarquist, the women’s fair is a “sham of tinsel and pasteboard” (817). If they really want to benefit the state, Cedarquist argues, they should invest in his Atlas Steel company, which has recently shuttered its doors and with which he was hoping to build his ships. Instead, the Eastern investors will be greeted with only a statue of dried apricots—a comic tribute to both the state’s agriculture and thriving arts community—and an abandoned mill.

While Norris mocks these trivial—and “feminine”—attempts at benevolence, this is not to say he does not believe progressive reform is possible, even within the framework of naturalism. Instead, Norris believes that the forces of empire—in this case, the forces of capitalism—will ultimately result in reform. Thus, the naturalism-progressivism binary that has presented a quandary for many critics is perhaps false. For Norris, the reform will simply come in the form of the free market, not in the form of the ladies’ committees. Of course, even though Cedarquist touts the humanitarian benefits of his plan, he is ultimately more concerned that his fleet is “prospering” (1094).

Investment in the Atlas Steel Company will not only benefit the starving Indians, but will also comfortably line Cedarquist's own pockets.

Cedarquist's words resonate with Magnus, who agrees that "the whole East is opening, disintegrating before the Anglo-Saxon. It is time that bread stuffs, as well, should make markets for themselves in the Orient" (830). He is immediately enamored with the idea, "seeing only the grand coup, the huge results, the East conquered, the march of empire rolling westward, finally arriving at its starting point, the vague, mysterious Orient. He saw his wheat, like the crest of an advancing billow, crossing the Pacific, bursting upon Asia, flooding the Orient in a golden torrent. It was the new era" (831). The idea appeals to Magnus's western character, "the pioneer, hardy, brilliant, taking colossal chances, blazing the way, grasping a fortune—a million in a single day" (831). But Magnus is a bit too old; a frontiersman of an older age, he grasps the idea of something big, but he is not yet savvy enough to successfully make it come about.

Given Norris's views about the American west and its role in the inevitable westward march of the Anglo-Saxon, the novel's optimistic, romantic ending can be understood as Norris's rhetorical attempt to naturalize the imperialistic aspirations of the nation. Eric Sundquist notes that Enlightenment ideals were often used to justify territorial exploration and expansion as following "organic laws of growth" (128). Norris picks up on this organicism, making United States' imperialism seem unavoidable, and the novel's conclusion hides the fact that actual people are responsible for it. Economic imperialism is, according to the logic of the novel, a biological imperative that follows laws of nature that cannot be disobeyed. If nothing can stop the forward march of the Anglo Saxon, and if, indeed, this cycle of expansion eventually works out for the good, then expansion across the sea is the inexorable conclusion. But Norris's ending, his

refusal to overtly attach human agency to the ultimate westward expansion—due, he claims, to “race impulses”—hides the fact that the imperialist movement is actually the result of human political and economic agendas. And it proves impossible for Norris to keep this troubling fact beneath the surface even within the context of the novel itself; the novel exhibits contradictions despite Norris’s attempt to argue them away.

One way Norris “naturalizes” the course of empire is to portray “race characteristics” as biological imperatives. Norris linked the “course of empire” to race, and indeed, the Anglo-Saxon “race impulse” is a common undercurrent in almost all of Norris’s works. “Races must follow their destiny blindly,” he baldly states in his essay “The Frontier Gone at Last” (1188). Unsurprisingly, for Norris the Anglo-Saxon’s “natural” impulse of conquest and expansion puts Anglos at the top of the racial hierarchy. The assumption of determined “race characteristics” was, of course, not unique to Norris, as evidenced by the blithe racial assumptions in texts by Jackson, Harte, and Atherton.

For Norris, the “race impulses” of the Anglo-Saxon are what drive him to conquer, and it seems to be the white man’s racial destiny (or “burden,” to use Kipling’s term) to work at a fever pitch to take over the world. Like many of Roosevelt’s writings, *The Octopus* exhibits a highly defined racial hierarchy. It is no surprise that the heroes of the novel are Anglo-Saxon. Even the German Hooven, though white, remains on the fringes of power and wealth, excluded from the circle of the landowners and their hopes for a bonanza crop and profits. Even though he gives his life for their cause, he is not invested in the national project of expansion—he is more interested in his own family than in the abstract concept of nation. Hooven has a more local definition for nation: “[D]er Vaterland iss vhair der home und der wife und kinder is. Eh? Yes? Voad? Ach,

no. Me, I nef'r voad. I doand bodder der haid mit dose ting. I maig der wheat grow, und ged der braid fur der wife und Hilda, dot's all" (716). His lack of participation in the electoral process and his interest only in sustenance farming are contrary to the values of the Leaguers. But, not being from English stock, he cannot be expected to have the same drive to conquer as his friends. Although he has proven himself in battle for Germany, he does not see the point of battle: "Den when der night come dey say we hev der great victorie made. I doand know. What do I see von der bettle? Noddun" (715).

Unfortunately, he is not exempt from the violence that the ranchers see as necessary, but the sacrifice that Hooven makes of his life is more for his family and friends than a political statement.

While Hooven is at least allowed somewhat into the circle of the owners, further down the novel's racial scale are the Mexicans and Portuguese. Norris plays into the oft-repeated romantic mythology of California's history, portraying the Mexican town of Guadalajara and its denizens as indolent and nostalgic for the good old days before the railroad took over the state. The Mexicans are "relics of a former generation, standing for a different order of things, absolutely idle, living God knew how, happy with their cigarette, their guitar, their glass of mescal, and their siesta" (593). The mission, too, is decayed and practically deserted, a picturesque tourist spot with a cockfighting priest. But Norris's most negative portrayal of the Hispanics is during the rabbit chase. Once the rabbits have been corralled, the white landowners turn away "in disgust" from their butchering and attend to their own barbeque (a more civilized kind of butchery, apparently), but "the hot, degenerated blood of Portuguese, Mexican, and mixed Spaniard boiled up in excitement at this wholesale slaughter" (978). The racial judgment, implied

elsewhere in the novel, is explicit here, and justifies for Norris the degraded state of Guadalajara and the ascension of the Anglo-Americans' industrial agriculture.

The lower economic status of Hooven and the Mexican-Americans would be for a naturalist such as Norris a result of their race rather than individual character flaws. Only the Anglo-Saxons in the novel are politically and economically driven—a notion Ruiz de Burton pointedly refutes in her novel. The other races are portrayed as somehow less “American” than the Anglo-Saxons. Hooven does not participate in the political process, he is not committed to American expansion, and he speaks with a thick accent; all are markers of his foreign identity. The Mexican-Americans are also almost completely physically separated from the American culture of California; they live in their own ghetto and speak a different language, though they do show up at events such as the rabbit slaughter to revel in the blood and gore. Norris does not allow for the racial fluidity that Ruiz de Burton does; unlike her *californios*, these Mexicans cannot hope to possess such “American” traits as industry. Thus, in the framework of the novel Anglo-Saxon economic and political supremacy and expansion is justified on the grounds that it is biologically determined.

Another way Norris naturalizes the imperialistic conclusions of the novel is by focusing on the organic, biological force of the wheat. Throughout the novel Norris portrays the wheat as a purely natural, unstoppable force:

As if human agency could affect this colossal power!...Men, Liliputians, gnats in the sunshine, buzzed impudently in their tiny battles, were born, lived through their little day, died, and were forgotten; while the Wheat, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, grew steadily under the night, alone with the stars and with God. (934)

In a similar passage, the earth demands “to be made fruitful, to reproduce” (678). It is the most beguiling of California myths: that its riches are just sitting, waiting, wanting to be used. The wheat seems to have a will of its own, capable of sprouting forth without cultivation. If human agency cannot affect the growing of the wheat—and, by extension, its deliverance to the hungry people of the world for consumption—then the League’s plan to intervene in the process is foolhardy, Norris seems to argue. It is futile to try to control the course of empire.

But the assumption that the wheat’s destiny is not due to human agency is flawed, and throughout the novel Norris seems to contradict himself, perhaps torn between the two conflicting ends of the book. To the contrary, human agency is of course completely responsible for the wheat’s “colossal power.” The wheat is a product of careful investment, planning, and hard human and animal labor; it does not sprout on its own, least of all in California, where the dry soil is better suited to fruit and nut orchards. Norris’s own description of the sowing, painted in epic tones, belies the “naturalness” of the wheat fields:

Everywhere there were visions of glossy brown backs, straining, heaving, swollen with muscle; harness streaked with specks of froth, broad, cup-shaped hoofs, heavy with brown loam, men’s faces red with tan, blue overalls spotted with axle-grease; muscled hands, the knuckles whitened in their grip on the reins, and through it all the ammoniacal smell of the horses, the bitter reek of perspiration of beasts and men. (680)

Raising a crop of wheat requires enormous labor. Fittingly, the sowing is carried out with military precision: the ploughs resemble “a great column of field artillery,” the foremen look like “battery lieutenants,” and the harvest begins at the signal of whistle

(678). As the new form of conquest, agriculture is portrayed as military. Far from natural, the planting requires an army of men, machinery, and horses, and it is carried out with precision and foresight. Indeed, harvests such as these required an army of laborers, sometimes numbering a thousand, systematically controlled by superintendents who received orders from the office headquarters.<sup>20</sup>

It is also important for Norris to portray capitalism itself as an organic system. Shelgrim gives voice to the naturalistic theories that run through the book most succinctly when he tells Presley, “You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men.” He insists, “I can not control it” (1037). Shelgrim links the naturalness of the wheat to capitalism: “The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business.” Shortly thereafter, he asks rhetorically, “Can anyone stop the Wheat? Well, then no more can I stop the Road” (1037). Presley finds that Shelgrim’s philosophy has the “ring of truth,” and enough of it survives in the novel’s conclusion to suggest that Shelgrim’s pronouncements are to be taken seriously (unlike Don Mariano’s refusal to accept the same philosophy as propounded by Leland Stanford in *Squatter*). Shelgrim hopes to convince Presley that capitalism is an organic, naturally occurring system, not humanly constructed. For Shelgrim, capitalism and the growth of the railroad and its wealth are as inescapable as the laws of nature—as unavoidable as the wheat’s slow, steady growth.

But Shelgrim’s refusal to accept responsibility for his business practices is also shown to be a sham even within the novel. While on one hand he is “a product of circumstance, an inevitable result of conditions, characteristic, typical, symbolic of

ungovernable forces,” in the same paragraph his stunning financial success is attributed to a romantically individual trait: “his commanding genius...the colossal intellect operating the width of an entire continent” (659). It is no accident that Shelgrim has risen to this level of power; rather, his great intelligence and his diligence accounts for his position—we learn that even though he is seventy years old, he returns to the office in the evenings after his dinner. Despite his attempts to displace responsibility, Shelgrim is indeed responsible for what happens. In the same way he exercises considerable control over a single alcoholic employee’s future, he enjoys a considerable amount of control over the events that affect the California farmers. Furthermore, his act of mercy toward his employee flies in the face of traditional business practices, illustrating that the laws and forces of capitalism are actually a bit more flexible than the laws of nature.

At Presley’s dinner at the home of Gerard, another railroad kingpin (whose wife “cannot eat asparagus that has been cut more than a day” (1066), and therefore has it shipped from Southern California to San Francisco on a special train), Presley is revolted by the opulent display of wealth, which he believes is the cause of his friends’ deaths and destruction. But in free indirect discourse which readers attribute to him, Presley stops short of directly refuting Shelgrim’s philosophy, in fact even conceding it: “The Railroad might indeed be a force only, which no man could control and for which no man was responsible, but his friends had been killed...” (1063). Indeed, Presley never wholly denounces Shelgrim’s pronouncements. Instead, he actually affirms them in the last pages of the book: “It was true, as Shelgrim had said, that forces rather than men had locked horns in that struggle, but for all that the men of the Ranch and not the men of the Railroad had suffered” (1096). Presley never acknowledges the fact that Shelgrim,

Behrman, Lyman Derrick, and others are to a large degree responsible for the destruction of his friends' lives; instead, he rails against only the seeming malevolence of the force that led to their deaths.

In the controversial conclusion, Presley stands on the quarter-deck of the *Swanhilda*, looking toward the coastal hills that separate him from the valley, reviewing the novel's events. His free indirect discourse is about to conclude in despair, but then "Vanamee's words came back to his mind" (1097) and the novel ends with Presley's final pronouncement that not only were the forces that brought about the events ungovernable, but that all works for the good: because the wheat has finally made it to India to help relieve the famine—and because more of Cedarquist's fleet will soon follow—Truth and Good have won out. The ending of the novel is a classic affirmation of the capitalistic assumption that the free market will right all wrong, and of the racial assumption that the Anglo-Saxon cannot be bound by continents or oceans but is destined to rule the world. Not even the closing of the American frontier can stop him. While Shelgrim seems at best to have an amoral view of the system and his work within it, Presley takes it a step farther, asserting the ultimate justice of the system. The white man on his trek west from an eastern college, Presley's voyage on the *Swanhilda's* journey to Asia makes him the symbol of the Anglo-Saxon's final expansion, not as military conqueror, but the bringer of "gentler trade" and a poet. As in classical tragedy, he is the single remaining character left to carry on the good. As Kaplan writes, "Despite his ironic critique of America feeding the world while immigrants starve on the streets of San Francisco, Norris can turn imperial expansion from a history of violent conquest to one of global and spiritual nourishment" ("Nation" 263). Unfortunately, this abrupt transition from violence to

global and spiritual nourishment is finally unconvincing. Ultimately, Norris fails rhetorically to make his case for the necessity of overseas expansion because there is too great an identification between the audience and the protagonists for us to relinquish our sympathy for them and our defeat at their deaths. Moreover, despite his case that U.S. expansion is natural, there are too many contradictory eruptions within the novel of the assumptions that undergird a naturalistic worldview to make convincing the case that what transpires is the result merely of “natural,” uncontrollable forces. From a rhetorical perspective, the novel is formally flawed.

### **“The Song of the West”: *The Octopus* as Norris’s Western Epic**

Fellow Californian Jack London immediately recognized *The Octopus* as illustrative of western ideals. In his review for *Impressions Quarterly* (1902), he enthused,

This great, incoherent, amorphous West! Who could grip the spirit and the essence of it, the luster and the wonder, and bind it all, definitely and sanely, within the covers of a printed book? Surely we of the West, who knew our West, may have been pardoned our lack of faith.

And now Frank Norris has done it. (151)

The novel’s subtitle, “A Story of California,” firmly locates the action in the West, and the frontispiece map of the locale, though a composite, imaginary setting, emphasizes Norris’s consciousness of place. But while there is critical attention to Presley and his search for “The Song of the West,” critics have generally overlooked Norris’s interest in defining—and writing—the novel of the west, which had, in Norris’s view, a major if unrealized role in American literature.

Norris saw in the west the potential for reclaiming “A Neglected Epic,” as his 1902 essay title suggests. A longtime advocate and practitioner of the genre, he praises European epic literature and complains that the eastern literary establishment is responsible for the absence of the epic in American literature. The story was there waiting to be written, but eastern cultural hegemony did not see it: “[L]iterature in the day when the West was being won was a cult indulged in by certain well-bred gentlemen in New England who looked eastward to the Old World, to the legends of England and Norway and Germany and Italy for their inspiration, and left the great, strong, honest, fearless, resolute deeds of their own countrymen to be defamed and defaced by the nameless hacks of the ‘yellow back’ libraries” (1203). Rather than merely an exotic subject for local color hacks, Norris believed that the west and its literature should play an important role in building a distinctly American literature whose ultimate expression was an epic depiction of the United States’ role in shaping an Anglo-Saxon empire. For him, America as a subject was equal to Europe, and the American west offered the best potential for an articulation of the Anglo-Saxon epic, representing, for him, the final phase of their centuries-long march west. For Norris, California history was national history—at once regionally unique *and* representative of the national experience. To William Dean Howells, Norris writes, “I think there is a chance for somebody to do some great work with the West and California as a background...which will be at the same time thoroughly American” (qtd. in Wyatt 99). As Wyatt notes, “The discovery of California still unfolds in his work, but the larger drama is that by persisting in such discovery we come up against the larger drama of national and even universal significance” (99). The novel’s western setting is significant in helping to develop an

argument not only about the history of California and the nation, but also about the epic history of an entire race.

Norris was not alone in seeing the west as an integral part of Anglo expansion; in “The Winning of the West,” Roosevelt sees U.S. continental expansion as “the crowning and greatest achievement of a series of mighty movements” of the Anglo-Saxon race (“Winning of the West” 45). In writing his most “western” novel—of all his novels, the one in which setting is most important—Norris strove to capture the conquering spirit of the American west and to relate it to the expansionist spirit of the nation as a whole. Consequently, by participating in this great national project, “western literature” would be elevated from the pitiful state in which Norris finds it.

Norris’s west is not the idealized mythical space of dime store westerns. He in fact rails against the dime novel in his essay “A Neglected Epic,” decrying the contemporary literature of the “trading, falsifying dime-novels” and the “wretched ‘Deadwood Dicks’ and Buffalo Bills of the yellow backs” (1179). As Amy Kaplan points out, Norris’s novel “deromanticizes the West of Jackson and Wister....In his depiction of the violent confrontation between the ranchers and the corporate railroad, Norris makes visible the capitalist economic structure that undergirds the mythical space of the West” (“Nation” 262). It is significant that his epic western is not about the adventurous mining days of California in the mid-nineteenth century or the initial conquest and settlement of the state—typical subjects of the local colorists—but rather about agriculture. To be sure, agriculture had exploded onto the California scene in the same way the mining industry did, as a sudden boom economy. Norris reports that, like gold, “wheat was discovered in California” (627). And soon after Dr. Hugh Glenn’s first

harvest, California's "output of wheat exceeded her output of gold" (627). But, like Ruiz de Burton, Norris recognizes that agriculture will be California's lasting, dominant industry in a way that mining never was. He portrays the new industry—and particularly the way it was being practiced by the ranchers as the new bonanza—as marking a transitional stage in California history, somewhere between the state's wild gold rush days and its more mature stage.

In his essay "'The Literature of the West,'" (1902) Norris declares,

[W]e are quite ready to relegate the red shirt fellow with his stock lingo, his makeup, his swagger and his gallery plays, to the lumber room and the county jail. We are done with him. He was a characteristic once, but now he is only a very bad actor who dresses the part according to the illustrated weeklies, and who, "pour épater les bourgeois," wears "chaps" on the plains. We distinctly do not want him to speak of his local habitation as "these 'ere diggin's," or to address us as "pard," or to speak of death as the passing in of checks, or the kicking of the bucket. He would not be true to Western life. (1176)

Norris parodies this stock character in the dance scene in *The Octopus* when Delaney, drunk and vengeful, bursts in on Annixter's barn dance decked out in full cowboy costume. Delaney

had arrayed himself with painful elaboration, determined to look the part, bent upon creating the impression, resolved that his appearance at least should justify his reputation of being "bad." Nothing was lacking—neither the campaign hat with up-turned brim, nor the dotted blue handkerchief knotted behind the neck, nor the heavy gauntlets stitched

with red, nor—this above all—the bear-skin “chaparejos,” the hair  
trousers of the mountain cowboy, the pistol holster low on the thigh. (781)

The scene emphasizes the performativity of the Wild West, with Delaney wishing “to make the most of the occasion, maintaining the suspense, playing for the gallery” (783). He pulls out all the clichés, declaring to the crowd at Annixter’s party, “When I’m bad, I’m called the Undertaker’s Friend, so I am, and I’m that bad tonight that I’m scared of myself. They’ll have to revise the census returns before I’m done with this place” (784). Annixter plays the scene as well; for it “was quite probable that no thought of killing each other suggested itself to either Annixter or Delaney. Both fired without aiming very deliberately. To empty their revolvers and avoid being hit was the desire common to both” (784). In the end, Annixter is mystified as to the outcome of the fight—he had no real intention to shoot the revolver out of Delaney’s hand and is surprised to learn of his accomplishment. Afterward, the party guests swap stories about their previous brushes with violence: “All the legends of ’49, the violent, wild life of the early days, were recalled to view, defiling before them there in an endless procession under the glare of paper lanterns and kerosene lamps” (787). But these days are gone, and the shoot-out ends without injury.

Norris treats the train hold-up similarly. Not personal witnesses to the hold-up, the excited passengers hear of it second-hand. The reality is that the passengers really have nothing to do with it. One drummer even sleeps through the entire incident, after which the other passengers chide him, “You missed *the show* of your life” (911, emphasis mine). The once possibly deadly event has become mere entertainment for them, which the shoot-out at the barn quickly becomes for the partygoers at Annixter’s dance.

The displays of violence in Annixter's barn and on the train have become shows reenacting the Wild West. For Norris, this is not the epic of the west. But the west of *The Octopus* is still a violent place. Dyke does kill someone on the train. He is later beaten mercilessly by the railroad hitmen, and of course, the central battle between the farmers and the railroad men is tragically violent. While the typical westerner is no longer the stock cowboy and outlaw, California is still holding onto vestiges of the rough-and-tumble 'fifties; it has not fully entered maturity, even while culture, education, and business are gaining a firm foothold in the region. If *The Octopus* is Norris's western epic, he seems to be grappling with two types of epic here: a traditional epic, which would include violence and glorious battle, and one that is more suited to the twentieth century of corporations and culture. California at this point has one foot in each age, and both are represented in the book. Norris uses his California setting to redefine epic to include more than traditional battle and conquest.

The ranchers are also caught between these two ages. Their failure in their attempt to use violence to hold onto their land shows that this form of conquest is outmoded. In its place is developing the conquest by international trade. As they cling to the old way of life, the ranchers are like misguided patriots. They have the right western fighting spirit, but they are fighting the wrong battle; they are on the cusp of forward thinking in terms of the industrial development of agriculture, but they don't quite grasp the big picture. Cedarquist gets the big picture in a way that Magnus and the other ranchers, with all their technological innovations, do not. Thus, the ranchers' violent deaths are sad, to be sure, but they are not the main scene. The novel must continue to its more significant climax, the wheat steaming its way to Asia.

Magnus Derrick, with his inborn tendency to think big and take big chances, is the perfect embodiment of the *fin de siecle* Westerner, a character caught between two ages. Norris argues that the literature of the west is neither about the cowboy nor the “prosaic farming folk of Iowa or the city-bred gentleman of the office buildings of Denver or San Francisco,” which Norris disparages in “The Literature of the West.” Instead, Norris argues, the “typical” westerner is one that the west itself rather than New York or Chicago has produced. The “product of the West” is still “the adventurer,” but he is a new kind of adventurer. Magnus, with his respectable title of “Governor,” is a perfect realization of this westerner. Norris describes this adventurer as having long since

put off the red shirt and...even abandoned his revolver. Meet him and for all you would know he is a man of sober mind, decorous even, the kind to whom you would suppose adventures never came. A man who very possibly drinks little, who gambles less, who wears the bowler hat and pressed trousers of convention.

But scratch the surface ever so little and behold—there is the Forty-niner. There just beneath the veneer is the tough fibre of the breed, whose work since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been the subjugating of the West. (1177)

Magnus Derrick is just this character. Although he is a dignified statesman and ambitious businessman,

He was always ready to take chances to hazard everything on the hopes of colossal returns. In the mining days at Placerville there was no more redoubtable poker player in the county...Without knowing it, he allowed himself to work his ranch much as if he was still working his mine. The

old-time spirit of '49, hap-hazard, unscientific, persisted in his mind.

Everything was a gamble—who took the greatest chances was most apt to be the greatest winner. The idea of manuring Los Muertos, of husbanding his great resources, he would have scouted as niggardly, Hebraic, ungenerous. (628)

Ultimately, it is Magnus's western nature to think big and take chances that leads him to accept the position of president of the League: "Chance! To know it when it came, to recognize it as it passed fleet as a wind-flurry, grip at it, catch at it, blind, reckless, staking all upon the hazard of the issue, that was genius" (724). Though it is not the same kind of gamble as staking a claim on a bit of rock that may contain untold riches, Magnus is betting on a different kind of bonanza, a crop of wheat that would make him rich beyond his wildest dreams. By the end, though, the epic movement of expansion has already swept past him, leaving him broken while other, younger men seize the opportunity to make their millions in business. Thus, the novel is adept at showing California in this transitional stage.

While the west may still attract men like Magnus, who are willing to gamble big, California is already moving toward a central place in the nation's economy, capable of feeding the U.S. and the rest of the world. Thus Presley, who does not always serve as a mouthpiece for Norris's views on literature, nonetheless accurately reflects Norris's thoughts when he ruminates, "Ah, to get back to that first clear-eyed view of things, to see as Homer saw, as Beowulf saw, as the Nibelungen poets. The life is here, the same as then; the Poem is here; my West is here; the primeval, epic life is here, here under our hands, in the desert, in the mountain, on the ranch, all over here, from Winnipeg to Guadalupe" (609). The story of California is epic. Presley never quite grasps the proper

subject for his epic, but Norris does: the valiant struggle of the ranchers against the railroad and the wheat's eventual journey to Asia *is* the epic. Headed west to the East, in a continuation of the epic journey, Presley is at least on the right track.

### **Epic Capitalism**

The epic of the Anglo-Saxon, on his final push toward world conquest, is Norris's genre. Machor argues that because of Annixter's death, the epic fails, and indeed, Norris does seem to vacillate between different modes after the climax at the ranch. Vanamee, whose subplot throughout the book has been purely romantic, suddenly insists that he no longer lives in romance but in reality: "Romance had vanished, but better than romance was here" (1087). With the return of Angéle's daughter in the flesh and the resumption of their affair, Vanamee claims to have found ultimate satisfaction in realism. But the final scene, with Presley at the helm of the ship continuing his epic journey, is more romantic than realistic, and continuing in the genre of epic romance allows Norris to continue in the tradition of conquest. Only now, the conquest is in the form of capitalism instead of military battles. Capitalism becomes for Norris the romance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the same old Anglo-Saxons pursuing their same old mighty race destiny. While capitalism may not seem especially romantic—once capitalism enters the scene it replaces days of battle glory with the mundane bureaucracy of the corporation—for Norris the development of global capitalism is only an extension of a centuries-long romantic conquest.

But naturalism also permeates the book, with its ubiquitous references to unstoppable forces. We might call it epic naturalism for the way the forces of the book converge around getting the wheat to Asia, and with it the Americans' global economic

dominance. Norris sees no conflict between romance and naturalism, in fact arguing that they are closely related in “Zola as a Romantic Writer” (1896): “For most people Naturalism has a vague meaning. It is a sort of inner circle of realism—a kind of diametric opposite of romanticism, a theory of fiction wherein things are represented ‘as they really are,’ inexorably, with the truthfulness of a camera.” Instead, he argues, “Naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism” (1108). It would be reasonable, then, to expect *The Octopus* to be an example of this type of romantic naturalism.

The determinism to which Norris is committed severely limits a social protest reading of the novel. Nathaniel Lewis observes that Norris “intended in *The Octopus* only to portray a segment of American society and the workings of economic forces. Yet it was read as a reform novel, an assault on the Southern Pacific Railroad. This is not so much a failure of control on Norris’s part as the most pointed illustration that the tension between determinism and reform is intrinsic to naturalism” (117). The novel’s determinism cuts off the potential for reform. As hard as the ranchers may struggle against the forces of the railroad, they are doomed to fail. In fact, the novel cuts off even the need for reform: since all things work together for good, according to the conclusion, there is no need to struggle against the railroad in the first place. As social protest, the novel fails. But when we understand that it was not meant to be read as such, it seems less inconsistent.

In the end, while *The Octopus* realistically lays bare the corruption of the railroad system, the purpose of the novel is not for its readers to identify with the ranchers simply as victims of an unjust system—though they are that—but as Anglo-Saxon conquerors.

The novel is an attempt to explain the “primal origins of American identity,” as Kaplan puts it (“Nation” 263), and to explain the then-current direction of American expansion. Overall, though, for modern readers the novel as a rhetorical text arguing for continued U.S. capitalistic expansion is flawed. Norris is almost too good at his craft; his technique of establishing identification between the reader and the characters in the first part of the novel is too strong for the reader to ignore the plights of the individual ranchers at the end of the novel. And an argument that tries to convince its readers of imperial destiny is inherently rhetorically inaccessible, since by definition it precludes identification with any of the characters. Furthermore, Norris’s attempts to show that monopoly capitalism is a natural, inevitable system are contradicted even within the novel itself.

Norris’s claims about expansion seem to have been largely overlooked by his contemporaries, who focused on the realism of the farmers’ battle with the railroad; with one or two notable exceptions, early critics did not complain about the conclusion.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the romantic conclusion about continued expansion seems to have been largely, wordlessly accepted. But it was not long before the time for romance passed. Granville Hicks’s critique—one of the first to analyze the inconsistencies in detail—appeared in the 1930s, when the nation was less concerned with the “closing” of the frontier and had turned inward to deal with the Great Depression. Perhaps by that point Norris’s own nostalgia for the romantic days was already out of step with the times—in the face of such depression, suddenly capitalistic expansion did not look as romantic—or possible—as it might have at the turn of the century. While *The Octopus* comes close to fulfilling Norris’s project of writing the epic romance of the West, the epic is a genre suited to the past, and despite Norris’s hope that the frontier romance could continue into the twentieth

century, it was ultimately a hope rooted in wistful nostalgia only. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, appearing in 1939, better addresses a twentieth-century nation's concerns.

## Chapter 4

*The Grapes of Wrath*: Steinbeck's Sentimental Harvest

The hitch-hiker stood up and looked across through the windows.

“Could ya give me a lift, mister?”

The driver looked quickly back at the restaurant for a second.

“Didn’ you see the *No Riders* sticker on the windshield?”

“Sure—I seen it. But sometimes a guy’ll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker.”

The driver, getting slowly into the truck, considered the parts of this answer. If he refused now, not only was he not a good guy, but he was forced to carry a sticker, was not allowed to have company. If he took in the hitch-hiker he was automatically a good guy and also he was not one whom any rich bastard could kick around. He knew he was being trapped, but he couldn’t see a way out. And he wanted to be a good guy. He glanced again at the restaurant. “Scrunch down on the running board till we get around the bend.” (11)

These are the first words Tom Joad speaks in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In this brief example of artful persuasion, Tom introduces the major argument of the novel: that people treat each other with kindness and humanity, even if it means bending the rules a bit. His argument is powerful to the truck driver, who wants to be a “good guy” and so reluctantly takes him along. Steinbeck counts on his audience to want to consider themselves “good guys” too; he “traps” them just as Tom traps the truck driver. The exchange has undertones of class-consciousness—for Tom casts himself and the driver against the “rich bastards”—an antagonism that was emphasized in the immediate critical reception of the novel, which at times branded Steinbeck a communist.

But small, furtive acts of subversion such as picking up a hitch-hiker—not revolution—are representative of the kind of social protest that becomes the Joads' main method of survival on their journey to and once they reach California, as they realize that their only source of assistance will be from people as downtrodden as they. It is their treatment of others that is important: giving a ride to an anonymous hitchhiker, giving the remnants of a pot of stew to a group of hungry children, giving a stranger a nourishing breast. Steinbeck hopes to convince his readers that because of their common humanity, the migrants are worthy of this kind treatment.

By 1939, the year Viking published *The Grapes of Wrath*, the nascent agricultural industry that Frank Norris depicted in *The Octopus* was firmly entrenched in California. By 1939, farmers like Annixter and Magnus Derrick had expanded their already-vast ranchos even further—or else had been swallowed up by even larger conglomerates—to meet the demand for larger and larger crops, securing America's place in the global economy. Carey McWilliams reports that in 1939 California was shipping well over 240,000 carloads of produce east at a value of close to one billion dollars (5). Like the ranchers in *The Octopus*, the growers in *The Grapes of Wrath* relied on temporary workers to harvest their crops and paid them rock-bottom wages. In 1939, well into the Great Depression, the system seemed at a crisis point, with hundreds of thousands of migrants flooding the valleys of California. In hopes of continuing their agrarian lifestyle, the Okies came in search of the California Dream and instead found a colossal surplus of labor and little hope of a permanent place to live.

Steinbeck's novel, like *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*, is an openly partisan book, Steinbeck's final response to the devastating effects of the migrant labor

system in his home state. *The Grapes of Wrath*, though, is different from the previous three novels in that it succeeded in capturing the nation's attention—in both popular and critical circles—on a scale that the others did not. Published in April, it topped the bestseller lists for most of the year and sold 543,000 copies by 1941 (DeMott, “Pressing” 190). Before this novel Steinbeck had already enjoyed significant critical and popular success. *Of Mice and Men*, the novel immediately preceding *Grapes of Wrath*, was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and was being produced on Broadway while Steinbeck was writing *Grapes of Wrath*. Partly because Steinbeck was a well established writer, then, *Grapes of Wrath* was immediately seen as an “important” book, one of the most important of the century, even by those critics who also found it flawed. The novel sparked a furor over California labor practices and, as contemporary reviews attest, was widely seen as the era's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>22</sup> Although the novel did not singlehandedly topple the regime of the Associated Farmers, the “fascist”—to use Steinbeck's descriptor—group of landowners and bankers that virtually controlled the state, it brought the migrant issue to the forefront of the nation's attention.

Alongside, and especially after the controversy about the novel's historical accuracy had died down somewhat, critics began to debate the merits of the novel as a work of art. *The Grapes of Wrath* has since its initial reception been accused of sentimentality, early on by Edmund Wilson, who compared it to “the sentimental symbolism of Hollywood” (qtd. in Owens 109) and most famously by Leslie Fiedler in the 1980s, who called it “maudlin, sentimental, and overblown” (qtd. in Seelye 12). Supporters of Steinbeck have defended the novel vigorously, refuting the label, or conceding some elements of sentimentality that do not affect the strength of the whole.

In this view, sentimentality is consistently seen negatively, a charge to be defended against (John Seelye is a notable exception to this trend, and I will discuss his conclusions later).<sup>23</sup> In this chapter I do not seek to redeem Steinbeck from the oft-maligned label of sentimentalist, but to examine how he appropriates aspects of sentimentality—usually considered a feminine genre—to put forth a powerful argument. The numerous comparisons of *The Grapes of Wrath* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suggest a strong connection, yet rarely are the two novels' similarities extensively examined. In this chapter I argue that Steinbeck was indeed indebted to the American sentimental tradition, though he adapts it for a twentieth-century audience, mostly by also incorporating elements of naturalism. Though sentimentalism and naturalism may seem strange bedfellows, it is their combination that accounts for the spectacular rhetorical success of *The Grapes of Wrath*. This unique combination of the two genres—along with Steinbeck's already-strong reputation—is what allowed this masterpiece of protest fiction to succeed rhetorically where *The Squatter and the Don*, *Ramona*, and *The Octopus* did not.

### **Background: Sowing the Seeds**

*The Grapes of Wrath* was born of Steinbeck's deep personal conviction that something had to be done for the poverty-stricken migrants drifting up and down Highway 99 in California's San Joaquin Valley. Steinbeck was deeply affected by the sight of the starving migrants, who had been flooded out of their already-meager shantytowns. He wrote to Elizabeth Otis, his literary agent, in 1938 of the dire conditions there:

I don't know whether I'll go south or not but I must go to Visalia. Four thousand families, drowned out of their tents are really starving to death. The resettlement administration of the government asked me to write some news stories. The newspapers won't touch the stuff but they will under my byline. The locals are fighting the government bringing in food and medicine. I'm going to try to break the story hard enough so that food and drugs can get moving. Shame and a hatred of publicity will do the job to the miserable local bankers. (*Life in Letters*, 159)

Steinbeck saw that his already-strong reputation as a writer gave him access to a large audience and the chance to effect some good, and much of his work from 1936 to 1939 was on behalf of the migrants.

*The Grapes of Wrath* was not Steinbeck's first written response to the migrant crisis. Between October 5 through 11, 1936, he published a series of seven newspaper articles for the left-leaning *San Francisco News*. Entitled "The Harvest Gypsies" and republished by the pro-labor Simon J. Lubin Society in 1938 as a pamphlet called *Their Blood Is Strong*, the articles originally appeared with photographs by Dorothea Lange, which lent them further visual authenticity. The articles were a result of his fact-finding travels up and down the state with Tom Collins, the FSA camp manager at Arvin and the "TOM" to whom *The Grapes of Wrath* is dedicated. Driving an "old pie wagon," as Collins called it, Steinbeck listened to the migrants' stories and songs and worked till exhausted to move flooded victims to safe ground in the Central Valley. Like similar missions undertaken by Jackson and Norris, these trips and Collins' vivid reports from his camp provided Steinbeck with an abundance of material that he eventually reaped for his novel.

“The Harvest Gypsies” articles are powerful—detailed and authoritative. The first in the series introduces the migrants as Americans of old stock. The second describes three “classes” of migrant camps and the various levels of despair they signify; the third introduces both “small farmers,” who “tended to side with the migrant against the powerful speculative farm groups,” and large farming corporations. The fourth installment describes the federal camp program that Collins worked for and in which the Joads find temporary haven in the novel. The fifth article discusses relief programs and the difficulties the migrants had using them; it also describes their starvation diets. The penultimate article steps back to trace the history of migrant labor in California, including Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Filipino workers. In this article Steinbeck suggests that the methods formerly used to keep these workers manageable—principally the method of deportation—will no longer be tenable. “Farm labor in California will be white labor,” Steinbeck inaccurately predicts, “it will be American labor, and it will insist on a standard of living much higher than that which was accorded the foreign ‘cheap labor’” (56). Therefore, “a rearrangement of the attitude toward and treatment of migrant labor must be achieved” (57). Steinbeck uses the last article to suggest such solutions to the crisis as making available federal lands for low rent or lease to the migrants, building houses and schools, and encouraging subsistence farming. Though funded by federal and/or local governments, “a spirit of cooperation and self-help should be encouraged so that by self-government and a returning social responsibility these people may be restored to the rank of citizens” (59). The ideas in these articles all find their way into *The Grapes of Wrath*: the American ancestry of the migrants, the government camps, the chokehold the Associated Farmers had on not only the migrants but on smaller landowners as well, and

the clash of the migrants' agrarian values with a modernized California farm system.

Although Steinbeck and Collins had originally planned a collaborative, photographic book, Steinbeck backed out of the project to work on the novel he felt building "on his soul" (*Life in Letters* 168), though he did assist Collins with editing. He refused a contract with *Fortune* magazine for a story because he didn't "like the audience" (*Life in Letters* 161), agreeing instead to a story with *Life*, which presumably would attract an audience less skewed toward the interests of big business. In this case, he perhaps missed a chance to address a rhetorically important audience—the industrialists with money and power—in favor of a more easily persuaded one. Horace Bristol's photos taken for the story were not published, however, until after *The Grapes of Wrath* was published. By the time Bristol was ready to publish the photos with Steinbeck in a photo-essay, Steinbeck had already moved past the *Life* project, telling him, "Well, Horace, I'm sorry to tell you, but I've decided it's too big a story to be just a photographic book. I'm going to write it as a novel" (qtd. in Howarth 77). When the photos were published, they were accompanied by captions that included quotes from the novel. Among them was a shot of a young mother nursing an infant, which was widely taken to be the inspiration for Rose of Sharon.

William Howarth suggests that Steinbeck "found himself caught between literary and journalistic impulses."<sup>24</sup> While at one point Steinbeck believed he could best "put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this" by publishing in newspapers (*Life in Letters* 162), the articles, while good, did not allow for the complete development of the human story and could not reach the wide audience a novel could (given that the national *Life* story wasn't published till after the novel). Freed from the

constraints and responsibilities of journalism, fiction also allowed Steinbeck to splice events and create composite characters that he felt best represented the migrants' struggle. With a novel, Steinbeck could create fully developed characters who were "intensely alive" (*Working Days* 40) and would arouse the audience's sympathy and identification.

His previous novel about a California labor strike, *In Dubious Battle*, began to earn Steinbeck the label of labor-sympathizer, even though he claimed the novel was symbolic of "man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself" rather than a political stance on labor strife (*Life in Letters* 98). He also worked on two prototypes of *The Grapes of Wrath*, a vicious satire called "L'Affaire Lettuceberg" and a draft of a novel tentatively entitled "The Oklahomans." He destroyed "L'Affaire Lettuceberg," confessing to Elizabeth Otis that it was no good: "It can't be printed. It is bad because it isn't honest. Oh! These incidents all happened but—I'm not telling as much of the truth about them as I know." It also went against his ethical system: "My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other and then I deliberately write this book the aim of which is to cause hatred through partial understanding" (*Working Days* xl). Struggling to find the proper authorial perspective—"Harvest Gypsies" being perhaps too detached and "L'Affaire" being too vituperative—Steinbeck returned to the subject of the migrants themselves, whom he found the most compelling. "The Oklahomans" dealt with the migrants, whom he saw as "brave...kind, humorous and wise" (*Working Days* liv). But no manuscript has ever been found for this early novel, and it is believed that he overstated the amount he had completed. Nevertheless, the attempt appears to have set him back on track with his focus on the migrants rather than labor organization. With the

focus on one migrant family, Steinbeck could work on creating the characters that sprang to life before the reader.

### **Identification Through Race, Class, and Religion**

Like the other three novels studied here, *The Grapes of Wrath* functions to create identification between the audience and the characters along lines of race, class, and religion, which I discuss here before turning to matters of genre. The Okies' racial status as Anglo Americans seemed to distinguish them from other, foreign laborers.<sup>25</sup> Steinbeck uses their whiteness to his advantage. The "Harvest Gypsies" articles emphasize the migrants' Anglo-Saxon heritage: their names "indicate that they are of English, German and Scandinavian descent." To these families living in rural areas, with names like "Munns, Holbrooks, Hansens, Schmidts," democracy "was not only possible but inevitable" (23).<sup>26</sup> Steinbeck declares that "this new race" is in California permanently, unlike previous migrant groups who were deported when no longer useful; therefore, he predicts, the state will have to adapt its system to accommodate them. Because they are Americans, "the old methods of repression, of starvation wages, of jailing, beating and intimidation are not going to work" (22-3). Carey McWilliams' *Factories in the Field* also predicts the "end of a cycle" of abuse with the arrival of the Dust Bowl migrants. They are not "another minority alien racial group," but "American citizens familiar with the usages of democracy," McWilliams argues (306). Movie stars, political figures, photographers and writers also flocked to the Okies' cause in numbers that the completely disenfranchised foreign workers did not attract. The title of Steinbeck's republished pamphlet, *Their Blood Is Strong*, also suggests that these migrants are biologically different from the others. They are "descendants of men who

crossed into the middle west, who won their lands by fighting, who cultivated the prairies and stayed with them until they went back to desert. And because of their tradition and their training,” Steinbeck argues, “they are not migrants by nature. They are gypsies by force of circumstance” (22). Though he does not say it overtly, the suggestion is that somehow because of their heritage, the Okies are more deserving—and will be more demanding—of a prosperous spot in the California garden than previous migrant groups.

Kevin Hearle argues that the novel demonstrates less of this racial thinking than the articles. Nevertheless, *The Grapes of Wrath* also makes the point fairly strongly that especially because these migrants are Americans, they should not be treated with such disdain. Like *Ramona*, *The Squatter and the Don*, and *The Octopus*, *The Grapes of Wrath* shows that the Okies possess American traits that give them right to the land. Like Ruiz de Burton’s *californios* and Jackson’s native Californians, Steinbeck had to work against popular, negative stereotypes of the Okies. They were seen as shiftless, lazy, and immoral, flooding into California for its government relief, not work.<sup>27</sup> Mainstream publications such as *The Saturday Evening Post* described a group of children as “slovenly, truculent, suspicious”; in their eyes one could supposedly see “the sinister heritage they are bringing from their mountain home” (qtd. in Starr 241). Steinbeck shows that this heritage is not “sinister” but proud. Indeed, the Joads’ ancestors “fit in the Revolution,” Ma declares (295). They are linked to America’s original westering movement: one migrant shares his experience of fighting Indians (419), and another reiterates, “When grampa came—did I tell you?—he had pepper and salt and a rifle. Nothing else” (114). This time, instead of pulling a wagon or coming on horseback, they drive cars, but, like their ancestors, bringing not much else besides pepper and salt. They

are settlers seeking a better life, “Allenses,” “Wilkeses,” a community of strong old American stock (254). They are “known people—good people” (254).

Knowing that the novel would be taken as a critique of capitalism, Steinbeck risked alienating his middle-class audience, with its staunchly-held capitalistic values. To mitigate this potential problem, Steinbeck creates identification with his characters through their shared, imaginative, pre-capitalist American past—a past system of yeoman farmers, growing their subsistence on their own land. This version of American history plays on the audience and the Joads’ imagined shared racial past as well. The agrarian past comes up poignantly in the general chapter nine, where one farmer sells his team of horses for a mere pittance. The horses worked as a team, “straining hams and buttocks, split-second timed together.” The farmer speaks of what the horses represent to his family: “You’re buying a little girl plaiting the forelocks, taking off her hair ribbon to make bows, standing back, head cocked, rubbing the soft noses with her cheek” (112). Later on, one migrant muses, “If a fella owns a team a horses, he don’t raise no hell if he got to feed ‘em when they ain’t workin’. But if a fella got men workin’ for him, he jus’ don’t give a damn. Horses is a hell of a lot more worth than men. I don’ understand’ it” (460). If the novel shows nostalgia for a past, agrarian economy, one in which farmers squatted on their hams to sift through the earth with their fingers, it is to create identification with the migrants rather than to suggest a return to that past as a solution to the problem.

The Joads’ dialect is another example of this yeoman identity. The dialect works simultaneously as a way to increase identification and to keep a safe distance between the reader and the characters. Kevin Starr suggests that the dialect may have contributed to

the “Tobacco Road” image of the Joads, presenting them as “white trash” and thus distancing them from their audience. Indeed, in *Ramona* Aunt Ri’s difficult dialect unfortunately makes her so difficult to understand and creates such a distance between her and the reader that the effects of her conversion and the arguments she makes on behalf of the Indians are weakened. While this same effect was possible to some extent with the Joads’ dialect, their dialect is not as difficult to read as Aunt Ri’s. Furthermore, it also separates them from the authoritative, standard English of the bank people and growers. The dialect is suggestive of an earthy, simple wisdom, one opposed to the monologic voice of the agribusiness institution. Their stylized dialect reinforces their identity as salt-of-the-earth yeoman farmers and allows the reader to participate with them in nostalgia for a simpler time. Though the audience would no doubt consider itself more sophisticated than the Joads, the Joads represent the way Americans liked to imagine their past, when a family could own a bit of land that provided all its subsistence. Given the historical context of the Great Depression, this mythic past would be all the more appealing to Americans, with its individualistic ideal of raising one’s own goods from the ground, rather than depending on less stable, intangible entities such as the stock market.

Whether Steinbeck did propose an actual return to this yeoman past is debatable. Though he was accused of communism by the Associated Farmers, his letters at the time are surprisingly apolitical. A New Deal liberal rather than a communist, Steinbeck suggests in “Harvest Gypsies” that the federal government provide relief for the Okies in terms of housing, health care and schooling, but that families “should be encouraged and helped to produce their own subsistence fruits, vegetables and livestock” (59). However,

Steinbeck does not seem to suggest that these subsistence farms should be a replacement for the large-scale producers. William Conlogue argues that, far from nostalgic for an agrarian past, Steinbeck “understood industrial agriculture as an inevitability, not as a choice” (30). But Steinbeck’s position seems to be somewhere between nostalgia and inevitability. He writes in “Harvest Gypsies” that California, with its reliance on migrant labor, is “gradually building a human structure which will certainly change the State, and may, if handled with the inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agricultural economics” (25). Rather than “inevitable,” he characterizes the industry here as changeable, even capable of collapse. But nowhere in the novel is an agrarian system modeled as a feasible alternative to an agricultural industry. Instead, the yeoman identity in the novel works only to mark the Joads as salt-of-the-earth Americans, not as a solution to the problem. The nostalgia for the past serves to show that the Joads share the same democratic values as their audience.

The appeal to shared memory is explicit in the scene in which Ma destroys her mementos, the symbols of a past the audience would be sure to recognize:

She sat down and opened the box. Inside were letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little gold signet ring, and a watch chain braided of hair and tipped with gold swivels. She touched the letters with her fingers, touched them lightly, and she smoothed a newspaper clipping on which there was an account of Tom’s trial. For a long time she held the box, looking over it, and her fingers disturbed the letters and then lined them up again. She bit her lower lip, thinking, remembering. And at last she made up her mind. She picked out the ring, the watch charm, the earrings, dug under the pile and found one gold cuff link. She took a letter

from an envelope and dropped the trinkets in the envelope. She folded the envelope over and put it in her dress pocket. Then gently and tenderly she closed the box and smoothed the top carefully with her fingers. Her lips parted. And then she stood up, took her lantern, and went back into the kitchen. She lifted the stove lid and laid the box gently among the coals. Quickly the heat browned the paper. A flame licked up and over the box. She replaced the stove lid and instantly the fire sighed up and breathed over the box. (140)

The familiar trinkets reinforce the idea that the Joads and the audience share a similar past. A character in the general chapter voices Ma's possible thoughts: "How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past?" (114). Displaced from the land and their homes, the Joads are also being deprived of their memories.

The trinkets are also signifiers of a place in a social community, a former rootedness that would align the Joads with the middle class. Leslie Gossage notes that the film version of the novel makes this alignment even stronger by including a postcard from New York and a porcelain dog from the Saint Louis Exposition, implying that "Ma's relatives or friends had time and money to travel" (118). While the Joads cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered middle class, Steinbeck does try to show that they have middle-class values. They are not the inhuman trash one service attendant believes them to be: "Them goddam Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas" (284).

Countering this charge is Ma, who says, "I pray God we gonna be let to wash some clothes. We ain't never been dirty like this. Don't even wash potatoes 'fore we boil

'em" (279). The Joads rejoice in the hot, daily showers and flush toilets the Weedpatch camp affords them. Like many Americans during the depression, the Joads are not accustomed to living as they are, but circumstances require it. They have middle-class sensibilities, if not the means to attain a middle-class lifestyle. Tom rebukes a private camp manager along Route 66, saying, "It's a hard thing to be named a bum" (240). Clearly, he is not used to being treated like trash, as is also evidenced by the family's bewilderment at the derogatory term "Okies."

Like Alessandro in *Ramona*, the Joads are portrayed as skilled workers: Tom and Al are expert mechanics, and the whole family is eager for farm work. Tom enjoys the feel of a pick in his hand: "Damn it...a pick is a nice tool (*umph*), if you don't fight it (*umph*). You an' the pick (*umph*) workin' together (*umph*)" (382). Picking cotton is "work I un'erstan'" (517), Pa exclaims. Another picker proclaims himself an expert who can pick cotton "blind...clean as a whistle" (521). The Joads are a proud family of strong, hard workers. Contrary to the popular belief that the Dust Bowlers came to California primarily to join the generous relief rolls, the Joads never go on relief, they never steal, and they never succumb to the utter dejection and poverty Steinbeck depicts in "Harvest Gypsies." In the "lower class" of the camp in the non-fiction articles, the children "squat where they are and kick a little dirt" because "the drive for cleanliness has been drained out" of the mother (30). In contrast, the Joads' tidy camps show that they remain in the "middle class" of the camps, allowing the reader to identify with them more strongly.

However, despite the Joads' skills and diligence, the novel argues that no matter how hard they work, they will not succeed in the capitalistic system that has developed in California. So they move away from the individualistic mindset they brought with them

from Oklahoma and turn toward collectivism. With this move, Steinbeck helps deconstruct the myth of American individualism and independence and helps redefine what an American worker should be: someone who looks out for others as well as for him or herself (a similar claim to the type of capitalism Ruiz de Burton espouses in *Squatter*). He also uses the rhetorical strategy of beginning with a commonly held premise and moving to something new, taking the audience along with him along the way. With the Joads' dialect, their connection to the land and their willingness to work it, Steinbeck harkens back to this mythic American identity. As they progress from the individual to the collective, the Joads embody the conversion that Steinbeck hopes the reader will undertake.

Steinbeck models this conversion in religious terms as well, casting the Joads as shedding a traditionally rural evangelical Christianity for one that is more intellectual and tolerant, one that Steinbeck's less conservative, Progressive audience may identify with more strongly. Casy is the primary spokesperson for this new belief system, with his quasi-religious, Emersonian transcendentalism. Casy's newfound religion looks more like transcendentalism than Stowe's brand of Christianity, emphasizing community and connections with others. Casy "foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul" (535). Unconcerned with "sin," this collectivist notion has a significant impact on the philosophical framework of the novel, serving as the basis for the way the Joads treat each other and their fellow migrants.

In fact, Steinbeck distances the Joads from a more conservative Christianity so that the audience can identify with the Joads through religion as well. Ma shuns evangelical Christianity: when Granma bursts out with "Pu-raise Gawd fur vittory!" (99) the effect is humorous, and Steinbeck makes clear that her type of religion is bankrupt:

“And it was so many years since she had listened to or wondered at the words used” (104). At any rate, Granma and her hollow religion don’t make it into California. On the contrary, when she is lying sick in her tent, Ma refuses an offer for a meeting. She explains to Rose of Sharon, “They’re howlers an’ jumpers....I didn’ think I could stan’ it. I’d jus’ fly apart” (272). A more restrained, middle-class audience probably would not identify with this type of religion either. When Rose of Sharon is greeted at the Weedpatch camp by Mrs. Sandry, who blackly warns her that she’ll lose her baby if she “hug-dances,” Ma dismisses the warning and is provoked to anger the second time Mrs. Sandry comes around to the tent. The woman is indeed termed “not well” by the camp manager and “crazy” by Ma (413). The Joads are Christians, but they are not associated with the camp religion or radical evangelicalism.

Thus Steinbeck presents the Joads as sympathetic people who share ancestry, middle-class sensibilities, and broad religious ideas in common with his intended audience. As we have seen, it is important for writers of social protest novels to establish similarities between their characters and audiences in terms of race, class, and religion. All four of these writers (Ruiz de Burton, Jackson, Norris, and Steinbeck) are adept at showing their readers that their characters are worthy, hardworking Americans who merit a piece of the California—and by extension, American—Dream. However, as seen with the merely moderate success or outright failure of the earlier three novels to affect the national scene, simply creating identification along these lines is not enough. Steinbeck alone is successful among these writers in balancing emotional appeal with gritty realism and socio-scientific explanation that lends his fiction an element of “truth.” (Ruiz de Burton accomplishes a similar task; however, her lack of notoriety hindered her from

achieving her political ends.) Steinbeck accomplishes this by employing elements of sentimentality to create emotional appeal with naturalism to provide a vehicle for the documentary sense of reality he wants to convey.

**“And That Feeling Must Go into It”: Sentimental Domesticity in *The Grapes of Wrath***

Appeal to emotion is a powerful rhetorical tactic and is necessary for identification; it is almost impossible to identify with a rhetor who is emotionally distant and dispassionate. As a masterpiece of sentimental fiction, Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* demonstrates the rhetorical effectiveness of emotional appeal and its capacity to change the many attitudes of a nation on such a deeply divisive topic as slavery. Almost one hundred years later, Steinbeck makes an explicit connection between the migrant laborers and slavery in chapter nineteen, where in his narrative of California history he notes that the big landowners “imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos” (298). For Steinbeck, California’s system of migrant workers was no less destructive than slavery, though perhaps not on as wide a scale, and it was a crisis he believed demanded both political and personal responses. Primarily in the novel’s Joad chapters, Steinbeck uses sentimentality to explore the emotional and moral implications of the labor problem, showing the effects of the system on a sympathetic, individual family. The sentimental aspects of the novel allow the reader to identify emotionally with the Joads, what Nicholas Visser calls the “intensely personal and intimate” (211); they also seem to suggest that a personal response to the crisis is appropriate, though a personal response does not preclude an additional political response.

Stowe and Steinbeck posit similar problems with the systems of slavery and industrial agriculture, respectively. From the very beginning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe emphasizes the breakup of the family as one of the central evils of slavery. Tom is separated from his family; George and Eliza are separated; Topsy is motherless; and an unnamed black mother drowns herself and her child. For Stowe, the problem is defined in terms of Christianity: Mrs. Shelby argues that she has taught their slaves the Christian duties of "family, of parent and child, and husband and wife," only to have her teaching undermined by Mr. Shelby's sale of George to Mr. Haley (83). The persuasive force of the novel is that it arouses "motherly sympathies" (Stowe 108), certainly appealing to an audience of women abolitionists, but, as was evident from the spectacular sales of the novel, also to a much wider audience. Stowe's primary rhetorical strategy is to cause her readers to identify with the Christian slave families, Christian families that should remain intact.

This emotional appeal to family would resonate strongly with a middle-class audience even a century later, and so *The Grapes of Wrath*, too, presents the breakup of the family as symptomatic of the problem with California's industrial agriculture. Ma's heroic efforts to keep the family together unfortunately prove quixotic, but her efforts are the central struggle throughout the novel. One by one, the Joads either die off or run off: neither Grampa nor Granma survives the trip west; Noah leaves the family to walk downriver; Connie abandons Rose of Sharon to seek his fortune alone; Al constantly threatens to leave in search of a job in a garage and a woman; Tom is driven from the family, a fugitive; and Rose of Sharon's baby is stillborn.

Like Stowe, who provides minor characters to bolster her argument about the breakup of families, *The Grapes of Wrath* makes clear that the family breakup is universal. One migrant traveling back to the Midwest from California tries to warn the Joads of the growers' strategy of enticing surplus labor with colorful handbills promising work: "Took two kids dead, took my wife dead" to show him that there was no work to be found. Floyd, the young husband Al meets in the Hooverville, regrets that he and his wife had to abandon their folks: "Back home we wouldn' of thought of goin' away. Wouldn' of thought of it." (336). "Back home," families stayed together. The shopkeeper outside the Hooverville remarks to Tom, "Seems like you people always lost somebody... Ten times a day or more somebody comes in here an' says, 'If you see a man so an' so, an' looks like so an' so, will you tell 'im we went up north?'" (354). Desperate in their search for work, families separate with faint hope of seeing each other again, a practice that had become the norm. For Steinbeck, the family's destruction is a symptom more of the societal destruction the system causes rather than a spiritual problem, as it is for Stowe. But by focusing on the family unit rather than on public-sphere issues such as labor organization, he situates the issue in the domestic sphere, appealing to his audience's identification of themselves as members of families. In this way, the problem is cast as a moral rather than political one, and would seem to demand a personal response rather than a political one.

Another important characteristic of the sentimental novel is the central moral position of women. As discussed in the first chapter, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, women—save Uncle Tom himself, though he also has been called a "feminine" character—are the moral arbiters of the family, extending their power in the domestic sphere to the public

sphere through their influence on their men. As we see her in the novel, Ma Joad cannot be said to use “mild precept,” like idealized genteel nineteenth-century women, to influence her men. In a perversion of the “proper” role of women in the family, Ma repeatedly usurps Pa’s power with overt threats of violence. She wields a jack handle against any who might try to cross her when the family debates whether to leave Tom and Al behind, warning Pa not to try to beat her into submission: “I’ll shame ya, Pa. I won’t take no whuppin’, cryin’ an’ a-beggin’” (217). Ma “was the power. She had taken control” (218). Like Eliza, who will desert her kind mistress to save her son, Ma will do anything to keep her family together.

However, lest he alienate an audience unlikely to approve of such behavior, Steinbeck makes it clear that Ma acts out of desperation. The family’s reaction to her assumption of power is one of both nervousness and humor: Ruthie giggles “shrilly,” (218) and Tom jokes to Al, “I’ll turn Ma on ya” (453). Their reactions make it clear that this is not Ma’s usual behavior; the character we see in the novel has not always acted this way. “I’ve never seen her so sassy,” Pa says helplessly (217). Ma’s next standoff with Pa makes it clear that she does not willingly assume control, but that she has no choice. The first time she asserts her power with the jack handle, once the moment has passed, she looks at it “in astonishment” and drops it with a trembling hand (219). Late in the novel Pa again tries to establish control: “Time was when a man said what we’d do. Seems like women is tellin’ now. Seems like it’s purty near time to get out a stick.” Ma agrees: “Times when they’s food an’ a place to set, then maybe you can use your stick an’ keep your skin whole. But you ain’t a-doin your job, either a-thinkin’ or a-workin’. If you was, why, you could use your stick, an’ women folks’d sniffle their nose an creep-

mouse aroun’” (453). In this, her most damning comment on Pa’s ineffectiveness, Ma also recognizes that under normal circumstances her behavior would be inappropriate. She tacitly accepts the patriarchal system, even with its violence against women. It is almost with regret that she assumes control. Portrayed thus, her behavior is a result of the perversion of the normal social order, caused by the inhumane agricultural system. According to this logic, if social order can be restored and the migrants’ poverty ended, then domestic order will be restored as well. Ma admits to Tom that she is only trying to goad Pa on. If she can make him mad, she hopes he will reclaim his proper position of head of the family. Like the strength Eliza shows crossing the river, Ma’s challenge to Pa is a desperate measure for desperate times. In fact, the novel’s concern with the breakup of the family and the dismantling of its patriarchal hierarchy would make Steinbeck’s critique seem less radical, but more acceptable to a moderate audience.

At the government-run Weedpatch camp the proper familial relations are restored, and Ma and Pa are afforded the luxury of family memories. In a moving passage, they look back on the place from which they have come:

“Funny, ain’t it. All the time we was a-movin’ an’ shovin’, I never thought none. An’ now these here folks been nice to me, been awful nice; an’ what’s the first thing I do? I go right back over the sad things—that night Grampa died an’ we buried him. I was all full up of the road, and bumpin’ an’ movin’, an’ it wasn’t so bad. But now I come out here, an’ it’s worse now. An’ Granma—an’ Noah walkin’ away like that! Walkin’ away jus’ down the river. Them things was part of all, an’ now they come a-flockin’ back. Granma a pauper, an’ buried a pauper. That’s sharp now. That’s awful sharp.... An’ I oughta be glad cause we’re in a nice place....I

can remember the choppin' block back home with a feather caught on it, all crisscrossed with cuts, an' black with chicken blood."

Pa's voice took on her tone. "I seen the ducks today....I seen a little whirlwin', like a man a-spinnin' acrost a fiel'. An' the ducks drivin' on down, wedgin' on down to the southward."

Ma smiled. "Remember what we'd always say at home? 'Winter's a-comin' early,' we said, when the ducks flew. Always said that, an' winter come when it was ready to come. But we always said, 'She's a-comin' early.' I wonder what we meant." (415)

This quiet, easily-overlooked passage is as close as Ma and Pa come to allowing any emotion into their voices, which they have been denied in their frantic scramble to survive. It is also the only time in the entire novel we see Ma and Pa acting as companions, as husband and wife. They continue to talk about Noah, their lost child, and to reminisce. These are the benefits of the camp: it enables these uprooted people to reclaim their past, and it enables them to assume their proper familial roles. Ma and Pa are able to re-establish their identities as husband and wife, as people with a past rather than people constantly on the move. It doesn't matter what governmental structure is necessary for the family to go on, but that it does go on. The memories must be allowed to surface, people must be allowed to grieve the loss of loved ones and loved places together. The camps are as close as Steinbeck comes to offering a political solution, and it is significant to the sentimental framework of the novel that the solution is one that restores proper domestic relationships.

As Wyatt argues, the Joads learn that place is not important, but relationships are. Early in the novel, Ma connects the family to the land. The land once lent the family

continuity and a “boundary.” But they gradually realize that the land is not what’s important. As Wyatt puts it, “We no longer try to occupy a spot, but survive, through love and imagination, in an ‘everywhere’” (*Fall* 150). While they learn the importance of the relationships, they also must learn to redefine family. It cannot be defined any longer as those tied by blood alone but must be broadened to include everyone in need. For the migrants, “twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream” (249). After the stillbirth of Rose of Sharon’s baby, Ma tells Mrs. Wainwright, “Use’ ta be the fambly was fust. It ain’t so now. It’s anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do” (569). Disenfranchised politically, the Joads can only act morally, learning to treat others with compassion and to help in whatever way they can.

Thus, as Steinbeck presents it, one of the central problems with the industrial agricultural system California has developed is that it destroys the family and its proper working, a powerful argument for both nineteenth- and early twentieth-century audiences. The family breaks up, its men emasculated, its women forced to assume roles for which they are not suited. The Joad chapters, situated mainly in the domestic/feminine sphere, allow the audience to identify emotionally and morally with the characters.

Along with domestic survival, religion is key in Stowe’s sentimental novel, culminating in Tom’s martyrdom. As Tompkins argues, Stowe’s eschatological worldview endows her seemingly powerless, feminine characters with moral power that her readers would have found compelling. Though, as discussed above, the Joads’ religion is not the evangelical Christianity we find in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the pervasive religious symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath* still works as an emotional appeal to the

audience and is another marker for identification with the Joads. In Steinbeck's novel, Rose of Sharon's stillborn baby functions like the death of Little Eva, which, for Tompkins, signifies her power rather than working simply as a tearful occasion. In death, Little Eva is vested with "the power to work in, and change, the world" (Tompkins 130). Rose of Sharon's baby functions similarly, with John telling it fiercely, "Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way. That's the way you can talk" (572).

Steinbeck also employs the martyr figure, so powerful in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in the character of Jim Casy. As has often been pointed out regarding *Grapes*, the Christ symbolism of Casy's death is none-too-subtle, beginning with Casy's initials and ending with his last words: "You don' know what you're a-doin'" (495). According to Tompkins, Uncle Tom's sacrifice of his life results in the religious conversion of his fellow slaves and in the conversion to abolitionism of George. Casy's death, too, results in a convert to his pro-labor cause: Tom declares his allegiance, "God, I'm talkin' like Casy." It is hoped that the audience will be converted in the same way as Tom has been.

Steinbeck's narrative voice also contributes to the emotional appeal of the novel. Just as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is notable for Stowe's strong narrative voice, which, like a prophet, expressed moral indignation, *The Grapes of Wrath* also benefits from Steinbeck's own passionate attitude toward his own characters and the other migrants. In a 1952 interview, he said, "When I wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, I was filled with certain angers...at certain people who were doing injustices to other people" (*Working Days* xxxviii). The visits to Visalia and Nipomo were "heartbreaking" to him (*Life in Letters* 161). He wrote in his working journal about his admiration for his characters, "who are so much stronger and purer and braver than I am" (*Working Days* 36). This compassion is apparent in the voice of the narrator and seems to have been rhetorically effective,

based on the reviews, which make multiple references to it. Charles Poore, writing for the *New York Times*, praises Steinbeck's "remarkable sympathy and understanding" for and of his characters (153); Louis Kronenberger speaks of Steinbeck's "great indignation and great compassion" (156); and Peter Monro Jack finds in the *New York Times Book Review* that "Steinbeck has written a novel from the depths of his heart with a sincerity seldom equaled" (161). According to Sharon Crowley, a rhetor's strong attitude can decrease the rhetorical distance between rhetor and audience and increase identification (97). Where the voice of "L'Affaire Lettuceberg" was too strong and caustic, perhaps creating a too-short, off-putting rhetorical distance between reader and narrator, the voice of *The Grapes of Wrath* is tempered yet compassionate, strengthening the ability of the audience to identify with the narrator and his characters.

The sentimental aspects of *The Grapes of Wrath*—its concern with the breakup of the family, with Ma Joad as the feminine moral center, its religious symbolism, and its narrator's morally indignant, compassionate voice—invite the reader to identify emotionally with the characters. Emotion plays a large part in identification, and thus sentiment is a powerful tool for the protest novel. Situating the main storyline in the private sphere of domesticity and religion, Steinbeck mainly frames the problem as moral rather than political, in terms of family, conversion, and feeling, appealing to middle-class values and offering the possibility for a personal response. But the novel is not wholly sentimental; it also incorporates scientific and political explanations and solutions. In doing so, Steinbeck draws on another genre also known for its affinity with social protest, naturalism.

### **“This Book Wasn’t Written for Delicate Ladies”: *The Grapes of Wrath* and Naturalism**

If sentimental fiction is “feminine,” then in some ways *The Grapes of Wrath* is very feminine. Yet the novel also exhibits decidedly unsentimental traits. For example, notably absent from the novel are tears, a seemingly essential by-product of the sentimental novel. Ma herself, the matriarch of the family and the apotheosis of the domestic sensibility is, ironically, staunchly unsentimental, never allowing herself to cry. She prides herself on “holdin’ in,” scoffing, “Anybody can break down. It takes a man not to” (181). Here Steinbeck seems to be overtly repudiating feminine sentimentality. “Anybody”—presumably, a woman—can break down, but none of the Joads, save the “little fellas” and Rose of Sharon, get the satisfaction of a good cry. Ma doesn’t ask for pity, as sentimentalism sometimes encourages, but only to be recognized as a human worthy of dignified treatment.

In fact, the novel is often cited by critics as an example of naturalism.<sup>28</sup> Norris and Steinbeck shared a background in journalism, both of them traveling the length of the state in preparation for their books. The kernel of Steinbeck’s journalistic work that survives in *The Grapes of Wrath* lends it the sense of an eyewitness account, and the novel’s success was due in large part to its verisimilitude. Other naturalistic traits in the novel include natural, biological, and economic determinism and rough, scatological language. Most significant, though, to its naturalistic feel are the “general” chapters that are interspersed with the “particular” Joad chapters (Steinbeck’s terms). Much criticism addresses this experimental form, but none addresses the rhetorical effect it has on the audience.<sup>29</sup> In the general chapters, Steinbeck paints a panorama of the westward migration, from the dust storms to the procession of road-weary jalopies crawling across

Death Valley. The Joad chapters then illustrate the effects of these national events on a single family. The general chapters take an entirely different tone from the Joad chapters, one that is broad, expansive, and public rather than intimate and personal.

The narrator of the general chapters possesses knowledge above that of the Joads and other characters, explaining to the reader the meteorological, historical, and economic forces that contributed to the mass migration of the Midwestern farmers to California. Steinbeck presents these forces as inhuman forces of nature, quite similar to what we see in other naturalistic texts such as “The Open Boat” and *The Octopus*, even if he acknowledges that men did help set the stage by overworking the land.<sup>30</sup> The omniscient, detached, biblical voice that opens the novel contributes to this feeling of inevitability, where elements of nature, not people, are the subjects of sentences and the actors in the scenes: “the last rains,” “the sky,” “the clouds,” “the weeds,” “the wind,” and “the dust” (3-4). There is nothing to be done about the weather.

The tractors and the banks that own them, the other forces driving the Okies west, are described just as naturalistically. The sentences could have been lifted straight from *The Octopus*, so similar are they to Norris’s themes and imagery: “If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, the Bank—or the Company—needs—wants—insists— must have—as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them” (41). One farmer tries to reason with the bank’s men:

We’re sorry. It’s not us. It’s the monster. The bank isn’t like a man.

Yes, but the bank is only made of men.

No, you’re wrong there—quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what

the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it.

(43)

Like Shelgrim and Behrman, who avoid responsibility for the human suffering they cause, Steinbeck here highlights the seemingly inescapable economic forces that contribute to the destitution of the migrants, and the farmers are at a loss to explain why they are being turned out of their homes.

As June Howard observes, with their scientific and sociological knowledge, typical naturalistic narrators, like the narrator of the general chapters, are usually set at a distance above their characters, explaining their predicament in ways the characters cannot because they don't understand the forces acting upon them. The flip side of this, Howard argues, is that the characters themselves are often portrayed as "brutes," incapable of understanding the larger issues they are confronted with. We see this in Norris's novels such as *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute*; and even in *The Octopus*, the ranchers, while far from stupid, are naïve in their dealings with the railroad and the emerging global capitalism upon which their industry verges. As discussed in the introduction, this gap in knowledge between the characters and narrator can create dissociation between the audience and the characters. Indeed, the audience is not encouraged to identify with the characters in the general chapters as they are in the Joad chapters; the characters in the general chapters remain nameless and generalized, and they don't seem to understand why these troubles have befallen them. But even though the narrator of Steinbeck's general chapters is set at a distance from the characters, Steinbeck avoids the potential problems this might cause in establishing identification.

Steinbeck mitigates the rhetorical distance these naturalistic elements might cause in various ways. First, his narrative voice, as discussed in the section on sentimentalism, is compassionate, angry, and prophetic even in the general chapters, even if it is set above the characters in these chapters. Steinbeck writes with his heart on his sleeve; this is not a detached narrator, content to examine causes and clinically document a family's degradation, but a moral one who urgently warns his readers against the "grapes of wrath" that are "filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage" (449). As discussed above, a rhetor's strong attitude toward his subject can shorten the distance between himself and a predisposed audience. The narrator of the general chapters certainly does not seem to suggest that change is impossible.

In fact, the reader is encouraged to identify with two perspectives: the narrator and the Joads. Steinbeck shows that the Joads aspire to the middle class, as discussed earlier, even if they aren't actually members of it, and he makes identification between them and sympathy for them possible. But he also encourages identification with the narrator of the general chapters, who, with his knowledge of the causes of the events, is closer in socio-economic status to the reader. Because they are closer in socio-economic status, it is probably easier for the reader to identify with the narrator than with the Joads, but while some distance between the reader and the Joads will necessarily remain, sympathetic identification with them is still possible.

By constantly moving back and forth between the general and particular chapters, illustrating the broader concepts at work with their effects on the Joads, any distance created in the general chapters is shortened in the particular chapters. The Joads are made "alive" for the reader; they are individuals who suffer and strive. And unlike McTeague and Vandover, the Joads are not made into brutes, even as their material

conditions deteriorate rapidly. On the contrary, if they begin their journey naïve and uneducated, by the end of the novel they have arrived at an understanding of the system in which they find themselves. Furthermore, even from the start, they have a better moral understanding of it than the industrialists (similar to Ruiz de Burton's characters, they do not accept the economic philosophy of the bankers' men). They take Casy along with them from the start, they are eager to lend a hand to the Wilsons early in their journey, and they are always willing to help other unfortunates. They can and do act morally, no matter the external forces acting upon them. While the narrator is more knowledgeable than they are in scientific matters, the Joads are his equals morally. Because Steinbeck keeps the moral issues of the crisis at the forefront, the audience is constantly reminded to identify with Joads, and thus the determinism suggested by the external forces is lessened.

Of course, the naturalism is not neatly confined to the general chapters any more than the sentimentalism is confined to the Joad chapters, which, for all their sentimentality, have naturalistic elements as well. Biological determinism, for example, can be found in them. Tom sees his violent, criminal tendencies as almost inevitable; they are something in him that cannot be stopped, and he shows no remorse for either of his killings, in fact declaring of the first, "I'd do what I done—again" (33). Later, he explains weakly that he "was nuts" when he clubbed the vigilante and hopes that he killed him (500). Similar to Uncle John's irresistible urges for binge drinking and sex, Tom's violent instinct seems part of his genetic makeup; it is inevitable from the moment he breaks parole by crossing state lines that he will repeat his violence and be forced to abandon the family. However, despite his violent tendencies, he never denies or loses his moral agency.

The same genetic makeup that drives Tom to kill when backed into a corner also enables the Joads to survive. Besides creating lines of identification, the Okies' whiteness also figures in a naturalistic way. Their biological heritage gives them the strength to survive, as Ma tells Tom: "Why, Tom—us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people—we go on" (361). However, as Hearle suggests, the biological determinism is only a suggestion—the passage also echoes "we the people" in an affirmation of the Joads' national identity. Steinbeck did not seem to buy into completely deterministic racial theories that were in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century.

Finally, the numerous references to bodily functions, the scatological language, and the frank references to sex—all written in the migrants' folksy dialect—also skew the novel toward naturalism. Casy talks about taking girls out to the grass to lay with them; Pa and Uncle John's discuss the facilities at their last visit to the toilets at the Weedpatch camp; Grampa scratches his privates in front of the family (and reader). While tame today, the Joads' frank talk about their bodies was shocking in 1939. But, it should be mentioned that although it is true that the novel's "obscene" language caused an uproar that resulted in the novel being banned in some places,<sup>31</sup> it is also true that many critics did not in fact object to the language; it was for the most part justified as being necessary to the realism of the novel. Wilfred Gibson writes in the *Manchester Guardian* that "if...[Steinbeck] would seem to dwell unduly on the operation of the ordinary bodily functions, with him this preoccupation is seldom offensive because his presentation is in all respects so authentic" (176). The review in *Collier's* states it even though it is

“written in an extremely graphic style,” it is a “moving” book (“The Grapes of Wrath” 174). James N. Vaughn writes for *Commonweal*, “If his realism is at times vulgar to a revolting degree, it must be admitted that it offends in this respect on so few occasions that it may be passed over without further mention” (173). Edward Weeks writes for *Atlantic*, “To tell the personal story Mr. Steinbeck uses language unadulterated, words which are profane and which in some companies would be lewd. I submit that he could not have written truthfully of the Joads without them, and that in his hands such words are as sanitary as they are relevant to the book” (170). Earle Birney concedes that “the sweep of the book’s vision and the controlled passion of its style will carry away all but the most hardened prudes” (169). And so on. In fact, unsurprisingly, oftentimes the groups who objected to the language were also the groups who had something to lose from Steinbeck’s collectivist ideas for the state.

More problematic than the scandal the dialect provoked, though, is that this type of language played into the Okie stereotype, as discussed above, setting the Joads apart from Steinbeck’s better-educated readers, marking their difference linguistically, and preventing identification with them. Dialect is a common trait of naturalism, and Howard argues, about Crane’s *Maggie*, “Not only content and vocabulary but orthography itself locates these characters as irredeemably Other; their speech is an exotic dialect, virtually a foreign language in comparison with the ‘standard English’ that is the medium of communication, the common ground of narrator and reader” (106). While the narrator clearly respects the Joads, and their dialect is not as heavy as Aunt Ri’s, the distance the Joads’ dialect creates between them and the audience cannot be denied; Steinbeck here risks creating a barrier to identification.

The major effect of the naturalism as Steinbeck employs it is to give the novel a documentary feel, as it steps back from the immediate predicament of the Joads to broaden the scope, providing socio-scientific explanation for the crisis. Overall, though, any distance created by the naturalistic elements in the novel is lessened by the narrator's great respect for the characters and their moral agency. While the documentary realism common to naturalism is necessary for social protest, providing urgency and shocking detail about the migrants' unbearable conditions, Steinbeck counters the determinism also usually associated with naturalism by keeping the moral issues of the crisis at the forefront. Steinbeck uses the domestic to foster an emotional identification between the audience and the Joads, moving the problem of the novel from the political to the moral, the private. But where Stowe then posits religion as the solution, Steinbeck proposes politics and science.

### **The "Giving of the Breast"**

*The Grapes of Wrath* is, then, a uniquely American blend of sentimentalism and naturalism. Steinbeck thought of it as a "truly American book" (*Working Days* 29), and perhaps this unusual combination of genres is partly what makes it so. The final tableaux of Rose of Sharon breastfeeding the stranger in the barn illustrates the novel's simultaneous sentimentality and naturalism. It is the scene one critic famously dubbed "the tawdriest kind of fake symbolism" for its melodrama (Fadiman 155), yet it was also criticized for its graphic, subversive sexuality that suggests "the natural law which demands reproduction and survival" (Ross 60).<sup>32</sup> Even though Steinbeck himself defended the scene as having "no more sentiment than the giving of a piece of bread" (*Life in Letters* 178 [an understandable denial, given the negative connotation of the

“sentiment” in critical circles]), the ending makes perfect sense in the sentimental framework as a symbol of the Joads’ understanding of family. Rose of Sharon enacts what the Joads have learned about family and human dignity in a potentially moving scene; she becomes the ultimate, “mysterious” maternal symbol, coming the farthest of all the Joads in her moral development. Unlike Ma, Tom, and Casy, who from the beginning of the novel have inklings about the change facing them, Rose of Sharon is initially concerned only about herself and her pregnancy. Her offering of her own body to feed a starving man initiates her into the community of humanity. Her gift is the climax of the Joads’ understanding.

Many of the contemporary reviews complained that the novel loses force in the second half and finally comes to an abrupt halt with no satisfactory conclusion—or “fruity climax,” to use Steinbeck’s term (*Life in Letters* 178). But this inconclusiveness, if not conducive to “artistic” completion, is necessary for a strong rhetorical effect. Steinbeck was aware of the emotional effect of the abrupt ending: “I am not writing a satisfying story. I’ve done my damndest to rip a reader’s nerves to rags, I don’t want him satisfied” (*Life in Letters*, letter to Covici 178). The reader doesn’t know what becomes of the Joads—how they survive the long, wet winter with no job prospects in sight for months—and Steinbeck, unlike Stowe, doesn’t launch into a sermon after the story stops about how to solve the problem. There is no comfort at the end for the Joads or the reader, who is left to respond to the crisis.

Steinbeck was criticized also for not providing a solution in the novel. But the absence of a direct political solution does not mean that the story itself does not teach a lesson. Steinbeck doesn’t give a political answer, but neither does he leave the reader

with nothing to do but feel pity for the Joads. Answering the common charge that sentimentality mainly appeals to those who benefit from the status quo, Casy deplors religions that preach that “if you got nothin’, why, jus’ fol’ your hands an’ to hell with it, you gonna get ice cream on gol’ plates when you’re dead” (536). Instead of proposing nothing, Steinbeck’s answer is humanitarian rather than political. From the illegal ride the truckdriver gives Tom in the second chapter, to the giving of a tent for a dying relative, to the giving of the breast, the audience sees over and over again the right thing to do, in small, individual acts of kindness. And we see the results of these moral acts: the shopkeeper loses his fear of the corporation when he offers the dime’s-worth of sugar to Ma, the Joads’ dignity is restored at the Weedpatch camp. As givers, the downtrodden are empowered. Where the conclusion of “Harvest Gypsies” proposes political and economic solutions to the system, in the imaginative treatment of the crisis, *The Grapes of Wrath* suggests that it is equally important to somehow enable the migrants to be treated and to act themselves with dignity, to recognize that we are all connected through bonds of common humanity.

This is why Chapter 22, Steinbeck’s long portrayal of the Weedpatch government camp, is so important to the framework of the novel. The government camp serves as part of the answer, not so much because it provides a temporary relief against the dire living conditions of the migrants, but because it enables strangers now living in proximity to treat each other like family—unlike the Hoovervilles, where Ma is scolded by the other families for feeding their starving children bits of leftover stew. Historians have pointed out that the camps were successful models of self-governance but that as a comprehensive solution they did not progress past the demonstration stage, and therefore

acted only as a palliative rather than a true solution. Critics have also seen the function of the Weedpatch chapter as Steinbeck's only, ameliorative solution to the problem. But the government camp in *The Grapes of Wrath* functions as more than just a palliative; Steinbeck spends too much time on it for it to be merely a stop-gap solution. The point is not that the solution to the problem will be socialist, government-funded camps, but that the camp provides a model for how people should treat each other, restoring their dignity. Even in "Harvest Gypsies," he recommends the camps for their ability to return "social responsibility" to the migrants, that they "may be restored to the rank of citizens" (59). The Weedpatch camp allows families to share a meal with a stranger, to wash their grimy clothes and bodies, to show hospitality with a cup of coffee, to elect their own leaders, to put on a clean dress for a Saturday-night dance.

John Seelye argues that the novel's naturalism prevents it from being a wholly sentimental novel with a "happy and regenerative" ending. He argues that the novel's controlling worldview of chance prevents it from arguing that any kind of social change is possible. But Casy's transcendental worldview, while not Stowe's evangelical Christianity, pushes strongly against the determinism of the book. Steinbeck's naturalism is not Norris's. Where Presley learns to cheerfully accept the inevitability of the wheat as something good, the Joads recognize the inherent injustice in the system, and that even though they can't singlehandedly overturn the system, they can offer acts of kindness in small but important ways. By performing these acts they subvert the survival-of-the-fittest system that does not encourage acts of generosity. The Joads experience a change in heart, just as Stowe wanted her readers to learn. They learn not only how to "feel

right,” but also how to act on their feelings to effect change. As moral actors, the Joads’ small acts of kindness are symbolic, yes, but they have a literal effect, too, as profound as saving a starving man’s life. Thus, the final scene contradicts a naturalistic worldview, and insofar as the solution is a moral one, the solution is sentimental. So the novel, rather than naturalistic, is sentimental at its heart.

Steinbeck’s letters and actions also indicate that he believed in the power of the individual to effect change. He despairs of the crisis in Visalia: “Of course no individual effort will help. Ten thousand people are affected in one area.” But in the very next sentence, his attitude is reversed: “Anyway, I’ll do what I can.” (*Life in Letters*, 159). Another letter: “I break myself every time I go out because the argument that one person’s effort can’t really do anything doesn’t seem to apply when you come on a bunch of starving children and you have a little money. I can’t rationalize it for myself anyway” (*Life in Letters* 160-1). He was reluctant to accept payment for his news articles, instead suggesting that the money be used to provide relief for the migrants. He does what he can because when confronted with despair he can respond in no other way. Furthermore, even though he once observed “how mean and little books become in the face of such tragedies” (*Life in Letters* 159), his own act of writing argues for the possibility of change. Otherwise why write at all? He cannot turn his back on such suffering. His goal is to convince his readers of the impossibility of doing anything other than helping.

Thus, rather than rely only on either sentimentalism or naturalism, both of which have rhetorical flaws, Steinbeck exploits the advantages of both. As is evident from the first three novels, neither sentimentality nor naturalism alone are particularly well-suited for protest fiction. The “happy” romantic ending of *Ramona* dilutes the suffering of

Alessandro and has kept the novel for the most part in the realm of romance. Merely shedding tears for the worthy heroine is not enough. On a plot level, *The Grapes of Wrath* certainly resists *Ramona*'s type of closure. On the other hand, *The Octopus*'s naturalism prevents Norris from dwelling on the suffering of the individual farmers and their families; it forces Norris to come down on the side of global capitalism as inevitable. It is not until Steinbeck combines the two that we have a protest novel that really has some effect. The novel has to have the flavor of documentary realism—it has to be hard-hitting. It also has to be emotionally moving. Like Stowe, who calls for a change of heart in the nation, for people to learn to “feel right,” Steinbeck shows the transformation of the Joads into people who feel right and do right. Rose of Sharon's intensely personal, maternal offering is the climax of Steinbeck's sentimental harvest.

### **The Effects of the Novel and Its Aftermath**

The effect of *The Grapes of Wrath* on the nation was profound, surprising even Steinbeck, who was sure it would not be a “popular” book (*Life in Letters* 173). It inspired stories in national newspapers and magazines, tours of the migrant camps by Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, congressional hearings, and Hollywood movies. Carey McWilliams took middle-class benevolence workers on tours of the migrant camps so they could see with their own eyes how the other half lived; and after her trip to California, Eleanor Roosevelt famously testified that she never thought *The Grapes of Wrath* “was exaggerated” (*Life in Letters* 202). The novel also prompted President Roosevelt to declare, “I would like to see the Columbia Basin devoted to the care of the 500,000 people represented in ‘Grapes of Wrath’” (Wyatt, *New Essays* 3).

Steinbeck's novel was published alongside several other works of "documentary art," as Starr calls it, that proliferated in the 1930s, which included government-funded documentary projects such as Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's *American Exodus* (1939) and Pare Lorentz's films *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937). Carey McWilliams' book *Factories in the Field* (not government-funded), published within months of *The Grapes of Wrath*, complemented the novel with facts and statistics about labor, and was written with literary flair. It can be argued that Steinbeck's work, along with these others, helped in creating the very crisis they sought to document, as they called for expansion of New Deal camps and federal and state aid for the migrants. This abundance of cultural production certainly served to heighten the success of the novel, helping to create its own exigence; the nation was in the mood to hear about the plight of the migrants. Starr points out that the moment soon passed, though. In 1940 the Toland Report, a congressional investigation on the "Migration of Destitute Citizens," had already lost its rhetorical occasion, as the nation was more concerned with the impending war. The war ended the crisis in an unexpected way, with migrants gratefully filling the sudden demand for factory labor and becoming permanent residents of California, though not in the way Steinbeck had imagined. Steinbeck's already-strong reputation as a serious and popular writer also gave him access to a national audience that the Latin-American Ruiz de Burton never had. It was the perfect confluence of circumstances for the book to catch fire as it did.

Published alongside the documentary works of Taylor and Lange, McWilliams, and Lorentz, *The Grapes of Wrath* was read at the time of its publication for the most part as fact. But in reality, it blurred the lines between fact and fiction. Steinbeck's letters do

indicate that he went to great lengths to stick to the “truth,” turning over some of his materials to the La Follette Committee of Congress and expressing his gratitude for the accuracy of Collins’ reports and letters: “I need this stuff. It is exact and just the thing that will be used against me if I am wrong” (*Working Days* 33). And in another, “I’m trying to write history while it is happening and I don’t want to be wrong” (qtd. in Visser 210). He despaired of being called a liar “so constantly that sometimes I wonder whether I may not have dreamed the things I saw and heard in the period of my research” (*Life in Letters* 202). But the Associated Farmers reacted swiftly against the book, an indication of the threat they perceived the novel to be. Steinbeck wrote to Carlton Sheffield of their tactics:

The vilification of me out here from the large landowners and bankers is pretty bad. The latest is a rumor started by them that the Okies hate me and have threatened to kill me for lying about them. This made all the papers. Tom Collins says that when his Okies read this smear they were so mad they wanted to burn something down.

I’m frightened at the rolling might of this damned thing. It is completely out of hand—I mean a kind of hysteria about the book is growing that is not healthy. (188)

He also wrote of his critics’ attempts to prove the events the novel represented were “untrue”:

Yes, the Associated Farmers have tried to make me retract things by very sly methods. Unfortunately for them the things are thoroughly documented and the materials turned over to the La Follette Committee and when it was killed by pressure groups all evidence went to the

Attorney General. So when they write and ask for proof, I simply ask them to ask the Senate to hold open hearings of the Civil Liberty Committee and they will get immediate documentary proof of my statements although some of them may go to jail as a result of it. And you have no idea how quickly that stops the argument....So they have gone to the whispering campaign (how in hell do you spell that) but unfortunately that method only sells more books. (187)

The most sustained response from the Associated Farmers was Ruth Comfort Mitchell's *Of Human Kindness*, a novel from the perspective of an entrepreneurial farming family who holds to "accepted standards of public and private conduct, to sane thinking, to a sense of clan loyalty" (233). The migrants in this novel reject Red agitators because they realize they are being paid fairly and must learn how to assimilate into the California system.

Indeed, there is still debate over how "truthful" Steinbeck's portrayal of the situation actually was. Without detracting from the value of the novel, Starr argues that parts of it were indeed inaccurate. For example, he reports that there is no documentary evidence to show that California growers advertised jobs with colorful handbills to entice surplus labor, as depicted in the novel. Instead, Starr demonstrates that while Arizona advertised for laborers, California growers warned migrants in Dust Bowl papers to stay away. The growers feared that when they found no work in Arizona, the migrants would continue to California, which they did (Starr, *Endangered Dreams* 259). As Starr points out, the cost of the migrants to the taxpayers would not justify such a recruitment strategy. The migrants placed such a burden on the public schools and health care systems of California that some local taxes increased 100% over the space of five years

(*Endangered Dreams* 239). While this fact undercuts the moral culpability of the growers to some extent—they perhaps did not have a hand in attracting the migrants to non-existent jobs—it does not excuse the treatment the migrants received once in the state.

In any event, in the end what is important from a rhetorical perspective is that the public perceived the novel to be an accurate portrayal of the situation. Wheeler Mayo, the editor of the *Sequoyah County Times* of Salislaw, Oklahoma, the Joads' hometown, testified before Congress as if the Joads were actual residents of his county (Starr, *Endangered Dreams* 257-8). Journalists' and politicians' practice of invoking the Joads' name to refer to the migrants as a whole quickly became common. That even FDR referred to them in a Fireside Chat as if they were real people indicates the rhetorical success of the novel (Starr, *Endangered Dreams* 258-9).

On a lighter note, as an indication of how deeply the novel embedded itself into the culture, Steinbeck wrote to Otis, "And Grapes dropped from the head of the list to second place out here and about time too. It is far too far when Jack Benny mentions it in his program" (189). The novel won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and was the cornerstone of Steinbeck's Nobel Prize in 1962. As recently as 1995, Bruce Springsteen's album *The Ghost of Tom Joad* continues to remind us of the symbolic status the novel has acquired in American culture.

As Wyatt and others have noted, the completion of *The Grapes of Wrath* left Steinbeck drained and exhausted. He had poured his entire being into his book and had done all he could for California. He left his home state in 1941, never to live there permanently again, perhaps attempting to escape his own notoriety and his failed

marriage. But he had succeeded beyond all his expectations at bringing the destitute migrants' plight to the forefront of the nation's attention, and his original, heartfelt book has forever changed the landscape of American fiction and the American cultural scene.

Epilogue  
The Rest of the Story

In many ways, the stories that Ruiz de Burton, Jackson, Norris, and Steinbeck told are still being played out. Migrant workers in California are still treated as consumable commodities, agribusiness dominates farming practices, corrupt monopolistic corporations like Enron are capable of holding the state captive (Joan Didion also calls the prison system, strongly supported by the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, “one more version of making our deal with the Southern Pacific” (*Where* 183)). Relations between whites, Latinos, and other minorities remain vexed. With exorbitant housing costs all over the state, more and more people are pushed out from centers of power. For a while in the 1990s, people were leaving the state in droves: Didion reports that in 1998, “Tulare County began paying its welfare clients the cost of relocating in other states, providing an average of \$2,300 a client to rent a U-Haul van and buy gas and stay in motels en route and pay first-and-last-month rent on a place to live once they get there” (*Where* 180). But the California dream is hard to resist, and despite its problems, soon people began to return to California. As of 2002, 550,000 people were entering the state annually (Legislative Analyst’s Office).

Some of these novels have proven to be prophetic: Ruiz de Burton’s Don Mariano was predictive in his argument for a movement away from a wheat-based agriculture; California’s fruits, nuts, and wines are now respected and marketed worldwide, and the state is the nation’s leading agricultural producer. In its inability to theorize a solution to the “Indian problem,” Jackson’s novel was predictive in that state and federal government policy has consisted of a series of bad-faith and ill-planned strategies. Norris was also correct in his foretelling of global capitalism and an

expansion of markets. Ironically, the most effective of the novels, *The Grapes of Wrath*, was also the least accurate in predicting the end of the migrant labor system. When the Okies went to work in the factories, foreign workers resumed their labor in California's fields and faced the same low wages and exploitation as the white workers. Rather than turning toward the labor-oriented philosophy of Tom Joad, the Okies instead became some of the most politically conservative Californians.

But, more than anything, what has proven to be true in the narratives of these authors is their vision of a California integrally connected to the rest of the nation. At a time when California was still seen as vastly different from the east coast, these authors wrote against that strain, persuading their Californian and eastern audiences to identify with their characters and the region in which they lived. State problems were national problems, they argued. And though in some ways California still holds a separate space in the imagination of Americans, it is no longer remote geographically or economically: the state's economy is the largest in the nation and ranks fifth in the world (Legislative Analyst's Office). The nation literally cannot afford to ignore what goes on in California. Politically as well, California often leads the nation in trends. Early on, these writers saw California not as a site for picturesque national fantasy, but rather as a vital contributor to a nation only just beginning to assert its dominance worldwide.

They also bequeathed a heritage of social protest fiction to other California writers. Certainly, the Philippine-born Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* is an inheritor of this tradition of California social protest that deserves further attention. To limit the scope of this project, I chose novels that explored questions about agricultural land use and dispossession, quite narrowly defined. These subjects could and should be

broadened, however, to include water rights, as treated by Mary Austin's *The Ford*, oil rights, as dealt with in Upton Sinclair's *Oil!*, and the plights of other dispossessed peoples such as the Asian and African American workforce that contributed so greatly to California's rapid development as a leading economic power.

Nathaniel Lewis calls for a reading of western literature that is not concerned with "authenticity": "Masquerading as benign and accessible, western writing appears to lack the 'depth' or complexity of other categories of American literature," observes Lewis (7). Social protest novels suffer from the same problem. And thus western social protest novels are at a double disadvantage. While social protest fiction has a special reason to portray the "real"—such portrayal is an essential rhetorical strategy in this type of fiction—reading the texts as rhetorical constructs is perhaps more rewarding than doggedly tracing the historical accuracy of the text. The ways these and other social protest novels play with genre calls into question how we have previously thought of the relationship between sentimentalism, romance, and naturalism; further inquiry into this relationship could be fruitful.

The subject of California, like most of western literature, seems to demand a personal response from its authors, historians, and literary critics, from Kevin Starr and Mike Davis to David Wyatt and Joan Didion. Like the writers studied in this dissertation who fought so vociferously for the state, the critics too display strong personal feelings about the state. Whether defending it, castigating it, or something in between, each evokes passion about the state and its residents. Where many literary critics these days are emotionally detached from the texts they concern themselves with, perhaps in an effort to justify their profession, this element of California criticism gives the impression

that there is something both public and personal at stake. Even if some of these critics, like Steinbeck, have had to abandon the state, at least it inspires passionate debate. Joan Didion writes that, long after her youth, she “began trying to find the ‘point’ of California, to locate some message in its history” (17). “Yet,” she writes, “California has remained impenetrable to me, a wearying enigma, as it has to many of us who are from there. We worry it, correct and revise it, try and fail to define our relationship to it and its relationship to the rest of the country” (38). It has been deeply rewarding to read and think so much about my home state from a distance. I think these four writers, too, were engaged in trying to find the “point” of California. I admire their optimism, though some might call it naïvete, in their earnestness and desire to achieve social justice and make California a better place. Though their ideas were not always perfect or effectual, they refused to reenact a nostalgic myth about the state, but rather looked toward California’s future to ensure for it a vibrant, vital place in the nation.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> One notable addition to the list of California social protest fiction is Mary Austin's *The Ford*, which she hoped to be publicly received as *The Jungle* of California water rights. I omit it from this study, however, because it does not engage in issues of race and class in the ways the others do, and because it deals with a slightly different subject—water rights—than the other novels, which focus almost exclusively on land issues. The same can be said of Upton Sinclair's 1927 novel *Oil!*, which he wrote while living in California. Of course, missing also are narratives from two other groups central to California's development as a state: the Asian and African American workers who built railroads, mined, and worked in the fields. Though their work contributed later to California's literary canon—see, notably, Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946)—I am unaware of any social protest novel written by members of these groups or about them in this time frame. Currently, there are many writers from these groups.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Sánchez and Pita point out that while Anglo historians often portrayed the Californians as welcoming annexation (despite conflicting memoirs of the *californios* themselves—one has only to compare, for example, the memoirs of Mariano Vallejo and the Herbert Bancroft version of the “Bear Flag Revolt” to find stark differences of perspective), but in this case it may have actually been true that the Mexicans welcomed the U.S. soldiers. See Martínez, *A History of Lower California*, 355, 371 (Sánchez and Pita, Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 2, 52n).

<sup>3</sup> Anne Goldman comes closest to offering a rhetorical analysis in *Continental Divides*, as she discusses to some extent Ruiz de Burton's audience, arguing that the novel appeals to westerners, her fellow *californios*, readers of the Spanish language press, and easterners (56). Goldman's assessment of Ruiz de Burton's audience is similar to my own (which follows below), though I stress Ruiz de Burton's focus on her Anglo audience.

<sup>4</sup> *Before the Gringo Came* was republished, with the addition of a couple stories, in 1902 as *Those Splendid Idle Forties*.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to my friend Fernando Galup for help with the translations. Any errors are mine, not his.

<sup>6</sup> Ruiz de Burton envisioned a similar plan for her Jamul ranch. In a letter to Mariano Vallejo from 1874, she writes,

Mi idea es ésta: si se hace un gran receptáculo de agua ahor se podrá usar para regar plantíos de árboles (como son naranjos, nogales, almendras, higueras, etc., etc.) y viñas que se pueden plantar en los terrenos que hay entre Jamul y San Diego y en “la mesa” de San Diego. Por tres y [o] cuatro años los árboles necesitarán más agua que después, de modo que si después fuese de más importancia llevar el agua a San Diego se llevaría dejando ya los árboles creciendo. Las viñas en particular que no necesitan much riego. [My idea is this: if a large water reservoir were built it could be used now to water plots of trees (like oranges, walnuts, almonds, figs, etc., etc.) and vines that could be planted in the land between Jamul and San Diego and in the plateau of San Diego. For three

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and [or] four years the trees will need more water than later, in such a way that if afterwards it became more important to bring the water to San Diego, it could be brought, leaving the trees that are already growing. The vines in particular do not need much irrigation. (Ruiz de Burton, *Conflicts* 452)

Unfortunately, a lack of capital prevented her from building the reservoir.

<sup>7</sup> The Don also shows his knowledge of current farming practices: by encouraging the squatters to plant orchards rather than wheat, he was following what was becoming a mainstream trend. During the 1870s it became apparent that the bonanza wheat crops that had begun the agricultural boom in California had been played out. No longer seeing the returns on wheat they once were, ranchers were increasingly turning to fruit as a more profitable crop. The squatters, in their insistence on planting wheat, belie their misunderstanding of the land they desire and the economics of California farming.

<sup>8</sup> Various critics have commented on her apparent classist leanings. Sánchez and Pita note that “the attack against the squatters is class-based rather than ethnic” (*Squatter* 25), and in *Conflicts of Interest* they write that her disdain of the lower classes makes her “a highly problematic figure” (550). Amelia Montes de la Luz acknowledges the classism in the novel, which complicates the novel for her. She supports a full discussion of Ruiz de Burton as a complex historical figure and writer. Sánchez points out that both Ruiz de Burton and Jose Martí were too elitist to call for a dismantling of the actual political and economic structures, but rather on only toppling the “ideological tower” (p.). In his dissertation, Lázaro Lima argues, “The novel deals with a particular type of Californio, and not an ethnically marked subject that can interrogate the protocols of American citizenship and critique the limited possibilities for accessing cultural capital” (151).

<sup>9</sup> The “no fence” law allowed the squatters to keep their land unenclosed; as a result, when a cow wandered onto their land, they were allowed to kill it with impunity. Because they did not have to pay for fences, this saved the squatters money; of course, it also wreaked havoc on the ranchers’ cattle herds.

<sup>10</sup> See Goldman’s introduction for a compelling analysis of California’s marginalization from the rest of the nation.

<sup>11</sup> Like Atherton, Ruiz de Burton does use military metaphors, but in ways strikingly different from Atherton. While Atherton frames the military conquest of California as seduction, implying that annexation was welcomed by the Californians, Ruiz de Burton uses the language of war to call attention to the hierarchy of the commander and subaltern, both in the relationship between the sexes and between the *californios* and their antagonists.

<sup>12</sup> Sánchez and Pita classify it as a historical novel, as does Anne Goldman and Jesse Alemán. Amelia Montes de la Luz finds that it participates in several genres, including realism, naturalism, and journalistic muckraking.

<sup>13</sup> Starr sees these marriages as a peaceful blending of the two cultures. The Americans “went by Spanish names, used Spanish in daily conversation... dressed as Mexicans, and fathered Mexican families” (26). For him, their peaceful cohabitation was a missed opportunity for California to develop “naturally,” without war.

<sup>14</sup> McCrackin was another California local colorist, like Atherton, to whom Goldman compares Ruiz de Burton.

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<sup>15</sup> Some of these have been collected and reprinted in *Glimpses of California and the Missions*, the edition from which I quote.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan Wagner's "Helen Hunt Jackson's Errant Local Color" disputes this reading, though he comes to a different conclusion about the novel from mine, arguing that *Ramona* "turns the picturesque prehistory of Southern California into a shared national inheritance that can be purchased on the expanding free market. Whereas the liberal tradition claims to unify the nation by assimilating cultural difference through the promise of citizenship, local color makes this difference available to the national public in fungible form" (4).

<sup>17</sup> For detailed accounts of Jackson's other conflicts with Schurz, see Mathes, *Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson* and *The Indian Reform Legacy of Helen Hunt Jackson*.

<sup>18</sup> Berlant defines the postsentimental as a text, such as *Beloved*, that refuses to repeat "the tragedies that seemed long ago to constitute whatever horizon of possibility your identity might aspire to;" it "would have you refuse to take on the history of the Other as your future, or as the solution to the problem of passing (over) water in the present tense" (665).

<sup>19</sup> "I wish you could see my rooms. What with Indian baskets, the things from Marsh's and the antique rugs, they are really quite charming, luckily for me who have been shut up in them by the solid work," she wrote to Abbot Kinney (qtd. in Polanich 154).

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed description of the process, including interesting pictures, see Conlogue.

<sup>21</sup> A notable earlier reviewer who addresses this question is Wallace Rice (1901), who complains that "After all the sin and suffering and death of its earlier pages, the whole question of personal responsibility for crime is dismissed" (126). The reviewer from the *New York Evening Sun* (1901) says the ending is not "convincing," but that it probably indicates only "a confession that the subject had overwhelmed the author, and he could conceive no remedy" ("Books and Their Makers" 114). The *Boston Evening Transcript* (1901) comments that "It does not require very keen ethical discrimination to point out in reply that wheat is in itself unmoral; that whether stolen or honestly owned if delivered in India it will save life" ("The Octopus" 159). These appear to be exceptions, however; most contemporary reviews do not really mention the ending, and the *Washington Times* review even argues "the denouement is not only strong, but inevitable" ("Novel of the West" 155).

<sup>22</sup> The comparisons among the contemporary reviews are numerous. Clifton Fadiman for *The New Yorker*, Louis Kronenberger for *The Nation*, Malcolm Cowley for *The New Republic*, and the review in *Time* magazine are only a few of the contemporary reviews that pair *The Grapes of Wrath* with Stowe's novel.

<sup>23</sup> A perfect example of criticism which defends Steinbeck against the charge of sentimentalism is Louis Owens' "The Culpable Joys: Desentimentalizing *The Grapes of Wrath*," in which he argues that the interchapters and the characters' moral flaws offset the sentimentality toward which the novel veers. But, he argues, it is also the migrants' own culpability in exploiting the American soil only to give it up and move further west which gives the novel "a new sensibility, not sentimentality" (115).

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<sup>24</sup> See Howarth for a more comprehensive, detailed account of Steinbeck's prolific work on the migrant situation. Howarth sorts out the many articles, essays, travels, and manuscripts Steinbeck worked on before delving into *The Grapes of Wrath*.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Steven Street attempts to correct the common notion that the whiteness of the new labor class in the thirties was anything new. Contrary to popular scholarship, he argues, "in fact more than half of all farmworkers since the Gold Rush were American-born whites or European immigrants" (xxiv).

<sup>26</sup> Steinbeck seems to be indebted to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis here in his assumption that living away from urban areas fosters democracy.

<sup>27</sup> It wouldn't have made much sense to come to California solely for the government relief, as Carey McWilliams and Kevin Starr make clear. To be eligible for relief, proof of at least one year's residency was required; in 1940 the Unemployment Relief Appropriation Act increased the residency requirement to three years, and attempts were made to increase it to four (Starr, *Endangered Dreams* 242). McWilliams argues bitterly that local relief rolls were controlled in large part by the Associated Farmers, who pressured relief agencies to threaten cessation of benefits if workers did not accept work for low wages.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Woodburn Ross's "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest."

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Ross, "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," and Seelye, "Come Back to the Boxcar, Leslie Honey: Or, Don't Cry for Me, Madonna, Just Pass the Milk: Steinbeck and Sentimentality."

<sup>30</sup> See Owens' argument, which emphasizes the human causes of the Dust Bowl.

<sup>31</sup> Nor is it true that California rejected the novel outright. As a glance at review titles from California publications indicates, the book was hailed in California as it was in the rest of the nation. "Books Worth Reading" (*Santa Monica Evening Outlook*), "The Great American Novel Has Been Written" (*Hollywood Tribune*), "The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck's Tragic Epic of America's Great Migration" (*Pasadena Star-News*), and "Steinbeck Tells Inspiring but Tragic Tale of America" (*Los Angeles Times*) do not suggest the book was rejected outright. Perhaps parts of California were anxious to refute the hardhearted image the novel gave them.

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